

Process: The Project

Although some schools of literature rather look down on eraure poems, they actually have a rather interesting and erudite history.

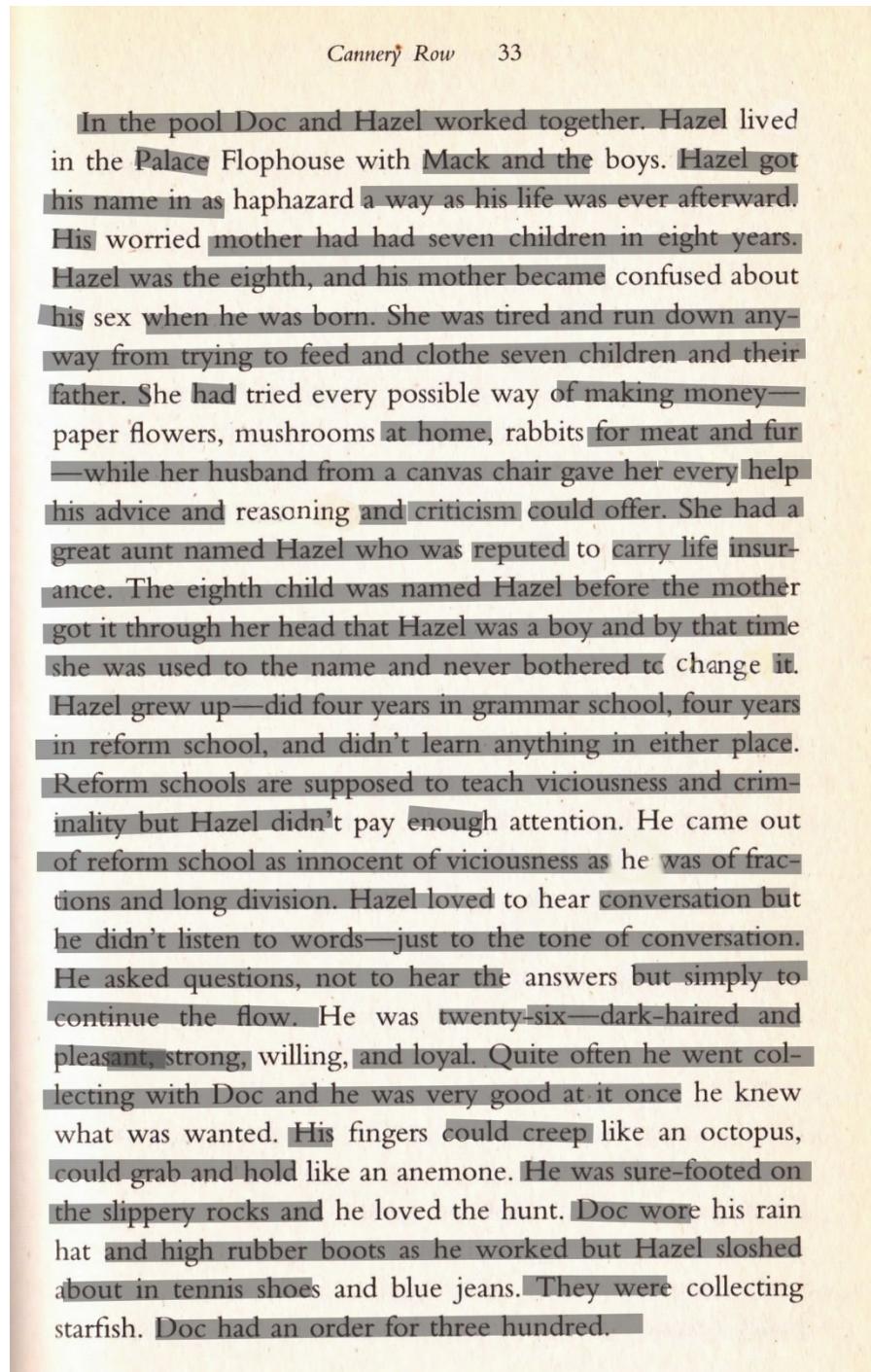
“Poet Erin Dorney identified six styles of erasure poetry: blackout; crossout, crossing out words to create a new poem; computer, using computer software to add or remove lines; cut out, using a knife to cut words out of paper; covered up, covering up the original text with another material (paper, sand, rice, etc.); and retyped, retyping the original text to make it look like a conventional, traditional poem, leaving space where the original text used to be. An early appearance of erasure poetry was in 1965 when artist and poet Doris Cross created “Dictionary Columns,” in which she used painting and drawings on a dictionary to create poems. Other examples of erasure poetry include “Freeland: An Erasure” by Leigh Sugar; renowned poet Tracy K. Smith’s poems “Declaration,” which stems from the Declaration of Independence, and “The Greatest Personal Privation,” from notes and letters about slaveholding; and M. NourbeSe Philip’s Zong!, which uses court documents about the 18th-century slave ship that threw more than 120 enslaved Africans overboard in order to collect insurance money. (Source: Poetry Foundation).

But one of my favorite erasure poets is Tom Phillips. His manuscript *A Humument* is his treatment of *A Human Document*, a small yellow Victorian novel by W. H. Mallock. Phillips began “treating” the book with “painting, painting, collage, and cut-up techniques” that obscure a majority of Mallock’s original words. At first Phillips “merely scored out unwanted words with ink leaving some (often too many) to stand and the rest more or less readable beneath rapidograph hatching.” Over time, his methods evolved and became more in-depth, even going so far as to collage a photo of Mallock’s grave onto one of the pages. He employed numerous methods, but all of those methods focused on adding something over physically removing part of the book through erasing.

This piece is part of my hybrid manuscript entitled: ‘Little Fish, Uncanned’ which is a response to ‘Cannery Row,’ by John Steinbeck. Each poem is an erasure of one single page of this brilliant novel, with each poem placed on a background of my original art, whether digital photo-art or some other medium.

Process: Erasure to find the poem

Through the process of whittling away the forest to reveal the tree, the poem reveals itself to me.



Process – The Poem

Once the poem has revealed itself to me through the process of whittling away the forest to reveal the tree, I writ it out as itself, seeing how its presence should look upon the page. In the instance of “the seeker”, the poem also reveals a process: the process of finding out who one really is, the process of search and revelation.

the seeker

erasure of *Cannery Row*
by John Steinbeck p.33

lived in the flophouse with boys,
haphazard, worried;

confused
about sex.

he tried every possible way: paper
flowers, mushrooms, rabbits—

reasoning? to change.
pay attention:

he came out
to hear answers—

he was willing, knew
what was wanted: fingers

like an octopus, like an anemone.
he loved the hunt,

his rain hat and blue jeans
collecting starfish.

Process – The Artwork

Once the poem's complete, I decide what artwork will work best as its background, whether art from scratch or a collage of my own photography, which I then modify to suit the topic.

In this case, I decided to go with a photograph of a pair of sneakers someone had randomly stuck on a pole – a perfect metaphor to me for a journey. I dabble with various digital tools to develop and move each piece wherever it is leading, but I never use Photoshop; I prefer a more organic approach.



Once I'm satisfied with the artwork and the size is adjusted to suit, I paste in the lines of the poem.



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