



**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**

Hugvísindasvið

***The Machine***

***A Novella And How It Came To Be***

**B.A. Essay**

**Anton Sturla Antonsson**

**January 2014**

**University of Iceland  
School of Humanities  
Department of English**

# *The Machine*

*A Novella And How It Came To Be*

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## Summary

This assignment is written as a creative B.A. thesis at the University of Iceland and consists of two parts. The former is a novella of around 8,800 words called *The Machine* which I wrote in the autumn and winter of 2013 as my B.A. essay. It centers around a talented young man named John who aspires to be the greatest painter of his generation. Shy and withdrawn, he struggles through his daily life as an art student at a university where his superiority breeds jealousy in the other students. However, his destiny as an artist is seemingly halted when his only friend within the school suddenly begins to plagiarize his work. On top of this and unbeknown to John a serious and life-altering disease is growing within him and is already leaving its mark on him. With the help of the only two people he can trust he must battle the odds and prove himself as the great artist he knows he is.

The story possesses traces of thriller and horror along with surrealistic elements and, hopefully, a dab of humor. However, categorizing it according to genre could be a tricky task as it was written without particular aims of that kind in mind, but was rather allowed to grow devoid of such worries.

The latter part of this assignment is an exposition written in an attempt to shed light on the process behind the creation of *The Machine* and is around 3,700 words. It goes into detail about the conception of the story, its development, the research done for it and various other subjects. It is worth noting that anyone reading the exposition is expected to have read the novella beforehand.

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# *The Machine*

By Anton Sturla Antonsson

The moment you lay eyes on Harry's "The Machine" you realize the sly bastard has been stealing your thoughts and you know you must get them back. You are in his small apartment near the university and the sea, drinking wine with some of the other art students when it happens. You are the last one to arrive which is on purpose, not in an attempt to make an entrance but rather the opposite, though this often proves difficult due to your freakish height. People secretly fear freakishly tall men, you have noticed this. As you enter, however, your classmates spend little effort in noticing you apart from Harry who greets you with a glass of red wine and a warm smile. His paintings cover most of the walls and many of them have been highly praised by our teachers. Despite of this he is unswervingly humble, a reflection of your own superiority no doubt, which sadly most of the other students ignore out of sheer jealousy. "Relax," he says in his friendly manner, "try to mingle, I have something to show you later on." You notice a canvas by the room's only window draped with a white cloth and you are not sure whether it is supposed to be obtrusive or screaming for attention, but you know you don't like it one bit. Harry's usual manner of unveiling his work is to simply point it out to you and you wonder what is so special about this particular painting.

You are half way through your second glass of wine, when Harry calls for everyone to assemble by the covered painting. You have been standing by some people you know from an art history class you took but you can not remember the names of, everyone here is purposefully ignoring you but you don't like them much anyway and you are just glad not to have to fake mingling for a while. He looks smaller than usual standing by the easel in front of everyone, his nervous eyes flashing between you and the floor. You feel a dreadful kind of pity for him as you often do when he looks so small, his shoulders collapsed down his shrunken frame like a dog showing submission. It is a fatal flaw in his social character that when a pair of eyes become a dozen his composure crumbles and even though you have known him for a long time this always takes you by surprise. But your sympathy quickly vanishes as Harry begins to introduce his new

painting.

“I call it ‘The Machine’” he says, “not much else to say I guess. I think it’s my finest work yet, so I wanted to build some suspense, I hope I’m not being too dramatic. Oh, and you John should especially appreciate this.” He says and points at you. You wonder what he means by that but as the white cloth falls and “The Machine” is unveiled you know the answer. Your heart stops and amidst the clatter of appreciation and awe you freeze. Your thoughts start to race and you have no idea how to react, how to feel. The painting is absolutely stunning, beyond what you would consider beautiful, it is brilliant. The colors seem to illuminate, jumping from the canvas into your eyes and overwhelming your senses. You can not only see it, you can smell it, taste it, feel it, and somehow ever more than that. Every little detail speaks to you like an old friend and the shapes seem like they have been carved from your flesh. The meaning and emotion of each stroke of the brush stand before you as if they were written there black on white. It is all so familiar like a flash of a forgotten dream or memory. You know it as well as your own name that this painting is yours.

You try to keep calm as the people around you congratulate Harry. You hear words like “excellent” or “marvelous” and a cheerful blonde girl even exclaims daringly that “it’s better than sex”. They all love him, but probably only half as much as they despise you. You nod calmly in approval when you feel you can move safely without shattering. You contemplate objecting but in truth you have no idea what to say, you are not even sure what is going on, if this is some sort of cruel joke being played on you or a strange misunderstanding. But as you watch Harry receiving his praise, surrounded by his friends who are all conveniently here see him reveal “his work” for the first time, you realize that this can only be deliberate theft of your thoughts and ideas. An act of jealousy no doubt; and from none other than the one person you could have called a friend. All of these thoughts are piling up on each other, spinning around in your mind, and you feel like they might start leaking out of every hole in your head. You slowly remove yourself from the group in search of more wine but your feet won’t stop moving and before you know it you are running down



the stairs of the apartment building and across the street and not until you have turned a few corners and put at least a couple of buildings between you and them do you feel like you can begin to calm down.

You head home and soon it starts to rain heavily. It is dark and few people are around as you cross through the center of town. There is a large pond where you used to feed the ducks and the swans when you were young. Now the ducks float motionless in the water, heads turned and beaks resting on their backs, surrounded by the furious beating of the raindrops on the surface of the water. It makes a comforting sound, drowning out the silence. The rain strikes your face and plasters your hair to your forehead and soon your coat, your tee shirt and the front of your jeans are drenched. There is a freezing headwind most of the way which feels like salt in an open wound and it is making you furious. You don't mind the rain but you absolutely hate the wind and you wish it had a face so you could punch it. Soon you are on your street where you pass under rows of street lamps dulled by the rain that light up the downfall and turn it into a hail of white paint for a short moment before it is swallowed by the pavement.

You enter the building and the sound of the rain dies behind you and with it the feeling of being alone. You enter the elevator and push button number eight with a shaking hand. The door closes and a deep knot settles in your stomach. You drip heavily on the red carpet. Jason's voice comes from the elevators speakers.

"I told you, John, didn't I tell you? Harry is up to something, that's what I told you."

"You tell me everyone is up to something."

"I'm looking out for you, man, and you should have listened. Now we're fucked. Aren't we fucked, John?"

"Where is Sid?" You ask. You try to keep calm but there is a tremble in your voice.

