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OTTOLINE MORRELL: PERSONALIST THINKER

Personality is a real thing—made up of intentions and of all kinds of threads.

How hard it is to give an idea of a personality.

(OTTOLINE MORRELL)¹

Her name is a good place to begin. Throughout her adult life and among her friends, Lady Ottoline Morrell (1873–1938) was always known simply as ‘Ottoline’. Biographers and those few academics who have written on her have, by and large, continued to refer to Ottoline by her first name, thus distinguishing her from ‘Morrell’, which in her lifetime always referred to her husband, Philip. By detaching her first name from her family alliance, commentators emphasize Ottoline’s unique personality, which in popular memory lives on through D. H. Lawrence’s Hermione Roddice in *Women in Love*, and in other fictional traces, in addition to visual portraits, most notably Augustus John’s 1919 painting, on display in the National Portrait Gallery.

Personality has until now been a stumbling block for Ottoline, if one is to understand personality as playing second fiddle to tangible artistic creation in specific works. In her lifetime she baffled people because of her eccentricity, her aristocracy, and her peculiar blend of hospitality and mystical Christianity. She was interested in the arts and went to great lengths to help artists reach their full potential as she envisaged this; and yet she often felt that she was a failure and misunderstood. Many of her friends have now become recognizable figures in modernism: Virginia Woolf, Augustus John, D. H. Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield, Vaslav Nijinsky, Mark Gertler, and many more besides. Ranged against these figures, Ottoline is bound to appear at best different, and at worst an irrelevance—a hanger-on. As someone said to me at a conference in 2013 after I delivered a paper on her: ‘We all love her, but why should we bother with her in a serious way?’ In addition to her various letters and other private papers, Ottoline’s only surviving and easily available output consists of her published memoirs and her journal writing, together with the other notebooks and papers collected in the Lady Ottoline Morrell Papers in the British Library. And yet, her biographies aside, this material is most often turned to in order to develop an understanding of the networks of

This article began life in 2012 as my MA dissertation at the Leeds Centre for Victorian Studies, and I received feedback on its conclusions at the Alternative Modernisms conference at Cardiff University in 2013. Thanks are due to Rosemary Mitchell for offering comments on earlier versions, and to Midlands3Cities and the Arts and Humanities Research Council for funding the article’s later development.

¹ Ottoline Morrell Papers 88886, Notes on Dr. Martin in Transcription of Journal for 1922–1924 (6/14), p. 6; Ottoline Morrell, *Ottoline at Garsington: Memoirs of Lady Ottoline Morrell 1915–1918*, ed. by Robert Gathorne-Hardy (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), p. 223.

other modernist figures, thus deflecting attention away from the writing itself and what light it can shed on Ottoline's own contribution to literary studies.

In this article I propose that Ottoline's personality is indeed interesting, but for reasons other than those that have been implied thus far: she is more than a connecting point for other people. To echo Susan Stanford Friedman's comment on H. D.'s various *noms de plume*, 'Ottoline' as a sign can be a 'text that [can] be read for the sel[f] [it] constructs, for the "spell" [it] cast[s] in an endless process of self-conscious self-making'.² I contend that Ottoline should be considered an important thinker whose approach to creativity and personality offers a fresh understanding of modernity and modernism—two themes which recur in her writing between the 1910s and 1930s. At times I reprise her biography in order to emphasize the central developmental arc that brought her Christian faith into synergy with her creativity, but I argue that Ottoline's writing ultimately reveals her self-identified vocation as a self-reflexive personalist thinker who critiqued modernity and the modernism of some of the most canonical figures in modernist studies today.³ Her personalist thought also deepens our awareness of the spiritual dimension of modernist cultures, especially Ottoline's metropolitan nexus of contacts, centred on her London salon in Bedford Square and her country home of Garsington Manor, Oxfordshire.

In order to claim Ottoline as a personalist thinker, I put her into dialogue with her contemporary, the Russian Christian thinker of the Silver Age, Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948), whose substantial body of work is now, for the most part, available in English. Although only two among a number of European personalist thinkers of the early twentieth century (such as Emmanuel Mounier, Martin Buber, Jacques Maritain, and Michael Polanyi), Berdyaev and Ottoline closely resemble each other in a number of ways. They were both reluctant aristocrats of the same generation; they were intuitive and mystical thinkers; they were concerned with the relationship between Christianity and creativity; and finally, they were both responsive to the spiritual dimensions of modernity. Their thinking is consistently advocative, showcasing their intuitions in order to instigate change. Meanwhile, Ottoline and Berdyaev often felt they were misunderstood by others, and both deliberately distanced themselves from establishment trends, whether these were related to 'society' (the aristocracy), to religion (Anglicanism and Russian Orthodoxy), or to creativity (philosophy and the arts).

Of course, there are indeed fundamental differences between Ottoline and Berdyaev. Ottoline never pretended to be a thinker in exactly the same way

² Susan Stanford Friedman, *Penelope's Web: Gender, Modernity, H. D.'s Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 41.

³ For an introduction to personalism as a philosophy see Jan Olof Bengtsson, *The Worldview of Personalism: Origins and Early Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

in which Berdyaev framed his activity, and Berdyaev's Russian roots play a huge part in the development of his thought: in spite of his expulsion from Soviet Russia in 1922 on the so-called 'Philosophers' Ships', he clung to his Russianness and described his philosophy as profoundly Russian. No doubt gender differences also had an impact on the development and manifestation of their thought; formal education was closed to Ottoline, whereas it was open to Berdyaev (although he never completed it), and the genres of journal and memoir were a more natural vehicle than the philosophical essay for the expression of Ottoline's thoughts.⁴ By unpacking five aspects of their thinking which they shared and approached in complementary ways, I hope, however, to show how Berdyaev's thought highlights Ottoline's and brings it into focus, so that her writing on modernity and modernists can be read in a new way and she can emerge as an important personalist thinker of the early twentieth century.

Ottoline's Neglect

Before examining the shared aspects of Ottoline's and Berdyaev's thought, it is worth pausing to consider Ottoline's relative neglect and the extant writing on her life and work. As this article proposes to take interpretation of Ottoline in a new direction, a bibliographical survey is a valuable first step. Within her lifetime Ottoline was caricatured and written about to the extent that for some decades after her death, these representations constituted her primary public image.⁵ John Cramb, writing as J. A. Reverbort, recalled the young Ottoline in his novel *Cuthbert Learmont* (1910).⁶ One can see traces of Ottoline in the character of Evelyn Murgatroyd in Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915) and latterly in Mrs. Manresa in *Between the Acts* (1941).⁷ D. H. Lawrence immortalized Ottoline as Hermione Roddice in *Women in Love* (1920).⁸ Aldous Huxley reflected her in *Crome Yellow* (1921) and *Those Barren Leaves* (1925).⁹

⁴ See Julia Bush, 'Ladylike Lives? Upper-Class Women's Autobiographies and the Politics of Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain', *Literature and History*, 10 (2001), 42–61.

⁵ Miranda Seymour, *Ottoline Morrell: Life on the Grand Scale* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), pp. 575–77.

⁶ J. A. Reverbort, *Cuthbert Learmont* (London: Constable, 1910).

