

“A review of the Course and Rewrite of *8 Days in Ireland*”

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with Susan Forbes

Advanced Script Analysis and Screen Writing

8 Days in Ireland is a screenplay I undertook early in my post undergraduate career, circa 2003. Initial reviews by peers and colleagues suggested that I needed to hone my craft and get more comfortable with the format of screen writing. Advanced Script Analysis and Screen Writing has been the means in which to do so, as it affects all my future efforts in screen writing. Most important among these will be the final project in my degree work.

Advanced Script Analysis and Screen Writing has been one of the most exciting courses for me thus far in my studies. It has combined all of the courses previously taken, from the history of film to adaptation theory, and put them into practice. I feel that I now have a handle on what is required of a professional script writer and that I can produce a screenplay that is viable for filming. Using *8 Days* was most effective, because it allowed me to look at my previous work and really see what it was that I needed work on. Creating a new work from which to do this would have provided a similar experience, but I don't think it would have left such a lasting impression.

The readings for the course, which are listed in the works cited section, gave me such a strong base to work from that when I was able to sit down and work on the spec, I felt confident in the undertaking. Not only was the story opened up to newer and greater possibilities, but how to proficiently pen the words to speak it were available to me, so I didn't have to struggle quite so much with what I was communicating.

8 Days went through many changes during this course. Thanks to Judith Haag and Hillis Cole, along with the Final Draft Software, I was able to ensure the format was completely

correct. Previously, the script had been formatted manually in MicrosoftWord. This is a tricky thing to try and do, and leads to a lot of pagination and formatting issues that stick out to the trained eye. The problem a writer faces in that is when they go to option a spec. It will be seen as unprofessional and easily tossed aside for another work no matter how good the story is. The competition is simply too thick and smallest mistake can see your work cast aside in favor of another. The idea is to be 100% professional in presentation, above all.

The next issue I encountered was consistency. Consistency was an issue in the scene titles, descriptions and even dialogue. How I dealt with this is that when I reviewed the material I was about to revamp, I altered the language to be consistent throughout on all titles. The descriptions and dialogue would wait for the major rewrite. That rewrite came next.

8 Days was originally penned by me in 2003. It's been a decade since I dealt with the material and I was still learning to hone my craft at the time. The basic story was a solid one, but it had problems. Howard and Mabley advised their readers to avoid "the unexpected arrival of a powerful figure" such as the fairy godmother, or other "conveniently timed" events like an illness or windfall of cash (Howard, 79). I had one! The character of Margie Hennessy, who we meet in the first few scenes, takes on more than a mother hen approach to our heroin Kit. She fixes everything for her. This would be great, if it didn't make Kit look so incapable of living her life and accomplishing her own goals that all of this story was pointless. Margie's power was too much. Once the rewrite was done, she was reduced to aiding in humorous situations, and having that final motherly talk that makes Kit wake up. However, Kit must choose and she does. Kit chooses to call her in to help in the airport. Kit chooses to listen to her in the café. Ultimately, Kit chooses to return to Ireland and Jacob, without a job and just the hope they can be together. Nothing is fixed.

Another character who took a major overhaul was Estefania Cruz, or Stef. Stef became Majida Sahni, Kit's roommate and confident. They're best friends, close as sisters and almost completely opposite. Their opposition isn't just in their ethnicity, which has always been different. Instead of a Hispanic native of the city, Stef becomes Majida, fourth generation Pakistani-American. The reason for the change is the current political climate. Stef could represent the immigration issue, but not as dynamically as Majida. In the post 9/11 atmosphere of America, Majida is still viewed as 'other', an outsider because of her ethnic and religious background. However, there is no one more American than the revamped Stef. She's glamorous, well-educated, involved with her community (a teacher of Tae Kwan Do), a business woman and happily living the American conformity. Her reality often comes into conflict with other characters' assumptions about what makes one American, such as sentiments held by the old man in the airport, Irish Natives, and even a customs officer. Majida provides a means to question these assumptions and challenge them, especially when placed against the contrast of Kit, who is a first generation immigrant. She does so with humor and vibrancy, providing a distraction from the tense struggle her friend undergoes.

Additional character changes came in dropping Kit's parents. I chose to do this because their absence made Kit's struggle that much more poignant. Without them, her search to fit in somewhere made a lot more sense. Without their wisdom, she struggled that much more. Her desire to go to Ireland to find who she was finally clicked, as did her eventual return.

The majority of other characters remained the same, and much of the original story is still intact. Mason, Jacob and his friends are left unscathed in alterations. The addition of brief glimpses into Jacob's past, dealing with alcoholism, and his mom are added to give him depth

and tie him to Kit more effectively. Jacob is not perfect and the viewer can see more clearly Kit's reticence. It is my hope that he endears himself to them as he does with Kit.

Essentially, *8 Days* is Kit's story. It follows her struggle to get to Ireland to bury her parents and see the *auld sod*. Just like the rest of her life, the trip is full of ups and downs. This tells us that no matter her choice, life will go on as normal for Kit, but things have the potential to improve in ways she doesn't expect. Above all, it tells us that change can be uncomfortable. Kit defies her friends and fate, determined that things are going to be her way, until eventually she sees that she settles for the things that make her unhappy and fights off the things that really do make her happy. Nothing exemplifies this more than her job with Hanley Corp. When Kit delivers Hanley and ultimatum, we realize that she understands her self-worth and is finding out how to reach for the things she wants instead of taking the things that happen along the way. Kit's life does best when she makes a determined decision. For instance, making the trip happen.

To make the script even better, I came to terms with the level of control that I had in the writing. From overwriting to direction, I learned to be more subtle in what I stated on the page. I needed concise language that didn't allude to me taking over the Director's chair or repeating myself from what was in the scene titles to the action (Benedetti, 11, Howard, 86). In addition, I discovered that I attempted to write dialect, not dialogue for some of the characters. Due to the overstep on the actors, this has been cleared out of existence (Sielicki, 223-224). To make them truer to their culture, for instance the Irish characters, I made use of sayings and slang that help them to stand out without being overbearing about their cultural differences. Having personal experience with Ireland, I used my knowledge and some brief travel research to get the bearings of the nation. The itinerary for the trip nearly matches the one I enjoyed.

When I completed the first redraft of the 8 Days, the length extended several pages past the expected 120. Concise writing in a second draft has reduced this extension to one page. The first page was overburdened by description and this has been broken up and reduced. Dialogue effectively moves the story and tells the viewer things that the scene cannot. For future changes, I might contrast the opening shots with Jacob's falling in the hands of Niamh, the bad girl who returns to mess everything up for everyone. This is her function and it would be nice to see her setting the trap she uses later.

Overall, I feel that 8 Days is an effective spec in its current draft that could be sold to a studio for production. It has a solid core story and follows the tenets well without being unimaginative. I retain my writing voice throughout and achieve the emotional ups and downs necessary to engage an audience (there are points that still get me when I read them). Rewriting a script is often necessary through the long process of developing a story from spec to screen, "but it is also possible to rewrite a story to death," (Howard, 97). At this stage, I feel I have shaped the story well. It has undergone several rewrites since I began the course and the changes leave me feeling confident that I have learned and effectively applied the content of the course.

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