
Trix
The Other Kipling
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9. Psychic Research

Trix returned to India, not simply resigned but resolved to salvage her marriage to Jack. She resumed her life in Calcutta, which she described as 'the sun-scorched and dust-laden city where flame flowered trees shed petals like sparks without pity to fire every breeze'.[1] There, she worked to convince Jack of her stability and reliability. She had been alienated from him for almost four years. To reassure Jack, Trix undertook her household chores and social obligations with special fervour. She tended carefully to her house and her husband, but still she had energy to spare.

Trix had been full of ideas for novels and stories before her breakdown and had written and published many poems and stories during her time in Tisbury. But she did not return to fiction or verse. Her large store of untried, unfinished, and unworkable fictional ideas simply slipped away. From time to time, she recalled with some pride how she had once submitted her work to publishers, dealt competently with editors, and gloried in seeing her work in print. Instead of returning to writing, she revived her interest in the psychic world.

On a steamy summer morning in 1903, Trix rose early and, still in her dressing gown and slippers, padded softly up to her writing table and wrote a letter to Alice Johnson, the research officer and secretary of the British Society for Psychical Research (SPR) in London. She explained that she had learned of the Society from having read and been deeply moved by *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*, written by the Society's founder, the late Professor Frederic Myers of Cambridge University.[2] Rarely shy, Trix introduced herself and described her

1 Trix Kipling, 'Letter to William de Morgan' (1908), in *William de Morgan and his Wife*, ed. by A. M. W. Stirling (New York: Henry Holt, 1922).

2 Frederic Myers, *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1903).

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interest in psychic research. She explained that she had practiced automatic writing—which she called 'pencil writing'—since 1893, for her own amusement and in spite of her family's discouragement. She added that she was able to see visions in a crystal and enclosed ten lines of automatically written verse. In her letter, Trix described herself as a healthy, cheerful woman, thirty-five years of age, who sometimes became conscious of beings and influences not patent to all. She wondered if this frame of mind should be checked or encouraged. She confessed that her own people hated what they called 'uncanniness', and that she was obliged to hide from them her keen interest in psychic matters.

Trix further explained that her automatic writing often came to her in childishly simple verse. While jingling in rhyme, the verses were rarely trivial in subject. Their most striking feature was the rapidity with which they came to her, swiftly dictated and without erasures. Her hand moved so quickly that she seldom knew the words as they were being formed. Trix added, 'I have never been in surroundings that encouraged this interest, I have never been mesmerized, I have never attended a séance, for the idea of anything connected with paid mediumship is peculiarly disagreeable to me. I only discovered by accident five years ago, that I have the clairvoyant faculty'.[3] Trix waited for Miss Johnson's reply.

Earlier that summer, Trix had become absorbed in Professor Myers's unusual work of spiritual science. In mid-day, when it was too hot to do anything but lie down and dream, Trix stretched out on her couch and read Myers's book describing his theory of the survival of the soul after death. Myers was a classical scholar and poet as well as a researcher into the subliminal mind, trance-like states, and telepathy—a word he coined. Myers's suggestive and seductive work contained his thoughts on the mysteries of psychical phenomena and set forth his innovative psychological and metaphysical theories. As the title of his book suggests, Myers wished to prove the survival of the spirit after the death of the body. He postulated that this could be confirmed by communications from the spirit world.

Trix was not alone in being attracted to Myers, his book, and the society he founded in 1882. At the end of the nineteenth century, the

3 Trix Kipling, letter to Alice Johnson. 'On the Automatic Writing of Mrs Holland', *Proceedings, Society for Psychical Research*, 21 (1908–09), pp. 171–74.

Society for Psychical Research was a respected British organization, the American branch of which had been founded by the philosopher and psychologist William James. Myers's book, which captured Trix's imagination, attracted many to the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), including numerous famous academics, philosophers, scientists, and writers. Members of the society included Sir Oliver Lodge, physicist, Lord Rayleigh, physicist and Nobel prize winner, Gerald, second Lord Balfour, classical scholar and philosopher, Prime Minister Arthur James Balfour, Gilbert Murray, Greek scholar, Henri Bergson, philosopher, Prime Minister William E. Gladstone, 'Lewis Carroll' (author of *Alice in Wonderland*), Alfred Lord Tennyson, John Ruskin, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The Society appealed to the fashionable, the respectable, academics, aristocrats, and royals.

Although Trix knew little about The Society, she familiarized herself with its immediate history and worked to understand its avowed aim—defending orthodox religion against the two main currents of thought threatening it. One current was a hunger for new and exotic forms of religious belief to supplement Christianity, including a revival of interest in the Rosicruscians, the Masons, and the theories of Emanuel Swedenborg in Europe, and the rise of Mormonism (founded in 1830) and Christian Science (founded in 1872) in the United States. A second opposing current included Darwinism, materialism, and agnosticism and the anti-religious tendencies of the day, which denied the existence of the soul separate from the body and maintained man's soul-less descent from distant non-human ancestors. The SPR represented a formidable backlash against these two powerful trends. The founders of the SPR proposed to subject the claims of these opposing belief systems to rigorous scientific exploration in the hope that they could cast serious doubt on them.

Myers and the founders of the SPR believed in the existence of the soul and were deeply desirous of answering the question, 'If man had a soul, could that soul survive bodily death?' Myers and his followers wished to prove survival after death as a state of being that man could look forward to as a sign that the universe was a benign and friendly place. They hoped through careful experiment to be able to demonstrate that immortality was a scientific fact, that natural science might rationally encompass the supernatural.

While serious intellectuals were endeavouring to test the claims and counter claims of the foundations of religion, Darwinism, and spiritualism, many frauds and fakers were exploiting the keen public interest in these theories for their own spurious ends. Spiritualism was a popular entertainment at the time. Phonies of all kinds took advantage of the credulous, describing inexplicable psychic phenomena and inventing dramatic stories of communications from the beyond. The popularity of spiritualism posed a challenge to science, if not to common sense. The fascination with the supernatural occasioned derision on the one hand and uncritical enthusiasm on the other. From the beginning, intimations of fraud sullied the reputation of the spiritual movement. The SPR endeavoured to distance itself from the numerous table-turners, spoon benders, and fakers who had recently appeared to take advantage of the fad for psychic entertainment. The society was especially eager to distinguish itself from the Theosophical Society founded by Madame Helena Blavatsky, a clever and charismatic charlatan who proclaimed herself the founder of a new religion, Theosophy, and wrote its bible, *Art Magic*.[4] The high-minded Victorians of the SPR engaged in psychic experiments from what they believed were pure scientific motives. While self-deception might have existed in the researchers of the SPR, calculated deceit did not.