⁷ Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (London: Vintage, 2000); Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts*, ed. by Mark Hussey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Richard Whitney, 'The Shadow of Ottoline Morrell in Evelyn Murgatroyd', *Virginia Woolf Bulletin*, 49 (2015), 7–16; Sally A. Jacobsen, 'Between the Acts: Ottoline Morrell and Mrs. Manresa, D. H. Lawrence and Giles Oliver', in *Woolf and the Art of Exploration*, ed. by Helen Southworth and Elisa Katy Sparks (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Digital Press, 2005), pp. 50–56.

⁸ D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (London: Vintage, 2008).

⁹ Aldous Huxley, *Crome Yellow* (London: Vintage, 2004); Aldous Huxley, *Those Barren Leaves* (London: Penguin, 1951).

And Walter Turner caricatured her in *The Aesthetes* (1928)—an act for which Ottoline never forgave him.¹⁰

However, the publication in 1963 and 1974 of Ottoline's memoirs, edited as they were by Philip and with introductions by one of her literary executors, Robert Gathorne-Hardy, heralded the dawn of a revisionist period. In 1975 Sandra Jobson Darroch published the first biography of Ottoline.¹¹ A year later, Carolyn Heilbrun edited a collection of photographs in the possession of Ottoline's daughter, Julian Vinogradoff, and this volume was introduced with a reassessment of Ottoline's legacy by Lord David Cecil. In 1992 Miranda Seymour published her comprehensive biography of Ottoline, which benefited from access to Ottoline's unpublished journals and the manuscript of her memoirs, and over a thousand letters written between Ottoline and Bertrand Russell.

Since Seymour's biography, which was reissued in 2008 as a Faber Find, there has been only a trickle of publications on Ottoline, most notably: a chapter by Vanessa Curtis on Ottoline's relationship with Woolf in *Virginia Woolf's Women* (2002); a discussion of Ottoline's 'bohemian' credentials in Janet Lyon's 'Sociability in the Metropole: Modernism's Bohemian Salons' (2009); and an essay by Inga Fraser entitled 'Body, Room, Photograph: Negotiating Identity in the Self-Portraits of Lady Ottoline Morrell' (2013).¹² The essays by Lyon and (especially) Fraser are important because they represent the first scholarly publications which aim to do more than establish an accurate biographical record of a woman whose story had been famously ill-defined and whose reputation still hung in the balance. Fraser, writing from within the field of art history, is interested in the relationship between Ottoline's dress and her photographic self-portraits, some of which are housed in the National Portrait Gallery, along with all of Ottoline's other photographs of friends and family, which are accessible online. Lyon, on the other hand, is a literary critic interested in a theory of the salon and London's relationship to bohemianism in the era of modernism. Together, Lyon and Fraser establish the case for taking Ottoline's creativity seriously.

As the psychologist Ruth Richards has claimed, for too long Western society has paid almost exclusive attention to the work of exceptional or 'genius'-level creators, and has thus tended to ignore, or relegate to a realm of lesser

¹⁰ Walter Turner, *The Aesthetes* (London: Wishart, 1927); Seymour, *Life on the Grand Scale*, p. 16.

¹¹ Sandra Jobson Darroch, *Ottoline: The Life of Lady Ottoline Morrell* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1975).

¹² Vanessa Curtis, *Virginia Woolf's Women* (Thrupp: Sutton, 2003); Janet Lyon, 'Sociability in the Metropole: Modernism's Bohemian Salons', *ELH*, 76 (2009), 687–711; Inga Fraser, 'Body, Room, Photograph: Negotiating Identity in the Self-Portraits of Lady Ottoline Morrell', in *Biography, Identity and the Modern Interior*, ed. by Penny Sparke and Anne Massey (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 69–85.

significance, modes and illustrations of creativity which tend to be exercised as part of daily living: decorating our homes, dressing ourselves, having people over for dinner, cooking that dinner, and many other facets of ‘humdrum’ life which we tend to think of as unremarkable.¹³ Indeed, for many years Ottoline herself considered these aspects of life somewhat ephemeral; her struggle to appreciate their creative potential eventually gave way to a distinctive vision of herself and her talents—a combination of Christian faith and creativity rooted in personality.

Christianity, Creativity, and Personality

In the introduction to her biography of Ottoline, Seymour wonders whether she ‘laid sufficient stress on Ottoline’s undogmatic belief in the importance of a religious attitude’.¹⁴ In her childhood Ottoline’s family lived close to the Victorian novelist Charles Kingsley, and Seymour suggests that Kingsley’s presence in Ottoline’s early life provided an important foundation to her Christian faith. Yet it was only in the 1890s that Ottoline threw herself more fervently into Christianity, partly as a form of rebellion against her family’s constricting aristocratic atmosphere. In her memoirs Ottoline wrote that “The unquestioning, unimaginative arrogance of it all had a power of impressing itself on me as “The Thing”, that it was “the supreme life” and that all other existences were simply insignificant and unimportant.”¹⁵ In the remote environment of Welbeck Abbey in Nottinghamshire, Ottoline cultivated her own ‘mystic religious world’ in which she could breathe.¹⁶ Like George Eliot’s Maggie Tulliver, she was influenced by Thomas à Kempis, which unfortunately caused her to restrict indulgence in innocent pleasures such as reading. She felt that

it was self-indulgent and that instead of reading I ought to be doing things for other people. The fire of asceticism still burnt me up and made all the things that my intelligence and artistic sense hungered for appear self-indulgence. I stripped the flowers and the tender branches off my life, and tore them from me, leaving only the stem. I became frenzied, every thought was examined, and those that were ‘worldly’ stamped upon, crushed and thrown away. (p. 92)

As if scourging herself for the indolence of her family, Ottoline undertook to conduct Sunday evening Bible classes for workmen on the estate, and used these as an opportunity to engage with and influence their lives on a personal

¹³ Ruth Richards, ‘Everyday Creativity and the Arts’, *World Futures*, 63 (2007), 500–25 (pp. 500–01).

¹⁴ Seymour, *Life on the Grand Scale*, p. 15.

¹⁵ Ottoline Morrell, *Ottoline: The Early Memoirs of Lady Ottoline Morrell*, ed. by Robert Gathorne-Hardy (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 95.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

level. Of course, the romanticized language through which Ottoline reflects on this experience in the 1920s is evidence of the way in which her imagination had since been saturated by precisely those elements which in her youth she had attempted to strip away.

The early phase of Ottoline's Christian faith, which predates her marriage in 1902, is generally characterized by an outward focus on doing good works in a typically mid-Victorian fashion, and indeed, her mentors at this time included the Victorian novelist George MacDonald and the Archbishop of York, William Maclagan—men of her parents' generation. In this sense Ottoline's faith approximates Seymour's notions of a 'religious attitude' and 'active benevolence'.¹⁷ Even by 1902, soon after her marriage, Ottoline wrote in her journal that life should be an offering, 'a Ministry—a ministering to the Wants of God—& of Mankind'.¹⁸ And yet as Ottoline recalls, she was creating for herself a 'mystic religious world' which was intended to enable her to live life at a deeper, more vital level than that of her aristocratic milieu; it was also a development whereby a 'religious attitude' entailed more than 'active benevolence'. Walks in the woods would occasion 'moments of wonderful religious ecstasy', and 'nature was divine to me', she says: 'it was a mother to me'.¹⁹ Ottoline's mysticism, which I explore in more depth below, later enabled her to pursue the aesthetic in a particularly experiential way because she had already accustomed herself to certain types of heightened experience. The various comments that ensue in the memoirs regarding Christianity can be traced back to Ottoline's early attachment to mystical experience as both escape from the world and also a deeper penetration into its mysteries.

