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# Between the Cave and Assuming One's Place in Society: Modern Rewritings of *Philoctetes*

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## ABSTRACT

In “Antigone, Deportee,” Jutta Gsoels-Lorensen argues that the cave to which Antigone is sentenced is not merely a site of punishment, but also a “legal and political figuration underpinning sovereignty’s putatively ‘blameless’ rupturing of a person’s juridico-political existence” (114). However, Antigone is not the only Sophoclean character consigned to a cave; indeed, the cave, as a common representation of the world in both ritual and philosophy, and the desert island of Lemnos in general, have a similar function in *Philoctetes.* Within the state of emergency of the Trojan War, Philoctetes passes from being a citizen to being *apolis* for no apparent reason; thus, the cave construct functions as a biopolitical space where, as the medical imagery employed indicates, political *bios* is intended to shrink into bare life. However, like all symbols, the cave has two sides, and while it represents a cavernous regression, it also indicates, like Plato’s later parable of the cave, the tunnel-like course the soul must follow to arrive to the “truth” (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 180-184). Focusing on Oscar Mandel’s play *The Summoning of Philoctetes* (1961), as well as on George Orwell’s dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) as an atypical rewriting of *Philoctetes,* this thesis aims to examine this double function of the cave construct as both a synecdoche for the carceral and a – provisionally – mystical space which leads to a deeper understanding. Indeed, Philoctetes’ wound becomes in *The Summoning of Philoctetes* an occasion for creativity and self-reliance, while in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Winston Smith’s inflamed varicose ulcer, revelatory of his fundamental disatisfaction with the bare life imposed by the Party, leads to a questioning of the political system of Oceania. Thus, the device of the cave is inherently linked to the question of what it means to be human, and to the price that social inclusion entails, as shown by Philoctetes’ eventual capitulation in both texts, which constitutes a betrayal of himself. The oracle’s insistence that Philoctetes should come to Troy of his own free will, overcoming his aversion for the Troyan War and for those who wage it, reveals that the hero’s possession which Odysseus – or the Party – seek has to do not so much with the mythical bow as with the hero’s mind and soul, something which is highlighted both in *The Summoning of Philoctetes* and in *Nineteen Eighty-Four.* The mythical hero’s cave, being open on two

sides, cannot long function as a shelter, but leaves his inner self exposed to the violence of sovereign power, and provides a schema via which one can see, and critique, similar "cavernous" conditions/spaces in society.

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# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

"Again and again, the rank misery of the abandoned, sick, helpless, ragged Philoctetes … was to fascinate [artists] for centuries after Sophocles. … *There* lay the peculiar appeal of Philoctetes," in his "relentless pain" and solitude, in the "suffering of the innocent hero," as the Belgian-born American author and scholar Oscar Mandel, who has also provided his own rewriting of the Sophoclean tragedy, has beautifully written in his study of the myth of Philoctetes (*Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* 36, 49, emphasis in the original). In other words, Philoctetes's ever-growing appeal resides in the fact that his figure is that of the marginalized, the social outcast who, despite his pain and suffering, remains magnificent in the strength of his defiance. Thus, in the absolute loneliness of the uninhabited, inhospitable island of Lemnos, Philoctetes is one of the most existential characters in ancient Greek tragedy (Austin 40). This is why Edmund Wilson in his influential *The Wound and the Bow* sees in the *Philoctetes* a "parable of human character," revealing the fundamental (Romantic) idea that "superior strength [is] inseparable from disability," as Philoctetes in his isolation from society is able to perfect himself and transform his pain into creativity (Wilson 287-289, 293-294).

And yet, commenting on the sheer physicality of the Sophoclean text, in which the Athenian dramatist extracts from his hero's suffering a "shattering ethicopolitical conclusion," Mandel complains that, if the extant texts are representative, no one in antiquity followed Sophocles on this difficult path, and that, quite possibly, he was "not even understood by his own posterity in Greece and Rome" (*Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* 40). According to Mandel, even our own civilization has "only recently dared to handle again, in all frankness" the problems Sophocles posed in his *Philoctetes* (*Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* 40). Hence the many modern rewritings of the myth since the late nineteenth century aiming to explore the elusive quality of humanity within thorny political and social contexts, such as André Gide's *Philoctète* (1898), Heiner Müller's *Philoktet* (1965), Alfonso Sastre's *Demasiado Tarde Para Filoctetes* (*Too Late for Philoctetes*, 1990), Seamus Heaney's *The Cure at Troy* (1991), John Jesurun's *Philoktetes* (2004), and Derek Walcott's *Omeros* (1990) among others, either evidently or covertly linked to the

ancient myth. This thesis will focus on Oscar Mandel's striking play *The Summoning of Philoctetes* (1961), as well as on George Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), in which Winston Smith, the "last man in Europe" as the novel's working title reveals he was intended to be, with his chronic painful, inflamed varicose ulcer in the right ankle provides an atypical rewriting of *Philoctetes*; there, as in the original text, "the object [is] not to stay alive but to stay human" (Orwell 10, 174). All of these rewritings, even the most radical or less obvious ones, like *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, taking their cue from elements already existent in the ancient text and developing them in various directions, establish a dialogue with the original text and bring to light those of its aspects that are the most valuable (Ντόκου 39), since tracing the global in the local is a way of rewriting "literary and other histories" to make them "the histories of *our* present world and also grounding its future perspectives" (Larsen 322, emphasis in the original). Thus, the case of Philoctetes constitutes a characteristic example of the way in which a text can be recontextualized on the basis of the "possible contexts opened by its comparativity," an approach which allows us to distance ourselves from what is familiar so that we can survey and retrospectively reinterpret it (Larsen 331, 335, 345); as Georg Brandes has characteristically written, "one never clearly observes what is right in front of our eyes nor what is too distant" (qtd in Larsen 345).

A particular feature of the Sophoclean tragedy that both *The Summoning of Philoctetes* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* explore and develop is the cave to which the mythical hero is consigned because of his "savage, sacrilegious screams of pain" (Sophocles l. 10). The central role the cave plays in the ancient Greek text can be seen in the very opening scene of the Sophoclean tragedy through the strikingly dissimilar terms Odysseus and Neoptolemus use in order to describe it. More specifically, where Neoptolemus sees only an "empty chamber" with nothing but "a pile of leaves pressed down for a man to sleep on," a "cup carved from a piece of wood/ by a clumsy workman's efforts," and "filthy rags … lying/ set out to dry, and full of hideous pus," Odysseus sees a "treasure-house," and a "dwelling-place" with provisions for living (ll. 31-40). By just listening to Odysseus, we would imagine Philoctetes to be in a comfortable holiday resort, since, according to him, Philoctetes' twin-mouthed cave is such that "in winter each of the entrance-ways/ faces the sun, but in the summertime/ a gentle breeze sends sleep through

both the chambers" (ll. 16-19). In other words, Odysseus tries very hard to conceal, almost in Newspeak fashion, the very bare life the exiled Philoctetes lives; a bareness that Neoptolemus perceives, appalled, as can be seen by his exclamations upon finding the pus-filled rags. This implies that the conflicting ways of representing the Lemnian cave reveal equally conflicting political and ethical stances.

As far as can be judged from the extant sources on the myth of Philoctetes, Sophocles was the first to use the Lemnian cave in this way. Homer, the earliest source on the myth, merely mentions that Philoctetes was in agonizing pain after he was bitten by a wild water snake, but he does not mention that he might have had any reason to be angry with the Achaeans; after all, the epic poet writes that Philoctetes' comrades were to remember him soon (Homer, *Iliad* 2.716-728), while in the *Odyssey* he mentions that Philoctetes happily returned home (8.248-252). Homer does not seem to suggest that Philoctetes is entirely alone in Lemnos, and does not attach any blame on the Greeks, while he also seems to propose that Philoctetes was both bitten and abandoned in the island of Lemnos, a detail that changes in later sources (Mandel, *Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* 8), giving rise to the question of why Philoctetes has to be removed to a place other than the one where he was bitten. Although a number of later sources insist that Philoctetes was taken to Lemnos so that he might heal there (Mandel, *Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* 9),[1] in Proclus' summary of the *Cypria* we learn that Philoctetes was accidentally bitten by a snake in Tenedos and left behind on Lemnos because of his wound's bad smell (Proclus, *Cypria* ll. 51-53). Thus, the elements of the wound's smell and possibly of a set of blameworthy Greeks are first introduced (Mandel, *Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* 9). Similarly, in Apollodorus' *Epitome* it is added that the wound "grew noisome" and that Philoctetes subsisted in the wilderness by shooting birds with the bow of Hercules which he had in his possession (3.27). As a result of the captured Trojan prophet Helenus' prophecy that both Philoctetes' bow and Neoptolemus' presence were indispensable for the taking of the city of Troy, according to the *Little Iliad*, Diomedes "fetches Philoctetes from Lemnos," while Odysseus brings Neoptolemus from Skyros (Proclus, *Little Iliad* ll. 4-6, 12). It is Aeschylus, in his lost tragedy on Philoctetes, who develops the idea of a righteously angry hero who would not welcome the idea of returning to the Achaean army, and who moreover introduces Odysseus instead of Diomedes (Dio Chrysostom, *Discourse*

52). As can be seen in Dio Chrysostom's comparison of the three tragedies dealing with the story of Philoctetes, both Aeschylus and later Euripides portray an Odysseus who tries to persuade Philoctetes by means of deception. And yet, both tragedies include a chorus of Lemnians; the inhabitants of Lemnos might have mostly kept away from the castaway, but Philoctetes is not as completely isolated as in Sophocles. Unlike the Sophoclean text, the two earlier tragedies appear to have been more didactic and meant to incite patriotism (Dio Chrysostom, *Discourse* 52).

Hence it is particularly inviting to read Philoctetes' cave in the Sophoclean text in terms of another Sophoclean cave, that of Antigone. Indeed, Creon declares he will hide Antigone, still living, in a rocky cavern in a "path which no man treads," putting out "enough food to escape pollution, so that the whole city may avoid contagion" (*Antigone* ll. 773-776), a declaration which is reminiscent of Philoctetes' abandonment on the pretext that his sacrilegious screams of pain disturbed the Achaeans' sacrifices to the gods. Like Antigone, lamenting the fact that in her "strange tomb" she will be "neither with the living nor with the dead" (ll. 847-852), Philoctetes accuses Odysseus of reducing him to a friendless non-citizen (*ἄπολιν*), a living dead *(ἐν ζῶσιν νεκρόν*) (l. 1030). What is more, both Philoctetes and Antigone are expected to subsist in their respective caves not upon food (*τροφή*), as translations would have it, but rather upon *φορβή* (*Philoctetes* ll. 43, 964), a word that was mainly used to refer to pasture and animal fodder (*The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*), and is, therefore, to be distinguished from "nourishmennt" or "food" (Gsoels-Lorensen 127). That is, *φορβή* is meant to keep one alive, but not much more; it is nourishment to be consumed so as not to die, while *τροφή* carries the significantly different connotations of "thickening," "rearing," "causing to grow or increase" (Gsoels-Lorensen 127). By highlighting this form of "phorbic survival" which calls into question the humanity of the tragic heroes and points to political strategies that destroy the balance between human beings and animals, both Sophoclean tragedies draw attention to the aftermath of the expulsion from the *polis*; as Jutta Gsoels-Loensen writes of *Antigone*, Sophocles' play allows us to see that "any forcible removal from the polity is not simply an expurgation, a banning *from*, but, importantly, a banning *to*," with the device of *φορβή* guaranteeing the city's blamelessness and impunity since it prevents death (128). In other words, in both tragedies the cave construct functions not merely as a site of

punishment, but also a "legal and political figuration underpinning sovereignty's putatively 'blameless' … rupturing of a person's juridico-political existence" (Gsoels-Lorensen 114). However, while in *Antigone* the threat of pollution is always looming for the city, forcing Creon to retract, even if too late, (Gsoels-Lorensen 129), *Philoctetes* ends on a much bleaker note, showing how the cave triumphs as sovereignty is able to "steal Philoctetes' soul" with complete impunity (*Philoctetes* ll. 55-56).[2]

At the same time, there is another Sophoclean cave which, even though different in its function from that of the *Antigone*, is equally relevant to the *Philoctetes*. More specifically, towards the end of the *Oedipus at Colonus*, the old Oedipus arrives at "the threshold that plunges down, rooted in the earth with brazen steps" and sits down by "the tomb of stone" (ll. 1590-1597). Shortly afterwards, Oedipus dies a mysterious death which only Theseus witnesses in awe; the only thing the messenger can surmise is that either some god bore the old man away or "the unlighted foundation of the earth that belongs to those below [opened] in kindness" (ll. 1661-1662). Significantly, the fissure or chasm referred to in these lines, which was supposed to be the opening of a passage leading down to the nether world, and through which Oedipus presumably passes in the play, is closely related to, and identified with, the cave on the northern side of the Areopagus down which the Furies passed after the trial of Orestes (Jebb qtd in Rodighiero 70).

This is no coincidence, since throughout the play a connection is established between Oedipus, who needs to be transformed into a benign, protective spirit for Athens and the Eumenides, the converted Erinyes who have renounced their anger and their threats to surrender the city to *Ares emphylios*, to civil strife (Aeschylus ll. 862-863). Indeed, having taken his seat in the sacred grove of the Eumenides, which as the peasant warns, cannot "bre trodden without pollution" because it belongs to the "dread goddesses," Oedipus, quite untroubled by the warning, declares that he will "never again leave this seat" for it is the "token of [his] destiny" (*Oedipus at Colonus* ll. 36-40, 45, 47). Moreover, like the undomesticated and untamed Furies who roam in the wild (Tzanetou 55), Oedipus is repeatedly referred to as a "wanderer" (ll. 124, 184), something which places him in an antithetical relationship to civilisation; the cluster of attributes associated with the Furies, namely, impotence, old age, pollution, and exclusion, as well as being chthonic and

uncivilized (Tzanetou 55), applies equally well to Oedipus and even to Philoctetes, the lame "dreadful traveller" who has been exiled from society (δεινός ὁδίτης, *Philoctetes* ll. 146-147). At the same time, the reluctance to forget and the desire for revenge, shared both by Oedipus and Philoctetes, by definition links them to the Furies, the goddesses who are always "mindful of evil wrought" (Aeschylus ll. 382-383). In Oedipus' own words, the significance of the grove of the Eumenides is that "this is the place … in which [he] shall overcome (*kratiso*) those who threw [him] out" (ll. 644, 646). Thus, just like the Furies, the spirits which perpetuate retribution within the family, leading to a symbolic vicious circle of civil strife, need to be assimilated within the *polis* in order for the ideal *polis*, "warlike outside its gates, civil and peaceful within" to be possible (Loraux, *The Divided City* 32, 53), so Oedipus and Philoctetes need to be placated and assimilated into the *polis* so as to bring it advantages and enhance its hegemonic power. In other words, both the grove of the Eumenides and the cave of the two mythical heroes, constituting a "threshold" which is simulataneously the "bulwark" of the city (*Oedipus at Colonus* ll. 57-58), and is indicative of the "ideology of space functions" in the classical city, where geographical marginality could be taken to express socio-political marginality (Meinel 179), pointing to the unacknowledged connection between conflict and the city.[3] Philoctetes' cave, would represent, therefore, the liminal space to which the threat of *stasis* is confined until the need arises to confront the dreadful suspision that *stasis* is not an external, god-sent *nosos*, but rather born within the city (Loraux, *The Divided City* 65), so that the threat has to be integrated and placated in order for it to be neutralised.