Psychic phenomena were not new to the Kiplings. Alice and her younger sisters often boasted playfully that they had second sight, while Trix, sometimes playfully and sometimes seriously, believed herself to be especially open to occult experiences. Rudyard was drawn to extraordinary religious expression, Freemasonry, and other forms of psychic experience. He described the state of artistic creation as a kind of trance. He claimed that 'the pen took charge' as he wrote stories about Mowgli and animals, which later grew into *The Jungle Books*. He advised, 'When your daemon is in charge, do not try to think consciously. Drift, wait and obey'.[5] This state of artistic inspiration resembles the state of hypersensitive passivity thought to be conducive to receiving psychic messages. Many of Kipling's stories, possibly conceived in this way, also have uncanny and supernatural elements to them. ('At the End of the Passage', 'By Word of Mouth', 'In the House of Suddhoo', 'The

4 Madame Blavatsky, *Art Magic* (1876).
5 Rudyard Kipling, 'Chapter 8', in *Something of Myself*.

Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes', 'The Phantom Rickshaw', 'The Sending of Dana Da'', 'The Mark of the Beast', 'The Return of Imray', and more.) Thus, Trix was not alone in the family for being receptive to the supernatural.

For some time in private, Trix had indulged in automatic writing and crystal gazing, believing that she was successfully hiding these occupations from her family and friends. During her time in Tisbury, she had shared with her new friend Evelyn de Morgan her interest in spiritualism, although she had not shared it with others and was unaware that others knew about it, which, it seems, they did. When Trix had visited Florence, she had been encouraged by Lady Walburga Paget to resume her crystal gazing. The spirit world had, for some time, been beckoning to her.

When Trix sat at her writing table in the early morning, corresponding with her friends, she often felt her hand move of its own accord, inscribing letters intended not for her usual correspondents but for people unknown to her. These curious movements and messages made her uneasy. She tried to ignore them or avoid them by dropping her pen, leaving her writing table, and taking up needlework or knitting until the force had spent itself. If her hand was not actively engaged at some other task during these times, it clenched itself and made the motion of writing in the air. Resisting these movements exhausted her and caused her to suffer cruel headaches. But after a while, Trix became more comfortable with these strange movements and, instead of discouraging them, relaxed into them and allowed her hand to move of its own accord. At the same time, she also began more seriously to seek visions in her egg-shaped crystal ball.

When she casually or accidentally mentioned these activities to Jack, he was not pleased. When Rudyard learned of Trix's continued participation in psychic activities, he became alarmed. He was worried that psychic research might have an untoward effect on his sister's precarious mental health. Rudyard, aware of his own susceptibility to spiritualism, warned Trix away from it precisely because he well understood its powerful attractions. Trix recognized that it would be wise to keep her renewed interest in spiritual matters to herself, and she tried to do so.

Trix scoured Myers's book *Human Personality*, trying to locate a person to contact in order to express her interest in psychic matters and to describe her own psychic abilities. Eventually, she found the name of the secretary of the SPR, Alice Johnson.

Miss Johnson, as a representative of the SPR, responded to Trix's letter with interest. She was especially intrigued by Trix's potential for receiving messages from the 'other side'. She described Trix's exceptional abilities to the other members of the SPR and explained that, as Trix's family objected to psychical research, she wished her name not to be mentioned in public. She was therefore given the name 'Mrs Holland'.

Miss Johnson, a natural scientist from Newnham College, was a trained researcher, vigilant against shoddy and ill-substantiated data. Like most other members of The Society, she was eager to find appropriately serious and qualified mediums and considered Trix to be ideal, as she had literary ability, a dramatic imagination, rapid perception, and a fine discrimination of character. Most importantly, Trix was a woman of integrity. Before locating Trix, the SPR had found few mediums whose honesty they could rely on. They had unhappily learned that psychic talent often manifested itself in decidedly shady characters. Mediums like the notorious Eusapia Paladino embarrassed their sponsors and brought discredit to their research. William James in Boston had been fortunate to discover an honest and respectable medium, Mrs Leonora E. Piper, who was later paired with Trix for a number of psychic experiments.

Thus, the SPR was delighted to be contacted by Trix, a medium of ability and integrity. When they suggested that Trix send her automatic scripts to them, she readily complied. Over some weeks, Trix sent many pages of writing but received little encouragement, until she sent a script that included the name and address of a woman in London. Trix had conjured the name and address from the air, but 'Mrs A. W. Verrall of 5 Selwyn Gardens, Cambridge' was the name and address of a lecturer at Newnham College and a leading member of the SPR.

Miss Johnson and members of The Society were very excited about the inexplicable appearance of this name and address and believed it indicated a connection between the two women. To exploit this valuable connection, Miss Johnson designed experiments that paired Trix (Mrs

Holland) with Mrs Verrall to discover 'cross-correspondences' between their two texts.

'Cross correspondences' were being carefully studied by the SPR to investigate communication between immortal souls and living mediums. The SPR submitted for study the theory that fragmentary utterances from one script, when put together with the fragmentary utterances of another script, supplemented one another and expressed a complete idea only partially expressed in each. This complete idea was trying to be communicated by a person or group of persons from the beyond who had invented this plan of cross-correspondences expressly to meet the objections of sceptics and unbelievers. This theory rested on the belief that an active intelligence was constantly at work in the present and was not a mere echo or remnant of individuals of the past.

More easily acceptable was the theory that information contained in alleged messages from the 'other side' were not actually communications from the dead but resulted from telepathy among living mediums. Messages received from the 'other side' were actually the product of the automatists acting under the impact and implied direction of the situation. Eager to act out the characterizations which they had taken upon themselves, they produced the desired results.

Although Trix was not privy to the exact nature of the experiments she was participating in, she submitted her scripts to The Society, assured that they were useful evidence. Trix never asserted a belief in the theory of cross-correspondences, never claimed to be in contact with the dead, or to communicate with spirits, but she was aware and proud of her own sensitivity to perceptions and influences that were outside of normal consciousness. She knew she had a remarkably keen memory. Most of all, she wanted to communicate, to be understood, and to transmit and receive thoughts and feelings over distance and time. Throughout her life, she felt she had failed at communicating to those she most earnestly wished to reach, and this failure was a continual sadness to her. (She was also able to transform this sadness into hilarious dialogues of marital discord. Miscommunication can be a tragedy, but it can also be a joke.)

Many people involved with psychic research had suffered a terrible sudden bereavement, a secret love, or a hidden relationship. While Trix had not suffered in these ways, she had experienced a prolonged bereavement, a childhood of exile and loneliness. In Trix's scripts, she

conveyed her old yearning to be heard and understood, her ancient unanswered cry for her mother. Many of Trix's scripts sounded like a wail of pain from a bereft child.

Trix sent scripts to Miss Johnson steadily from September 1903 to January 1904—filled, like her conversation, with quotations from poetry, fiction, and drama as well as classical literature and mythology. Early in the morning, before the bustle of the day began, Trix crept softly to her desk, settled herself into her chair, and, as instructed, tried to make her mind blank in order to receive messages from Frederic Myers and Edmund Gurney, former leaders of the SPR. Leaning forward with her pen or pencil, she bid these spirits to come to her. When the spirits came, she felt her hand move, saw the letters form, and wrote until the spirits passed. Although she felt she was conscious during her writing, on several occasions she partially lost consciousness, and, on one occasion, when she shut her eyes, she felt as if her right arm were the only part of her body not asleep. At times, she felt so sick while writing that she had to get up from her desk and leave the room. At times, she found that being interrupted at her writing gave her a jarred and dizzy feeling. But at other times, when she concluded her writing, she felt refreshed and alert.