"He is up there, man, he is losing it."

"Sid lost it a long time ago."

“Not like this he didn’t, I’ve never seen him this mad before.”

“How would you know? You always hide when he’s around.”

The door opens and you step out before Jason has a chance to answer. Maybe you were too harsh on him, after all he *is* usually trying to look after you. However, you quickly forget about Jason as you get closer to the door to your apartment and hear the muffled sound of Sid’s hateful cursing. You stand for a while with your key in your shaking hand held against the lock, holding your breath in order to hear him but through the door it only sounds like a lunatics rambling. Finally you jam the key into the keyhole loud enough for him to hear. You know there is no point in trying to avoid him anyway.

As soon as the door opens Sid is silent and the only sound inside the apartment is the rain pounding on the windows. You don’t wait for Sid to speak but head straight into the bathroom. There you remove your jacket and search for a towel to dry off but they are all stained and lying on the floor so you have to do with a seemingly unused corner of the cleanest towel you can find. As you dry your hair vigorously you can hear that Sid has started again from the living room, though he is not as loud. There is a handle on the mirror which you pull, opening a shallow cabinet. It contains your toothbrush, toothpaste, eye drops, some over-the-counter painkillers and a pill bottle with a long brand name printed on it which you can not pronounce. There is a small post-it note stuck to it with some very jagged handwriting, it says: *You can either be a crazy diamond or a black coal.*

Out in the hall you flick a light switch and the bare bulb lights up the small and filthy apartment. Trash litters the floor and all the tables and dirty plates and glasses lie here and there, some in pieces.

“Turn off the damned light” a voice growls from the living room and you do as he says.

“Now get in here, boy.”

You enter the living room slowly, your wet clothes still dripping on the floor. Sid is sitting in

a chair across the room from you. In the dark the old man is only a vague silhouette and a heavy breath that rattles with each exhale. It always surprises you how small and fragile he can seem. Between the two of you the room is covered in paint splatter, empty paint tubes, brushes and canvases, either blank or caked in thick layers of paint. The smell in the room is a mixture of paint and sulfur.

“Look at all this shit,” Sid says, “you call this art? You choose to be proud of this? And then you dance around town pretending to be an artist. You foolish boy, there is no art in you.” He turns towards you, baring his teeth.

“I know you heard,” you say into your chest.

“Heard what? Oh, you mean about Harry’s painting? Now there is a real work of art. You could learn a lot from your friend, he is a true artist.”

“Stop it,” you say, fighting the urge to cry even though you can already feel the hot tears run down your cold face. “You don’t know what you are talking about, you never do.”

“Don’t worry, John, I’m sure your mother thinks your work is very nice.”

“Don’t talk about my mother.” You scream at the old man who stares back at you laughing, his crooked teeth and sickly yellow eyes stand out in the dark like chalk on a blackboard. “I know that painting is mine, it has to be, there is no other answer. He must have stolen it from me somehow because he is jealous of my talent and that I am the next great artist and not him.”

“Ah, right. You are the next Picasso or Da Vinci or whatever. Maybe you are the next messiah as well? No, boy. I’ll tell you what you are. You are a tiny ant placing grains of sand at the foot of a giant ant hill, and if someone were to step on you none of the other ants would even notice. You are at the bottom, boy, and no one cares about you.”

“That’s not true. Jason knows, he’ll tell you.” You turn on a small radio and place it between stations so it makes a low hissing sound.

“Turn that damned thing off, I don’t want that freak in my house.”

You are quietly sobbing now but you let the hissing continue although you know that Jason won't come. It reminds you of the ducks floating in the rain, it feels like ages ago. Then Sid begins again.

“Look at you, boy. You look terrible. Like a junkie or a sicko, the way you shake all over. Well, we know that you are sick, don't we? You sick, sick little boy. Take a look at yourself in the mirror, see how sick you look.”

The mirror stands against the wall next to Sid and you start to sweat just thinking about being so close to him, of feeling his presence next to you and smelling him. You take small steps, each one filling you with dread for the next to the point where when you reach the mirror your heart is pounding so hard you can feel thumping in your eyes. Sid is right though, the figure in the mirror, only slightly illuminated by a faint light coming from a window, looks sick. And you feel sick. Your mind is swimming, your skin and your insides ache and your usually tall and lean figure looks collapsed and weak like a shamed boy, shaking in the soaking wet clothes. A shadow grows into view behind you and Sid's hand touches your shoulder. The poisonous stench of sulfur burns in your nostrils.

“You should take off your clothes,” Sid says in a calm manner, “so you don't come down with a fever.”

“But I'm already sick.” You say confused, your vision starts to get blurry and you feel dizzy.

“I know. Now take them off.”

You do as Sid tells you and put the wet clothes in a pile on the floor. Outside the rain has stopped and somewhere behind you the radio still hums its low tune. You stand in front of the mirror naked, Sid's hands still on your shoulder.

“If that painting really is yours, and I believe you when you say it is, then we can't let Harry get away with stealing it, can we John? You know what we have to do.”

“We have to prove that it's mine, that I am the true artist and Harry is just a fake, so that

people will know, so that I can become great.” Sid pulls a blanket over you and guides you to the couch where you lie down. As you drift off you hear Sid’s calm voice.

“No one will believe you, John. You know what we have to do, what *you* have to do.”

*It is dark inside my head, almost too dark to see. Two windows in the far distance let in strong beams of light which flood over the surface of my brain like the sun over the sand dunes of a vast desert. I think they are my eyes. I can hear echoes of voices coming from the outside, one in particular that I recognize as Mrs. Patcher, my teacher and head of the art department. Beneath my bare feet my brain is soft and warm. I start to walk towards the light, treading carefully from fear of damaging the smooth and delicate surface. I walk for a long time, growing bolder with each step, and soon I am walking briskly as I would on regular concrete. The voices grow louder and the light gets brighter as I slowly get closer. Occasionally electric currents shoot over my brain, lighting up the inside of my cranium like a camera flash, and I wonder what I might have been thinking.*

*I am about half way there when I notice something standing close to the light, casting a long shadow which stretches almost to where I am standing. It is hard to make out the figure from so far away but it looks like the silhouette of a man gazing out into the light. I hasten my step and before I know it I am running up and down the round hills as fast as I can. I quickly reach the shadow but feel that I have no time to examine it, I must get to this person inside my head.*

