

The essential homer book review

[Health & Medicine](#), [Body](#)



The theme of burial and damnation is often naturally present in Greek war-related epics, but in *The Essential Homer: Selections from the Iliad and the Odyssey*, Stanley Lombardo reveals how Homer's *Iliad* lingers on the theme of the treatment of a corpse. Lombardo translations of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have often been reflexively referred to as something new.

Lombardo's translations are full of conversational humor and despite the quirkiness of his approach to these two Homeric texts, both enthusiasts and instructors will gain a lot from this book. Lombardo's translations are full of life, and possess an astonishing grace and irresistible force. The purpose of this essay is to reveal the significance of theme of the final fate of the corpse at various instances in Homer's *Iliad*, such as the concern of Trojan soldiers for their bodies after death, Hector's intentions to impale Patroclus's head and skin his body, and the desecration of Hector's body by Achilles, based on Lombardi's translation.

Lombardo particularly emphasizes on the presence of the theme of being properly buried and the treatment of the corpse throughout Homer's *Iliad*. The soldiers are so concerned about what will happen to their body after they die because the Greeks believed that the burial or cremation of a corpse was the only way to allow the spirits of the deceased to pass over the river Styx. The soldiers are concerned that if their corpses are not buried properly, with a gold coin in their mouths, then their spirits would not be transported through the gates of Hades, and would have to linger on the opposite bank. By explaining this in his translation, Lombardi also ends up explaining why Hector hoped to impale Patroclus's head and skin his body, and why Achilles desecrates Hector's corpse.

Lombardi makes it obvious that since Patroclus was Hector's opponent, he did not want his corpse to receive a proper burial or cremation, he wanted to punish him even after death, wanted his soul to wander aimlessly on the bank opposite to the gates of Hades. Beheading slain soldiers and warriors, and impaling their heads was a favorite Assyrian punishment, and as mentioned, its purpose was to prevent deceased's soul from resting in peace. Through Isis, Achilles learns of what Hector envisions to do with his dear friend, Patroclus's corpse, and out of revenge, after killing Hector, he does the same to Hector's corpse, instead by dragging it behind his chariot for twelve days.

The emphasis on the theme of the ultimate fate of corpses in Greek times as it appears through Homer's Iliad displays Lombardi's praiseworthy attention to detail in his book, *The Essential Homer: Selections from the Iliad and the Odyssey*. Lombardi does a great job of making readers understand these two particular Homeric texts, while explicitly revealing the meaning and significance of every aspect of both texts, such as the theme of the treatment of corpses that was discussed here.

Works Cited

Lombardo, Stanley. *The Essential Homer : Selections From The Iliad And The Odyssey*. 1. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000. Print.