THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

BYRON FOUNDATION LECTURE for 1992

The Grapheme Conquest: Literature and the Post-Print Age

by

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The Lectureship was founded in 1912 by public subscription, and the first lecture was given in 1919.

This lecture was given at The University of Nottingham on 2 June 1992.

Published in 2009 by
The Byron Centre for the Study of Literature and Social Change
School of English Studies, University of Nottingham,
University Park, Nottingham, NG7 2RD
http://byron.nottingham.ac.uk

This electronic edition digitized and edited by Nicola Bowring
Byron Foundation Lectures Online Series Editor, Matthew J.A. Green

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This is a revised version of the Byron Foundation Lecture delivered by Professor Andrew Gurr in June 1992.

ISBN: 978-0-9555740-5-4

The Grapheme conquest: Literature and the post-print age

There is a hill in Hawkes Bay, New Zealand, called Puke te Whino. 'Puke' is a hill in Maori. 'Te' is Maori 'the', and 'Whino' can mean a number of things. It might be 'whenua', the earth, for instance. The hill's name was first inscribed by one of the early surveyors, who were almost invariably Scottish, and mapped the country around Napier in the middle years of last century. He had a Maori assistant with him, and would get him to talk to the local Maoris to find the Maori name for each feature on his map. When he asked for the name of this hill, his helper asked the local and then told him 'Puke te Whino'. And so it was recorded in perpetuity on the maps of New Zealand. But what the Scottish surveyor failed to record was the shrug which accompanied the name when his assistant answered him. Maori has no voiced plosives, so what in standard English is a 'b' becomes a 'p', and a 'g' becomes a 'k'. 'Wh' is an 'f' sound. There are times when it helps if you can use the standard pronunciation. That map-name records one of the small losses that happened when the graphic form is used for recording essentially phonemic communications. The solemn record of the name is one victory for the grapheme over the phoneme.

My subject here is a simple one: the consequences of the fact that for a thousand years the only form of record for the spoken word was print. The technological accident that 500 years ago developed the grapheme, the written form, as a cheap and accessible way to record the phoneme, the spoken form, created the modern literary canons. Literature literally means the written word. Written forms of language create a hierarchy of values. Standard English, what we might now call international English, has developed solely because of print. There are hundreds of forms of spoken Chinese, most of them pretty incomprehensible between one region and another. But each uses the same ideograms for the written form of each language, so that although one Chinese may not be able to understand a speech in phonemic form in another Chinese language, it is possible to understand it when reading it in its grapheme form. In a faintly analogous way, thanks to print, Europeans have copied the Mandarin bureaucrats by standardising the written forms of their languages. The gains from developing standardised written forms are tremendous. But the losses through standardisation are also tremendous.

My argument is that in a post-print age (Edison started making wax recordings nearly a hundred years ago), and in the age of a National Curriculum for English in education, we need to raise our consciousness about the hierarchy that rules our thinking. We have been colonised by print. For that metaphor I cite Bakhtin:

> The victory of one reigning language over others, the supplanting of languages, their enslavement, the process of illuminating them with the True Word, the incorporation of barbarians and lower social strata into a unitary language of culture and truth, the canonisation of ideological systems, all this determined the content and power of the category of 'unitary language' in linguistic and stylistic thought.... But the centripetal forces of the life of language operated in the midst of heteroglossia. ('Discourse in the Novel', *The Dialogic Imagination,* ed. M. Helquist, Texas 1981, pp. 271-2).

You can see the colonising principle in Murray's decision back in 1878 to use not the first appearance of a word or a new meaning in speech but only its appearance in writing as the basis for the New English Dictionary *(OED)* and its 'historical principles'. It was a bit like Mopsa in *The Winter's Tale,* saying "I love a ballad in print, for then we are sure they are true".

Traditionally, speech always comes first, and is infinitely various. The written forms are only a means of recording what is spoken or thought. In the process of recording, a reductive system of simplification, they standardise. In the early years of printing, from the 1460s until the seventeenth century, you can see writing developing devices to overcome the limitations imposed by the fact that print is a far from perfect means of recording the infinite variety of the spoken voice. Ways of italicising for visual emphasis, marks of question or exclamation and similar notations of emphasis were developed out of the manuscript traditions, to establish standard conventions for recording sound and emphasis. The balanced sentence in prose, and blank verse in the theatre, both in their different ways helped to give a rhythm and distinct pattern of stress and emphasis to the silent forms of record that print provides.

