

*About the Cover Artwork: A Creative Exploration  
and Review of “Red Comet”*

Reading Sylvia Plath has always been a pivotal encounter for me. Thus, the inspiration for this cover artwork draws directly from the unique experiences I have envisioned of Plath herself while reading through Heather Clark's *Red Comet: The Short Life and Blazing Art of Sylvia Plath*. From the beginning of page XX of Clark's Prologue, her goals for writing this work are clearly stated. The focus of the scratchy-lined drawing around Plath's body represents action and movement with “Plath Unbound”, as Clark herself unbinds the magic from the mythos in an honest portrayal of the things that readers might miss while untangling themselves from rumor and ruin and finding themselves inside Plath's own soul.

For example, while strolling through nature, Clark relates that both Plath and her husband Ted Hughes had found a wounded bird, having fallen from its nest. After a week of nursing, which proved non-beneficial, Ted wrapped the creature within a cloth and put it to final sleep (*Bird, nursing and asphyxiating of*, pages 400, 402-403; Index page 720). As Clark also relates on page 528, the burial of the bird occurred under a stone where it was later found. This shows both compassion and despair, as Plath confirms an incident which held such impact on her own emotions.

After reviewing Julio Cortázar's “Hopscotch” method of reading in a non-linear fashion and applying this open-ended structure to reading the detailed 41-page index of “Red Comet”, these understandings become amplified by inviting the reader to use this same strategy in order to pinpoint specific moments of Plath's life. This further illuminates Plath as a complex being rather than a 2d-biographical representation of herself according to a prefixed timeline, as her childhood years develop her into the full person that she became and provide insight into her psyche.

As a beekeeper's daughter, confirmed on both pages 3 and 714, Plath places bees as central figures in both her writing and her married life alike—this is why I have chosen to include this imagery in my art. Bees symbolize fertility, soul intention, and the Divine, placing Plath directly inside her more spiritual path. Part of the childhood with Plath that resonates with me the most is the importance of both religion and community in her formative years, as indicated

on page 1108 of the Index. The Girl Scouts were an important part of Plath's childhood development, as were religious beliefs; however, her Christian upbringing traversed several denominations, spanning Lutheran, Unitarian, and United Methodist ideals of spirituality (page 1112 index; pgs 6, 9-11). Yet, paradoxically, page 81 also details the luxury of just lying in bed on weekends, which I have depicted in the artwork, lamenting how quickly Monday arrives, denoting more of a personal journey through spirituality rather than traditional orthodoxy.

Allusions to music are also robust throughout her works. Specifically, the piano scene from "The Bell Jar" and references to the viola can be found on page 70 of Clark's amazing index. One needs only look towards the melody of Plath's own words to find music.

Based on the benefit of Cortázar's reading method, I propose to begin with the Index, and then proceed accordingly to the reader's interests. This sequence enables everyone to find their way to what "speaks" to them in Plath's life. By drawing your own map and connecting the dots as they resonate for you, this also creates another opportunity to appreciate Plath from a deeply personal perspective. She invites us in with her eyes—those which many have commented on as being a piercing blue (page 25).

Indeed, "Red Comet" can be read from front to back in its 1118 page entirety. But this is not the only path. The reader has choices to walk in nature with Plath in this way—whether it be in a sequence or on an adventurous path, or simply forging a path of their own. And this is what makes "Red Comet" so enjoyable and intriguing—it challenges the reader to make Plath their own.

— Vivian O'Shaughnessy

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "V.O. O'Shaughnessy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, prominent 'S' at the end.