
Trix
The Other Kipling
Barbara Fisher

https://www.openbookpublishers.com

Barbara Fisher, *Trix: The Other Kipling*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2024, https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0377

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-80511-152-8
ISBN Hardback: 978-1-80511-153-5
ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-80511-154-2
ISBN Digital eBook (EPUB): 978-1-80511-155-9
ISBN HTML: 978-1-80511-157-3

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0377

Cover image: Kennet, William Morris, Morris & Co., Birmingham Museums Trust, https://unsplash.com/photos/white-blue-and-green-floral-textile--KfLa4I4eTo

Cover design: Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal.

11. Recovery and Return

In the spring of 1924, Trix returned to Jack in Edinburgh. Her mental health was not markedly different from what it had been for several years, but Jack's physical health, at the age of sixty-six, had declined. He was weaker and needier. At fifty-six, Trix was calm and quiet, as she had been for some time. Jack had recently purchased an austere Victorian mansion at 6 West Coates, somewhat outside of the centre of town, with room for Trix. The stately house was set back from the street by a wide, sharply sloping lawn. The interior of the house contained the familiar eclectic mix of Jack's Indian artifacts and Trix's few remaining prized pieces of furniture, rugs, embroidery, and art.

Trix was never completely comfortable in Edinburgh, but she was pleased to be recalled from exile in Jersey. In Scotland as before, Trix endured days and even weeks of straight, steel rain. The external weather mirrored her own, which remained dour. She was back in Jack's home, but she was not back in Jack's heart. She felt she had been allowed, but not exactly welcomed, back into the Fleming family.

The chief obstacle to Trix's happiness was Jack's older sister, Moona Richardson, who ruled the Fleming household. While Trix was nominally living as Jack's wife, she felt she was 'actually under the heel of Jack's big sister'.[1] Moona asserted her control in many ways. Her most annoying and offensive act was obliging Trix to have a companion/nurse tend to her. Moona chose the companions, although Trix protested that she found them unnecessary and often unsuitable. Trix recognized Moona's insistence on her having a companion as a strategy consciously designed to insult and humiliate her.

In addition to Moona, Jack had a younger and sweeter sister, Mary Craigie, who often visited and was available to care for her brother, but

1 Trix Kipling, letter to J. H. C. Brooking, 25 October 1945. Texas A&M.

 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0377.11

her kinder nature was little felt. It was Moona whose influence prevailed, who oppressed Trix, and whom she held responsible for having set Jack against her years before. Trix believed that Moona had conspired to have Trix certified as incompetent in the past and continued, in the present, to demean her and attempt to demoralize her. Trix considered Moona tough, stubborn, and stupid, strong as a horse but without horse-sense. She claimed, perhaps with some exaggeration, that Moona told wicked lies about her, struck her, and even tried to maim and disfigure her. When Trix was disturbed by unusual sounds and movements during the night, she accused Moona of intentionally trying to frighten her. To protect herself from Moona's treachery and trickery, Trix had a heavy bolt installed on her bedroom door.

Moona lived in a large, cluttered house next door to her brother at Eglinton Crescent and often stayed through the winter months at the West Coates house. Friendless and defenceless, Trix felt fortunate to have the comfort of her two loyal servants, the prickly pear (pair) Mary and Minna, who had worked for her for more than twenty years. They were her faithful companions through her years of banishment and during her return to Edinburgh. They were her only reliable allies in her early years of her residence at 6 West Coates.

For the next eight years, Trix bravely assumed the role of a proper Scottish matron, taking up gardening, charity work, and visiting with friends and family. She enjoyed parts of this role—tending to the garden especially. She was proud of her roses, lilacs, daffodils, and periwinkles. She distracted herself by knitting socks and woollen caps. She reestablished her relationship with the psychic world by joining the Edinburgh Psychic College, but she did not resume her serious work as a medium or a writer of automatic scripts. And she did not take up her pen again to write fiction or verse. Caring for Jack, as his health deteriorated, was her main employment. She fussed over him as he complained of his lumbago, his gout, his legs, his back, his eyes, and more.

For many years, Trix longed to visit London and begged to be taken on a trip there. In the spring of 1932, Jack responded to Trix's frequent plaintive requests and arranged a brief visit. Several cousins and old friends of Trix's were invited to meet the Flemings for tea. Trix dressed and ornamented herself with extravagance, remaking several of her old dresses and rescuing her few remaining jewels. She was thrilled to be out of the gloom of Scotland and into the glare of London. She revived

in the company of admiring cousins and friends over scones and clotted cream in the tearoom of a fashionable hotel. Performing for her audience, she told stories, quoted from her favourite poems and plays, and talked almost without a pause for the entire visit. Her young cousins were especially delighted with their eccentric and effervescent aunt. Jack took in the performance with some confusion, impressed by a new vision of his wife, who proved herself to be not only capable and coherent but witty and winning. In Edinburgh, Jack had adopted Moona's perspective on Trix and had seen her as barely recovered and unready to resume her role as mistress of the house. In London, she proved that this perspective was woefully inaccurate.