These political dimensions of Philoctetes' cave have not, however, been sufficiently explored up to now. Apart from a considerable body of criticism concerning the scenic arrangement of the cave (Davidson 307-315), critics like Norman Austin have focused either on the way in which the cave functions as a "sacred space" that will undo Odysseus' machinations, a "sanctuary from which the true spiritual drama of this play will emerge" as Neoptolemus learns to have compassion for Philoctetes' suffering and acquires *arete* (Austin 88-89), or as a mystical womb-like space functioning as a locus of Philoctetes' "surrogate death but also of his rebirth as a changed and more powerful hero," one who can offer a solution to his community's historical crisis (Greengard 41, 106). And while these readings are valid, since the cave is indeed a mystical space leading to

transformation for both Philoctetes and Neoptolemus, the conclusion of the play with Philoctetes' surrender and betrayal of himself, even under divine injunction, proves that, after all, neither have Odysseus' schemes been upset, nor does Philoctetes return to civilization transformed into a heroic figure of "full daemonic power" (Greengard 38).

This thesis will, therefore, argue that the cave construct, as a common representation of the world in both ritual and philosophy, functions as a biopolitical space where, as the medical and animal imagery employed indicate, political bios is intended to shrink into bare life, as Philoctetes passes from being a citizen to being *apolis* within the state of emergency of the Trojan War. However, like all symbols, the cave has two sides, and while it represents a cavernous regression, it also indicates, like Plato's later parable of the cave, the tunnel-like course the soul must follow to arrive to the "truth" (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 180-184). Focusing on Oscar Mandel's *The Summoning of Philoctetes*, as well as Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as an atypical rewriting of *Philoctetes*, this thesis aims to examine this double function of the cave construct as both a synecdoche for the carceral and a – provisionally – mystical space which leads to a deeper understanding. Indeed, Philoctetes' wound becomes in *The Summoning of Philoctetes* an occasion for creativity and self-reliance, while in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Winston Smith's inflamed varicose ulcer, revelatory of his fundamental disatisfaction with the bare life imposed by the Party, leads to a questioning of the political system of Oceania, since the body, "required to be docile in its minutest operations, opposes and shows the conditions of functioning proper to [the] organism" (Foucault 156). Thus, the device of the cave is inherently linked to the question of what it means to be human, and to the price that social inclusion entails, as shown by Philoctetes' eventual capitulation in both texts, which constitutes a betrayal of himself. The oracle's insistence that Philoctetes should come to Troy of his own free will, overcoming his aversion for the Troyan War and for those who wage it, reveals that the hero's possession which Odysseus – or the Party – seek has to do not so much with the mythical bow as with the hero's mind and soul, something which is highlighted both in *The Summoning of Philoctetes* and in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, showing how power "produces reality and rituals of truth" (Foucault 194). In short, the mythical hero's cave, being open on two sides, cannot long function as a shelter, but leaves his inner

self exposed to the violence of sovereign power, and provides a schema via which one can see, and critique, similar "cavernous" conditions/spaces in society.

For the purposes of such a reading, I will draw on Michel Foucault's concept of the carceral, as well as on Giorgio Agamben's notions of bare life and the *homo sacer*. Before proceeding to the literary works themselves, it is, therefore, imperative to briefly introduce these terms. To begin with, Foucault develops the idea of the carceral in his seminal work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), which provides an analysis of the sociopolitical, economic, and theoretical mechanisms behind the evolution of the Western penal systems as synecdoches of wider social control from the onset of modernity to our days. Based on the premise that the object of punishment tended to be no longer predominantly the body but rather the soul of the offender, the philosopher traces the processes by which disciplinary methods became "general formulas of domination" during the course of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, not only within penal institutions but throughout the whole social body (Foucault 16, 137). Namely, as "criminality" rather than crime became the object of penal intervention, "passions, instincts, anomalies, infirmities, maladjustments" came under constant surveillance and judgement (Foucault 17, 100, 175); this Foucault calls a "micro-penality" of activity, of behavior, of speech, of the body, and of sexuality, making the slightest departures from the norm subject to punishment (178). Thus, a punitive function was given to seemingly indifferent elements of the disciplinary apparatus, like the school, the hospital, the military, or the factory among others, leading to the formation of a "disciplinary society," that is, a society "penetrated through and through with disciplinary mechanisms" (Foucault 178, 209). For the transformation of individuals, the carceral apparatus resorts to three great schemata, the "politico-moral" schema of individual isolation and hierarchy, the economic model, and the "technico-medical model of cure and normalization" (Foucault 248). In other words, as the carceral apparatus transported the penitentiary technique from the penal institution to the entire social body, a continuous gradation of "specialized and competent authorities" was established, a "carceral continuum," by means of which the authority that sentences infiltrates all the other authorities (Foucault 298-299, 303). And while it would be anachronistic to apply to the Sophoclean text the disciplinary techniques described by Foucault, inextricably linked as they are with the development of capitalism,

industrialization and new military-technological advances, the fact remains that, as has been shown, Sophocles was particularly interested in exploring cavernous-carceral social spaces. This holds particularly true in the case of *Philoctetes* with the hero's wound and promised cure at Troy, insofar as, as Foucault writes, in its function "the power to punish is not essentially different from that of curing or educating" (303).

The second concept I will be using is Agamben's idea of bare life. Significantly, Agamben draws a distinction between *zoe* (ζωή) and *bios* (βίος), which, according to him, constitute a mutually exclusive conceptual pair, *zoe* denoting "the simple fact of living common to all living beings," and *bios* signifying "the form or manner of living peculiar to a single individual or group" (Agamben, *Means without End* 3). The *bios* or form-of-life is closely related to the good or political life (*Means without End* 4). This distinction is important, insofar as political power tends to separate a sphere of naked life and reduce it to a juridical concept (*Means without End* 4). In other words, the law reduces *bios* to bare life, and this founds biopolitics, as can be seen, for instance, in the "medicalisation" of the concept of life, which is increasingly reduced to survival (*Means without End* 7-8). Based on this distinction, Agamben associates bare life with sacred life, that is, life which may be killed but not sacrificed (*Homo Sacer* 83). In other words, the sovereign creates a sphere in which it is permitted to kill without committing murder and without celebrating a sacrifice (*Homo Sacer* 83). Agamben clarifies that the sacred life is neither political *bios* nor natural *zoe*, but rather "the zone of indistinction in which *zoe* and bios constitute each other in including and excluding each other" (*Homo Sacer* 90). Within this framework, sovereignty and the state of exception become synonymous, inasmuch as both are based on the power of decision over life and death (*Means without End* 5). At this point, Agamben echoes Walter Benjamin, according to whom "the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule" (qtd in *Means without End* 6). Thus, the *homo sacer* is a subject of recurrent materializations in history (Ek 368). The state of emergency serves to legitimize power, so that, in order to be able to function, power not only appeals constantly to emergency, but also labours to produce it (*Means without End* 6). Eventually, as politics becomes biopolitics, the *homo sacer* becomes indistinguishable from the citizen (*Means without End* 37, 41). Clearly, the concept of bare life is particularly apposite to the form of phorbic survival described by

Sophocles in the *Philoctetes*, especially since, as a result of his god-sent wound, Philoctetes becomes *sacer*, both "sanctified and made taboo" (Austin 23). As will be shown, the concepts of bare life and the state of exception also apply to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Summoning of Philoctetes*, as Mandel's Odysseus, with his casual murder of his own troopers, shows how the line between the citizen and the exile becomes increasingly blurry, until the exception becomes the rule, while in the dystopic Oceania the Party aims to maintain control by declaring an unceasing war on its own citizens until war and peace become synonymous, employing, among other means of subjection, a series of continuous privations.

The first part of this thesis will, therefore, approach the cave construct from an anthropological perspective, through its symbolisms in mythology, Freudian analysis, and in Plato's allegory of the cave in the *Republic*, in order to examine how the cave functions as a mystical space which leads to knowledge, transformation, and rebellion. More specifically, it will be argued that the cave is a dual symbol, a protective womb-like space and, at the same time, in the case of the ancient Greek text, an entrance to the underworld facilitating the hero's *katabasis*, a descent to the nether world from which he and Neoptolemus emerge with a boon for their community, consisting in the knowledge that the individual conscience is above the mandates of the state, "any man more right than his neighbors [constituting] a majority of one already" (Thoreau 11). Oscar Mandel, drawing on the significations of the cave, as well as on some of the myths related to the island of Lemnos, shows how in this womb-like space Philoctetes and his companion, Medon, attempt to construct an alternative world of peace, creativity, and sexual freedom, converting their place of exile into a utopian space, while Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* shows how Winston Smith's "wound," his inflamed varicose ulcer, is closely connected to the sexually and otherwise bare life he leads in Oceania. In other words, it is the issue of sexuality and his love for Julia that lead Winston to rebel against the Party, and to seek in the room in Mr. Charrington's shop a womb-like protective space in the midst of Oceania's cavernous society, where the two might construct a secret, alternative world.

However, the second part will focus on the way in which all three texts proceed to show how this idyllic, womb-like space is undermined. That is, Philoctetes and his literary

descendants are not allowed to live in a world the state cannot control, and the original vision of the cave is perverted into its exact opposite. Thus, the cave proves to be not an impregnable refuge, but rather a prison, a biopolitical space, through which the state delegitimizes its citizens. Within this context, Philoctetes' refusal to forget past and present injustices reveals the political dimension of memory, and indicates the way in which retrospection, in its "refusal to participate in the present," becomes "the ultimate technique of antipolitics" (Marcus 120). This is why, within the state of emergency of the Trojan War, the cave is used as a device for capturing and altering Philoctetes' – and Winston's – most valuable possession, their inner mind and soul, curing them from their "defective" memories, so that they will capitulate to sovereign power (Orwell 258). In other words, the mythical hero's cave, being open on two sides, cannot long function as a shelter, but leaves his inner self exposed to sovereign power's violence, and provides a schema via which one can see, and critique, similar "cavernous" conditions/spaces in society.

Notes

[1] For instance, a Homeric scholiast writes that the Achaeans abandoned Philoctetes in Lemnos because they "knew that the priests of Hephaistos tend to people who have been bitten by snakes" (qtd in Mandel, *Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* 26), while a similar view is expressed in Dictys Cretensis' *Ephemeris belli Troiani,* where the author writes that Philoctetes was sent "with a few other men, to be cured of his poison on Lemnos" (qtd in Mandel, *Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* 26).

[2] Norman Austin in his characteristically titled book *Sophocles' Philoctetes and the Great Soul Robbery* demonstrates that with the verb *ἐκκλέψεις* Sophocles means to steal rather than to deceive, and thus translations rendering it as 'to deceive' or 'to beguile' eliminate the crime to which these lines refer, while to render *ψυχὴ* as 'mind' rather as 'soul' is similarly more innocuous (59). The lines "τὴν Φιλοκτήτου σε δεῖ/ ψυχὴν ὅπως δόλοισιν ἐκκλέψεις λέγων" should therefore be rendered as "you must see how you using words will steal the soul of Philoctetes" (Austin 59).

[3] As Nicole Loraux demonstrates in her book *The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens,* the Athenian democracy preferred to disavow the existence of conflict within the *polis,* promoting instead the fiction of a united city (25).

# CHAPTER 2. THE CAVE AS A MYSTICAL SPACE: TRANSFORMATION, CREATIVITY, SEXUALITY AND REBELLION

## 2.1 Prologue

"Son, let us go – but first we must salute (*προσκύσαντε*)/ this home which is no home, for you must learn/ how I sustained myself with patient heart," Philoctetes characteristically urges Neoptoloemus when he believes he is about to depart for his homeland, intimating that his cave is in some way a sacred space containing a valuable lesson for the young man (ll. 533-535). This chapter will, therefore, approach the cave – and other cave-like spaces in the case of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – from an anthropological perspective, looking into the various symbolisms caves acquire in ritual, folklore, and philosophy, in order to examine the cave as a place of transformation. Namely, it will be argued that the cave functions as an ambivalent symbol, being both a womb, a protective retreat, and a tomb facillitating a sort of *katabasis* through which the hero is transformed, coming back with a potential boon for his community as his experience leads him to question his society and its leadership, and to pose questions on the issue of justice. In *The Summoning of Philoctetes*, Oscar Mandel picks up some of the symbolisms of the cave and of the island of Lemnos in general, and, departing significantly from the ancient text, transforms the arid Sophoclean island into a sort of earthly paradize, a place of peace and creativity diametrically opposed to ordinary human society. It is, after all, no coincidence that the first version of Mandel's play on Philoctetes is precisely entitled *The Island.* At the same time, it is significant that in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell locates the origins of Winston Smith's 'wound,' his varicose ulcer and other psychosomatic symptoms, in the sexually and otherwise bare life the protagonist leads in Oceania. In other words, it is the issue of sexuality and his love for Julia that leads Winston to rebel against the state, and to seek in the room in Mr. Charrington's shop a cave/ womb-like protective space in the midst of his cavernous society.

### 2.2 Caves in ritual and in Plato's *Republic*

As Ralph Crane and Lina Fletcher pertinently remark in their comprehensive study of caves in speleology, folklore, literature and the arts, caves are omnipresent in literature because, while scence thinks about caves, lirature "thinks *with* caves" (ch. 7, emphasis in the original). Indeed, what stands out about caves is that they are typically defined and depicted in relation to human beings (Crane and Fletcher ch. 1). For instance, it is common to employ parts of the human body or architectural metaphors in order to describe a cave; cave openings can be "gaping 'mouths'" or "ruptures in the planet's 'skin' which lead to the 'bowels' of the earth, while caves can also have 'chambers,' 'vaults,' 'floors,' 'walls,' 'ceilings,' and 'domes' (Crane and Fletcher ch. 1). In other words, there has always been an overwhelming tendency to see caves as analogues for human phenomena, such as the dark spots in the individual or collective human psyche (Crane and Fletcher ch. 1). However, the symbolism of caves is not straightforward; rather, caves tend to have a cluster of antithetical significations. Thus, caves are simultaneously dwelling places and sanctuaries from persecution, they are places of shelter and places of "deep, dark danger," places of birth, but also of burial, repositories of secrets and keys to the truth, a source of knowledge and wisdom, and a metaphor for regimes of ignorance and unreality; they are "a human habitat and the home of mythical monsters" (Crane and Fletcher Preface, chs. 1, 5, 7).

For Sigmund Freud, all objects sharing the capacity of enclosing a space which can be filled by something, like "pits, caves, and hollows" are a representation of the female genitalia (Freud, tenth lencture), something which ties in with the common motif according which caves are the "primal womb" from which we all emerge and the "primal tomb" to which we all return (Crane and Fletcher ch. 7). Insofar as the hollowness and roundness of caves suggest that, whilst they contain nothing, "everything is contained in that cosmic nothingness" (Crane and Fletcher ch. 7), caves become a common representation of the world, especially in ancient Greek initiation traditions (Chevalier and Gheerbrand 180). Plato's well-known allegory of the cave, which he presents at the beginning of the seventh book of the *Republic*, employs precisely this symbolism, adding to the cosmic signification of the cave a moral and ethical one as well (Chevalier and Gheerbrand 180-184). More

specifically, Plato asks us to imagine that the world in which we live is like a cave, an "underground den," when human beings are chained from childhood onwards so that they cannot move or turn their heads, being able to see nothing but the shadows of one another and of real objects on the opposite wall of the cave (*Republic,* book VII). In this way, the cave dwellers believe the shadows they perceive to be real, while, according to Plato, truth and reality are to be found in another, higher realm outside the cave. The philosopher himself clarifies that the cave, the "prison-house" as he calls it, is the world of the senses, while the journey upwards to the sunlight is "the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world" (*Republic,* book VII). In other words, this is a cavernous world of ignorance, suffering, and punishment where human souls are chained, but at the same time, it is the cave that indicates the way the soul has to follow in order to find all that is good and true (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 180-184). As will be seen, the myth of Philoctetes, as developed by Sophocles and contemporary authors, anticipates to a large extent such a platonic conception of the world. It also poses the question, however, of whether the world of the cave does not eventually affirm itself as more real than any other transcendental truth it might point to.

