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Conclusion: Reruns

Ἀνδρομάχης ἔτι θρῆνον ἀκούομεν, εἰσέτι Τροίην
δερκόμεθ' ἐκ βάρων πᾶσαν ἐρειπομένην
Καὶ μόθον Αἰάντειον, ὑπὸ στεφάνῃ τε πόλῃος
ἔκδετον ἐξ ἵππων Ἑκτορα συρόμενον . . .

Andromache still laments – we hear her. And we still see
all of Troy being torn down from its foundations,
and Aias's battle-din, and beneath the crown of the city,
tied behind the horses, Hektor, dragged . . .

Alphaios

When I began this project, I was traumatized: that image of Hektor, dragged, his face that was before so lovely, tumbling in the dust was graven, branded on my mind. I could not stop mourning for Hektor. I always felt as though I stood on the wall beside Andromache when she first sees him there, dragged. So I started this book, and it was about Hektor, and it was about death. And for that, I started this project by translating Book 22. Then I produced and directed a performance of Books 21 and 22, and for months of working on the show, I heard Hektor's death hundreds of times. Hektor's death had been everything to me, and then I made it an even stronger focus of my obsession. A couple of months after the second run of *Iliad* 21/22, I interviewed the director Stathis Livathinos about his recent production of the *Iliad*. I told him what I had done, that I had made this *Iliad* that was Hektor's death. He told me that this was like putting on the *Oedipus Tyrannos*, only to pull the curtain back at its start to show Oedipus there, with his eyes already out. It was then that I realized I had forgotten my experience of the *Iliad* itself. The *Iliad*, it turns out, was the cure for the very trauma that it had caused. So this book became something very different.

Reading back through and back through the whole *Iliad*, it feels more and more like television. 'Serialized dramas privilege process over product . . . the "getting there" – the journey – is key.'¹ All those tiny details and thousand characters

that the narrator pulls together like a magic trick, keeping track of a whole expanding universe in his mind. What a pleasure it is to see this trick, to see all of its myriad intricate working parts, to participate in that trick and try to fit those parts together. No need to rush towards Hektor's death, or to hurry up, gobble it whole, and turn away. No, now, with this book, the time to revel in every scene.

This approach has helped my appreciation of the *Iliad*, and I hope that it might open it up for others as well. This has been a cursory overview, one reading of the *Iliad* within the poetics of serial narrative, and how its characterizations fit within those same poetics. Beat by beat, through episodes and arcs, the *Iliad* slowly parcels out its pieces of narrative and character information, building character recognition, alignment, and allegiance in its audience. The *Iliad* builds not just one character through this serial narrative, but many, which, in turn, allow its narrative to fan out laterally, to grow and expand, to continue to build audience anticipation and to delay the pleasures of resolution in the primary characters' story arc. The *Iliad*'s multiplicity of alignments is its greatest strength. Its melodramatic alignment structure lets events ricochet between characters, emotional responses and consequences like ripples on the water after a stone is thrown in the pond. At any given moment, our allegiances can shift and alter and come into conflict as the narrative shows us its characters in diverse scenarios and interactions and conversations.

Hektor stands apart from me, as he ever has, unknowable as anyone, but familiar just the same. He might kill you on the battlefield and try to cut off your head. He might just run away. He might inspire you to fight for him, or threaten your life even when you fight for him, or give you orders that get you killed. He has kindness in him, and cruelty. Bravery and fear, stubbornness and adaptability. The *Iliad* succeeds because it leaves me feeling like I wish I knew him better: I wish I could have spent still more time with him. Perhaps I am unduly influenced by Andromache, and her richly imagined alternative for Hektor, where he died in her arms, whispering something unforgettable, something comforting, in her ear (24.743–5).

As I have searched for Hektor through the *Iliad*, and its many characters with its many beats, new favourites have emerged. Menelaos feels constant, loyal, right. Aias remains a bulwark, and feels, perhaps appropriately, taken for granted, not just by other characters, but by the narrative itself. The gods have become more interesting. There is comfort in alignment with the gods, even as there is pain. They have real emotional investments, and they can be wounded, but they do not die like our favourite heroes do. With *Game of Thrones* constantly killing off its fans' favourite characters, especially when they seemed to kill Jon Snow, a

campaign started to support the ‘white walkers’ – zombie-like creatures that cannot be killed.² Sometimes the pain of character allegiance can be too much.

As I lay out my own new feelings about the *Iliad*’s characters, having spent so much time with them while writing this book, the research avenue that opens up widest moving forward involves the interrelated issues of parasocial connections to serial narrative and how fandom affects serial narratives. It might seem forced to compare the parasocial possibilities of a show that lasts many years to a performed epic that lasts many days, but in both a sense of familiarity grows. If the Homeric epics were performed often, and there certainly seems to be evidence that at least in later periods they were well known by a wide range of people, then it seems very plausible that audiences would form long-term relationships to those characters. Television critics now excitedly explore the transmedia natures of primary serial narratives and their characters. Now shows have accompanying websites or comic books or webisodes, all of which can affect and interact with the principle serial narrative as it progresses, not to mention fansites and episode-by-episode recaps and reviews. This makes me more curious about the Homeric tradition, which obviously also existed transmedially, where audience members might have heard or seen different versions of the *Iliad*’s pieces before or after seeing the *Iliad* itself performed. The rise of fan fiction also piques my curiosity: there has been an evolving trend for ‘fans’ of shows or popular media franchises to begin to influence the course of that franchise, from Ronald D. Moore joining *Star Trek: The Next Generation* as a writer to Simon Pegg first starring in and then writing the new *Star Trek* film series,³ complete with fan input,⁴ or to J.J. Abrams taking over the *Star Wars* franchise. Bryan Fuller’s *Hannibal* is perhaps the most compelling product of this trend. Not only does Bryan Fuller approach the source material of Thomas Harris’s novels as though writing fan fiction – imagining an intimate relationship between Will Graham and Hannibal Lecter beyond what exists in the source – but the show pushed this dynamic further in response to fans’ positive responses to that relationship. Bryan Fuller discusses his process of working on *Hannibal*:

‘That’s the fun of an adaptation – you know the story works because you’ve read it before. And in this case, not only had I read it before but I’d seen a couple of movies that have covered the same territory. It’s up to me to make that story fresh for the audience that’s tuning into this program, but it also becomes a fan fiction of sorts.’⁵

The *Iliad* too, as scholars have shown, must have gone through similar processes of artist/fans putting their spin on the epic:⁶ later genres and generations certainly

revisited the Homeric tradition with their own 'fan' versions as well (long before *Hannibal*, there was Aeschylus's *Achilleis*). Being such a fan of a character or characters that one wants to recreate them in a new version of a story is a constructive apex of the parasocial relationships that all audiences form, particularly with serial narratives. This interest in parasocial relationships with serial narratives has emerged from the very act of writing this book, which has shifted my own character allegiances and complicated my own relationships with the *Iliad*'s characters.

The strength of these parasocial relationships that we form with the characters of serial narrative keeps us coming back to a story. The combination of our allegiance/parasocial relationships and the ludic nature of serial narratives and their characterizations not only inspires loyalty over the course of a narrative, but also allows pleasure in repeated experiences. In this past summer, I have read through the *Iliad* many times as I have watched and re-watched entire series: *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, *Game of Thrones*, *Rectify*, and *Hannibal* among many others. And each time, in each story, I have made new discoveries and found new pleasures. And then I reach the end. And at the end, I am not ready to let go of the characters. And at the end, I still want to know what happens next. And at the end, I am left with a nagging curiosity of how we all got to the end.

So then, because I am an addict, I start once more at the beginning.