



Reexamining the Three-Dimensional Meanings of Persse's Love Scripts in *Small World*

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Abstract

Small World, the masterpiece of contemporary English writer David Lodge, is famous for its pursuing theme. Persse's love pursuit is one of the prominent events in the novel. Readers always laugh at Persse's pursuit, but leaves the reasons of why Persse's pursuit is so funny untouched. This paper establishes "A continuum of Script Development" model based on Schank & Abelson (1977)'s personal script category, Gioia & Poole (1984)'s prototypical feature of script and Gibbs (2003)'s dynamic construing of script to reveal the knowledge structure of Persse's love script. At the meantime, the paper specifies three actors (narrator, characters and readers) who construct the meanings of Persse's love script. It is found that there are three different trails of Persse's love pursuit under the examination of the script theory. The clashes between the three love scripts are one of the main reasons to achieving the humorous and ironic effects of the novel. Moreover, it expands the meaning of the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY, and it highlights the death-rebirth theme of the novel.

Key words: Love pursuit; Script; parody; Metaphor

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1. INTRODUCTION

David Lodge (1935-) is an influential and prominent contemporary novelist and literary critic in Britain. Among all his novels, *Small World* is the most popular one. It was shortlisted for "The Man Booker Prize" in 1984 and adapted for a television serial in 1988, which won "the Royal Television Society's Award" for the best drama serial of 1989. Since its publication, it has aroused literary circles' interests. Its integrated structure, multifaceted themes, the carnival-like language and form, and the parody of medieval romance, etc. are all hot topics.

Small World begins in England with an ill-conceived and poorly attended conference in Rummidge. Philip Swallow, who has been the main character in *Changing Places* (1979), has been promoted to the rank of professor and now chairs the Rummidge English Department, as well as to Morris Zapp, who has flown in from the States to give the keynote address. We learn that Philip and Hilary have remained together and that Morris and Désirée have divorced. We are also introduced, in the novel's opening pages, to the naive and idealistic Persse McGarrigle, who occupies the hero slot in this mock romance, and Persse's quest for the beautiful, brilliant, and elusive Angelica Pabst, and several of the other characters' quests to be awarded a cushy, well-paying, and prestigious UNESCO chair—the Grail of academia. The novel's grand finale, during which both quest plots culminate, and comic closure is affected on all fronts, is set in New York in December. It ends with Persse's failure of winning Angelica's love and Arthur continues to be the chairperson of UNESCO. However, Persse's pursuing journey can produce several different pursuing scripts, which achieves many literary effects and creates thematic meanings, if we examine his pursuing course carefully. They need to be studied thoroughly and deeply.

2. SCRIPT THEORY

Script is first put forward by Roger Schank and Robert Abelson. It is defined as “a structure that describes appropriate sequences of events in a particular context” (1977, p.41). It then becomes one of the most important notions in cognitive science. As a variety of cognitive models, the script is defined in a wider context. It describes those frequently recurring sequences of events connected by causal chains, based on real experiences. These event sequences are generally rooted in the human mind, yet they present themselves in a text mostly in the form of covert knowledge structures. Those structures will be activated during the process of text interpreting. They are the most helpful supplemental knowledge in the process of understanding a text.

Schank and Abelson (1977) distinguish two kinds of scripts: situational and personal. The situational script is “characteristic of institutionalized public situations with defined goals (the customer eating, the restaurant making money) that the social interactions be stylized” in restaurant script (1977, p.61). The personal script “exists solely in the mind of its main actor. It consists of a sequence of possible actions that will lead to the desired goal” (Schank & Abelson, 1977, p.61). In the text of *Small World*, we mainly use the personal script.

The script is experience-based and knowledge abstracted. The script theory has schematic features. Dennis A. Gioia and Peter P. Poole declare that “scripts are assumed to be held prototypically. That is, a person’s knowledge of behaviors and behavioral sequences appropriate for given situations is held categorically, with a ‘prototypic’ or generic script (a ‘protoscript’) which are representing each category of situations” (1984, p.449). Second, the relations between those sequential events (which can also be called prototypical events) in scripts, logically—based on probability, tendency or necessity. Finally, scripts are considered to be held in memory in prototypical fashion. “A prototype consists of an abstract set of representative features that define members of a category” (Cantor & Mischel, 1977,1979; Tsujimoto 1978).