After dazzling her friends in London, Trix was ready for more. She persuaded Jack to allow her to make the short trip to Bateman's to visit Rudyard. Relaxed and happy after her recent success, she easily proved to her brother that she was her old self. During the visit, Rudyard found her to be delightful company—fresh and witty as ever and still beautiful, almost unmarked by time.

Letters between Rud and Trix resumed with greater frequency after this visit. Trix continued to suggest plots to Rud; he, to tell her stories. A letter from Rudyard to Trix several months after her visit to Bateman's in January 1933 recounted the story of a clever little girl, which delighted Rudyard and which he knew would similarly delight his sister. The story concerned:

> A small friend of mine, aged about seven. Fair with blue eyes and a shadow of a look of my Josephine about her.
>
> She has been suffering from some small ailment, which involved pain—in turn and so forth. Her Mother and she discussed the matter and symptoms, and by that way generally the mysteries of the human body. Then, she reflectively: 'Mummy, I cant see whats the use of the little hole in my tummy. Whatever good is it? Do we all have one?' Here I suppose Mummy said that the navel was common to all humanity. There was a little thought and then the child of the Dominant Race—I suppose it is to show that we are British.
>
> You can't—the gods themselves can't—defeat a breed like this!
>
> The conception of the God-given Trademark [...] but your imagination can fill in at leisure. Isn't it perfect?[2]

2 Rudyard Kipling, letter to Trix Kipling, 22 January 1933. University of Sussex.

The story displays not only Rudyard's sly humour but also his affection for children and his appreciation for their uncanny grasp of unspoken adult attitudes. Rudyard's use of the 'Dominant Race' has more than a trace of irony to it. He assumed (correctly) that his sister shared his opinions as well as his sense of irony and would appreciate the story. No doubt, she did.

Fig. 28 Trix and Jack in Edinburgh in 1932.

Back home in Edinburgh after her social successes, Trix reclaimed her role as Jack's partner, successfully displacing Moona at last. With his health deteriorating more rapidly, Jack was grateful to have Trix as an attentive caregiver. Trix was happy to be of use, and happier still to exercise her advantage over Moona. She also took pleasure in exercising her sharp tongue on Jack. Now that Jack was old and ill, and she was full of renewed life, she teased and gently tortured him. She no longer felt the need to repress her natural volubility and vindictive wit. If Jack had punished her in the past with his silence and distance, she repaid him with her acid tongue. Her terrible vitality in old age was punishment for his earlier tyranny. Colin MacInnes, son of Trix's cousin Angela Thirkell, watched as his Uncle Jack, 'that much mocked, admirable

personage, the English—or—Scottish military gentleman: kind, good, honest, unimaginative and timid' was mercilessly, almost cruelly, teased by Aunt Trix 'like a cat with sharpened fangs'. MacInnes was present for a visit with the Flemings during which Trix always arrived late for meals, exasperating poor Jack. 'Her breast clattering with necklaces, her fingers glittering with rings, she talked, and talked, and darted witty shafts. She chattered on and on until he cried out in despair, like an Old Testament prophet in the depths of torment, "Oh, Woman! Woman!"' She responded to his outburst with a sweet smile and raised eyebrow.[3]

While Trix was revelling in her revived good spirits and good health, Rudyard, like Jack, was ailing. Despite being in poor health and almost constant pain, in August 1935, Rudyard began writing his autobiography, *Something of Myself*. The short book omitted large parts of his self and contained no description of his first loves, Flo Garrard and Wolcott Balestier, his marriage to Carrie, or the deaths of his children. But it did include at length the story of the childhood he had shared with Trix. That story always remained a vital source.

Shortly after completing the memoir, while on a trip to London to discuss his will, Rudyard was taken ill at Brown's Hotel. He was removed to Middlesex Hospital, where he died on 18 January 1936. His ashes were interred in Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey on 23 January 1937. In his will, he left his wife, Carrie, in control of his real and intellectual property. He left small bequests to his daughter Elsie and her husband, George Bambridge, but the remainder of his large estate went to Carrie. He left nothing to his sister.

Trix's disappointment over this neglect is nowhere recorded. Rudyard's name and fame were fresh in the news. This wide coverage may have encouraged Trix, at the end of the year 1936, to copy out a previously written story (See Chapter VII), titled 'Ricochet or Boomerang's Return'.[4] The neat regularity of the hand-writing as well as the carefully written date on the story—12.30.36—suggest that Trix copied it out with the intention of sending it to magazines for publication. Although it is very unlikely that she wrote the story at this late date, it is likely that, at this time, she was feeling optimistic about her chances

3 Colin MacInnes, 'Aunt Trix', in *England, Half English*.

4 Alice Fleming, 'Richochet or Boomerang's Return', dated 12.30.36. University of Sussex.

of achieving publication. At times, Trix used her association with her famous brother to increase her chances of publication, but at other times she chose not to use what help might come from the Kipling name. At this moment, with the Kipling's death prominently in news, Trix found the opportunity especially tempting and submitted or considered submitting this old work for publication. If she did submit it, she did not receive a positive reply. The story was never published.

