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THE BODILY CATHARTIC IN SOPHOCLES' *KING OEDIPUS*, *ANTIGONE*, AND *PHILOCTETES*[2]

This paper examines Sophocles' plays *King Oedipus*, *Antigone*, and *Philoctetes* in order to explore whether catharsis is possible without body torture. Referring to the ideas of Michel Foucault from his seminal work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), the paper investigates the role of the body in Sophocles' plays and, within the realm of Sophocles' fiction, reassesses Foucault's claim that over time the reform of the soul had become more important than the punishment of the body.

Keywords: Sophocles, body, punishment, torture, drama, Foucault

"**Chorus:** Many things dread and wonderful,
none though more dread than mankind…"
Antigone
(Sophocles 2014a: 10)

1. *INTRODUCTION: THE LAUGHTER, THE PAIN, AND THE BODY*

Three traditional theories explain the role and meaning of laughter and humour. The oldest, Superiority Theory, advocated by Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and later Thomas Hobbes, asserts that we laugh at misfortunate people because we feel superior to them. This theory "dominated Western thinking about laughter for two millennia" until two new theories appeared in the 18th century: the Relief Theory, according to which "laughter relieves pent-up nervous energy"—Herbert Spencer and Sigmund Freud were prominent supporters—, and the Incongruity Theory—seconded by Kant, Schopenhauer, and Kierkegaard among others—, which claims that people laugh when they perceive "something incongruous—something that violates [*their*] mental patterns and expectations" (Morreall 2016). Traditionally, these theories have been applied to Comedy, which, according to Aristotle's definition of the Ludicrous in his *Poetics*, presents some mistake and imitates the shameful people. In a comedy, the shame is painless and not at all destructive, so that we laugh not at the pain but only at the ugliness of the things presented (Aristotle 2013: Chapter V).

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In his *Passions of the Soul*, René Descartes goes one step further by claiming that "Ridicule or derision is a kind of joy mixed with hatred, which results from our perceiving some small misfortune in a person who we think deserves it: we hate this misfortune but enjoy seeing it come to someone who deserves it. When this comes upon us unexpectedly, the surprise of wonder causes us to burst into laughter" (Descartes 2017: Part 3, 50). Laughter is thus seen as an expression of ridicule, scorn, wonder, indignation, hatred, and even joy—"the joy we get from seeing that we can't be harmed by the evil that we are indignant about" (Descartes 2017: Part 2, 35). In a comedy, this misfortune "must be small; if it is great, we can't believe that the person who has it deserves it, unless we were born mean or hate him very much" (Descartes 2017: Part 3, 50). But what if one was to apply these theories of laughter to some of the great spectacles of torture and death that are known to have taken place in both history and literature? The laughter accompanying the witnessing of the mutilations of the body throughout history may be said to combine the teachings of the three famous theories: it is the laughter springing from the incongruity of the very situation, celebrating our superiority, and relishing the relief we feel for not being the ones mutilated.

A famous example of body mutilation as an appropriate punishment for regicide involves Sir William Wallace (1270-1305), one of the leaders of the First War of Scottish Independence, who was "hanged, drawn and quartered" after being accused of high treason by King Edward I. The said punishment was devised by Edward I's father, King Henry III, and had been applied (in various forms) in England until 1870. There are many different accounts of Wallace's martyrdom, one claiming that

> After hanging for a certain time, the sufferer was taken down, while yet in an evident state of sensibility. He was then disembowelled; and the heart, wrung from its place, was committed to the flames in his presence … The body was afterwards dismembered; the head fixed on London Bridge, the right arm on the bridge of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the left at Berwick, the right leg at Perth, and the left at Aberdeen. (Carrick 1830: 161)

According to another account, Wallace was also emasculated in the process: stripping him of his masculinity must have been particularly ignominious for one who was thought of as "a hero, befitting of praise and glory", but also satisfying for those who thought that Wallace "deserved one of the most brutal executions possible" (Hale 2016).

