



# The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World

By Elaine Scarry

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## The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World By Elaine Scarry

Part philosophical meditation, part cultural critique, *The Body in Pain* is a profoundly original study that has already stirred excitement in a wide range of intellectual circles. The book is an analysis of physical suffering and its relation to the numerous vocabularies and cultural forces--literary, political, philosophical, medical, religious--that confront it.

Elaine Scarry bases her study on a wide range of sources: literature and art, medical case histories, documents on torture compiled by Amnesty International, legal transcripts of personal injury trials, and military and strategic writings by such figures as Clausewitz, Churchill, Liddell Hart, and Kissinger. She weaves these into her discussion with an eloquence, humanity, and insight that recall the writings of Hannah Arendt and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Scarry begins with the fact of pain's inexpressibility. Not only is physical pain enormously difficult to describe in words--confronted with it, Virginia Woolf once noted, "language runs dry"--it also actively *destroys* language, reducing sufferers in the most extreme instances to an inarticulate state of cries and moans. Scarry analyzes the political ramifications of deliberately inflicted pain, specifically in the cases of torture and warfare, and shows how to be fictive. From these actions of "unmaking" Scarry turns finally to the actions of "making"--the examples of artistic and cultural creation that work against pain and the debased uses that are made of it. Challenging and inventive, *The Body in Pain* is landmark work that promises to spark widespread debate.

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**Editorial Review**

Review

"I believe this project to be perhaps one of the most significant books on language, philosophy, and literature of the coming years."--Emory Elliott, Princeton University

"Stunningly original, enormously important, powerfully written....The beauty of her writing is that she can make us see torture and war as we have never seen them before, read the Bible and Marx as we have never read them before--indeed, see our day-to-day world in a usefully new manner."--Eric J. Cassell, M.D., Cornell Medical Center

"One of the most important books I have read this year [1987]."--Judith Fryer, University of Massachusetts

"Not for some time have we read a more original book on an announced subject than this review of pain's locations in torture, war and wherever people would do violence to others."--*The Christian Century*

"An extraordinary book: large-spirited, heroically truthful. A *necessary* book."--Susan Sontag

"A richly original, provocative book which makes one reconsider torture, war, and creativity from a new perspective."--Anthony Storr, *Washington Post Book World*

"Brilliant, ambitious and controversial...an all-encompassing discourse on creativity, imagination and the distribution of power."--*Los Angeles Times Book Review*

"In its breadth and humaneness of vision, in the density and richness of its prose, above all in the compelling nature of its argument, this is indeed an extraordinary book."--Susan Rubin Suleiman, *The New York Times Book Review*

"A brilliant and difficult book...Scarry's compassionate linguistics documents how [the] bridge between torturer and victim is cut."--Michael Ignatieff, *The New Republic*

"One of the most important books I have read this year."--Judith Fryer, *University of Massachusetts*

"Only by following Scarry step by step may a reader gradually discern the daringly encompassing scope of Scarry's vision on body and pain, making and unmaking. [Her] style of writing is at once profoundly personal and succinctly scholarly."--*Religious Studies Review*

"Scarry has written a dramatic and provocative discourse on the power of pain and man's reaction to it....The flow of the text is fluid and creative; the book is a well-disciplined example of literary thinking."--*Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine*

"The book is large, ambitious, intricate and alternately illuminating, baffling and irritating....[It] is a brave book, and worth persevering with."--*The Times Literary Supplement* (London)

"An absolutely astonishing achievement...I believe it will change many lives, not by persuasion, but by widening the scope of consciousness. The book itself is a great act of courage, intelligence, and style."--Allen Grossman, Brandeis University

About the Author

Elaine Scarry is at Harvard University.

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