

2022-05-28

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Journal of the American Academy of Religion

<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/45098>

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The Book of Torture. The Gospel of Mark, Crucifixion, and Trauma.

Luis Menéndez-Antuña*

Abstract

Literary analysis of texts dealing with the experiences of tortured bodies faces numerous riddles. For example, the urge to be faithful to the victims' experience hits a wall because of language's inadequacy to express torment. Another riddle is the urgency to represent the tortured body outside the logic of torture embodied by the torturer. By incorporating some of Elaine Scarry's insights in *The Body in Pain* and paying close attention to the testimonies of those who have survived torture, this article argues that the crucifixion of Jesus in Mark 15 is a case of torture that expands beyond the crucifixion itself and bleeds into other literary topics such as discipleship and the temple.

1. A painful absence

“No queda nada de mí, sino esta avidez histérica de mi pecho por tragar aire” (“There is nothing left of me, only this hysteric eagerness in my breast to grasp for air,” Valdés 1974, 164). So ends Hernan Valdés' detailed testimony of torture under the Chilean dictatorship. “Finally Jesus, as he was screaming to the top of his lungs, breathed his last,” (Mark 15:37).¹ So climaxes Mark's grueling account of Jesus' torture under the Roman Empire. Whereas Valdés narrates his own experience in the first person during the Chilean dictatorship in the 1970s, and Mark's account comes to us in the form of a third-person literary witness in the context of the first-century Roman Empire, both testimonies concisely summarize the discrepancies between the wholeness of the

*Luis Menéndez-Antuña, Boston University School of Theology, 745 Commonwealth, Boston, MA, 02215, USA. Email: antuna@bu.edu.

I am grateful to Martha Alimi, Jonathan Calvillo, Becky Copeland, Filipe Maia, Nicolette Manglos-Weber, Méadhbh McIvor, Candida Moss, and Shively Smith for their engaging feedback. Thanks to Cavan Concannon and the members of the Seminar in Religious Studies at University of Southern California for the invitation to present an earlier draft. My gratitude goes to the anonymous reviewers for their very insightful comments and constructive critiques.

¹ All NT translations are my own.

literary author and the destruction of the tortured body, and between the urgency of giving voice to pain and language's inadequacy to express what happens during torture. These contradictions, common in narratives about extreme pain under torture, riddle the Gospels' accounts of the crucifixion. Although no one would question that the historical reality of crucifixion is a case of torture, there has been little sustained attention to crucifixion as torture. This is particularly true in the Gospel of Mark, where, as my argument shows, the literary rendering of the victim's pain reflects what we know about torture from the experiences of those who have survived it.

Two unattended issues have obscured an understanding of the power dynamics involved in torture. Both elements are interrelated: insufficient attention to the defining contours of torture has resulted in a decentering of the victim's experience and vice versa. Definitional lack and obliviousness of the survivors' experiences plague New Testament studies, but this diagnosis might also be useful to scholarship invested in discerning the ties between torture and literary criticism more broadly. Regarding the conceptualization of torture, consider Martin Hengel's pioneering contribution. *Crucifixion* (Hengel 1978) details the mechanics of the crucifixion and offers an extensive study of the religious, cultural, and political attitudes about this capital punishment, but it lacks any theorization of torture as such. Hengel seems to think that torture and crucifixion are two different realities, with the first leading to the latter (see Hengel 1978, 5, 16, 141, 153, 156). When following Hengel, Gunnar Samuelsson analyzes Dyonisus of Halicarnassus' account of a slave's crucifixion, and he argues that "nothing in the text suggests that the slave was crucified after the torture" (Samuelsson 2011, 94; also 132). Torture then either appears as a distinct category from crucifixion (Cook 2019, 12, 428, 452) or is not mentioned at all (Joseph 2018; Wenkel 2018). In other cases, torture equates to the "instrument of torture" defined as the cross (Chapman 2008, 9), or refers to its gory elements rather than to "mockery or the final abandonment." (Bond 2019, 434, 429; For an exception see Glancy 2005). These sources, in the end, illuminate the historical and literary life of the crucifixion but obscure how this event belongs to the broader category of torture. In the process, we miss thematic connections between crucifixion as an act and other components of torture, such as the relational dynamics between the world of the victim and the world of the torturer, or how capture and interrogation are essential components of torment.

The second and most crucial issue is the lack of attention to the victim's experience. To be sure, historical and historical-critical studies have explored in detail the mechanics of the cross and

the historical reliability of the available accounts (Chapman and Schnabel 2019).² Literary studies have also considered Mark's theology of the cross and its effects on the intended audience (Kimondo 2019, 214-218; Simon 2007, 147; Rhoads 2004, 52-53). Material, textual, and literary evidence point to the crucifixion as Rome's most humiliating form of punishment. Similarly, studies of the Gospel paint a gruesome picture of such a punitive institution,³ analyzing either how this deprecating punishment is rhetorically presented to intended audiences (Bond 2019; also Sloyan 1995; Campbell 2004; Dowd and Malbon 2006; Keith 2006; Marcus 2006; Georgia 2013; Eubank 2014; Oyen and Van Cappellen 2015; Aernie 2016; Chiu 2016), or how Mark edits pre-existing sources (Nickelsburg 1980, 153-184; Wire 2012). These attempts, however, skip over the raw experience of torture and its literary manifestations—even when they address the pain and trauma inflicted on the addressed community (Dube 2013; Choi 2015; Huebenthal 2020)—in part because they do not theorize torture itself.

Subsequently, this study defines the contours of the term *torture*, and focuses on the ethics of torture and its narrative aftermath by seeking to understand how the Gospel of Mark bears the scars of torture and how the grammar of torture bleeds into some of the main Gospel plot lines.⁴ Such a task demands, first, sustained attention to the constitutive elements of torture; second, an exploration of how those elements crystalize in the narrative; and finally, a reflection on the complex relationships between extreme pain, its expressions, and its witnessing. Attention to the experiences of tortured victims weave these three components together. Although my argument draws heavily from historical-critical and literary scholarship on Mark 15, it takes issue with the way these approaches neutralize the victim's pain, offering a disembodied notion of death by torture. David Tombs is a paradigmatic example. The most consistent and staunch proponent of tackling crucifixion as torture—particularly in its implications for sexual abuse—Tombs considers contemporary geopolitical contexts as a template to study torture (specifically, Latin-American dictatorial regimes) and carefully teases out those textual elements that qualify crucifixion as

² For a careful and sharp analysis of the *status quaestionis*, see Harley 2019, 303–23.