She had been directed to write every day, and for a brief period she seated herself at her desk and waited for the spirit to come to her at eleven each morning. But she found that she preferred writing earlier in the day when she was less likely to be disturbed. She wrote at this early hour once a week, not once a day. Trix thus arrived at a schedule of weekly sessions, where, as the dawn broke outside of her tall windows, she sat alone and called to the spirits. Most often, what came to her, as she cleared her mind and closed her eyes, were sad thoughts about the difficulty of communication between souls living and dead. Her waves of classical and mythological references rode on an undercurrent of pure personal lament.

Sometimes, Trix, under the control of Mr Myers, wrote in a sloping, pointed, and continuous hand, using a pen. At other times, under the control of Mr Gurney, she wrote in a bolder, more upright, often disjointed style, using a pencil. Under the influence of both Myers and Gurney, she dwelled on her difficulties and discouragements. The various texts do not make it clear who exactly is describing these troubles. It could be Myers or Gurney or Trix herself, who is 'sending a message', 'dictating feebly', or feeling powerless and impotent.

This appeal is typical.

'If it were possible for the soul to die back into earth life again I should die from sheer yearning to reach you—to tell you that all that we imagined is not half wonderful enough for the truth . . .'.[6] Trix detailed the troubles:

> The nearest simile I can find to express the difficulties of sending a message—is that I appear to be standing behind a sheet of frosted glass—which blurs sight and deadens sound—dictating feebly—to a reluctant and somewhat obtuse secretary. A feeling of terrible impotence burdens me—I am so powerless to tell what means so much—I cannot get into communication with those who would understand and believe me.[7]

Miss Johnson, who edited and commented on the scripts of both Mrs Holland and Mrs Verrall, wrote that 'the reader who compares the general character of the two scripts can hardly fail to notice the emotional nature and the note of personal appeal in the utterances of the Holland-Myers [Trix] as contrasted with the calmer, more impersonal, and more matter-of-fact tone of the Verrall-Myers'.[8] In concluding her impressions of the first phase of Trix's involvement with the SPR, Miss Johnson focused on Trix's painful efforts to be recognized by the spirits from beyond in laments like this: 'It is such a passionate craving sometimes that I find myself crying out: "If I could help you—Oh! If I could only help you!" while I write'. Trix reported that the writing 'often brings a very sad impression of great depression with it—a feeling as if some one was calling to deaf ears'. Trix recalled:

> a feeling that sometimes comes in connection with the script—a feeling that some one, somewhere, urgently and passionately desires to be understood, or reported even without understanding, and that no mental strain on my part can adequately respond to this demand. This feeling has been strong enough to make me cry and to make me speak aloud. I do not often dwell upon it. I frequently control it, for it seems to me perilously akin to hysteria; but it is a very real part of automatic script.[9]

Trix, struggling to receive and transmit Myers's words, cried aloud, 'If I could only reach you—if I could only tell you—I long for power and

6 *Proceedings of SPR*, 21 (1908–09), p. 179.
7 Ibid., p. 208.
8 Ibid., p. 239.
9 Ibid., p. 240.

all that comes to me is an infinite yearning—an infinite pain. Does any of this reach you—reach any one—or am I only wailing as the wind wails—wordless and unheeded'.[10]

In her automatic writing for the SPR, Trix reported Myers's and Gurney's anguished yearnings across the infinite beyond to transmit messages. Then she sent her transcriptions across thousands of miles, from India to England.

'Wailing as the wind wails' recalls the feelings of Trix's sad childhood. As a lonely little girl, Trix longed for contact and consolation, writing imaginary letters and composing imaginary scenes of reunion, reconciliation, and revenge.

Later, as a misunderstood and unappreciated wife trying to reach her unresponsive husband, she experienced similar feelings, which she cleverly transformed into comic dialogues of miscommunication. As a cautious and conflicted fiction writer, she tried, without complete conviction, to write what she deeply knew and felt, the bitter alienation and frustration of women's lives. 'Wailing as the wind wails' is how Trix had often, perhaps always, felt. Automatic writing gave her permission to weep and wail on schedule and on paper. It also held out the promise of being useful to researchers.

For five months, week after week before dawn, Trix let herself slip into an altered state, somewhere between waking and dreaming. She sought out this trance-like state, encouraged it, and repeated it.

After January 1904, she wrote with less regularity, but continued her correspondence with the SPR. Then, in April 1904, she stopped her correspondence for almost a year, because, as she explained to Miss Johnson, when she was interrupted during her writing, she experienced a terrible jarring feeling. This feeling did not justify the uncertain results she obtained from her writing. The greater problem during this time was that Trix didn't have the privacy she needed to write undisturbed. She was not in her own home in Calcutta but traveling on the continent with her husband. On 15 February 1905, Trix resumed the correspondence with the SPR, sending Miss Johnson a poem which she had written in January of 1905. She explained her long silence in part by describing the troubling sleepiness and faintness that had accompanied her recent writing. She

10 Ibid., p. 222.

had also been discomfited by a trance she had fallen into, during which she had spoken automatically for about a quarter of an hour.

Trix omitted from this explanation Jack's strict prohibition against her correspondence with Alice Johnson. Jack claimed that he was protecting Trix's health from the extreme agitation caused by her psychic activity. But he was also protecting his own reputation among the British ruling class, who looked on psychic activity with extreme disfavour. On more than one occasion, Jack had cause to suspect that, despite his strictures, Trix was continuing the correspondence. When he was especially troubled by doubts, he interrogated Trix cruelly. On one occasion, when he wrung a confession of disobedience from her, he extracted a promise that she would put an end to the correspondence. Trix tried to honour this hard promise, but the impulse to write was irresistible, and she resumed her writing in February 1905, continuing with complaints about the difficulties of communication. 'The Veil remains the Veil. The Door will continue to have no Key…', and 'We feel as if only one sentence reached of twenty that we strive to send'.[11]

During the spring and summer of 1905, Trix, with Jack's approval, made arrangements to travel alone to England in the fall. What Jack did not know and would not have approved of was that her plans included a meeting with Miss Johnson, the woman who had been an important part of her world for the preceding two years, who had received not only her scripts but also her private thoughts and feelings.

