



Rejection

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IN AN EARLY SOLO SONG, Morrissey sang, 'Rejection is one thing, but rejection from a fool/Is cruel'. It's a reminder of the subjective cruelty of rejection, but also how easy it can be to lash out at the perceived aggressor. Unfortunately, the one thing I can guarantee writers – artistic people in general – is rejection.

Perhaps to some, it's water off a duck's back, but in my experience, rejection hurts like hell. It doesn't matter if we've spent a decade worrying at a novel, or three weeks writing a script for a soap — we pour our hearts and souls into our work, or should do, anyway. And anyone who rejects that is not just criticising our hard work, but calling into question our very status as creative people. (For the record, this is not really what's going on; I'm simply trying to describe how it *feels*.) All writers have the scars; memories of rejection run through us like words in a stick of rock. Rejection comes in many forms. Someone you thought of as a friend might publish or say something negative, or a company will stop returning your calls. An agent or an editor might tell you that your book – which could well be perfectly fine, or even a work of genius – is not for them. That's a personal decision, but we have our own tastes as readers and viewers — why should we expect other professionals to be any different? (Of course, there is the small matter that the book might actually be complete rubbish, but that is a discussion for another time.) Just because many of these decisions are subjective, it doesn't automatically make them wrong. Many people will tell you to shrug it off, to develop a thick skin. I'm not sure this is entirely helpful. Those qualities that can make us good writers



– sensitivity, compassion, insight – also make us particularly vulnerable to feelings of rejection. While it’s true that most writers get better at receiving negative feedback, to have too hard a skin can be synonymous with no longer caring about your work.

Instead, I’d say: listen to feedback, if it’s sensible, and try to learn from it. If you’re going to respond at all, don’t do so immediately, especially if you find yourself typing some variation of, ‘When my novel wins the Booker, you’ll be sorry!’ We want people to fall in love with our writing; trying to argue someone into submission is counterproductive. Remind yourself: this is not a rejection of you, as a person. Remind yourself of all those who were rejected, time and time again, but persevered. Of course, there may not be a happy ending for you, for this particular project, for any of us — but we’ll never know if we don’t keep trying. Remind yourself why you write, and – this is probably most important of all – look beyond yourself. In private, seek comforting words from your family, your friends, from fellow writers. They might not make you feel better, but the writers especially will be able to say, ‘Yeah, I know; it’s grim, isn’t it?’, and mean it.