It has been noted that "Edward had destroyed the man, but enhanced the myth" (BBC 2014). As is often the case, the greatest martyrs, such as Jesus or Saint Joan, haunt the human imagination and help create some of the most exquisite myths. Writers have been known to take advantage of the human thirst for pain resulting in beauty and to create literary works that stand the test of time. Francis Fergusson, for example, singled out "*Oedipus Rex*, near the beginning of the tradition, and *Hamlet*, on the threshold of the modern world" as two "sphinxes of literature, with the disconcerting property of showing up those who would interpret them" (Fergusson 1972: 2). This paper

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goes back to *King Oedipus* and two more plays written by Sophocles, *Antigone* and *Philoctetes*, in order to explore whether catharsis is even possible without body torture and whether the purpose of such catharsis is similar to the feeling one gets from laughter. Referring to the ideas of Michel Foucault from his seminal work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), the paper examines the role of the body in Sophocles' plays and, within the realm of Sophocles' fiction, reassesses Foucault's claim that over time the reform of the soul had become more important than the punishment of the body.

2. BODY AS A BRAND IN SOPHOCLES' PLAYS

In order to prove his argument that in the modern system the body is punished and regulated by means other than public torture, Foucault opens his *Discipline and Punish* with precisely this image: that of a body damaged to such an extent that it becomes painful to read about its mutilations. Much like Wallace, Foucault's chosen victim, Robert-François Damiens (1715-1757) was executed in France by drawing and quartering[3], but significantly, he was the last person to die in this gruesome way. In less than a century, the penal system was reformed, the age "saw a new theory of law and crime, a new moral or political justification of the right to punish; old laws were abolished, old customs died out" (Foucault 1995: 7). The body was no longer in the spotlight:

> If the penality [*sic!*] in its most severe forms no longer addresses itself to the body, on what does it lay hold? The answer of the theoreticians—those who, about 1760, opened up a new period that is not yet at an end—is simple, almost obvious. It seems to be contained in the question itself: since it is no longer the body, it must be the soul. (16)

In a classical tragedy, however, it seems that the body punishment leads to the reformation of the soul: physical torture elicits pity and fear that are necessary for "the proper purgation of these emotions"[4] (Aristotle 2013). What leads to catharsis (which reforms the soul not only of the tragic hero, but of the spectator as well) is the inevitable "Scene of Suffering" that is "a destructive or painful action, such as death on the stage, bodily agony, wounds and the like"

3 Foucault cites several accounts of the punishment, all of them closely describing the torture, claiming that Damiens was "…'taken and conveyed in a cart, wearing nothing but a shirt, holding a torch of burning wax weighing two pounds'; then, 'in the said cart, to the Place de Gréve, where, on a scaffold that will be erected there, the flesh will be torn from his breasts, arms, thighs and calves with red-hot pincers, his right hand, holding the knife with which he committed the said parricide, burnt with sulphur, and, on those places where the flesh will be torn away, poured molten lead, boiling oil, burning resin, wax and sulphur melted together and then his body drawn and quartered by four horses and his limbs and body consumed by fire, reduced to ashes and his ashes thrown to the winds' (*Pilceso riginales*..., 1;72-4)" (Foucault 1995: 3).

4 The full definition of tragedy given in *Poetics* goes as follows: "Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions." (Aristotle 2013)

(Ibid). In *King Oedipus*, the paradigmatic Aristotelian tragedy, the physical wounds are self-inflicted and do not bear resemblance to the actual wounds inflicted to historical persons such as Wallace and Damiens. Oedipus chooses his own physical punishment, one that is fitting for the crime he unwittingly committed. Both the historical examples and the literary example refer to regicide, but the latter relies heavily on the hero's ignorance of the truth without which recognition (anagnorisis)[5] would be impossible. Oedipus' ignorance is implied in his offensive words to Teiresias:

> **Oedipus:** There is no truth in you, since you are blind and deaf and dumb and mad! … Your life is one eternal night and so you cannot do me harm or any man that sees the light of day … the trusty Creon secretly assails me, seeks to throw me out by bribing such a scheming quack as this, whose sight is only sharp identifying gain, whose 'art' of prophecy is, however, blind. (Sophocles 2014b: 11)