### 2.3 The cave of Philoctetes in Sophocles: the significance of the hero's *katabasis*

In the Sophoclean text, Philoctetes calls his cave an "ἄοικος εἰσοίκησις," a "home which is no home," and yet he insists that Neoptonemus enter, for he should learn how Philoctetes "sustained [himself] with patient heart" when no other man could have endured such a life (ll. 534-538). Moreover, like Antigone who calls upon the natural landscape, the fountains and groves of Thebes, to bear witness to "what kind of laws" send her to her tomb when she believes that the community of city elders is mocking her (*Antigone* ll. 844-849, my translation), Philoctetes addresses his cave, his "hollow cavern of stone,/ now hot, now icy cold" where he believes he is about to die, upon finding out Neoptolemus and Odysseus have deceived him and robbed him of his bow (ll. 952-953, 1081-1085). In other words, while it is hard to agree with Carola Greengard that from the very beginning of the play the cave is identified as a "protective retreat" with increasingly "womb-like aspects" (41), since this is how Odysseus attempts to represent the cave, it is significant that Philoctetes

himself stresses the cave's tomb-like aspects, implying that its value lies in the way in which it has born witness to the injustices, past and present, done to him. This whould explain why Philoctes seems to believe that inside the cave lies an important lessson for Neoptolemus. Philoctetes' choice of words is also highly suggestive; namely, Philoctetes suggests that they "salute" the cave (l. 533), using the word 'προσκύσαντε' from the verb 'προσκυνέω' which means to "make obeisance to the gods or their images," to "fall down and worship" or to "do reverence" to sacred places (*The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*). It would seem that the cave, a mystical space by itself, has become a sacred space through a second process, that is, through the hero's suffering; the cave is a significant plot device because it "must be not only seen from the outside but also *experienced* from within" (Austin 88).

And yet, the cave of the mythical hero is much more than a "sanctuary" from which the "true spiritual drama" of the play will emerge, as Norman Austin claims, adding that Neoptolemus, "initiated into the mystery of suffering, … enters the cave a political man [but] emerges a spiritual being" (88, 96). Rather, the cave is the locus from which the 'true' political message of the tragedy emerges, as first Philoctetes and then Neoptolemus find out through the device of the cave that there is something higher than the mandates of the state. The two-mouthed cave would, of course, suggest to the audience the traditional ancient Greek depiction of the underworld as an "underground cavern with one entrance for arriving souls and one for departing" (Greengard 41). Philoctetes' repeated strokes of pain resulting in death-like slumbers inside the cave function, therefore, as a recurring *katabasis*, a descent to the underworld, from which the hero emerges with knowledge that can potentially be a boon for those who might meet him.[4]

Indeed, it can be argued that Philoctetes has made sense of his unmerited punishment, at least to a certain extent, when he links Odysseus and the commanders of the Achaean army to the snake that bit him; thus, when his learns through the false merchant that Odysseus means to bring him back among the Greeks again, Philoctetes declares he would "rather listen to the hateful/ serpent that crippled [him] than hear this man" (ll. 630-632). Similarly, later on, Philoctetes says that, if only he could see all the men who have wronged him perish, he would "think [his] illness cured" (ll. 1043-1044);

the only cure Philoctetes can imagine for himself is to see his enemies suffer like him (Tessitore 76). In other words, the Sophoclean text seems to imply, without ever stating it explicitly though, that the leadership of the Achaean army is directly responsible for Philoctetes' suffering not merely for having abandoned him to rot in a deserted island, but also for the very nature of his illness. This being the case, it is no wonder Philoctetes does not want to be reminded of Troy which has brought him and others so many woes (ll. 1400-1401), since during this campaign, not only has he been exiled from his society, but, as he learns, the best of the Achaeans have died while the evil live and thrive (ll. 435-460). When Philoctetes says he cannot "praise the deeds" of the gods because they allow "the evil and villainous to live," but "always banish whatever things are right and good" (ll. 448-452), he in fact rejects the pan-hellenic cause of the Trojan War and poses questions on the issue of human and cosmic justice. Philoctetes' steadfast refusal to rejoin the Greek army even though that would mean his cure shows that he considers the society that has banished him to be worse than the Lemnian cave. Hence it is no coincidence that, for some critics, the uncurable devouring wound that is consuming Philoctetes is "at heart the problem of … justice," the "longing for a world that is clearly and consistently just" (Tessitore 75, 77, 84).[5]

Philoctetes' potential to be a catalyst for change becomes evident in Neoptolemus' transformation. In fact, the *Philoctetes* is often considered to be a play about Neoptolemus and about his "movement from lie to truth" in mind and action rather than about Philoctetes himself (Mandel, *Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* 103); thus, the struggle "between Odysseus and Philoctetes for the soul of Neoptolemus constitutes the theme of the tragedy," writes Agostino Masaracchia (qtd in Mandel, *Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* 104). In the first scene of the play, Odysseus explains to Neoptolemus that the time has come for him to "show [his] true nobility," not only with his body, but also by doing whatever is asked of him, however unexpected or unheard-of it might seem to him; "if you hear some unexpected plan,/ yet serve me – for you came as my assistant" (ll. 50-53). That is, instead of instructing the young man to show his nobility in body and mind, as the standards of classical Athens demanded, Odysseus replaces 'mind' with strict 'obedience' (Austin 55), and then proceeds to convince him that the end justifies the means, by arguing that the pursuit of victory and glory justifies the use of lies and deceit; "none should recoil

when what he does brings profit," he insists, and the profit for the young man, according to Odysseus, would be to be proclaimed "both wise and good" (ll. 79-85, 111-119).

And yet, in Philoctetes' cave, Neoptolemus receives a different kind of education, when he witnesses Philoctetes' suffering. Structurally situated in the very centre of the tragedy, Philoctetes' inarticulate cries of pain teach Neoptolemus to regard Philoctetes as first and formost a human being rather than as a loathsome means to an end; Neoptolemus comes to realise, therefore, that there is something fundamentally wrong with the world of "political machination which Odysseus represents," where "a man does not mean much more than a tool" (Poe 21). Hence Neoptolemus' decisions, first to reveal to Philoctetes the true destination of their journey, and then to return to him his bow and to agree to take him home, whatever the cost to him, show that he comes to see the exiled hero as a subject. Thus, towards the end of the play Neoptolemus declares it was a mistake to let himself be persuaded by Odysseus and the whole army, and that justice is above wisdom – at least as Odysseus defines it (ll. 1226, 1247).[6] Having personally lifted up the suffering Philoctetes from his "deathlike condition" has brought Neoptolemus into contact with "one of the most universal symbols of renewal and transformation" (Van Nortwick 63), and has initiated him into a "new kind of vision of social justice" which includes the pariahs of society (Austin 87). More than that, however, the development of the play shows that Neoptolemus becomes concerned not merely about deceit and about Odysseus' lies but about the broader issue of justice and the very purpose of the mission, having experienced it form Philoctetes' perspective (Poe 24). In other words, he agrees to take Philoctetes home rather than to Troy because he comes to see that the benefit of his original mission would be greater for the Achaean army than for the sick man.

Many critics like Austin lament that, although Philoctetes has emerged as the winner in the struggle for Neoptolemus' soul, what seems like a victory for "honesty and courage," and "true friendship" is in fact a "victory for sickness over health," pernicious both for Philoctetes and for Neoptolemus (Austin 154-155). As their argument goes, this is a colossal error that the *deus ex machina* has to fix. Yet, if this play celebrates anything, it is this short-lived victory of 'sickness over health'; one cannot help remembering Winston Smith's secret wish that he could have infected the whole population of Oceania

with “anything that hinted at corruption. … Anything to rot, to weaken, to undermine, […] that would tear the Party to pieces” (Orwell 131-132). When Neoptolemus makes the “second and greater of his decisions” to honour his promise to carry the injured man home, he does so “fully conscious that he will become a hounded outcast”; his “moral victory” is, therefore, complete (Mandel, *Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* 113-114). Neoptolemus has received from Philoctetes the boon of civil disobedience, according to which the individual conscience must sometimes rebel against the mandates of state expediency. Anticipating Henry David Thoreau by a vast stretch of time, Sophocles argues that “we should be men first, and subjects afterward” (Thoreau 2).

## 2.4 The Cave and creativity in *The Summoning of Philoctetes*

### 2.4.1 *Overview*

In *The Summoning of Philoctetes,* Oscar Mandel departs significantly from the Sophoclean text in several important ways. To begin with, he gives Philoctetes a companion, Medon. In the epic tradition, Medon was the bastard son of Oileus, king of Locris, and thus the half-brother of Ajax. After being exiled to Phylace for killing the brother of Oileus’ wife, Eriopis, he went to fight in the Trojan War (Homer, *Iliad* 13.693-700). When Philoctetes was left behind at Lemnos, Medon was the one to take command of his seven ships (Homer, *Iliad* 2.716-28). He was killed in battle during the final year of the war by Aeneas (Homer, *Iliad* 15.332-336). By contrast, Mandel gives us a very different Medon, who, like his master, Philoctetes, never goes to Troy and who shares in Philoctetes’ hostile stance against the Greek army. An important consequence of the fact that Philoctetes is given a companion is that he is able to thrive on the island, transforming the arid Sophoclean landscape into an earthly paradise which contrasts sharply with the ordinary human society. For the same reason, Mandel’s Philoctetes feels no need to be reinstated into society as long as he has Medon with him. Another important departure from the Sophoclean text is that here the one to accompany Odysseus is not Neoptolemus but Demodocus , who in the *Odyssey* is the blind bard who sings of the Trojan War and of Odysseus’ exploits in it while Odysseus is a guest in the court of Alcinous, king of the Phaeacians (Homer, *Odyssey* 8.74-130). In fact, Demodocus’ significance in Mandel’s play is precisely that he is not merely

a soldier in Odysseus' service, but also a bard, and thus one of those who will determine the official narrative on the Trojan War. In Mandel's play, Demodocus is to pretend to be a castaway and persuade Philoctetes to come to Troy voluntarily, but is instead won over by Philoctetes' alternative way of life, especially after he comes to realise that anyone, including himself, is expendable if that will serve the purposes of the state.

### 2.4.2 *The transformation of Lemnos*

In the *Philoctetes,* it is not just the cave, but the whole island of Lemnos where the cave is located that plays a significant role. But while Sophocles focuses on the island as a symbol of "isolation," "solitude" and "death" (Cirlot 160), Mandel chooses to focus in the first part of his play on the common signification of islands as primordial spiritual centres, a miniature world which constitutes a complete and perfect image of the cosmos (Chevalier and Gheerbrand 519-520). In this aspect, the island evokes, like the cave, a place of refuge, being moreover a special place of science and peace in the midst of the ignorance and turbulence of the secular world (Chevalier and Gheerbrand 519-520). In this rewriting of the myth, the island of Lemnos provides an opportunity for an idyllic self-sufficiency, something which, as Thoreau argues, is a prerequisite for an honest living; it is impossible, he writes, "to live honestly, and at the same time comfortably, in outward respects. … You must live within yourself, and depend upon yourself always tucked up and ready for a start, and not have many affairs" (Thoreau 15-16). In a similar way, Philoctetes and Medon, transform by themselves the deserted island into a hospitable place of habitation. Thus, upon arriving, Demodocus and the other soldiers are amazed to find the cave furnished, made into "almost a house," with "couches covered with skins," "wooden utensils – table, benches, a few knives – bronze basins and pots … stone tools. A hearth" (*The Summoning of Philoctetes* 186). Later on, Philoctetes himself narrates to Demodocus his various accomplishements, the way he has devised agriculture, "captured the sun's rays," or fabricated his bow and a wheel moved by a river (195). In other words, he is not just a *homo faber,* a maker of things, as the Sophoclean Philoctetes was with his herbs, his rudimentary wooden cup, the fire-making and the hunting and gathering (Austin 57), but he is meant to be here the figure of the scientist and engineer. Mandel's conception of the figure of Philoctetes becomes more clear through a reading of his play's earlier version,

the *Island*; there, in the prologue, Heracles introduces Philoctetes as "the most skillful of the Greeks," a "prince of resources; explorer of the Danubian and the Scythian wildernesses; mathematician; builder of aqueducts and baths and harbors and war machines" (266). More importantly, he devises a bow "so strong, so far-shooting that the possession of it will end the Trojan War" (*Island* 267). In short, Mandel's Philoctetes possesses skills that the state must harness.

In sharp contrast to the wild landscape of the Sophoclean Lemnos, here the island's nature is nurturing, and peaceful, suggesting the possibility of another way of life based on humanitarian values rather than on war or political expediency. While the Sophoclean Piloctetes existed in a primitive and antagonistic survival struggle with the wild animals that he hunted, but which would devour him once he was helpless without his bow (ll. 952-960, 1146-1162), the exclusion of predatory beasts creates here a landscape "of cyclical nature and nurture" which could be described as a "feminized scenery" (Greengard 40). Indeed, Mandel's Philoctetes addresses his island calling it "clean Lemnos" whose breeze "cools [his] wound and sings like an old nurse" (*The Summoning of Philoctetes* 191). Significantly, the Lemnian landscape is constantly contrasted to that of the war-ravaged plain of Troy; Demodocus himself is stunned by the difference between the peace of the green island, where he can sit "chatting under the trees … drinking clean water and eating figs" and the "scarred, sacked, cracked" plain before Troy, where "every leaf and every blade of grass [has been] blasted," the "heather uprooted" and the ground filled with "bones and sand and mud" (*The Summoning of Philoctetes* 193). The portrayal of Lemnos as green and thickly wooded is highly significant, insofar as woods, bushes, gardens, and water are part of the symbolic topography of the pubic hair growth and the female genitals; as Freud characteristically writes, wood is "a feminine, maternal symbol" (Freud lecture 10). He also adds that whereas in general "weapons and implements always stand for the male, materials and things manufactured [stand] for the female" (Freud lecture 10).[7] Thus, Philoctetes' creative genius is in perfect harmony with this idyllic landscape, reflecting the way in which Lemnos is one of those "fabled islands of the mythic journey of the soul: a place where an old self dies and is reborn and a new world order is symbolically regenerated" (Segal 294).[8] In short, the Lemnian landscape is feminine, maternal, and therefore nurturing, leading to renewal and rebirth, and this is why it contrasts so sharply

with the masculine, war-scarred landscape of the Trojan plain; in Greengard's words, the "forces that move Philoctetes' landscape are those of natural creativity and life, and the scenery suggests … the mountain caves in which gods are bred" (47).[9]

Such a depiction of Lemnos is not arbitrary, but rather alludes to the various myths concerning the island. Indeed, Lemnos was traditionally associated with the cult of Cybele, the Great Mother goddess, as well as with a number of myths revolving around the murderous conflict between men and women, a conflict ending with the exclusive occupancy of the island by women (Greengard 47). Prominent among those myths is that of Hypsipyle and the Lemnian women, who were punished by Aphrodite with a vile smell when they failed to honour the goddess (March 411). After this, their men brought home captive women from neighbouring Thrace and had sex only with them, so that the neglected women retaliated by murdering their husbands and their concubines, as well as the rest of the island's male population (March 411). Later, queen Hypsipyle and the Lemnian women, who, according to Apollonius Rhodius, bore arms and all participated in the assembly, mated with the Argonauts so as to repopulate their island (*Argonautica* 609-909). As Charles Segal points out, this mythical event has a historical analogue in later times, when the pre-Greek Pelasgians, the original inhabitants of the place, killed their Athenian concubines and children, and reflects the vicissitudes in the Greeks' struggle for expansion to the northeast, overcoming the "hostility of its indigenous (female) powers," something which results in "barrenness and the destruction of civilization" (307). Significantly, the foul smell emanating from Philoctetes' wound parallels that of the stinking Amazons (Rhodius).

