Finding Valhalla:
An Investigation of Writing in the Mystery Genre
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Introduction
Unlike other forms of fiction, stories in the mystery genre have a more planned out structure. In my novel, Finding Valhalla, disgraced police investigator, Rebecca Olson, is forced to face her past after the killer who murdered her younger sister supposedly resurfaces. After the murder of another young woman, fifteen years later, she becomes determined to solve the case that has haunted her. Ultimately, this mystery is a story about a woman who has too much pride for her own good, and, in the end, Rebecca must learn to move beyond her obsession with the past, and, more importantly, to forgive herself. The main themes of this novel are justice, isolation, and loneliness, and being able to overcome them.

Brainstorming
In the mystery genre, there is a lot more pre-planning that needs to take place, in order for the story to be both well written, and intriguing to the readers.

Minneapolis, Minnesota
I have family here, so this served as the inspiration for the setting.

Before I began thinking of finalizing my plot, once of my first goals was to create a character summary. This would include detail about their personality, as well as their life before the plot of my novel begins. In this particular case, this allowed me to be able to picture and imagine how my character, Rebecca, would act in every situation.

Through my summary exercise, I created a precise breakdown of the different plot twists, revelations, and reversals that I had planned to take place throughout my mystery.

In order to strengthen this process, and to become more familiar with the mystery genre structure, I read the novel Unsub, by Meg Gardiner. Through this, I became more familiar with the overall breakdown and structure of novels in the mystery genre through creating a break down of each chapter. Through this breakdown I included the moments of irony, situation reversals, and the revelations. I also included the situations of conflict that occurred in each chapter. In the end, this exercise guided me in the structuring of my novel as a whole.

Drafting and Revising
After going through the process of brainstorming, drafting, and revising, I have finished what is essentially ACT I of my novel.

Throughout this process, I needed to consider the themes constantly, which helped in coming up with the overall title. In this case, Finding Valhalla is primarily about a woman trying to find peace after the death of her sister. In relation, the killer in this story is obsessed with Norse mythology and Viking lore, so I tried to think about how that played into the themes as well.

“Valhalla” (1896) by Max Brückner
Throughout the drafting, I wrote roughly three pages a day, keeping in mind what I had outlined in my summary, and even how to improve what I had originally planned. Revisions were based on review by my sponsor. I would make revisions with the goal of improving the flow, context, and continuity of the novel as a whole.

A letter from the killer serves as the end of Chapter 7. At this point, I had written roughly 60 pages, double spaced. To end this chapter, I wanted to think about the impact that it would have, and how it would lead to the action that would be taken in the next chapter, and the story going forward.

Methods
- Completed and revised roughly 4 to 7 chapters (about 40-60 pages)
  - Brainstorming
    - John Truby, The Anatomy of Story
    - 22 steps
    - Character development
    - Irony
  - Outlining
    - Summary and chapter breakdown
  - Drafting
    - Daily page goals
  - Revising
    - Formatting, clarity, and sentence flow
    - Context, what is realistic, and continuity
  - Kept a log, journaling and responding to craft-oriented readings, and my thoughts during writing
  - read and looked at them critically for their narrative style
    - Silence of the Lambs
    - Unsub
    - An Unsuitable Job For a Woman
  - Related to script writing and visual storytelling
    - The Killing

Discussion
- The Logline
  - Includes irony
    - Makes the reader want to find out more with a mismatch between character and situation that promises probable conflict.
    - If you don’t have irony, “then there may not only be something wrong with your logline - maybe your story is off, too,” (Snyder 7).
  - Conflict
    - Ask yourself, does the world of your story have conflict built into it? (Mass)
  - Character
    - “The single biggest mistake writers make when creating characters is that they think of the hero and all other characters as separate individuals,” (Truby 57).
    - Rebecca Olson vs. Jeremy Thompson
    - Rebecca vs. Hersir
  - Moral Argument
    - Authors express their moral argument or theme primarily through dialogue
    - Splitting the theme into opposition
    - “There are three main techniques you can use to break up your theme line into dramatic oppositions; giving the hero a moral decision, making each character a variation on the theme, and placing characters’ values in conflict,” (Truby 114).

Literature Cited
Gardiner, Meg. Unsub; a Novel. Dutton, 2018
James, P. D. An Unsuitable Job for a Woman. Faber & Faber, 2015

Acknowledgements
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A mockup of what a prospective cover for my novel might look like
A diagram detailing the three act structure of a mystery novel, based on discussions with my sponsor