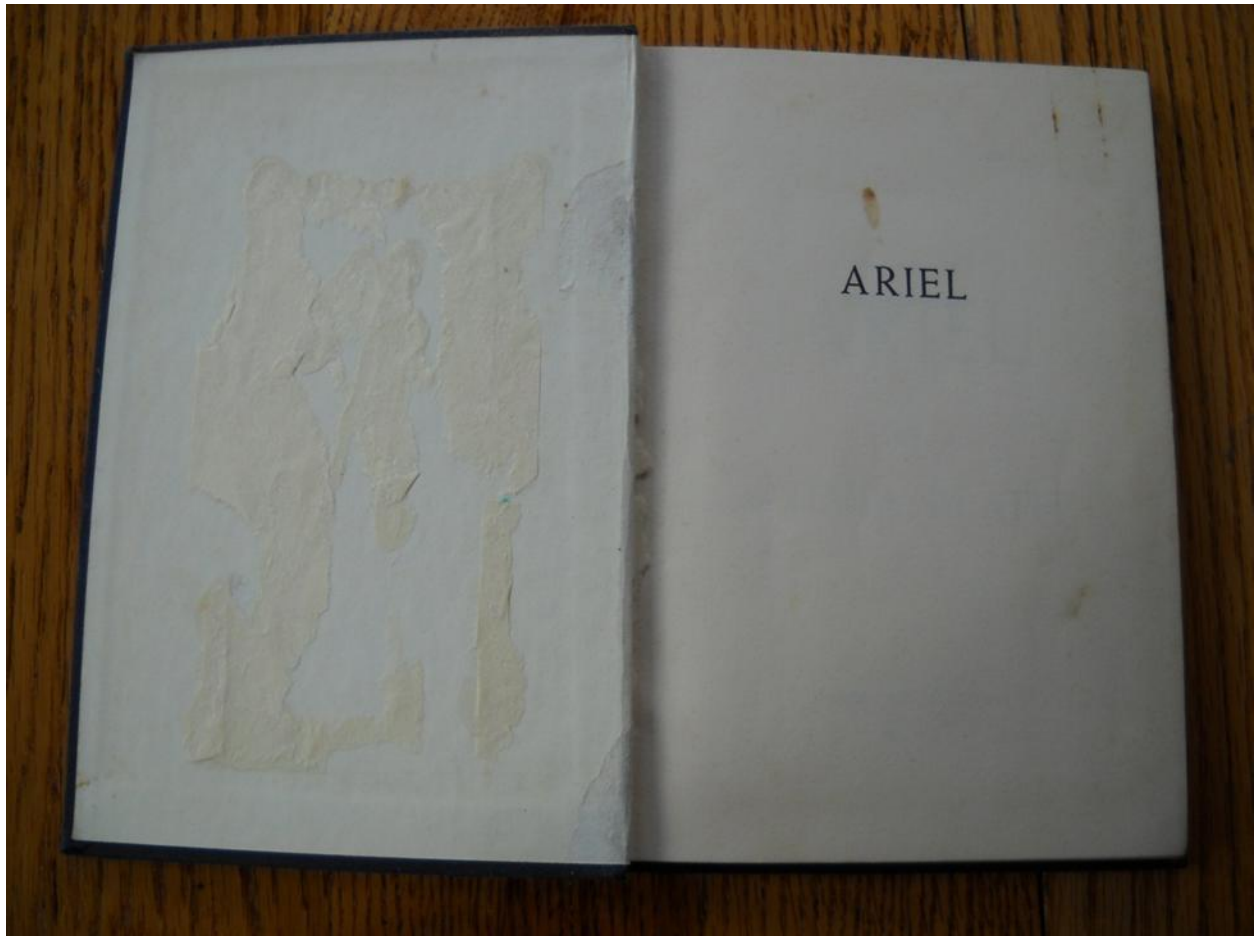


*Ariel was the first book I ever stole*

Anne Gorrick

I still have that same volume of *Ariel*. I looked at it recently. Apparently my guilt at stealing it made me tear out the yellowing library card and its pocket. But it's still stamped with the name of my high school. Embarrassing to say, I've only stolen books from libraries – it was exciting at the time to do this during times of immense boredom. It broke the stifling air of being 15-years-old.



The wound in the book.