In early 1937, after Rudyard's ashes were buried in Westminster Abbey, Trix wrote 'A Biography'—a memorial poem for her brother based on his 'A St. Helena Lullaby'. Although it is a very close imitation of Rudyard's poem, it is nonetheless very personal, focusing, as before, on the crucial times they spent together. Below are the first two stanzas and the last two stanzas of the eight-stanza poem.

> A BIOGRAPHY 1865–1936
>
> BOMBAY 1865–1872
> 'How far is Poets Corner from a baby in Bombay?
> I can't explain, I cannot say—the paths they wind about.
> But Mother, call your son again or else he'll run away.
> (When you're full of mischief you must play it out.)
>
> SOUTHSEA 1872–1877
> 'How far is Poets Corner from a lonely bullied child?'
> A certain kind of wisdom is given when you weep:
> And though the fog is round you, your Star is undefiled.
> (How bitter is a stranger's bread, a stranger's stairs, how steep.)
>
> WESTMINSTER 1936
> 'How far is Poets Corner from a coffin 'neath the Jack?'
> So near that we may count the steps that bring you to the stone.
> 'Lest we forget, lest we forget' Tears, and a crowd in black,
> (And the choir's singing verses of your own.)
>
> ? ? ? ?
> 'How far is Poets Corner from a happy spirit freed?'
> Further than mind of man conceives, astronomers are dumb
> Your works will live behind you, but you are off at speed
> (To learn how solar systems work,—until The Kingdom come.)[5]

Although Trix and Rudyard had spent most of their adult lives apart, they had almost always been in contact, mostly by letter. Trix was deeply affected

5 Alice M. Fleming, 'A Biography', in Lorna Lee, pp. 160–61.

by this final loss, but she did not go mad over it. Gone was the person she had shared her childhood with and had continued to share her literary tastes and judgments with throughout her life. She had learned to console herself for her losses, and she managed to console herself for this one.

After Rudyard's death, Trix wrote about her relationship with her famous brother. Her recollections, 'Some Childhood Memories of My Brother Rudyard Kipling', published in the *Chambers Journal*, contained stories she (or he) had told before.[6] Like most memoirs, Trix's is a polished performance, a carefully chosen and edited excerpt of a life. Trix's recollections of her brother inevitably went back to their earliest years when they were all in all to each other. She detailed, as he had done in *Something of Myself*, their childhood years, when Rudyard was the person Trix most trusted, loved, and depended on.

In 'More Childhood Memories of Rudyard Kipling' (1939), Trix told of going to visit the house of desolation for the first time since childhood. When she was just minutes from the house where she and Rudyard had been exiled, she turned back, feeling her courage fail her. When she told Ruddy of her experience, he confessed that he had made the exact same cowardly retreat. 'I think we both dreaded a kind of spiritual imprisonment that would affect our dreams,' explained Trix. When Trix asked Rudyard later if he knew whether the house still stood, he answered, 'I don't know, but if so I should like to burn it down and plough the place with salt'.[7]

When Trix wrote about her adult relationship with her brother in her 'Childhood Memories,' she concluded, 'I married in 1889 and he married three years later and after that our paths in the world divided. He went west and I went east and the personal devil seemed to arrange that seldom the twain should meet'.[8] Except for the clever echo of Rudyard's line 'east is east and west is west', this is an especially feeble description of one of the most important relationships of her life. She did not attempt here in this memoir to explore deeply her feelings for her beloved brother. Rudyard was the person who had been closest to her in childhood, adolescence, and perhaps in life. She loved him as she loved no one else, but she emphasized that, 'although Ruddy and I were always devoted comrades there was never any Charles-and-Mary Lamb or Dorothy-and-William Wordsworth

6 Alice M. Fleming, 'Childhood Memories of My Brother Rudyard Kipling'.
7 Alice M. Fleming, 'More Childhood Memories of My Brother Rudyard Kipling', *Chambers's Journal*, July (1939).
8 Ibid.

(brother-sister intimacy/incest) nonsense about us'.[9] While there was probably no such intimacy between the two, there was an attachment that transcended time, space, and speech. Rudyard's lifelong dislike of Jack Fleming and Trix's similar hatred for Carrie suggest some sexual jealousy, as does Rudyard's first and most intense love—Flo Garrard, who was a friend of Trix's and served as a model for his one romantic heroine. When Rudyard wrote *The Light that Failed*, his only romantic novel, he created a young woman who was an amalgam of Trix and Flo. He longed for Flo and continued to long for her for years, even when it was clear that the relationship was impossible.