Teiresias' answer suggests that to know, one must go blind:

> **Teiresias:** Hear me now, since you have taunted me with being blind; *you have your sight, but do not see*[6] the evil you are in, nor where you live nor yet with whom you live … the twofold curse of mother and father both one day will drive your injured feet in exile from this land, since you see nothing now, but darkness only then. (12)

Teiresias' warning evokes the lines of Shakespeare's Gloucester from *King Lear* (IV, 1), who realizes his mistakes only after he has lost his sight:

> **Gloucester:** I have no way, and therefore want no eyes.
> I stumbled when I saw.
> Full oft 'tis seen,
> Our means secure us and our mere defects
> Prove our commodities. (Shakespeare 2002)

While Lear's metaphorical blindness is a symbol of lack of insight, Gloucester's literal blindness symbolizes gaining insight. Shakespeare turns to metaphorical blindness numerous times: in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (I, 1), Helena exclaims that "Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind. / And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind"; in *Cymbeline* (IV, 2), Imogen remarks that "our very eyes / Are sometimes like our judgments, blind"; in *The Merchant of Venice* (II, 6), Jessica says that "Love is blind" so that "lovers cannot see the pretty follies that themselves commit". But when metaphor is not enough, he tends to translate it into action, as in Gloucester's case. In *King John* (IV, 1), the most striking scene involves young Arthur pleading Hubert not to burn out his eyes with hot irons. In *Titus Andronicus* (II, 4), when Marcus discovers Lavinia after her rape and mutilation, he invites her to go and make her father blind, "For such a sight will blind a father's eye". The

5 In *Poetics*, anagnorisis is defined in the following way: "Recognition, as the name indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune. The best form of recognition is coincident with a Reversal of the Situation, as in the Oedipus." (Aristotle 2013)

6 Added italics.

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blindness he refers to is caused by pain and will also gain insight into truth. Thus Shakespeare, writing "on the threshold of the modern world" follows Sophocles' King Oedipus, who decides to take his own eyes upon seeing his wife and mother, Jocasta, hanged by the neck:

> **Second Messenger:** … what followed was a dreadful sight. For snatching up the golden pins which clasped her gown about the corpse, he raised them up and then struck down and through his open eyes, and cried that they would never more behold himself nor yet the consequences of his crime, but in perpetual darkness he would see the ones that he should not have seen and would not know the ones that he had longed to see; and so he cursed as more and more he lifted up his hands to strike his eyes. (Sophocles 2014b: 31-32)

By this moment Oedipus has turned into a threefold murderer: a regicide, a patricide, and a matricide. Darkness becomes his only friend and refuge, as he wails:

> **Oedipus:** The darkness! Apotropaic of friendship! Unspeakable, it comes; untamed and lavish on the breath of a breeze. What need have I for eyes, for whom there would be nothing sweet for them to see?

The darkness also allows Oedipus to become an archetypal figure of the blind seer, much like Teiresias whom he ridiculed for being blind, or the one-eyed Odin, a revered deity in Norse mythology, who "drew wisdom from the well of the Giant Mimir" (Munch 1926: 7) after having gouged one of his eyes and exchanged it with Mimir in return for the draught of wisdom. Moreover, Oedipus' self-inflicted blindness symbolizes the blindfolded justice, and like Lady Justice, he must impartially punish the regicide even if it means punishing himself. Significantly, the play's "catastrophe" is not Oedipus' death but his self-imposed exile, contributing to an intense sentiment of pity as expressed by Oedipus himself in one of his final lines: "If there can be a fate of fates most heinous and unparalleled, then Oedipus has suffered it" (Sophocles 2014b: 34). By reducing Oedipus to the state of an ordinary man, Sophocles helps the audience identify with him and achieve catharsis. This, however, would not be possible if Oedipus had not plucked his eyes out, since the gruesome image becomes the necessary visible symbol for both human wisdom and extreme pain and suffering.

