

Valentine Ackland was born Mary Kathleen Macrory Ackland on 20 May 1906 in London, the younger daughter of Robert Craig Ackland and Ruth Kathleen (née Macrory). Her family was Molly, and her father, a West End London dentist, worked at making a symbolic son of her, since he had no sons, teaching her to shoot and to box. Her sister Joan harboured a lifelong jealousy of Molly, psychologically tormenting her.

Molly received an Anglo-Catholic upbringing in Norfolk and a convent school education in London. In 1925 at the age of nineteen, she impetuously married Richard Turpin, a homosexual youth who was unable to consummate their marriage. Upon her marriage, she was also received into the Catholic church, a religion that she later abandoned, returned to, and then abandoned again in the last decade of her life. The consummation of their marriage was traumatic for both partners, and Molly was advised to have an operation to stretch her hymen. In less than a year, she had her marriage to Turpin annulled on the grounds that she was a virgin. The doctor who performed the examination failed to spot that she was pregnant due to an affair. Her husband had agreed to adopt the child, but she had a miscarriage and she was determined to end the marriage.

She began wearing men's clothing, cut her hair short and was frequently mistaken for a young man, to her great pleasure. She changed her name to Valentine in the late 1920s, as she began writing poetry seriously. Her poetry appeared in British and American literary journals during the 1920s to the 1940s, but Ackland deeply regretted that she never became a more widely read poet.

In 1929, Ackland met the musicologist and novelist Sylvia Townsend Warner, with whom she lived in a marriage in all but law for thirty-nine years. Their relationship was close and passionate, and at times difficult given Ackland's serial affairs with other women, many of these sanctioned by Warner, and her secret alcoholism. Warner was twelve years older than Ackland, and the two lived together until Ackland's death from breast cancer in 1969. Warner outlived Ackland by nine years, dying in 1978. Ackland's reflections upon her relationship with Warner and her intense relationship with the American heiress and writer Elizabeth Wade White were posthumously published in *For Sylvia: An Honest Account* (1985). Later works by Peter Haring Judd (*The Akeing Heart*, 2018) and Frances Bingham (*Valentine Ackland*, 2021) examine Ackland's life and loves more closely.

Ackland was responsible for involving Warner in the Communist Party and many socialist and pacifist activities. They were investigated by the British government in the late 1930s for their membership of the British Communist Party, which remained an open file until 1957, when the investigation was halted. Ackland and Warner supported the Republican cause during the Spanish Civil War, visiting Spain as conference delegates.

After the Second World War, in which she was prevented from doing any meaningful work by her open MI5 file until a local pharmacist gladly accepted her services as a dispenser, Ackland developed her poetry and private journals. She continued to battle her alcoholism, and she experienced shifts in her political

and religious alliances. She returned to the Roman Catholic Church, going as far as to begin devotional training, but after Vatican II decided that the Church no longer expressed religious truth for her. In her later years she found peace and spiritual integrity as a member of the Religious Society of Friends, which was the only church to which Warner would willingly accompany her, as an attender. Ackland also found a new creative outlet in her growing expertise in antiques, opening a small shop in the couple's shared home, and becoming an acknowledged expert in the provenance and conservation of smaller pieces.

Ackland died at her home in Maiden Newton, Dorset on 9 November 1969 from breast cancer. She was buried in St Nicholas's churchyard at Chaldon Herring in Dorset, with the inscription from Horace *Non omnis moriar* (Ode III.30, 'I shall not wholly die') on her gravestone. Warner was buried beside her after her death in 1978.