Usually reticent in speaking about Rudyard when he was alive, Trix allowed herself to speculate very little about his character after his death. She credited him with originally having his mother's sunshiny Irish nature but believed that after his almost fatal illness, Josephine's death, and John's later death, he was a sadder and harder man. Responding to suggestions made by others, she rejected the idea that his terrible childhood had completely poisoned his character in later life, and she also disagreed with those who thought he was a happy, carefree man.

When speaking or writing about Rudyard, Trix was especially touchy about any disparaging or demeaning remarks. A particularly irritating piece of gossip which seemed to follow Rudyard—that the family had black blood—disturbed her deeply. Rudyard simply shrugged the slander off. When he was accused of being '8 annas in the rupee' (not pure), a nasty racial slur, Trix vigorously refuted this slander, asserting that 'it would be difficult to find two large families so absolutely free from any connection with India as the Kiplings & the Macdonalds were in 1865—And their woodpiles were utterly devoid of any n-----'.[10] Trix often repeated an upsetting story of going to the opera in Florence, wearing a low-cut evening dress, and being insulted and offended by a woman seated behind her, who suddenly rubbed at her bare shoulders and neck with her black gloved hand. After rubbing so hard she caused Trix's skin to redden, she looked at her glove and said in a disappointed

9 The relationship between Dorothy and William Wordsworth particularly annoyed Trix. She wrote to Maud on 24 May 1944, 'I only love W.W. in patches —& never adored the tiresome Dorothy – unwholesome & selfish!'

10 Alice M. Fleming, 'My Brother Rudyard Kipling', *Kipling Journal*, December 1947.

voice—'Oh, it doesn't come off. I've heard so often about your brother having black blood I thought I must see if your white neck was real'.[11]

Trix, like most of the British of her time, was always especially sensitive to matters of class as well as race. She asserted forcefully that she, Rudyard, and their parents were always part of Simla's highest society, that they were invited everywhere, participated in the exclusive amateur theatrical society, dined and danced with the finest people. Back when she and Rudyard were being mistreated and humiliated by the Holloways, they maintained their senses of self by assuring each other that they were of a higher class than the Holloways, that they had breeding, culture, and family far superior to Aunty Rosa and Harry. After Rudyard's death, it remained important to Trix that he be remembered as superior to people of colour or people of a lower class, caste, or culture.

Trix mourned the loss of her brother in private. In public, she added 'sister of the late great man' to her persona, enthusiastically joining the Kipling Society when it was formed in 1937. She made herself readily available to biographers and interviewers and was happy to talk about her famous sibling.

Fig. 29 Trix at a Kipling Society Luncheon in the 1930s, with J.H.C. Brooking (the head of the Kipling Society) and Florence Macdonald.

11 Trix Kipling, letter to J. H. C. Brooking, 7 October 1941. Texas A&M.

After Rudyard's death, she engaged in a number of disputes first with Carrie and later with Elsie, Rudyard's daughter, over control of Rudyard's literary estate. With energy and focus, Trix fought with Carrie, who repeatedly tried to block publications and retain and control copyrights. Trix recognized Carrie's pleasure in the power of saying no and wondered how (and for how much) she had said yes and sanctioned the hideous film versions of 'Wee Willlie Winke' and 'Gunga Din'. Trix criticized Carrie's more than forty-year habit of shielding Rudyard from reporters and publicity. During his life, this might have been useful, but after his death, it was hardly necessary. When Trix tried to reason with Carrie about releasing information or documents, she was met repeatedly with the objection that Rud would have hated it. Trix responded that he wouldn't hate it now, or, if he did, he was learning not to, for he was above and beyond such worries. Trix's most damning criticism of Carrie was that she looked upon books as merchandise only. Trix claimed she had never seen Carrie read a book and doubted if she could.

While Carrie was alive, Trix kept her displeasure largely to herself, but the ill-feeling between the two smouldered just below the surface for many years. After Carrie's death in 1939, Trix allowed the embers of her animosity to flare up. Trix blamed Carrie and her influence for all that she disliked in her brother. It was Carrie who had changed him from being loving and giving to being suspicious and greedy, who had allowed his heart to shrink as his genius grew. Trix believed that the breach that occurred between herself and Rudyard during her years of exile was, if not caused by Carrie, certainly prolonged and exacerbated by her. Trix bitterly resented that Rudyard and Carrie had kept several of her old friends from visiting her during her years of banishment and was especially unforgiving of Rudyard (under Carrie's influence) for having ever considered having her declared incompetent.