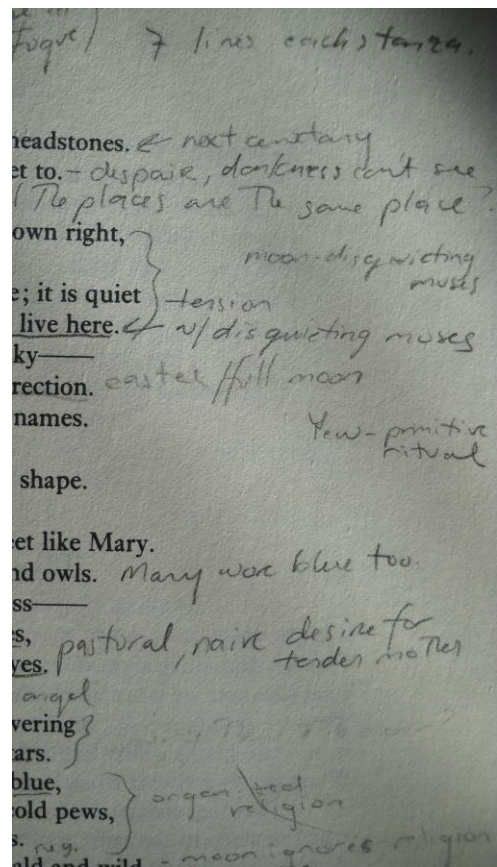
The wound in the book / The wounded book / the winded / the wound

*I was supposed to be having the time of my life (The Bell Jar 2)*

The figure was slumped against a high school library bookcase, facing another wall of books. There was a quiet and calm to the dust. The old black coat was cashmere, way too big but warm, probably cast off from an estate. Someone was dead, but it was keeping her warm. Probably there was something to flee, which is why she ended up on the floor, back against books, knees up against her chest, scanning the shelves. For something. Maybe it was after her close friend flipped out in class because of a bad reaction to some pain medication, and then ended up in a locked psych ward because of the way the drugs unraveled her.

I had cut off most of my hair.

The thin black book on the shelf looked cindery and brittle. *Ariel*. When she took it off the shelf, it fell open to "The Hanging Man," and she thought of her friend, she thought of the pack of tarot cards that seemed important (as it turned out, falsely). She really had no idea what the poem meant, only that the language perfectly mirrored the weather in her buildings, the fragile cloud formations in the school hallways, the brutal fleshcut graffiti that marked her days.



*Barely daring to breathe or Achoo. ("Daddy")*



I had to buy tissues recently on one of my food shopping expeditions. There were these boxes stamped with "ah-choos" all over them. I bought them to have some Plath tissues in the house. It occurs to me now that I would never use this word in a poem because it is too Plathian. Apparently this has not stopped the Hannaford Food Corporation from using it.



*Both the wolf and the man suffer the wound of their own unspent and misspent energies...*

(<http://www.thetedhughessociety.org/wolfwatching.htm>)



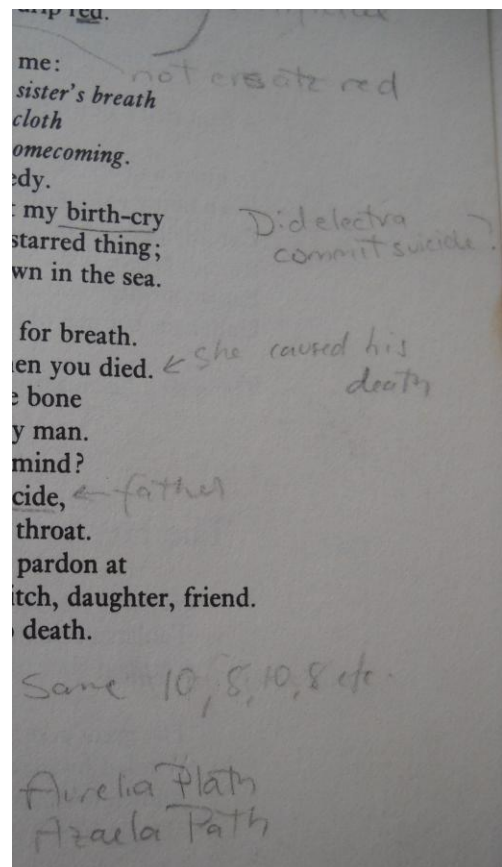
When I went to college, I spent a brief semester at the New School in New York City, and then moved back to the Hudson Valley to attend SUNY New Paltz. There was this annoying and elaborate way to register for classes that involved getting permission first from your advisor. This involved a signature. As an almost sophomore, I wasn't allowed to take "upper level" classes, but those were the ones I really, really wanted to take. So I forged the signature of my advisor, who was a spacy Wilhelm Reich scholar (as well as my parents' neighbor – we heard he had his own orgone accumulator in the backyard), and got myself into a Plath class for seniors. Nobody seemed to notice or mind. Later, for fun, I had the Reichian sign and authorize my final semester's worth of classes. He looked alarmed for a moment because he didn't recognize me.