In early October 1905, Trix travelled past Oxford Street to busy Hanover Square, then to number 20, the headquarters of the Society for Psychic Research. Eager and excited to have her first meeting with Miss Alice Johnson, she arrived at the appointed hour at the impressive Regency building. At the double pillared entrance of the brick façade, she was greeted by Miss Johnson, a woman slightly older than herself. Together, the two women climbed the wide ornamental staircase, lit from above by glowing glass panes. Miss Johnson ushered Trix into a formal drawing room and directed her to a comfortable chair. Having seated Trix, she then seated herself opposite, under a large portrait of man with a trimmed grey beard, high forehead, and keen gaze. Trying to look at Miss Johnson, Trix found herself drawn to the man in the

11 Ibid., p. 249.

painting, who seemed familiar to her, but whom she could not identify. She could not take her eyes off the portrait and stared so fixedly at it that she feared she might fall into a trance. She could hardly listen to what Miss Johnson was saying to her. Before the interview could begin, Trix anxiously asked Miss Johnson, 'Who is that man? I'm sure I've seen him before. I know him quite well'. Miss Johnson explained that he was Frederic Myers, the dead man whose spirit Trix had been struggling to hear and report. Once Miss Johnson had identified the portrait, Trix recalled having seen it reproduced in one of Myers's books.[12]

After identifying the portrait, Trix spoke calmly with Miss Johnson for two and a half hours. Wishing to appear amiable and tractable, Trix held herself still and silent to listen to the Miss Johnson's reports of the society's progress and purpose. But when her chance to speak came, she rushed on enthusiastically to describe the details of her writing process. She happily supplied the sources of her many classical allusions and poetic quotations. When Miss Johnson questioned her repeatedly about the possibility that she may have heard, seen, or read names, dates, or photographs that appeared in her scripts mysteriously and spontaneously, she struggled to reconstruct all the books she had read and photographs she had seen, and agreeably entertained all the possible explanations Miss Johnson suggested for their appearance. Trix found Miss Johnson cautious and reticent in her speech and careful to avoid any indiscretions about the experiments in which Trix was participating.

Miss Johnson recognized that Trix often produced in her automatic scripts names, places, and images, which, when shown to her later, were unknown to her. Miss Johnson was impressed by this failure of Trix's supraliminal (conscious) mind to recognize something well known to her subliminal (unconscious) mind. Later scripts of Trix's confirmed the process by which ideas and impressions recorded by the subliminal mind emerged in automatic scripts, although they were unavailable to the supraliminal mind. Myers and others recognized that the dreaming mind similarly had access to impressions and images not available to ordinary consciousness, and which the waking mind found surprising, unbelievable, and often unacceptable.

12 Ibid., p. 266.

Trix met Miss Johnson several more times in November, cheerfully providing whatever information was requested of her. At one meeting on 16 November, Trix arrived at Hanover Square and was taken by surprise to be introduced to a woman she had never seen before. This was Mrs Verrall, Trix's immediate cross correspondent. Trix and Mrs Verrall, who had never met nor communicated directly before, were escorted up the grand stairs under the skylight and into an austere drawing room, seated at separate desks, and instructed to write scripts while sitting together in the same space. The experiment was meant to determine if propinquity had any influence on the correspondences in their writings. The experiment proved that it did not. From November to June, Trix returned many times to Hanover Square to sit as a subject in psychometry experiments for the Society, exchanging rings, gloves, and other trinkets to test for influences emanating from objects. While these experiments produced largely negative results, they nonetheless constituted useful data for the Society.

Through November and December of 1905, while Trix travelled back and forth from London to Tisbury and to Edinburgh, she faithfully sent scripts to the Society. In February 1906, Trix began two series of experiments with Mrs Verrall, which she found especially difficult, as they produced faintness almost to stupor. She tried writing in the evening, sitting in a hard, straight chair away from her table with no support for her arms or head, rather than in the morning to see if this helped, but she continued to feel so sleepy she fancied she might fall into a trance. Miss Johnson encouraged her to continue writing, and, despite discomfort, she kept at it.

Miss Johnson, when evaluating the evidence provided by Trix and other mediums, was a scrupulous and prescient investigator. Writing on subliminal reminiscences, she suggested explanations that were entirely reasonable and that resemble the results of modern neuro-scientific experiments. She posited that the recrudescence of memories that have completely lapsed from the normal consciousness is common and is not to be attributed to a supernormal cause. Events, although seemingly forgotten, have been recorded and retained, and are often reproduced in dreams, hallucinations, and recovered memories.

When not visiting London, Trix stayed with her parents in Tisbury. She felt it was her duty when visiting The Gables to try to entertain

Alice, and she generously chattered away to her frail and unhappy mother. On this trip to England, Trix was surprised to be invited to stay at Wilden with her wealthy Aunt Louisa and Uncle Alfred Baldwin. Trix had never before been invited to visit Wilden or to spend time with the grand Baldwins. Trix was suspicious that Louisa, a devout Christian, had heard of Trix's involvement with the Society for Psychic Research, and had invited her expressly to dissuade her from pursing her impious pastime. If she tried to influence Trix, she was unsuccessful. Trix remained devoted to her friends in the SPR.

The high point of Trix's visit to England was a large house party she attended at Clouds, the Salisbury home of her parents' closest friends, the Percy Wyndhams. The Wyndhams were members of an elite social group called 'The Souls', who cultivated high aesthetic and cultural values and practiced unconventional and liberated morals. The members of the group pursued superior social pleasures, disdaining the vulgarities of racing, card-playing, and gossip. The Wyndhams' home, a grand gothic-style mansion, was the setting for many gatherings of intellectual excitement and romantic intrigue. The interior of the house was designed by Kipling family friend, William Morris, and the walls were hung with paintings by Trix's uncles, Edward Burne-Jones and Edward Poynter.

Trix arrived at Clouds to find that the many distinguished guests included twenty adults, several cheerful adolescents, and numerous raucous children. At her arrival, Trix was shown to her own lovely bedroom. When she came down to luncheon in the elaborately decorated dining room, she was delighted by the informal festive meal. Later, at the formal dinner, she nervously wondered how she could speak with any of the many famous men. When she was seated between Sir Oliver Lodge and Mr George Wyndham, she did not know which way to turn and felt 'like the donkey between two bundles of hay'.[13] She was especially eager to talk to Sir Oliver Lodge, who resembled a great sage with his fine brow and long beard, but she was intimidated by his formidable reputation. Lodge was a revered scientist and author of many books who had been, since the 1880s, interested in detecting and transmitting electromagnetic waves. Along with Marconi and Tesla, he was an early experimenter on

13 Trix Kipling, letter to Maud Diver, 4 September 1906.

the transmission of radio signals and wireless telegraphy. For Trix, he was of special interest as a former president of the SPR (from 1901-3) and a close friend of the late Frederic Myers.

At dinner, Trix wished to speak with Lodge, but feared he would try to talk to her about electromagnetics. She was relieved when he engaged her in conversation about the psychic realm. When he asked about her automatic writing, she enthusiastically described her part in the cross-correspondence experiments and was surprised and flattered to learn that Sir Oliver knew about her. Delighted by his familiarity with her work, Trix described how effortless automatic writing was for her, how it came to her unsummoned and with swiftness and ease or not at all. Lodge was surprised, telling Trix that most mediums who had attained proficiency had done so only after a great deal of study and effort.

Gerald Balfour, a distinguished SPR member, who was present at the party, asked Trix if she would attempt crystal gazing as an after-dinner entertainment. She readily agreed and gave a dramatic performance, while Balfour cooperatively held the crystal for her. When Lodge prepared to leave the house party, he went out of his way to search Trix out. In saying goodbye to her, he repeated his praise of her powers, assuring her that they were a great deal rarer than she imagined. He earnestly begged her to faithfully continue the experiments—however dull they might seem—for the sake of science. She promised to continue her writing, a pledge she meant to redeem.