Having paid his penance for the heinous crimes he had unwittingly committed, it is only fair that he should find his resting place in the grove that is dedicated to Eumenides, Greek deities of vengeance, "the goddesses who see all things" (Sophocles 2014c: 3). At Colonus, he becomes the man whose ears are his eyes (6) and he uses his secret knowledge to help king Theseus keep the town of Athens safe from Theban warriors—a secret not to be shared with the viewers. His final wish is another mystery that adds to his mythical status: he decides to die "untombed", i.e. he makes Theseus promise never to reveal his final resting place. His disregard for his own tomb clashes with the importance of burial rites as presented in *Antigone*. In this play, the body is too revered a thing, as was the custom in ancient Greece. According to Plato, "the ideal of

any Greek [*is*] to be rich, healthy and honoured; to live to a grand old age; to bury his parents with honour, and ultimately to be buried in turn by his own children with due respect" (Retief 2006: 44). Ancient Greeks had specific funerary practices in an effort to "prevent the process of burial from causing inconvenience to the community or providing an opportunity for exploitation by those with ulterior political motives" (Ibid). Special rules applied to the burial of violent criminals, suicides, and murderers (52), but soldiers (who were also murderers in their own right) "were normally buried with the same honours as their comrades" (55). Death was viewed as "a form of cultural/religious contamination" (48) because the gods abhorred the act as it was not natural to them. Individuals were also affected by this contamination: "The Greeks believed that a temporary aura of sanctity from the deceased at the time of the departure to the afterlife (the process of death) also "contaminated" the next of kin and that they thus needed to be purified of this inappropriate "pollution" before they could continue with their everyday lives" (59). These beliefs, along with the background situation as presented in *Oedipus at Colonus*[7], helps put *Antigone* in perspective. In the former play, Oedipus disowns his two sons, Eteocles and Polyneices, and proclaims that Polyneices "shall never conquer Argos with the spear, nor yet return to live in the Argive vale, but rather die by a sibling hand and kill the kin who drove [*him*] out" (Sophocles 2014c: 36). The wretched son (and brother) has only one plea:

> **Polyneices:** My sisters, you have heard our father's harsh curse launched against me and so, by all the gods, I beg you, if his imprecations are fulfilled, and you somehow do make your way back home to Thebes, do not you dishonour me, at least, but place me in my tomb with proper burial rites.

The spiritual tragedy and external uncleanness that were faced in *King Oedipus* are even more prominent in *Antigone*, whose eponymous heroine becomes the tragic loss and victim of fate on the surface. From beneath the surface she emerges as the first true rebellious dramatic character who "chooses to disregard the state law in favour of the law of gods" (Vlašković Ilić 2017: 143) due to the promise to her brother. Antigone's rebellious spirit was markedly celebrated by the Irish playwright Seamus Heaney in his 2004 translation of Sophocles' play titled *The Burial at Thebes*, in which Heaney presents Antigone as the embodiment of (possible) change and describes burial as "the most significant metaphor of the twenty-first century" (142).

7 **Ismene** *[to Oedipus]*: Now rather is the time to tell the tale of ills besetting your two wretched and unlucky sons. At first it was their wish to leave the sovereign power to Creon, so to spare the city more pollution yet, in contemplation of the former taint upon the race, which once had taken hold of your unlucky house; but now foul strife has come upon these thrice unlucky sons - some god or errant thought the cause - inspiring them to snatch the kingship for themselves. The younger of the two in years and temperament, Eteocles, has driven his elder brother Polyneices both from the throne and from the land in exile. And he, according to the tale that most has currency among us, went in his flight to Argos in its ring of hills and there procured new kinsmen and spear friends (Sophocles 2014c: 11-12)...