This ties in with Mandel's argument that the Philoctetes matter was "intrusive from the beginning" to the *Iliad* and the Epic Cycle (*Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* 12). This comment is prompted by what Mandel calls a "union of large promise with small fulfillment" (11), since Helenus' oracle dictated that Philoctetes was to be instrumental to the fall of Troy, and yet it is far from evident how just killing Paris brings about the end of the siege.[10] In fact, only Pindar's ode credits Philoctetes, the archer son of Poeas, with sacking the city of Priam and bringing "an end to the toils of the Danaans" (Pindar, *Pythian 1* 50-55). Moreover, the *Iliad* does not hold bows and arrows in particular esteem; these

weapons belong to the previous generation, the one in which Heracles rather than Achilles had flourished, something which also seems to indicate that an older legend was accommodated into a later one so that Heracles might share in the glory of the Trojan War through the presence of his weapon (Mandel, *Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* 12, 18). The tale of Philoctetes as as a pre-Trojan myth is in some ways the key to understanding the origins of Philoctetes' wound by a snake which the hero disturbed when approaching Chryse's altar. That is, insofar as Chryse is one of the many representations of the Mediterranean Great Mother or Earth Goddess who reigned before the Achaeans came and established the cult of the male and martial Olympian gods (Mandel, *Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* 43), the encounter between Philoctetes and Chryse can be seen as connected with the struggle between matriarchy and patriarchy. Chryse, protected by her serpent, faces "a minor bow-carrying Apollo,"[11] something which could signify a momentary setback of the conquering Olympians (Mandel, *Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* 43-44).[12] The hero's wound, whose force is that of "a devouring woman," would therefore signify the goddess' revenge (Greengard 44, 48).

Such a line of interpretation would tie in with Oscar Mandel's original conception of the play in the *Island*, a detail which he later omitted in *The Summoning of Philoctetes*. Namely, in the earlier version of the play, Philoctetes draws a connection between his wound and the sacrifice of Iphigenia, another myth denoting the passage from matriarchy to patriarchy (Λεκατσάς 67)[13]; Iphigenia's sacrifice, perpetrated so that the Achaeans might be able to plunder "Priam's coffers of gold in Troy" but disguised behind the pretext of a just "Cause" so that nobody would take the blame, woke Philoctetes to the way in which the Trojan War rendered everyone expendable, allowing the disenfranchisement of people both within the Greek society, in the case of women for instance, and outside in the case of the Trojans. "But my eyes were opened … It was soon after that the serpent bit me" (Mandel, *Island* 278), Philoctetes characteristically says, linking his wound to the moral and political foundations of his society with its hypocritical criminality disguised in the name of piety and the common good.

Thus, the condemnation of the Trojan War which remains implicit in Sophocles, so much so, in fact, that it is generally not noticed by critics, is here stated overtly. Hence,

whereas in the Sophoclean text Philoctetes becomes wild as a result of his wound and the harsh living conditions as Neoptolemus accuses him (σὺ δ' ἠγρίωσαι, l. 1321), in *The Summoning of Philoctetes* it is the Greek soldiers who become wild and beast-like as a result of the war:

> And these years, … in which I might have established a house and grown in wealth and reputation, I have spent them like a beast among beasts in the sand; yes, my mouth filled with sand when we crawled on the beach and drove back the Trojans in the first onslaught, like a beast sweating and growling, muck-covered, swearing over dice, scratching the blood off the rings I stole from the dead. … Fifteen years we are children, fifteen years we are old men; and the little space between, must we spend it howling in the attack, luckless if we die, luckless if we live, life either killed or wasted? And why? … Why are we driven and driven? (190)

Contrary to these soldiers, timidly questioning the purpose of being 'driven' like animals but ultimately accepting this way of life as the only possible one, Philoctetes has been transfomed through the influence of the island and its cave. As Philoctetes explains to the bemused Demodocus, the greatest wonder of all is that in this place "where men left me to rot, in this silence I can think at last. I ask questions of the stream and the tree leaf, of the spider and the seashell" (195). And what Philoctes learns from his island is that a human being can be absolutely pure only in perfect solitude; a "man stops being a bandit only when he's alone," for in the world of human affairs "crime and justice are bossom friends" (181, 194). As opposed to the lonely Sophoclean Philoctetes, who despite his hatred for the leaders of the Achaean army still loves many of his former comrades and is hungry for news of them, in Mandel's play Philoctetes and Medon seem to have severed all ties with the rest of humanity. Feminized through his wound, Philoctetes is a failure by the standards of his patriarchal society, but, instead, he finds perfection in his island in his ideal homosexual relationship with Medon.[14] Living and working together, they have created a perfect "we" (195), in which their two identities merge into one, something which contrasts with the thousands of "swilling solitudes" of which the Achaean army is made up (196), and this is why Odysseus can break Philoctetes only with Medon's murder. Thus, in the

bliss of their earthly paradise they feel no need to know anything about the outside world; "Tell me no stories. Keep your nightmares to yourself … and feel what peace is like," Philoctetes exclaims (193).

Like Socrates in the *Republic*, he argues in favour of "the only life which looks down upon the life of political ambition" and which is that of "true philosophy" (Plato 7.521b). When Philoctetes finds "perfection" in the island where he was meant to die, it shows that his prison has transformed his vision of the world (194); Lemnos and its cave have allowed Philoctetes to see more distinctly the state in which he had been living and to conclude, along with Thoreau, that the rest of humanity is like "a distinct race from [him]" (Thoreau 20). In his earthly paradise, Philoctetes is like the freed captive of the Platonic cave, the philosopher who, having attained his "beatific vision," is unwilling to descend back to the (cavernous) world of human affairs (Plato), something which is paradoxical enough considering that Philoctetes has been consigned to a cave. But then again, under a regime which imprisons – or banishes, in this case – unjustly, maybe "the true place for a just man is also a prison," that "separate but more free and honorable ground" where the state places those who are not with it but against it (Thoreau 13).

### 2.5 The wound and the cave: sexuality and rebellion in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

In mythology, not only is the island of Lemnos closely associated with the feminine element, but Philoctetes himself is in many ways a feminized hero. Unable to fight because of his wound and, at the same time, lacking any opponents because of his abandonment he cannot perform his *aristeia,* and gain in the battlefield the glory that signifies masculine heroic status (Van Nortwick 50-51). At the same time, Philoctetes' lameness as a result of the bite received by Chryse's snake is a symbolic castration (Segal 309), while the bleeding wound is suggestively androgynous, insofar as the way in which it oozes recalls the menstruation of women (Greengard 45), which the Greeks believed brought the danger of pollution (Van Nortwick 51). And while this symbolic castration can validly be read as the righteous anger of Chryse, the Earth goddess, against patriarchal impositions, another line of interpretation is also possible if, following the hints dropped by Sophocles, we assume the leadership of the Achaean army rather than the goddess to be responsible for the wound.

In this section, I will therefore examine how in *Nineteen Eighty*-Four, Orwell picks up from the myth of Philoctetes the theme of sexuality and metaphoric castration, and places it at the very centre of the politics of his dystopian society.

Winston Smith's varicose ulcer, a detail which tends to pass unobserved although it runs throughout the novel like a leitmotif, is the way in which George Orwell rewrites the wound that cripples the mythical hero.[15] In the very beginning of the novel, where Winston Smith is first introduced, we learn that his flat was on the seventh floor, and he who was "thirty-nine and had a varicose ulcer above his right ankle, went slowly, resting several times on the way" (3). Significantly, Winston's varicose ulcer recurs at regular intervals, whenever it begins to itch "unbearably" or to become inflamed (10). But this ulcer is not the only psychosomatic symptom Winston experiences; the meagerness of his body, his compulsive need to drink gin, and especially his violent coughing fits which "nearly always attacked him soon after waking up," leaving him breathless, are also emphasized throughout the novel (33-34, 149, 157), indicating a profound dissatisfaction with living conditions in Oceania. And just like Philoctetes has been leading a life of bare, phorbic survival by hunting birds and drinking stale water off ponds, the inhabitants of Oceania are made to live in an overcrowded, grimy world where they can only drink bad coffee and bad gin with "a sourish, composite smell," eat "metallic stew" and wear "dirty clothes" (62). Hence, just like the Sophoclean Philoctetes seems to think that the Achaean leaders are somehow responsible for his wound, so in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* there is "always in your stomach and in your skin … a sort of protest, a feeling that you had been cheated of something that you had a right to" (62). In other words, Orwell is providing here a possible explanation as to why the mythical Philoctetes might have to be ostracized because of his wound. After all, a wounded soldier, screaming and smelling badly, would have been nothing new in an army, and no other wound appears to have been in any way remarkable throughout the ten-year siege. But this particular wound is a kind of protest, hence the cries accompanying it are so dangerous and unsettling, while the smell emanating from it would probably reflect that of the society that caused the wound. Answering the question which is persistently being raised in the ancient Greek text without ever being convincingly answered, the narration here holds that the wound and the ulcer are, in short, a protest, opposing the discipline imposed upon the body and revealing that these are not

its proper conditions of functioning (Foucault 156); in Orwell's words, "why should one feel it to be intolerable unless one had some kind of ancestral memory that things had once been different?" (63).

Thus, in Winston Smith's case, the wound indicates the body's instinctive reaction to a whole series of constraints, privations, and disciplines, prominent among which are the regulation of sexuality by the state and the sophisticated surveillance system which guarantees the observance of these regulations. As the narrator informs us, the "unforgivable crime" in Oceania was "promiscuity between Party members" (68). The aim of Oceania's politics of sexuality was double and reveals the way in which the conditioning of the body and its instinctual drives serves as an intermediary which aims at the soul of the individual (Foucault 11, 15-16): one the one hand, the prohibition of eroticism prevented men and women from "forming loyalties which [the Party] might not be able to control" (68), while on the other hand this sexual privation induced fear, hatred, a "lunatic credulity" and a hysteria which could be transformed into "war-fever and leader-worship" (139-140). Significantly, this biopolitical intervention on the population of Oceania is assisted by means of an unceasing surveillance through the telescreens, devices which "received and transmitted" simultaneously, picking up immediately any sound or facial/ bodily expression of an individual (Orwell 3-4). In a truly Foucauldian manner, the narrator informs us that in Oceania there was "no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment," but that "you had to live … in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized" (4-5). This is, of course, the very definition of the Panopticon, the architectural apparatus which allows for the inmates to be seen without themselves being able to see the person watching them, and which constitutes a "generalizable model of functioning," polyvalent in its applications (Foucault 201, 205). As Foucault points out, panopticism induces a state of "conscious and permanent visibility" which assures the automatic functioning of power as the idea of being watched causes the individual to monitor their own behavior, inscribing in themselves "the power relation in which [they] simultaneously [play] both roles," becoming the principle of their own subjection (201-203). By successfully passing judgement on its inhabitants' "passions, instincts, anomalies, infirmities, maladjustments … drives and desires," the

society of Oceania creates a carceral continuum which produces docile and, therefore, manipulable bodies (Foucault 17, 136).

At the same time, the abolition of privacy in Oceania, both in public overcrowded spaces, and in private yet incessantly watched ones, blocks another fundamental need of the individual, that of creativity. The Sophoclean Philoctetes, alone in his cave, is forced to manufacture the objects and find the medicinal herbs that will allow him to survive, while in Mandel's version of the myth, the hero is the very definition of the *homo faber*, illustrating the idea that true creativity comes from within, from "the dark places of the earth or the soul" (Crane and Fletcher ch.7). In Oceania, however, "ownlife," that is, any manifestation of "individualism and eccentricity" is severely frowned upon (Orwell 85), denying the creative impulse any outlet. Winston Smith's name is, thus, to a large extent, a euphemism; he manufactures nothing. The only timid manifestation of his craftiness is the diary which he keeps, as a legacy to be left to the future as a testimony of life in Oceania (8-9), and which he himself uses in his attempt to make sense of the world in which he lives. Winston, who feels as if "he were wandering in the forests of the sea bottom, lost in a monstrous world where he himself was the monster," and who wonders whether he is alone "in the possession of a memory" (28, 62), is merely a shadow of the powerful brain of the philosopher who lives in the Platonic cave and finds his way out of it. In short, through surveillance, the Party produces a series of completely isolated and, in a sense, both sexually and politically castrated individuals, as isolated as Philoctetes is in his deserted island.

It comes, thus, as no surprise that Winston's rebellion against the Party comes as a result of his love for Julia and consists precisely in this love rather than in what one would typically consider to be a political act. It is no coincidence that, when Winston and Julia meet for the very first time in the countryside, the setting of the novel is suddenly transformed, from the war-ravaged urban wasteland which is London, with its "bombed sites where the plaster dust swirled in the air … over heaps of rubble" and its "sordid colonies of wooden dwellings like chicken-houses," to a beautiful, peaceful and eroticized natural landscape, full of trees and flowers, birds and streams, where the "air seemed to kiss one's skin" (5, 123, 130).[16] Just like Mandel's play contrasts the island of Lemnos

with the war-scarred plain of Troy, so here Orwell contrasts the "sooty dust of London" with the brightly sunlit countryside (125). Then, when Julia tears her clothes off, flinging them aside, it is with "that magnificent gesture by which a whole civilisation seemed to be annihilated" (131), reminding us that the figure of the troglodyte, that is, the figure of the cave-dweller – which Winston and Julia are insofar as they live in a cavernous society – connotes a return to a mode of life "somehow other than or antithetical to human civilization" (Crane and Fletcher ch. 3). Consequently, since in Oceania the sexual act is an "unforgivable crime," it follows that, "successfully performed, [it is] rebellion" (71); as Foucault writes, crime is potentially a "fortunate irrepresibility of human nature," it is an energy that is reviving and stands for the return of what is repressed (Foucault 289-290). This is why Winston and Julia's "embrace had been a battle, the climax a victory. It was a blow struck against the Party. It was a political act" (Orwell 133). But more than that, this relationship provides, albeit temporarily, the cure to Winston's/ Philoctetes' wound; indeed, all of Winston's psychosomatic symptoms subside during the time Winston and Julia create for themselves a sort of protective womb which functions as a temporary shelter from the ever-vigilant eyes of Big Brother.

The womb-like space which renders secret rebellion-disobedience and the resulting transformation/ cure possible is the room they rent in Mr. Charrington's shop, rooms being, of course, prominent amongst the various symbols representing the womb of the mother (Freud, lecture 10). Mr. Charrington's room echoes Philoctetes' cave in many ways. Like the sparsely furnished cave, with the few rugged objects Philoctetes has fashioned for his survival, Mr. Charrington's room is nothing more than a "shabby little room" with an "enormous bed … ragged blankets and a coverless bolster," while Mr. Charrington has additionally provided a "battered tin oilstove, a saucepan, and two cups" (Orwell 143). Moreover, like the two-mouthed cave Philoctetes lives in, the house has two entrances, "one of them through the back yard, which gave on an alley" (Orwell 143). Combined with the hidden presence of the telescreen, the two entrances constitute an element which undermines the ability of the cave to function as a refuge, as a place where the couple can meet in all safety, and the presence of the rats, which so unsettles Winston (Orwell 152), testifies to the permeability of the room.

