

## AN OCEAN OF STATIC

J.R. Carpenter is a Canadian-born, UK-based artist, writer, performer, researcher, and maker of maps, zines, books, poetry, short fiction, long fiction, non-fiction, and non-linear, intertextual, hypermedia, and computer-generated narratives. Her pioneering works of digital literature have been exhibited, published, performed, and presented in journals, galleries, museums and festivals around the world. She is a winner of the CBC Quebec Writing Competition, the QWF Carte Blanche Quebec Award, the Expozine Alternative Press Award for Best English Book, the Dot Award for Digital Literature, and the New Media Writing Prize.

[luckysoap.com](http://luckysoap.com)



# An Ocean of Static

J.R. Carpenter

Penned in the Margins

LONDON

PUBLISHED BY PENNED IN THE MARGINS  
Toynbee Studios, 28 Commercial Street, London E1 6AB  
[www.pennedinthemargins.co.uk](http://www.pennedinthemargins.co.uk)

All rights reserved  
© J.R. Carpenter 2018

The right of J.R. Carpenter to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patent Act 1988.

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Penned in the Margins.

First published 2018

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ International

ISBN  
978-1-908058-46-1

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

## CONTENTS

NOTE TO THE READER

LEGEND

<i>Once Upon a Tide</i>	13
<i>Notes on the Voyage of Owl and Girl</i>	21
<i>There He Was, Gone.</i>	35
<i>Instructions and Notes Very Necessary and Needful to Be Observed in the Purposed Voyage for Discovery of Cathay Eastwards</i>	45
<i>Ten Short Talks About Islands... and by Islands I Mean Paragraphs</i>	99
<i>TRANS.MISSION [A.DIALOGUE]</i>	115
<i>Etheric Ocean</i>	119
<i>Along the Briny Beach</i>	135
SOURCE/CODE	155
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	157



# An Ocean of Static

*The static's like the sound of thinking. Not of any single person thinking, nor even a group thinking, collectively. It's bigger than that, wider — and more direct. It's like the sound of thought itself, its hum and rush.*

TOM MCCARTHY, C



in memory of Rose Krauss  
first daughter across

## NOTE TO THE READER

This book is made of other books. The poems in this book are composed of facts, fictions, fragments, and codes collected from accounts of voyages undertaken over the past 2,340 years or so, into the North Atlantic, in search of the Northwest Passage, and beyond, into territories purely imaginary.

These poems are intended to be read on the page and to serve as scripts for the live performance of a body of web-based works. They retain traces of the syntax and grammar of code languages.

## LEGEND

// stage direction

#{variable}

['argument']

narrative

voices

are separated

by indentation

// a voice is followed by a break



# Once Upon a Tide

// To be read under cover of  
// ['canvas', 'oilskin', 'tarp',  
// 'half-light', 'shadow', 'shelter',  
// 'fog', 'gloom', 'murk', 'new moon'].

Once upon a ['high', 'spring', 'slack', 'neap'] tide we ['drifted', 'coasted', 'slid', 'slipped', 'tacked'] past a ['bay', 'beach', 'cape', 'cove', 'dune', 'lagoon'], our ship ['brought us hither', 'a brave vessel', 'tight and yar and bravely rigged', 'most strangely landed', 'so near the bottom run'].

On the ['lower', 'main', 'middle', 'poop', 'side', 'quarter'] deck two ['old', 'young', 'slim'] ['friends', 'boatswains', 'sailors'] ['hunched', 'perched', 'crouched', 'sat'] ['mending nets', 'baiting lines', 'spinning yarns', 'twisting tales']. From their ['accents', 'apparel', 'dress', 'gestures', 'looks', 'movements'] I ['guessed', 'gathered', 'suspected', 'assumed'] that ['they', 'both', 'the pair', 'the two of them'] had ['been born', 'come', 'hailed', 'sailed', 'journeyed'] from ['braver', 'better known', 'far', 'fairer', 'gentler'] shores, ['clearly', 'surely', 'obviously'] none so ['barren', 'bleak', 'harsh', 'haunted', 'wicked', 'wild'] as these.