In the interpretation of discourse, the script is one of the most frequent cognitive models for people, who always tend to use their most familiar knowledge as a foundation for understanding new things. The routine sequence of events in the script is one kind of the conventionalized knowledge form in the discourse, and its implicit knowledge is easily activated during interpretation. Most of the script models in discourses are unmarked. However, as people living in different cultures and having different life experiences, the script cannot be all the same. The novel event consists of the marked script. In particular, one of the functions of literature is to amuse people and give them a surprise, sadness, etc.... Those feelings can only be raised by the deviation of literary contents, forms of structure, and so on. The

deviation of routine event sequences is the marked script. Moreover, in the marked script, it is not “top-down” processing, but an interactive model between the top-down and bottom-up.

3. SCRIPT MODEL

In order to understand a (literary) text, readers must firstly find a relevant script and know how it should be modified to fit the context at hand. “Many studies show that readers automatically infer appropriate script-related actions when these are not explicitly stated. Other experiments reveal that prior activation of script-based knowledge provides readers with a highly available set of causal connections that can facilitate sentence-by-sentence integration” (Gibbs, 2003, pp.33-34). The meaning construing process is the dynamic interaction between the pre-existing conceptual structures stored in readers’ mind and the textual information at hand.

One main logic relations in the script is causal chains of events. It has three representative forms: 1) the occurrence of the former events triggers the latter ones; 2) one sub-event causes the happening of the next event; 3) several independent events together cause the happening of an event or a sequence of events. In the building of *Small World*’s narrative structure, the causal relation in the novel is chasing and being chased. But the prominent traits in those scripts are the possibilities, incidents, misunderstanding, and suspense. They form the main content of the marked scripts, violates readers’ routine cognitive model of pursuit script. The construction and reconstruction occurred in readers’ meaning-making process.

According to the previous studies on the script theory, the difference between the marked script and the unmarked script lies in the fact that they have different goals. The personal script consists of “a sequence of possible actions that will lead to the desired goal” (Chen, 2007, p.25). If the personal script follows the fixed sequences of actions, the desired goal will be achieved, and then it is the unmarked script; if the personal script does not comply with the set events, it is the marked script. If goals are different, their sequences of actions must be presented differently. However, the marked and unmarked script can be happened as “actor” has the same personal goal, but interpretations of those realizing actions are different. The paper tries to offer another vertical perspective to supplement the horizontal understanding of the script theory.

In the horizontal view, the script is a continuum with the marked script and the unmarked script at each end of the two axes. However, those scripts in the continuum do not devote intensive thought to all actions equally. Novel situations (the marked script) require intensive and conscious processing to decide appropriate understanding procedures. Such understanding involves little or no script processing. On the other, familiar or stereotypical

situations (the unmarked script) can be handled with little or no conscious processing. They can be characterized as automatic script processing. Between these two extremes, actions or events require progressively less active processing because situations become increasingly conventional, repetitive, and stereotypical. Thus, the progression toward unmarked script processing is best represented as “a continuum of script development”. It is anchored at one end by active cognitive processing (marked script) and the other by automatic processing (unmarked situations).

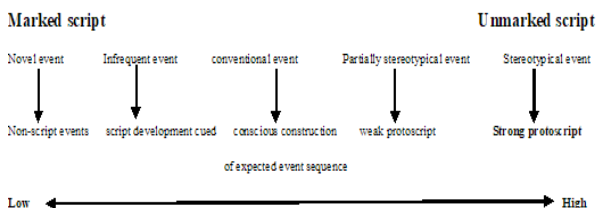


Figure 1
A Continuum of Script Development

Events represented on the left side of the continuum do not clearly entail scripted sequences of events. However, as similar events are repetitively experienced, a script for the event is cued and can begin to evolve. In conventional or normative events, “a script is a heuristic device that people use for understanding a new situation in terms of a similar but different old one” (Dennis & Peter 1984: 453). The protoscript serves as a basis for modifications that fit a current context. In complete or stereotypical situations, a schematized strong protoscript guides understanding, which is performed automatically. But, one script in literary works may form several different script constructions, for example, character’s script, narrator’s script, textual script, and readers’ script. Under such occasion, if we still use the above horizontal script continuum to analyze texts, meanings and aesthetic values will be missed partially. Persse’s love pursuit trajectory in *Small World* falls into this category.

4. LOVE SCRIPTS OF PERSSE

According to the medieval romance classics, Persse is the reincarnation of *Perceval or Parzival* story. Percival is the Grail knight or one of the Grail knights in numerous medieval and modern stories of the Grail quest. His natural prowess led him to Arthur’s court. Sir Percival was possibly an earlier version or name of Galahad. He is the perfect knight and ideal hero, encompassing purity and strength, holiness and courage. He successfully finds the Holy Grail.

