



# A Little White Shadow

*Mary Ruefle*

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Selectively painting over much of a forgotten nineteenth-century book, Ruefle's ninth publication brings new meaning to an old story. What remains visible is delicate poetry: artfully rendered, haunted by its former self, yet completely new. A high-quality replica of the original aged, delicate book in which Ruefle "erased" the text, this book will appeal to fans of poetry as well as visual art.

**Mary Ruefle** is the author of *Madness, Rack, and Honey: Collected Lectures*, a finalist for the 2012 National Book Critics Circle Award in criticism (Wave Books, 2012), and *Selected Poems* (Wave Books, 2010), winner of the William Carlos Williams Award. She has published ten other books of poetry, a book of prose (*The Most of It*, Wave Books, 2008), and a comic book, *Go Home and Go to Bed!*, (Pilot Books/Orange Table Comics, 2007); she is also an erasure artist, whose treatments of nineteenth century texts have been exhibited in museums and galleries, and include the publication of *A Little White Shadow* (Wave Books, 2006). Ruefle is the recipient of numerous honors, including an Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Guggenheim fellowship, a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship, and a Whiting Award. She lives in Bennington, Vermont, and teaches in the MFA program at Vermont College.

### A Little White Shadow Details

Date : Published May 1st 2006 by Wave Books

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Author : Mary Ruefle

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## From Reader Review A Little White Shadow for online ebook

### Lou Last says

very simply,  
"It's always noon with me.  
pale, and  
deformed but very interesting,

sorrows of  
a little Quietist,

\*

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### Nate D says

As someone who has occupied myself carefully exacto-ing words out of old books until only a strange residue remains, I can immediately appreciate this weird little book, created from redacting content from a short preexisting story of the same name until only a dizzy, unfamiliar poetry remains, sometimes funny, sometimes wise, often surreal. Not sure if this actually qualifies as Oulipo, but I found it in the Proteus Gowans Oulipo bookstore, which is good enough for me. Right next to Nets, a similar book created by bolding scattered bits of Shakespearean sonnets.

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### Evan says

eh

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### Moon Captain says

for me to review this would do it a disservice. it silenced me and intrigued me. I came back the next day, to read it again.

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### Kelsey Williams says

A Little White Shadow by Mary Ruefle

A Little White Shadow by Mary Ruefle has to be the strangest book of poetry I have ever read. The book itself is rather small and when you open it up each page was filled with text, but looks to have white-out covering a majority of the words. This is extremely creative, it makes the few words left stand out and look very important. I believe many times poets use too many words, in my mind poems should be to the point and if you want the poem to be short there should be no extra fluff words, and although unordinary I think Ruefle

is brilliant because any words that were not imperative to her poem she just whited-out leaving only the heart of the poem.

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### **Sylvia says**

Mary Ruefle's little book is aptly named, or has an aptly borrowed title. I was enchanted at first by the size, the layout, the fact that each page looks as though it has been scanned right from the original, white out mess and all. Beyond the design however, I felt a little let down at first. Each poem was such a small snippet, almost a little forced into the text that was there, or forced into sounding too "pretty" with the options given. Also, I kept wanting the poems to continue from page to page, but each one felt very separate, making my first experience a little unnerving until I got used to it. Another thing I found dissatisfying? That I couldn't find any information about the original book that Ruefle covered over... However, the more I looked at the book and the more I read through it the more I came to terms with it, and began to enjoy Ruefle's style. Many of the pieces are beautiful snapshots, tiny frozen images that seem as though they are pulled out of and preserved from the larger text. At some points Ruefle even shows a nice sense of humor which is welcome in an object that seems to take itself rather seriously otherwise. The sparse distinct images create a lonely almost melancholic atmosphere, as though they are all that is left, faded and falling apart, in a photo album from all that ago. All in all I enjoyed the read and rereads, and the very idea of erasure and borrowing a text is an attractive one that I hadn't considered much until now. I know debate will rage on how much of her own work was put into simply whitening out another book, but for me it took creative energy to come up with the idea and to choose the appropriate words. This little book is elegant and intriguing.

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### **Caleb says**

at last standing before  
two donkeys  
stopped and spoke with them.