But that was only a beginning, the phase when print was seen as inferior to speech, no more than an imperfect form of record. From the early seventeenth century through to the twentieth, printed literature developed a technology of its own. It was made rather a form for creation in itself than a secondary technology for recording speech. Writers in the time of Shakespeare and Donne discovered things that

print could do and speech could not. Over the years this helped to generate a standardised English, using forms identifiably 'correct' across a wide market, launching a new tradition that with the help of social and commercial changes gave priority to silent and private reading. Audiences listening to public speeches, even in print, were supplanted by individuals reading silently for themselves.

Now the twentieth century's development of electronic forms of audio and video record, which make speech itself both durable and easily transmissible, has challenged this standardisation of print. New technology has made a multitude of different spoken englishes accessible to the markets that were previously only open to print. In the 1990s post-modernist and post-structuralist emphasis on the authority of readers rather than authors has even led to the creation of literature composed in hypertext, where readers can compose their own forms from the variants on offer, a freedom seriously eroding the expectation that we still suffer from, based on our still largely print-based culture, of fixed and immutable texts. Where, you might well ask, does that leave study of the traditional forms of literature in print, and even the concept of reading itself, embedded and hallowed in the new National Curriculum as it is?

I propose to offer you the chance to look at (and listen to) examples of some poems spoken and written in non-standard englishes, and to register in the hearings some of the limitations of print as a form of record, especially of dialect or non-standard English. I shall also offer a couple of examples of how print was first exploited, by John Donne in particular, to do things that speech cannot. At the end the question is how far the predominance of standard English and English in print over the spoken forms of the language imposes limitations on the creative use of language, and how far does it dictate reader expectations that we should be starting to dislodge.

To begin with an attempt to measure the chill that the fixity of print imposes on the spoken word in the first two poems that you will hear. Edward 'Kamau' Brathwaite, from Barbados, wrote a trilogy of poems in the 1960s. The first he called *Rights of Passage* (RIGHTS, not RITES, a twist using sound against print), in 1967, then *Masks,* 1968, and *Islands,* 1969. The three books are a verbal, essentially vocal, re-creation of the ancestral voyage into slavery, the 'rights' of the middle passage from Africa to the Caribbean in the first book. The second book deals with the 'masks' of cultural dislocation and adaptation,

including the mask of the back-to-Africa move that Brathwaite himself made to Ghana in the 1950s. Finally the 'islands' of the Caribbean, and the desert island of the cultural nomad that we are all nowadays becoming. The two poems on the sheet are from the *Rights of Passage* volume, the first section called 'Work Song and Blues', a group which starts with a poem about the middle passage into slavery and goes on to describe what the new slave dreams of. 'All God's Chillun' is the fourth in this section, a tight paraphrase of the 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' step in the long quest. The close of this poem, "we kept / our state on golden stools—remember?", alludes to the kings of Ghana. The second poem is the 'Prelude' to the second section of the volume, called 'Spades', the tool of the slave's trade, and also the name given in London in the fifties and sixties to black people.

All God's Chillun

They call me Uncle
Tom and mock me

these my children
mock me

they hate the hat
in hand

the one-
roomed God

I praise.
Winds raise

the flat-
roofed house

each harvest
time

each southern soft Sep-
tember.

'Hey, nuncle!
wanna see

what God in heaven
brought for me?

One pink-ear’d rat,
thick knuckle-headed land

one plot, you know, one
bloody plot; one cow, one dog

one fuckin’ plough that only works one way,
a snotty pond in which my children play

leap frog: frog’s habitat.
A sniffin’ mouse

Won’t touch the best
we have to offer it; and yet there was a time

we kept
our state on golden stools—remember?’

Prelude

Memories are smoke
lips we can’t kiss
hands we can’t hold
will never be
enough for us;
for we have learned
to live with sun
with sin
with soil
with rock
with iron
toil

no dreams
for us
no hopes
no scabs
to heal
in the hot
sun neither
no screams
no whip rope
lash

no sweat-
ing free-
ness either.

Just give us
what we earn
in bright bold
cash
before we
smash
and grab
it.

To hell
with Af-
rica
to hell
with Eu-
rope too,
just call my blue
black bloody spade
a spade and kiss
my ass. O-
kay? So
let's begin.