³ Felicity Harley, for instance, after assessing the pros and cons of the minimalist and maximalist positions on the definition of “crucifixion,” advocates for a use of the term closer to the broader category of suspension to “register the horrific nature of that specific category, and its significance within spectacle culture as such” (Harley 2019, 323).

⁴ For a similar analysis applied to Classical texts see Ballengee 2010.

torture. However, Tombs skips over the links between pain and language, between torture and its literary manifestations because he papers over the victims' experiences (Tombs 2009, 175-201; 2002, 21-40; 2019, 387-412). For sure, such sadistic capital punishment ought to be understood in its mechanics and in the way textual witnesses theologize the deceased, but we overlook crucial literary connections and, most importantly, fundamental ethical insights if we neglect the victim's pain in its radicality, ineffability, and inexpressibility.

Talking about torture—its structure and its painful effects—requires reconsidering Elaine Scarry's groundbreaking reflections in *The Body in Pain* (Scarry 1988). Long deemed the inaugural contribution to comprehend the phenomenology of torture, Scarry's theoretical intervention, amply deployed across disciplinary boundaries, has had little purchase in biblical studies, an omission all the more surprising given that crucifixion, arguably the most prominent narrative in the Gospels, represents torture in one of its purest forms. Capture and interrogation, physical abuse, humiliation, and deliberately inflicting pain in intensifying ways are constitutive elements of torture. They are enacted in the events that center this study: a mob with swords and clubs (Mark 14:43) captures Jesus and takes him to the high priest who, in turn, gathers the chief priests, scribes and elders (Mark 14:53); Jesus is interrogated, accused, physically abused (Mark 14:65), tied and subjected to a second interrogation by Pilate (Mark 15:5); he is then further abused by soldiers (Mark 15:17–20), crucified and mocked (Mark 15:29) until he breathes his last (Mark 15:37). Therefore, this article analyzes, from a literary perspective, what it means for the Markan narrative to account for pain in its crudest form.

It is interesting to notice that focus on pain, torture, injury, and agony in the Gospels features most prominently within contextual theologies that draw thick connections between the predicaments of marginalized communities and the gospel narratives.⁵ And so, for instance, Latin American Liberation theology has coined the term *pueblo crucificado* (crucified people) to describe the plight of the vast majority of the population in the subcontinent, and to substantiate a reading of the cross as torture (Sobrino 2004). Within the Black thought tradition, James Cone suggests compelling parallels between Jesus suffering at the cross and the suffering of thousands of African Americans who were lynched in 20th-century America (Cone 2011; Matthews 2019). Biblical scholarship produced in the Global North tends to look askance at these contributions for

⁵ For a philosophical analysis on the epistemology of lived experience see Medina 2013.

not meeting the criteria of objectivism and textual accuracy, for catering to the dangers of anachronism, or for being theological rather than historical. Such ideological considerations feed into a self-understanding of the discipline as bias-free, disembodied, and universal.⁶ My argument shows how, contrary to these claims, sustained attention to the phenomenology of torture, to the literary analysis of its witnessing, and to the testimonies of those who have survived, enhances literary analysis rather than obscuring it.

Maia Kotrosits and Hal Taussig have addressed some of these concerns in their analysis of Mark from the perspective of trauma (Kotrosits and Taussig 2013, 1–8; also Choi 2015 and Thate 2019). Their relevant and original contribution provides a compelling reading of the Gospel as a work on loss, as a traumatic transcript of the pain inflicted on the cross. The burgeoning field of trauma theory and Early Christianity (Rambo 2010 and 2017; Becker, Dochhorn, and Holt 2015; Reinhartz 2015; Emanuel 2019 and 2020; Moore 2017, 85-106; Maier 2021;) inaugurates a line of inquiry where the loss and trauma felt in the aftermath of the victim’s death shapes communal identity. This work however, has yet to focus on the originating experience of trauma whose locus cannot be other than the pain of the victim of torture themselves.

An analysis centered on the always fractured nexus between extreme pain and its linguistic expression offers at least two important contributions: First, it problematizes the hermeneutical drive to approach language as descriptive or transparent. While Kotrosits and Taussig suggest that Mark describes what it means to be in pain without “resolving, redeeming, or justifying such experiences” (Kotrosits and Taussig 42), a thick theorization of torture shows that Mark, like most authors conveying the experience of torture, does not resolve the experience precisely because it does not and cannot describe it (Thate 2019, 28; see also Waller 2014, 462-463). Second, a thick theorization of the experience of torture offers a template to evaluate how literary accounts of torture—and subsequent academic renditions of it—illuminate or obscure the victim’s agony.

Similar to how historiography and historical data grant scholars the ability to cross-examine the relationships between the literary world and the ancient world, an exploration of the entanglements between agony and its linguistic manifestations offers a springboard to inquire how narratives about torture mirror or glamorize the body in pain. A working definition of torture, to

⁶ For a recent critique in terms of whiteness see Horrell 2017 and Park 2017. For a comprehensive analysis of ethos of the discipline see Segovia 2000; Sugirtharajah 2001; Schüssler-Fiorenza 2006. More recently see Moore and Sherwood 2011, 69-75.

say it briefly, opens literary criticism to epistemologies, heuristics, and hermeneutics of torment. Accordingly, we could think of virtual relations between torture and its literary manifestations as placed along a continuum. The left pole, let's say, would have those narratives in which the written word remains close to the victim's experiential world, while the right pole would harbor literary idealizations of pain. In the first case, the screams in the narrative echo the victim's screams, whereas in the second instance, the authorial figure clouds the sufferer's piercing yells. For instance, autobiographical accounts of torture would be on the left extreme, whereas some martyrdom literature would be on the opposite end. My claim on Mark's Gospel is that it sits close to torture — or at least to our working definition — whereas scholarship on Mark has tended to slide into the right pole. Unlike other theoretical traditions (duBois 1991; Brown 2008; Burrus 2008; Cobb 2016; Harrill 2017), in my hermeneutical take, the victim's agony — of course, always susceptible to misconstructions and distortions — centers the hermeneutical task. More broadly, such an approach contributes to scholarship committed to exposing how religious texts of various traditions — and subsequent academic renderings of them — mystify, idealize, or fetishize pain, even beyond torture (Carroll 1989; Lillie 2017; Barry 2020), and how the specter of the victim's pain, now crystallized in language, haunts those who continue witnessing it (McGrath 2006; Rambo 2017, 109–143).