In the 1890s and 1900s, with her asceticism at least under control, Ottoline also began to supplement her mystical experiences with a diet of reading from Romantics such as Keats, Shelley, and Wordsworth, as well as independent study in a diverse range of subjects: 'Theology, Psychology, Moral Philosophy, Italian (Dante), English Lit—Poetry—Aesthetics, Biography, Classics (Greek), Music, Natural History, German Classics'.²⁰ Enrolment in the 1890s as an external student at St Andrews and Oxford Universities helped to structure her independent learning, but ultimately these experiences of university lectures were never as instrumental in Ottoline's learning as her independent reading and the various excursions to Italy which took place in the late 1890s and early 1900s. Moreover, the influence of personal contacts which Ottoline nurtured in her twenties cannot be underestimated either; she credits MacDonald and Mother Julian of the Sisterhood at Truro as people who helped her to develop

¹⁷ Seymour, *Life on the Grand Scale*, p. 15.

¹⁸ London, British Library, MS Ottoline Morrell Papers 88886, Transcription of Journal for 1901–1902 (4/1), p. 24.

¹⁹ *Early Memoirs*, p. 91.

²⁰ Ottoline Morrell Papers 88886, Journal for 1896 (3/1), unpaginated.

her intellectual and aesthetic sides, advising her about reading, but also simply proffering their friendship and giving her the necessary confidence to form opinions of her own.

Berdyaev's developmental arc evidences a similar discomfort with aristocratic society and the pursuit of what he considered to be a more vital way of living. He was born in 1874 to an established Kiev family with an estate in Poland and relatives with country seats in the south-western region of the Russian Empire. He attended a military school as a day pupil before enrolling at the University of Kiev in 1894, where he became increasingly attracted to Marxism. Berdyaev's biographer, Donald A. Lowrie, highlights Berdyaev's antipathy towards what he referred to as the 'as-it-should-be' mentality among conformists within the establishment. Berdyaev's Orthodox faith, which developed during his years in Moscow in the 1900s, was more politically coloured than Ottoline's mystical Anglicanism. He too befriended tenants on his family estate (Babaki, near Kharkiv (or Kharkov), which belonged to Berdyaev's mother-in-law); he would hold 'spiritual conversations' with them and foster a community of 'God-seekers'.²¹

Yet in spite of Berdyaev's political sympathies at this time, he and Ottoline shared a Christian faith, albeit in different shades, which shaped their thinking and behaviour. The events in Berdyaev's subsequent life intensified his commitment to setting forth his thinking concerning human beings and their purpose in life; his experience of exile and misunderstanding by others fuelled his commitment to an experiential way of personalist thinking, underscoring the need to be free in order to create. Ottoline's marriage, meanwhile, provided her with an outlet for engaging with other people (through hospitality), and she quickly developed contacts in the art world. Encouraged by her day-to-day activities of reading, talking to people, engaging in various charity and other activities, she turned to writing in order to process her thoughts. With the help of Berdyaev's thinking, it is possible to locate five subthemes within the broader relationship between Christianity, creativity, and personality—areas central to Ottoline's personalist thinking.

MYSTICISM

Although Ottoline's Christianity was firmly western European in its substance and outlook (she was influenced by, among others, Thomas Traherne, Thomas Erskine, and Evelyn Underhill), her mystical inclinations allow comparison with Berdyaev's eastern European orientation (though Berdyaev himself was influenced by western and central European figures, such as Jakob Böhme and Meister Eckhart). As Berdyaev wrote: 'Mysticism by its very nature overrides

²¹ Donald A. Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet: A Life of Nicolai Berdyaev* (London: Gollancz, 1960), p. 121.

the barriers which divide Christians.²² Mysticism is a complicated phenomenon and perhaps because of this resists rigid definition, but Berdyaev offers a few pertinent characteristics.

First, and differing somewhat from William James's analysis in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), Berdyaev claims that mysticism is a spiritual rather than psychological activity; mysticism presupposes 'spirit', and in Berdyaev's thought human beings exist in two interpenetrating dimensions: the spiritual (which is invisible), and the material (which is visible). As he writes: 'To live through anything mystically is to live through it spiritually and from within.'²³ Mysticism is a mode of experience which Berdyaev argues is also a way of knowing, a way of apprehending material existence. A person's 'spirit' is evidence of her connection to and awareness of the divine. At the heart of both Western and Eastern Christian mysticism is a desire to transcend 'creatureliness', or *Kreaturlichkeit*.²⁴ Although Ottoline began her Christian experience by equating mysticism with asceticism, she evidently passed through an ascetic phase while retaining her mysticism, and this chimes with Berdyaev's assertion that the desire to transcend creatureliness is not the same as a rejection of the body and material things. Instead, transcendence is founded on an intuition and experience of oneself and the world as redolent with divine energies, which break down the distance between created and Creator.

When Ottoline claims that 'nature was divine to me', she is not necessarily moving into pantheism (which in fact is materialistic because attention is focused on material things)—her belief in the Trinity prevents her from subscribing to a pantheistic outlook. Instead, she is moving towards what Berdyaev's Orthodoxy would call 'transfiguration'. Broadly speaking, transfiguration pertains to the Holy Spirit's work of stripping the cosmos of sin and its effects and of marking its ascent towards the divine. Ottoline comes close to this position when she quotes T. R. Glover's *Conflicts of Religions in the Early Roman Empire* (1909) and speaks of 'the Spirit of Jesus spiritualizing and transforming' life.²⁵ As Berdyaev writes: 'the Christian mystic also understands salvation, as illumination and transfiguration, the deification of creature, as overcoming the isolation of creatureliness, i.e. as separateness from God'.²⁶

Ultimately, however, Christian mysticism, for Ottoline and for Berdyaev,

²² Nicolas Berdyaev, *Freedom and the Spirit*, trans. by Oliver Fielding Clarke, 4th edn (London: Bles, 1948), p. 244.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 247–48.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

²⁵ Ottoline Morrell Papers 88886, Transcription of Journal for 1909 (6/6), p. 10.