Nevertheless, throughout the second part of the novel, the room does function, not only as a refuge, but also as a place of transformation. Not only does Winston drop his habit of drinking gin at all hours, no longer feeling the need to drown his malaise in it, but he also grows fatter and healthier, while, significantly, his varicose ulcer subsides, leaving "only a brown stain on the skin above his ankle," while his fits of coughing in the early morning also stop; as the narrator characteristically phrases it "the process of life had ceased to be intolerable" (157). At the same time, it there that Julia can transform herself from a "Party comarade" into a "woman." Situated in shop where antiques are sold, the room itself is furnished in such a way as to evoke the past that the Party seeks to erase. The old painting featuring a church and the half-forgotten rhyme which it brings to mind demonstrate the way in which the room and the objects in it function as "a little chunk of history that they've forgotten to alter. It's a message from a hundred years ago, if one knew how to read it" (154). Thus, it is there that Winston later reads can read Goldstein's book, gaining at last a better understanding of the principles governing the functioning of the Oceanian society. A place of memory amidst the general oblivion, the room is, like the cave, a place affording a deeper knowledge and understanding, indicating the way that must be followed to arrive to the truth. Gazing at the everyday life of the proles through the room's window, Winston begins to realise how dehumanized the Party members are (145).

Finally, the room is an amplification of the glass paperweight that Winston buys at Mr. Charrington's shop. This object, which Winston assumes must have functioned as a paperweight, was a "heavy lump of glass, curved on one side, flat on the other, making almost a hemisphere," at the heart of which, magnified by the curved surface, was a piece of coral (Orwell 91). The glass paperweight, as opposed to shabby little room, is a beautiful object, and yet, it does not appeal to Winston for its beauty; like the room, its significance lies in the fact that it provides a link with the lost past, having belonged to "an age quite different from the present one" (92). Like the room, or like the cave, the interior of the glass paperweight is, by analogy, a miniature representation of the world. Its curve resembles the dome of the sky, so that, gazing into it, Winston seems to see in it "a tiny world with its atmosphere complete" (155). Indeed, Winston not only wishes that he could get into the safety of the womb-like glassy world, but that he actually is inside it, along

with the bed and all the other objects in the room (155). The glass paperweight is "the room he was in, and the coral [is] Julia's life and his own, fixed in a sort of eternity at the heart of the crystal," the narrator concludes (155). The room provides the couple with the illusion "not only of safety but of permanence," since "[so] long as they were in this room no harm could come to them" (150, 158). Yet, the equation of this womb- or cave-like "sanctuary" with the fragile glass paperweight into which Winston gazes, highlights not only the protective aspect of the room and its cosmic significance, but also its permeability, functioning as a metaphor for the precarious nature of the refuge such cave-like spaces can provide (158).

### 2.6 Concluding remarks

To sum up, both Sophocles and the two contemporary authors employ the common symbolism of caves as a representation of the world leading their respective protagonists to a questioning of their society and to acts of disobedience, so long as the cave functions as a – provisionally – mystical womb-like space granting a better knowledge of the nature of civil society. Mandel rewrites the cave of Philoctetes and the island of Lemnos in general as an "Elysium" (193), an earthly paradise created by human ingenuity rather than divine benevolence, which unexpectedly leads Philoctetes and his companion to perfection, providing an alternative value system to the one represented by the war-hungry Heracles and the ruthless Odysseus. Similarly, Orwell dramatizes the effort of Winston and Julia to construct "a secret world in which you could live as you chose," not accepting it "as a law of nature that the individual is always defeated" (Orwell 142). The fundamental question these texts address, therefore, is that of whether truth is to be found in an alternative realm, which would be more real than the world to which the protagonists belong, or whether the oppressive "sphere of politics is the only truth for human beings" who attempt to live together in human communities (Tessitore 71).

Notes

[4] On the motif of the hero's journey, including the *katabasis*, the Belly of the Whale, from which the hero returns to his community with the ultimate boon, see Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces.*

[5] Joe Park Poe also insists that the issue around which the play's action turns is whether "justice ultimately exists in the world," arguing that the gods' casual disregard of Philoctetes' wishes and questions implies that they have no interest in the question of justice, revealing the "meaninglessness of life," a theme of the modern theatre of the absurd (9-10). However, the issue here might not be exactly that of divine justice, as that of whether the gods function as a metaphor for sovereignty.

[6] For the translation of these lines see Tassos Roussos' translation rather than the one provided by Oscar Mandel.

[7] For Panagis Lekatsas, the origins of civilizations and of arts like weaving, decorating, cultivating the land, fruit gathering, and other manufacturing activities are to be found in the matriarchal society (49).

[8] See also the ending of Mandel's play, where Demodocus, having taken the decision to remain alone on the island, says that in order for his peace to begin, he must first "bury a man" (213).

[9] Of course, Greengard makes that argument about the ancient Greek text and not about its modern rewritings, basing her argument mostly on the tragedy's last scene, where Philoctetes, persuaded at last to go to Troy, takes a lyrical farewell of his island, apostrophizing the "chamber that shared in [his] vigil" and the nymphs of the meadows and of the streams (ll. 1453-1454). However, such a transformation of the way in which he views his island, a view which suddenly coincides with Odysseus' depictions of it, seems rather to anticipate, as shall be argued later, the way in which Winston Smith comes to love Big Brother.

[10] Information on what happens to the mythical hero after being taken to Troy comes from the *Little Iliad,* attributed to Lesches of Mitylene, where it mentioned that

Philoctetes is cured by Makhaon, the son of Asclepius, and that he kills Paris in single combat (Proclus ll. 7-8).

[11] It should be remembered that the bow that Philoctetes has inherited from Heracles was, in fact, Apollo's gift to Heracles, something which creates a link between Philoctetes and Apollo.

[12] Conversely, the violation of Chryse's shrine might signify a victory over the goddess, which the younger god/ hero has to expiate (Mandel, *Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* 44).

[13] See also later novels presenting the Trojan War as a state of exception which facilitates the subjugation of women within the context of the struggle between matriarchy and patriarchy, such as Christa Wolf's *Cassandra* (1983), Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Firebrand* (1987) and Sheri S. Tepper's 1988 novel *The Gate to Women's Country* (Thomson ch. 15).

[14] It should be remembered that, in Epigram 2.84, the Roman satirist Martial writes that "the hero Philoctetes was soft and readily gave himself to men," although, according to Martial, that would be a punishment sent by Aphrodite due to the slaying of Paris, who was her favourite (255).

[15] In Greek mythology there are a number of affinities between Philoctetes and the Lemnian fire god identified with Hephaestus. As Charles Segal points out, both were exiled from society because of a conflict involving a woman (the goddess Chryse and Aphrodite respectively) and the return of both to society was deemed necessary because of an indispensable technical skill (310). More significantly, however, Philoctetes' lameness, like that of Hephaestus, "belongs to the magical *smith* or worker of metals" (Segal 310, emphasis mine). It should also be remembered that Hephaestus was also originally a matriarchal deity who was later incorporated into the group of Olympian gods (Λεκατσάς 61). This could account for the origin of the name of George Orwell's protagonist, Winston Smith – with the -ston in "Winston" etymologically alluding to 'stone' from Middle English *stone*/ *stan*/ *ston,* deriving from the Old English form *stān* (*Middle English Dictionary Online*).

[16] Notice that in Greek literature and ritual birds often shared the mythic significance of women as procreators and nurturers, while the use of birds in sexual

imagery was common throughout ancient Greek art and literature (Greengard 42). Moreover, the description of the field where Winston and Julia meet, where “the boughs of the elm trees swayed just perceptibly in the breeze, and their leaves stirred faintly in dense masses like women’s hair” is symbolic of the female genitals (Orwell 129; Freud, lecture 10).

## CHAPTER 3. THE CAVE, THE CURE, AND THE STATE OF EXCEPTION

### 3.1 Prologue

As Norman Austin points out, every Sophoclean play has two questions as its central themes: what it is to be a human being, and, also, what it is to be a citizen "living and participating in a community of citizens" (17). This holds particularly true in the case of the *Philoctetes*, a tragedy especially concerned with the price that the hero's healing, and hence, social inclusion, entails. This chapter will, therefore, focus on the function of the cave as a biopolitical space, as well as on the "cure," which is, in fact no cure, but rather a capitulation, a complete betrayal of the self. Examining Philoctetes' laments in the Sophoclean text as speech acts which aim to incite to action, it will be argued that the mythical hero's obstinate memory, which will not forget past and present injustices, embodies the politics of *stasis*, even if Philoctetes is merely "a majority of one" (Thoreau 12). It is this theme of obstinate, or "defective" memory, as O'Brien would call it, that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* picks up, as Winston struggles to retain the only possession you can have in Oceania, the "few cubic centimetres inside your skull" (Orwell 29, 258). That is, Orwell, reflecting on the value of tragedy, carries on the Sophoclean meditation on the nature of humanity and connects it to consciousness, arguing that "the object [is] not to stay alive but to stay human" (174). Moreover, this chapter will examine the way in which both Orwell and Oscar Mandel find in the Trojan War a paradigm of the state of exception in modernity. In *The Summoning of Philoctetes*, in particular, Mandel shows the ambiguity of the state, demonstrating that the value of the myth of Philoctetes lies in the fact that it does not represent a "crazed aberration of the state, but the state in its everyday operations" (*Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* 116-117, 181). The twin-mouthed cave is shown to ultimetely make the hero vulnerable, leaving him exposed to the violence of sovereign power; Demodocus' choice between companionship and solitude in the end of the play is, therefore, only possible because Demodocus is not indispensable to the state. It is a choice which the all too useful Philoctetes would never have been allowed to make (Mandel 182). Both for the ancient text and for its modern rewritings, the cave is, thus, a synecdoche for

the inner soul, which, like the cave, turns out not to be impregnable, as both the body and then the soul of the hero are invaded by a venomous society.

### 3.2 The wound, the cure, and the politics of memory in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*

"Such suffering my eyes have never seen," the chorus of Achaean sailors exclaims as soon as Neoptolemus and the suffering Philoctetes withdraw into the cave, posing, furthermore, the question of why Philoctetes should suffer such a cruel fate (l. 677). In its search for a mythical paradigm for Philoctetes' punishment, the chorus lights upon the myth of Ixion, a "byword or criminality beyond ordinary crime" (Austin 98); "they say/ Ixion once went near to the sacred bed/ of Zeus, and was cast by the god to the depths on a wheel of fire;/ but I have never beheld or heard of another/ whose fate was harder than this man's," the chorus members go on to say (677-681). Despite having lived "at peace with all," doing "no wrong to any man alive," Philoctetes "wastes away *unjustly*" (ll. 682-684, emphasis mine). The disparity between the two cases is so great that the effect of this allusion is to further emphasize the incomprehensibility of suffering, which, though sometimes sent as a punishment, is at other times completely unmerited (Austin 98-99). This question of why Philoctetes has to suffer so much seems to be left unanswered in Sophocles; no character offers a convincing answer, except perhaps Neoptolemus, who argues that the gods' plan was to keep Philoctetes away from Troy until the appointed time had come for him to unleash his deadly arrows against Troy (ll. 191-201), but even this explanation does not really go anywhere near justifying the necessity for so much suffering, while, for his part, Heracles is clearly not interested in explaining the whole matter. Yet, while the answer to this question would have to wait for modern rewritings to state it explicitly, it is already present in the ancient text in a remarkable way.

Many critics like Greengard and Van Nortwick have remarked that the extraordinary physicality of this play, in which "visceral suffering" and "inarticulate screaming" replace dialogue, departs from the dramatic convention of reporting physically violent events in narrative through a messenger, and marks a radical break from anything that had been seen that far in Attic tragedy (Greengard 22; Van Nortwick 60). This brings us back to Oscar Mandel's insight that it is in the hero's very suffering that the appeal of

the myth resides (*Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* 36, 49). In fact, not only the appeal, but also the very meaning of the play is conveyed through this intense physicality; in other words, it is, paradoxically, the suffering itself that provides its own justification. Punishment need not presuppose crime; instead, the *Philoctetes* already implies what *Nineteen Eighty-Four* will make explicit in the twentieth century: "the thing had happened because purges and vaporizations were a necessary part of the mechanics of government" (Orwell 48). The case of Philoctetes illustrates the idea that "power everywhere and continuously refers and appeals to emergency as well as laboring secretly to produce it" (Agamben, *Means Without End* 6); as the *Philoctetes* shows through the wound devouring the hero, the price to be paid for healing includes "the unjustified horror that makes healing necessary" (Tessitore 84), exemplifying the way in which sovereign power produces and preserves states of emergency in order to be able to function.

The "savage" wound that attacks and devours Philoctetes is, therefore, a mechanism by which Philoctetes' status as a citizen is undermined until he is reduced to a state of bare life which calls Philoctetes' humanity and agency as a subject into question (*Philoctetes* l.173). To begin with, away from human society, Philoctetes lives "crawl[ing]," "helplessly creeping along," increasingly resembling the "spotted and shaggy beasts" with which he lives (ll. 184-187, 205, 290, 701-702). In such extreme conditions, Philoctetes has lost much of his "sense of equality" with others, since he progressively loses his health, his security as a member of society, and then his sense of dignity as a man among men, in what constitutes a gradual "stripping away of his physical and mental resources" (Poe 18). Indeed, upon encountering strangers in his island, Philoctetes begs them not to "recoil in terror at [his] wild appearance," but to pity him, a "wretched, … deserted … friendless, wronged" man (ll. 225-228), while later he again implores them not to abandon him to live all alone amongst so many hardships, but to take him with them on their ship though the burden for them will be great because of his offensive odour and his repulsive cries (ll. 469-487). In fact, he even begs them to treat him like a piece of baggage, placing him wherever it will be more convenient for them, "down in the hold, or in the prow, the stern,/ wherever [he] will be least in the way" (ll. 480-483). As the chorus comments later on, the wound has reduced Philoctetes to a "child who has lost his nurse" (l. 703), taking away from him all notion of agency; if Philoctetes is "just like a child" (l. 703), it follows that he

is also incapable not only of covering his needs, but also of deciding what is best for him. Someone else, they seem to imply, Odysseus, the army, the gods or the state needs to do that for him. Thus, it is easy to see why, despite the hero's defiant refusal to compromise, Joe Park Poe finds that Philoctetes is, nevertheless, too passive, and that rather than inspire us with a "sense of wonder at man's potential greatness," he is merely an object of sympathetic pity, a victim to whose warm personality and undeserved suffering we respond (6).

