

*A Lot of Lives: Biographical Books from Warner's and Ackland's Library*

Peter Swaab

A better person would have told friends in the STW Society, but I didn't, on the grounds that all's fair in love, war and book-collecting. A friend had tipped me off that an auction house was selling a group of books that had belonged to Warner and Ackland. The lot was made up of 18 volumes, all of them biographical or autobiographical – journals, letters, memoirs and diaries as well as biographies and autobiographies. I bid, and won, and a big box of books arrived after a brief Covid delay.

I asked Mr George Wewiora at the auction house about the provenance of the books, and he kindly replied: 'The books were originally sold by Dominic Winter who were responsible for disposing of the contents of Warner's estate round about 1980. They were sold as a collection of biographical works and the significance of the signatures was overlooked at the time. They were purchased by a private collector in Bury (Lancashire) who was the former Director of Education of Bury. Following the collector's death 3 years ago we were asked to clear the huge library of books he left behind. We are still disposing of the library and discovered the Warner/Ackland books amongst them still with the original Dominic Winter invoice.'

Eleven of the books belonged to Valentine, two of them being gifts (one from Alyse Gregory, one from Sylvia). Six belonged to Sylvia, three of them gifts from Valentine. The remaining book was a gift to both of them. All of the books have either a bookplate or a signature, and most include their dates of acquisition (between April 1929 and 1970). Some include marginal and other markings, and on the basis of this small sample Valentine was the more assiduous annotator. I have gone through the books looking for marginalia and include a compressed version of what I found in the list below. Pedantry, snooping, honest curiosity and love of the author all played their part in this quest for traces. I ploughed on regardless through Valentine's copy of Bernard Berenson's diaries (see 10. Below) even as my list of marked pages grew to absurd lengths. Fandom, scholarship, affection and absurdity are not exactly strangers to one other.

1. *A Quaker Journal, Being the Diary and Reminiscences of William Lucas of Hitchin (1804-1861), A Member of the Society of Friends, Vol II*, eds G.E. Bryant and G.P. Baker (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1933). Inscribed 'Sylvia, on Valentine's birthday, with Valentine's Love. 20. v. 34'.

2. *Dr Campbell's Diary of a Visit to England in 1775*, ed. James L. Clifford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947). With Valentine Ackland's bookplate inside front cover.

3. [William Hale White], *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d. but 1913). Pen signature 'Sylvia Townsend Warner' inside front cover, facing page torn out. Pencil markings by STW (see below).

4. *The Diary of Thomas Turner of East Hoathly (1754-1765)*, ed. Florence Maris Turner. Introduction by J.B. Priestley (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head Limited, 1925). STW's bookplate and pen signature 'Sylvia Townsend Warner.' inside front cover. A few pencil markings by STW.

5. *The Letters of Sacco and Vanzetti*, edited by Marion D. Frankfurter and Gardner Jackson (London: Constable & Company, 1929). Pen signature 'Valentine Ackland. April 1929'. Some passages marked in pencil on pages 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 57, 67, 68, 79, 101, 128, 148, 168, 207, 208, 221, 224, 225, 227, 258, 290, 291, 295, 362, 363, 379, 380. The inside back cover further notes passages on pages 11, 12-13, 15-16, 91, 202, 203, 227.

6 and 7. *Purefoy Letters 1735-1753, Vols I and II*, ed. G. Eland (London: Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd, 1931). With STW's bookplate inside front cover, and pen inscription 'Sylvia from Valentine — on Bishop Valentine's Day, 1947' (vol I) and 'Sylvia from Valentine, Valentine's Day, 1947' (vol II).

8. *Scottish Diaries and Memoirs 1550-1746*, ed. J.G. Fyfe (Stirling: Eneas Mackay, 1928), inscribed 'To Valentine and Sylvia, on Ruth's birthday, with much love. 13 Feb 1945'. Passages marked in pencil on pages 161 and 169, and four passages noted in pencil in VA's hand on inside back cover (pages 161, 169, 189, 259-60).

9. *Tom Moore's Diary*, edited with an introduction by J.B. Priestley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933). With Valentine Ackland's bookplate inside front cover. Marginal cross by the entry for April 3, 1832 (p. 167), an entry also noted on the inside back cover.

10. Bernard Berenson, *Sunset and Twilight: From the Diaries of 1947-1958*, ed. Nicky Mariano (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1964). With Valentine Ackland's bookstamp inside front cover, and 'a handwritten note 'from Alyse Gregory. Christmas 1964'. Marginal markings on pages 3, 4, 7, 9, 15, 17, 18, 21, 70, 71, 72, 75, 77, 79, 82, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 97, 101, 103, 107, 111 ('My lifelong worst suffering has come from inability to express myself satisfactorily', entry for 22/12/48), 117, 119, 123, 125, 129, 130, 135, 136, 140, 141, 145, 151, 152, 153, 158, 161, 163, 164, 165, 170, 171, 183,, 186, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 197, 199, 202, 203, 208, 209, 212, 221, 227, 230, 231, 233, 234, 240, , 243, 246, 247, 249, 251, 252, 256, 263, 266, 275, 282, 283, 288, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 310, 318, 319, 323, 327, 331, 332, 335, 338, 339, 340, 342, 345, 350, 352, 353, 354, 355, 357, 359, 360, 370, 372, 379, 380, 382, 389, 397, 399, 404, 407, 410, 411, 413, 414, 419, 420, 425, 426, 427, 430, 433, 438, 439, 441 ('the growing conviction that there is no use in talking' is heavily scored), 445, 448, 449, 460, 463, 466, 472, 474, 475, 482, 497, 498, 500, 505, 506, 507, 509, 513, 514, 515,

517, 524, 526, 527, 528; and passages from pages 335, 346, 347, 397, 497, 505 have been noted in VA's hand on inside back cover.