In *Small World*, Persse McGarrigle, the novice in academic conference, attends “The University Teachers of English Conference” to improve himself. After encountering a beautiful lady, Angelica L. Pabst (abbreviated as Al hereafter), Persse changes his goal

from pursuing knowledge into winning Al’s love. During the pursuit, Persse had funny, interesting and unexpected experiences, such as interpreting Keat’s poem “The Eve of St. Agnes”, witnessing Al in a stripper poster, reading the note in his church petition, hearing Al’s intention to use “McGarrigle” as her family name, catching Al in a lift, etc. Those events are quite decisive in Persse’s pursuing journey, but the pursuit scripts are different from characters, narrators and readers.

4.1 Love Script of the Narrator

Small World is the third person narration. The narrator in the novel provides many episodes of Al and Persse. They will become the textual love script if we extract them. The novel has five parts, Persse’s pursuits of Al are narrated in part one, three, four and five. Persse’s first round of pursuit is narrated in part one. The narrator tells readers that Persse meets Al in a conference. Persse falls in love with Al. Persse chases after Angelica to the theatre, to the bar, to the top floor of the campus building. Persse asks Al to marry him and be refused immediately. And at last, Al disappears.

Part two does not mention Persse’s pursuit of Al at all. Then, in part three, Persse’s pursuit script of Al emerges again when Persse wins a poem prize. He tells Frobisher, a writer attended the award ceremony, that he would spend the money to find a girl. In their spare time, they hang around at Soho, an entertaining place. With a glance, Persse sees Al in a stripper poster. Being astounded, Persse continues to find out that Al is a stripper, and probably a whore. Disillusioned, Persse gives up Al and back to his University.

In part four, coincidentally, being inspired by *The Faerie Queene*’s sentence “appearances can be misleading” which is added in his petition in the church, Persse guesses that there was another girl who was identical to Al (Lodge: 256). In order to confirm his guessing, Persse restarts his pursuit of Al. In his second round of pursuit, Persse goes to Europe, America, Asia, and Africa, but he does not find out Al. However, he makes clear that Al has a twin sister Lily, who is the actress in strip show.

The third round of pursuit happened in part five, the last part. Persse waits and attends the MLA conference in New York, the most prestigious academic conference. Persse sees Al is presenting her paper in a panel. Waiting to talk to Al, Persse meets Miss Maiden again. Persse tells Miss Maiden that Al is the girl she found out from the plane’s toilet. Miss Maiden falls in a faint after heard that. Persse loses Al again. Hurried and anxious, Persse rushes into a lift and finds that Al is there. He holds Al tightly and they go into a room together. At last, Al tells Persse that she is Lily, and the real Al has engaged to Peter McGarrigle. With great disappointment, Persse has to give up Al. However, he suddenly discovers that the airport check-in girl Cheryl Summerbee loves him. Persse begins another round of love pursuit. It is the whole pursuit trail of Persse.

Above is the actual pursuing sequence of Persse, which is told by the narrator. It exists in *Small World's* fictional worlds. Persse's love pursuit script is different from the medieval romance classics, which has a happy ending and the knight always wins the princess love. In *Small World*, Persse, the knight, fails to win Al's love.

Structurally, part one is the beginning of the story, a reversal happens at part two when a naked "Al" printed in a poster. The whole narrative of Persse's love pursuit stops for he gives up his pursuit. Part four works as a transitional part. Persse knows that there might be two girls instead of one, and he restarts his pursuit. Part five consists of Persse's third round of pursuit, the climax (Persse's reunion with "Angelica") and the open ending (Persse starts another round of love pursuit).

The narrator tells Persse's love pursuit trail in a rather detached manner, any events related with Al are interpreted, commented, talked, or judged by other characters or by Persse himself. The text provides only textual facts. In each part, there is one or two events (marked scripts) waiting for the interpretation. But, most of the love scripts are proto scripts, the meaning of the pursuit script can be easily constructed by all people. However, during the process of telling, the narrator's voice sometimes is substituted by the characters' voices. For example, in part one, "Al invites Persse to a room at night" is an encoded discourse, which is waiting for decoding. The literal meaning of Al's invitation is that it is only an invitation, but the covert meaning behind this invitation lies in Keats' poem "St. Agnes's Eve". Only those who have strong literary competence can reveal the real meaning of this literary allusion. In *Small World*, Persse undertakes the job. Persse's perspective substitutes the narrators, and readers may not aware that they have been manipulated by Persse's view. All those manipulated shifting perspectives will be discussed in the section 4.2 and section 4.3. In section 4.1, we only focus on the narrator's voice.