At their last meeting, 28 May 1906, Trix and Miss Johnson discussed the results of the new set of experiments, which had been scientifically tabulated for correspondences and were more compelling than earlier experiments. Nonetheless, the cautious Miss Johnson wrote that the cross correspondences of Mrs Holland and Mrs Verrall had not produced 'really good evidence of supernormal knowledge'.[14]

She concluded that the results of the cross-correspondence experiments were too slender to support the hypothesis of supernatural communication. The many experiments were seen as promising and worthy of consideration, but not proof of any supernatural communication. Miss Johnson concluded that 'the same normal though

14 Alice Johnson, 'On the Automatic Writing of Mrs Holland', *Proceedings, Society for Psychical Research*, 25 (1911), p. 391.

obscure psychological processes with which we are all familiar in dream and reverie are also at work in automatic writing'.[15]

After her last meeting with Miss Johnson in Hanover Square, Trix returned to Tisbury to rejoin her mother, who was anxiously worrying over the deteriorating health of her sister Agnes. Through most of the spring, Aunt Aggie—wife of the painter Edward Poynter—had been in failing health. While Aunts Edie and Louise had nursed their sister in her final months, Alice had only rarely gone to comfort her sister. After several months lying in bed, often unconscious, Aggie died on 12 June.

Trix had already booked her passage back to India, when Agnes died, and, although she recognized her mother's sorrow, she could not postpone her departure. She left her mother on the day of Aggie's funeral, 16 June, and boarded the P. & O. Somali in London, as she had planned. Abandoning her grieving mother gave Trix a fierce headache, which lasted for the first three days of the voyage. But soon, Trix's head cleared, and she felt well enough to read, devouring Sir Oliver Lodge's book, *Life and Matter*,[16] which convinced her that telepathy was an actual phenomenon. For most of the journey home, she felt unusually well. She made new acquaintances and resumed a friendship with an old dancing partner from Simla days. The weather was perfect all the way to Port Said with sapphire seas, fresh breezes, and lovely cool nights full of stars. East of Suez, the seas grew rougher, but the lovely beginning of the voyage made Trix feel rested and restored. In the past, Trix had suffered on the long sea voyage, but this trip was a delight. Despite the heat and the rolling of the ship, Trix never missed a meal.

She arrived in Bombay on the morning of 8 July, but she still had to endure the long, hot trip to Calcutta. This, too, was easier than before, especially because Jack had made special efforts to make her comfortable. He provided an electric fan for her railway carriage, had hired a new Victoria with rubber tires for her overland journey, and had even purchased her favourite tooth-paste.

When Trix finally arrived in Calcutta and saw Jack, she was alarmed. He was thin and white, and worry creased his face. He told Trix that he had been unable to shake off a constant low fever, and that it had worn him down. She could see that the fever had also exacerbated his usual

15 Ibid., p. 283.
16 Oliver Lodge, *Life and Matter* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1905).

depression. Despite his low energy and low spirits, he had managed to engage a new house at 7/1 Loudon Street—a large three-storied structure on the corner of Loudon and Shakespeare Streets, in the heart of 'White Town'. It was ochre-yellow stucco with green shutters, fancifully etched windows, and a lush walled garden in the rear. Trix was charmed by the asymmetry of the house and its many small rooms and impressed by the vast, forty feet long drawing room. She made plans, which she eventually carried out, to make the small rooms into a suite of separate bedrooms and dressing rooms for herself and Jack. She needed a place where she could sit alone and be undisturbed in the early hours of the day, when she resumed her automatic writing.

The house was two blocks away from the Saturday Club, where Trix and Jack dined, played tennis, swam, and met with friends. The club, named for the day of the week on which the mail arrived from abroad, was a gathering place for the British. It featured formal reception areas, rooms for billiard tables and squash courts, two dining rooms, four bars, and a large hall for dancing parties. Behind the main building were lawns for tennis courts and tables for outdoor dining. In a separate building, a large marble swimming pool was housed beneath a vaulted glass skylight.

The house and the club were ideal for socializing, but Jack hardly felt social. Added to his usual complaints was a new one—varicose veins, for which he required surgery followed by bed rest. After recovering from the operation, he continued to be in poor health and low spirits. Trix felt she was constantly battling it, like 'David slinging pebbles at the Goliath of his habitual depression'.[17] Although she knew how useless it was to try to dispel his black moods, she couldn't stop herself from trying. She endeavoured to think only resolute and cheerful thoughts, refusing to let Jack's despair drag them both down. Faithful to the pledge she had made to Sir Oliver Lodge, in early August, Trix returned to her writing for the SPR, rarely missing a week. As always, she filled her scripts with literary references—Shakespeare, Dante, Ovid, Milton, Swinburne, Shelley, Poe, and classical myth. But she wailed and worried less in these later writings than she had before. Trix continued writing regularly on Wednesday mornings through 1907 and into early March 1908. Though

17 Trix Kipling, letter to Maud Diver, 17 October 1907.

Trix took her promise seriously, she had her doubts about the results of her scripts. She confided to the de Morgans, the only people to whom she ever mentioned her automatic scripts, that while the writing went on fairly regularly, it was dull when she read it over. Nonetheless, she faithfully sent her writing—secretly—to the patient readers at the SPR, and she modestly claimed that 'they sometimes found things that seem to count'.[18] As before, her texts were compared with Mrs Verrall's and with several other mediums for cross correspondences.

During the rest of the day, while enduring the extreme climate—alternating periods of insufferable heat and pounding rain—she ran the household and did her part in the social and sporting activities Jack was able to pursue. As always, she read great amounts of contemporary and nineteenth-century fiction. She read current novelists as well as Thackeray, Austen, Balzac, Flaubert, and Maupassant, and had a remarkable memory for everything she read. Although reading constantly, Trix wrote almost nothing. She tried her hand at drama, composing a slight entertainment for children. In September 1906, the play 'The Smuggler's Cave', or 'Old Mother Midnight', was performed in the puppet theatre at the home of her friends, the Mackails. In the program, the author of the play, Alice Fleming, identified herself with the anagram Alice F. Le Ming. James M. Barrie, creator of *Peter Pan*—who Trix described as 'a very shy bird'—was in the audience, but he hastily flew away before Trix had a chance to talk with him.[19]

This was all that Trix produced. She did not compose stories, plan novels, or submit essays. She confessed to Maud, 'Don't I know the 'stuck' fits in writing—(I'll forgive you if you suggest that I appear hardly to know any others!) I think you have wonderfully few of them as writers go'.[20] Trix wrote and published nothing, while Maud continued to publish one story after another. At the same time, Rudyard, at the age of forty-one, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1907. Trix did not openly lament the end of her own writing career, contrive excuses for abandoning it, or express envy of the international fame of her brother. Trix's friend Redney Coates felt that Trix poured all of

18 Trix Kipling, 'Letter to the de Morgans' (1908), in *William de Morgan and his Wife*, ed. by A. M. W. Stirling (New York: Henry Holt, 1922).
19 Trix Kipling, letter to Maud Diver, 18 September 1907.
20 Ibid.

her extensive energy into her long and charming letters, which were absolutely 'Trix on paper'. This explained why there was so little of 'Trix between covers'.[21] If Trix regretted that she was spending her energy on letters and scripts and not on fiction, she did not complain about it.