*The light grows from twilight to daytime in a matter of seconds and the sound of Mrs. Patcher’s lecture now bellows around me. She is talking about a painter I know but can not for the life of me remember the name of. I ignore it and keep my focus on the figure which grows steadily in the distance. My eyes have also grown immensely and seem to be a lot bigger than I had imagined at first, like two giant movie theaters placed side by side. Suddenly giant lids slide over them and for a second everything is pitch black. Everything except a faint glow somewhere in the distance where the long shadows had come from. I trip in my confusion and fall face first on the thankfully*

*soft tissue of my brain. Lying on my stomach I look up to see that the figure is in fact not a man but rather what seems to be some items of furniture.*

*I get back on my feet and start to make my way to my eyes again which are now only about a football field's length away. Soon I can make out the shape of a floor lamp, a chair and a small table and a few minutes later I have reached the oddly placed furniture. It is simple and old. The lamp is tall with a single bulb that is covered with a beige screen spotted with red roses, the chair is a simple kitchen chair made of wood with a padded seat and the table next to it is small and round and on top of it sits only a black TV remote. All of it is neatly placed on a thick red rug, directly in front of the giant screens that are my eyes. What strikes me as odd though, is that the lamp, although lit, has no power cable.*

*I sit down in the chair and look out into the world in awe. I am at the back of the classroom with a view over the backs of the heads of the other students. I spot Harry in the front row, right in front of Mrs. Patcher. She is rambling on about some painter I am sure I know who committed suicide. His face is projected on the wall and I have the name right on the tip of my tongue, I even remember reading conspiracy theories surrounding his death but the name escapes me. Then Mrs. Patcher points at me and says something I don't quite catch and I don't feel myself doing anything and she just keeps staring at me, so I grab the remote and push a random button because I just cannot bring myself to watch.*

After class you go down to the students pub downstairs from the cafeteria. It is a quiet place with a small stage in one corner, a kitchen, and a bar in the center. They are playing one of your favorite songs in the stereo called "In My Head" and you ask them to turn it up but the bartender says it's already as loud as he can play it. So you order a burger with fries and a beer and the bartender looks at you with a puzzled smile and says:

"Starting early are we?"

You notice that the time is still only eleven thirty which is odd since you were sure it was at least past three. You reply that in Spain they sometimes drink wine with breakfast and the bartender nods while pouring your beer and then sends your order to the kitchen. The bar is empty except for you, the bartender and a man standing behind the kitchen counter you assume is the cook. However, you know that soon students on their lunch break will start flowing in which always smothers the mood and you plan to be gone by then. You find a secluded table in one corner and plug a headphone in one ear and Jason is there talking as if he had never stopped.

“This place is making me nervous, John, don’t you think?” he says. “I mean, what is the deal with that bartender? He was looking at you like he knew exactly who you are, man. Something ain’t right here.”

You look over at the bartender who is casually leaning against the bar with his back turned to you, carefully wiping a glass as if he were hoping for a genie to pop out of it. You pull out a small notebook and write back:

“He seems harmless to me.”

“People like him always do, trust me, I know a goon when I see one. Go ahead and smell that beer he gave you.”

You do. It smells like a beer for the most part but you can sense a hint of something else behind it. You smell it again and this time the scent is stronger and it smells horrible like a decaying carcass set on fire. Suddenly you feel tension in the air, you notice that the bar is much darker than is usual at this time of day and why are you the only one here? The mood has changed in the room, or maybe you were just oblivious to it until now. The song changes to “Sick Sick Sick.” Is this some sort of joke? Your heart pumps faster and you can feel a drop of sweat run down your neck. You are about to bolt for the door when Jason yells in your ear to stay.

“If you run they’ll know you are on to them. Just sit back down and pretend that everything is fine.”

You do as he says even though you have a strong urge to leave. You know you can trust Jason more than anyone and you are always comforted when you know he is watching over you. He is like a guardian angel although he is not always there when you need him the most and you know he is probably suspicious of his own reflection and flinches at the sight of it. You realize now that he is your best friend and you are about to write that to him when you remember that there are people trying to kill you so you ask him what you should do instead. While Jason is trying to figure a way out the man in the kitchen places your food on a tray and rings a bell. When you pretend not to notice the bartender brings it to you smiling the way you do when you know something others don't.

“Jesus, look at him,” Jason says, “it’s like he’s not even trying to hide it.”

You force out a barely audible “Thanks” and as the goon turns and walks towards the bar you pour about half of the beer into a flower pot next to you.

“Good thinking, now stay calm while I figure something out.” There is a clear tremble in Jason’s voice now, his nerves are getting the better of him as they always do. The smell of food reminds you of how hungry you are but underneath lurks the bitter smell of poison. You consider shoving all of it into your bag and you look up to see if anyone would notice but the man in the kitchen is standing right behind the counter, hands crossed, looking out over the floor like a guard dog. The bartender is at the same spot as before with his back towards you but as the song changes to “The Lost Art Of Keeping A Secret” you notice something that makes your heart sink to your stomach. On the liquor shelve behind the bar there is a mirror in which the reflection of the bartender stares straight at you. Your eyes meet for a split second before you jerk your head down. He has been watching you all along, he must have seen you pour the beer. The gig is up, they know you know. You can feel their eyes burning holes in you. A rush of adrenalin runs through you like a bullet and Jason starts to panic in your ear, yelling loudly at you to bolt for the door but you keep your head down and hope for a miracle and in that moment a group of about seven walk into the bar



and start ordering. You sigh in relief as the goons go to work and decide to get out while you can. Then you notice that one of the people who just entered is waving at you and it is Harry and he is coming over, smiling to his ears and you try to smile back but it feels more like a grimace. As he takes a seat his smile fades into a look of concern.

“How are you, John? You look tired.”

“I’m fine. I was just leaving.” You make a gesture to stand up but Harry has already taken the seat facing you and in an overly sincere tone says:

“What happened with you the other night? You just left without a word.”

“I was tired.”

“Are you sure you are okay? Are you taking your medicine?”

“I’m fine, now get off it. Sometimes the medicine just makes me tired, that’s all.”

“Alright then, sorry.”

You sit in silence for a minute. Jason is mostly quiet as well, occasionally cursing at Harry, so you remove the headphone and stuff it in your pocket. Then Harry looks in your eyes with that big smile and you look at your hands.

“I have some good news, I was showing Jenny my painting just now. You know, ‘The Machine’. Anyway, she loved it and wants to show it to some gallery owner she knows. She thinks he might let me hold my own exhibition. Isn’t that amazing?”

You can’t believe this, you want to cry. “It’s mine,” you say, realizing immediately that you are playing right into his hands.