Hence, if we simplify the narrator's love script of Persse, it is Persse pursues Al, Persse gives up Al, Persse restarts to search for Al, Persse knows Al has engaged to Peter, Persse starts to search for another girl. The narrator's love script of Persse is "weak protoscript" because it only violates the last action of the event sequence.

4.2 Love Scripts of Characters

To some events, the narrator can only give clues or describe what happens, leaving the facts to be revealed at the end of the novel. But during the progress of narration, characters' interpretations and understandings blend with the plot and become temporary facts. They make the narration continue. And to some extent, these interpretations and understandings manipulate readers' meaning construing. In the novel, there are some foregrounded anecdotes that are blended with characters' understandings, they are decisive to the whole plot. At the same time, they are quite unconventional.

Persse himself constructs the second love script of Al. The first two steps are the same as the first script. Persse thinks that he loves Angelica, he proposes to Al but is refused. However, Al tells him a room number and asks him to come at night. In ecstasy, Persse believes it is Al's room. Moreover, Al recites several lines from "St. Agnes's Eve", Persse decodes the poem as Angelica wants to see her future husband in the dream. Since Al invites him, it means that Al expects him to be her future husband. Thus, Persse's love script at that time is: Al loves him, but she does not want to marry him. Although the invitation turns out to be mischief, Persse still believes that Al loves him. The humorous effect is achieved by the incongruity between the original meaning of Keat's poem and the conspired misuse of the poem. It is also ironic because it subverts the traditional female victim pattern and turns out to be Persse and Rodney the teasing objects. The poem of "St. Agnes's Eve" is the marked and unmarked script concurrently. Persse and Rodney adheres the traditional understanding of "St. Agnes's Eve", their interpretation belongs to protoscript. While in Al's hands, she creatively changes the female into male, then it becomes the novel event.

Small World is characterized of practicing allusions into textual facts. Besides "St. Agnes's Eve", there are *The Faerie Queene*. The conflicts between the proto script and the marked script create the humorous and ironic effects of the novel. *Small World* inherits the great tradition of English literature, and it enriches the depth and richness of those great works.

During the process of pursuing Al, Persse constructs that Al is a stripper and maybe a whore based on he sees Al's image is printed in a poster. Persse guesses that there are two girls instead of one according to the stanzas in *The Faerie Queene*, Persse rebuilds his confidence that Al loves him because he heard Miss Maiden said that Al will add McGarrigle as her second name, Persse finally stays together with Al but mistakenly she is Lily. At the end of the novel, Persse starts a new journey to search for Cheryl Summerbee. Another pursuing circle is going to form when Persse starts his searching.

4.3 Love Script of Readers

As the analyses conducted in section 4.2, readers, to some extent, are manipulated by the shifting perspectives between narrator and characters. Because narrator's and characters' language are mingled together covertly, it is very hard to discern who is talking. Under such condition, readers (as the author is the reader) may follow characters' thought flow, and readers' love scripts and characters' love script may sometimes coincide. But readers' meaning construing process is different from characters, they can constantly change or reconstruct event sequences or meaning making. Generally speaking, when readers finish a novel, they will reorganize all the plots and characters together to form a holistic view. All partial information will be rearranged in order to secure the emergence of real textual facts.

The same is true to readers of *Small World*. When readers encounter the name Persse, they are expecting to read a happy ending story with the marriage of Persse and Al. Thus, they are easy to accept Persse's conclusion: Al loves him. At the same time, readers doubt whether Persse really loves Al. Like Al's words and behaviors wait the interpretation of Persse, Persse's words and behaviors are also interpreted by readers. When Persse stops pursuing Al as he mistakes Al as a whore, or Persse mistakenly takes Lily as Al, readers almost get the conclusion that Persse does not love Al. Lily also points out that "you're not really in love with Angelica. You were in love with a dream" (Lodge, p.326). In Persse's mind, Al is pure, beautiful, and charming. She is the "good woman" whom he wants to possess. As soon as he knows that Al is not pure, he abandons her quickly and decisively. From his behavior, readers can conclude that Persse is in love with an image he constructed in his mind, and that traits project to Al. Then, it is easy to understand Persse turns to pursuit Cheryl.