Elsie, Rudyard and Carrie's one surviving child, continued her mother's battles after her death. Trix found herself again engaged in a family squabble over Rudyard's works. When Trix was invited to record her recollections of her early life with her brother to be broadcast by the BBC, Elsie blocked the transmission of the broadcast. She objected to the use of several quotations, claiming copyright infringement and threatening legal action if the broadcast were not cancelled. Her

objections were considered groundless. The quotations she objected to were from unpublished poems that existed only in Trix's memory, and it was 'thought therefore that they could be regarded as her personal possessions', but the threat of legal and financial consequences caused the BBC to back away from the program. The BBC had had to bow to other objections raised by Elsie 'based on similar absurd reasons'. Elsie's objection over the copyright issue was seen 'as a blind to cover the personal one'.[12] She did not want Trix to make the broadcast. The interview was never aired but was eventually published in *The Kipling Journal*. J.H.C. Brooking, the president of the Kipling Society, concluded that Elsie was 'acting more as an enemy than as a friend of our Society', but he was unable to impeach her or request her resignation from the Society. Trix, along with Brooking and the BBC, gave in to Elsie's demands without resorting to legal recourse or personal attack. Somewhat later, Elsie claimed that Trix was no longer responsible for her actions, an accusation that Brooking flatly contradicted, citing a recent letter from Trix that was 'crystal clear'. Brooking considered Elsie unreasonable, while he found Trix not only reasonable but flexible and generous. Trix levelled the same criticisms at Elsie as she had against Carrie. She accused them both of having no literary taste or judgment. Elsie, she remembered, couldn't read until she was eight years old and, she believed, had read little since.

In her later years after Rudyard and Jack were dead, Trix battled with Moona, Carrie, and Elsie again and again. Trix disliked these three women and believed they not only disliked her, but had made repeated attempts to remove, displace, or discredit her. Trix may have intentionally or unintentionally encouraged and aggravated the envy and enmity of these women. She had the greatest contempt for women like Carrie and Elsie, who cared little for books and rarely read them. She was proud to set herself her apart and above such ignorant women.

12 J. H. C. Brooking, letter to Trix Kipling, not dated. Texas A&M. 'In the course of the talk, however, there were three quotations in verse – two from one poem and one from another. Both these poems were unpublished and neither had any existence except in Mrs Fleming's memory: it was thought therefore that they could be regarded as personal possessions of Mrs Fleming. Mrs Bambridge, however, through her agent, Messrs. A. P. Watt, claimed copyright in these extracts and the right to refuse permission to reproduce them, and she did in fact refuse such permission'.

She held a place in her brother's life that neither Carrie nor Elsie could ever approach, much less fill. Only her mother Alice had had literary taste and talent. Trix was worthy of envy—for her beauty, charm, and especially for her literary judgment, prodigious memory, and witty conversation. Alice had been a fair rival; but Carrie, Elsie, and Moona were beneath consideration.

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 did not pass Trix by, as did the First. During the war, she and Jack remained in their solid stone house in Edinburgh, although they were offered safer quarters in the country. They were prepared with sand, water, and shovels on each floor and endured the boredom of black-outs and the terror of air-raids. Trix did her share for the war effort by writing names, addresses, and figures in ration books and by doing her knitting in khaki.

One day, while drinking tea in her drawing room, Trix heard a loud booming crash, which she took for a railway accident. When Jack woke from his afternoon nap and heard Trix's account of the noise, he kindly agreed that it came from the railway, although he knew full well that it was the sound of near-by big guns. Similarly, the sight of small planes fighting in the afternoon sky, which Trix assumed was an air exhibition, was recognized by Jack as a real dog fight. Gallant soldier Jack protected his wife from the terrors of the fighting, which were often fairly close by.

Always alert to what she, as a good wife, should do, Trix cared for Jack attentively during his last long illness. When he died in 1942, it was a loss—perhaps more of structure than of affection. Over the course of more than forty years, being married to Jack, being estranged from Jack, and being reunited with Jack had shaped her life. For a decade, tending to Jack's complaints and illnesses had dominated her days and her thoughts. She was pleased that she had done her wifely duty and reported with satisfaction that, when Jack died, he was resting peacefully in her arms.

Trix also did her duty to Moona, who remained a presence in Trix's life even after her brother's death. Despite disliking and distrusting her, Trix took care of Moona when she needed companionship, nursed her after a fall, and, when she was ill, oversaw her care in a nursing home. Moona died at the age of ninety in June 1947. Three weeks after Moona's death, her younger sister, Mary Craigie, died at the age of eighty-eight. Trix was grateful to Moona for her two lovely nieces—Ethel Craigie,

who married Thomas Walker Hector, and Katharine (Kit) Johnston, who married Harry Crossley. Both women later became devoted to their 'Aunt Trix'.[13]

Jack's death left Trix alone to manage by herself. Although it took some time for Jack's substantial estate to be settled, when it was, Trix discovered that the estate was left in a way that benefitted his other heirs at Trix's expense. Trix was left with an allowance and a pension sufficient for necessities, although not for luxuries, which she had always expected and enjoyed. Jack had promised to leave Trix enough for dresses and sweets, but there was actually only enough for food and expenses. Trix fretted over the rising cost of everything—her maids' wages, her gardener's fees, hotel rates in London, dresses, hats, and gloves. Nonetheless, she managed with fewer niceties and a diminished household staff and contrived, with a little management, to buy the ornaments that she had always loved.