The pages of print are here to be analysed like any printed poem, but it changes when you listen to it on tape. By hearing Brathwaite himself recite it you feel the strong rhythm, the incantatory intensity that the words do not have when read silently from the page.

[TAPE 1: Edward Brathwaite]

Against Brathwaite's spoken poems—he recorded them all, being born into the post-print age—I would like to set just one small section from Eliot's *Prufrock.* Eliot was born before the age of audio recording, butecond printed section he did live long enough to record his poems, and a case has been made for the spoken version as the authoritative, definitive text, especially of *The Waste Land.* The question of authority in a text or a performance is not a question I shall tackle here, since it does raise huge questions, notably the restrictiveness of a single performed version.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,

Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street
Rubbing its back tipon the window-panes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me.

What is worthy of note here is the oddity of Eliot's idiom. It shows, if nothing else, how quickly the spoken idiom changes even when the printed forms remain the same.

[TAPE 2: T.S. Eliot]

That is poetry composed to be read on the page. It was first published in 1918, before the wax recording industry had made much impact on poetry and it was still thought of entirely as texts to be seen on the page. You can see the distance we have come since then in two more recent poets, the second of whom, John Agard, is one of the more remarkable poets writing in England today. You will not find him in the literary magazines, not so much because he is black British as because his work does not record so happily in print. Like the first poet I shall play you, Valerie Bloom, he is a performance poet. Being a record of a performance, you will hear the audience reactions—rather more distinctly than you'll hear Valerie Bloom's poems, in fact.

[TAPE 3: Valerie Bloom, John Agard]

These examples I offer as specimens of an alternative form of record to print. They raise a version of the old chicken-and-egg question: which came first, the performance poets or the means of our learning about them through the printed recordings of their speech? That sort of question is unanswerable precisely because the only evidence we have is what was put on record. No significant records of oral art exist before this century. Even Shakespeare's plays, oral though their original transmission was, only survive in the rough transcripts that he made for the spoken performance.

It is to Shakespeare's time that we should turn now, though, to pick up evidence for the intricacies that the poets began to exploit when

the first uses of print as a new resource for poetic invention became apparent. Donne is famous for his use of speech idioms in his poems. What we sometimes miss is how he used them. Even on the page the opening stanza of 'The Canonisation' sounds like an explosion of anger, the ageing and helpless poet protesting to the unwitting reader-speaker who interrupts his love-making.

For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love,
   Or chide my palsy, or my gout,
My five grey hairs, or ruined fortune flout,
   With wealth your state, your mind with arts improve,
      Take you a course, get you a place,
      Observe his Honour, or his Grace,
Or the King's real, or his stamped face
   Contemplate; what you will, approve,
   So you will let me love.

"For God's sake hold your tongue!" is a comically irritable exclamation, a loud and familiar spoken exclamation. Only later, when the reader registers the claim that starts with the title, that the speaker is a candidate for sainthood, to be canonised as half of a double act with his mistress, does the oath turn into a declaration of fully Christian belief. Only on re-reading do you realise that you should hold your tongue out of silent reverence for the dead lovers, for God's sake. It is a poem which can be read many ways. Cleanth Brooks hailed it as a fine poem for its paradoxical mix of reverence and blasphemy. Wilbur Sanders reads it as a bad poem for the same reason. Andreassen reads it as only a finely parodic piece of blasphemy, while Wilfren Roston reads it as only a wonderfully neoplatonic act of worship. All four diametrically opposed readings emerge from the poet's exploitation of the grapheme as an expression of the phoneme. That makes it one of print's first victories over the spoken word.

Such a victory needs a context, which Shakespeare supplies in *Richard II.* The lines I have in mind come from a section of 135 lines in that play's fourth act that was cut from the printed versions of the play, very probably for reasons of political censorship, in Queen Elizabeth's lifetime.

Fl: *Bull.* Are you contented to resigne the Crowne?
Rich. I, no; no I: for I must nothing bee:
Therefore no, no, for I resigne to thee.

Q4: *Rich.* I, no no I; for, I must nothing bee,
Therefore no no, for I resigne to thee.

F4:	I no; no I, for I must nothing bee, Therefore no, no, for I resign to thee.
Theobald:	Ay, no; no, ay: for I must nothing be, Therefore no No, for I resign to thee.
Vaughan:	Ay—no: no 'ay', for I must nothing be, Therefore no No, for I resign to theGurre.
Arden:	Ay, no; no, ay: for I must nothing be. Therefore no 'no', for I resign to thee.
New Penguin:	Ay, no. No, ay; for I must nothing be. Therefore no no, for I resign to thee.