²⁶ Nikolai Berdyaev, 'Salvation and Creativity: Two Understandings of Christianity' (1926), trans. by Stephen Janos (1999), sect. III <http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd_lib/1926_308.html> [accessed 03 November 2016].

involves experiential union with God, and particularly with Christ. This is latent in Ottoline's lyrical moments of ecstasy, as when we understand her sense of 'nature as divine' to be a reference to God's energies transfiguring the 'creature'. But such union is explicit when she writes that her religion 'is called Mystical. The belief in union into God & the Indwelling of God through the Holy Spirit—to bring forth a life in me as like Christ's as possible in these modern days'.²⁷ The writer Thomas Erskine (1788–1870) provided Ottoline with 'the mystic doctrine of the Vine and the Branch, God as the Father Full of Love'.²⁸ Meanwhile, Ottoline copied into her journal Evelyn Underhill's language of 'the eternal voyage of the adventurous soul on the vast and stormy sea of the Divine', taken from Underhill's preface to *Ruysbroeck* (1914).²⁹ Images of 'union into God' and God as 'Vine and the Branch' are shared with a vision of an experiential adventure 'on the vast and stormy sea of the Divine'. Ottoline's Christian mysticism was less a theological position, and still less a psychological symptom, than a way of life and thinking which brought her into deeper communion with the Trinity.

Like Berdyaev, in exploring mysticism Ottoline was stretching the bounds of acceptable ecclesiastical expressions of the Christian faith in her day; she often found parsons disagreeable—'so little sympathy or realization of what people need at all', she wrote in 1909.³⁰ Yet her commitment to mystical Christianity can partly be explained, as it can in Berdyaev's case, by her more fundamental commitment to the worth of the human person and of personality. In 1919 she wrote of the Bishop of Oxford, Charles Gore, coming to preach at Garsington and of his sermon, which claimed that 'the human being as such is what is valuable in God's eyes'.³¹ For Ottoline, a deeper experience of God was linked to a stronger engagement with the personalities of other people.

PERSONALITY

In 1917 Ottoline wrote that her 'genius lies in being a personality'.³² Her journals are full of statements of this kind, detailing the emotional pain involved in coming to this conclusion. Her friends were by and large working in specific domains and producing paintings, novels, poems, dances, and other tangible forms of creative expression. For Ottoline, who has gone down in literary history as a literary hostess and patron of the arts, her assertion that

²⁷ Ottoline Morrell Papers 88886, 'Vol. I. For Julian Morrell from her Mother', 1913 (3/13), p. 6.

²⁸ *Early Memoirs*, p. 91.

²⁹ Ottoline Morrell Papers 88886, Transcription of Journal for 1922–1924 (6/14), p. 3.

³⁰ Ottoline Morrell Papers 88886, Transcription of Journal for 1909 (6/6), p. 8.

³¹ Ottoline Morrell Papers 88886, Transcription of Journal for 1918–1919 (6/12), pp. 58–59.

³² Ottoline Morrell Papers 88886, Transcription of Journal for 1917–1918 (6/11), p. 66 (emphasis original).

she was a 'personality', and that this was the essence of her genius, is in fact a radical form of self-vindication which is deeply connected to her Christian faith and her vision of creativity. And yet, she leaves her understanding of personality largely untheorized.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that personality lies at the heart of Berdyaev's thinking. His vision of freedom and creativity springs from his sense of the person as fundamentally a spiritual process. One is not born a person; one becomes a person (person and personality being interchangeable). For Berdyaev, the 'individual' is a natural category: one is born an individual. A person, on the other hand, 'is not something completed, it has to realise itself, this is the great task put to man, the task to realise the image and likeness of God'.³³ Berdyaev emphasizes the dynamism of the person because personality is a creative activity: 'Man, as subject, is act, he is a striving. In the subject is revealed the inwardly transpiring creative activity of man.'³⁴ Someone's personality 'possesses an axiological, a valuative character. To become person is the task of man. To define someone as a person, is a positive evaluation of man'.³⁵ Positivity is linked to a sense of a person's uniqueness. Ottoline's sense of her vocation as a personality in union with God is linked to her feeling of specialness: she realizes her personality's 'uniqueness, its independence, its spiritual freedom'.³⁶

When in 1928 D. H. Lawrence wrote to Ottoline from Florence that she had been 'an important influence in lots of lives', he was referring to her 'being Ottoline. After all, there's only one Ottoline.'³⁷ Lawrence intuited Ottoline's gifts in the realm of personality, which she refers to as being her 'genius'. Berdyaev's notion of genius supports her self-assessment. He argued that there is often a discord between a person's 'inner creativeness' and the 'external realization of it'.³⁸ Berdyaev suggests that ordinarily genius seems to refer to the presence of originality 'together with a great talent for realizing the products of creative activity'.³⁹ Yet, he says, 'there may be something of genius in a man's love for a woman, in a mother's love for her child, in a person's concern for other people's welfare, in inner intuitions which find no outer expression, in the pursuit of righteousness and the suffering of trying to discover the meaning of life'.⁴⁰ Although a philosopher might take issue with the notion of

³³ Nikolai Berdyaev, 'The Problem of Man: Towards the Construction of a Christian Anthropology' (1936), sect. III, trans. by Stephen Janos (2000) <http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berdlib/1936_408.html> [accessed 3 November 2016].

³⁴ Ibid., sect. I.

³⁵ Ibid., sect. III.

³⁶ Ibid., sect. V.

³⁷ Quoted in *Ottoline at Garsington*, p. 131.

³⁸ Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Destiny of Man* (1931), trans. by Natalie Duddington, 2nd edn (London: Bles, 1945), p. 129.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 130.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

the presence of a quality which cannot be empirically quantified, Berdyaev's idea is compelling when applied to Ottoline's experience. Her difficulty in evaluating her strength as a personality was partly due to lack of knowledge about differences in creativity, which Ruth Richards claims is still missing in Western culture. But it may also be down to a lack of ability on Ottoline's part to realize her personality in sufficiently coherent ways. She sometimes (though by no means always) deflected attention away from her personality towards her activities, such as her embroidery, her interior designs, or her fashion, seeing these as ends in themselves rather than an extension of a more profound project of nurturing her spiritual personality.

However, there is a further dimension to personality that is pertinent. Berdyaev claimed that the personality is a microcosm. What he meant by this was that the personality is irreducible; it is an existential centre, a developing subject whose core is inviolable spirit. In a sense, the personality is the organizing principle of life, through which knowledge crystallizes. By focusing on nurturing one's own personality, one also becomes aware of the personality (or lack thereof) in others. The process of acquiring knowledge, of apprehending some of the mystery of life, is centred on the concentration of attention upon personality. As I shall show, this has important implications for how 'thinker' and 'thinking' are to be defined. But for now it is enough to say that Ottoline's sense of herself as a personality with a vocation in society is inextricably linked to her concentration on other people's personalities and on forming personal relationships: 'I have made human beings, individuals my work', she says.⁴¹ That she found this so difficult and confusing should not detract from this essential dyadic organizing principle: of personality as the most important reality—the creative, spiritual path to transfiguration.

CREATIVITY

Ottoline and Berdyaev are in fundamental agreement in understanding creativity as a spiritual response to God's call to humanity's co-creation with himself. In this sense creativity is much more than artistic expression: it encompasses the whole of culture, understood as all human activity. Berdyaev claimed that the 'creative act is always connected with the depths of the person. Person is creativity.'⁴² The human 'is called to be a creator, a co-participant in God's deed of world-creation'.⁴³ For Berdyaev, creativity, both God's and the human's, is essentially a movement from non-being towards being. This idea is linked to Berdyaev's preferred view of creativity as constructive, although he recognized that it can be destructive and fragmentary as well (he criticized

⁴¹ Ottoline Morrell Papers 88886, Transcription of Journal for 1913–1917 (6/10), p. 4.