2. The Grammar of Torture

Let us start then with the phenomenology of torture. For Scarry, torture encompasses three phenomena: a deliberate inflicting of pain in “ever-intensifying ways;” the amplification of bodily pain objectified and made visible outside of the body; and “objectified pain [being] denied as pain and read as power” (Scarry 1988, 28). Not a chronological description but a theoretical map to grasp the phenomenology of torture, Scarry further argues that torture incorporates two elements: the physical act of pain-infliction and the verbal act of interrogation — “the pain is traditionally accompanied by ‘the question’” (Scarry 1988, 28). Both components work to achieve the ultimate effect of torture: the destruction of language and ultimately the erasure of a world. As Scarry puts it, “to witness the moment when pain causes a reversion to the pre-language of cries and groans is to witness the destruction of language” (Scarry 1988, 6).

The relationship between both components, the physical and the linguistic, is often misunderstood and misconstrued because theorists traditionally identified the acquisition of information as the motive for torture. Although, for obvious reasons, most ethicists hold the ethics of torture in contempt, they tend to ascribe the potential obtention of valued, hidden, treasured information as the motive of torture itself. Such decoupling of the linguistic and the physical dimensions, of interrogation and pain-infliction, is relevant to New Testament studies because scholars tend to understand the crucifixion, either in isolation from or a step removed from, the acts of interrogation. Although it is tempting to explain the irrational, deliberate, and sustained infliction of pain on the victim by scrutinizing the motives in the interrogation process, such explanatory strategy, Scarry argues, situates interrogation outside the process, erasing the fact that the question and the action are two sides of the same coin. Instead of approaching capture, interrogation, and crucifixion as three narrative moments contributing to the climax of death, the grammar of torture requires an integrative analysis that understands them in sync with each other.

Scarry's account of torture has become widely influential for its reflections on the relationships between pain and the destruction of the world and language. She theorizes torture as the ground where two worlds are at war. The torturer's world, both numb to the victim's agony and enflamed in its desire to maximize pain, is fueled by the feigned urgency of the question; meanwhile, the victim's world, submerged in crass pain, neutralizes the form and content of the question which is always superficial, an obstacle to the stopping of pain (Scarry 1988, 29). Pain is world-destroying. The moment the torturer drills the victim's nerves, their conscious world empties. The destruction of language accompanies world-destruction because pain is quintessentially non-linguistic. Pain is inexpressible, a quality that further contributes to the collapse of the victim's world: "physical pain always mimes death and the infliction of physical pain is always a mock execution" (Scarry 1988, 31). There is no world or language in death. These apophatic and nihilistic dimensions of extreme pain throw into relief the paradoxical nature of accounting for pain. If torture destroys language, how might the victim's experience be linguistically expressed? If extreme pain equates to the destruction of the victim's world, how does the literary world account for such destruction?⁷ It is precisely here where the hermeneutical task

⁷ Some later narratives on martyrdom suggest that such world-destruction is ineffective, even innocuous, because it does not affect the divine order of things, it cannot touch a soul possessed by Christ, or it is enacted by those who have no real power (Brown 2008; Perkins 1995; Burrus

needs to proceed with utmost care. The contemporary interpreter ultimately witnesses an account of torture that is entangled with the inexpressibility of pain and embedded in a process where the torturer's world wreaks havoc on the victim's world. To put it briefly, at this juncture biblical interpretation encounters the ethics of torture: the dilemma of how to explore the literary expression of the inexpressible. It is within this framework that my argument specifies narrative elements that reach beyond language to convey pain and world-destruction (for instance, 15:37).

Testimonials consistently show that the process of destroying the victim's world reduces the tortured psychic and bodily dispositions to absolute exhaustion and desperation: the self disentangles from itself, gasping for the last breath of agency with the exclusive purpose of making pain stop. The world becomes weightless, as if vanishing behind the thin veil of a consciousness so strained that it cannot hold anything beyond its bare survival. Such annihilation of one's world represents the triumph of betrayal, the disavowal of any remaining link keeping the victim—now on the verge of death—connected to the realm of the living, both at the personal (family, friends, disciples) and institutional (nation, religion, voluntary associations) levels. In the following, my argument will explore how these underlying components of torture—in the form of capture, interrogation, mocking, beating, humiliation, and finally hanging—should inform our considerations of narrative elements, such as the “cry of dereliction” (Mark 15:34) or the tearing apart of the temple's veil (Mark 15:38). At the cusp of torture, the victim's worldly anchorage—relationships, institutions, beliefs, values—and the victim's language (Mark 15:37) become null (Mark 15:33).

3. Torture as destruction of the world

2004 and 2008; Castelli 2004; Moss 2012). As Perkins so poignantly puts it: “Martyrs’ deaths, portrayed as so joyfully and exuberantly embraced in Christian discourse, display not the power of the Roman state but rather the power of the Christian community’s reordered beliefs about pain and death. The broken bodies of Christians gave testimony not to the ‘restored order of the body public’ but rather to a new understanding of the social body extended beyond life’s natural limits” (Perkins 1995, 120). Scholars on martyrdom have tended to disagree with Scarry’s account of torture because, as Burrus puts it, while “Scarry explains the success of torture; texts on martyrdom perform its failure” (Burrus 179 2004, n. 7). My approach suggests that rather than demonstrate the failure of torture, martyrdom accounts fall on that side of the spectrum where the literary word differs from the victim's world. As Cobb puts it, “within the discrete narrative worlds of these texts, if not in reality, martyrdom does not hurt” (Cobb 2016, 136).

Torture conceives of the world as a war zone. For the torturer, the existing world is pending destruction and their actions aim at eliminating any threat to its orderliness. The victim's existence, on the other hand, endangers the stability of the torturer's world. Torture condenses a process where oppositional visions of future worlds collide, hence the torturer's ultimate goal of annihilating the victim's project for a new reality. The victim's body, their past actions, their alliances, their institutions, threatens the "here and now," and so their mere existence, an existence entangled with a utopian project, is invested with menacing authority. Here torture is a process that turns constitutive elements of the victim's world on their head. Josephus, for instance, portrays the fate of those Jews who were caught fleeing the city of Jerusalem during Titus' siege in 70 C.E., "as being scourged and subjected to all possible kinds of torture before being crucified opposite to the wall." Here, Josephus is not as specific as Mark. Both in terms of vocabulary and vividness, Josephus spares the readers most details by subsuming them under the term *torture* (*πάσαν αἰκίαν*). He goes on to specify that Titus used such a gruesome spectacle to induce the remaining Jews to surrender (Josephus *War* V, 451).⁸

In this instance, *torture* refers to a literal war of the worlds. Josephus places the resistant Jews and the Roman armies as pawns in a battlefield where torture/crucifixion functions as the torturer's weapon to dissuade the other party from further resistance, a way of forcing the victims to capitulate, to give up their world. Torture then functions as a spectacle where the destruction of the victims' world is on full display (Castelli 2004, 107). Although historical and genre differences between Josephus' and Mark's accounts of crucifixion leave little room for parallel analysis, in both cases torture channels the imposition of one world over the other. In the same vein, although most contemporary torture is covert and clandestine (see figures below) as opposed to the exhibitionism pervasive in ancient sources (Mark 15: 26. 29. 40), in both instances the torment aims at suspending the relational world of the victim. Let me further explore how Mark builds the victim's (i.e., Jesus') world and its ensuing demise.