11. Ann Blainey, *The Farthing Poet: A Biography of Richard Hengist Horne, A Lesser Literary Lion* (London: Longmans, 1968). With Valentine Ackland's bookplate inside front cover.

12. Christopher Devlin, *Poor Kit Smart* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1961). Pencil signature 'V.A. 1962' on inside cover, together with name stamp 'Valentine Ackland, Maiden Newton, Dorchester, Dorset, England'.

13. Joseph Hone, *The Moores of Moore Hall* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1939). Pencil signature 'Valentine Ackland' on inside cover.

14. R.W. Ketton-Cremer, *Horace Walpole: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1946). With Valentine Ackland's bookplate inside front cover. Sentences noted on p. 172 and inside back cover.

15. Eugene Lyons, *The Life and Death of Sacco and Vanzetti* (New York: International Publishers, 1928). Pen signature 'V. Ackland' on inside cover.

16. Ruth Michaelis-Jena, *The Brothers Grimm* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970). Pen signature 'Sylvia Townsend Warner. Maiden Newton, 1970' inside front cover.

17. Rabindranath Tagore, *My Reminiscences* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1917). With Valentine Ackland's bookplate inside front cover. Inside back cover has VA's pencil calculations of US dollar to pound conversion rates in 1950.

18. Edward John Trelawny, *Adventures of a Younger Son*, vol 1 (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1914). Inscribed by STW 'Valentine with my love. 24: ix: 1952'.

The book most extensively annotated by STW is Hale White's 1881 *Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*, and I hope some readers may share my fascination with what caught her eye in this late Victorian classic, a fictionalised narrative of the author's own journey from religious faith to doubt. Warner made a note on one passage on page 59, marked another three passages with a cross (pages 238 and 241), and marked eleven other passages with pencilled vertical lines by the side of the text.

p.59: 'My predecessor had died in harness at the age of seventy-five [...] after a course of three sermons on a Sunday for fifty years'. Pencilled asterisk after 'fifty years', with a note at the foot of the page: '52 x 50 = 2600. 2,600 x 3 = 7,800. Sermons!'

p.61: marginal bracketing of this passage, about Mr Catfield, the deacon: 'I could never call him a hypocrite. He was as sincere as he could be, and yet no religious expression of his was ever so sincere as the most ordinary expression of the most trifling pleasure or pain.'

p. 66: marginal bracketing: 'I could never endure to speak if people did not listen.'

p. 146: marginal bracketing: 'More painful still; he loves somebody, man or woman, with a surpassing devotion; he is so lost in his love that he cannot endure a moment without it; and when he sees it pass away in death, he is told that it is extinguished—that that heart and mind absolutely are *not*.'

p. 187: marginal bracketing: 'They were perfectly orthodox, except that they denied a few orthodox doctrines.'

p. 197: marginal bracketing: 'I half or a quarter knew a multitude of things, but no one thing thoroughly, and was never sure, just when I most wanted to be sure.'

p. 219: marginal bracketing, about the man overseeing the clerks working as assistants at a publisher's: 'I meditated much upon him. If ever I had occasion to rebuke anybody, I always did it apologetically, unless I happened to be in a flaming passion—and this was my habit, not from any respectable motive of consideration for the person rebuked, but partly because I am timid, and partly because I shrink from giving pain. This man said with perfect ease what I could not have said unless I had been wrought up to white heat. With all my dislike to him, I envied him: I envied his complete certainty; for although his language was harsh in the extreme, he was always sure of his ground, and the victim upon whom his lash descended could never say that he had given absolutely no reason for the chastisement, and that it was altogether a mistake.'

234: marginal bracketing: 'I had, it is true, an hour of two's unspeakable peace in the early morning'.

238: marginal cross: 'Two of my chief failings were forgetfulness and a want of thoroughness in investigation.'

239: marginal bracketing, about some business correspondence: 'I thought that if I was incapable of getting to the bottom of such a very shallow complication as this, of what value were any of my thinkings on more difficult subjects, and I fell a prey to self-contempt and scepticism. Contempt from those about us is hard to bear, but God help the poor wretch who contemns himself.'

240: marginal bracketing: 'the longing for death as the cancellation of the blunder of my existence!'

241: two marginal crosses, against (1) 'With a storm of tears, I laid open all my heart. I told her how nothing I had ever attempted had succeeded' and (2) 'I was useless, even to the best friends I had ever known, and that the meanest clerk in the city would serve them better than I did. I was beside myself.'

243: marginal bracketing: 'Blessed are they who heal us of self-despisings.'

243: marginal bracketing: 'I had a mind to write to her; but I felt as I have often felt before in great crises, a restraint which was gentle and incomprehensible, but nevertheless unmistakable.'

Perhaps further books from the library of STW and VA will appear on the market soon, and perhaps members will be able to share details of other volumes they come across? In the meantime if any members of the Society would like further details of these marginalia or want to examine particular volumes, they are welcome to get in touch with me to help with my not very sharp feelings of acquisitiveness guilt.