The professor for my highly prized Plath class, Carley Rees Bogarad, was a thwarted Plath scholar, dashed at every turn by the Plath Estate each time she wanted to quote from something as of yet unpublished. She would write these articles she could never publish and put them in a drawer. It was like the Soviet Union. This was the Spring of 1987. I was 20 years old.

*Where bees, striped black and gold, sleep out the blizzard* ("Electra on Azalea Path")

For our final paper in her class, we each had to choose a different poem and analyze it in ten pages. Once we chose our poem, we made a class trip to Smith College so we could look at the drafts of the poem we had chosen in the Plath Library papers to how it was constructed. For someone who was about to be a poet, that was an invaluable exercise for me.

My teacher died before she knew this detail of Plath's death: that Plath put a small cloth under her head to cushion her cheek against the oven grate. My teacher once said that even her lesbian friends found Hughes irresistibly hot after hearing him read.



I wrote my final paper on "Electra on Azalea Path." I was too young at the time to write about the later poems. I was almost finished with sleeping out my own personal blizzards. It would take a few more years.



*Vija Celmins. Untitled (Big Sea #2). 1969. Graphite on acrylic ground on paper. 33 1/2 x 44 in.*

*dance dance dance dance dance to the radio* ("Transmission" - Joy Division, a briefly-lived British post-punk band from the late 1970s. Lead singer Ian Curtis committed suicide in 1980)  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f\\_zLxPNUIqw&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_zLxPNUIqw&feature=related)

There are things about my life that are very overlappy with Plath's – the early false academic promise, the early educational rigor, the way none of it mattered to the ocean. In my case, I stepped off the academic train much earlier in order to write.

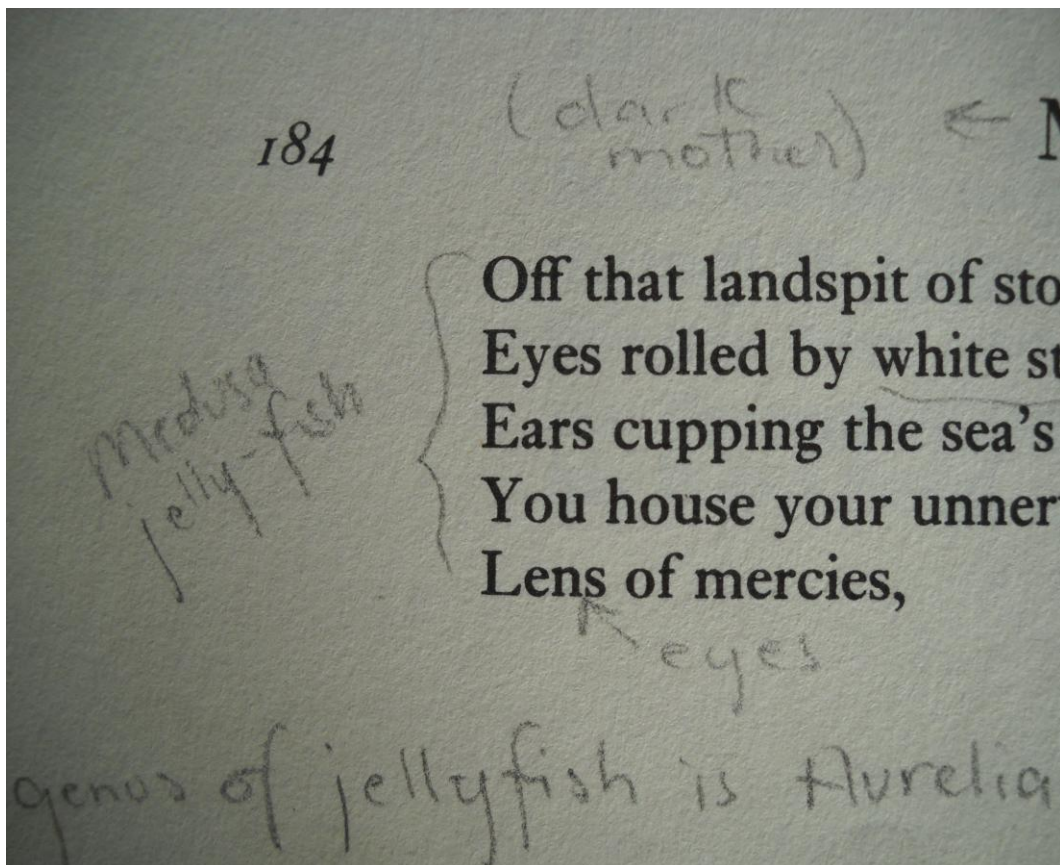
When I was younger, I'd listen to the radio and wonder, "Is this all there is?" It took a long time for my dial to find the end of that numbered line inside my little blue transistor radio during