“What’s that?” he says innocently.

“I said that’s fine. Congratulations.”

“Thank you, well it’s not a done deal,” he says, smiling a sly smile. Clearly he is enjoying your misery. You know you should go before you lose your composure but then Harry takes your hand and with an almost motherly look says:

“If you ever need to talk just call me, okay? I worry about you.”

You nod without a word and you want to believe him but deep down you know it is a trick, a ploy. So you stand up and tell him you really have to go now but before you leave you slide the untouched hamburger over to Harry. “You can have it,” you say, “it’s still warm.”

“Thanks,” he replies, “I’m starving. You should come out tonight, we are having drinks down at The Rooster around nine before heading over to that gallery I mentioned. I’d really like you to be there.”

“Maybe, we’ll see.” You quickly walk away before he can say anything else. When you are out in the cold you realize what you have done by giving Harry the poisoned food. You consider going back but Jason convinces you not to as it would probably be too late if he had eaten the food, which he doubts very much that he did. You go to your next class which starts in five minutes but there is a group of students waiting outside the classroom and when you approach them they look at you with sheer contempt as if they know what you just did so you ditch class and instead walk aimlessly around the campus. You think about Harry and the painting and about the men at the bar. You think about Mrs. Patcher and about what Jason said. The more you think the more you feel the big picture hidden underneath it all and the more anxious you become. You know the pieces fit together, you are just not sure how.

Soon winter darkness starts to seize the day and it starts to snow the kind of snow you would want to wake up to on Christmas morning, the air dense with large flakes that glide slowly to the ground where it builds up immediately and covers everything in sight. You look up and find yourself in front of the university’s main building. It is old and gray and until now you have never given it a second glance. But looking at it now through the heavy snowfall, lit up by a row of floodlights, there is a quiet and somber dignity to it. You recall sitting in one of the buildings old classrooms on a hard wooden bench next to Harry. It was your first class at this school and you remember being nervous and wanting to leave but Harry calmed you down. Even later that day

when the older students welcomed the new with beer and games he convinced you to be there and then stayed with you as you sat on the sideline.

As you reminisce tears run down your face and your throat starts to cramp. It is getting very cold now so you walk up the steps to the main entrance and look inside. The lights are dimmed and there is no one in sight so you gently push the heavy doors open and slip inside. You feel like you have just walked into a Victorian-era novel. The hall you enter is much bigger and more magnificent than you remember. Broad stairways curve up along both sides to the second floor and a large silver chandelier hangs between them. Underneath the stairs hallways leading to the classrooms lie in opposite directions. You hear voices coming from the one on the right so you head for the hallway on the left. Your footsteps echo loudly as you cross the hall so you hasten your pace, go into the hallway and enter the first door on your right.

The lights are off inside the classroom but a large window in the back provides enough light for you to see. It is similar to the one you remember although you can not be sure if it is the same one. You take a seat on one of the benches and try to make sense of everything that is in your head. But the more you focus on it the more you seem to feed into the chaos and turmoil and you can't say you didn't know it was coming. A hundred thoughts rush to the surface at once, racing around like evil spirits, some fade but others stick like glue. The worst ones always stick. Images flash, voices speak to you, yell at you, laugh at you. Some you recognize. Through this fury you somehow realize that you need help, you need to regain control. So you pull up your phone and dial your mother's number. The ringing tone soothes you slightly, but as it keeps ringing you get anxious. Why won't she answer? Then a voice says "Hello, John" but it does not come from the phone, it comes from inside the classroom, and it is Sid. He is standing in the back by the large window and behind him the snow is still descending.

"I wouldn't do that if I were in your shoes, boy." He says as he moves his frail body along the benches, one small step at a time. You need to fight your gag reflex as he passes you and heads

for the teachers desk. The call goes to voice mail.

“Are you confused? It saddens me that you do not come to me first for answers. After all, I am one of the few people you can trust. If not the only one.”

“Why should I even trust you?” you ask.

“Oh John, you blind fool.” Sid says amused. “You know I don’t need to answer that. Besides, what does it matter? Nothing you do really, truly matters. Not unless you are willing to do what has to be done.”

“What is that?” You ask even though you don’t want to hear the answer.

“It is simple, you strike back at the people who struck you first. It is only fair, don’t you think? An eye for an eye.”

“You want me to strike Harry?”

“Yes, Harry and Mrs. Patcher. Although a knife would do the job quicker.”

“Mrs. Patcher? What has she got to do with any of this?”

“Come on, boy. Do you still not get it? Are you stupid enough to think that Harry is behind all of this alone? Do you even realize what *this* is? It’s not just about the painting they stole from you, it is about you. And about sabotaging your destiny. They are jealous of your talent so they steal it, and you are too much of a coward to do anything about it.”

At first this hits you as complete bullshit but the more you think about it the more it makes sense. “They haven’t stolen my talent, how could they?” You want to believe this but the pieces fit so perfectly together. Perhaps you knew it all along. When you think about it you haven’t so much as drawn a sketch in almost a week. You feel sick thinking about it and about what Sid wants you to do. “I can’t do it,” you stammer out.

“Nonsense! Of course you can. And you will, do you hear me, boy? You sink or you swim, such is life, and if you don’t swim I won’t be there to help you, although I wouldn’t mind watching you drown,” Sid says with a nasty grin.

“Not tonight,” you say. It comes out more like a question than a statement.

“Tonight is the night, boy, it must be. ‘The Machine’ was only the beginning, they won’t stop until you are dead.”

“I need to think about this,” you say as you stand up and head for the door. Rushing down the hall towards the exit you hear Sid’s voice fade behind you:

“You sink or you swim, boy, you sink or you swim.”

You run home in a frenzy like a lion to its threatened cub and your insanity follows. People are yelling after you but when you stop at the end of a street and look behind you there are only your footprints trailing through the new fallen snow. Then you notice the small shadow of the old man slowly making his way towards you at the far end of the street. You waste no time and sprint the rest of the way. When you arrive, panting like a wild animal, you block the main entrance with a heavy flower pot then enter the elevator where an old woman you think lives on your floor is waiting. “Going up?” You ask and she nods so you push the button and the elevator starts. “You haven’t seen any suspicious looking cooks or bartenders around here, have you?” She doesn’t answer. You notice how pale her face is, she must be sick.