Unlike Sophocles, who ultimately claims that fate rules us all[8], Heaney stresses Antigone's free will and choice:

> **Antigone:** I disobeyed because the law was not
> The law of Zeus nor the law ordained
> By Justice, Justice dwelling deep
> Among the gods of the dead. What they decree
> Is immemorial and binding for us all.
> The proclamation had your force behind it
> But it was mortal force, and I, also mortal,
> I chose to disregard it. (Heaney 2004: 21)

Heaney places heavy emphasis on the political aspect of the play, which is all but muted in the original. The character of Creon slowly evolves from a benevolent brother-in-law in *King Oedipus* to an insensitive ruler who decides to kidnap Oedipus' daughters after Oedipus refuses to leave Colonus. In *Antigone*, his role is much more prominent: he is portrayed as an oppressive despot whose kingly body becomes an idea more important than the sanctity of the dead body of a hero-warrior. His decision to leave Polyneices' body "all exposed, a feast for carrion birds and dogs, gross spectacle of shame" (Sophocles 2014a: 7-8) provides a sharp contrast to the holiness of his own kingly body, which cannot and will not be contradicted, let alone by a woman: "So long as I live," he bellows, "no woman shall rule me" (15). Hence, Antigone's bold decision to contravene Creon's laws and pay respect to the dead body of her brother is also political and justified, as she claims:

> **Creon:** … You, though, answer me… and keep it brief. Were you aware that I had publicly forbidden such an act?
> **Antigone:** I was aware of it, of course I was… You made it crystal clear.
> **Creon:** And still you dared to contravene these laws?
> **Antigone:** I did, since Zeus had not pronounced these laws, nor yet does Justice, dweller with the gods below, prescribe such laws among the ranks of mortal men. I did not think that your decrees were of such weight that they could countermand the laws unfailing and unwritten of the gods, and you a mortal only and a man. The laws divine are not for the now, nor yet for yesterday, but live forever and their origins are mysteries to men. There was no way that I would wish to pay a penalty to gods for contravening them, and all because I feared a tyrant's temper … And if by chance I seem to you to act in foolishness, it may just be it is a fool himself condemns my foolishness. (13)

It is at this point that the play distances itself from the mere physical punishment of the body and focuses instead on the reformation of (Antigone's) soul. Creon decides to "take her somewhere off the beaten track and hide her there, alive, within a rocky cave, providing food enough to satisfy the rite, so that the state might not incur blood guilt. And in that place she then may pray to Death, the god she cherishes the most, to win from him the prize of life, or

8 As the Chorus of Theban Elders exclaims, "The rule of fate is mystical indeed. For there is no escape from fate, however rich or warlike a man might be, possessed of black ships and a citadel" (Sophocles 2014a: 24).

learn at last what a waste of effort and time it is to dedicate oneself to what is dead and gone" (20). In reality, Creon's attempt at reforming Antigone's soul is simply a way to keep his own hands clean since his overall aim is to make Antigone a "docile body", or if that does not happen, to make Antigone die. Arguably, in this classical play Foucault's description of a soldier as a docile body comes to life:

> By the late eighteenth century, the soldier has become something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit; in short, one has 'got rid of the peasant' and given him 'the air of a soldier'. (Foucault 1995: 135)

Furthermore, Creon's punishment resembles what Foucault termed "biopower" in his *History of Sexuality* (1976): a type of "social control through individual self-discipline" (Pylypa 1998: 21). Jen Pylypa maintains that "biopower" is a "useful concept for an anthropology of the body both because it focuses on the body as the site of subjugation, and because it highlights how individuals are implicated in their own oppression as they participate in habitual daily bodily practices and routines" (22). An important aspect of "biopower" is its centring on "the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls" (Foucault 1978: 139). Disciplining Antigone's body, however, proves impossible since she finds the honourable way out by committing suicide, which is followed by two more suicides, that of Creon's son/Antigone's fiancée Haemon and Creon's wife Euridice. Rather than producing "docile bodies", "passive, subjugated, and productive individuals" (Pylypa 1998: 22) and maintain political order, Creon's decisions set off a tragic chain of events that no repentance can mollify. Perhaps the most powerful image in the entire play is the image of Antigone and Haemon's entwined corpses resembling a marriage embrace "inside the hall of Death, to prove to mortal men that of all the ills that plague our kind the worst by far is plain stupidity" (Sophocles 2014a: 31). Ultimately, the play is about the contamination of the soul rather than its reformation: the corpse becomes its main symbol.