As the bells rang for ['morning', 'forenoon', 'first dog'] watch the ['quieter', 'slighter'] one said:

['We are oppressed with travel.', 'We are all sea-swallowed', 'our garments drenched.', 'The sea mocks our frustrated

search.', 'Every drop of water sears against us.', 'The sea, mounting, dashes the fire out.', 'A thousand furlongs of sea', 'the washing of ten tides.', 'The still-closing waters', 'will shortly fill the reasonable shore.', 'They hoist us to cry to the sea', 'the last of our sea-sorrow.', 'I would have sunk the sea within the earth', 'plunged in the foaming brine', 'the ooze of the salt deep.', 'I shall no more to sea.', 'The sea cannot drown me.', 'I am standing water.']

['One bell', 'Two bells', 'Two bells sounded, a pause, one bell', 'Two bells sounded, a pause, two bells', 'Two bells sounded, a pause, two bells, pause, one bell', 'Two bells sounded, a pause, two bells, pause, two bells', 'Two bells sounded, a pause, two bells, pause, two bells, pause, one bell', 'Two bells, a pause, two bells, pause, two bells, pause, two bells'].

In the ['near', 'middle', 'faint', 'far'] distance the ['bulk', 'hulk', 'ghost', 'shadow', 'vision'] of an island loomed. The ['fairer', 'slower', 'sharper'] one ['leaned', 'gestured', 'peered', 'pointed'] in this direction.



After ['a pause', 'a sigh', 'the bells', 'some time', 'what seemed an eternity] the other replied:

['I am king of this country.', 'This fearful country!', 'I could recover the shore.', 'But is this not near shore?', 'How came we ashore?', 'Unto these yellow sands.', 'Come alive to land.', 'Have you no mouth by land?', 'Here shall I die ashore.', 'Here in this island,', 'We lie in an odd angle, arms in a sad knot.', 'This island will not let you believe certain things.', 'Be not afraid, this island is full of noises.', 'The folly of this island!', 'Most opportune place.']

isle:                    '#{isle}',

[ ['Enter like a water-nymph', 'Enter playing and singing', 'Solemn and strange music', 'Enter several strange shapes', 'Gentle actions of salutation', 'A quaint device', 'Soft music', 'Solemn music', 'Enter divers Spirits in shape of dogs and hounds', 'They sing', 'Song', 'A strange, hollow, and confused noise', 'A noise of hunters heard', 'A cry within', 'A frantic gesture', 'A tempestuous noise of thunder and lightning heard', 'Enter a Shipmaster', 'Enter a boatswain', 'Enter Mariners wet' ] ].

['Come', 'Open your mouth', 'A word', 'O, but one word', 'O, wonder', 'O, defend me', 'Doth thy other mouth call me?', 'Monstrous', 'Mercy', 'Mercy on us', 'Alack, for mercy', 'Fury', 'Silence', 'Why, I said nothing!', 'Ha, ha', 'Oh ho', 'Hark', 'Here', 'A most strange story', 'The story of my life', 'Please you, draw near', 'What cheer?', 'How now?', 'All lost', 'Away'] the ['leaner', 'meaner', 'stronger'] one ['croaked', 'spoke', 'whispered', 'exclaimed']. Would you that soon the ['flush', 'half', 'hurricane'] deck be ['standing', 'drowning', 'drenched'] in ['cold', 'mist', 'magic']?

['The strangeness of this business.', 'These are not natural events.', 'I raised the tempest.', 'I called forth the mutinous winds.', 'I bedimmed the noontide sun.', 'I put the wild waters in this roar.', 'A plague upon this howling!', 'Oh, the dreadful thunderclaps!', 'The fire and cracks of sulphurous roaring.', 'Run upon the sharp wind.', 'wound the wind.', 'a mind to sink', 'It is foul weather in us all.']

