



D. Scott Rogo

1950-1990. One of the most widely respected writer-journalists covering the field of parapsychology. Attended the University of Cincinnati and then San Fernando Valley State College from which he graduated in 1972 with a B.A. in music. Served as a visiting researcher at both the Psychical Research Foundation (then in Durham, North Carolina) and the (former) Division of Parapsychology and Psychophysics of Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn, New York. He published three papers reporting experimental research on the ganzfeld and conducted a study on personality factors of successful ganzfeld subjects. Scott was also active in field investigations of hauntings and poltergeists. Not only did he produce many books and popular articles, but in addition he published full papers in all of the professional, English-language, refereed parapsychology journals. Scott was also consulting editor for *Fate* where he wrote a regular column on parapsychology. Tragically, on August 18, 1990, Scott was found stabbed to death in his home.

Psychical Research and the Survival Controversy (Part 5)

The Cross-Correspondences

- D. Scott Rogo -

[F. W. H. Myers](#) died in 1901, which was one year after the death of Professor [Henry Sidgwick Gurney](#)'s death had come, tragically, by possible suicide some years before. The SPR leadership now fell into the hands of a team of new intellectuals headed by Alice Johnson, who was a protégé of Professor [Sidgwick's wife](#), and [J. G. Piddington](#), a scholar and barrister who soon devoted his full attention to psychical research. These researchers threw themselves into the study of the [Piper](#) mediumship, but they also began working with several other trance psychics who appeared on the scene. Chief among these were Mrs [Margaret Verrall](#), the wife of a Cambridge professor of classics, and her own daughter Helen. Both of them were well aware of the SPR's work before they actually developed their own mediumships. The SPR also found itself studying the automatic writings of Rudyard Kipling's sister in India, whom they identified only as '[Mrs Holland](#)' in their reports on her. She actually contacted *them* when she found herself suddenly receiving automatic writing from the surviving F. W. H. Myers! The last of this group of new trance mediums was a woman only called '[Mrs Willett](#)' in the reports and who was one of the most talented of the group. It wasn't until years after her death that her identity was revealed as Mrs Winifred Coombe-Tenant, a prominent British stateswoman of the time. It was extremely lucky that the SPR was able to find so many talented mediums, for it appeared that the deceased founders of the Society were themselves eager to establish communications from beyond the veil.

That these eminent scholars should seek to contact their colleagues is not surprising but what was surprising was the nature of their communications. Sometimes one of the psychics, working alone at home, would scribble a message that made little sense, but which seemed to relate to what one of the others was writing at about the same time. These messages often seemed to be coming from the deceased Myers. Piddington and Johnson realized very quickly that curious jig-saw puzzles were being communicated through the scripts; for when the messages were joined together, an important communication would be spelled out. These puzzles were immediately called the 'cross-correspondences' and represent a very important chapter in the literature on trance mediumship. They went on for years, and it appeared as though Myers was devising his own very personal way of proving his continued survival to the colleagues he had left behind.[9]

[9] Saltmarsh, H. F. *Evidence of Personal Survival from Cross-Correspondences*. London: Bell, 1938.

Some of the cross-correspondences became enormously complex, since Myers was in the habit of drawing his material and citations from classical Greek and Latin literature. Most of the mediums were ignorant of this body of literature, but Myers was an authority on it, so his choice was certainly *a propos*. One of the easier cases to follow is the case of the Medici tombs, which the soi-disant Myers communicated through several SPR sensitives in 1906. The cross-correspondence first came to light when Mrs Holland was visiting England that year. Some of her private scripts of that period contained messages from Myers alluding to death, sleep, shadows, dawn, evening and morning. No clues to the meaning of these themes were given except that the name 'Margaret' (Verrall) was appended.

Such cryptic allusions immediately suggested that a cross-correspondence case was in the works; so upon learning about the scripts, Alice Johnson and Piddington started checking the writing their other psychics were producing and sending to them. Since Mrs Piper was also visiting England at this same time, J. G. Piddington sat with her a few months later and she spoke the following words while emerging from trance: 'Morehead - laurel for laurel. I say give her that for laurel. Goodbye.' She also saw the apparition of a negro. This really didn't make all that much sense either, so Piddington held another session with Mrs Piper the very next day. During this séance Myers communicated directly and explained that the key to the cryptic message could be found by examining Mrs Verrall's scripts. (Remember that this same message was alluded to in Mrs Holland's germinal scripts). It turned out that the discarnate Myers was a little off the mark, for the next allusions to the puzzle came in Helen Verrall's scripts written in Cambridge. She followed up on the laurel theme by writing one day: 'Alexander's tomb - laurel leaves, are emblems, laurels for the victor's brow.' Mrs Holland was also still under the influence of the alleged Myers, for shortly after the Verrall scripts arrived, she found herself writing one evening: 'Darkness, light, shadow, Alexander Moor's head.' It should be noted that none of the psychics was in contact with any of the others.