When you get to your apartment you make sure to turn on all the lights. Then you clear a space in the middle of the living room where you place a blank canvas on an easel. You scavenge the place for unused paint tubes and soon you have a fine collection to get started. So you place yourself in front of the canvas and you are ready to paint, to let the inspiration flow through you, but for some reason there is not an inch of you that dares to touch the spotless canvas with the dirty paint. You just stand there and soon the voices and the maddening clatter catch up with you. You need a mission, something to aim at, so you are off across the apartment, into the bedroom, then back out into the living room but you see nothing you could be looking for, nothing that helps. Then you are out on the hallway and there is nothing there either except for a heavy fire extinguisher

which you do take inside but when you try to use it on the canvas the trigger won't move. So you pace the apartment again until you find yourself in front of the medicine cabinet, holding a pill bottle in your hand. You open it and inside you find a crumbled piece of paper. *You can either be a crazy diamond or a black coal.* You remember reading this note before but you don't know who wrote it or what it means. What you do know is that you are neither a crazy diamond nor a black coal. Then you realize what it is. It has to have something to do with everything else. It is a threat from Mrs. Patcher or Harry or one of their goons. They are either going to frame you as crazy or burn you alive. You flush the note along with the rest of the bottle's content.

Back in front of the canvas again and nothing is happening. You try to imagine yourself painting "The Machine" but you are unable to concentrate. This is making you furious. What if Sid is right? Maybe Mrs. Patcher and Harry have already stolen your talent and you will never have it back. The future that you were promised, that you deserve, turned to nothing. No, you have to prove Sid wrong, that you still have what it takes, that you are not a mere ant. You have to paint something, anything. You finally stain the canvas with your paint and once the first drop has been spilled the fury takes over and you are lost in it. For what feels like a very long time you are in a trance-like state and you don't dare to come out of it from fear of realizing that it is fake.

When you finally do stop it is not because you are finished but rather due to your hand having been cramped around the brush in a death grip for hours. You massage it gently while you examine your work, inspecting every detail closely, and soon you feel that you can safely reach the conclusion that it is good so far. On the floor behind the easel lies the radio which you pick up and turn on and Jason is there, much calmer than the last time you talked.

"What do you think of my painting?" you ask, but Jason ignores the question.

"Sid was here," he says impassively.

"Where?"

"Here, with me."

“Really,” you say, “what did he want?”

“He told me about the art department’s conspiracy against you.”

“Is it the whole art department now?” You say and chuckle, but it is a nervous chuckle. “Sid is full of shit, there is just no way...”

“They stole ‘The Machine’ from you didn’t they?”

“Yes but...”

“And they tried to poison you this very morning, don’t tell me you forgot about that. If I were you I’d disappear, get the hell out of the country if you can.”

“If you would just look at the painting.”

“It’s terrible, John. The painting is terrible.”

“What?”

“I’m sorry,” he says but you don’t care if he is and what does he even know about art and he can just go fuck himself so you hurl the radio into the wall where it shatters. The painting is facing away from you and you stare at the back of it for a while but you don’t have it in you to see it again just yet. Instead you look out of the window and the city is sleeping under a heavy blanket of snow. You look at the time, it is only half past eleven. Down on the street beneath you the occasional car slowly makes its way through the deep tracks that cut through the smooth surface and you hear the distinct cracking sound of the snow being compressed under its tires. There are no signs of the old man. Perhaps he is still with Jason. Perhaps he was standing over him during your whole conversation, pulling his strings, turning you against him. When you think about it it makes perfect sense and maybe Jason was lying and he really thought your painting was good.

You hurry across the room, almost slipping in a pool of paint which has gathered in front of the canvas but when you see the painting it stops you in your tracks and you realize that you have been fooling yourself. You don’t have a clue what it is supposed to depict nor do you remember what you had set out to paint in the first place. It looks like a dozen concepts succeeded and

overlapped each other in a manic attempt to display of what was going on in your head at the time. There are recognizable faces here and there, one is clearly supposed to be Harry smiling to his ears and another one is you but it doesn't look like you at all and the rest is just noise and chaos and smears of black. The whole thing is mostly layers of dark colors and you can not remember painting any of it.

You pick up the brush again and tell yourself that it is just not finished yet and you can fix it no problem. There is not much left of the paint and you try to make something out of the large black smears with it but you have really no idea what you are doing anymore. Nothing works out the way you want it and your impotence makes you anxious at first but it quickly evolves into anger and soon you are just throwing the paint at the canvas. When you have no paint left you fall on your knees and cry and you know that they won and you lost. Then you notice a vague shape in the paint clutter that looks like the old man's silhouette sitting in his chair and a whiff of sulfur puts you over the edge and you yell out all of your anger and frustration at the painting and finally you tear it off the easel and after putting your foot through it you throw it out of the window.

As you watch the painting fall to the ground you feel lost and defeated and you start to think that maybe the best thing to do would be to just crawl into a corner and die. But before that you are going to apologize to Jason for throwing him into the wall so you turn on an old stereo which is connected to two large floor speakers that start to hum a static tune. Jason doesn't show up which you think is strange although he is probably just angry with you and won't speak so you let the speakers hum. A few minutes later you hear a rattle and then a voice bellows out so loud you feel it vibrate under your feet but it is not Jason, it is Sid.

"Hello, John," he says.

"Where is Jason?" you ask.

"Don't worry about him right now, you have bigger things on your plate."

"I don't want to talk to you."



“You don’t need to talk, boy, just listen. I know a way for you to solve all of your problems tonight.”

“I won’t kill anyone. Now, where is Jason? I need to talk to him,” you say, surprised by your own assertiveness.

“You don’t have to kill anyone for this. All you have to do is break into Harry’s apartment and steal ‘The Machine’, then bring it back here.”

“What good will that do me? Everyone knows that Harry painted it.”

“Don’t you see, John? All of this started with ‘The Machine’. It is not just your thoughts and ideas that were put into it but your talent and your artistry. If you get ‘The Machine’ back you get all of this back as well and then you can prove to everyone that ‘The Machine’ is yours. All you have to do is dissolve it from the painting and absorb it back into you.”

“How will I do that?”

“By setting it on fire and stepping into the flames.”

“That is ridiculous, let me speak to Jason.”

“No.”

“Am I just supposed to step into fire because you say so?”

“I’ve been right about everything so far, haven’t I? Besides, it wasn’t even my idea, it was yours.”

“What are you talking about? If Jason tells me this is the right thing to do I will do it, so just let me talk to him, please.”

“I’m afraid that just isn’t possible.”

“Why not?”

“Because he is dead.”

“You killed him?”

“I’m pretty sure you did. Now, you need to do as I say, boy, or you won’t live to see another

day. You need to swim before you sink.”

