For the past 5 months, from August until December, I have traveled to several destinations in southern Europe where I enjoyed solitude (and warmth!) while participating in online workshops regarding professional development in new and emerging trends in screenwriting. I was trained in the world of narrative fiction films, but with the rise of the Netflix generation and the volume and quality of streaming series increasing exponentially, I was able to take courses and do research to explore this recent phenomenon and the method in which they are created, namely "story bibles" . These economical manifests are basically multiple page outlines of a potential tv or streaming series, focusing on character, theme, and seasonal plot lines. Normally one full written "pilot" episode is included with a bible to ensure that the writer is capable of delivering a finished product.

I completed 3 online courses of study which I will detail in the following pages, as well as some extremely productive on-line research into all the offerings of experts from my field. The bulk of my studies looking for new inspiration, as mentioned, was in the crafting of "series bibles"

The titles and brief description of the 3 courses from on-line creative universities were:

1. "Writing the series bible: Developing your tv series."

   This was a solid hands-on course focused on building an idea into a sustainable multiple episode format and creating the essential building blocks with what is dubbed a "series bible". A pilot episode was not required for the course, but encouraged.

2. "The Nutshell Technique, writing for television."

   Jill Chamberlain, acclaimed author and creator of the Nutshell technique, an exceptional approach to successful storytelling, helmed this writers

workshop where a dozen participants benefited from her unique lectures, skill building exercises and group discussions.

3. "Writing the Viral Web series".

   The short format web series is a relatively recent entry into the world of new media, basically a shorter and tighter rendering of series television format, but with largely no budget so while the quality can be lacking, the opportunity is immense with the advent of the streaming generation.

All of the above courses were enlightening, and will certainly feed my desire to continue to spread the joy of good storytelling. Following I will give a brief overview of the courses and the knowledge I gained from them.

"WRITING THE SERIES BIBLE: DEVELOPING YOUR TV SERIES"

Professor Lynn Buck was exceptionally insightful and compelling in presenting the craft. I was really interested in finding out how to develop a series long "story arc", which seems a bit more daunting than a 2 hour feature film, or certainly a 10 minute short film, both of which I have worked with extensively.

In the class we focused on developing both a story bible and a pilot episode which is presently the norm when submitting this format professionally. The pilot is necessary not only to show that the creator can write an engaging script, but it sets up the entire series, most notably the main characters and the world they live in.

The story bible helps people see how the characters and conflict that are set up in the pilot evolve over the following episodes in the first season. In this model we were focusing on a season with 13 episodes which meant writing a short paragraph capsulating each episode, culminating with the climactic final episode of the season. Since most submissions are hoping for a 3 year commitment, the following two seasons are roughly outlined, hopefully providing an overall sense

of theme, tone and character, and particularly the character arc for the protagonist over the course of the series..

Regarding creating an idea for a series, the teacher had a unique take on what can engage an audience. She referred to a book by Seth Godin that is actually geared towards business, but works really well for writers in creating a product that will get people's attention. The book is called "Purple Cow: Transform your business by being remarkable."

"Mr. Godin asks us to imagine an urban family that's never traveled going to Europe, renting a car for a country drive, and seeing the most amazing, beautiful dairy cows in picture-perfect pastures—one after the next. After 20 miles of this, the cows that at first made them pull over to take pictures are now being ignored. The family's already tired of them, which is a metaphor for how fast trends burn out in the consumers' (viewers') minds these days. Mr. Godin asks what would have made this family stop to take pictures again, after being burned out on dairy cows, and he says a **purple cow** standing in the field would have done that. The purple cow becomes a metaphor for a marketing hook or marketing originality—basically, what makes your story stand out?"

A great example of this is the series "Breaking Bad" with the main character, Walter White, a mild-mannered highschool science teacher pulling a purple cow by becoming a dangerous drug dealer.

A series bible is typically between 5 and 10 pages, which include a log line, a brief synopsis, condensed character bio's (and arcs), brief individual paragraphs on each of the first season's episodes, followed by a brief overview of the following 2 seasons or more, depending on ambition.

The very first step is to create a log line to entice an audience, to "hook" them. It should inform them of certain key features of the show, mainly the hero, what they want, and who or what is in their way. The logline can also set up the genre or give a feel for the show's tone.

A SHORT SYNOPSIS:

After enticing the reader with a log line, a synopsis presents the case for the story, a brief compelling overview of the world being created.

Some obvious but essential exercises offered and completed were writing a logline for at least 3 different existing series, as well as a synopsis.

THE PILOT:

One of the main things the pilot accomplishes is to set the series in motion. It's hugely important as a means to introduce the elements of the series, and these include characters, themes, plot devices, and tone (or style).

CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES:

Insightful, tight biographies of each of the unique main characters are essential, as well a list of potential secondary characters with their key traits.

The goal is to introduce as many characters as possible in the pilot, with the protagonist having a sustainable built in conflict that can last the entire series. Memorable introductions of all essential characters is a must.

The opening scene of "Breaking Bad" is again a case in point. Walter White, wearing a gas mask and racing through desert mountains in an RV, with 2 bodies bouncing around on the floor behind him as sirens approach..

One of the main differences between writing a feature film and a series, is that a feature needs a resolution, where in a series it has to continue onward, so resolving things too far in any given episode can stop the show from progressing. A good series episode must resolve something while leaving other questions unanswered for future episodes to tackle.