There seems little doubt but that these messages were all interrelated, though they probably will make little sense to the modern reader. But the SPR leaders were versed in classical literature and history, and the allusions made considerable sense to them. The final key came when Mrs Willett contacted the SPR with some of her own automatic writings, which contained the words: 'Laurential tomb, Dawn and Twilight'.

It was now apparent that all these messages referred to the tombs of the Medici family in Italy. J. G. Piddington explains in his report on this cross-correspondence that the laurel was the family emblem of Lorenzo, the Magnificent, a one-time patriarch of the Medicis. Other symbols carved on the family tombs represent dawn and twilight. The allusion to Alexander was not too puzzling either, since Alessandro de Medici had been another member of the family. He was known as 'The Moor' because of his mulatto heritage, and he was secretly buried in the Medici tombs.



Mrs Margaret Verrall was the protagonist of the 'cross correspondences' which she felt were the deliberate handiwork of a single personality, that of the recently deceased F. W. H. Myers. (Mary Evans Picture Library)

One interpretation of this case, then, is that the deceased Myers used his knowledge of the tombs to inject a literary jigsaw puzzle into the scripts of the mediums. This was the type of information with which Myers was well conversant but which was beyond the education of some of the psychics.

The case of the Medici tombs is actually a rather simple and compact one. Some of the other cross-correspondences were much more complex and took years to complete. The pinnacle of the cross-correspondences probably came in 1906 when Mrs Piper was still in England. During one of his sittings with her, Piddington delivered a specially constructed message to the purported Myers which set the stage for it. He explained to 'Myers' through Mrs Piper: 'We are aware of the scheme of the cross-correspondences which you are transmitting through various mediums; and we hope that you will go on with them. Try to give to A and B two different messages, between which no connection is discernible. Then as soon as possible give to C a third message that will reveal the hidden suggestions'. He also proposed that Myers designate his allusions to the cross-correspondence by signing the pertinent scripts with a triangle transcribed within a circle.

Now there was an important catch to this message, for *it was read to the entranced medium in Ciceronian Latin*. Mrs Piper, of course, understood no Latin and especially not such an obscure dialect, but the language was well within the command of the living Myers. Mrs Piper's controls responded to the message by saying they understood.

It took only a few weeks for the deceased Myers to spell out this complicated cross-correspondence. Between 17 December and 2 January allusions of the themes of stars, hope, and the poetry of Robert Browning started cropping up in the writings of Mrs Verrall and her daughter. These allusions made little sense to Piddington until he received a message at a sitting with Mrs Piper in London to 'look out for Hope, Star, and Browning. The allusions then all made sense when Piddington read up on Browning and found that the cross-correspondence related to themes contained in his poem *Abt Vogler*.

The cross-correspondences went on for years, and gradually began ebbing in the 1910s. The SPR leaders found them very convincing evidence for survival, although they tend to be very problematic for the modern student. The greatest difficulty with the cross-correspondences was that it took a great deal of classical scholarship to fully appreciate them. Writing in 1972, Dr [Robert Thouless](#) - a British psychologist and an authority on the survival problem - went so far as to suggest that, 'if this was an experiment devised ... on the other side of the grave, I think it must be judged to be a badly designed experiment. It has provided a mass of material of which it is very difficult to judge the evidential value, and about which there are varying opinions.'^[10]

[10] Thouless, Robert. *From Anecdote to Experiment in Psychical Research*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972.

Dr Thouless's verdict is a little harsh, but it echoes the sentiments of many contemporary researchers. It is nonetheless important to note that those researchers who studied the cross-correspondences most intensely came to see them as strong and almost irrefutable evidence for life after death. The only exception was the always sceptical [Frank Podmore](#), who believed that telepathy among the sensitives could explain them. He especially focused on Mrs Verrall as the source of the leakage, since she alone among the psychics had a good background in the classics.



F. W. H. Myers with his son Harold. (Mary Evans Picture Library)