Soon after Jesus' violent capture ("Judas, one of the twelve, arrived and with him a mob with swords and clubs, sent by the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders"; Mark 14:43), he is

⁸ Translations are my own. Josephus provides many examples where crucifixion is deployed by the Romans to quell insurrection (War II, 75; War II, 167; Ant. 17.354-355, 18.1-10, 26-27; War II, 241; War II, 253; War II, 305-308).

taken in front of the high priest and other officials (Mark 14:53) where several witnesses accuse him of trying to destroy the material temple and build a new one “not made with hands” (Mark 14:58). The high priest’s interrogation starts precisely with questioning the victim’s authoritative status: are you the Christ? (Mark 14:61). Are you, in other words, one who claims to abolish the current order and establish a new one? The victim’s last utterance before he is led to hang ratifies the torturer’s fears (“I am”; Mark 14:62) as it specifies how such new order comes from another world (“you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven”; Mark 14:62). The ripping of the temple’s veil (Mark 15:38) confirms its symbolic destruction. Additionally, sandwiched between the capturer’s/priest’s interrogation and Jesus’ detainment at Pilate’s palace (Mark 15:1-15), Mark locates Peter’s denial (Mark 14:54.64-72), the last disciple to abandon Jesus after everyone else (Mark 14:50-52). Both elements, Jesus’ links to the temple and Jesus’ relationships with his disciples, are constitutive elements of the victim’s world. If torture, as Scarry reminds us, expands the world of the torturer while constraining the world of the victim, then we should understand both elements as exemplary loci for world-construction and world-destruction. The narrative space between the victim’s world’s maximum expansion (his world comes from above; Mark 14:62) and its utter destruction (Mark 15:33.37-38) unfolds a drama where a carefully constructed world of relationships, teachings, visions, and hopes comes to an end.

Literarily, world-creation relies, among other elements, on establishing congenial relationships among characters (usually sharing common projects), on ramping up conflict with antagonists, and on delineating all kinds of boundaries with other created worlds inhabited, in turn, by other characters.⁹ Plotlines weave together, undo, and recreate complex relationships between actors who react to each other on shifting grounds. Such are the elements that shape the victim’s world. The institutions a character inhabits, the relationships they build, and the antagonisms they create, materialize the contours of their world as much as the limits of their body and the reach of their actions and visions. The goal of the torturer, understood here as a collective character, is to

⁹ Recent narrative studies demonstrate how character construction relies on intra and textual elements and on the construction that readers make of both (Dinkler 2017). For a critique of such an approach that neglects the role of actual readers see Menéndez–Antuña 2019, 643–664. This critique is relevant to the present study because it shows that centering contemporary lived experiences of oppression illuminates the Gospel’s witnessing of torment (see figures below).

deconstruct such boundaries and reinstitute a world that they perceive is currently under attack. Although such observations owe much to most recent developments in narrative theory, I should notice that such theorization is simply a way of grounding well-studied theological themes such as “kingdom of God,” in literary theory. “Kingdom of God,” a salient Markan topic (France 2003; Markusse and Middleton 2018; Hatina 2005; Matera 1995; Donahue 1973; Paul 2006, 55), encapsulates Jesus’ world — a project of its own, a scenario populated by disciples, beneficiaries, teachings, actions, visions, and institutions. It is within such a view that we turn our attention to discipleship and the temple as paradigmatic examples of what constitutes the victim’s world, even as it is eventually threatened and destroyed under the rule of torture.

Mark features the apostles as major characters and as models of discipleship.¹⁰ Their narrative makeup presents them as flawed personae, inviting audiences to sympathize and engage with their embodied (mis)understandings (Choi 2015; Benny-Liew 2016, 99–128).¹¹ Mark’s creation of Jesus’ world, proposed as the kingdom of God, heavily relies on the configuration of relational ties around discipleship. Discipleship involves leaving an old world behind in order to step into a new one. Following Jesus means abandoning everything (Mark 10:28) and situating oneself differently in “this world.” As Leif Vaage argues, “the brash breakage of ordinary kinship ties and the disregard of other social norms as the first step of discipleship soon involve revisiting the very region just forsaken or previously forsaken” (Vaage 2009, 753). This “domestic ascetism,” as Vaage terms it, interweaves discipleship with political utopianism by presenting the latter as a transformative way of inhabiting the world.

In this narrative, “the most fully characterized individual,”¹² Peter, epitomizes the flawed nature of Markan discipleship (Bauckham 2006, 175). His actions and sayings operate as

¹⁰ The literature on Markan characterization is extensive and, as one could expect, hardly consensual. Leif Vaage convincingly argues it is in the middle of the Gospel where we find instructions on how to enter the kingdom (8:27-10:52), and where Jesus instructs the disciples on how to practice discipleship. He writes that Mark defines entrance into the kingdom in terms of “unorthodox social practices” (2009, 741-761).

¹¹ By narrative makeup, I refer here to the consideration of characterization in light of source criticism (Dowd and Malbon 2006).

¹² Scholarship has long debated Peter’s role as a literary character, his influence in the Gospel’s composition, and his presumptive role in shaping the community of reception. Peter is mentioned first and last (Mark 1:16; 16:7), he is the main character in numerous episodes (8:23; 10:28; 14:66-72), and reiteratively mentioned by name as part of the close group of disciples (9:1; 10:33). Ernest

checkpoints for the audience to rectify errors in Jesus' project. Take, for instance, his misunderstanding of Jesus' messianism (Mark 8:27-9:1). Jesus proposes a model of messianism where discipleship equates with rejection and forfeiture of one's life. Peter's rebuke triggers Jesus to spell out the ethical implications of his new model of discipleship (Mark 8:34-9:1). The narrative creates a world where Jesus as a teacher and a messiah predicts his own demise and redefines how disciples have understood his role as miracle-worker, preacher, and exorcist. It is a world where disciples ought not to rebuke their master, a world where disciples must follow their teacher to the cross. It is a world, if we contextualize the pericope, where blind men see (Mark 8:22-26) and disciples are invited to see (Mark 9:2).

