

Preparation for our discussion of “So Late in the Day”

Try this little exercise after reading Claire Keegan's story.

*Compare her writing style to your own.*

When it comes to craft, to the “fine-tuning” we do in rewriting that takes our own stories from an unpromising lump of coal to a bright shiny diamond, what do you start with? What are your first moves towards “improvement?”

I've used a metaphor that feels apt to me, but may not resonate with you. All writing is personal, though, right? Below is my effort.

Keegan's writing is like pulling off a scab with a quick yank—to discover the new skin beneath. She just goes right at it, doesn't she? Looks at uncomfortable truths and exposes them without mercy! My writing is like picking at a scab, bit by bit, until it is gone. I am not as ruthless as she is. I, too, will discover the pink new skin beneath (let's call that skin the idea of the story in its purest form), but what a mess my prose is compared to hers!

To take the metaphor further, I have also—in my approach to telling a story—extended the unpleasant part, haven't I? And by that I mean the part where, in order to get the emotional reward, the reader must invest in the story, must be saying, with each tug, “I hope this is worth it.”

So there is Claire Keegan, every scab a kernel of truth, every pull (those few words that are so telling) a revelation.