⁴² Berdyaev, 'The Problem of Man', sect. III.

⁴³ Berdyaev, 'Salvation and Creativity', sect. IV.

Proust and Picasso for this reason). For a person to be constructively creative involves a continual movement from non-being into being, into the fullness of life, in conscious union with God. As the pre-eminent personality, Christ in Berdyaev's thinking is the perfect *theandros*—the God-man. In being God-man, Christ unites the human and the divine in a fully constructive creative work. Christ is the model for human beings who wish to be fully creative, fully human.

Berdyaev recognizes that creativity was given short shrift by the Church for much of its history and also says that, in recent centuries, humanistic culture has witnessed 'a deep tearing asunder of the way of creativity of life apart from the way of salvation, apart from God and from Divine grace'.⁴⁴ In her memoirs, Ottoline frequently dwells on the discord between her Christianity and her desire for creativity. In a reported conversation with Bertrand Russell in 1915, she commented on the 'war between beauty and puritanism'. Eventually, she condemned 'those who fear and destroy beauty and colour in life' because they 'are denouncing what the Creator thought good, and [...] in destroying it they are envious, ignorant and irreverent'.⁴⁵ Of course, puritanism is not humanism, so it would be an easy target for someone who believed in the importance of creativity. But Ottoline's mysticism conditioned her to minimize the western Christian emphasis on individual salvation from sin and to broaden her vision so that it approximated (unintentionally) an eastern Christian emphasis on the transfiguration of the cosmos and the deification of the human being. Her praise of creative artists and thinkers, in particular Tolstoy, Montaigne, Pascal, Keats, and Whitman, among others, is aimed at folding them into the perennial task of renewing human life through constructive creative acts. The dogma of their personal faiths is skipped over in order to emphasize their personality, their existential core. Berdyaev was also sensitive to the coexistence of faith and creativity in a personality and went so far as to say in *The Destiny of Man* that a 'creator forgets about his salvation' (p. 130). To be concerned with individual piety may be a distraction from the intensification of one's humanity through creativeness.

Berdyaev solves the problem of salvation and creativity by being a universalist. In a moving passage in *The Destiny of Man*, he says that 'Paradise is impossible for me if the people I love, my friends or relatives or mere acquaintances, will be in hell—if Boehme is in hell as a "heretic", Nietzsche as "an antichrist", Goethe as a "pagan" and Pushkin as a sinner' (p. 276). Essentially, Berdyaev posits heaven and hell as existential states of being which are concerned with the ethical—a concern which is a quality of lapsarian existence and thus not eternal, beyond time. It is not necessary here to examine the

⁴⁴ Berdyaev, 'Salvation and Creativity', sect. 1.

⁴⁵ *Early Memoirs*, p. 289.

intricate argument Berdyaev puts forward for universalism, suffice it to say that the restoration of the entire cosmos is in accord with his vision of personality and the role he gives to creativity in the transfiguration of the world. Ottoline says very little about heaven and hell. She does, however, share in Berdyaev's expansive and generous attention to creative people throughout history who may not have shared her own faith; she sees them as valuable co-creators of a better world, characterized by beauty and love.

One difficulty with the vision of personality and creativity set forth by Ottoline and Berdyaev lies in its attraction. The attraction of their vision is its care for the unique person and attention directed towards their God-given gifts. The problem with this is that it is still aristocratic. Perhaps because Berdyaev and Ottoline were reared as aristocrats, they maintained a sense of the value of aristocracy as a principle. Berdyaev believed in the need for a spiritual aristocracy: although each person is granted gifts and talents by God and all have a right to reach their full potential as a person, not everyone is created equal or with the same measure of gifts and talents. This belief manifests itself in both Berdyaev's and Ottoline's use of the word 'genius', a contentious term. For both, genius is a spiritual category, associated with the quality of a person's spirit, which is, of course, independent of a person's class: the spiritual aristocracy is not congruent with the social aristocracy. The mystic overtones of spirituality further underscore the somewhat esoteric nature of genius, as being an inward work peculiar to some but not all people.

Although the aristocratic subtext of Berdyaev's and Ottoline's thinking cannot be ignored and may be distasteful to some, that is not sufficient reason to reject their thinking altogether. Their concern that all persons should have the necessary conditions to fulfil their potential is testament to their thoughtful care for the personality in each human. In their specific contexts, their politics were considered humane: Ottoline was a Liberal insistent on social and economic reforms, and Berdyaev defined his politics as personalist socialism, socializing the economy for the free and full transfiguration of each person. Indeed, the broader issue of freedom is fundamental to Ottoline's vision of personality and creativity: each person needs to be free to become a personality.

FREEDOM

In their own lives, Ottoline and Berdyaev strove for freedom from determinacies. Berdyaev claimed that 'Person is resistance, resistance to the determinism of society and nature, an heroic struggle for self-definition from within'.⁴⁶ In her writing, Ottoline is sensitive to the ways in which the conditions of modernity, especially in urban spaces, enslaved individuals and determined

⁴⁶ Berdyaev, 'The Problem of Man', sect. III.

their existence. In a sketch entitled ‘Shadows’, written in 1917, she recalls an occasion in Whitehall, watching ‘a stream of girls, gay, chatting, wheeling round from the steps to the pavement, fluttering off like a flight of birds, shaking their feathers in the air’.⁴⁷ Freed from their office jobs, these women initially appear to Ottoline as birds liberated from their cages. She then asks herself a series of questions about them:

Where did they all come from? Where were their homes, and their lives? Were they born into the world to tap on a typewriter other people’s thoughts, to trip from office to office with messages from one official mind to another, which decided, swayed the lives and fate of thousands of their brothers and lovers in France?

Does it pain them to be frail shuttles in the vast machinery of destruction, or are they such perfect machines themselves, that they give no thought to what their fingers are doing? Little frail ‘flappers’, are you too only phantoms or real women?⁴⁸

In her concern for these women, Ottoline, with undertones of Marx’s theory of alienation, echoes Berdyaev’s critique of technology, which ‘tears man apart from the soil, carries him across the expanses of the world, and gives man the sensation of earth as a mere planet’.⁴⁹ Ottoline’s women have become ‘frail shuttles in the vast machinery of destruction’, enslaved to a phantom representation of their humanity; they are carried back to non-being.

For Berdyaev, modernity is predominantly analytic rather than synthetic: it fragments the human into parts and denies him or her the potential to reach an integral whole, by which is meant the spiritual growth of personality. ‘The person within man,’ wrote Berdyaev, ‘which in him is the image and likeness of God, is dissociated and disintegrated into its elements, it loses its integral wholeness.’⁵⁰ When the human is fragmented, as Berdyaev and Ottoline believed was frequently the case in modernity, the individual can become enslaved. The human is seen as an object rather than a subject, projected as a means rather than as an end in itself.⁵¹

To be free, therefore, is to resist determinacies, to seek for oneself and for others the conditions—economic, social, spiritual, or political—which will permit the creative development of personality and communion with God. To be free is also to engage with other people on the level of their personality: to enter freely into a relationship with them. For Ottoline, this became the hallmark of her specific way of thinking.