The intertwining of Peter's and Jesus' worlds peaks in the torture scene.¹³ The juxtaposition of both plots — Peter's betrayal and Jesus' interrogation — creates a series of dramatic parallels: whereas the priest questions Jesus, a lowly slave girl questions Peter; although accusations against Jesus are false, those against Peter ring true; Jesus confesses thrice "I am," while Peter denies him equally (Whitaker 2013, 675). At a moment when the victim's world is pending destruction, the supreme apostle is accused of belonging to such world, both in terms of relationship ("you were with Jesus the Nazarene," Mark 14:67; 3:14) and location ("truly you are one of them for you are also a Galilean," Mark 14:70; see also 1:16 and 16:7). The drama, initiated as Jesus births a new world through relationship-building and in crescendo until that moment when the mob captures him ("all of them deserted him and fled;" Mark 14:50), climaxes when Peter breaks down and weeps (Mark 14:72). In other words, the peril posed by torture effects the abandonment of those who, up to this point, had populated the victim's world. Now, only Jesus' body stands as a threat to the world of the torturer.

The persecuted body of Jesus (Mark 3:16.19; 9:31; 10:32–33; 11:18; 14:18–21; 14:41), itself a converging point of discipleship (Mark 13:9–12), sits at the center of the processes of

Best calls him the "proto-penitent for Mark's community" (1986, 175). Wiarda argues that Peter is the spokesperson for the group (1999, 19). Robyn Whitaker suggests that the rebuke and recall of Peter single him out as a "distinguished figure above all others", "not despite his failure, but precisely because of his failure" (2013, 667). Other scholars consider Peter as a negative character. See Smith 1985, 190. My argument does not take a position on such distinct characterizations, but it draws on them to show that Peter is a constitutive part of Jesus' world.

¹³ A perfect example of a Markan sandwich. See Marcus 2009, 1022.

world-making and world-destroying.¹⁴ Peter's denial confirms that the victim's world, built upon a network of relationships, collapses. The "disappearance" of the disciples signals both that the victim stands now by himself and that torture isolates the victim in order to destroy his world. The severance of the relational world peaks, as the torturers turn their focus to the victim's body. The destruction of the victim's body means the destruction of his most intimate relational links (Mark 15:34).

Whereas discipleship is an "institution of allegiance" inviting its members to abandon their worlds and bear the cross of a new reality, the temple is the physical and theological locus of dis-allegiance, a place that the religious elite misuse for their own benefit to the detriment of those in need. Subsequently, the temple functions as a warzone between two different worlds: Jesus advocates an ethical use, and his opponents defend a religious, political, cultural, and economic status quo. The conflict starts early on when God, tearing the heavens apart to declare affiliation, places God's divine presence in the body of Jesus (Mark 1:2-3).¹⁵ Jesus' eruption into the "house of God" (Mark 11:15-18) seals the irreconcilable nature of the opposing views on the temple's function. It is not surprising then that the temple features prominently in the midst of torture. Jesus' conflicting relationship with the institution first grounds the torturer's accusation (Mark 14:58; 15:29), and then metaphorizes the victim's demise (Mark 15:38). The war of the worlds, to put it differently, is about the victim's body as much as it is about its metonymic and symbolic links with other realities (discipleship and temple in this case).

Mark frequently depicts Jesus' body's close ties with the temple's body (Chance 2007, 268-291). For instance, the apocalyptic discourse (Mark 13:1-37) takes place at the temple (Mark 13:1-2). Here Jesus forecasts its total destruction ("there will be no be left here stone on stone that will not be destroyed;" Mark 13:2), creating a series of literary resonances between the fate of the

¹⁴ Michal Beth Dinkler argues that the disciples' misunderstandings of Jesus contribute to the suffering of Jesus himself (Dinkler 2016, 316-338). See also Kotrosits and Taussig 100-103.

¹⁵ In Mark, the temple functions in the narrative not primarily as a strictly religious/cultic institution but as part of a larger theopolitical conflict between Jesus and the leaders. The temple is implicated as the primary mechanism for the leaders' self-serving exploitation of the common people (represented by the poor widow); and it is targeted to the extent that it serves this exploitive function. In other words, Jesus condemns the temple to destruction because of its rebellious caretakers, not because of its cultic system; and he proves superior because he yields authority over the temple's caretakers, not by virtue of some anti-cult agenda. See Driggers 2007, 246.

temple and the fate of the victim: the cosmological signs in Mark 13:24-25 anticipate the darkening of the earth in 15:3 and the evocation of God's reign as coming from the clouds in 14:62 replicates the reference in 13:26. Furthermore, the obscure saying about the abomination of desolation (*τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως ἐστηκότα ὅπου οὐ δεῖ*; 13:14)¹⁶ ties together Jesus' and the temple's destinies (Kloppenborg 2005, 419-450). Such abomination, Kloppenborg argues, refers to the imperial siege practice of *evocation deorum*, whereby the conquest of the land also meant the "calling out" of the tutelary deity before its inhabitants were enslaved and the rest of the buildings razed (Kloppenborg 2005, 434). In the case of Mark's Gospel, the protective deity that needs to be called out and separated is the body of Jesus (Kloppenborg 2005, 441). When Jesus overturns the money changer's tables (Mark 11:15-18), he is contesting the torturer's use of the temple while linking his persona to the institution. Both destinies are linked (Mark 11:18; see also 12:10-12). The prediction of the destruction of the temple (Mark 13:1-2; see also 11:12-21, 27-34; 12:1-12; 13:5-37; and 15:33, 37-39) chains Jesus' death with the temple's demise. No longer viable, the victim's failed project for the institution, in conflict with his torturers' vision, results in God abandoning it. The darkening of the sky and the tearing of the temple's veil (Mark 15:33, 28) metaphorize its breakdown (Kloppenborg 2005, 449).¹⁷ The centurion's confession, whether one understands it as serious or ironic, confirms that Jesus' now dead body is the place for God, once the temple's demise has been confirmed (Mark 15:39).

In a world where one's relationships have been banished, and one's project of a new world is on the verge of collapse, the victim is at the mercy of derision, precisely for the failure of such a project. Bystanders' mocking of the idea that the tortured would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days (Mark 15:29), the torturer's derision and physical torment (Mark 15:20), and sarcasm (Mark 15:31) represent the torturer's world conquering the victim's world, which is now

¹⁶ In his influential essay, S. G. F. Brandon argued that this cryptic saying refers to the desecration of the temple in August, 70 C.E. when Titus erected legionary standards with cultic functions. These banners were meant to bear the emperor's images in the courtyard (1961, 126-141).

