

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – 9 MARCH 2021

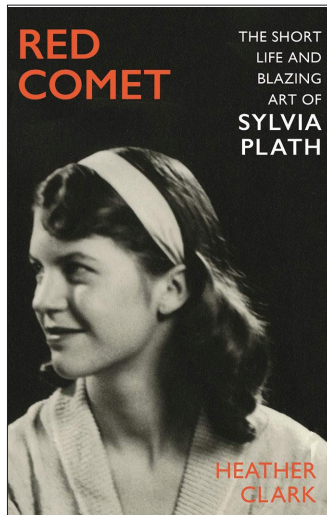
Slightly Foxed



The Biographers' Club  
Supporting, promoting and connecting  
biographers at all levels

ANNOUNCING THE WINNER OF

THE SLIGHTLY FOXED BEST FIRST BIOGRAPHY PRIZE 2020



## Heather Clark

### *Red Comet: The Short Life and Blazing Art of Sylvia Plath*

The first biography of this great and tragic poet that takes advantage of a wealth of new material, this is an unusually balanced, comprehensive and definitive life of Sylvia Plath.

Determined not to read Plath's work as if her every act, from childhood on, was a harbinger of her tragic fate, Heather Clark presents new materials about Plath's scientist father, her juvenile writings, and her psychiatric treatment. Clark evokes a culture in transition in the mid-twentieth century, in the shadow of the atom bomb and the Holocaust, as she explores Plath's world: her early relationships and determination not to become a conventional woman and wife; her conflicted ties to her well-meaning,

widowed mother; her troubles at the hands of an unenlightened mental-health industry; and her Cambridge years and meeting Ted Hughes, a marriage of minds that would change the course of poetry in English.

Clark's clear-eyed sympathy for Hughes, his lover Assia Wevill and other demonized players in the arena of Plath's suicide promotes a deeper understanding of her final days, with their outpouring of first-rate poems. Along with illuminating readings of the poems themselves, Clark's thorough and compassionate research brings us closer than ever to the spirited woman and visionary artist who blazed a trail that still lights the way for poets the world over. (£30 • Jonathan Cape)

*'Red Comet is an astoundingly detailed reappraisal of Sylvia Plath and her influences, and of her relationships with her mother, Ted Hughes and mental illness. Through the exposure of fresh material and a bold critique of the many clichéd interpretations of Plath's life, Heather Clark has brought us a ground-breaking biography of great narrative and perceptive force. This is traditional biography writing at its subtle best: meticulous, erudite, encompassing, based on excellent research, justified by important discoveries and leading us to new thoughts about one of the greatest poets of the twentieth century.'* Alexander Masters, 2020 Prize Judge

### THE WINNER

Heather Clark earned her bachelor's degree in English Literature from Harvard University and her doctorate in English from Oxford University. She is the author of two award-winning books on post-war poetry, *The Grief of Influence: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes* and *The Ulster Renaissance: Poetry in Belfast 1962–1972*. She divides her time between Chappaqua, New York, and Yorkshire, England, where she is Professor of Contemporary Poetry at the University of Huddersfield.

### THE PRIZE

This is the seventh year of the literary quarterly and independent publisher Slightly Foxed's sponsorship of the Biographers' Club **Slightly Foxed Best First Biography Prize**, with a winner's award of £2,500. Previous winners: Jonathan Phillips, *The Life and Legend of the Sultan Saladin*; Bart van Es, *The Cut Out Girl*; Edmund Gordon, *The Invention of Angela Carter*; Hisham Matar, *The Return*; Alan Cumming, *Not My Father's Son*; Claudia Renton, *Those Wild Wyndhams*; Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher*; Thomas Penn, *Winter King*; and Matthew Hollis, *Now All Roads Lead to France*.

## THE JUDGES

Rupert Christiansen, Selina Hastings and Alexander Masters

## THE SHORTLIST

- Heather Clark, *Red Comet: The Short Life and Blazing Art of Sylvia Plath* (Jonathan Cape)
- Hadley Freeman, *House of Glass: The Story and Secrets of a Twentieth-Century Jewish Family* (4th Estate)
- Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Black Spartacus: The Epic Life of Toussaint Louverture* (Allen Lane)
- Shelley Klein, *The See-Through House: My Father in Full Colour* (Chatto & Windus)
- Jonathan Lichtenstein, *The Berlin Shadow: Living with the Ghosts of the Kindertransport* (Scribner)

## SLIGHTLY FOXED

*Slightly Foxed: The Real Reader's Quarterly* and its acclaimed list of classic limited-edition memoirs have become something of an institution in the literary world. Contributors to the magazine have included: Diana Athill, Quentin Blake, Ronald Blythe, Margaret Drabble, Adam Foulds, Melissa Harrison, Michael Holroyd, Amy Liptrot, Penelope Lively, Richard Mabey, Robert Macfarlane, Dervla Murphy, Sarah Perry, Jane Ridley, Christopher Rush, Posy Simmonds, Adam Sisman, Ali Smith and Jacqueline Wilson. The *Slightly Foxed* series of memoirs includes works by: Edward Ardizzone, Roald Dahl, Jennie Erdal, Graham Greene, Michael Holroyd, Laurie Lee, Hilary Mantel, Gavin Maxwell, Jessica Mitford, Jan Morris, Eric Newby, Ernest Shepard and Rosemary Sutcliff

Single issues from £12; Subscriptions from £48; Books from £17 • Worldwide shipping • [www.foxedquarterly.com](http://www.foxedquarterly.com)

## THE BIOGRAPHERS' CLUB

Founded in 1997, the Biographers' Club is committed to supporting, promoting and connecting biographers at all levels. It offers three prizes each year: the *Slightly Foxed* Best First Biography Prize; the Tony Lothian Prize and the Exceptional Contribution to Biography Award. For information on the club please contact Ariane Bankes or Nicholas Clee on [thebiographersclub1@gmail.com](mailto:thebiographersclub1@gmail.com) •

[www.thebiographersclub.com](http://www.thebiographersclub.com)

For a review copy of Heather Clark, *Red Comet*  
or for extract or interview requests contact: Joe Pickering, Jonathan Cape  
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# Slightly Foxed

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