She did not waste much time mourning, but rather allowed herself new and deserved freedoms. After Jack's death, Trix travelled, talked, and indulged herself. In 1943, venturing out into the world of commerce, she opened a gift shop, 'Gifts and Gratitude', on Roxburgh Street in Kelso, forty miles southeast of Edinburgh on the River Tweed. The shop was a fund-raising venture for the benefit of soldiers. Although she employed a manager for the store, on occasion she gamely worked behind the counter and chatted with customers.

Sloughing off the roles of proper matron, companion, and nursemaid to Jack, she became a garrulous and eccentric old lady. She happily moved about, visiting London and participating in the activities of the Kipling Society. When in London, she stayed at Bailey's Hotel or with Katherine Crossley (Moona's niece) in Streatham. When she came to London, often for a period of a few weeks, she charmed everyone she met. Novelist Angela Thirkell, Trix's cousin, and her son Colin, along with Hilton Brown, the secretary of the Kipling Society, and all the Macdonald cousins rallied around and feted her when she was in town.

She was always in high spirits in company, showing off with a ceaseless flow of conversation, dotted with quotations from Shakespeare. On one occasion, Gwladys Cox (Gwladys's husband's uncle, Ralph Richardson,

13 Moona had two nieces, Ethel Craigie, who married Thomas Walker Hector and Katharine (Kit) Johnstone, who married Harry Crossley.

had been married to Moona) and several others 'sat silent, while this one small, elderly lady with flashing, intelligent, deep-blue eyes talked and talked—for two solid hours. We listened spell-bound, and when she left, the place seemed empty and silent—such was the spirit of her'.[14]

The most vivid description of Aunt Trix as a determinedly eccentric, voluble old lady comes from first cousin twice removed Colin MacInnes. MacInnes was himself a writer of great charm and a shrewd, tender, and penetrating chronicler of English life. As an outsider himself—half English/half Australian and openly gay in the 1950s and 60s—he was drawn to his dramatic and flamboyant 'Auntcestress' Trix. He described a typical visit with her, 'in her spacious and frightful drawing-room, decorated with a singular mixture of Indian souvenirs of uncle Jack's, and of objects of pre-Raphaelite art belonging to her own family'. She was at the time in her seventies, he in his twenties.

> With her hands fluttering like butterflies, but with her body in repose, she would look somewhere over the top of my head, or round the side of me, as if it was my shadow, or my guardian angel, she was addressing. The most beautifully constructed, precisely enunciated phrases fell then from her lips as if she'd learned the intricate sentences by heart; and so far did she often adventure into a forest of conditional clauses, and of parenthetical embroidery, that I wondered if she would ever conclude these Proustian periods with sufficient syntactical clarity. Not once, however—rather to my disappointment—did she fail to do so. And if, as sometimes happened, the thoughts that passed so rapidly through her agile brain outpaced even her capacity for expressing them, then, while she stopped a moment to dispose her ideas in a harmonious sequence, she would utter a high-pitched 'And ...' like the sharp cry of a bird in pain an 'And...' destined to prevent me from interrupting, rather as someone leaves his hat on a seat in the train to show that, even though he's not occupying it himself, you must not. On such occasions, I found that the only way I could break in on her was to put my hands over my ears and shut my eyes. The sound would then cease; and when I looked up again aunt Trix gazing mildly at me, and hear her saying in kind, gentle tones, 'yes, dear. Have you something to say to me?' 'Aunt Trix; I want to *speak'*. 'Then *speak*, dear. Pray Speak'. This I would do; while she waited, her eyes averted and her thoughts probably elsewhere, until, when I paused for an instant, aunt Trix, in whose mind a great backlog of thought by now accumulated, would give a slight smile, say, 'Yes, dear, yes ...' and begin again.[15]

14 Gwladys Cox, 'Aunt Trix, Some Recollection', in Lorna Lee, pp. 73–74.
15 Colin MacInnes, p. 114.

She doted on children and loved animals. She often accompanied children to the zoo, where she entertained them by speaking Hindustani to the elephants and hippopotamuses. She had close relationships with Macaws and parrots as well. After taking two of her little grandnieces to the zoo in 1937, she reported with delight that one of them asked, after gazing at the big turtle in the aquarium, 'Where is the mock turtle?' These performances were not a form of craziness but an inspired contrivance for charming children. Colin MacInnes described a day at the zoo with her, where she addressed,

> Cynical macaws who strolled courteously along their perches to listen to her. Herself like some rare bird [...] she spoke to them [...] until a crowd of curious Scots gathered round her [...] sufficiently near to observe if the birds would bite her when she popped chocolates through the bars into their huge, slow, lazy beaks. When birds and Scots were all assembled in sufficient numbers on either side of the metal barrier, aunt Trix would turn to tell their human brethren what the birds were thinking, as if she were the interpreter between two portions of the animal kingdom.[16]Children responded by returning her love. Like her brother and others who had suffered in childhood, she retained a great affection for children and knew how to engage and delight them. She was well known for her ability 'to charm the heart out of any child and was full of amusing little tricks with handkerchiefs and finger magic to hold them by her'.[17]Trix had learned early that one sure way to gain notice and praise was by entertaining—quoting Shakespeare, reciting poetry, and singing songs. Interminable poetic quotation was the greatest flaw in her otherwise graceful social manner. All the descriptions of Trix from friends and relatives present her as sparkling, often to a blinding degree, in her conversation, full of wit, vivacity, and humour. Her scandalous talk and whimsical rhetorical flourishes, which were often ascribed to her 'fey' character, were in her conscious control. Colin MacInnes's brother Lance Thirkell said of Trix. 'There was a streak of sheer mischievous innocent and delightful wickedness which ran through her entire conversation and all her letters for those who knew her. [...] I think I might best describe Trix as having a reverent irreverence'.[18]