When it was too hot to concentrate on anything, she entertained herself with numerology—reading character from names. In the languor-inducing heat, she made calculations for her own amusement, by replacing the letters in names with numbers and then supplying the characteristics associated with the numbers. She made calculations for herself, for Maud, and even for Maud's fictional characters. Evelyn, one of Maud's heroines, is calculated at 7+5+3. Neptune and Mercury are her planets, sea green and slate blue her colours. She is magnetic, full of life and go, apt to be intuitive and sometimes mystic and occult. She is imaginative, plucky, often not overly scrupulous, tender-hearted, generous, and easy going—up to a certain point when she will fight like a tiger cat. Trix passed her time in this silly and harmless way.

While Trix kept up a steady correspondence with good friends back in England, including Maud and Redney Coates, she had only a few sustaining friendships in Calcutta. Like most English women in India, Trix had little experience with 'natives', and no friends among Indian women. Indian women tended to keep to themselves, and British women resisted interfering with this tendency, which nicely coincided with their own. But in the fall of 1907, Trix made the acquaintance of a woman lawyer named Cornelia Sorabji. With financial help and special pleading from her friends, Cornelia had been educated at Bombay University and at Somerville College at Oxford, where she was the first woman to take the Bachelor of Civil Laws exam. She became a social reformer and legal activist, advising and championing purdah women denied access to the legal system. She petitioned the India Office to provide women with a female legal advisor in provincial courts and, to that end, travelled throughout India to the provinces of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, and Assam. Trix met her at the start of her long and distinguished career and was impressed with her exceptional education, extensive reading, wide social circle, fascinating personality, lovely sense of humour, brilliant mind, and mystical spirit. Trix was proud and pleased to have

21 Trix Kipling, letter to Maud Diver, 6 May 1908.

formed this friendship, and was especially gratified when, after she had introduced Mrs Sorabji to Maud Diver, the two women collaborated on a book, *The Englishwoman in India* (1909).[22]

Trix remained devoted to her old friend Maud and wrote to her faithfully on a fortnightly schedule. Maud, who had published stories in the same magazines that had accepted Trix's early efforts, was just beginning her long and successful career as a novelist. Trix read Maud's early novels *Captain Desmond, V.C.* (1907), *The Great Amulet* (1908), and *Candles in the Wind* (1909) in rough drafts and gave specific suggestions as well as general advice. Trix criticized her friend's work with great confidence. She had a sure sense of how a novel was structured, how a character was developed, how sympathy for a character was maintained, damaged, or destroyed. She praised Maud's insight, her wonderful character studies, her splendid writing, her powers of invention, and her steady application. She disliked overwriting and was especially firm when discouraging Maud from over-praising her characters. She begged Maud to not rub in the best qualities of her most beloved characters, and when Maud was unable to adhere to this advice, Trix sweetly chided her. 'I smile at your tendency to put sugar on the top of the butter [...] yet you have struggled bravely against that inclination to over sweetness!'[23]When a reviewer in *The Times* wrote that Maud's novels were 'not quite literature', Trix tried tactfully to explain this criticism to Maud.

> Well to the best of my often expressed belief you cannot do full justice to your work if it goes to the printers hot from your hand. You ought—on completion—to lay it aside for at least 3 months & think of something else—Then bring a rested brain & a fresh eye to bear upon it & make your final corrections & eliminations—Your gift of language & your power of realizing & loving your characters have of course contributed greatly to you success but like all good gifts they need guarding & controlling—Had you brought a new cool eye to bear on Candles you would have toned down some of the over praise of Lyndesay— [...] You remember how years ago I used to risk your wrath by begging you to turn the limelight off Theo—It's the same sort of thing—Trust your readers a little

22 Cornelia Sorabji and Maud Diver, *The English Woman in India* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1909).

23 Trix Kipling, letter to Maud Diver, 6 May 1908.

> more & don't rub in your best beloved characters too much—You only do it with your special favourites –
>
> I think leisurely re-reading would have made you cut out one or two of the scenes between Lyndesay & Videlle—Holding down the loud pedal too much rather expresses what I am trying to say—As for 'efflorescence of diction'—I notice—when reading Candles en masse that—owing to your wealth of words every noun has almost inevitably one adjective—& often two or three & that does give rather a piled up effect—Also—since we are dissecting things, be wary that your sentences don't grow too long –[24]

After reading a published edition of *Captain Desmond*, Trix wrote that she was 'proud to think I had a finger in the beginning of such an admirable pie!'[25] She went on with praise for many specific improvements she had herself suggested earlier. She discouraged Maud from trying to turn *Captain Desmond* into a drama, citing the considerable difficulties of having a play produced without the aid of a cooperative actor manager, leading lady, or wealthy backer. She cautioned Maud how situations which can be delicately developed in the leisure of a novel must be rushed and coarsened to suit the stage.

Maud's second novel, *The Great Amulet*, published in 1908 by William Blackwood & Sons, was dedicated 'to Trix Fleming in Memory of Dalhousie Days'.[26] This dedication, memorializing the teenage friendship between the two girls, expressed Maud's gratitude to her old friend for her extensive help in the writing of the novel**.** Trix had written detailed suggestions about the shape and tone of the novel, mostly suggesting cutting, pruning, and toning down. She repeatedly recommended restraint and time for reflection and revision. When Trix read the plot outline of Maud's third novel, *Candles in the Wind,* she responded with a long letter of specific, chapter by chapter, suggestions. Maud had many reasons to be grateful for the editorial help of her friend.

During these years, Trix was occupied by tending to her pleasant home and her gloomy, grumbling husband. Jack's continual depression weighed heavily on her, and although she had devised methods for easing his suffering and sparing herself, she had to continually steel

24 Trix Kipling, letter to Maud Diver, 6 December 1909.
25 Trix Kipling, letter to Maud Diver, 9 April 1907.
26 Maud Diver, *The Great Amulet* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1908).

herself against Jack's fears and forebodings. Writing to Maud, she put the best face she could on the extreme differences between herself and Jack.

> I suppose it is Nature's intense care for the next generation that insures married people always having widely differing tastes. It prevents the race from getting groovy—if your husband were as book loving as you are Cyril would not be the dear many sided lad he is—& if I had been privileged to have babies Jack's practicalness & order & punctuality would have been greatly blest to them.[27]

By this time, Trix had accepted the deep divide between herself and Jack, and although she tried to find the good in the disparity of their tastes and interests, she did not find much. She lamented that she not been 'privileged to have babies', but she never explained exactly why she had been denied the 'privilege'. She was simply unaccountably and sadly childless. Trix maintained her health and her spirits during this last stay in India. She was proud of herself for having fared so well where many other women had suffered in mind or body.