However, not only is Philoctetes reduced to a beast-like state because of his harsh living conditions, but he is persistently viewed as a monster or a beast to be hunted by those who have come to fetch him; "you stole on me, hunted me," Philoctetes accuses Odysseus (ll. 1006-1007). It is no coincidence that Odysseus and the rest of the Achaeans abandon Philoctetes precisely inside the narrow rocky cave while he is fast asleep (ll. 271-272). The primitive, physically repellant cave-dweller who has to be duped because he nurses a powerful anger against Odysseus is highly reminiscent of another mythical episode involving Odysseus, that of Polyphemus and the Cyclops episode in the *Odyssey* (Van Nortwick 44). Thus, before Philoctetes makes his appearance and addresses Neoptolemus and his sailors, forcing upon the audience the realization that Philoctetes is and must be treated like a human being, Sophocles allows us a glimpse of the way in which the hero is seen through the eyes of his pursuers. Namely, in the opening scene Philoctetes is portrayed as a kind of howling "monster," whose "crude lair is an anthropological curiosity," a "strange, semi-human creature" whose imminent return is an occasion for fear (Van Nortwick 44, 49, 51; *Philoctetes* ll.135-136). In Lemnos, it is, indeed, not the newly arrived sailors but the exile who has lived there for ten years who is considered foreign and who needs to be known; "Tell me," the chorus anxiously asks Neoptolemus, "what chamber/ does this man inhabit,/ and what land is his? for I/ must learn, lest suddenly/ he fall upon me here" (ll. 152-156), foreshadowing the way in which, in modernity, the disqualified citizen/ the criminal emerges as "a wild fragment of nature … a monster, a madman," a sick or abnormal individual who has to be intelligible so that power might be exercised upon them (Foucault 27, 101, 148).[17] Yet, interestingly, here it is the "monster" that is devoured instead of devouring; Philoctetes, describing his woes to Neoptolemus, says that for ten long years he has wasted in Lemnos, "in hunger and in pain,/ feeding the ravenous

maw of [his] disease," while later, in the very middle of the play, during his fit of pain, Philoctetes screams that the pain is "killing" and "devour[ing]" him (ll. 311-313, 745). In other words, the wound turns out to resemble the Trojan War itself, which also feeds on human bodies, when it, "of its own choice, will take no man/ who is evil, but will always take the good" (ll. 436-437). This understanding of disease as an aggressive force which "attacks the individual from the outside, penetrates him, takes possession of him and, like a wild animal [feeds] on his flesh," common in the ancient Greek medical as well as literary corpus (Jouanna 81), in the Sophoclean tragedy serves to illustrate the way in which the "'medicalization' of ever-widening spheres of life" is inherently related to the way in which sovereign power reduces the political *bios* to "forms of *survival*" (Agamben, *Means Without End* 8, emphasis in the original).

The removal of Philoctetes to the island of Lemnos in general, and to the Lemnian cave in particular, marks, therefore, sovereignty's rupturing of Philoctetes' juridico-political status in the *polis*, and Philoctetes himself recognizes this when he laments that, despite being the son of king Poeas, he has come to "be a slave and never live in freedom," a "friendless, lonely, homeless (ἄπολιν), living corpse" (ll. 995-996, 1018). Reading the figure of Philoctetes through Agamben's concept of sacred life, that is, of life which may be killed but not sacrificed, in a sphere where it is permitted to kill without committing murder and without celebrating a sacrifice (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 83), allows us to understand how sovereign power in the *Philoctetes* can perform such a rupturing of the hero's place in the *polis* with complete blamelessness, making it appear completely natural; Philoctetes has been marooned because his "savage, sacrilegious screams of pain" disturbed sacrificial rites in the army (ll. 8-11). And if the chorus considers Philoctetes to have been blameless when he was exiled, it does insist that Philoctetes is wrong in his adamant refusal to compromise by capitulating to his corrupt enemies, repeating to him incessantly that "you have caused this, you alone,/ harsh-fated man, and no one/ is forcing this fortune/ upon you but you" (ll. 1095-1098). "You had your chance to choose/ a better fate, but chose instead/ one which is harder for you," the chorus members add unsympathetically (ll. 1099-1101), while Neoptolemus admonishes him that when people "willingly persist in pain,/ like [him] it is not right for anyone/ to pardon them or have compassion for them" (ll. 1316-1321). In the light of this, it is unsettling that critics tend

to side with the view expressed by the chorus members, arguing that if Philoctetes' wound keeps festering it is only because of his rage and hate, that this is a "disease of the will," as well as that the solitude he chooses is a "psychotic solipsism" (Austin 133, 181).[18] As Poe remarks, these critics would be right "if all the evil were in the past" (45); indeed, to past injustices Odysseus and the rest of the Achaean army have added the present persecution which forms the occasion for this tragedy, attempting to deceive Philoctetes and manipulate him against his wishes. Thus, as Philoctetes himself explains, it is not "resentment for the past" that hurts him, but "thinking on the pains that [he] must suffer hereafter" amongst evil company (ll. 1358-1361).

This brings us to one of the most important themes of the play, namely, the politics of memory. More specifically, Philoctetes' laments occupy a large portion of the play, and, as is typical in laments, they do not only recall the injustices done to him, but they also contain imprecations against those who have wronged him.[19] For instance, when Philoctetes realizes that he has not only been deceived, but that Odysseus has no qualms about binding him and depriving him of the right to decide over his own life or death, the hero hurls at him a torrent of accusations, ending with curses, calling on his homeland to avenge him:

> Why do I seem, god-hated man, no longer
>
> crippled and putrid to you?
>
> …
>
> May you be damned! – You *will* be damned for all
>
> the wrongs I suffered, if the gods are just.
>
> …
>
> O fatherland of mine, O gods who watch me,
>
> avenge, avenge, however late, my wrongs
>
> on all these men, if you have pity for me.
>
> I live most piteously, but if I saw

them perish, I would think my illness cured. (ll. 1031-1044)

These recurrently uttered lamentations for the injustices he has suffered and the ensuing calls for retribution, feeble and impotent though they may seem, are highly significant, insofar as they are to be interpreted within the larger politics of memory and mourning in classical Athens. As Nicole Loraux pertinently explains, myth and ritual show us that it was but a short step towards action, from sorrow to wrath, and from wrath to secession (*Mothers in Mourning* 43).[20] Indeed, Philoctetes' obstinacy in recalling past and present evils, for which he so often stands accused, powerfully embodies *menis,* the "memory-wrath" of sorrow transformed into defiance (Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning* 44). *Menis,* "black like a child of the night," that is, black like a Fury, is "terrible" and "it lasts," writes Loraux; it is "repetitive and endless," all the more so since "never to have an end is precisely the motivating force of *menis*" (*Mothers in Mourning* 44). In other words, the repetitive and endless nature of Philoctetes' grief and wrath contravenes the injunction to "*me mnesikakein*," that is, the classical principle of swearing not to recall misfortunes of the past, undermining the fiction of a unified city, free from the threat of internal conflict (Loraux, *The Divided City* 15, 251, 261). Laments are to be understood, therefore, as "powerful speech acts, capable of inciting violent action," as indeed they did, since female laments in the classical *polis,* as well as in later times, played a "crucial motivating role" behind initiating cycles of vengeance (Dué 236, 238). In short, words "act, they exercise performative force of a certain kind," sometimes being "clearly violent in their consequences, as words that either constitute or beget violence," as Judith Butler has characteristically phrased it (Butler 63), and this is why Philoctetes in his cave represents the threat of *stasis,* which has to be integrated and placated, in order for it to be neutralised and turned to the benefit of the *polis.*

Thus, in the face of the impasse the confrontation between Philoctetes and Odysseus has reached, with the hero solemnly declaring to everyone that he would never come to Troy, "not though the god of the fiery lightning/ came to envelop [him] in his flame" (ll. 1197-1198), only Heracles, descending from the sky as a *deus ex machina* can provide a solution. Overturning completely all the preceding action of the play, Heracles' intervention tends to be considered "implausible" (Austin 158), "autonomous in character,"

an extraneous element encroaching "as an alien discourse" on the end of the play (Pucci qtd in Austin 193). However, as Poe argues, far from being external or anticlimactic, the appearance of the *deus ex machina* is the play's "logical conclusion," in the sense that, from the beginning to its end, the play emphasizes Philoctetes' suffering, humiliation, and ineffectuality (49). What is more, the fact that in ancient Greek performances of the tragedy the same actor would have interpreted the part of Odysseus, the disguised merchant, and Heracles implies that there is a direct connection between all of these characters (Tessitore 86). Taking this hypothesis further, it can be argued that the appearance of the deified Heracles is, in fact, a clearer manifestation of sovereign power, something which would justify the way in which the content of Heracles' speech vindicates Odysseus' claims (Tessitore 85). Whatever the case, it is important to consider the fact that Heracles is a divine figure issuing a command, which means that Philoctetes' final capitulation is anything but voluntary. "What sort of free will is that? … When a god says "Go," men go. God *dissolves* the human will," as Mandel characteristically phrases it (*Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* 111, emphasis in the original).[21]

All in all, Philoctetes' capitulation constitutes a betrayal of himself, a wound worse than the physical one he had had to bear, when he consents to become part of an order of things which he despises (Poe 46-47). As Poe writes, something "more humiliating" is demanded of Philoctetes than that he abandon mere abstract principles; he is asked "to embrace his enemies," and return to Troy on their own terms to accomplish an end that they desire, although he doesn't desire it himself, denying "the validity of his own feelings of outrage" and renouncing "all claim to justice," something which comes very near to the "ultimate degradation" (47). This is why Philoctetes sees his island and his cave with new eyes when he is about to leave them; speaking of "streams" and "nymphs" where he previously saw only the reality of his privations, Philoctetes seems not to have forgiven, but to have forgotten. More than that, he seems to see the world as Odysseus would like him to see it, having lost all touch with reality, intimating that he is as broken by the end of the play as his literary descendant, Winston Smith will be by the end of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* when his heart swells with love for Big Brother; Odysseus' initial mission, to steal the soul of Philoctetes, as he suggestively phrases it, has succeeded, and the ultimate boon the Sophoclean Philoctetes has gained through his mystical cave, namely, that those "who

serve the state with their consciences necessarily resist it for the most part" (Thoreau 4), fails to be transmitted. His heroic quest has failed, as the continuation of the myth amply demonstrates; his pupil, Neoptolemus, brutally murders the old king Priam in Zeus' altar, while Neoptolemus' other victims include Hector's little son Astyanax, Priam's son Polites, as well as Polyxena, whom he sacrifices at his father's grave, when Achilles' ghost demands her as his war-prize (March 526). Philoctetes himself shares in the general punishment of the Achaeans for their crimes in Troy through his failed *nostos*, being driven to Campania in Italy, and finally settling in Crimissa, near Croton and Thuriumis, after making war on the Lucanians (Apollodorus, *Epitome* 6.15b).[22] Thus, the play ends with a perversion of the original womb vision, confirming the core of Odysseus' claim to wisdom, namely, the conviction that "there is no intelligible world beyond the polis" (Tessitore 72).

### 3.3 Philoctetes' submission and the ambivalence of the state in *The Summoning of Philoctetes*

As opposed to the Sophoclean text, in which Heracles's intervention takes place in the end, nullifying all the moral and political choices made by the characters, as well as all the cave-symbolisms the play has established, *The Summoning of Philoctetes* begins with Heracles' discourse; Philoctetes and Medon may well try to create an alternative world, but their efforts are predestined to fail, this time not by the gods but by the laws upon which human society is founded. Significantly, Heracles' very first words are an address to Philoctetes, although he knows Philoctetes cannot yet hear him:

> Philoctetes! *My voice fills this island,* you do not hear it, yet soon you shall. Heracles returns to earth: your master and companion … now become among the Gods another God, and still your master. And my word as God remains my word when I was man: War! (185, emphasis added)

The prologue to the play not only reflects the playwright's understanding of the unequal relationship between Heracles and Philoctetes, but also serves to express the view that "social man is at war with man" (Mandel 181); similar to the biblical creation, here too in the beginning is the Word, but now the "human word, the god-sent word," that is, the

primary law of creation, is "War" (185). In the earlier version of the play, Heracles makes his existential claim even more explicit: "to live is to do. To do is to fight. I who fought perfectly rose to the perfect gods" (*Island* 267). Human nature is defined as "carnivorous, predatory, angry, imperious, cruel, embattled" and all that human beings can do is bleed (*Island* 267). So, if the essence of dramatic tragedy resides in "the solemnity of the remorseless working of things [and the] inevitableness of destiny" (Whitehead qtd in Austin 194), then it follows that Philoctetes' attempt to find refuge in his island cave, and to construct an alternative world of peace, where there are "no masters and servants" (*The Summoning of Philoctetes* 191), is compromised from the very beginning; he is doomed to fail. Heracles' voice fills the island and the hero's cave, becoming, by extension, the cave in which Philoctetes must live; "Two heroes have landed on Lemnos, charged by the oracle to summon you. You do not hear them, but they take possession of you" (*The Summoning of Philoctetes* 185), Mandel has Heracles say, siding with Orwell who concludes that "they" can get "inside you" (Orwell 303).[23]

This brings us to the significance of Philoctetes' bow. Unlike the Sophoclean text, in which the bow was originally Apollo's gift to Heracles, and was then passed on from generation to generation of mythical heroes, the bow is here Philoctetes' own creation, the result of his creative genius, and constitutes, therefore, an extension or visible manifestation of the hero's mind and soul, so that the possession or destruction of the bow, which is Odysseus' aim, signifies the possession or annihilation of Philoctetes' soul. This foregrounds the significance of the oracle's decree that Philoctetes should come to Troy "voluntarily," "freely … offering his skill" (*The Summoning of Philoctetes* 186). Commenting on Odysseus' command to Neoptolemus that he must steal the bow (*Philoctetes* l. 78), Austin pertinently reminds us that in ancient Greek the words for 'life' and for 'bow' were very similar,[24] and since *bios* meant not so much simple biological life as "manner or mode of life," the resonance arising from these words in conjunction would suggest the equation of the bow with life or a way of living, as well as with the soul, insofar as in Homeric language a man's *psyche* denotes his life (122). The theft is, thus, twofold, involving not only Philoctetes' bow, but also his identity, and the "debate itself becomes a discourse on the soul" (Austin 122).[25]

In mythology, the divine origin of the bow renders it an ambivalent symbol; it can symbolize the (supposedly) civilizing power of Apollo, who killed the dragon at Delphi with it, establishing his oracle there,[26] but it should not be forgotten that the very same god wielded this same bow to rain down a plague on the Greek army at Troy (Van Nortwick 57). In other words, Philoctetes' bow, in this case, his mind/ soul/ conscience is a weapon that can very easily prove dangerous for the state; it is no mere token of technological skill and superiority which needs to be harnessed within the logic of a Cold-War type polarity before the enemy can get to it. It is for this reason that Odysseus, trying to convince his men that the weapon should not fall to the hands of the Trojan delegation, says that "the man has a murderous weapon in his hand or in his brain. Who made him contrive it? He himself compels us either to attach him to us, or to destroy him" (*The Summoning of Philoctetes* 187). Reading in this an echo of the Sophoclean politics of memory, we can see here Odysseus arguing for the blamelessness of the state's marginalization/ banishment of whoever represents different values other than its *realpolitik* demands of not only holding "the right opinions" and "the right instincts," but also of having "no respites from enthusiasm, [being in a] continuous frenzy of hatred of foreign enemies" (Orwell 220). In other words, the bow represents the possibility of having private beliefs and feelings, nurturing private "resentments and … quarrels" which threaten to destabilize the state (*The Summoning of Philoctetes* 188).[27]

It is Odysseus, playing here a more important role than Sophocles allows him to, who embodies the exact opposite values from the ones Philoctetes represents; an ambiguous, if ultimately repulsive, figure, Odysseus is the only who represents commitment to a common cause, arguing that in times of emergency, like that of the Trojan War, the needs, feelings, beliefs, and ethical principles of the individual are to be sacrificed for the common good (*The Summoning of Philoctetes* 188). Moreover, he does not represent, as Mandel pertinently phrases it, a "crazed aberration of the state, but the state in its everyday operations"; the "Ithacan's moral stature is not defined for us," the playwright argues regarding the ancient Greek text, and, by his own admission, he attempts to highlight this ambivalence in his own play (*Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* 117, 181). Thus, Mandel devotes a whole choral to the praise of the Ithacan king (*The Summoning of Philoctetes* 201). According to the members of the chorus, who represent the public

opinion, there is a lot that is praiseworthy in Odysseus, not only his rightly earned rank among the Greeks, whose leaders and warlords he surpasses in strength, loyalty, and wisdom, but also his role as a civilizing hero for his country (201-202). The soldiers paint the picture of a rocky, barren, primitive island in desperate need of order for the improvement of the living conditions of its inhabitants, and Odysseus is the one to bring these improvements. More specifically, he teaches them to build fine houses, he clears the roads of bandits "by hanging some and giving work to others," he feeds the poor "without robbing the rich," he proclaims religious festivals and holidays, rescues "debtors from prison," proclaims a "full remission of taxes," establishes courts of justice, puts an end to private revenge and family vendettas, gives "peace without sloth" and "prosperity without vice," and shares the toils of his workers, while being, at the same time, an excellent husband and father (202-203). Odysseus' fingers "hold the strings of destiny," he is "almost a god," the choral concludes (203). In other words, he is the ideal statesman, managing justice and finances to everybody's content; this is a vision of the state with which the audience can identify, a familiar one, or even one to aspire to.