⁴⁷ *Ottoline at Garsington*, p. 241.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Nikolai Berdyaev, ‘The Spiritual Condition of the Contemporary World’ (1932), trans. by Stephen Janos (2009) <http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd_lib/1932_377.html> [accessed 3 November 2016].

⁵⁰ Berdyaev, ‘The Spiritual Condition’.

⁵¹ See Donald A. Lowrie, *Christian Existentialism: A Berdyaev Anthology* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1965), p. 35.

THINKER AND THINKING

Lowrie notes that Berdyaev once remarked that academic philosophers preferred to call him a ‘thinker’ rather than a philosopher, ‘since his philosophical processes do not conform to the usual methodical type’.⁵² Berdyaev was fundamentally an intuitive thinker: what ‘he defended and the theories he held came to him not by a process of ratiocination, but directly, produced in his own mind by a sort of psychological virgin birth’.⁵³

In his own writing Berdyaev claims that cognition ‘is an event within being’.⁵⁴ For Berdyaev, as a personalist thinker, the personality is a microcosm and as such is the source and end of mystery; ‘creative intuition’ proceeds from personality, from the free and creative activity of the spiritual person. It is not surprising, therefore, that for him ‘the most profound intuitions are not those of academic scholars but of free thinkers. One [Joseph] de Maistre or [Pyotr] Chaadaev is worth more than many professional specialists.’⁵⁵ In asserting such a preference, Berdyaev was aligning himself with a tradition of Russian thought which intensified in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and which he believed was synthetic rather than analytic, concerned with eschatology and the passionate search for truth and justice.⁵⁶

Such concerns are concretized in a focus on the personality. Berdyaev writes that ethics ‘is to a great extent the theory of personality. Moral life is centred in the person and not in generalities.’⁵⁷ Tragedy, meanwhile, ‘is always connected with the personality—with its awakening and its struggles’.⁵⁸ Berdyaev’s constant references to the novels of Dostoyevsky and the plays of Ibsen in particular are his way of focusing his thinking, of finding concrete evidence in personalities of ethical problems and the ‘awakening’ of personhood in the human.⁵⁹ In other words, the writings of Dostoyevsky and Ibsen allowed Berdyaev to channel his thinking by commenting on concrete human situations depicted in their novels and plays.

Because Ottoline has never been claimed as a thinker, let alone a personalist thinker, it might seem strange to describe her in this way. Yet, all the essential ingredients of personalist thinking can be found in her writing. The mystical, Christian foundations of a theory of personality, explicit in

⁵² Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet*, p. 243.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Nikolai Berdyaev, ‘My Philosophic World-Outlook’ (in German 1937; in Russian posthumously 1952), trans. by Stephen Janos (2000) <http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd_lib/1952_476.html> [accessed 3 November 2016].

⁵⁵ Quoted in Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet*, p. 243.

⁵⁶ See Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, trans. by R. M. French (Hudson: Lindisfarne, 1992).

⁵⁷ Berdyaev, *The Destiny of Man*, p. 55.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁵⁹ See Patrick Grant, *Personalism and the Politics of Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 103–31.

Berdyaeв's writing, are latent in Ottoline's concern for the spiritual nature of personality and human relationships. Personality, not least her own, is a project to be worked at: by discerning the various gifts and talents which God has given us, Ottoline says that we can harness our creativity towards their realization in whichever vocation we happen (and are able) to choose. By resisting determinacies from without, the personality is better able to move into the fullness of life—however that is articulated by itself, according to its own understanding. Attention to such issues—of personality, spirituality, creativity, and freedom—allows us to read Ottoline's writing on modernists in a new light. While she was sensitive to personality in strangers—such as the office girls in Whitehall—it is primarily in her relationships with people close to her that she exercises her personalist, synthetic, and highly intuitive thought, and homes in on the moral and creative life of some of the most prominent figures in modernist studies.

Ottoline's Personalist Thought in Practice

Ottoline's memoirs and journals are full of comments about an extraordinarily wide range of individuals—artists, writers, politicians, aristocrats, clergymen. It is beyond the scope of this article to consider more than a few of them in any detail; my readings are meant to be introductory and to serve as an impetus to further discussion. Ottoline is known for assisting modernists in the production and dissemination of their work, yet it is evident that she reflected very deeply about the people she helped and came into contact with. Of 'modern artists' in general, she claimed that they

don't know what it means to have a love for humanity. They can understand a personal selfish love, but that is only an extension of themselves. The sort of love I value is one that understands ordinary human beings. I suppose many artists are wanting in vitality and they fear this larger love. They say it 'ruins their flame'. But how selfish they are, and by being so their flame flickers and dwindles, instead of becoming a torch of fire like Tolstoy's.⁶⁰

This passage, which references Tolstoy and is preceded by a reference to Keats, emphasizes a break between the modern artists, especially Katherine Mansfield, Mark Gertler, and John Middleton Murry, and the figures whom these artists paradoxically respected: Tolstoy in Mansfield's case, and Keats in Murry's. In her reflections on Mansfield, Virginia Woolf, and Aldous Huxley—representative subjects of her thinking—Ottoline focuses the discussion on the presence of personality in their lives, and whether they recognize a spiritual dimension to life which would energize their creative personality and move them towards a different kind of love.

⁶⁰ *Ottoline at Garsington*, p. 234.

KATHERINE MANSFIELD

Ottoline's primary theme in evaluating Mansfield is the extent to which she attached (or enslaved) herself to the identity of 'artist' at the expense of being a better person:

She takes great pride in being an 'artist', and she speaks as if she and Murry belonged to some sacred order of artists superior and apart from ordinary people like myself. I have known many artists, but they have never looked on themselves as 'separate' and superior as she does, and I feel puzzled by it. She is brilliant, witty in describing people and is certainly not kind or charitable.⁶¹

According to Ottoline, Mansfield would hide behind her identity as a writer and 'use people for that end' as if it were an 'absorbing game'.⁶² Her insecurities, which Ottoline suspected resulted in part from her immigrant status and family losses, exacerbated Mansfield's retreat into a shadowy self-identity which absolved her from properly negotiating human relationships: 'She is too dreadfully without human kindness to ever be wonderful to me', wrote Ottoline, recalling the time when Mansfield stayed for a weekend in December 1917; 'She is just as great a mocker as Lytton [Strachey] really. They have to develop themselves as artists at the expense of their hearts. They live in their own world—of their own perfection—and put up a wall between them and other people.'⁶³

Yet Ottoline was also sensitive to the ways in which life at Garsington and its creative experiment nurtured Mansfield's personality. Ottoline and Mansfield would talk about Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and his story 'Family Happiness', which Ottoline understood to be 'the story above all others that [Mansfield] delighted in and absorbed into herself' ('K. M.', p. 123). The garden at Garsington 'became blended in [Mansfield's] mind with the garden' in 'Family Happiness' (p. 122). Writing to Ottoline, Mansfield explained how 'I positively lead another life with you there [Garsington] bending over the flowers, sitting under the trees, feeling the delights of the heat and shade' (quoted p. 123). Having talked so much of 'embracing life', Ottoline believed that Mansfield had grown from her experience of hospitality at Garsington, in spite of the disagreements.