The news of Jason’s death falls strangely flat on you and you are not quite sure how to react though you doubt it was because you destroyed the radio. Sid must have killed him, or perhaps he did it himself. Either way you don’t have time to think about that right now. You have decided to follow Sid’s instructions, not because you trust him or necessarily believe him but rather because it is a sure way out, whether it works or not. Harry is probably still out celebrating so you grab your jacket and head downstairs and out on the street towards his apartment.

*I am sitting in the wooden chair inside my head, watching as I break the glass on Harry’s front door; then extend my hand inside and undo the lock. Before I enter I glance over my shoulder at the parking lot below, it is empty. I half expect Harry to greet me with a huge question mark on his face, or perhaps a baseball bat, but there is no one here. I watch myself as I walk through the apartment, tearing paintings off the wall and breaking everything within my reach. The inside of my skull is flaring with flashes of electricity and a turmoil of voices talking over each other echo around me. Then I am standing in front of “The Machine”, struck by its beauty just like the first time I saw it. It takes me a minute to remember what I am doing here but soon I am watching as I cover the canvas with a sheet from Harry’s bed. Then I hear voices and a distinct sound of a key going into a keyhole so loud that it can only have come from Harry’s front door. It opens and someone is in the hall cautiously saying “Hello” into the door between us that stands ajar; then a more determined voice yells that the police are on their way. I make a run for the balcony without hesitating and climb onto a fire escape, the painting dangling from one hand. On my way down I hear Harry break down crying as they enter the living room and another voice is talking on the phone. Sirens are wailing in the distance. The last thing I see before I push a button on the remote is the frantic, shaking motion of me sprinting into the darkness, I then look back and see Harry standing on his balcony looking down at me. Then my eyes close and everything is dark and quiet*

*for a while.*

*When my eyes open again I am standing in a hospital room next to a bed where a frail and sickly man is looking up at me. I remember how old he looked then, it was almost as if he aged a year each day of those last few weeks. I take his hand and I lean in as he speaks to me in a whisper and although I can not hear what he is saying to me I can remember it clearly. My eyes become cloudy and I realize this was the last time I saw my father alive. Shortly after I sit down in a chair next to the bed and watch my mother and my father embrace. It is hard to believe that this was only a year ago, it feels like ages.*

When you approach your street you expect the police to be waiting for you but to your surprise they are nowhere in sight. Perhaps Harry didn't recognize you. On your way up you take the stairs instead of the elevator and before entering your apartment you take a lighter to a smoke detector in the hall which triggers the alarm. You watch through the peephole as people rush out of their apartments and down the stairs, then you go into the living room where Sid is waiting for you. He is sitting in his chair in silence and when you enter he turns his head towards you and holds out a lighter fluid canister in his hand and you walk over and take it and for a while you just stand there and look at it. Then Sid points to the middle of the floor and says: "Put it there," and you remove the sheet covering "The Machine" and lay it front up where the old man is pointing.

Outside the window you notice blue lights blinking on the street, you know there is no doubt they are here for you and sure enough only seconds later there is a sharp rap on the door and a voice tells you to open the door. Your heart starts to pound so hard you can feel it throughout your body as you empty the canister over the painting and yourself. The smell is horrifying and the gas burns your skin and you look over at Sid hoping for encouragement but he just stares back at you and you feel in your heart that this is wrong but the confusion is returning and more than anything you just want it to stop.

Outside the door the officers are losing their patience and threatening to kick down the door if you do not open it but you ignore them. You are holding a match box in your hand and you remove a single match and hold it against the striker but you hesitate, trying to remember why you are doing this if not just to find rest. "Light it," Sid whispers next to you and others join him and you even think you hear Jason's voice in the noise. The rapping on the door sounds like it has turned to kicking and you know you need to act fast so you light the match and the fire is bright and beautiful and you wonder if perhaps this is not the right thing to do. Then the kicking stops and someone else is talking to you through the door and you recognize Harry's voice. You can barely hear what he is saying and you don't particularly want to either so you scream at the door that you are not a fucking ant and he can go fuck himself and then you throw the lid match onto the painting but instead of stepping into the fire you take a step back, sit down and watch as it burns.

*I watch through my eyes as the fire quickly eats away the painting and I want to save it but I know it is too late and then it is gone and there is only a large black stain on the floor, framed by fire. The room is filled with smoke and I hear a loud crash and suddenly men in three kinds of uniforms are rushing in and one of them puts the fire out and another is trying to talk to me. I grab the remote off the table and push a button because I can't stand watching this and my eyes slide shut. They open again almost immediately and the dark smoke filled room is replaced by a sunny summer's day. The sun stings my eyes but as I adjust I begin to recognize where I am although I do not recognize this memory. I am standing at the bank of a pond where dozens of ducks and swans are swimming peacefully around and I feed them bits of bread. On a bench behind me sits a young couple and I run to them and they smile to me and when I can't get up on the bench by myself my father picks me up and walks over to the bank and we throw more bread to the ducks and the swans. I lay the remote on the table, here is where I want to stay.*

# *Exposition*

On the process of writing *The Machine*

## **1. Introduction**

Writing an exposition on the process of writing a story can be a tricky task, especially if the process is still ongoing. If the story is complete and one has the chance to look back at the choices made there are many things that are suddenly very noticeable that would very likely have gone over ones head earlier on. In truth, the act of writing, and generally contemplating, about ones own creative writing brings to light much that for some reason has stayed hidden before. This exposition is written when its counterpart is on the last stage of its process and only minor details such as stylistic choices are yet to be polished. Still I feel I am too close to the work to be properly able to examine it in detail. What makes this harder is the fact that no one is able to help me with a second look or to prevent any sort of tunnel vision. My instructor reads the story and gives me notes but it tells her very little about the process it has gone through as it lives in my memory mostly and on notes that I have left myself partially. Notes that make so little sense without the context of my memory. Armed with my memory, notes and a large stack of hand written drafts I must therefore do my best in explaining how I came to create the story titled *The Machine*.

## **2. Conception**

At the start of autumn I chose to write my BA thesis a semester early and signed up, excited by all the possible subjects I could write about. The choices seemed endless and I was certain I would have no problem in creating an interesting thesis statement from which I could spin my essay. But the weeks leading up to the decision deadline were much to quickly diminished and suddenly I was on the verge of having to choose, with only vague ideas to choose from. With only about a week to make the call and the pressure starting to make itself noticed I went to a meeting for students who, like me, were planning to write their BA thesis. There I was relieved to find that I was not the only one without a plan and I also learned that there was an option to not write a scholarly essay but to write a fictional story instead. The second I heard this my mind was made up, if they

would let me I was going to write a great story, a masterpiece.