The first quarto of 1598, and the second quarto of the same year, the first text of Shakespeare to bear the author's name, omit the 'deposition scene' where Richard appears on stage to hand the crown to his successor Bullingbrook. It was first printed in the fourth quarto of 1608, and then more accurately in the 1623 First Folio. The Folio version, printed as the first in the seven versions here, gives what was probably the version closest to what Shakespeare wrote for his first actor of Richard to speak. Q4, which follows, gives what I think was a player's idea of what he thought was spoken on stage in Shakespeare's time at the Globe. The remaining five versions give what successive editors of the play have thought to be the best way of reproducing the ideal written text. The different ways of saying 'yes' as "Ay" or "I", and the double negative of "no 'no'" are set out in these seven different ways of struggling with the forms of reporting speech in print.

I find this little puzzle interesting in three quite different ways. One is the evidence it provides of the hopeless struggle which the grapheme faces in trying to reproduce the phoneme when it carries a heavy loading of different possible meanings. Another is how fixative the printed form is, and how despite that fixity it can report so ambiguously what must have been the single set of nuances fixed or intended in the original spoken form. And the third is the question that lies behind all of these examples: what do we lose by the fixity of print? How far does the modern literary 'reading' depend on the multiplicity of meanings held latent in written texts? Theory argues strongly these days against authorial authority and for the liberation of the reader to read as he or she chooses. So perhaps we should add an eighth variant to the seven ways of printing what Shakespeare intended in these two lines of King Richard's, one blank enough to admit all possible readings

and hearings of the two lines. Ultimately, of course, a blank page. You may think that such a proposal is a nonsense, a parody of the theories that transfer authority from writer to reader. If so, wait for the examples of hypertext that I shall come to later.

A leap forward now, to the nineteenth century, and another version of the standardisations that print has introduced. By the time of Walter Scott and Dickens the predominance of print had made all non-standard englishes provincial and usually comic. Special orthography was invented to reproduce it in print. Scott's invented and new-standardised Lallans, John Gait's Ayrshire dialect (which his publishers changed to Scott's idiom and orthography), and above all the London dialects that Dickens first gave an orthography to were largely the inventions of nineteenth-century writers. The reader of such orthography was expected to start with standard English and to translate in his or her head the sounds of the spellings that signified the Scots or London accents. To read such dialectal sounds on the page was more effortful than reading standard English. It alienated the reader used to standard English. It was patronising, since to the educated it signified the uneducated. So it became, at least south of the Scottish border, chiefly an instrument for portraying comic characters. My example of this is Kipling's joke poem, with its comically cut aspirates and half-censored oaths like 'blooming'.

WHEN 'Omer smote 'is bloomin' lyre,
He'd 'eard men sing by land an' sea;
An' what he thought 'e might require,
'E went an' took—the same as me!

The market-girls an' fishermen,
The shepherds an' the sailors, too,
They 'eard old songs turn up again,
But kep' it quiet—same as you!

They knew 'e stole; 'e knew they knowed.
They didn't tell, nor make a fuss,
But winked at 'Omer down the road,
An' 'e winked back—the same as us!

If you imagine transcribing Edward Brathwaite's or John Agard's poems in a similar non-standard orthography you will see how patronising the written form is.

If it were not for print, there would certainly have been even more englishes (small e) than there are now among the three hundred million

who claim English as their first language. Print is a colonising force. Without print as a fixative, they would have changed and diversified far more and more quickly than we can know. The history of English is narrowly based on a standard, slender and narrow concept, a trunk with no branches, thanks to the fact that the only form of record was writing, and that from Chaucer onwards that technology needed standardised forms.

Now of course there are other technologies, aural and visual. What effects are they having, and (without being too judgemental) should they have on modern theories of reading? A pair of examples from the American poet Theodore Roethke, Saul Bellow's Humbolt, will offer one kind of contrast that I think tells us something. His poem 'Dolour' is in the *Collected Poems* of 1967.