¹⁷ John Paul Heil extends the identification of Jesus' body with the community. "The narrative invites its audience to become the community that supplants and surpasses the temple by implementing in their lives Jesus' teaching within the temple (Mark 11:1-12:44) and outside the temple (Mark 13:1-37), but they are able to do so only with the empowerment of Jesus' death and resurrection (Mark 14:1-16:8)" (Heil 1997, 76-100). In the next section I will provide an interpretation of these metaphoric elements as examples of the "destruction of language."

at a point of exhaustion. Uttering a loud cry and giving up his last breath (Mark 15:37), immediately followed by the ripping of the temple's veil from top to bottom (Mark 15:38), bring the victim's fight for life to an end. Scarry writes, "for what the process of torture does is to split the human being into two, to make emphatic the ever present but (...) only the latent distinction between a self and a body, between a 'me' and 'my body'" (Scarry 1988, 48-49). Scholars' inattentiveness to pain's centrality leads them to paper over those literary connotations expressing the effects of torture. The *velum scissum* is a case in point. In 1989 Timothy Geddert listed thirty-five possible interpretations, and a connection between the victim's broken body and the tearing apart of the temple's veil is nowhere to be found (Geddert 1989, 141-143; also Motyer 1987, 155-157 and Jackson 1987, 29). More recent studies fare no better (Gurtner 2007, 292-306; McKinzie 2018, 219-221; Aguilar Chui 39). It may be the case, as Timothy Wardle and many others notice, that the "death of the Son of God in Mark brings an end to the continued efficacy of the Jerusalem temple," but such a parallel is predicated on the thematic connections between the body in pain and the traumatic events around the temple's destruction (Wardle 2016, 73).

One could name many more instances where the world of the victim revolves around the temple and discipleship. For the sake of the present argument, it is worth emphasizing that to understand torture in its world-destroying capacity requires examining in retrospect the constitutive elements of the victim's world. It is here where the narrative of torture draws close literary connections between the climax of pain, total abandonment, and the destruction of the temple. It is also here where the ethics of representing torture warn against conceiving Jesus' relationship with the temple or with his disciples as the triggers, as the judicial causes for torture. To do so is to justify the torturer's logic, to cater to a grammar of torture that upholds "rebellion" or "resistance" — the excuses here are countless — as legitimizing instances to instill the crudest pain on the victim.¹⁸ The accusation that Jesus intended to destroy the temple should then not be understood as the cause of crucifixion, but as a verdict that the victim's world has no place in the

¹⁸ Michel Foucault's insights that torture has nothing to do with fairness and everything to do with the maintenance of political power represents here the genealogical underside of Scarry's argument. For Foucault, this "ceremony of punishment" is not an act of justice, is an "exercise in terror" (Foucault 1977, 49). Additionally, a refusal to buy into the logics of torture by dismissing causative explanations contributes to a non-anti-Jewish reading because it delinks the torturer's infliction of pain from the victim's former actions.

torturer's world. As I show in the next section, considering the accusation as the origin of torture risks accepting the logics of torture itself. At the historical level, there are good reasons to believe that Jesus' actions at the temple lead to his assassination (Ådna 2019, 2635-2675), but when it comes to the narrative and literary representation (see Mark 14:55-56), to locate the etiology of torture in the victim's actions is to reinscribe a justification of torture. The question, as Scarry puts it, is always a wound, and the answer is already a scream.

4. Torture as the destruction of language

To claim that the victim's utterances are screams is to say that language is no longer available. Although my argument proceeds by making an analytical distinction, language destruction equates world destruction and vice versa: as extreme pain undoes one's world, it also erases language's ability to name it, express it, account for it. On the side of language however, torture also demands expression and linguistic articulation. Testimonials agree (see figures below) that expressing the pain of torture through language is a paradox: on the one hand, the experience destroys language while, at least in its aftermath, triggers the need to make sense of it. Nihilism — the destruction of values that comes with the destruction of the victim's world — demands, in its wake, values. Torture seeks to eliminate the subject of speech while simultaneously pretending that she can speak (Scarry 1988, 47). Torment demands utterances even as it enforces silence. Scarry further elaborates that “the moment language bodies forth the reality of pain, it makes all further statements and interpretations seem ludicrous and inappropriate, as hollow as the world content that disappears in the head of the person suffering” (Scarry 1988, 60). Not only does torture eradicate the victim's capacity for language, it foregrounds the inability of language to ever account for such pain. Subsequently, when attempting to convey such experience, literature resorts to analogies, symbols, metaphors, gaps, breaks, and silences to pit language against itself (Caruth 2016, 1-9).

Torture, grounded on pain cycles (its anticipation, recovery, reenactment, etc.), inscribes the cusp of pain on the tortured body, forcing it to desperately reach out for experiences, memories, perceptions, and emotions that would alleviate its demise. The tortured mind dwells on spatial and temporal elements that precede and follow pain. Agony, a peak of the process of the worlds-at-war in which the tortured experiences their world in the making of being unmade, unhinges the

body from itself even as it forces the body to reach beyond itself. The narrativization of pain seems to look back at pain and see in the experience a moment when the total isolation and solipsism of pain reaches out, grasping to hold on to the familiar. Consider the following first-hand testimonies of survivors as they reflect back on their experience:¹⁹

Figure 1.

I was just a set of ‘basic functions’ — as you call them — not working at all. Or were they? The basic functions of my heart thumping in my chest or that of breathing bloody air in and out of my lungs, for example, continued to work despite my wish to die there and then (...) Can I live with the dying of my body? (Rivera-Fuentes and Birke 2001, 660-661.

Figure 2.

Maybe the experiencing of pain has no language — as you assert — in the conventional way of understanding language, i.e., words producing meaning. However, I strongly believe that pain does find a voice in the yelling, in the screaming, even in the loss of those “basic functions” we were talking about before when, in my case, electrodes inside my vagina threatened with the disintegrating of my/self. You yell, you piss yourself and you are saying “it is hurting so much I cannot put it into f**** words!,” because the pain is deeper than flesh and bones; it travels beyond your physical body, into some space within yourself which cannot make meaning of what is happening outside. You say to yourself: “I am losing the

¹⁹ I have chosen these three testimonies from women who were tortured in Chile under the Pinochet regime because they reflect compellingly on the relationship between body, subjectivity and language. It is important not to conflate the experiences of those who have survived torture (especially because torture takes many forms), but tracing common threads in the way these experiences issue forth in linguistic form is fundamental to understanding the various ways pain struggles to find its way home in the literary word. For similar testimonies see Dawes 2007, 164-230; Levi 1989; Levi 2006; Weine 2006.

only way I have known until now to describe what is going on inside me, I am losing my tongue, I am losing meaning.” I insist, though, that pain does have a voice, if not in words, then in its performance. The other thing in relation to your assertion that pain has no voice is that there are some of us (lots, indeed) who shout our pain in public by writing, painting, dancing, singing, talking pain. And we, sometimes, do this by disrupting the boundaries of discipline and polite behavior (Rivera-Fuentes and Birke 2001, 661).