The same symbol dominates Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, only this time the eponymous hero of the play is himself a "corpse" who is living a life in death. Not only does Philoctetes' diseased body signify that something is rotten in Greece, but it also stresses the political aspect of the dramatic conflict, which is not limited to the main hero's inner struggle: it extends to two more characters, the cunning Odysseus and the righteous Neoptolemus, Achilles' son. The play opens as the latter two characters arrive at Lemnos, a Greek island in the northern part of the Aegean Sea, where the Greeks had left Philoctetes to rot and die, "alone—among the living, a corpse displaced" (Sophocles 2014d: 27), as he explains to Neoptolemus:

> **Philoctetes:** Accursed I am on many counts and hated by the gods, since no report of me has reached my home, nor anywhere within the land of Greece. But those who threw me out impiously, they mock me by their silence, while my disease forever thrives, increases more and more. My child, son, born of your father Achilles, I am that man, the man of whom perhaps you know as master of the bow of Herakles, yes, Poeas' son, Philoctetes, the man the twin commanders and the lord of Ithaca expelled in shame to be this lonesome castaway, reduced now by a harsh disease, struck down, consumed alive by the venomous bite of a deadly snake (9) … No one is willing though, if I should mention this, to bring me safely home, and so I die in misery for ten long years, in hunger and in wretchedness, providing myself as food for this insatiable disease. Such are the crimes the sons of Atreus, and the bold Odysseus have done to me… (10)

Philoctetes is a sorry sight that sparks pity, a "man with none of men to bring him aid, no friendly face to keep him company, poor wretch and always all alone, sad victim of a fell disease" (7); his slowly-decaying body has a cave for a "tomb", in which he dries his rags "full of matter, thick and heavy with disease" (3). Odysseus explains that ten years ago he put ashore Philoctetes because his foot was consumed by disease and oozed pus, "for you see we could not peacefully make offerings of drink or sacrifice, because his wild, ill-omened cries had completely paralysed our force in its entirety, as he screamed and groaned" (Ibid), but he fails to mention that it was the terrible stench coming from the wound that was the main reason for Philoctetes' ostracism.

Evidently, all the imagery used in the play to describe Philoctetes points to a living corpse that is a dangerous source of pollution. The question then arises as to what possible use the Greeks could have of the man they willingly got rid of long ago? At this point Odysseus emerges as a Machiavellian hero who argues that the end justifies the means: namely, Philoctetes possesses Heracles' invincible bow and arrows without which Troy will never be conquered by the Greeks. Thus, Odysseus, "a man of manifold devices" (30), persuades Neoptolemus that in stealing Philoctetes' bow he is not robbing him of his only means of survival, but is helping the Greeks seize Troy. "Since the fruits of victory are sweet, be bold!", he advises the young hero, "At length we will be proven justified" (4). Although Neoptolemus struggles to accept this, he is no match to the sly lord of Ithaca:

> **Neoptolemus:** Your orders then amount to this—that I should lie?
> **Odysseus:** My orders are for you to take Philoctetes by guile.
> **Neoptolemus:** But why the need for guile and not persuasion?
> **Odysseus:** Neither persuasion nor force will capture him.
> **Neoptolemus:** Is his strength so terrible it breeds assurance?
> **Odysseus:** His arrows are unerring, dealing death...
> **Neoptolemus:** So nobody is brave enough to deal with him?
> **Odysseus:** No, only if you can outwit and take him, as I said.
> **Neoptolemus:** But don't you think that telling lies brings shame?
> **Odysseus:** Not if the falsehood wins for us salvation.

Philoctetes becomes the play that most clearly explains the difference between a branded body on one side and victory as a brand on the other side.