> I have known the inexorable sadness of pencils,
> Neat in their boxes, dolour of pad and paper-weight,
> All the misery of manila folders and mucilage,
> Desolation in immaculate public places,
> Lonely reception room, lavatory, switchboard,
> The unalterable pathos of basin and pitcher,
> Ritual of multigraph, paper-clip, comma,
> Endless duplication of lives and objects.
> And I have seen dust from the walls of institutions,
> Finer than flour, alive, more dangerous than silica,
> Sift, almost invisible, through long afternoons of tedium,
> Dropping a fine film on nails and delicate eyebrows,
> Glazing the pale hair, the duplicate grey standard faces.

It is a neat piece about the apparatus of writing. You can see that he did not enjoy visits to his publisher. A sad poet? A composed, meditative poem? Now listen to him performing a different poem in front of an audience.

[TAPE 4: Theodore Roethke)

A drunken poet? Which do you prefer, the richness of the performed text, the spoken voice, or the fine verbal games of the printed text? Was Roethke's performing voice disconcerting after the delicacy of the printed voice? Each text has a quite different kind of richness.

I have one last example of audio recording to set against the printed word. You have the visual script with you, Sylvia Plath's 'The Applicant'.

> First, are you our sort of person?
> Do you wear
> A glass eye, false teeth or a crutch,

A brace or a hook,
Rubber breast or rubber crotch,

Stitches to show something's missing? No, no? then
How can we give you a thing?
Stop crying.
Open your hand.
Empty? Empty. Here is a hand

To fill it and willing
to bring teacups and roll away headaches
And do whatever you tell it.
Will you marry it?
It is guaranteed.

To thumb shut your eyes at the end
And dissolve of sorrow.
We make new stock from the salt.
I notice you are stark naked.
How about this suit—

Black and stiff, but not a bad fit.
Will you marry it?
It is waterproof, shatterproof, proof
Against fire and bombs through the roof.
Believe me, they'll bury you in it.

Now your head, excuse me, is empty.
I have the ticket for that.
Come here, sweetie, out of the closet.
Well what do you think of *that*?
Naked as paper to start

But in twenty-five years she'll be silver,
In fifty, gold.
A living doll, everywhere you look.
It can sew, it can cook,
It can talk, talk, talk.

It works, there is nothing wrong with it.
You have a hole, it is a poultice.
You have an eye, it's an image.
My boy, it's your last resort.
Will you marry it, marry it, marry it.

I'd suggest you read it while you listen to the poet speaking it.

[TAPE 5: Sylvia Plath]

I offer this poem as an example of the differences between the two forms of recording, not because it is particularly famous, or even particularly good, but because it stands in between the two technologies. Plath learned to write poetry as a reader, not a listener. Performing the written text, using the words on the page as the script for her enactment of the text in performance, was not an integral part of her own writing programme, her concept of what her poetry is. She reads it uncomfortably, with a blankness of expression that belies the strong expressiveness of the language, and shows her idea of it to be words pushed into place in a visual and evocative shape on the page, not in speech. Packed with feeling though it is, its semiotics are more those of a concrete poem, like Ian Hamilton Finlay's or Edwin Morgan's visual games. Finlay is a sculptor, an artist in material things as much as he is a poet. His poems belong in the semiotics of the visual arts. Plath in her audio recording, her re-reading of her own finished work, is uncomfortably caught between the two forms of record.

Semiotics as a critical practice lies behind all of this. As a critical principle it has long passed its sell-by date for most critics, I know, but I believe it underlies all critical theory more intimately than we usually care to acknowledge. A study of language as a set of codes that connects speaker or writer to hearer or reader in ways which allow neither side to be completely passive recipients puts what authority there is in determining the codes and the communication firmly in the middle, the mediating position. And that is where the form of record, the choice of speech or print, and the different kinds of games and rules apply. In the theatre, where the author's words are translated by the director and performed by the actors to a voluntary (paying) audience, the semiotics of the event are well-defined, however intricate the process is. And theatre semiotics are not different in kind from any other exchange, whether it is John Agard performing to the converted in the Albert Hall or Sylvia Plath mumbling to her microphone in a sound studio.

Now, though, there is a new technology to add to the familiar forms. It is entirely postmodernist in its principles, and it illustrates part of my subtext—that print is fixative, colonising and restrictive—most thoroughly. This is writing in hypertext. Hypertext unfixes the text for the reader. The reader, or user, or keyboard operator, participates actively by choosing the variant he or she prefers for any one reading, or even inside a single reading experience while at the keyboard. It is one

measure of how fixative the standard forms of print are that I cannot offer you an example here. All I can offer is the thought that if you confront a piece of hypertext and feel resentful at being invited to choose the text for yourself, you are perhaps allowing yourself to be coerced by the five-hundred-year long tradition of fixed print. If you feel you need the authority of an author, you must in part at least be responding to the habit of reading texts that are standardised, and marginalise the multitude of spoken englishes in favour of a single dominant form. In an age rich in new forms of record, that is a distinctly conservative attitude to maintain. All I can offer as a final comment on that is three pieces of print-recorded verse from Edwin Morgan that parody the fixity we expect from print.