When her brother and husband had been alive, she had spoken little of her psychic powers; but after their deaths, when she was no longer constrained by their displeasure and disapproval, she spoke openly

16 Ibid.
17 Katherine Crossley, letter to Gwladys Cox. 'Some Recollections', in Lorna Lee, p. 94.
18 Lance Thirkell to Sheila Wilson, 30 January 1988.

about her psychic triumphs—conveying a message from a dead child to her grieving mother, and reassuring a lance-corporal that his mother would recover from an illness and reproving him for doubting his sweetheart. Her greatest success was a vision of sacred relics that came to her in a dream during the night when she had slept with an iron key tucked beneath her pillow. She published some of her dramatic experiences in psychometry in the *Kipling Journal* of October 1945. Trix revelled in telling stories of her second sight, describing places she had never been to, repeating conversations she had never heard, seeing spirits, interpreting dreams, receiving messages, calling up visions, etc.—but these were performances, meant primarily to surprise and delight. They were not meant to be taken with great seriousness.

Trix retained her sharp tongue and keen memory into old age. Lord Birkenhead and Hilton Brown, both of whom consulted Trix when writing their biographies of Rudyard, found her extremely cooperative and helpful. Both were awed and amazed at the power of her memory. She answered pages and pages of letters crammed with questions from Lord Birkenhead, whom she later referred to as 'Lord Woodenhead'.

When Lord Birkenhead and his assistant Douglas Rees travelled together to Southsea to visit the House of Desolation in 1946, they had Trix's description of the house in hand to check against the actual house. Rees reported, 'Everything was exactly as stated—so much so that it was not difficult to supply in imagination the dampness, the gloom, the Victorian furnishings, the texts on the walls and even the musty smells from the data which we had brought'.**19** He came away marvelling at the extraordinary accuracy of Mrs Fleming's memory.

Well into her seventies, Trix remained physically healthy and active and took some pride in this. She claimed to walk five miles a day at seventy-seven years of age, a number she considered over large. Up until the last two years of her life, her one health complaint was malaria, which returned on occasion in the hot weather and made her feel like 'chewed string'. She boasted of weighing only 101 pounds despite eating like a fool. Her weight went up and down. When thin, she felt she looked pinched. When heavier, she believed her wrinkles (some of them at least) disappeared. She remained vain about her appearance to the very end of her life, dressing in her own extravagant style whenever

19 Douglas Rees, the Birkenhead papers. University of Sussex.

she ventured out. Her distant but devoted Fleming cousin, Gwladys Cox, described her at the age of seventy-seven: 'Small and slight with a perfectly chiselled, small, aquiline nose and deep sapphire-blue eyes, she is extraordinarily energetic for her years with amazing powers of conversation'.[20]

In August 1946, she was diagnosed with diabetes and put on a strict diet. She was ordered to eat three big meals and two snacks a day and to take shots of insulin. In May 1947, she suffered an attack from diabetes and ended up lying rigid on the ground, her face the colour of earth and her eyes and mouth both wide open. She was revived, dosed, and warned to be more careful about her diet. The diabetes made her feel languid, weak, and forgetful. She followed the diet and took the insulin but found 'living by rule' an unhappy encumbrance on her freedom. In the last year of her life, she suffered from the flu and spent much of her time in bed. But she felt it was ungenerous to complain as she had been free of pain and sickness for twenty-five years. She was determined to enjoy her old age, to take advantage of what little time she had left.

When Trix reflected on the almost completed span of her life, she recalled that her only happy years were between 1883 and 1889. These were the years of the Family Square in Lahore, Dalhousie, and Simla. She characterized the years of her marriage as years of strain and unhappiness. She admitted that if she had her life to live again, she would never have married Jack. She very rarely complained about the disparity of interests and energy between herself and Jack, and she never openly compared the narrow and confined life she had chosen with Jack to the artistic, intellectual, and bohemian circles she had had contact with through her parents, brother, and Macdonald relatives. When she chose Jack at nineteen, she chose what she hoped would be solid comfort and tender care. She chose (supposed) emotional stability over intellectual excitement. What she got turned out to be neither. Jack's own instability, expressed through numerous physical ailments and constant complaining, required most of his and her energy. She and Jack scarcely shared one thought or pleasure. Trix contrived to make up for this lack through her own writing and her friendships with Maud and other cultured women, her work with the Society for Psychical Research, and her visits with her exceptional family. She had, at one time, suggested that Maud write a novel about a troubled

20 Gwladys Cox, 'Some Recollections', in Lorna Lee, p. 71.

marriage, but, during her years of exile, she withdrew this suggestion, noting that it would make a horribly sad book. Trix's own portraits of an unhappy marriage, rendered in her George and Mabel dialogues, are comic riffs on what she recognized was a 'horribly sad' situation.