PODS

In sketching out the first season structurally it's helpful to work in "pods" or story units that evolve over several episodes. This is the equivalent to "sequences" in feature films, where a series of related scenes push the story forward. While the first series of pods is being resolved, future pods are being set up and nudged along, at least partially developed.

The completed efficient manifest or "story bible", should entice the reader with compelling characters put into a series of unique conflicts under the umbrella of a larger conflict that will be resolved at the end of the series.

"THE NUTSHELL TECHNIQUE, WRITING FOR TELEVISION."

In this workshop that I audited, over the course of 10 weeks 12 participants were each coached in creating an original series using Jill Chamberlain's unique nutshell technique, with a series of simple graphic worksheets that the creator fills in to propel them though a story. One of the more effective uses of this type of structure is that as a character is thrown into the story they get what they initially want, but with "a catch", that is a huge price they will have to pay. This method really works well, in both the feature and series format.

Each 3 hour class, aside from critiquing students' material, had an informative lecture on particulars of the craft, as well as discussing and dissecting an existing series pilot episode.

Having the unique opportunity to witness Jill coach and coax effective and entertaining stories out of the participants was especially inspiring.

WRITING THE VIRAL WEB SERIES

The relatively new storytelling format, the web series, is compelling for novice creators because they are cheap to make and easily accessible for viewers via Youtube, vimeo, or personal websites. Although unique in format and certainly distribution, the web series at its core contains the same basic elements of creative fiction - memorable characters facing conflict in intriguing stories.

Following the basic structure of a television series but with much shorter episodes, the web series has created a space for nearly anyone with the right set of skills and tools to tell a story and find their Audience. There are advantages to working on this smaller scale. Foremost among these is that the format gives writers full control over their series and lets them connect directly to the viewer. The creative freedom allowed by the web series has made the format an ideal vehicle for new writers, filmmakers, and actors to engage in the craft.

Comprehensible, efficient storytelling is important above all else, hopefully based on a conflict-packed premise that will help give direction that drives the story forward by helping us connect to the protagonist almost instantly, and thus compelling the viewer to want to see more of them.

DIFFERENCES FROM OTHER FORMATS

There are distinctions that make writing in this format different from any other. The most obvious is the short length of each episode meaning character introductions have to be quick and clever, and the same goes for plot. Tone and genre also should be established as efficiently as possible and conflict should be presented to hook the audience early, especially because the experience of viewing a web series is different from any other format. It's important to keep one's audience in mind when writing a web series with special attention being paid to the viewer's experience. Obviously, people watching a web series will be on their computers (or smartphones or tablets)—not in a movie theater or in front of their TVs. This means the competition from serious distractions will increase tenfold so it is essential that the viewer is engaged almost immediately. Literally "cut to the chase" because there is no time to set up the status quo, aka

"ordinary world" before getting to the turning point. The first page of the script should be a good indicator of what the series as a whole will be like with the premise creating a lasting potential that can sustain itself over multiple episodes.

Keep It Brief

When creating episodes that are only a few minutes long, efficiency is key. Scenes should begin with action or conflict and cut away before that momentum is lost.

Although it may not contain the depth, power or weight of a feature film or series, this web format is intriguing for giving the opportunity for new talent to prosper. With the new generation's rapid increase in self-schooling in the technical fields of filmmaking, the potential for more professional "looking" web series has arrived. The content is still key, but it is now becoming increasingly possible for no-budget productions to look nearly as good as high-budget productions, increasing the possibilities of development of new talent like never before.

AND FINALLY, ON-LINE RESEARCH..

I was surprised and certainly overwhelmed with the sheer volume of quality content available on the internet, particularly youtube. Being "old school" I thought I had participated in nearly all the surviving guru's of the screenwriting field (Robert Mckee, John Truby, Linda Seger, Chris Vogler, Michael Hauge, Syd Field etc etc), but I was intrigued to discover some really invaluable messengers of the craft out there.
By volume, the "Film Courage" channel is youtube is by far the largest and probably most useful. It contains well over 1,000 interviews with teachers and creators in the field, is quite easy to navigate by topic, and thankfully has been edited into 5 to 10 minute segments.

"IndieFilmHustle/bulletproof screenwriting" is a close contender, with host Alex Ferrari interviewing pretty much everybody who is anybody in the entertainment industry.

I found over 40 quality online screenwriting sites offering quality insights via articles and videos, mostly for free.

Due to my sabbatical, I was able to watch hundreds of these and put them in categories by topic, relevance and quality. I was thrilled to find several purveyors of the craft that I had never heard of that are arguably better than most of the gurus I have the good fortune to study under.

Some particular favorites are "The Anatomy of Chaos" a brilliantly crafted series of in depth and cerebral videos on structure and character, the likes of which I have never seen before. "Lessons from the Screenplay", "Top Development", and "Writing for Screens" all offered fantastic and varied content. The research can seem endless, but it is rewarding and just having access to these sites can easily educate a new generation of students to the medium.

In conclusion:

Having done many screenwriting workshops abroad and at gymnasiums around Denmark, the added knowledge and inspiration from my further studies will allow me to expand the education I can offer due to my increased skill base. I look forward to exposing these opportunities to my base as much as possible in the near future.