THE COMPUTER'S FIRST DIALECT POEMS

i. The Furze Kidder's Bating (Northamptonshire)

Blea on the baulk the furze kidder rocked
with a bottle of flags and a budget of bent.
Sawning and soodling in a drabbled scrip
he hirpled and jolled hirkling and croodling.
Morts of mizled mouldiwarps
gaddered the ball at beavering hour
and progged the fotherer's frumitory.
His cag of stingo by the stools
was teemed by puddock, pink, and pismire.
Clabbering sturnels swopped on sprotes.
Rawky poppies whewed and quawked.
Hariff and foulroyce clouted the meer.
Brustling at clink and bandy chock
his sawney doll pelted pranking.
Bating the lown with hugh icles
she pilled him on the pudgy plats
and pessed his yaum as pluft as a pooty.

A bumbarrel scrowed Joe Millar's book.

ii. The Birkie and the Howdie (Lowland Scots)

A dorty, vogie, chanler-chaftit birkie
brattled the aizles o the clachan chimlie,
glunched at his jaupin quaich o usquebae,
scunnered red-wud at the clarty lyart howdie
snirtlin by the ingle-neuk sae laithron and tozie,
and gied the thowless quine a bland wi his gully
till she skrieghed like a cut-luggit houlet and dang her tassie

aff-loof at his unco doup, the glaikit tawpie.
The skellum Callan goaved at her fell drumlie:
'Te tocherless wanchancie staumrel hizzic,
ye groazlin, driddlin grumphic, ye awnie ferlie,
deil gie your kyle curmurrings o scroggy crowdie,
and bogies graizle ilka ramfeezl't hurdie
till aa your snash is steekit, ye duddie hoodie!'
–'Ach, I hae warlock-briefs, stegh the collieshangie!
Aa you ier-oes sail gang sae muckle agley
they'se turn to blisters and bauckie-birds, and in a brulzie
they'se mak their joes o taeds, aa thrang and sonsie,
snowkin in aidle whaur asks and clegs are grushie:
yon is an ourie pliskie!'

Wha wan the tulzie?

The Computer's First Code Poem

TEYZA	PRQTP	ZSNSX	OSRMY	VCFBO	VJSDA
XSEVK	JCSPV	HSMCV	RFBOP	OZQDW	EAOAD
TSRVY	CFEZP	OZFRV	PTPEP	FRXAE	OFVVA
HFOPK	DZYJR	TYPPA	PVYBT	OAZYJ	UAOAD
VEQBT	DEQJZ	WSZZP	WSRWK	UAEYU	LYSRV
HYUAX	BSRWP	PIFQV	QOYNA	KFDDQ	PCYYV
BQRSD	VQTSE	TQEVK	FTARX	VSOSQ	BYFRX
TQRXQ	PVEFV	LYZVP	HSEPV	TFBQP	QHYYV
VYUSD	TYVVY	PVSZZ	PCYJP	FRDFV	QYEVQ
PJQBT	CYFES	JQSZP	QTTQZ	DQRQZ	VQUSP
TRFWP	VCEYJ	TZQSR	JYEXP	QOYFV	XCYJP
MCYPV	CQSWF	AUSVP	QTSRM	GYYSX	VQUSP

Two are mock-dialect poems, that look on the page like folk-poetry but have no source in real speech. The third, composed, or computed, in 1973, is what Morgan with some justification calls "the computer's first code poem". I leave it with you like a crossword puzzle, that other form of fixity that assumes a shared body of knowledge and asks for stone-precise answers to woolgathering clues.

Authority takes many forms. Some have only the force of tradition, of long usage. Others have a technical edge. Whatever the source of authority, when it imposes on our freedoms we ought to question it, and choose our priorities aware of what it is that authorises this authority. In university departments of English and now in the National Curriculum for English, the authority of the printed word is absolute. In a world of new technology, we ought to ask whether it should be quite as strong as it still is.