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### **Sean A. says**

The erasure lends to revisiting just as much if not more so, than a typical poetry text. Re-looked at this after reading an essay-poem of hers about her erasure technique. The words chosen and the technique itself are haunting. The shadow is like a ghost, but a shadow. The white is the white-out that removes much of the original text.

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### **Anne says**

I'm assuming, since the original Little White Shadow was copyrighted in 1889, that Ruefle didn't run into any copyright issues with what she chose to do. Honestly, my first reaction to the book was one of visceral horror that someone would deface a book in that manner. Once I got over my shock, I began to admire the idea, and I think it's something I'd like to try myself (perhaps with an obnoxiously famous poem like "The Wasteland"). In order to make sense of the poem, I found myself copying out the non-whited out words, which made an interesting, if occasionally nonsensical, poetic text. There were some beautiful lines:

"exhausted with the intensity of hope" and "autumn had no particular talents but genius" were among my favorites. All in all, an interesting and unique reading experience.

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### **Alyson Hagy says**

In the small realm of recent books that feature erasures, A LITTLE WHITE SHADOW is memorable for its design and delicacy. The production of Ruefle's redactions by Wave Books is nearly as lyrical as Ruefle's work with the strange and potent 19th century text. I was delighted by Ruefle's poetry--both its originality and the way her sculpted lines riff on and appropriate some of the Gothic conventions of the original novel. A LITTLE WHITE SHADOW (and the book truly is little) is a delight to hold, to leaf through, to read, re-read and share.

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### **Laura says**

I love these. They are delicate. They are modest. They are like little treasures you find in other people's desk drawers, or the bits and pieces that collect on the edge of tidal pools.

Timing is everything, of course. When I picked up this book, I had just finished reading *The Children's Book* (a novel of the Victorian era by A.S. Byatt), and wasn't ready to leave that world yet. The pamphlet Ruefle draws her "erasures" from - written by Emily Malbone Morgan - was published in 1889, so boom! I'm smack back in the wonder of the age.

I love the whole idea of "erasures" - whittling away the bulk of an existing text until what's left is your own. It reminds me of wood-cut printing, where all the work we do is on the part we don't see, carving out the negative space. There are strange and beautiful possibilities lurking in the yellowed pages of public domain books. I love the spatial elements introduced into the poems by this process of erasure, so that which is whited out still has presence and weight.

Here is a link to some of her erasures, courtesy of the Poetry Foundation:

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archi...>

This was my first introduction to Mary Ruefle's work. These poems are like an amuse-bouche - a perfect little bite to excite the taste buds. I will definitely seek out her other books.

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### **Susan says**

A beautiful little book of erasure poems. Ruefle is a master at this form. This book is pocket-sized and has the feel of an art book.

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### **S. says**

Wonderful and surprising and often very funny. I adored this book. When I received the book and saw how slim and small it was, I was like, what? I paid \$16 for this? But by the end I was ready to surrender much more than that. It brought me so much pleasure.

Found poetry is an acquired taste so I realize this book and others like it aren't for everyone. I recently told a poet acquaintance over dinner that I was writing found poetry and she could not disguise her distaste. Not that she tried. Smile. Oh well. Five years ago, it seemed an odd pursuit to me, too.

Anyway, Mary Ruefle takes a 41-page pamphlet from 1889 and whites out most of the text to find a short poem on each page, some as short as six words. It's as if the constraint has freed her. The results seem reckless and weird and are often very funny. The reader is still looking at the original pamphlet but it has been smeared with white-out fluid, somewhat sloppily to be honest, but I found that part of the charm.

One of my favorites, without its 'format,' goes:

*seven centuries of sobbing  
gathered in the twilight  
and had their pages  
wandered through*

Another is the short:

*It  
was my duty to keep  
the piano filled with roses.*

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## **Ellie says**

Beautiful and beautifully presented book of erasure poetry. A major work. Amazing that she found the words/phrases inside another text and made them her own. The book itself is also a work of art.

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## **Deniss says**

Buena idea. Poemas bonitos (¿poema?), aunque me gustaría leer otra cosa de la autora, algo más "ella" y menos... esto. No sabría cuántas estrellitas darle así que lo dejo en blanco.

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