In March 1908, as Jack's army service was terminated and she prepared to leave India for the last time, Trix suspended her writing for the SPR and busied herself with the details of closing the house and packing up her things. She was no longer afraid of the hardships of the journey back to England and had learned to accept the difficulties cheerfully. Knowing it would be her last Indian railway journey and her last long ocean voyage, she was prepared to be uncomfortable and even sick. But when, in mid-summer, she boarded the ship for the final voyage home, she was quite well, and after 24 hours on shipboard, she was able to shake off her few worries and laugh as she chased her dinner plate across a rocking table. She was well enough to write her first script in several months on 23 July, from shipboard.

As an officer of the Indian Army in permanent civil employ to the Survey of India, Jack had served faithfully for many years. Fleming's career, a steady rise from Captain through Major to Lt. Colonel, was unspectacular. He advanced, but slowly and never to a position of prominence. His stint as superintendent 2nd Grade in the Survey of India in Upper Burma lasted but a brief time in 1900 due to his ill health. Receiving his first commission in 1902, he was based in Calcutta first in

27 Trix Kipling, letter to Maud Diver, 4 September 1906.

charge of Engraving and Drawing, then in charge of the Photographic and Lithographic Office, then in charge of the Survey General and Mathematical Instrument Office, and finally as Superintendent of the Map Publications Office.[28] He studied military history and wrote an ambitious volume, *The A.B.C. of the More Important Battles of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, which was unfortunately never published. His undistinguished career can be accounted for by his own physical ailments as well as Trix's mental problems, both of which required long and frequent home leaves. Jack and other Fleming family members suggested that Trix's occult activities compromised his advancement, but this contradicts Trix's many assertions that she kept her activities to herself, protecting Jack from being associated with anything that might be considered improper or unsavoury. Jack's own depressive personality coupled with his many physical complaints were sufficient to keep his career from flourishing.

When his service ended, he and Trix travelled amiably together on the continent—to France, Spain, and Italy. They returned to England in the late summer of 1908.

In the fall, Trix had her long-anticipated visit with Miss Johnson in Hanover Square. After describing her most recent script from the voyage home, Trix considered Miss Johnson's newest proposal—a new series of cross-correspondence experiments with Mrs Verrall and Mrs Piper, an American medium discovered by William James. Trix accepted the invitation and promised to set aside time to write weekly automatic scripts.

In the spring of 1909, Trix and Jack visited friends in Torquay, then returned to Edinburgh, where Trix tried to make herself comfortable at 8 Napier Road. Never happy under the sunless Scottish skies, Trix tried to content herself with Jack and the Fleming family.

She paid frequent visits to Alice and Lockwood at The Gables in Tisbury. Alice, who had grown more and more isolated, was delighted to have Trix with her. She rarely ventured out, and few of her neighbours cared to call on her, having been alienated by her sharp tongue. When Trix came to visit, Alice insisted that they not be separated, installing a cot in her room for Trix. Used to her mother's anxious hovering from her previous visits, Trix accepted Alice's conditions and manipulations.

28 Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, India, *The Quarterly Indian Army List* (1896–1912), Calcutta, British Library, London.

Alice called her an angel. Lockwood, still active and social in his retirement, had deepened his friendships with his neighbours. When Trix came to The Gables, he was happy to give over Alice's care to her, while he dined out with friends. Like Alice, he was full of praise for his daughter.

Whether in Edinburgh or Tisbury, Trix faithfully wrote her automatic scripts. Between 25 November 1908 and 19 May 1909, she produced twenty-two pieces of script. When she could get to London, she continued to meet with Miss Johnson, going over her scripts and identifying the many obscure allusions and references. Trix's scripts were compared with scripts from Mrs Verrall and from another medium, named Mrs Forbes—not from Mrs Piper, as originally proposed. The comparisons encouraged Alice Johnson to entertain a more audacious interpretation than she had ventured previously. She put forward as a possibility the existence of an independent intervention, an active designing intelligence constantly at work in the present and coming from departed spirits from the other side. But, as an honest investigator, Miss Johnson reported all of the very compelling objections to this theory. 'The weakness of all well-authenticated cases of apparent telepathy from the dead is, of course, that they can generally be explained by telepathy from the living'.[29] She concluded that spirit agency had not been proven conclusively.

Whether the result was deemed supernatural or telepathic, the evidence supporting it was supplied by Mrs Holland, and that evidence was extremely useful to the Society. Trix was considered an important medium by the SPR, and to be valued by the members of this society was sustaining for Trix. In India, she had been surrounded by people, including her husband, who offered her little intellectual stimulation or affirmation. They failed to notice her gifts, praise her efforts, or make use of her energy and enthusiasm, while the members of The Society—university-trained, knowledgeable in literature, philosophy, and the sciences—respected and esteemed her efforts. Here was an audience who appreciated her talents.

Trix's contribution to the SPR—many hundreds of pages of automatic writing—took a shape that elegantly combined her fluid writing with her emotional longing. As a medium for the departed spirits of Frederic

29 Alice Johnson, 'On the Automatic Writing of Mrs Holland', *Proceedings, Society for Psychical Research*, 25 (1911), p. 375.

Myers and Edmund Gurney, she poured out scripts in which she repeatedly, monotonously begged for communication, understanding, and connection. She allowed herself to fall into a state of feeling that was familiar, if painful to her—that depressed her spirits, often to tears, but provided an outlet for her yearning. In this dreamy state, Trix experienced feelings that were unavailable or unacceptable to her in her normal waking state. She opened herself up to the 'obscure psychological processes with which we are all familiar in dream and reverie',[30] as Alice Johnson described them. Through these psychological processes, called primary process thinking or free-association, Trix found a way to express her feelings of longing, isolation, and disconnection. If a psychoanalyst, rather than a psychic researcher, had listened to or read her scripts, she might have offered Trix some insight into her longing and perhaps some relief from it. But Trix found relief just in being able to express her yearning and have it heard and valued.

Through the SPR, Trix designed a therapy for herself that allowed her to experience painful states and feelings again and again and perhaps gain some mastery over them. It is as if, ten years before Sigmund Freud published *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in 1920, which explained how the repetition compulsion was useful in restoring control to a traumatic situation, Trix had made the same discovery for herself. Freud postulated that by repeating the traumatic event, one might control an unbearable situation and establish a more favourable outcome. In hoping to reach the departed spirits of Edmund Gurney and Frederic Myers, Trix hoped to substitute happy contact and conversation for devastating separation and silence.

It was a wonderful coincidence that Trix and the SPR found each other, that Trix's particular talents and the SPR's needs so neatly dovetailed. Trix gave herself permission to dream her way into emotional release and relief by reassuring herself that she was participating in scientific research. She more or less stumbled upon this therapy for herself, without being aware that her psychic trances were acting as a form of psycho-therapy.

