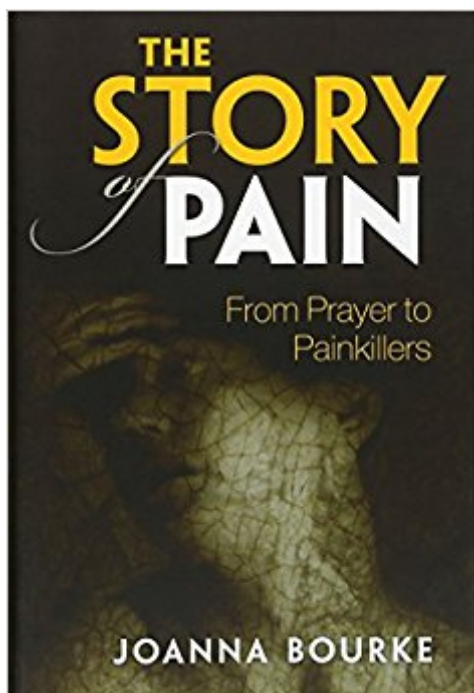


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# The Story Of Pain: From Prayer To Painkillers



## Synopsis

Everyone knows what it feels like to be in pain. Scraped knees, toothaches, migraines, giving birth, cancer, heart attacks, and heartaches: pain permeates our entire lives. We also witness other people - loved ones - suffering, and we 'feel with' them. It is easy to assume this is the end of the story: 'pain-is-pain-is-pain', and that is all there is to say. But it is not. In fact, the way in which people respond to what they describe as 'painful' has changed considerably over time. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for example, people believed that pain served a specific (and positive) function - it was a message from God or Nature; it would perfect the spirit. 'Suffer in this life and you wouldn't suffer in the next one'. Submission to pain was required. Nothing could be more removed from twentieth and twenty-first century understandings, where pain is regarded as an unremitting evil to be 'fought'. Focusing on the English-speaking world, this book tells the story of pain since the eighteenth century, addressing fundamental questions about the experience and nature of suffering over the last three centuries. How have those in pain interpreted their suffering - and how have these interpretations changed over time? How have people learnt to conduct themselves when suffering? How do friends and family react? And what about medical professionals: should they immerse themselves in the suffering person or is the best response a kind of professional detachment? As Joanna Bourke shows in this fascinating investigation, people have come up with many different answers to these questions over time. And a history of pain can tell us a great deal about how we might respond to our own suffering in the present - and, just as importantly, to the suffering of those around us.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This book is rich with examples illustrating medical, religious, racial, and gendered discourses about its subject and the impact these have had, and continue to have, in the provision of medical care to the public . . . A fascinating read" --Library Journal "Bourke has done a fine job of detailing the story of pain and the folly it reveals." --Kirkus Reviews "The Story of Pain is full of harrowing first-hand accounts of excruciating pain . . . But on balance, reading The Story of Pain is more pleasant than painful. Bourke has, for the most part, put together a fantastic, compelling, and engaging history. She writes scrupulously and generously." --Bookforum "The Story of Pain is a bold exploration grounded in historical sources . . . [it] opens an enormous field of inquiry with interesting but unexplored ramifications . . . Bourke's work prompts the need for a study of contemporary understandings of religion and pain. The field is open." --National Catholic Reporter

Joanna Bourke is Professor of History at Birkbeck College at University of London. She is the prize-winning author of nine books, including histories of modern warfare, military medicine, psychology and psychiatry, the emotions, and rape. Among others, she is the author of *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain, and the Great War* (1996), *An Intimate History of Killing* (1999), *Fear: A Cultural History* (2005) and *Rape: A History from 1860 to the Present* (2007), *What it Means to be Human: Reflections from 1791 to the Present* (2011), and *Wounding the World: How Military Violence and War-Play Invade our Lives* (2014). *An Intimate History of Killing* won the Wolfson Prize and the Fraenkel Prize, and "Eyewitness," her audio history of Britain, won a number of prizes, including the Gold for the Most Original Audio. She is also a frequent contributor to TV and radio shows, and a regular newspaper correspondent.

If you're at all interested in pain and why people vary in the ways they deal with pain, this book is a must-read. It's written by historian Joanna Bourke, and traces the language used by people-in-pain and about people-in-pain. Pain is the ever-mysterious yet ubiquitous experience that has been variously thought to be a punishment, an experience to bring us closer to God, an out-of-balance body system and most recently, a neurobiological phenomenon. Bourke takes us back to some of the early writings in medical journals like the *British Medical Journal*, *The Lancet* and *Journal of the American Medical Association* to show us how our understanding and therefore our management of pain has shifted and changed as we define what is, and isn't, acceptable pain AND acceptable

behaviour associated with pain. Pain, and our behaviours as people-in-pain have been used to justify superiority of ethnic origin, gender, spirituality, education and socio-economic background. If you've ever thought that pain is simply about tissue damage, this book will very clearly articulate a counter-argument that should, if you're open to it, help you both as a person-in-pain and as an onlooker or clinician. I thoroughly recommend it as an absorbing read.

Wife got this book ex library twice & when we saw remainder price on we could not resist. Recommend.

No one could deny the scholarship required to generate this book. However, it reads like a re-edited thesis. The basic assertion of the book is that pain is not purely physiological but is informed by 'social worlds': culture, frameworks, biases, perceptions of the higher morality of the sufferer. The first and last chapters are by far the best, but the book gets bogged down in repetitive details of the semantics of pain, without providing an adequate scientific basis of physiological pain which I believe necessary to carry the argument. There are many emerging novel hypotheses of the physicality of pain, these are not discussed in any detail, nor comprehensively. I learned a great deal of interest, particularly the historical etiology of our attitudes to suffering, but remain unconvinced. One of the best aspects of the book is its comprehensive notes and bibliography. I think the marketers are ahead of the content in the way it is represented, however.

Joanna Bourke.....is the real deal. She is a very serious, highly respected, enormously talented British historian and academic at the University of London. How good? Well, most recently, less than one month ago, the British Academy elected her to be a Fellow. This month the Oxford University Press has just published her newest book, which you are considering buying. I hope you do. You will not be disappointed on any level. And just to name one -- unless you are planning on dying in the manner and circumstances that happened to Adlai Stevenson, or instantaneously in some accident, most of us are going to travel a final road paved with considerable and increasing pain at the end of our lives. It might behoove us to know a little more about this pain in advance, the better to deal with it, hopefully. Professor Bourke's new book will help you with that, enormously. Especially since we all live in two worlds as Susan Sontag once wrote: "Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick." I'm fortunate to have lived to be 77 (78 in a week). Most of my friends are of my general age. So I purchased a few copies since I know for certain that I will have keenly interested readers. But even if I were still 35 I would do the same. Pain

knows no generational barriers, as Professor Bourke's brilliant comments about children make chillingly clear. And if you are still on the fence about whether to buy this book, simply read the review of it in the August 21, 2014 issue of The London Review of Books. Having been this highly positive in my recommendation to you of this book, I should also make clear that I do not know the author, have never met her (I wish I had), and that in no way am I connected with her, her book, her publisher, or the LRB. I just think it's one terrific book. The LRB is right to call it "a magnificent feat of research." No news there -- superb research is Bourke's trademark, along with a highly readable style; an unbeatable combination, those two. Kenneth E. MacWilliams Portland, Maine

Very in depth, like a text book. Dry, but very informative.

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