**IOC Preparation: a supplementary handout on some important Plath poetic devices**

**Mood and Atmosphere**: The feeling created by the text.

*Plath Example*: A threatened/threatening mood and atmosphere are created in the last two stanzas of “Hardcastle Crags”, altering the tranquil, even numb and washed-out mood created earlier.

**Tone**: Attitude of the author that comes through the text

*Plath example*: A cruel, unflinching and persecutory tone totally overtakes “Elm” in its last stanza.

**Defamiliarization**: When the author forces the reader to see the familiar in a new, often unsettling perspective.

*Plath example*: In “Cut” the speaker has cut her thumb pretty deeply, but the poem begins “What a thrill – My thumb instead of an onion. The top quite gone”. Odd, we feel, to be placed in a perspective, all of a sudden, in which a cut is a thrill.

**Caesura**: A significant halt (by means of a period) or pause (by means of a colon, semi-colon, question mark, exclamation mark or dash) created in the middle of a line of poetry.

*Plath example*: In “Fever 103” Plath uses a caesura near the bottom of p.198 – “Hurts me as the world hurts God. I am a lantern/” to really bring the reader up short on the startling statement that the speaker is hurt by the addressee’s body as much as God is hurt by the sinful world.

**Lyric Poem**: A type of poem characterized by brevity, compression and the expression of feeling. A poem less concerned with telling a story than with capturing a mood or an idea.

*Plath example*: All the poems in our book are lyric poems, though some may tell more of a “story” than others. “Kindness” or “Sheep in Fog” are short lyrics very much concerned with capturing a mood more than telling a sustained story.

**Tricolon**: A sentence that is made up of three parts, often with ever growing rhetorical power. We could also call this **climactic word order** in **parallel structure**.

*Plath example*: “Contusion” ends on a lethal tricolon, signifying the onset of the final resignation: “The heart shuts, / the sea slides back, / The mirrors are sheeted.”

**Closed Form** vs. **Open Form**: Closed form entails the use of constraining rules/patterns in the poetry such as a rhyme scheme (Plath often allows herself slant rhyme too), a metre of counted syllables (stressed and unstressed), a careful counting of lines (in stanzas etc), a deliberate rhythm. Open form entails **free verse.**

*Plath example*:Certainly “Trio of Love Sonnets (1)” is in careful rhyme with syllables in each line counted (metre): it is therefore closed form. “Balloons” is open form – free verse.

**Sibilance**: Hissing “s” sound repeated for a sonic (often mimetic) effect

*Plath Example*: “In Hardcastle Crags”, “incessant seethe of grasses” captures the sound of hissing wind-gusts through long grasses. We could also call this sort of mimicking a kind of **form-content link**, where the way a line is written mimics what the line is talking about.

**Assonance**: Repeated use of a vowel sound to create a sonic effect.

*Plath example*: In “The Munich Mannequins”, “the blood flood is the flood of love” yields 5 “uh” sounds. “Moon-blued” in “Hardcastle Crags” gives a pair of mellow-sounding “oo” sounds.

**Intertextuality**: When one text consciously borrows from (or dialogues with) another.

Plath example: Just prior to the first spark of their fire, Ted Hughes had written a dynamic poem called “Jaguar”, so Plath coyly, flirtatiously wrote the erotic if conflicted poem “Pursuit” in a sort of response: it’s about an energetic, violent Panther that stalks her.

**Classical Allusion**: reference to Greek and Roman gods/mythology/historical figures.

Plath example: “Face Lift” - “Nude as Cleopatra in my hospital shift” (Cleopatra was Egyptian but lived during the Roman era of Egypt); “Barren Woman”: “I imagine myself with a great public / Mother of a white Nike and several bald-eyed Apollos”.

**Symbols**: when physical things take on a meaning beyond themselves.

Plath examples:

The Moon (also constitutes an image pattern, when repeated imagery forms a recurrent motif and takes on thematic significance)

Colours (as above)

Bees (as above)