Trix's experience, while hardly ordinary, is not utterly strange or unique. The connection between psychic experience and mental

30 Ibid., p. 283.

illness is more than a coincidence. The medium, like the mad woman (and the inspired poet) has fluid boundaries between conscious and semi-conscious states—trances, automatic writing, crystal gazing, and subliminal suggestion. For Trix, being a medium was an acceptable way of using her tendency to go into dream or trance-like states by giving in to it with an avowed scientific purpose.

When Trix sat at her desk with pen in hand in the early morning, she was not herself. She was a medium, a conduit for the words of departed spirits. She was free from personal responsibility and could express shocking and dreadful thoughts. As if she were in a dream, she could see, hear, and report visions that were obscure, obscene, and insane.

Frederic Myers, whose book first inspired Trix, had worked productively in two disciplines—psychic research and mental health research. In the 1880s, he published a series of articles on the abnormal and the supernormal, focusing on the subliminal as it emerged in trance states and dreams. Anticipating Freud, Myers believed that behaviour was only partly controlled by the conscious mind and that ordinary consciousness was just a small part in a larger mental process that goes on outside of awareness. He posited the existence of the subliminal mind, similar to Freud's unconscious and Carl Jung's collective unconscious.

Myers and other neurologists, alienists, psychologists, psychoanalysts, and philosophers—including Jean-Martin Charcot, Hippolyte Bernheim, Sigmund Freud, and William James—were investigating the uses of trance, dissociation, automatic writing, double consciousness, dream, and other altered states as clinical tools for assessing a subject's susceptibility to hysteria, as therapies for mental distress, and as mechanical means of reducing agitation. Hypnotism was studied for its use in the diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders. Dream interpretation, free association, and Freud's primary process psychoanalytic technique depended on establishing access to the patient's unconscious mind. Dream or trance-like states were especially helpful in releasing inhibitions, uncovering hidden motives, and exposing unacceptable desires. Freud's early psychoanalytic cures for mental disease depended on hypnosis and trance-like free association to make known to patients their repressed and unacceptable memories, thoughts, and feelings, and thereby relieve their hysterical symptoms.

Psychic researchers, like alienists, recognized the hypnotic state and other altered states of consciousness as elevated states of inspiration. But, unlike mental health professionals, they were not interested in these states to relieve mental suffering but to reveal the existence of the soul. Mediums and the spirits they heard or embodied in trance were studied with interest and enthusiasm by researchers into the new psychical sciences, in order to provide proof of the existence of the immortal soul.

Myers, who was trained as a scientist, wanted the experiments he designed to provide hard evidence, not be reliant on faith, belief, or received religious teachings. One of Myers's favourite theories was that the influence of science on modern thought was not confined to this life alone but could be carried on into the next. The experiments Myers designed, which were carried forward by the SPR, were meant to lead to evidence of an afterlife. But, instead of demonstrating the existence of the eternal soul, the research provided evidence of communication between living minds—telepathy. Thus, Myers's disciples followed the evidence where it led, concentrating later experiments on telepathy.

Many of Freud's techniques—hypnotism, free association, dream interpretation, and transference—depended on an active sympathetic collaboration between the doctor and patient. Transference, occurring in the intimate relationship between analyst and analysand, included the possibility—perhaps even the inevitability—of hidden transmissions. The spiritual resemblance between occult communications and transference is even more striking when transference is described as a haunting return. Through transference, the patient re-experiences, for example, a first love. All subsequent loves conform to this stereotype of one's first love. Every succeeding love is thus a ghostly repetition, a revenant, a reincarnation of the first love.

Like the analytic patient, the medium creates visions or forms words in concert with his or her experimenter. The medium's suggestibility and connection to his or her experimenter produces the visions or creations. Myers posited direct contact between individual minds through telepathic communication, a subliminal collaboration.

Spiritualists, like other scientists, wanted to provide proof—hard evidence for the existence of an afterlife. Psychoanalysts similarly wanted to develop a science of the mind, a medical specialty in which observable symptoms could be catalogued, diagnoses could be standardized,

and treatment results could be verified. Philosophers, psychologists, and psychic researchers all considered dreams, hypnotism, automatic writing, crystal gazing, trances, and speaking in tongues as important areas of mental activity that could be studied and measured with scientific accuracy to reveal the unknown workings of the human mind.

At the time, the conjunction of these fields of enquiry seemed plausible to many serious, intelligent, and educated people. This may seem odd now, studying trance-like states for insight into potential cures for mental disease and as proof of the existence of the soul. But, at the end of the nineteenth century, as much that had been invisible came to be explained and harnessed for human benefit—radio waves discovered in 1887, x-rays in 1895—areas of the unknown and unseen were open to scientific enquiry. The existence of the soul might be demonstrated by scientific measurement, while advances in technology—the telegraph and the telephone, entangled as they were with theories of spectral communication—at times seemed haunted. Myers, Lodge, and other members of the SPR were interested in detecting and manipulating invisible waves—magnetic, electric, radio, and psychic. All were equally mysterious at the time. Radio waves and emanations from the immortal soul were equally valid phenomena for study. The need to prove the utility of magnetic waves and the desire to prove the existence of the invisible soul were not considered opposite realms of study—one pure science, one pure superstition—but were part of a spectrum of invisible and mysterious occurrences.

Trix, who knew none of these theories, discovered the benefits of automatic writing almost by chance. She had indulged in automatic writing as a pastime in secret for some time. Once she had connected with the SPR, she persisted with it to provide evidence for the existence of the soul after death. She was drawn to it, and certainly remained attached to it, because it eased the strain on her mind.

During the seven-year period of Trix's active involvement with the SPR, she steadied herself and repaired her shaky marriage. She travelled from India to England several times, ostensibly for her health, although threats to her health may have been convenient excuses so that she could separate from Jack, leave India, stay with her parents in Tisbury, and visit with members of the SPR in London. In general, this was a period of good health and good spirits. Trix tried to keep her automatic writing

a secret from Jack and Rudyard, although Jack discovered the secret several times and Rudyard may well have suspected it. She knew they considered it unhealthy for her, 'Whereas,' she reported to Maud, 'I have felt so much better & more practical in my mind since I read Mr Myers' "Human Personality" in 1903 & realized that the automatic writing I have tried to suppress for years is a well known thing & not necessarily dependent on imagination or "hysteria."'[31] Alice Johnson, with whom Trix corresponded during her years of psychical experimentation, was convinced that Trix's interest in the research in no way contributed to her mental illness and, on the contrary, exercised a healthy influence over her mind. It appeared to Miss Johnson that Trix gradually freed herself from various nervous fears and obsessions and came to have a sense of much greater security in the universe.

During the years that Trix worked with the SPR, the nervous disorder that had felled her earlier remained in abeyance. She maintained a clear mind and remained sceptical, forthcoming, and enthusiastic about her contributions to the Society. Psychical research, despite the fears of Rudyard, Jack, and her parents, did not compromise Trix's mental health. On the contrary, immersion in psychical research channelled and checked Trix's distress and helped her to maintain her mental balance for a long period of time.

This stable period came to an abrupt end in December 1910.

31 Trix Kipling, letter to Maud Diver, 26 June 1906.