

Fame and Failure: Uses of *Phaidimos* in the *Odyssey*
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The meaning of *phaidimos*, like all Homeric epithets, is to a great extent opaque to the modern reader. Its usage shows that it is a personal epithet used of male warriors, but specific to no particular character. This, however, fails to distinguish the meaning of *phaidimos* from similarly non-character-specific epithets (e.g. *dios*). It may also be related to words such as *phaos* and *phaino*, which have associations with light. More well understood words believed to share a common etymology with *phaidimos*—for example, *phaidropos*, *phaidronous*, and *phaidruno*—potentially allow one to infer a sense of “notability.” They also carry strong senses of either fame or the pleasant joy contained in a light-filled space. The men who are modified by *phaidimos* are not merely shining or radiant but share some common trait that sets them aside from others.

Richard Sacks, in *The Traditional Phrase in Homer*, sees failure as the common distinguishing feature of these men. They are dead, dying, defeated, retreating, wounded, ineffectual, or doomed—Hektor above all others. But, he asserts, whatever “inappropriate” (143) connection to failure the word may have in the *Iliad*, it is lacking in the *Odyssey*. However, he makes two errors. First, he assumes that any connection to failure the word may have is restricted to *martial* failure, topically eliminating the *Odyssey*. Second, he further assumes that the author of the *Iliad* is deliberately using *phaidimos* in a way not appropriate to its meaning rather than within it. It may well be more prudent to conclude that *phaidimos* is not used in the *Iliad* in moments devoid of glory and fame, but in moments in which glory and fame are connected to the fact of failure. In those cases Sacks notes as “inappropriate,” the men are not *phaidimos* in spite of their having strived and failed, but at least partly because of this.

This paper aims to demonstrate the extent and depth these connotations of a glory within failure are present in uses of *phaidimos* in the *Odyssey*. Having examined carefully each of the twenty occurrences of *phaidimos* with a character in the *Odyssey*, I show that this sense of *phaidimos* is visible in the *Odyssey*, above all in the characters of Telemakhos and Odysseus when focus is shifted from martial successes and failures to those of the domestic sphere.