***Sylvia Plath***

P1 Intro

* Plath’s poetry is often highly subjective, focusing on her inner self, feelings and thoughts – even when she appears to be writing about the outside world
* Uses her immediate surroundings as a metaphor for her feelings and ideas
* Intrigued by her ability to transform realistic objects and scenes into consistent sets of metaphors for her thoughts and emotions
* These concrete objects are clearly realised by her skilful use of language and imagery
* Invited me into her thoughts
* These are the outpourings of a troubled mind
* Self-definition central to her work

P2 Black Rook

* Plath sees inspiration as transcendent – it will announce itself to her from the external world
* Witness Plath exploring her own depression
* Exhausted and aimless **“Not seek any more in the desultory weather some design... this season of fatigue”**
* Her poetic landscapes embody associations between scene and mood
* The mute sky may grant her the **“back talk”** she desires
* Her mood may transform by a flash of inspiration

P3

* Language includes a mixture of colloquial and formal
* Slang expressions used adjacent to archaic words
* Biblical words **“hallowed”**, **“bestowing”**, **“portent”**
* Contrast strongly with every day sound of **“I can’t honestly complain”**
* Creates great diversity in poem

P4

* Symbolism plays key role: **“A wet black rook arranging and rearranging his feathers in the rain”**
* Symbol of how the **“minor light”** of life can shine suddenly from banal objects
* Rook can **“so shine as to seize my senses”**
* I believe the rook is a ruse she chooses in order to instil patience in herself

P5 Morning Song

* Plath’s images are remarkable for clarity and unexpectedness
* Highly concrete, drawn from ordinary things, often catch us unaware
* Differs from other poets
* **“Fat gold watch”** in Morning Song is simple but vivid, witty and unusual
* Description of world as **“draughty** **museum”**  and new babies as **“naked statues”** = unusual
* Forces reader to question Plath’s state of mind
* Suggests a world that has held onto its past, storing events, people, everything that makes up our life
* Not a very comfortable place but perhaps not unsafe for the new **“statue”**
* Use of imagery through MS is effective in contrasting the infants lightness and delicacy and the mother’s clumsiness and heaviness
* Told about baby’s **“moth breath”** and her **“clear vowels rise like balloons”**
* Mother is clumsy as she stumbles, **“cow heavy”** and swathed in a **“floral... Victorian nightgown”**
* Find myself drawn to the musical quality of the poem
* Final image is one of pure colour and happiness (balloons)
* Relationship between mother and child which is neither sentimental/ clichéd
* I think the image of dawn breaking is the mother finally escaping post-natal depression

P6 Elm

* Learn a lot about Plath in Elm
* Succeeds in creating a mindscape rather than a landscape
* Very open and intense poem that reflects feelings that come only from the deepest self
* Articulates her darkest fears in this poem
* Taunting voice of Elm describes some of the nightmarish horrors she knows – nervy, exhausted state
* Wind – a destructively violent force will **“tolerate no by-standing”** causing the elm to shriek – causing Plath herself to shriek
* Depression has taken hold and she admits she has reached the **“bottom”**
* She feels a part of her was always connected to the dark side of life, she transforms into a fearful, petrified being **“incapable of more knowledge”**
* Mentions her madness but dismisses it, saying it was the **“voice of nothing”**
* Message in the poem perhaps- she is warning us that we can turn any situation poisonous by what we do and say
* She has lost all ability to love and we are aware of this
* Terrified of madness deep inside her and terrified of what she might do to herself in a moment of darkness

P7

* It was the directness in her choice of language that struck me moat forcibly on first reading
* **“I know the bottom, she says; I know it with my great tap root”**
* Many lines written in the same unvarnished style
* Plath has created for herself a dark, disturbing and surreal world where love does not exist
* Terrified by **“this dark thing that sleeps in me” “so murderous in its strangle of branches”**
* Poem concludes with a mind that has become inhabited by a dark cry – my perception being that this **“dark cry”** was created in her mind because of her awful fear of being herself

P8 The Arrival of the Bee Box

* Go on to learn more about her self destruction
* Explores a number of themes through a series of rich metaphors
* Poet tries to assert her identity and in doing so tries to take control of the buzzing, maniacal mass which are the bees – her inner daemons
* Box of bees becomes a metaphor for the fertile swarming and potentially destructive chaos that she senses within herself
* Bees = dark thoughts in her subconscious mind
* Takes a strenuous journey into her subconscious in which she finds a mass of conflicting and incoherent messages which she is unable to understand, let alone control
* Her mind is a dark dangerous place yet she is helplessly drawn to it
* The bee box and all it represents both frightens and attracts the speaker **“and I can’t keep away from it”**
* Scared that if she lets the bees (thoughts) out, they will do her harm
* Danger is captured by the sound effects – buzzing, swarming sounds = claustrophobic atmosphere
* Potential for destruction apparent in **“it is like a Roman mob/ Small, taken one by one, but my god, together”**

P9

* However, Plath grows more confident
* Defines the situation and solution with new clarity
* **“I have simply ordered a box of maniacs/ They can be sent back”**
* Here she asserts her own will **“They can die, I need feed them nothing. I am the owner.”**
* As soon as she contemplates killing them she is moved to concern
* She will set them free
* But if Plath risks losing something, she also has something to gain – the feeling of exercising what little power she has in a generous way: **“Tomorrow I will be sweet God/ I will set them free”**
* Note of optimistic triumph in the final line **“The box is only temporary”**
* By taking control, by exercising her poet, Plath may give birth to her unborn self

P10 Concl

* In conclusion, I believe that Plath’s poems have that heart-breaking quality that has made her my acknowledged ‘Queen of Sorrows’
* Her poetry is as deathly as it is impeccable
* It enchants me almost as powerfully as it must have enchanted her