Figure 3.

But, as I’ve said before, I felt as if I had no voice because I had no way of expressing my pain in words, which did not mean I was totally silent. My written text is full of ellipses, of gaps. They are my resistance to say more then and now, my refuge from the spoken language, my feminist/feminine imaginary. Remember the conversations I had with myself, the singing in my head, the tricks I used to keep my/self company and not to go insane (Rivera-Fuentes and Birke 2001, 663; very similar testimonies in Behar 1990, 167).

These testimonies throw into relief the multi-layered relationship between torture and language. Although these witnesses have different views on how proper articulation remains possible in the aftermath of torture, they all convey the notion that the narrative expression of pain cannot be linear, propositional, or formulaic. The incommunicability of pain is pain’s most salient feature. Its inexpressibility is language’s most striking barrier and, as a consequence, literature’s ultimate frontier. Writing about torture seems to be writing about the apophatic experience, trying to capture an unrepresentable catastrophe. In such a titanic task, literature humbly seeks to fill in the gaps between language and experience (Richardson 2016).

In the previous section, I explored how torture, with its world-destroying power, retrospectively maps onto the Markan apocalypse. Jesus warns his disciples that they “will be delivered over to councils, be beaten in synagogues,” and will stand in front of governors and kings (Mark 13:9). Apocalypticism, after all, is a genre invested in staging worlds at war (brother versus brother, father versus child, children versus parents, false versus true prophets; Dashke 2014). The

world as we know it breaks down and the “son of man comes in clouds with great power and glory” (Mark 13:26). When the victim’s world is destroyed, only language remains (“heaven and earth will end, but my words will not end”; Mark 13:31; see also how the preamble of torture hints at the erasure of the victim’s agency in 13:11), but its presence is nowhere to be found once torture finds its way deep into the body.

Mark uses several literary elements to convey the idea that torture destroys language. The most obvious one is that under the extenuating circumstances of the crucifixion, the victim no longer can come up with words (*λόγος*). When the body gives up, language is no longer possible (*ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἀφείς φωνὴν μεγάλην ἐξέπνευσεν*; Mark 15:37).²⁰ The victim’s final grunt, unarticulated and opaque, stands in clear contrast with previous verses where everyone participating in the torturous process speaks.²¹ If the cry of dereliction signals the destruction of the world, the “loud cry” literalizes the death of language.

In two different moments, Jesus breathes his last (Mark 15:37, 39). Both moments sandwich the tearing of the veil (Mark 15:38). While in the previous section, I suggested the *velum scissum* as a symbol referring to the world’s collapse in terms of Jesus’ relationship with the temple, I further propose that it is a metaphor for the destruction of the victim’s body right at the moment of language’s annihilation. To be sure, the interpretation of this theophany has shifted from historical considerations to literary and theological ones (Ulaney 1991, 123-125). No longer understood as a “real event,” the veil metonymically stands for the temple’s new status in the wake of Jesus’ death. It is surprising, however, that no argument mentions the possibility of the veil as a literary motif to convey what language can no longer do, the pain involved in the torturous death of the son of God (Chance 2007, 286). Flesh and veil are torn apart, their ripping evoking a similar sound, in a play of literary connections that find echoes in Heb 10:20 (“we, brothers, are emboldened through the blood of Christ to enter the holy place, because he inaugurated for us a new and living path through the veil, that is, his flesh”).²²

²⁰ This expression is used in the case of the Gerasene to express social death (Menéndez-Antuña 2019).

²¹ Pilate (Mark 15:2.4.7.9.12.14), observers (15:29), chief priests and scribes (15:31), bystanders (15:35), the sour wine provider (15:36), and the centurion (15:39).

²² Although it is outside of the scope of the present paper to go into the details of this obscure verse, it is enough to say that there is a close thematic reference between Jesus’ flesh and the ripping apart of the temple. See Moffitt 2010, 71-84; Jennings 2010, 85-97; Gurtner 2007.

It might be the case that the veil's ripping inaugurates a new world (Chance 2007, 284-285), but such inauguration is predicated on the victim's torn flesh that can no longer speak, and still it speaks (see fig. 3 above): the collapse of language encounters its way out, a way of speaking out through the ripping apart of the veil (and the darkening of the earth). It is actually pretty common to find among victim's testimonies an expression of their inexpressible pain through metaphors of darkness and textiles being ripped apart. Juan Cassassus, a survivor himself, writes: "The victim feels that the structures that secured his identity burst out. He is thrown into darkness, with no sense of time or space. In such darkness, there is no longer any parameter to relate to any kind of experience" (Casassus 2013, 48). Donatella Di Cesare adds: "whoever survives torture, she is not only different from before, she is completely other, to the point that one cannot recognize those threads, nexus that could mend and fix that shred" (Di Cesare 2018). The survivor here considers the contemporary self as totally other, as a textile that has been torn apart and can no longer be stitched together. Such destruction of the self through pain should caution against adhering to thick conceptions of agency. If at the cusp of torture, the self vanishes, then we should understand the victim's *ipssissima verba*, not so much as an expression of his agency (Mark 15:34), but as a literary device geared towards conveying the inexpressible. To understand the victim as an agent in full command of his actions is to not take seriously the victim's plight and to paper over the narrative's struggles to express such torment. Furthermore, to understand Jesus as a character in full command of what he says, right when speech is no longer possible, is to follow torture's logic because it "systematically prevents the prisoner from being the agent of anything and simultaneously pretends he is the agent of some things" (Scarry, 1988, 47).

The cry of dereliction (Mark 15:34), the tearing of the veil (Mark 15:38), and the victim's outcry with his last breath (Mark 15:37.39) bespeak literary moments when authorial imagination captures crushed victimhood, when the inevitable expressive nature of the author's written word grasps the ineffable essence of the victim's inner world. The ways that scholarship interprets these literary motifs is a painful reminder of how professional criticism dramatically departs from the lived experiences of the victims, of how qualified interpreters ultimately fail to take the crucifixion for what it really is: the peak of a long, painful, carefully articulated process of torture geared to destroy the victim's inner and outer worlds, thoughts and language, flesh and bones, past and future.