Odysseus is, in short, a figure made to represent commitment to the public good and to a common cause, qualities which are usually thought of as positive. He claims, however, that not only private needs, but the very essence of an individual are to be denied whenever reasons of state demand it. Indeed, in the *Island,* Odysseus declares that "I'm not Odysseus and you're not Demodocus. [We are] Greeks. I am Greek item one, and you are Greek item two" (285). This complete objectification of an individual is, however, too much for Demodocus, who asserts his individual identity, a precondition to his assuming responsibility for his actions, as opposed to the blamelessness the state claims for its own actions; "I ask to be relieved of my obedience. … I'm Demodocus! And I lied, fooled a man, played with him, betrayed him! *I* did, not Greek item number two," he exclaims (*Island* 285, emphasis in the original). In other words, it takes an act of civil disobedience to reveal what is hidden behind this magnificent façade of the state. Shaken by the contrast between this war-hardened society and the peaceful Lemnos on the one hand, and between their callous lies and Philoctetes' trust on the other, Demodocus decides to reveal the truth and return the bow, so that Odysseus may openly and clearly summon Philoctetes to Troy. However, this is immediately perceived as an act of "open mutiny" and high treason (*The*

*Summoning of Philoctetes* 199). Yet, since Demodocus acts from conscience without having yet realized the magnitude of what he is facing, even after his act of disobedience, he functions as a catalyst that causes sovereign power to start showing progressively more and more of its darker side. Deciding who is a patriot and who a traitor to the cause,[28] who is to live and who is to die, Odysseus, the embodiment of the state, is the one to decide on the state of exception, exemplifying the notion that sovereignty and the state of exception become synonymous, inasmuch as both are based on the power of decision over life and death (Agamben, *Means Without End* 5). Casually having two of his own loyal soldiers murdered and disguised as members of the Trojan delegation so that his plans might succeed, Mandel's Odysseus demonstrates that, eventually, as politics becomes biopolitics, the *homo sacer* becomes indistinguishable from the citizen (*The Summoning of Philoctetes* 210; Agamben, *Means without End* 37, 41).

Ultimately, Philoctetes' isolation is revealed to be a very effective disciplinary mechanism. The twin-mouthed cave, being open on two sides, becomes an untenable stronghold, so that the Achaean soldiers can penetrate the cave, where Philoctetes has sent Medon to protect him, and kill him, depriving the exile of his companion (207-208). As the stage directions indicate, when the soldiers bring Medon's body out of the cave, Philoctetes, with a "mighty effort" breaks his bow in two and flings himself over the body (208), indicating that with his friend's death, his soul, his very identity is broken. As if that were not enough, Odysseus gives his men the order to sack the cave and destroy everything (208). In other words, Odysseus shatters into pieces every last part of the alternative world Philoctetes has created, from the products of his creative genius to the ideal relationship between the two men. When Odysseus turns and leaves Philoctetes alone amidst the ruins of his world, he finally succeeds in breaking the outcast, who runs after the soldiers, begging them to take him with them (209).[29] Significantly, only and only then does Heracles physically appear on stage, no longer commanding Philoctetes to renounce his rightful anger as in the Sophoclean text, but gloating over Odysseus' victory by ironically urging the Greeks to acknowledge Philoctetes as their "master" (210). Only Demodocus does not prostrate himself before Heracles (210). Demodocus' final decision is to stay all alone on the island of Lemnos, and to abandon language, the instrument Odysseus would have him use to lure ever more people into his carceral world, as he used him, the poet, to

try to ensnare Philoctetes' soul; "I will stop singing, being perfect," Demodocus finally announces (213). And to begin his peace, "Demodocus must bury a man" (213), meaning that he has to bury his former self and be reborn in the Lemnian womb-like cave. Indeed, severing himself from a mission that he formerly shared, and from a society that had represented "a vital portion of himself" (Mandel, *Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* 117), Demodocus has won a significant victory over himself. Nevertheless, the ending is ambiguous. Demodocus is neither broken nor coopted by the state; yet this only happens because he is not indispensable for the furtherance of Odysseus' plans.

### 3.4 The Trojan War as a paradigm for the state of exception and Winston's "cure" in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

"War is Peace," "Freedom is Slavery," and "Ignorance is Strength"; so run the three slogans of the Party, reflecting the fundamental principles of Oceania's regime (Orwell 6). Paradoxical though it may seem that war equals peace, it is not a situation invented by the three superpowers of Orwell's dystopian world. Behind the postulate that "War is Peace," it is, indeed, possible to hear the echoes of another war which dragged on and on for many years with no decisive victories on either side, this war being, of course, none other than the mythical Trojan War. Interestingly, the principle that "Ignorance is Strength" appears to be the least important of the three; when Winston begins reading Goldstein's book, "The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism,"[30] he interrupts his reading of this first chapter in order to move on to the more significant one, the one explaining how war might be the same as peace – not to mention the fact that Julia falls asleep during the reading of this first chapter (191-192, 226). By contrast, the postulate declaring that war is peace occupies a central place in the narrative and marks the insight Winston gains in his womb-/cave-like room, so that, both in its place in the narrative, and in its content, it is in many ways analogous to the insight Philoctetes gains into the Trojan War both in Sophocles' and in Mandel's texts.

Briefly, this slogan explains why the three super-states, Oceania, Eurasia, and Eastasia are permanently, in one combination or another, at war with each other (193). As the narrative informs us, it is "a warfare of limited aims between combatants who are

unable to destroy one another, [and who] have no material cause for fighting … War hysteria is continuous and universal in all countries" (193). Of course, the Trojan War did have material causes; the Achaeans fought for spoils, slaves, gold, and control of commerce.[31] At the same time, however, it is a war that dragged on interminably and could not have been won without the intervention of those of the Olympians who favoured the Achaean army.[32] Moreover, the type of warfare the three super-states wage involves "very small numbers of people, mostly highly-trained specialists" (Orwell 194), since, despite knowing that victory is impossible or at least undesirable, if the social hierarchy is to be maintained intact, all three powers hold the contradictory belief that "the coming conquest of the entire world … is to be achieved either by gradually acquiring more and more territory … or by the discovery of some new and unanswerable weapon" (201). This is highly reminiscent of the myth of Philoctetes, a hero in possession of just such an unanswerable weapon, which will tip the balance of the war. There is, however, a more fundamental similarity between the Trojan War and the perpetual war Oceania and the other two powers wage against each other, namely, that both function as a state of exception. As has already been discussed, the Sophoclean text shows how the war causes both the expulsion and the summoning back of Philoctetes, undermining his status as a citizen, even calling his humanity into question, and, finally, changing his very essence, while Mandel's play the *Island* reminds us of another related myth of the Trojan cycle, that of Iphigenia. Moreover, the phorbic form of survival the mythical hero is subjected to is directly analogous to the continuous series of privations caused by the wars Oceania engages in, against which Winston's body rebels as is manifested in his "wound."

In other words, the Trojan War is not a purely external war, but also constitutes an internal one, and it is this potential of the myth that Orwell's novel magnifies. The "primary aim of modern warfare," Winston reads in Goldstein's book, "is to use up the products of the machine without raising the general standard of living," since such a development would result in the disappearance of human inequality and of the hierarchical society; "the essential act of war is destruction, not necessarily of human lives, but of the products of human labour," Orwell writes (196-198). At the same time, while the Trojan War was actually happening, the Party has found out that an actual war is not, in fact, necessary; "it does not matter whether the war is actually happening … all that is needed is that a state

of war should exist," since it is the "social atmosphere of a besieged city," the consciousness of being at war, and therefore in danger, that makes the "handing-over of all power" to a ruling class seem "the natural, unavoidable condition of survival" (199-200). In other words, both *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the Trojan War, the war that could not be won and which demanded a series of supposedly voluntary sacrifices, exemplify the way in which "the 'state of emergency in which we live is not the exception but the rule'" (Walter Benjamin qtd in Agamben, *Means Without End* 6).[33] This is the meaning of Oceania's seemingly paradoxical slogan, since, as Winston comes to realize, by "becoming continuous war has ceased to exist" (Orwell 207).

Within this framework, Winston, the modern Philoctetes, desperately tries to keep his only and most valuable possession, his inner soul.[34] "Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimetres inside your skull," we learn at the beginning of the novel, and Winston clings to the belief that "they can't get inside you," that the inner heart "remained impregnable" (29, 174). The skull, the seat of memory, becomes, therefore, an important manifestation of the cave into which Winston tries to take refuge, in his effort to escape the collective paranoia and remain human. This is closely related to the Party's politics of memory, which consists in a complete control of external reality, through a process of "continuous alteration," as "minute by minute the past was brought up to date," rendering all history "a palimpsest" (42, 83-84). The Party's programme of controlling all memory, thoughts, and notion of reality of the inhabitants of Oceania was rendered possible through the technique of "doublethink," which is defined as simultaneously knowing and not knowing, being conscious of "complete truthfulness while telling carefully-constructed lies," holding at the same time "two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them, and similarly, as being able to "forget whatever it was necessary to forget, then to draw it back into memory again at the moment when it was needed, and then, promptly to forget it again" (37).[35] In a few words, "reality control" consisted in an "unending series of victories over your own memory" (37). This brings to mind, however, a very ancient practice, the ban on recalling the misfortunes of the past following the restoration of democracy in Athens (Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning* 84, 87), a prohibition which suggests it is possible to consciously manipulate one's memory and induce a state of unconsciousness, since you need to be conscious of what has happened

if you promise not to remember it. Thus, like Philoctetes who refuses to forget past and present injustices, Winston realizes that rebellion consists in trying to stay sane, in not submitting to this practice of collective hallucination; "freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four," he characteristically writes in his diary (30, 83-84).

It is, thus, of his "defective memory," a memory, which carries with it the threat of civil conflict, that Winston needs to be "cured" (Orwell 258). O'Brien repeatedly refers to Winston's obstinate memory as if it were a mental illness from which Winston has never cured himself because he has not chosen to (258). According to O'Brien, Winston has chosen to be "a lunatic, a minority of one," something which constitutes a lack of "humility, [and] self-discipline"; "You would not make the act of submission which is the price of sanity," he tells Winston (261). This is, of course, the very definition of hubris, hubris being a "psychic necessity on the way of individuation and differentiation towards higher levels of consciousness" (Raizis 54). If Winston has committed hubris, however, it means that there is some superior order whose laws he has violated. Here, as in *The Summoning of Philoctetes*, it is the personification of the state occupying the place of the place of the divine order of classical tragedy. Like Odysseus who is, in Mandel's play by general admission of his crew, "almost a god," Big Brother is a semidivine figure, omnipresent through the posters looking at you, yet in reality non-existant (Orwell 3, 205); like all acts of hubris, Winston's attempt to stay sane and to take refuge in an alternative world with Julia brings about its punishment. Thus, the agents of the Thought-Police smash to pieces the glass paperweight, in a gesture that stands for the smashing of Winston's shelter (232). The womb-like room is suddenly replaced with its exact opposite, its uncanny, perverted double, the labyrinthine Ministry of Love, with its dreaded "Room 101."

Within the walls of the Ministry of Love, a cave-like building with no windows, reaching as far below ground as it rises above it, Winston will find out the most important tenet of the Oceanian society: the ultimate wisdom he is destined to get before being reshaped by the Party is that "Freedom is Slavery" (241, 277).[36] This means, as O'Brien reveals, that "alone – free – the human being is always defeated," whereas numbers guarantee strength (277). It is in the torture chambers of the Ministry of Love that the reason behind the hero's suffering is finally revealed; the ultimate truth Winston learns is

that “power is power over human beings,” which means that one asserts their power over another by “making them suffer” (277, 279). If Mandel points out that the significance of the Sophoclean tragedy lies in the hero’s intense and unjustified physical suffering, Orwell makes explicit what is so vaguely intimated by the original text, namely, the reason for the hero’s suffering: obedience is not enough unless the other person is suffering. “Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing,” as O’Brien characteristically phrases it. Once again, the Platonic cave is inverted; it is the cave’s chained inmates who live in the real world rather than the one with the powerful brain who escapes from it, because in the world in which Winston lives, no escape is possible. If Winston tries to remain human, then he is “the last” specimen of humanity, being alone in the possession of memory, an emaciated skeleton suffering from “some malignant disease,” as the varicose ulcer, which had temporarily been cured, has returned fiercer than ever, until Winston’s foot is “an inflamed mass with red flakes of skin peeling off it” (282, 284-285). The incurable wound marks the progress of Winston’s mental “healing,” and the shrinking of Winston’s body, “rotting away, falling to pieces” (285), is a manifestation of the way in which the state’s biopolitics causes life to shrink into bare life.

Thus, the “predestined thing happened in any case”; O’Brien fulfills his promise to “save” Winston, to “make him perfect” (256, 290-291). Despite Winston’s desperate effort to retain his humanity by preserving his love for Julia, he ends up finding, like Mandel’s Philoctetes does when he faces the prospect of complete isolation in the island, that “for everyone there is something unendurable” (Orwell 297). The distorted image of Mr. Charrington’s room, Room 101, containing each person’s worst fear, brings to light another mythological representation of the cave as the abode of monsters which are, nevertheless, “never quite out of touch with the human encounter zone” (Crane and Fletcher ch. 5). Winston emerges from the underground chambers of the Ministry of Love alive, but his humanity remains buried there; when he betrays Julia, he becomes one of those “corpses waiting to be sent back to the grave” that he had so often seen before (Orwell 79, 300). Completely reformed, Winston hardly knows “why he had ever rebelled” (290-291). Ultimately, as in the case of Philoctetes, who can only be cured at Troy, Big Brother’s decisive victory against Eurasia brings about Winston’s “final, indispensable, healing

change": "O cruel, needless misunderstanding! O stubborn, self-willed exile from the loving breast!" he thinks (311). "But it was all right, … the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother" (311).