Of course my ambition exceeds my actual ability as a writer so forgive me, but I did have experience with writing before this project. Granted most of this experience is hidden in folders in my computer or on the bottom of my drawer besides a short story published in an Icelandic literary magazine called *Stína*. I quickly sent an email to Anna Heiða, the only instructor willing to take on students writing a Creative Writing BA project in English, and made sure to mention my published story. To my delight she said yes and in my excitement I could not wait to get started, only to realize that I was in the exact same position I had been in before. I had no idea what to write about.

Following Anna's instructions I went down to the library and found a book by one Sol Stein called *Stein on Writing* and leading up to the deadline I read the first half. During this time I began to make out a vague idea for my story which would eventually become *The Machine*. The idea was inspired by a line in a Pink Floyd song called "Wish You Were Here" on their record with the same name. The line goes "We're just two lost souls / Swimming in a fish bowl, / Year after year, / Running over the same old ground." The record deals in part with a former band member's exit from the band after suffering a mental breakdown. With this knowledge and a basic understanding of many mental illnesses owing to my mother's profession as a psychologist I had the idea to write a story about a young man suffering from schizophrenia, lost and alone with only a voice in his head to keep him company.

The initial title for the story was "The Fishbowl", referring to the song that inspired it, and in terms of plot and storyline I had not gotten much further than an image in my head of the character roaming the streets of Reykjavik in the snow. This all changed when I read the second chapter of Sol Stein's book about the importance of a story's first paragraph in hooking the reader, and more specifically its first sentence (15). I made the schizophrenic protagonist an artist and had him think that a painting he did not paint was somehow his creation, or at least originally his idea. The sentence as it first stood was: "The first time I laid eyes on Harry's 'The Machine' I instantly knew

he had been stealing my thoughts.” Anyone familiar with the disorder knows that delusions like this are very common with patients suffering from it, and no matter how bizarre and ridiculous they sound to sane people they are an undeniable truth to the patient.

What followed this breakthrough was a rough first draft of the initial two scenes where John is at Harry’s party and sees his painting for the first time and then goes home where the voices in his head are introduced. Naturally the first draft looks almost nothing like the final one except for the general outline. However, what was undoubtedly born in this first attempt were the voices inside of John’s head, Sid and Jason, and initial ideas for how they would affect John differently throughout the story, along with other specifics of John’s condition.

### **3. Point of view**

The early drafts for the first chapter of the story are all in a first person view in the past tense and although I did not give it much thought at first I knew that the story needed a narrator that knew what was going on inside John’s head. Much of the stories I wrote before this project involve a third person limited narrator and that was something I had really enjoyed as you are forced to convey meaning through action and description. As I wanted to put the reader into John’s mind and his disease in *The Machine* I knew that such a narrator would not be suited for that task. So naturally I went for the most common choice and it was only by accident one evening as I was browsing the internet that I stumbled upon the opening line from a book by Jay McInerney called *Bright Lights, Big City* which is told in the second person. I found this interesting and I wanted to know how it would affect the reader so I went down to the library the next day and got the book. What I found was that it did not differ much from the popular alternative and in fact was rather pointless as it did not bring anything new to an otherwise very good book.

What I felt I could achieve with the second person narrative was an underlining of John’s mental state without having voices yacking away in his head in every scene. I also felt that having



Sid and Jason around to much would get tiresome and would lessen their impact so making the narrator one of the voices felt like it added a new element to the story and John's illness that would otherwise be missing.

I decided that the section where John is visualizing himself inside his own head should be told in the first person because I wanted to use it as a way for him to distance himself from the illness and everything that it entails. There the voices and the chaos is not directed straight at him but his real self which serves as his shell, and there he is alone with his own thoughts. This also served as a useful tool to bring in elements of John's past without having to squeeze in a flashback and ended up being a big part of the ending when he withdraws into a peaceful memory. This concept was in fact not an original idea of mine but something I found in a book on abnormal psychology while researching the symptoms of schizophrenia. There a schizophrenic patient talks about what the disease means to her and says describes it as "feeling sometimes that you are inside your head and visualizing yourself walking over your brain, or watching another girl wearing your clothes and carrying out actions as you think them" (Comer 435). The image stuck with me and I wanted to put it in my story if only as a representation of how surreal the experiences of the illness can be for its patients, however, it turned out to be more useful than I had anticipated.

#### **4. Schizophrenia**

When I first set out to write a story about a schizophrenic character I wanted to stay true to the disease so to speak. I did not want to hype up the symptoms nor did I want to understate them and most of all I did not want to make a villain out of its victim. What I found out as I began reading about the disease was that not only is there a lot of symptoms but they also vary greatly. Two separate individuals can be diagnosed with schizophrenia without actually sharing any symptom. Not to mention that the severity of the symptoms can vary as well. In fact the effects the illness has can be so different that one patient can be stuck in an odd perpetual pose, talking in

nonsensical sentences while it can hardly be noticed on another unless you know what to look for (Comer 438-439, 445).

According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (commonly referred to as DSM) there are two types of schizophrenia called type one and type two. Type one includes positive symptoms which are among others delusions and hallucinations and type two includes negative symptoms such as avolition and social withdrawal. The standards for diagnosing schizophrenia are, however, ever changing and were last changed as early as May, 2013. These changes dictate that at least one of three core “positive symptoms” is necessary for a reliable diagnosis. These include delusions and hallucinations along with disorganized speech (2-3).

This gave me a lot of choices when it came to creating the symptoms of John’s illness although I had already outlined a plan for it in my head. I wanted him to suffer from the two most common symptoms that schizophrenics face, delusions and hallucinations. The hallucinations would consist of the voices John hears in his head and they would be instrumental in driving and developing the delusions, which at the time were limited to the theft of thoughts. These would later expand and in the final story John has both visual and olfactory hallucinations on top of the auditory ones, as well as having delusions of grandeur, delusions of persecution and delusions of reference (Comer, 440). I would also add the pill bottle and the note in John’s medicine cabinet to indicate that this is not the beginning of the illness but rather a recurrence of it due to John neglecting to take his medicine. The reason John does not realize that taking the medicine can help him is not only that he clearly thinks it is inhibiting his talent, but also that he can not understand by himself that he is sick, which in many cases is a part of the disease.