summers on the Jersey Shore. Such a relief to find later that *Band on the Run* was not the full extent of 1970s summers.

Plath was a hint at what might lie at the far ends of my poetic transistor dial. But being a poet pre-internet meant that it took a long time to find the work that would really "set me going like a fat gold watch." Finding Susan Howe's *Singularities*, work by Mei Mei Bergenbrusse, Leslie Scalapino, Robert Kelly, Michael Palmer, and Gustaf Sobin made my work possible later. Plath was the hint though.

I am happy to say that there is one part of Plath narratives that has died for me: the search for a poetic voice. That this died has allowed my work to become much bigger, since it's no longer hinged on the self. Hughes has this theory (promoted also by some biographers) that Plath had a first and false self who wrote false poetry. When her false self burned off, it left a true self, a true voice worth the burning. That poetry should be a cornering of the false self by the true self until a

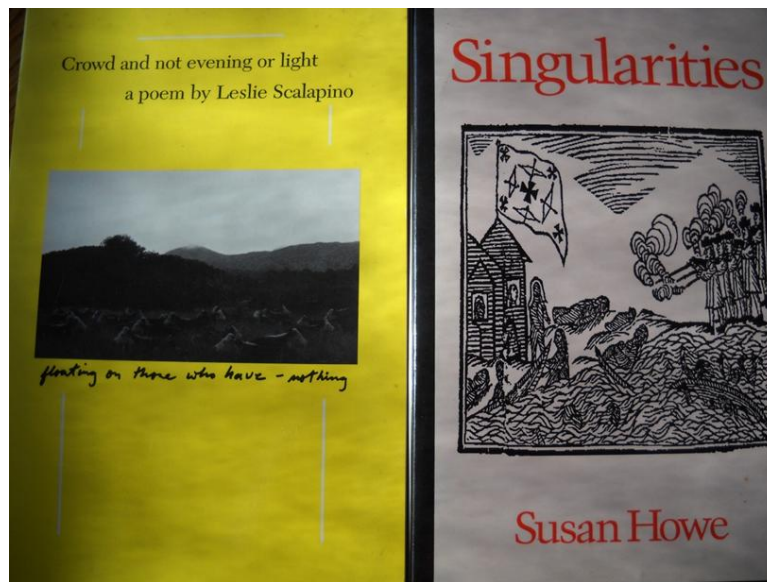


essential  
voice  
happens...wel  
l, any poet  
would kill  
themselves  
too if they  
believed that.  
It's a form of  
*suttee*, a ritual  
killing.

While it looks  
like a  
poetically  
quaint idea  
now, it rabbit-

trapped her. When I find my own work now sounding too "Gorrick," I start down another rabbit hole. The entirety of Plath's final work acted as a spoken spell for her final trap. There was no other way out. I'm so very grateful and glad to write in a time when mythomaning isn't the only way into the poem. The self becomes a deadly, boring matrix from which to begin. Deadly when it's the only one. When the self began to bore me, I turned to visual art as a way to extend my vocabulary. The Plathian voice ultimately killed Plath. Her self killed herself.

While I still love her work, I don't read her much now. I can't because my own work starts to sound like her. Had she lived, I often wonder what she would have done next. She was probably too smart and vibrant to languish as a Quietist poet. It's fun to think about would have happened had she embraced L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E once she tired of the self as beginning.



While I worked on this project, I was also working on a bunch of my own poems. I started noting lines that seemed Plathian:

Mention French poppies - *A poem is a small thing that looks like heaven in the yellow pages*

A museum of indications - *The Crocodile Inn*



It is black. Use black - *The Crocodile Inn*

The body performs distances - *His body did not want her body to be an activity for preschoolers*

The sign that makes up the boy / his possibilities in terrible detail - *The Crocodile Inn*

The stars will declare who you are – *A spell to make someone read and write like a vampire*