### 3.5 Concluding remarks

In conclusion, the cave of Philoctetes and the other cave-like spaces, like the Ministry of Love in the case of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, function as biopolitical spaces where life crumbles into bare life, illustrating the process by which the sovereign state delegitimizes its citizens. The Sophoclean politics of mourning, inherently connected to the politics of memory, is, in this context, an important aspect of the political vision of the play and of its rewritings, even in *The Summoning of Philoctetes,* in which, even though the hero is content with the happiness he has found on his island, he still hates the Greeks who abandoned him. Not surprisingly, this theme becomes central in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, since the "struggle against power … is the struggle of memory against forgetting" (Milan Kundera qtd in Marcus 120). Thus, the value of tragedy as a genre, and of a myth like that of Philoctetes lies in the way in which it places the private realm over the *polis*; "she had possessed a kind of nobility, a kind of purity, simply because the standards that she obeyed were private ones," Winston thinks as he dreams of his mother (Orwell 171). The hero's wound, seemingly a very private thing, becomes, therefore, revelatory of a societal *nosos* "corresponding symbolically to a civil *stasis*" (Karakantza 22).[37] As Efimia Karakantza points out, tragedy "always turns around an instance of crisis … during which the system of social values is disrupted and needs to be restored" so that civic life may continue unobstructed; "time and again," however, this is accomplished by "sacrificing the wellbeing of the individual … to that of the community" (22, 29). This is why the cave to which the heroes are consigned cannot be allowed to exist autonomously of the state but rather has to be an extension of it. Since the prison is "a machine for altering minds" (Foucault 125), the cave construct is a place where the state brings its enemies, not merely to destroy them, but to "reshape" them; "we have brought you here … to cure you, to make you sane. … no one whom we bring to this place ever leaves our hands uncured," O'Brien tells Winston, and so it is that Philoctetes in the end embraces Odysseus, and Winston

Smith loves Big Brother. The cave-dwelling protagonists, being made “hollow and then … fill[ed]” with the state (Orwell 269), are destined never to leave the cave as long as they live in a cavernous, carceral society.

Notes

[17] In modern terms, this is translated into the Party's chief aim, which is "how to discover, against his will, what another human being is thinking" (Orwell 201).

[18] Such a reading is proposed by critics including Austin, Segal (316), Winnington-Ingram (qtd in Austin 192), and Knox and Harsh (qtd in Poe 44), among others.

[19] The formal structure of laments in ancient Greek tradition generally followed a three-part pattern, consisting of "a direct address [to the dead person], a narrative of the past or future, and then a renewed address accompanied by reproach and lamentation," but in tragedy these three elements appear both combined and isolated from one another in countless ways, so as to "express immeasurable sorrow" (Dué 239).

[20] In her work *Mothers in Mourning,* Loraux takes the ancient Greek "mentality of lament" as a starting point for understanding the classical mentality of amnesty, demonstrating the close affinity that exists between grief and anger, as the emotions of grief, from which lament springs, "spill over into emotions of anger," and even rage (Nagy xi). In the case of the grieving mothers of mythology this grief turned into rage takes the form of secession when the grieving mothers are goddesses, as in the myth of Demeter, and goes as far as murder in the case of the mythical queens of tragedy, like Clytemnestra and Medea, who are deprived of the "weapon of secession" (Loraux 43). Significantly, it was in the temple of the Mother of the gods, the *Metroon* dedicated to Rhea or Demeter in the Athenian agora, that the *Bouleuterion,* the seat of the Athenian Democracy which was responsible for the proper functioning of democracy, was housed during the fifth century, while later this was were the public archives, the written memory of the *polis,* were kept (Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning* 67-68, 70).

[21] As Christopher Gill points out, Aristotle describes the relation of gods to men as that "of the benefactor to the benefited, and in general of the natural ruler to the natural subject" (Aristotle qtd in Gill 143), something which establishes a paternalistic relationship between Heracles and Philoctetes, giving the former the right to tell Philoctetes what to do for his own good (Gill 143).

[22] For the notion that the Achaeans' failed nostoi, and especially Odysseus' ten-year wandering, are a punishment for their acts in Troy see the Hellenistic tragic poet Lycophron's tragic monologue *Alexandra*.

[23] After all, the etymology of the word "oracle" does derive from the Latin verb "orare," meaning "to speak" (*Oxford Dictionary of English*), so the oracle decreeing the hero's involvement in the Trojan War is the Word.

[24] Austin writes that "Sophocles would have us recall that *bios* in Greek signifies both 'life' and 'bow'" (122), something which is, in fact, not exactly accurate; βίος meant "mode of life" or "manner of living," while βιός meant "bow" (*The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*). However, the only difference between the two words being only in stress, it can be assumed that Sophocles meant to draw on the similarity for the purposes of his play.

[25] Notice how in the *Island,* Odysseus has a slip of the tongue concerning the importance of Philoctetes' offering his services voluntarily, speaking of "voluntary submission" where he should have said "affection" in order to conceal his meaning (269).

[26] This constitutes another mythical allusion to the historical struggle between matriarchy and patriarchy.

[27] The possibility of the bow being turned against the Achaeans almost materializes in the play when Philoctetes and Medon are besieged in their cave by Odysseus and his soldiers, a skirmish which leads Demodocus to ask Philoctetes to kill Odysseus (*The Summoning of Philoctetes* 206-208). Something remotely analogous to this potential of the bow could be Orwell's notion of "ownlife," meaning "individualism and eccentricity," which is frowned upon in Oceania (85).

[28] "I, not you, shall decide who is a traitor," Odysseus tells his soldiers when they demand that he not forgive Demodocus' disobedience (*The Summoning of Philoctetes* 200). Indeed, Demodocus never expected to be called a traitor, and much less to be attacked by the whole army (200), but Odysseus points out his mistake to him; "You take me for a coward or a clown," he tells him (200). This shows the playwright's understanding that the state is "an ambiguous creature, good and evil, serious and ridiculous" (*Philoctetes and the Fall of Troy* 117).

[29] This ties in with Foucault's analysis of isolation as a disciplinary mechanism, according to which solitude is the "primary condition of total submission," until the prisoner loves the warden (Foucault 237, 239).

[30] This book is not, in truth, written by the imaginary Goldstein, but rather by members of the Party itself, highlighting the way in which the only voice which can be heard, filling everything, is that of the state, just as in *The Summoning of Philoctetes* Heracles' voice fills the island from beginning to the end, until Demodocus remains alone.

[31] On the idea that Troy constitutes an obstacle to the Greeks' commerce with Colchis and the Scythians see Mandel's the *Island* (271).

[32] Mandel also expresses such a view of the Trojan War when he has Demodocus say that all "the glory is gone, and we remain on the plain of Ilion by a kind of habit, like men who have lost the knack of doing anything except whatever they happen to be doing – hardly remembering why and what for" (*Island* 281).

[33] Interestingly, Euripides in his *Orestes,* performed only a year after Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, attributes a similar function to the Trojan War, expressing the very Orwellian idea that the gods contrived it in order to get rid of part of the population; Apollo, descending to restore an order as satisfying as that imposed by Heracles, informs us that the gods have used Helen's beauty so as to drive "Greeks and Trojans together in the press of war/ to drain the earth of its human horde/ proliferating in pride" (ll. 1733-1736).

[34] Indeed, while the name of Philoctetes means traditionally "fond of gain" (Daly 441), Sophocles and the two contemporary authors seem to propose a different interpretation of the name, according to which Philoctetes is fond of his possession. In Sophocles and Mandel, this possession is the bow, that is, his soul, so in Orwell's novel the bow is appropriately translated as the mind and consciousness.

[35] A direct antecedent of "doublethink" is to be found in Odysseus' speech in the prologue of the *Philoctetes,* when the Ithacan king persuades Neoptolemus that it is possible to "seem just" and be called the "most reverent of men," and to "be proclaimed at once both wise and good" by telling lies and doing something "shameful" (ll. 79-85, 119). Thus, Sophocles seems to be arguing along with Plato that language is the most powerful tool of human consciousness (Austin 52). Indeed, in the *Gorgias*, Plato characteristically writes that rhetoric is "the incantatory power which by its witchery

enchants, persuades and changes the souls of men," and that the power of speech over the disposition of the soul is the same as "the disposition of medicine with respect to the body" (qtd in Austin 58-59, 62). Indeed, as Akrivi Taousiani highlights, the wide semantic spectrum of language, which can encompass all utterance, both honest and dishonest, is abruptly circumscribed in Odysseus' approach to persuasion to become a term that can only signify "deceptive communication" (429). Similarly, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the continuous development of "Newspeak" with the destruction of words aims to "narrow the range of thought" until "thoughtcrime" becomes impossible (Orwell 53-54). This would suggest that for both Sophocles and Orwell language is a powerful disciplinary mechanism, through which the carceral is propagated and perpetuated in society.

[36] Notice that calling the ministry which deals in torture the "Ministry of Love" is an inversion both of the love Philoctetes needs in his life and finds in Julia, and of the nurturing aspects of the cave symbolism.

[37] In Attic tragedy, no matter how "'familial,' or 'personal' the actions of the tragic hero seem to be," they compromise the "totality of the system," as the contagion spreads to encompass the social and political life of the community (Karakantza 27).

# CONCLUSION

"Whatever else it may do, a play embodies a playwright's belief about how it is to be alive today," the American playwright Charles Mee has said, adding that "what a play is about, what people say and how things look onstage, and, even more deeply than that, how a play is structured, contain a vision of what it is to have a life on earth" (Mee 89-90). Thus, Sophocles' innovative approach to the myth of Philoctetes, converting the island of Lemnos into an uninhabited, arid, inhospitable place, and setting the action of his place in front of a cave, are indicative of a possible vision of the world as equally cavernous – an interpretation supported, furthermore, by the traditional symbolism of caves as a representation of the world.

Within this context, the cave of Philoctetes assumes a dual function, first as a – provisionally – mystical space which leads to a deeper understanding and to transformation, and ultimately as a synecdoche for the carceral. Thus, both *The Summoning of Philoctetes* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* begin with the protagonists' attempt to find refuge in a protective, womb-like space where they might construct an alternative, utopian world not controlled by the state, when their wound, revelatory of the way in which the body resists the impositions placed upon it in the state's attempt to subject it, leads them to rebel against the politically, morally, and sexually bare life the state imposes. However, both texts proceed to show how, within the state of exception of the Trojan War, the cave ultimately constitutes a legal and political stratagem through which sovereignty delegitimizes its citizens with complete impunity, making it appear natural or necessary, until everyone becomes potentially a *homo sacer*.

Thus, the contemporary rewritings of the *Philoctetes* indicate that the value of the myth resides precisely in the mythical hero's unjustified suffering, which shows pain to be "part of the mechanics of government" (Orwell 48), as sovereignty labours to produce and maintain a state of exception in order to legitimize its power and be able to function (Agamben, *Means without End* 6). The cave in which the hero is trapped functions, in short, as a prison, that is, as a device using the body as intermediary for capturing the mind and soul (Foucault 11, 15-16). Politics is shown to be "a continuation of war," adopting the

tactics of the military model and importing them within society for the subjection of individual bodies (Foucault 168), and, thus, Philoctetes' and Winston's eventual capitulation, does not coincide with a healing, but rather with a complete betrayal of the self; with the hero's reinsertion into society, we see how "the carceral archipelago transport[s] the penitentiary technique from the penal institution to the entire social body" (Foucault 298). In other words, the mythical hero's cave, being open on two sides cannot long function as a shelter, but leaves his inner self exposed to the violence of sovereign power, providing a schema through which one can see, and critique, similar cavernous conditions and spaces in society.

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## Περίληψη

Στο άρθρο της «Antigone, Deportee,» η Jutta Gsoels-Lorensen γράφει πως η σπηλιά στην οποία ο Κρέοντας καταδικάζει την Αντιγόνη δεν είναι απλά ένας τόπος τιμωρίας, αλλά επίσης μια νομική και πολιτική δομή που διέπει τον τρόπο με τον οποίο η φαινομενικά αψεγάδιαστη εξουσία διαρρηγνύει την νομικοπολιτική υπόσταση του ατόμου (114). Ωστόσο, η Αντιγόνη δεν είναι ο μοναδικός χαρακτήρας του Σοφοκλή που εξορίζεται σε μια σπηλιά. Πράγματι, η σπηλιά, η οποία συχνά αποτελεί αναπαράσταση του κόσμου στη μυθολογία και τη φιλοσοφία, καθώς και το νησί της Λήμνου γενικότερα, επιτελούν παρόμοια λειτουργία στον «Φιλοκτήτη». Μέσα στην κατάσταση έκτακτης ανάγκης του Τρωϊκού Πολέμου, ο Φιλοκτήτης περνά από την κατάσταση του πολίτη στην κατάσταση του «απόλιδος» χωρίς προφανή λόγο. Έτσι η δομή της σπηλιάς λειτουργεί ως ένας βιοπολιτικός χώρος, όπου, όπως δείχνει η ιατρική ορολογία που χρησιμοποιεί ο Σοφοκλής για να αναφερθεί στην πληγή του ήρωα, ο πολιτικός «βίος» τείνει να συρρικνώνεται σε «γυμνή ζωή». Ωστόσο, όπως όλα τα σύμβολα, έτσι και η σπηλιά έχει δύο όψεις και ενώ αναπαριστά έναν σπηλαιώδη κόσμο, ταυτόχρονα υποδεικνύει και την πορεία που πρέπει να ακολουθήσει η ψυχή για να φτάσει στην αλήθεια (Chevalier και Gheerbrant 180-184). Εστιάζοντας στο θεατρικό έργο του Oscar Mandel «Η Κλήτευση του Φιλοκτήτη» (*The Summoning of Philoctetes*, 1961), καθώς και στο δυστοπικό μυθιστόρημα του George Orwell «Χίλια Εννιακόσια Ογδόντα Τέσσερα» (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 1949) ως μια ασυνήθιστη επανεγγραφή του μύθου του Φιλοκτήτη, αυτή η εργασία εξετάζει τη διπλή λειτουργία της έννοιας της σπηλιάς και ως συνεκδοχή της φυλακής (the carceral) και ως έναν, προσωρινά τουλάχιστον, μυστηριακό χώρο ο οποίος οδηγεί σε βαθύτερη γνώση. Πράγματι, η πληγή του Φιλοκτήτη γίνεται στην «Κλήτευση του Φιλοκτήτη» μια αφορμή για δημιουργικότητα και αυτάρκεια, ενώ στο «Χίλια Εννιακόσια Ογδόντα Τέσσερα» το κακοφορμισμένο κιρσώδες έλκος του Winston Smith φανερώνει τη βαθύτατη δυσαρέσκειά του με τη γυμνή ζωή που επιβάλλεται από το κόμμα, κάτι που τον οδηγεί στο να αμφισβητήσει το πολιτικό σύστημα της Ωκεανίας. Έτσι, ο συμβολισμός του σπηλαίου είναι αναπόσπαστα συνδεδεμένος με το ερώτημα του τι σημαίνει να είναι κανείς άνθρωπος και με το τίμημα που συνεπάγεται η ένταξη στην κοινωνία, όπως φανερώνει η τελική

συνθηκολόγηση του Φιλοκτήτη, η οποία αποτελεί προδοσία του εαυτού του και στα δυο κείμενα. Η έμφαση που δίνει ο χρησμός στο να πάει ο Φιλοκτήτης στην Τροία οικειοθελώς, υπερνικώντας την αποστροφή που νιώθει για τον Τρωικό πόλεμο και για αυτούς που τον διεξάγουν, δείχνει πως το αγαθό που κατέχει ο ήρωας και το οποίο αναζητούν ο Οδυσσέας και το Κόμμα δεν έχει να κάνει τόσο με το μυθικό τόξο όσο με το μυαλό και την ψυχή του ήρωα, κάτι που τονίζεται ιδιαίτερα τόσο στην «Κλήτευση του Φιλοκτήτη» όσο και στο «Χίλια Εννιακόσια Ογδόντα Τέσσερα». Όντας ανοιχτή από δύο πλευρές, η σπηλιά του μυθικού ήρωα δεν μπορεί να λειτουργήσει ως καταφύγιο για πολύ καιρό, αλλά αφήνει τον εσώτερο εαυτό του εκτεθειμένο στη βία της εξουσίας, παρέχοντας ένα σχήμα μέσω του οποίου μπορεί κανείς να δει και να ασκήσει κριτική σε ανάλογες «σπηλαιώδεις» συνθήκες και χώρους στην κοινωνία.