Trix never openly expressed regret for giving up her writing and rarely mentioned her early aspirations to become a novelist like her brother and her best friend. Experience had taught her that she did not possess the confidence and persistence to develop and promote her talents when confronted with difficulties and discouragements. It wasn't for lack of models that she faltered. Rudyard and Maud, two very close models of immense success, might have served as positive inspirations, or as too stiff competition. Both possibilities have been suggested, and both seem likely. Maud was, after Rudyard, the most popular Anglo-Indian writer of her generation. Her romance/adventure novels (*Captain Desmond*, 1907, *The Great Amulet*, 1908, *Candles in the Wind,* 1909, *Lilamani,* 1911, *The Hero of Herat,* 1915, *Far to Seek*, 1921, and many more up to 1940) were devoured by the female novel-reading public.

The greatest losses are the satiric novels Trix never wrote and the fierce heroines she never created. Although she had a ready store of anger to call upon in order to create a disappointed, thwarted, and bitter heroine, she could not imagine how such a heroine might recognize her own nature, use it productively, abuse it disastrously, or change it convincingly. Her two novels are flawed specifically because she could not shape her own rage into fictional form and bestow it and its consequences on her two heroines. Instead, she created heroines who were unaccountably angry at the start of the fiction, and illogically satisfied, immoderately punished, or left adrift in their conflict and confusion at the end. Trix had the insight to locate and describe many of the unpleasant realities of women's lives—pretence, imposture, resentment, discouragement, disappointment, anger, and aggression—but not courage or talent enough to shape these realities into plausible plots with appropriate rewards or punishments. Presenting women's constraints and complaints fully would have conflicted with the good manners and proper behaviour that Trix's society and family valued and that she, having internalized them herself, could never fully disown or discard.

Only as an old lady did Trix allow herself to express her anger fully in wickedly irreverent conversation. It is a great loss that she didn't take

up her writing again in her sixties or seventies. She might have dipped her pen poisonously and productively into the inkpot up until her death. She might have written truly about women's needs to disguise their true selves at the end of her life when she no longer had to disguise herself.

In her old age, she said of her life, specifically of her years in exile, that it had been a waste. Certainly, it was a waste of much talent and spirit, but not at all a complete waste. She produced fine, if flawed, fiction and poetry. She contributed to the work for the Psychic Research Society. She supported and shaped the work of her friend, Maud Diver. She collaborated with and encouraged her brother, providing him with a sympathetic, like-minded, and bookish companion and correspondent throughout most of his illustrious career. She delighted all who knew her with her gift for words, not only on paper and between covers, but also in conversation. Her brilliant talk, embellished by quotations and ornamented with devilish humour, was well remembered by anyone fortunate enough to have shared her company.

Her friends lamented that she was remembered primarily for her sweet nature when young and her sharp tongue when old. They thought she ought to have done tremendous things, but was prevented by many difficulties, both internal and external. If she had been more self-assured and daring, less dependent on the approval of her conventional family, she might have been able to defy them, disobey their rules, disappoint their expectations, and express her true self. If late Victorian society had allowed women to write with anger and aggression about the repressions, humiliations, and hurts they suffered, she might have written novels that reflected her own thwarted experience and the experiences of many other women as well. That so much energy and talent wasted itself is sad, but her life could have been sadder still—she could have succumbed to the common fates of many talented and unfulfilled women of her time—madness, invalidism, and suicide—but she chose life. Again and again, she chose life.

Despite all the restrictions that bound her, she made choices. When she was embraced by the Family Square, she chose to find happiness in her family, her talent, and her beauty. She chose to marry tall and handsome Jack Fleming. She persevered for some years with her fiction writing with only scant encouragement, and she was gratified at the publication of her stories and novels. She strategized to separate from

Jack when she felt betrayed and, at the same time, devised a way to alleviate her ancient mother want. She found pleasure in making a proper home for Jack and took pride in being useful to the SPR. She delighted in entertaining and performing, especially for children. Although she often felt like an unwanted parcel, she was not without a will and wiles of her own.

Trix died at home at 6 West Coates on 25 October 1948. She had outlived her husband and her brother, but her nieces and nephews and the many others who called her 'Aunt Trix' felt her loss and remembered her with great affection and admiration. Gwladys Cox recalled, 'She was made of "spirit, fire and dew" and at 80 died young'.[21]

21 Katherine Crossley, letter to Gwladys Cox. 'Some Recollections', in Lorna Lee, p. 96.