

## *ὥς τίς τε*: Homeric Similes and Heroic Conduct in the *Argonautica*

The phrase *ὥς τίς τε* and its variations serve three major functions in the *Iliad*. They introduce similes used to describe valorous heroes, add color to the narrative surrounding Patroclus' combat and death, and highlight the relationships between stronger and weaker warriors. I will show how Apollonius of Rhodes, the Alexandrian scholar-poet, uses the phrase to shed light on his peculiar engagement with the heroic code in the *Argonautica*.

The phrase occurs without any intervening particles only three times in the *Iliad* (17.133, 17.542, 17.657). It is always followed by the word *λέων*, to introduce a leonine simile (Ruijgh 1971, 618). As leonine similes are generally reserved for the most valorous heroes (Saïd, 2012, 359-60), the phrase assumes a heroic gravity. All three uses in the *Iliad* occur in rhapsode *P*, to describe the responses of Greek heroes to Patroclus' combat and death, forming a loose ring composition around the episode (Edwards 1985, 126n657-87). The relationship between the heroes and Patroclus is emblematic of a relationship essential to Iliadic heroism: the protection of weaker warriors by stronger.

Yet this relationship can be antagonistic, as well, as highlighted by the recurrence of a slight variation of the phrase. *ὥς δ' ὄτε τίς τε* appears four times in the *Iliad* (3.33, 4.141, 8.338-9, 17.61), each time to describe violence between inferior and superior warriors. Thus, *ὥς τίς τε* and its variations always appear in scenes that highlight the sometimes protective, sometimes combative relationship between weaker and stronger warriors.

The phrase was peculiar enough in Apollonius' day to be seen as distinctly Homeric (Hunter 1989, 179n755, 245n1323), and Apollonius turns it to his advantage, as was customary for the poet (Rengakos 2008). He causes the phrase to fulfill all three of the functions which it

fulfills in the *Iliad*: evoking heroism, recalling Patroclus' death, and highlighting the ambivalent relationships between stronger and weaker warriors. Yet he positions his protagonist as Patroclus - the weaker warrior - while acts of heroism are attributed to the stronger Hercules and Medea.

Appropriately, the phrase appears five times within the epic, describing first Hercules, then Medea, then Jason, then once again to describe Hercules, then again Medea. Not only does this synchestic arrangement highlight the fact that Jason is, in a sense, cradled by these two figures, but the phrase also appears in contexts which position Hercules and Medea as Achilles after the death of Patroclus. Finally, these scenes also solidify Hercules' and Medea's roles in the epics: Hercules as an absent hero, forever casting a long shadow over Jason's puny achievements, and Medea as a present hero, whose accomplishments constantly engulf Jason's.

When Hercules learns of the vanishment of his young companion, Hylas, he is likened to a bull stung by a gadfly (*Arg.*, 1.1265). The scene strongly recall Achilles' similar grief upon the death of Patroclus (a comparison made complete with erotic overtones, given the later use of the bull-and-gadfly simile of 3.275-8). The scene also describes the moment when Hercules disappears, and it is only in Hercules' absence that his true heroism shines forth (e.g. 3.1225-46).

ὄς τις τε opens the simile describing Medea's love for Jason. The scene recalls the love-pains Achilles suffered for Patroclus, (Laguna-Mariscal and Sanz-Morales, 2005), while anticipating Medea's heroic role in the epic. During Jason's most purely heroic moment, the phrase is employed to describe his *aristia* (3.1322). Jason's own heroism is, of course, only possible due to Medea's cunning bravery. The phrase is then used in a scene describing the final sighting of Hercules (4.1477), thus firmly establishing the hero's absence. Finally, Medea's ultimate act of heroism is described with the help of this heroic particle sequence (4.1680).

Thus, the phrase is used to trace two heroic arcs that thoroughly overshadow Jason's own, while simultaneously positioning Hercules and Medea as Achilles upon the death of Patroclus. Jason is positioned as the weaker warrior, whose ambivalent relationship to his superiors is explored in rich poetic implication and detail, aided with the use of close Homeric exegesis.

### Bibliography

- Rengakos (2008), 'Apollonius Rhodius as a Homeric Scholar', In *Brill's Companion to Apollonius Rhodius*, ed., Theodore Panghelis and Antonios Rengakos, Leiden, 245-266.
- Hunter (1989), ed., *Apollonius of Rhodes: Argonautica, Book 3*, Cambridge.
- Ruigh (1971). *Autour De „te Épique”*: *Études sur la syntaxe grecque*, Amsterdam.
- Edwards (1985). *Volume V: Books 17-20 in The Iliad: A Commentary*, ed., G.S. Kirk, Cambridge.
- Saïd (2012), "Animal Similes in *Odyssey 22*", In *Homeric Contexts: Neoanalysis and the Interpretation of Oral Poetry*, ed., Franco Montanari, Antonios Rengakos, and Christos Tsagalis, Berlin, 359-368.
- Gabriel Laguna-Mariscal, & Manuel Sanz-Morales. (2005). Was the Relationship between Achilles and Patroclus Homoerotic? The View of Apollonius Rhodius. *Hermes*, 133(1), 120–123.