Both "brands" are visible, but the first refers to a literal mark on the body (a wound, consequences of physical punishment, a decaying corpse etc.), whereas the second refers to a distinctive and recognizable characteristic of the Greeks, to whom victory was essential. While Antigone with her defiant spirit manages to prove that the body brand is more important than the political brand, in *Philoctetes* the opposite is true: the greater good becomes infinitely more significant than the plight of an ordinary man. Therefore, the seemingly unsolvable conflict must be resolved by a *deus ex machina*, i.e. Heracles himself, who addresses Philoctetes:

> **Heracles:** Accompany this young man to the citadel of Troy and first you will be cured of this foul pain, be judged most virtuous of all the host and kill with this my bow, kill Paris, guilty cause of all of this grief, lay Troy waste, sending homeward loot … and this is my advice for you, Achilles' son, since you are not empowered to take Troy's kingdom except in this man's company and he in yours, paired lions keeping watch in mutual defence … For it is the city's fate to fall a second time to my weaponry. (37)

One may argue that the end of *Philoctetes* brings relief rather than catharsis. The bodily agony and the stinking wound, which are supposed to lead to catharsis, dominate the whole play and do not intensify at the end but bring a happy ending, at least for the Greeks. Philoctetes' banishment from the Greek society should be regarded as a political tactic (Foucault regards punishment in the same way in his *Discipline and Punish*[9]) as should also the Greeks' decision to bring him back into their society and "reform his soul". The play provides us with the perfect opportunity to follow Foucault's advice to "study the metamorphosis of punitive methods on the basis of a political technology of the body in which might be read a common history of power relations and object relations" (Foucault 1995: 24).

3. CONCLUSION: TO LAUGH, OR NOT TO LAUGH?

In this paper we have tried to apply Foucault's observations of the change in punitive methods during the modern age to the microcosm of three plays written by Sophocles. The four parts of Foucault's study roughly correspond to the plays: torture and punishment to *King Oedipus*, discipline to *Antigone*, and prison to *Philoctetes*. The interpretation has shown that firstly, catharsis in Aristotelian sense of the word could not be achieved without the gruesome images of torture, both physical and spiritual, and secondly, that these images are inevitably related to the power relations that have "an immediate hold" upon the body: "they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (Foucault 1995: 25). Oedipus, the King, must punish and mark his own body for being a regicide; Antigone has to be sacrificed because of her disobedience; Philoctetes must be "saved" in

9 One of the four general rules that his study obeys is the following: "Analyse punitive methods not simply as consequences of legislation or as indicators of social structures, but as techniques possessing their own specificity in the more general field of other ways of exercising power. Regard punishment as a political tactic" (Foucault 1995: 23).

order for Greece to be saved. All three characters have certain tasks to perform, but not one of them is truly reformed. Foucault remarks that "in our societies, the systems of punishment are to be situated in a certain 'political economy' of the body: even if they do not make use of violent or bloody punishment, even when they use 'lenient' methods involving confinement or correction, it is always the body that is at issue" (Ibid). The same is practiced in Sophocles' plays: the bodies are more memorable than the souls. On the other hand, the point of divergence between the plays and Foucault's study has to do with laughter. In "The Spectacle of the Scaffold" of *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault states that execution "was accompanied by a whole ceremonial of triumph" (51) and describes in a side note the 'atrocious and disgusting' conduct of an executioner who after hanging a condemned man 'took the corpse by the shoulders, violently turned it round and struck it several times saying: "Are you dead enough now?" then, turning towards the crowd, laughing and jeering, he made several indecent remarks'" (310). No such vicious laughter is heard in Sophocles' plays; moreover, there are no spectacles of execution on stage. However, this does not diminish the role of the body in ancient times but points to the fact that the body was often seen as a sick tissue that the country must get rid of and that was no laughable matter.

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TELESNO KATARZIČNO U SOFOKLOVIM DRAMAMA *KRALJ EDIP*, *ANTIGONA* I *FILOKTET*

Rezime

Rad tumači Sofoklove drame *Kralj Edip*, *Antigona* i *Filoktet* sa ciljem da istraži da li je postizanje katarze moguće bez prikazivanja ili opisivanja telesnog mučenja. Oslanjajući se na ideje Mišela Fukoa iz njegove uticajne studije *Nadzirati i kažnjavati: nastanak zatvora* (1975), rad ispituje ulogu telesnog u Sofoklovim komadima i, u okviru Sofoklove fikcije, preispituje Fukoovu tvrdnju da je vremenom reformacija duše postala bitnija od kažnjavanja tela.

Ključne reči: Sofokle, telo, kazna, mučenje, drama, Fuko

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