Reflecting on Mansfield's life up to her death in 1923, Ottoline's speaker in 'K. M.' observes: 'You turned your back on all your poses and play-acting and made a pilgrimage to find that "something" that would reveal your true self to yourself [. . .] in 1918 you were already in sight of it; and indeed you only sought for what you already at moments possessed—faith' (p. 125). Ottoline

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁶² Ottoline Morrell, 'K. M.', in *Dear Lady Ginger*, ed. by Helen Shaw (London: Century, 1984), pp. 117–25 (p. 118). Further references are given parenthetically in the text.

⁶³ Ottoline Morrell Papers 88886, Transcription of Journal for 1917–1918 (6/11), p. 65.

does not specify what kind of faith this might be, although Mansfield's engagement in the last months of her life with George Gurdjieff's 'Fourth Way' at the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man in Fontainebleau may be behind Ottoline's speculation. In her journal for October 1922 Mansfield wrote of wanting to 'lose all that is superficial and acquired in me and to become a conscious, direct human being. I want, by understanding myself, to understand others. I want to be all that I am capable of becoming.'⁶⁴ Ottoline's central intuition about Mansfield—that she was preventing herself from being fully creative as a personality—seems to resonate in Mansfield's journal entry, which speaks of a dual process of freedom from social determinacies (what has been 'acquired') and of actively seeking to understand herself better so that she may understand others more.

With Virginia Woolf, on the other hand, Ottoline focuses on her friend's persistent failure to apply understanding of herself to an *accurate* understanding of others. Ottoline presents Woolf as a discordant being, as someone whose concrete relations with others are at odds with the genius of her writing.

VIRGINIA WOOLF

Ottoline and Woolf were friends for decades. Any criticisms that Ottoline made in her journals about Woolf were never final. They were intended to help Ottoline understand Woolf's personality and her spiritual make-up.

In Ottoline's photograph albums there are pictures of Woolf surrounded by male admirers at Garsington, particularly young Oxford undergraduates. In the early 1920s men such as Lord David Cecil, Robert Gathorne-Hardy, L. P. Hartley, and Kyrle Leng frequently came to Garsington on Sunday afternoons, invited by Ottoline to meet distinguished guests such as Woolf and Strachey. Reflecting with T. S. Eliot on Woolf's behaviour at such occasions in 1923, Ottoline wrote:

The young men who clustered round her and who I thought drank in her beauty and her words with delight—were very cold about her when they came last Sunday. Lord David C[ecil] said she thought she knew so much about one—when she didn't—and that really is my feeling.

She took for granted that they were all very emancipated and of course they aren't and don't wish to be. She said, 'How delightful it must be to be young and free as you all are'—and really they don't want to be free in morals. She is far freer than they wish to be.

I was amused by her ignorance of what they were feeling—her laughter and contempt made them shy off her.⁶⁵

Eliot seemed to agree with Ottoline and 'said truly that [Woolf's] contempt

⁶⁴ Katherine Mansfield, *Letters and Journals*, ed. by C. K. Stead (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p. 278.

⁶⁵ Ottoline Morrell Papers 88886, Transcription of Journal for 1922–1924 (6/14), pp. 51–52.

makes one very uncomfortable'.⁶⁶ Later in the year, Ottoline's journal accuses Woolf of 'having no humanity', suggesting that she therefore 'really cannot see what is human. Her contempt is not balanced by her heart.'⁶⁷ Although Ottoline uses the word 'humanity' instead of 'personality', I contend that what she is focusing on is a deficiency in Woolf's personality, in the terms explored in my discussion. The potential discord between creativity and personality which Berdyaev locates seems to have manifested in Woolf's failure to align her creativity. In other words, while recognizing Woolf as a brilliant artist—she 'has an exquisite pen'—Ottoline criticizes her because, like modern artists in general, she has failed to develop her personality, which is fundamentally a spiritual and moral quality.⁶⁸

Where Mansfield potentially moved towards a deepening of personality by the end of her life, Ottoline suggests that Woolf was stunted because of her attitude towards Christianity. As Ottoline wrote:

We were talking about religion—and she said she could not imagine anyone having need of it. She had no particle of it in herself, and I feel her just as cold as ice. She talked of everyone as if she was far above them—as if she sat on a throne and they were like creeping pigmies and savages underneath.⁶⁹

Again, at this point we have to detach Woolf from her fiction. I am not at present concerned with evidence of spirituality in Woolf's novels; Ottoline praised Woolf's subtlety in her writing. From the perspective of Ottoline's personalist thinking, which sees personality as a spiritual activity in the process of deification, Woolf the person is in a critical condition, and this is what makes Ottoline's writing significant.

Ottoline offers a spiritual angle on the dynamics of modernism. In attributing a tendency to unnecessary aloofness and elitism among some of her modernist friends, she sensed a fragmentation of personality, a rupturing of creativity, and a thwarting of healthy spirituality. In the same journal, Ottoline likened herself to a 'receiving station for wireless messages—from all the spirits that have gone before—and who are still living in the sea of Divine Love and Beauty'.⁷⁰ Like Berdyaev, she also seems to be aware of, as Lowrie puts it, 'a world of spirits existing about [her], ever striving to influence [her] thought and action'.⁷¹ In the consciousness of a spiritual dimension to existence, Ottoline's thinking about her modernist friends is shaped by this mystical sense of invisible spiritual influences. Her criticism of Woolf's lack of religion is not therefore a reactionary one; it is made with the sense that Ottoline's

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 53.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 42 (emphasis original).

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 43.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 42–43 (emphasis original).

⁷⁰ Ottoline Morrell Papers 88886, Transcription of Journal for 1922–1924 (6/14), p. 66.

⁷¹ Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet*, p. 228.

own faith has helped her to become a creative personality who intuits other people's personalities in a more accurate way than Woolf's suppositions. It is as if Ottoline is hinting at the question: Was Woolf influenced spiritually by forces unknown to her, which pushed her to reject Christianity so vehemently and stunted her capacity for accurately imagining other personalities? With Huxley, however, Ottoline is more transparent about the negative effects of separation from God and the effects that a lack of personality can have on creativity.

ALDOUS HUXLEY

Huxley lived at Garsington for some time during the First World War, and met his wife through Ottoline. Ottoline therefore knew him extremely well, and followed his literary endeavours with interest. When Huxley published *Crome Yellow* in 1921, Ottoline read this as a thinly disguised depiction of life at Garsington. For example, she noticed 'pages and pages taken from a book of sermons by our rector, all mocked at and held up to derision'.⁷² She also felt that Russell and H. H. Asquith were being ridiculed. When Huxley responded to Ottoline's complaint, he claimed that when he was writing he did not imagine 'that people could argue from the reality of the place to the reality of the people, and [that] they must indeed see portraits in trees and hear them in the wind'.⁷³ Huxley is defending his art on the familiar basis that it is not life, and therefore the criteria of ethical judgement that one applies to life cannot be applied to art.