'The ['sea sorrow', 'mist', 'tempest'] by that ['island', 'hour', 'tide', 'time', 'watch'] was ['certainly', 'clearly', 'unquestionably'] ['uncommon', 'unnatural', 'unsettled', 'grim'], but was that any ['help', 'use'], that ['kind', 'sort',

'type'] of answer? The ['bizarre', 'awkward', 'odd', 'strange']  
ness of their ['speech', 'exchange', 'yarn', 'narration'] put a  
['cold', 'heavy', 'helpless', 'listless', 'restless']ness in me. In  
the ['foul', 'frigid', 'humid', 'heavy', 'salt'] air a ['bolt rope',  
'cable', 'cuddy lamp', 'riding light', 'lantern'] ['creaked',  
'groaned', 'swayed', 'listed']. Under cover of ['canvas',  
'murk', 'shadow', 'shelter'] I ['loitered', 'crouched',  
'sat', 'stooped']. Long I ['listened', 'waited', 'watched',  
'wondered'] ['closely', 'quietly', 'keenly'].

[ [ 'Exit.', 'Exeunt.', 'They vanish.' ] ]



# Notes on the Voyage of Owl and Girl

// This is a work of fiction.  
// Frequent references to actual events,  
// persons, and texts are entirely intentional.

// The Voyage.

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', 'shipshape', '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'].

// The notes.

*May 7<sup>th</sup>*

departed from Dartmouth

on board  
unmoored  
unhomed

*June 15<sup>th</sup>*

mightily pestered with ice and snow

don't fret  
sea wet  
mist and haze  
come inland  
come hell or high water

uncomfortable  
untranslatable

come home sick  
come house wreck

come sea wrack and ruin  
strewn ashore

*June 29<sup>th</sup>*

no hope of landing

a company of isles  
full of fair sounds

silence  
listen

the sea void of ice  
the land untroubled with snow

an ocean of static  
an ocean of noise

within the sounds we sent our boats

beeps  
blips

tongue slips  
loose lips  
sink ships

within the snowy mountains  
earth and grass such as our moor  
and waste grounds of England

a plant of the borage family  
sea lung wart  
leaves with an oyster-like flavour

*July 17<sup>th</sup>*

we fell upon a most strange quantity of ice

far flung  
low slung  
sea lung

we supposed it to be land

a frozen tide  
a breath suspended

we coasted this mass

impassable impossible impenetrable  
neither land nor sea nor vapour

our shrouds, ropes, and sails frozen  
compassed with ice

*August 2<sup>nd</sup>*

much troubled with a fly which is called mosquito

*August 15<sup>th</sup>*

here we had great hope of a through passage

legends warn of rip tides  
shallows  
shoals  
reefs  
ridges  
spits  
bars  
stones

this land is nothing in sight but isles

cracks beneath the surface  
hydrothermal vents

*August 19<sup>th</sup>*

it began to snow

wind lift  
spin drift

all night with foul weather

gale blown  
spray sown  
storm seeds

*August 20<sup>th</sup>*

we bare in with the land

avoid a void inked-in  
where sea monsters swim

*August 28<sup>th</sup>*

in this place we continued

beware  
be where  
be here  
here be dragons

*September 1<sup>st</sup>*

six miles by guess into the country

into the ether

this place yieldith  
great store of birds  
at the harbour mouth  
great store of cod

*September 6<sup>th</sup>*

purposed to depart

post date  
press here

press on

presently let slip our cables

*September 11<sup>th</sup>*

a fair westnorthwest wind

spoon drift

moon lifts

we departed with trust

questions

chart answers

sound fathoms

compass bearings

shaping our course

mid-ocean smoke

a sudden sulphurous odour



October 4<sup>th</sup>

I have now experience of much  
of the northwest part of the world

a column of bubbles  
tunnels up from the deep

- - - / - - - . - . - . - . - . - . - . - . /  
.. ... / - - - / . - . - . - . - . - . - .  
.. - . . - . - . - / - - - / - . - . - -  
. - - / - .... - - / .. - . / . - . / . -  
. - . - . . . . . / .. - . - . - . -  
- - . - . / ... . - / - .... . - . /  
.. ... / - - - . . / .. ... . - . - .  
- . / .. - . - . - . / . - - .... .. -  
. - . .... / - . - - - . - / .... . - -  
. / ... . - / .. - . - - - - / - .... .  
.. - . - - . - .