What I was realizing at this point in the research was that perhaps a perfectly accurate depiction of each symptom and a complete alignment with the diagnostic criteria was overambitious and unnecessary. Some symptoms such as disorganized speech were simply out of my reach as they would make the story very difficult to write without adding much to it. I knew I had to pick and

choose what would suit the story without too much regard for reality or probability. Therefore I gave John additional hallucinations such as visual, which only a very small percentage of patients experience.

## **5. Characters**

When it came to the voices that John hallucinates I wanted to make them into an integral part of the story as characters rather than any sort of gimmick or tool. Often in reality these voices are one dimensional, repetitive and vague (perhaps due to them being symptoms of a disease rather than actual persons) but what I wanted was for them to be the drive behind everything that John did and, going back to the original “two souls in a fishbowl” concept, to be the only other characters in the story to ever really be on the same level as John. I also wanted each of them to influence John differently and for such a short story I felt that there was only really room for one or two such characters.

The first voice I created was Sid and the idea behind him had come to me early on when the story was still in its stages of conception. I wanted to have a truly sinister and dark character to influence John, a sort of puppet master that would give the story a scary edge. I knew that this would have to be the main voice and would set the tone of the story to a great degree, and I also knew that to give him more of an impact I would have to go beyond auditory hallucinations. However, I did not want to go into too much detail regarding his appearance so I had the idea to always have him in the dark or a shadow so that only his outlines are visible. This is also more consistent with the disease as patients who experience visual hallucinations are much more inclined to see simple shapes or clouds of color rather than fully detailed persons (Comer 443).

I also wanted Sid to somehow be connected to the original onset of schizophrenia in John. At first the plan was to have a character in John’s past that would be directly responsible for the onset and could be seen as an inspiration for John to subconsciously create Sid in his mind. Later on

I abandoned this and instead had John remember his father lying on his deathbed and how shockingly old he looked. From the beginning I had intended to have Sid be an old man to make him more of an authoritative figure for John and this matched well with the onset and made Sid a representation of what was most memorable about the onset for John.

Jason was the second voice I created and in almost every aspect he is the complete opposite of Sid. While Sid's manner is very dominating and assertive Jason is rather submissive and spineless. He is perhaps also a bit less comprehensive than Sid and definitely gets less stage time. However, he does play a large role in building the paranoia in John and putting ideas in his head that drive him straight into Sid's evil hands. I had him talk almost exclusively through various speakers and such as I felt that displaying him as a sort of tech-guru would blend well with his paranoid tendencies. To John he is a sort of guardian angel watching over him, shielding him from the imaginary powers that are out to get him. He is therefore very paranoid and nervous towards every one that John interacts with, which in turn fuels these emotions in John, and truthfully this was meant to be his only function within the story.

As the work developed I felt that Jason was really the only friend John had from his point of view. Although his impact on John serves only to drag him deeper into the abyss his intentions are always to help and protect. When John in the very end kills Jason, at least according to Sid, he takes it very calmly and without any particular emotion. This sort of reaction to bad news is in fact also a symptom of schizophrenia, albeit one that John had not previously shown (Comer 445). However, I felt that this would pair better with the ending where John is completely overwhelmed by the chaos and ends up cutting himself loose of his distorted reality.

As a character John developed very much as the story developed. A lot of the ideas for his characteristics came while studying schizophrenia such as his socially withdrawn nature which is categorized as a negative symptom of the disease and can be devastating to the patient's life outside of his own head (Comer 445). Therefore I did not want to have this as a part of his illness as I felt it

would be too demanding, so instead I integrated it into his personality. To contrast this and perhaps make it a bit more awkward for John I made him tall so that even though he desperately wants to hide he never truly can, except when he hides in his own mind. On top of this John is by nature very socially awkward which, as is seen when he reminisces about his first day in the university, has nothing to do with his mental illness.

As the story progresses and John's mental state deteriorates the parts of his character that can be attributed to schizophrenia start to take over more and more. The paranoia, anger and confusion become a part of who he is and he becomes the disease. Along with this you could also say that the voices in his head, Sid and Jason, are very much a part of him and reflect his life and what he has been through. He is weak against authority and so Sid has his grip tight on him while Jason is perhaps mostly a personification of the most serious aspects of his illness, delusions and paranoia. As his only friend who is never really there for him he also manages to showcase his loneliness.

## **6. Practical Process and Conclusion**

As this was my debut in writing a story any longer than five to ten pages I must say that I had no real idea as to how I should go about it practically speaking. I knew from my limited experience the immense value of revision and the benefit of rewriting and rethinking, cutting, slashing and replacing. With this in mind I constructed a routine that I dutifully followed for the first half of the story. I started out with a notebook and a pencil and wrote and wrote until my hands would start to cramp, making my handwriting barely readable even to myself. Most of the time I would do one scene at a time or perhaps two and I would hold nothing back but let the words flow as they came to me. After a scene was done I would read through it, make notes and comments, cross over what I didn't like and so forth. This would take two or three hours, at which point I would be on my fourth or fifth cup of coffee (I have never drunk as much coffee as when I wrote

this story, honestly, sometimes I amazed myself). After this I would type everything down on paper with a typewriter, most of the time making a lot of changes from my notes. I found this very helpful both because I had to go through every detail again and also because afterwards I had the text, vastly more readable and accessible than in my handwriting, on paper in front of me and could make further notes and such. The final stage would then be to type the text into my computer with the desired changes. Later on I would skip the middle part where I used the typewriter to save time and also because I felt it was a bit unnecessary as I could just as well throw it straight into the computer and simply rewrite it there. Although, I must say that using a typewriter has some advantages, for example it has no Internet.

When I look back on my work on this story I like to think of it as a great learning experience, which is of course this assignment's purpose. I do feel that this story could have been vastly better in a lot of ways and I also feel that I could have made it better, perhaps with more time, perhaps with more dedication (not that I feel I lacked it but you can always do more, do better). I also feel that this experience has provided me with very essential tools that I lacked before and sharpened those I already possessed. I learned that writing only when you feel inspired or up to it does not get you very far and that sticking with it even though you feel like you are completely empty always pays in the end. I learned that cutting out lines or even whole sections when they do not fit is essential, no matter how good you think they are, and that the only way to get better is to write and write and write. I am very thankful for this opportunity and to Anna Heiða, who took me on despite her busy schedule, I would like to say thank you, you helped me more than you know. I can say in all honesty that I am happy with my story, despite the nagging feeling I have that I could have done better (I hope it never goes away).

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