Ottoline responded to this letter, which she republished in her memoirs, by pointing out the 'disingenuousness' of his defence.⁷⁴ Apparently the rector's wife opened *Crome Yellow* and found, to her surprise, that she was reading her husband's sermons, proving that others also found scenes and people from life misappropriated in the novel. What hurt Ottoline most, however, was that Huxley *appeared* to think nothing of the life he had shared with the Morrells:

He must have been aware that in writing of our life in that *tone* he was violating all our feelings. Was he so completely blind to other people's characters, even his intimate friends, or had he such inordinate conceit that he believed that the existence of his book justified any suffering and was worth the wrecking of a friendship? Or was it merely a clever *jeu d'esprit* of an undergraduate?⁷⁵

I do not interpret this comment to mean that Ottoline misunderstood the logic of art—that it is a work of fiction and requires a different stance from

⁷² *Ottoline at Garsington*, p. 215.

⁷³ Quoted *ibid.*, p. 216.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 218 (emphasis added).

a non-aesthetic one; rather, she focuses on its direction or its tone.⁷⁶ Indeed, I see a radically ethical position which puts the exercise of love at the heart of imaginative, creative work: art in the service of personality. If creative expression is at risk of ‘wrecking’ a friendship—the bond between concrete personalities—is there something amiss in the nature of this creative act?

In a similar vein, some years earlier Ottoline recalled how William James spoke of his response to his brother’s book of travel writing, *The American Scene* (1905):

He was distressed that Henry should have written *The American Scene* about his own country; especially painful to him was the chapter about the Commercial Traveller’s breakfast. ‘How could he have written that about a fellow human being—one for whom Christ died?’⁷⁷

William James’s question is meant to be provocative: there are no easy answers. What immediately comes to mind, however, is the desire to think about the ways in which fiction opens up our imagination to human beings as potential personalities even though they are fictional characters, or the extent to which it anaesthetizes the mind by typecasting and invoking malice, somehow leaving their personalities unrealized, phantoms of non-being.

To get back to Huxley, Ottoline could not understand why he, ‘who is [generally] so full of good will to the world, so desirous of improving mechanical conditions and of abolishing war, [should] be so lacking in the capacity for contact with his fellows’.⁷⁸ Having the attitude of an ‘onlooker, a sad disapproving onlooker, a scientific student of human behaviour’, he seemed to Ottoline to have ‘checked or blocked the channels of feeling, and atrophied the imagination that springs from the heart’.⁷⁹ He did not have an imaginative grasp of the worth of the person ‘for whom Christ died’—a grasp that would, in certain places, have humanized his tone.

And yet, as with Mansfield, Ottoline detected a struggle in Huxley to discover a spiritual foundation to life which might unlock ‘the imagination that springs from the heart’. In 1936 Huxley talked to her ‘of the necessity of believing in a spiritual background to life’; but, crucially, Ottoline wrote:

I had not the courage to add what I believe to be true, that without a re-birth in which arrogance and superiority are cast away and humility and love are sought for, there can be little advance in spiritual knowledge, or in a fundamental understanding of life.⁸⁰

Echoing Jesus’s metaphor of the camel passing through the eye of a needle

⁷⁶ See Louise Rosenblatt, *Making Meaning with Texts: Selected Essays* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005), pp. 125–26.

⁷⁷ *Early Memoirs*, p. 130.

⁷⁸ *Ottoline at Garsington*, p. 223.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 220–23.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

(Matthew 19. 24), Ottoline concluded by asking herself: 'Is it not perhaps as hard for the very clever as for the very rich to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven?'⁸¹ In the context of Jesus's words, and particularly in Matthew's Gospel, the kingdom of heaven is less a place than something metaphysical, filled with reconfigured values, such as humility and love. Ottoline is implying that as an artist, Huxley is somewhat flawed because his values, whether conscious or not, are not congruent with a deeper, more profound spiritual orientation towards the world and other human beings. His personality had atrophied and, like Woolf's, sometimes prevented him from reaching the personalities in others.

Imbued with a sense of pathos, Huxley told Ottoline that 'we are all parallel straight lines destined to meet only in infinity. Real understanding is impossible.'⁸² But Ottoline found such a position untenable. Doubt in the possibility of 'real understanding' can often give way to no understanding, accepting parallel lines as something to be accommodated rather than fought against and overcome. As a personalist thinker, Ottoline worked hard to negotiate the subtleties and challenges of engaging with other people's personalities. She was never an impartial, scientific onlooker, or an Austenian connoisseur of human folly. Her sense of personality was of something multifaceted, 'made up of intentions and of all kinds of threads'; it 'is a real thing'.⁸³ And yet, 'how hard it is to give an idea of personality'.⁸⁴ Evidence of her thinking on personality in her writing is coloured by its emotional, raw, and honest tone, and the generic conventions of the journal and memoir effectively cater to such a tone. Ottoline's mode of thought is not academic; like Berdyaev, her thought derived from her own experience and the intuitive fusion of her extensive reading and her encounters with a wide range of individuals in various stages of personality growth (or indeed atrophy).

Conclusion

Though she was ridiculed in her day because of her Christian faith and mysticism, her eccentricity and overt sense of personality, Ottoline's writing tells another story, and the publication of her oeuvre in its entirety would enable a more nuanced interpretation. Her writing often focuses on her experiences of other people and her attempt to penetrate the mysteries of their personality. With its frequent references to her reading, Ottoline's writing was also her way of thinking.

Drawing on the personalist thought of the Russian thinker Nikolai Ber-

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Quoted in *Ottoline at Garsington*, p. 217.

⁸³ See above, n. 1.

⁸⁴ *Ottoline at Garsington*, p. 223.

dyaev, I have argued that Ottoline too was a personalist thinker because of the way in which she put her mystical Christian faith into dialogue with her vision of creativity and personality. She was saddened by individuals who seemed to be mere shadows or whose creativity atrophied in their failure to nurture a personality. Her benevolence was motivated by a desire to see individuals with God-given gifts and talents free to nurture these for their own benefit and for the benefit of the modern world, beset as it was by challenges for which new visions in art were needed. And, of course, she was remarkably successful in creating her own personality out of freedom, in 'being Ottoline', as Lawrence says.

In her specific evaluations of modernist artists such as Mansfield, Woolf, and Huxley, Ottoline focuses on the way in which their innovative and often brilliant art was sometimes discordant with their behaviour towards other people and how they presented themselves as persons. While appreciating the importance of their work, Ottoline is nevertheless uneasy about such a division between creativity and personality. Analytic fragmentation—particularly noticeable in modernity and modernism—was for Ottoline something to be overcome by synthetic creative construction and, more importantly, by intuiting other people with greater sensitivity, by overcoming the harsh parallel lines of modern human relations.

There is no record in Ottoline's journals, notebooks, or visitors' books to suggest that she read the works of Nikolai Berdyaev or that she met him, though she did meet one of his contemporaries, Maxim Gorky, and knew his writing. No doubt if she had read Berdyaev and made his acquaintance, she would have intuited something of his own personality and left us with a valuable addition to our understanding of the man and his work. At a time when literary studies more generally are witnessing increasing interest in religion and spirituality and their role in cultural history, Ottoline's personalist approach to thinking through some of the challenges of modernity—and the responses of modernists to this challenge—represents an important contribution to this exciting turn. That it was a woman who achieved all this is, of course, additionally significant, but that is a subject worthy of another discussion entirely.