Recording of the week: a poetry reading by Kayo Chingonyi

This week's selection comes from Dr Eva del Rey, Curator of *Drama and Literature Recordings and Digital Performance.*

Zambian-born poet Kayo Chingonyi reads selections from his pamphlet *Some Bright Elegance* (Salt, 2012) and other works.

In this recording you can hear some of the stories behind the poems. For example, Kayo's thoughts of himself as a writer in the poem 'Daemon', and his memories of making cassette mixtapes of songs recorded from pirate radio, which informed 'Guide to Proper Mixtape Assembly'. And, before the reading of 'Orientation', Kayo invites the listener to imagine being a secret service operative, setting the mood for the spy poem that follows.

Kayo Chingoyi reads

THE LAST

Kayo Chingonyi, British Library 2016.

The recording was made in the British Library studio, 12 March 2013, for ‘Between Two Worlds: Poetry & Translation’, a British Library project created in collaboration with Amarjit Chandan, and funded by the Arts Council.

For other recordings of Kayo Chingonyi accessible at the British Library please see:

Interview with Kayo talking about his work and influences (2013)

‘Beyond Bounds: Britain Re-Presented in Poetry’: event at the British Library with Kayo Chingoyi and fellow poets Anthony Joseph, Jay Bernard and Vahni Capildeo (2016)

Follow @BL_DramaSound and @soundarchive for all the latest news.

World Rivers Day

You may not know it, but a global celebration of the world's waterways has taken place on the last Sunday of September every year since 2005. From rallies and special film screenings to community cleanups and riverside get-togethers, this annual event highlights the importance of our rivers and the need to protect them.

In honour of World Rivers Day 2017, here are some of our favourite river recordings from around the world.

Agua Azul cascades recorded in Chiapas, Mexico by Richard Beard (BL ref 149032)

Riverside atmosphere recorded in Wedza, Zimbabwe by Nigel Tucker (BL ref 125784)

River Dart below the surface recorded in Devon, England by Peter Toll (BL ref 212542)

Boyd River atmosphere with frogs recorded in New South Wales, Australia by David Lumsdaine (BL ref 150641)

THE LAST

Be sure to check out the Twitter hashtag #WorldRiversDay for more info on the day's events. You can also find other watery sounds in the Environment and Nature section of British Library Sounds.

Recording of the week: Oldbury – a tour of a decommissioned nuclear power station

This week's selection comes from Tom Lean, Project Interviewer for An Oral History of British Science.

For nearly 60 years much of Britain's electricity was supplied by a fleet of eleven Magnox nuclear power stations, built between the 1950s and the 1970s. They were the first series of full-scale nuclear power stations in the world, each built with a pair of nuclear reactors supplying hot steam to a set of turbines to generate electricity for homes and workplaces. While they became the workhorses of the nuclear industry, gradually their numbers dwindled as they reached the end of their design lives and one by one they were decommissioned. North of Bristol, amongst the last to be built was Oldbury, which first went critical on the 18th of September 1967. Switched off in 2012, it now stands silent awaiting the start of a decades-long process that will gradually demolish the station and decontaminate the site. Yet today Oldbury remains much as it was when the station was operational, even if its control rooms and reactor halls seem eerily empty, as Peter Webster, station manager in the 1990s, explains in this video tour of Oldbury recorded last year for An Oral History of the Electricity Supply Industry.

In-depth oral history interviews documenting the lives and careers of those who worked in the electricity industry can be found in the Industry: water, steel and energy collection on British Library Sounds.

Follow @BL_OralHistory and @soundarchive for all the latest news.

Recording of the week: Epic

This week's selection comes from Rosy Hall, an ESRC-funded PhD student from Oxford University working with the BL's Spoken English collections.

Epic **3. b.** *colloq.* (orig. and chiefly *U.S.*). Particularly impressive or

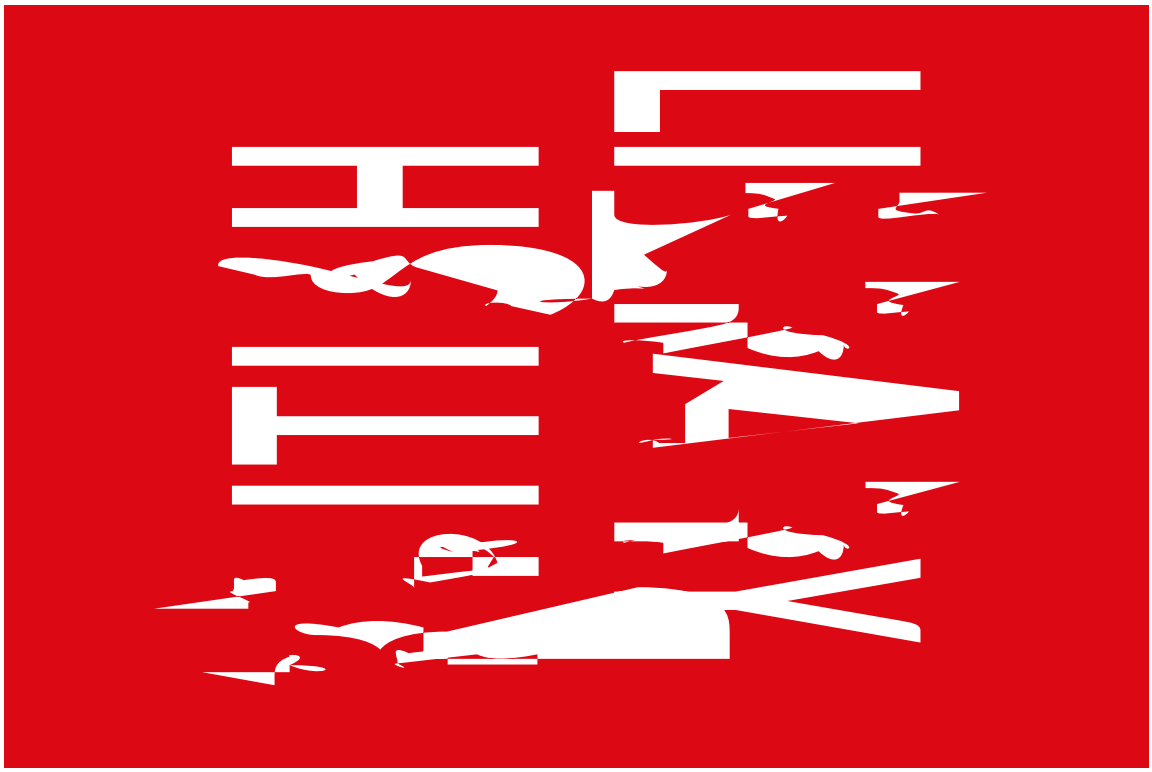
remarkable; excellent, outstanding. (www.oed.com)