Actually, the failure of Persse's pursuit of Al is implied in the novel. It goes back to Persse's travel to Tokyo because he thinks that maybe he will find Al in Tokyo. One night, in a small bar, Persse and Japanese translators play a game of guessing the phrases' meaning. When they tell Persse that *The Comedy of Errors* is translated into "The Flower in the Mirror and the Moon on the Water" (SW, p.295), Persse holds that one beats all the others. No matter for the translation or the name of "the comedy of errors", they all summarize Persse's pursuing destiny.

Textually, Persse's pursuing of Al is a sheer mistake. Not only the prototypical Princess splits into twin sisters: Angelica and Lily; but also the prototypical knight Perceval splits into two modern knights: Persse McGarrigle and Peter McGarrigle. The match between wrong persons achieve the humorous effects. Because of the similarity between their names, Persse luckily gets the job that Peter gives up. The comic effect reaches the

ultimate when Lily tells Persse that Al's fiancée is Peter McGarrigle. At that time, readers suddenly realized that they were all wrong. Al tells Miss Maiden in Hawaii that she wants to add McGarrigle as her second name in thinking of Peter instead of Persse. The comedy is not only happened in the plot level, but in the textual level for it is a parody of *The Comedy of Errors*.

Metaphorically, Persse's love pursuit is one sub-branch of the novel's meta-metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY. The genre romance presents the life-journey metaphor, *Small World* is a story about life-journey metaphor, so as to Persse's love pursuit. But the implications differ. Life-journey metaphor in the genre of romance inherits the tradition of the picaresque novel, it borrows the narrative structure. The life-journey metaphor in the novel implies that the knowledge pursuing is realized by world travelling. The life-journey to Persse's love pursuit indicates that the meaning of life is a process of searching. People get more mature and clear to one's goal during the process of pursuit.

Thematically, the description of Persse's love pursuit is to mirror the trends of 1980s' literary criticism condition in the west. Persse's new pursuit symbolizes that literary criticism will usher into a new era. The theme of rebirth is represented humorously and ironically. Table 1 below is the different love scripts of Persse.

CONCLUSION

Through the multi-perspective analyses of the love scripts of Persse, this paper reveals that the humorous and ironic effects are achieved by the clashes between those marked and unmarked scripts existed in the minds of narrators, characters, and readers. Moreover, the love scripts of Persse have three-dimensional meaning: it is a parody of *The Comedy of Errors*; it echoes the meta-metaphor of the novel LIFE IS A JOURNEY; and it represents the death-rebirth theme of romance.

Table 1
Love scripts of Persse

Classical romances' love script	Love script of narrator	Love script of Persse	Love script of readers
Princess being caught	Persse meets Al	Persse meets Al	Persse meets Al
Knights start to rescue	Persse loves Al	Persse loves Al	Persse loves Al
One knight kills the monster	Persse proposes to Al	Persse proposes to Al	Persse proposes to Al
The knight saves the Princess	Al refuses	Al refuses	Al refuses Al does not love Persse
Princess loves the knight	Al disappears	Al invites Persse to a room Persse thinks he is Al's future husband Persse sees Rodney Persse is cheated by Al Al disappears	Readers are manipulated by Persse's perspective (readers' love script overlap with Persse's)
Princess marries the Knight	Persse sees Al in a stripper poster	Persse thinks Al is a stripper Persse remembered Al was in a blue movie Persse sees Al in a room Persse concludes Al is a whore	Readers are manipulated by Persse's perspective (readers' love script overlap with Persse's)

To be continued

Continued

Classical romances' love script	Love script of narrator	Love script of Persse	Love script of readers
	Persse stops pursuing Al	Persse stops pursuing Al	Persse stops pursuing Al
	Persse reads a note	Persse reads a note Persse deduces Al has a twin sister	Readers are manipulated by Persse's perspective
	Persse restarts to pursue Al	Persse restarts pursuing Al Persse knows Al wants to add McGarrigle into her name Persse is confident Al loves him	Readers are manipulated by Persse's and Miss Maiden's perspective
They live happily	Persse meets Al in MLA	Persse meets Al in MLA	Persse meets Al in MLA
	Persse stays with Lily	Persse stays with Lily Persse does not believe she is Lily Persse has to accept the truth	Persse stays with Lily
	Persse loses Al	Persse loses Al Persse realizes Cheryl loves him	Persse does not love Al, he loves what he constructed
	Persse pursues Cheryl	Persse starts to pursue Cheryl	Persse starts to pursue Cheryl

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