



PARLIAMENT | PARLEMENT
CANADA

Parliamentary Poet Laureate



POETRY CONNECTION: LINK UP WITH CANADIAN POETRY

J. R. Carpenter (1972 –) is a Canadian artist and writer, known for working in a variety of different media, including print, digital or electronic media and live performance since the early 1990s. Her literary projects span a wide array of genres and formats, including fiction, non-fiction and many experiments in interactive, programmable media. After graduating in the visual arts at Concordia University, she quickly became one of Montreal's most innovative 21st century artists, serving as president of the artist-run gallery and new media lab OBORO's board of directors until 2010. Due to the prevailing visual and interactive nature of her work, many of her projects have been featured at museums, galleries, conferences and festivals around the world. Several of her most recent literary works have been published online in Volumes One and Two of the *Electronic Literature Collection*. In 2010, she moved to the UK, where she currently lives and works in Devon, one of England's most southern counties.

Poem for discussion:

NOTES ON THE VOYAGE OF OWL AND GIRL

Digital Literature, <http://luckysoap.com/owlandgirl>

An owl and a girl most [adventurous', 'curious', 'studious'] ['set out', 'set sail', 'sailed away'] **in a** [bottle-green', 'beetle-green', 'pea-green'] ['boat', 'sieve', 'skiff', 'vessel']; **a** ['beautiful', 'ship shape', 'sea worthy'] ['craft', 'raft', 'wooden shoe'], **certainly, though a** ['good deal', 'wee bit', 'tad'] **too** ['small', 'high in the stern']
to suit the two of them. They took a ['bushel', 'barrel', 'bundle']
of ['honey', 'money'] **and an** ['almanac', 'astrolabe', 'barometer', 'chronometer'] **of**
dubious ['accuracy', 'origin', 'usefulness']. **The owl was** ['actually', 'basically', 'simply', 'slightly'] ['home sick', 'sea sick', 'sceptical', 'terrible with

directions', 'a nervous traveller']. **The girl sought to gain** ['definitive', 'further', 'first-hand'] ['knowledge', 'experience', 'proof'] **of** ['the Northwest Passage', 'Ultima Thule', 'a strange phenomena known as sea lung'].

According to my ['calculations', 'library books', 'test results'], **the girl informed the owl, it's** ['six', 'seventeen', 'twenty-seven'] ['leagues', 'knots', 'nights', 'nautical miles'] ['due north', 'north', 'northeast'] **of here. Her** ['mother', 'great-aunt', 'grandmother'] **had been among the most revered of** ['authors', 'experts', 'philosophers'] **on this topic. But the girl had her own** ['life to live', 'line of inquiry', 'ideas', 'theories'].

The owl said, ['Birds of a feather stick together', 'Loose lips sink ships', 'Everywhere we go, there we are'].

How soon he ['drifted', 'floated', 'sailed', 'veered'] **off** ['topic', 'course', 'track', 'radar']!

According to my ['spyglass', 'sea chart', 'sextant', 'sonar'], **we're nearing the edge of our** ['our story', 'our journey', 'the earth', 'this narrow sea'], **the girl said, but still they sailed** ['for a year and a day', 'on through the night', 'on until well past bed time'], ['despite the wet and sea fret', 'by the light of the silvery moon', 'across the North Atlantic', 'on a river of crystal light', 'into a sea of dew'].

By this time, all the owl's ['magazine subscriptions', 'snack food items', 'phone card credits', 'batteries'] **had run out.**

Don't ['fret', 'jinx us', 'obsess', 'second-guess'], **said the girl most** ['ardently', 'rationally', 'seriously']. **The** ['diaries', 'letters', 'lists', 'ships logs'] **she kept constitute the entirety of the** ['knowledge', 'evidence', 'proof', 'records', 'traces'] **we have left of this** ['impossible', 'implausible', 'improbable'] **voyage toward** ['the edge of the earth', 'the fountain of youth'].

For discussion:

1. This poem is meant to be read on a computer screen, featuring text that changes every time you re-load the browser as well as various images that complement the narrative. How does the poem's format as a screen-based work influence the way you might read it?
2. When loaded on screen, the poem's text is generated in part by a computer program that the poet helped write. If computers continue to replace books as primary modes of publication and distribution, would you recommend that all poets and literary artists in general learn how to code?
3. Printed together on a page, each of the sentences introduces a choice of phrases to complete it. How do you choose which phrase to use when reading the poem? Do you feel some choices work better than others or are they all equal?

4. How strong a role does a reader have in determining a poem's overall meaning?
5. How does the poem's theme of travelling relate to writing?
6. How does a poet know when her poem is finished?

Writing prompts:

1. Create a neologism (a new word or expression of your own that has never been used before). Construct a definition of the word, including examples of its usage and then compose a poem that features your neologism in its title.
2. Cut a single sheet of paper into 14 squares. On 4 of the squares write down either an article and noun pairing of your choice (e.g., "The dog;" "A girl;" "A flock of geese") or a single pronoun (e.g., "he," "they"). Choose another 4 blank squares and write down a verb or verb phrase on each one, using different tenses (e.g., "was talking;" "is burping;" "swam"). On the remaining 6 squares, add either a preposition or an adverb (e.g., "when;" "because;" or "quickly;" "colourfully"). Toss the squares together in a bag and randomly choose one at a time, placing them next to each other in a single row. Once you have completed the row, read it out aloud. Break the row into 4 different lines of your choice to compose a new poem.
3. Find your current location using a GPS enabled program (like Google Maps) on your computer or smart phone. Choose four or five nearby locations and compose a poem that narrates a journey from one place to the next.
4. Type a location (a town or street name or county or country) of your choice into the Google Images search engine using any browser, and choose three interesting images the search engine finds for you. Compose a poem that links each image together according to a single theme or issue.
5. Find three paragraphs from a story or novel or magazine article you consider personally valuable. Parse out and then copy all the nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs from the paragraphs into four separate lists. Compose a poem building lines based entirely on the terms contained in your lists. Feel free to add functional words like articles and prepositions to help the lines flow well grammatically, but try to use only the nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs taken from the original texts.

(Notes prepared by Andrew Klobucar)