According to one Urban Dictionary entry, the birth of 'epic' as a popular catchphrase has its origins among 'avid gamers and pretentious English majors'. This fits with the WordBank contribution of one of our speakers (b.1991), who attributes it to 'video gamer culture' and his gaming friends.

Um, I think that 'epic' is a very interesting word that I constantly hear my friends use, because, it's interesting because it's, I feel it comes from like some kind of like video gamer culture, cause my friends are like ((bay kid)) gamers, I mean I'm not so much, but they always use the word 'epic,' 'that was epic', or like 'epic fail' and {cough} I just, where, what does it mean? I guess it's kind of like…uh like 'amazing', like it just sort of emphasizes something. You know what I mean? Yeah. It's like a lot of emphasis on something it's epic*, it's not just s- – you know ordinary, it's* epic*. I don't know, maybe it's rooted from the actual word epic where you know, like, I don't know the Odyssey? Who knows? Who knows. But yeah. Bye!*

Epic (C1442)

Like so many words whose meanings have evolved over time, *epic* is a common bugbear among prescriptivists – English language mavens who would rather the word were reserved only for Homer and Virgil. As alluded to by this speaker, *epic* hasn't always been a trendy word for something like 'really good' or 'extreme'; traditionally it's a genre of lengthy heroic poetry. Scholars have pointed out, however, that even this definition is fairly fluid – the meaning of *epic* has changed over time to cover both oral and written forms, and extends to novels and even movies (*Game of Thrones*, anyone?). Language change is inevitable, after all; it seems this new *epic* is just the latest iteration.



And we'd better get used to it: unfortunately for the pedants, a high level of objection usually correlates to a high level of usage. Judging from the number of internet rants against it, it's clear that *epic* is here to stay!

Continue the conversation with us @VoicesofEnglish

Dialect Where You Least Expect It

Jonnie Robinson, Lead Curator of Spoken English, writes:

The recent publication of fixtures for the 2017-18 hockey season may have escaped the attention of many sports fans in the frenzy of Transfer Deadline Day, but this week's friendly between Southgate and Durham University was a personal highlight as, with a daughter on each side, household bragging rights were at stake. A significant occasion for the family, of course, but surely not a source of professional interest: after all, hockey – in the UK anyway – is a predominantly middle-class sport so not, one might imagine, a likely focus for dialect research. Well you'd be surprised: the impressive thing about dialect is it can crop up virtually anywhere.

Take last season, for instance: watching one daughter play at Ben Rhydding I was delighted to see post-match teas included the option of a *bread-cake* (not to mention a *chip buttie*).

Regional variants for BREAD ROLL feature regularly in dialect surveys as noted in a previous blog post and, given the spectacular setting of Ben Rhydding Hockey Club, little more than a drag flick from

Ilkley Moor and the famous Cow and Calf rocks, it’s perhaps not surprising to find Yorkshire dialect in this context. However, watching my younger daughter play in a school tournament at Charterhouse – an exclusive boarding school – I was equally intrigued by the wording on a noticeboard next to the astroturf hockey pitch.

This eminently sensible

set of principles for parents and supporters includes in rule 8 an appeal to respect ‘decisions made by *beaks* and coaching staff’. The OED records the term *beak* [= ‘teacher’] from 1888 and includes four citations: two contain references to Eton College and two are by authors educated at Marlborough College. Its use is categorised as ‘schoolboy slang’, so not really an example of dialect then, although according to the OED dialect encompasses a ‘[m]anner of speaking, language, speech; esp. the mode of speech peculiar to, or characteristic of, a particular person or group’. While the distinction between dialect and slang can be a little blurred, it would be interesting to establish how widespread *beak* is within private schools – this recording explores the existence of a similarly idiosyncratic code at Harrow School, for instance.

So while *beak* might not be strictly comparable with the more overtly dialectal *bread-cake*, it offers a fascinating glimpse of boarding school parlance and demonstrates how localised and vernacular forms permeate even ‘official’ communication within a school and to its extended community. You would imagine, for instance, that Standard English is universally adopted by schools for written communication to parents, but as the new school term approaches and parents up and down the country check whether their children have the right school uniform it’s fascinating to see how one essential item of PE kit varies from place to place. A quick online search of primary school websites in England confirms that school brochures, newsletters and websites differ in how they refer to SOFT SHOES WORN FOR PE.

The four variants shown here from Francis Askew Primary School in Hull (*sand-shoes*), Wylde Green Primary School in Birmingham (*pumps*), Howard Primary School in Croydon (*plimsolls*) and Hullavington C of E Primary School in Wiltshire (*daps*) were among the many alternatives captured in the *BBC Voices* survey of 2004/5 and show how we all use and encounter dialect even in the most unexpected places.