

On April 16, 2012, PED Seminar Series Presents

Story versus Verse: Convergent versus Open Pattern

by [Professor Brian Boyd](#)

In *On the Origin of Stories* (2009) I proposed that we can find the common features of all the arts if we understand art as cognitive play with pattern. There, I focused on fiction. In its companion piece, *Why Lyrics Last: Evolution, Cognition, and Shakespeare's Sonnets* (April 2012), I focus on verse. Together these form the two main, often intertwined, strands of literature.

I'd like to build on the difference between these two books to contrast the almost automatic convergence of patterns in fiction, or narrative more generally, and the compounding of patterns upon patterns—patterns athwart or concealed behind other patterns—in verse, especially in lyrics, verse *without* narrative.

In much of his work Shakespeare weaves both strands together more memorably than anyone else. How can I show the enormous difference between the love lyricism in his greatest romantic comedy and the love lyrics in his *Sonnets*? Poet Don Paterson, in his buoyant recent book on the *Sonnets*, assumes that they "have to be read as a narrative of the progress of love." I will suggest, on the contrary, that we need to read them as lyrics, as verse without narrative, where other kinds of patterns come into play, patterns of experience and emotion, image and idea, word and structure, set forms and found freedoms.

[ROROTOKO interview](#)