To be clear, my argument does not discard theological or narrative connections between the metaphors around darkness (Mark 15:33) and the tearing apart of the temple's veil (Mark 15:38). For sure, Mark here, as in many other instances, draws on a wide variety of intra and extra-textual references that create a network of meanings to theologize the event of torture. Similarly, my argument makes no pronouncement on historical-critical or theological interpretations (see below) as interpretive keys to understand the passion narratives. My contribution does, however, emphasize that such renderings skip too quickly over the grueling details of pain and torture, even as they obscure the power dynamics between the worlds of the torturer and that of the victim. Simply put, this is a narrative about torture, extenuating pain, and utmost humiliation, and so literary motifs, even in their metaphoricity, are intertwined with these grounding realities. The narrative, to recap, explains that the torturers flog (Mark 15:15), humiliate (Mark 15:17-19), wound his head (Mark 15:17), strike him and spit upon him (Mark 15:19), mock him (Mark 15:20), and offer wine with myrrh, to add insult to injury (Mark 15:23).²³ The extent to which the victim is subjected to pain allows forensic evidence to term it as "sadistic" (Hengel 1978, 25-87; Koskenniemi, Nisula, and Toppari 2005, 4; Samuelsson 2011, 292). Consequently, to center the victim's pain, as Mark does, means to explore how language struggles with injury.

5. The ethics of accounting for torture

Scarry's take on torture staunchly dismisses any attempt to theorize torture outside or beyond the victim's pain. To speak about torture is to unapologetically center the experience of the tortured. In other words, the body in pain (not its cause, telos, or circumstance) is the focal point of interpretation. This ethical stance tasks biblical hermeneutics with the assignment of probing the Gospels as literature of pain. To be sure, the Markan account might be understood as an instance of "noble death," "resistance," "vindication," or even as an "anti-blasphemy manifesto," to name a few; but to do so without carefully unpacking how the narrative conveys (struggles to convey, as most writings about torture do) the raw nature of pain—how the grammar

²³ Very much like scholars paper over the event of the crucifixion as a case of extreme pain, they interpret the myrrh as an analgesic. An empirical experiment shows that when myrrh is added to wine so that the liquid is saturated, the wine's taste becomes too bitter to drink. It was an effective form of torture for a man suffering from thirst caused by hypovolemic shock and dehydration. See Koskenniemi, Nisula, and Toppari 2005, 379-391.

of torture bleeds into the narrative plots—risks neutralizing torment, sanitizing torture, and objectifying the victim. Shelly Rambo reminds us that trauma language “is compelling language not insofar as it contains truths but insofar as it testifies to truths that cannot be contained” (Rambo 2010, 165). Aware of the paradoxical nature of pain, impossible to pour into language while demanding to be poured, this essay’s goal has been to testify to the centrality of torture in the passion narrative even as it spills over the rest of the Gospel.

Torture itself, one could argue, is not the representation of torture. The experience of pain and its narrativization belong to separate domains. It is precisely this gap between the victim’s subjective experience and the objective literary account that should, I am arguing, be at the center of an ethics of biblical interpretation invested “in the pain of others” (Sontag 2019). A thick description of torture and attentiveness to its victims’ traumas illuminate how grammars of suffering weave themselves into narrative threads. Torture, however, has no monopoly on pain, and so this type of approach may be of interest to scholarship invested in probing the depths of religious texts for their portrayal of other forms of violence (rape, incarceration, enslavement, trafficking, and lynching come to mind; see Alcoff 2018; Guenther 2013; Bales and Soodalter 2010; Mitchell 2011 respectively). A victim’s language has its own grammar, its ethos, its intensities, its metaphors, its breakages and semantics and, ultimately, its own specific ways of crystalizing in literature. As professional interpreters, scholars are proficient in interpreting religious texts in all of their complexities and nuances, but we would be remiss to deny that the world of the academic, often nestled in a comfy office chair, sits far removed from the world of the tortured. Except for those rare occasions when the scholar and the victim are one (Wiesel 1982; Améry 2009), intellectual discourse runs the risk of abstracting, mystifying, and obfuscating the world of the victim. Ultimately, this is an issue concerning the “politics of scholarship itself” (Jain 2017, 865), of how professional criticism welcomes the victim into the fold, not merely as an object of study but as a subject of knowledge (de Sousa Santos 2017 and 2108).

Let me conclude, to bring the ethical point home, by hinting at how scholarship on Mark talks about pain in ways that contemporary trauma and torture studies find deficient. This ethical component has epistemological and historiographical implications alike. I have shown how centering the victim’s experience unlocks previously unexplored literary elements: listening to the “pain of others” involves specific ways of knowing, reading, interpreting. The historiographical dimension, somewhat unaddressed but implicitly driving my inquiry, suggests that a hermeneutics

of torture reorients the contemporary interpreter in her positioning vis-à-vis the ancient text. The historiographical question then comes into sharp focus: why do we, historians and literary critics, talk about torture in the past in ways we find ethically deficient when we talk about torture in the present?

A recap of how the different approaches heretofore surveyed (political, historical, and literary) both illuminate and obscure the grammar of torture, brings into sharp focus the hermeneutical and heuristic gains of unapologetically centering the victim's experience. Political readings, first, demonstrate both the relevance and urgency to tend to the geopolitical context of testimonies of torture. Focusing on the political backgrounds of certain regimes under which torture takes place helps us connect regimes of terror with terrorized bodies. These accounts make little sense if divorced from the terrorism that facilitated their widespread deployment in the first place. David Tombs, along with similar scholars (Carter 2016, Horsley 2008), reminds us that crucifixion as torture ties closely with the Roman Empire and its expansive forces. Historically oriented interpretations, second, remind us of the advantages of paying attention to material circumstances, such as the mechanics of inflicting pain and the strategies that systems of torture employ to maximize harm. Hengel's contribution and those who have followed in his steps help us understand the vicissitudes of Roman execution, its forensic elements, and its punitive tactics. Finally, literary analysis invites us to explore the literary forms and genres that autobiographies and other testimonial literature inhabit, and how the adoption of those forms theorize trauma and death. Helen Bond, in the wake of traditional historical-criticism (Collins 2009), advocates for "passion as noble death," arguing that Mark theologizes the crucifixion to make it fit broader Greco-Roman patterns of honor. Kotrosits and Taussig along with more recent studies within cultural criticism (Choi 2015; Thate 2019), inaugurate a promising hermeneutics of loss and trauma. To various degrees, however, these approaches overlook the irreducible reality of pain during torture, its inexpressibility and the dilemma that it poses to language. In other words, they decenter the victim's pain and leave questions about the literary representation of agony unaddressed. And they do so, despite the text's heavy emphasis on locating the victim at the center of the forces of torture.

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