There was a young lady of Niger
Who smiled as she rode on a tiger.
    They returned from the ride
With the lady inside
And the smile on the face of the tiger.

Is this a story?
Story

Roses are red
Violets are blue
Sugar is sweet
And so are you

Is this a story?
Deconstructing stories

• Todorov’s causal transformation through five stages:
  – a state of equilibrium (A)
  – a disruption of equilibrium by some action (B)
  – a recognition of disruption (-A)
  – an attempt to repair the disruption (-B)
  – a reinstatement of initial equilibrium (A)
Deconstructing stories

There was a young lady of Niger
Who smiled\textsuperscript{A} as she rode\textsuperscript{B} on a tiger.
They returned\textsuperscript{B} from the ride
With the lady inside\textsuperscript{A}
And the smile\textsuperscript{A} on the face of the tiger.
Pop Quiz

• For each of the following raise your hand if you believe that it is a story.
  – The king died and the queen died.
  – Mary ate an apple.
  – The king died and then the queen died in grief.
Definitions

• A connected sequence of statements.
  • Seymour Chatman

• A closed *discourse* that proceeds by unrealizing a temporal sequence of events.
  • Christian Metz

• A recounting of a chronological sequence, where sequence is taken to be a group of non-simultaneous topic-comment structures the last one of which constitutes a modification of the first.
  • Gerald Prince
Branigan’s Narrative Schema
**Drama**

- McKee describes the *dramatic* story, the story told by Hollywood screenplays and “non-experimental” stageplays
  - Well formed plot arcs (structure)
  - Intensity (nothing extraneous, distilled, boiled down)
  - Mimesis (telling a story by showing)

- For many of us, our implicit model of what makes a good story is informed by our experience of cinema

- Drama is communicated through *action*
  - Why might this be a useful model for interactive narrative?
Dramatic structure

• Drama selects key moments from characters’ life stories
  – The *story told* vs. *life story*
  – Distillation of the essence of life

• Structure is a selection of events from characters’ life stories strategically composed to express specific emotions and points of view

• Story event
  – A story event turns (changes) a story value

• Story value
  – Universal binary qualities of human experience
  – Alive/dead, love/hate, freedom/slavery, courage/cowardice, wisdom/stupidity, ...

• Conflict
  – Change in the story value is achieved through conflict – values shouldn’t change through accident or coincidence
Scenes and beats

- **Scene**
  - A story event that changes at least one value (from negative to positive or vice-versa)
  - No exposition – information should always be communicated through value change
  - Test of “sceneness” – could the story event be expressed in a unity of time and space? Is there a focus on a single story value?

- **Beat** – action/reaction pairs that shape the turning of the scene
  - The smallest unit of value change
Sequences, acts and stories

• A sequence is a series of scenes (typically 2 to 5) that culminates with greater impact than any previous scene
  – Each scene turns its own value
  – The sequence turns a greater value that subordinates the others

• An act is a series of sequences that peaks in a climactic scene causing a major reversal of values, more powerful than any preceding scene or sequence

• The story, in the story climax, brings about absolute and irreversible change
  – The audience can’t imagine any change past this
McKee's Triangle

CLASSICAL DESIGN
Archplot

Causality
Closed Ending
Linear Time
External Conflict
Single Protagonist
Consistent Reality
Active Protagonist

Open Ending
Internal Conflict
Multi-Protagonists
Passive Protagonist

Coincidence
Nonlinear Time
Inconsistent Realities

MINIMALISM
Miniplot

ANTI-STRUCTURE
Antiplot
The Protagonist

• The protagonist is the central character, providing a point of view and motive force for the action
  – The protagonist might be plural (e.g. representing a whole social class) or multiple (intertwining multiple points of view)

• The protagonist must be willful – no passive protagonists
  – Has a conscious, and potentially an unconscious object of desire

• The protagonist must have the capacities to pursue the object of desire and must have at least a chance
  – Without the possibility of achievement the audience looses interest

• The protagonist has the will and capacity to pursue the object of desire to the limit

• The story will build to a final action beyond which the audience can not imagine another
Empathy and identification

• The audience must be able to empathize with the protagonist
  – This is not the same as sympathy – doesn’t mean you like the character

• In Aristotelian drama, empathy results in identification – the audience experiences what the protagonist experiences

• The drama takes the audience on an emotional journey through the values explored by the story
• The audience then experiences catharsis (a purgation of the emotions)
Conflict

• The will of the protagonist must be resisted
  – The protagonist takes the minimal, reasonable action to achieve her goal, but provokes antagonism
  – This is different from real life – most of the time our actions don’t provoke antagonism (though we may encounter resistance)

• Inner conflicts
  – Mind, body, emotions

• Personal conflicts
  – Family, lovers, friends

• Extra-personal conflicts
  – Social institutions, individuals in society (social roles), physical environment
The gap

- Conflict happens where the subjective and objective realms touch
- The protagonist has an expectation of the results of her action, but the provoked conflict violates expectations

- The first action of the protagonist results in this gap – the second action now involves risk (there’s something to lose)
- As actions result in gaps, the ante must be upped, with the “minimal and reasonable action” becoming bigger and more being put at risk
- The character’s desire must be strong enough to take us to the end of the story (maximum risk, irrevocable change)

- To create emotional truth for your character, you must write from the inside out, asking yourself “if I were this character in these circumstances, what would I do?”
The gap

Object of desire

GAP
between expectation and result

First Action

Protagonist

Second Action

Risk!