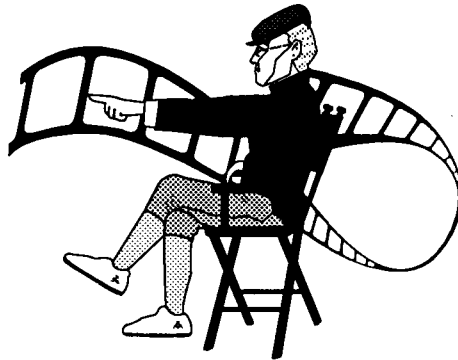


in the cave be different if their love was not so equally hidden? Or what of his grief as he fulfils his promise and carries her from her tomb, would his grief be less? Would our perceptions change if the plot had this adulterous element removed? I don't think so. Her awful, lonely death and his futile battle to save her transcend their history and elevate both characters to heroic proportions. Their true tragedy is demeaned by their lies.

I am fed up with the glorification of lies and infidelity. It's not glorious, it's sordid. Love flourishes in truth, not in deceit. This

may make our lives difficult sometimes but isn't this also how we learn and grow? It is not manly to make love with another man's wife and then sit down to dinner with him, it's dishonest and puerile. It's not womanly to lie to and cheat the man you have made vows with, it's adolescent and based in fear. If you feel good about yourself and what you are doing, do you need to lie? It takes courage to be truthful and there's plenty of drama in it, too; just like this film which is full of images of courage and doesn't need the drama of infidelity to make it interesting.



An Astrologer at Work

Anne Whitaker

The Starting Point

My first serious encounter with astrology came at a stage in my life when I was an

out-and-out sceptic. In 1974 in a launderette in Bath I became friends with a little girl whose parents were astrologers. They

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invited me back for a cup of tea, and drew up a birth chart on a piece of paper which I still have. They then produced a description of the inner workings and outer manifestations of my life which stunned me with its accuracy.

'You may be a 26-year-old total sceptic now,' they said. 'But in your early thirties there's going to be something arising in you which longs to connect with a more spiritual and esoteric dimension of life — you might very well end up doing astrology yourself.' I regarded this as nonsense, at the time believing myself to be a Marxist. It's only now that I realise how much I was denying my own spirituality and need for relationship with the symbolic world. In my early thirties someone gave me a present of an astrology book. I was compelled by it, found out about the Faculty of Astrological Studies and did their Certificate correspondence course. By then I knew that astrology was a subject I wanted to pursue, probably for the rest of my life.

But I think that it's important for people who work in esoteric fields to have a strongly rational side, a sceptical side. One of the things I say to my students right from the beginning is, 'Look: I wear the sceptic on my left shoulder, where it will remain till the day I die.' I have a great respect for the rational dimensions of life. But also for the symbolic, intuitive, spiritual, non-rational dimensions. The point is to bring both those facets together in mutual respect and equal balance.

What a Reading Can Offer

It's simply not possible for popular astrology as found in the media to describe in any detail who you are, since it focuses purely on where the Sun is (Pisces, Aries, Virgo) on your birthday. It's like trying to

tell the story of a complex play with reference to only one character on the stage. You can only get a view of all the characters on the stage of a client's life from the map which you draw of the heavens at the particular *time and place*, as well as day, of their birth.

This map or horoscope or birth chart is then used as a medium to mirror back to the individual, as lucidly as you can, with as much care as possible for their sensitivity and their level of awareness, what the different characters are on the stage of their life and how these interact with one another.

After twelve years of doing astrology professionally, I think the central thing that individuals gain from a birth chart reading is confirmation of who they are: their strengths and weaknesses, their gifts and difficulties. It gives them more confidence and courage to be themselves. It is a very powerful and potentially spiritual experience to have a stranger, who knows nothing of you, describe your essential qualities accurately from a map drawn of the heavens. The other great gift that astrology can offer is to say: 'This is *your* moment in time, through which you are connected to a process which was unfolding aeons before you were born and will continue long after you have departed; you are a strand in the weave of life, with a contribution to make, using the energies that you have been given as fully and as creatively as possible.' Feeling connected is a great antidote to alienation and meaninglessness.

My Job as an Astrologer

My job is to help other people understand themselves more clearly. I don't know what the balance is between fate and free

will any more than any one else does. But the birth chart suggests strongly that we come into this world not as *tabulae rasae*, but with certain characteristics; and that the world is a stage where certain characters are poised to live out a complex drama as the process of our life unfolds from birth to death. What astrologers can't do is describe the whole range of possibilities of expression which arise from each core character on this stage.

There appears to be a dynamic relationship between what you have been given — through family physical and psychological inheritance (the Old Norse word for 'fate' also means genitals!), location and social status — and your own choices in what you do with it. I think that effective astrologers in consultation are poised on the interface between fate and free will: on the one hand helping clients to confirm who they are, which they probably already know, if they are honest with themselves; on the other, helping them to see, and to broaden, the range of possible expression of their energies and talents. My job is to send folk out of my consulting room feeling more able to operate constructively and honestly in their world than when they came in.

The astrologer's ego should have a minimum influence on the process. It's impossible to keep ego out of it, to be completely objective, to avoid making mistakes; but what the person takes away should be as much theirs, and as little the astrologer's, as is possible.

The Links between Counselling and Astrology

I work as an astrologer, but also as a counsellor. I keep the two activities separate in

practice, although the symbolic perspective which astrology provides has influenced the context which I bring to my counselling work.

If a counselling client is interested in the spiritual and symbolic levels of life, this usually comes out at some point; if I feel that person would find an astrology reading useful, then I'll suggest it. I recommend an astrologer from the very small group in this area who have qualifications from the Faculty of Astrological Studies, as I do, and operate within the Faculty's code of ethics and practice. The client can then bring back some of the clarification gained from the reading, and we will work with that. I think astrology can complement the therapeutic process in some instances.

Both counsellors and astrologers need good counselling skills, the counsellor using them in the therapeutic process over time with their clients, the astrologer using them more in the here and now. About half my astrological work is with new clients, and half with people who return. I don't do ongoing weekly work with my astrology clients. We have an initial reading — then if the person wishes to take it further I encourage them to go away and reflect, listen to the tape, and call me if they wish to explore some of the themes in more detail. I sometimes do two, three or four sessions, spread over a period of months, with one person. I have, for example, a male client in his 40s who refuses to go into counselling, preferring to come to me for some astrological work twice a year, identifying areas he can work with from one six-month visit to another. He has found this way of working very helpful for him.

If it is evident at an initial reading that the client wants and needs to do some very regular follow-up work on areas of pain or

concern, I usually refer on — to counselors or psychotherapists, acupuncture therapists, massage therapists, or specialists in homeopathy, herbalism or naturopathy. It is important for astrologers to have a good referral system of reputable colleagues.

My Reasons for Referring Clients On

One of the many things that astrology has taught me is great respect for process. Any process has its own timing; it likes not to be hurried, pushed, or interfered with. Having an astrology reading done is such a radical and powerful thing that it takes some time to digest the implications of what's been said, and to incorporate some of it into one's life. Having repeated astrological work done (this is my own view and I'm not speaking for anyone but myself) can perhaps be too much, can overload the client and perhaps push the process on too fast. This is why I prefer people to go and work with other therapists.

Maybe once a year or couple of years they can come to me, to take stock of where they are from a symbolic perspective; also, if they wish, to look at how the unfolding energy patterns of the coming year link with their particular horoscope, in order to gain some idea of what the main themes are for further work. I'm only interested in working with people who are prepared to take responsibility for themselves. Astrology appropriately used should enhance the sense of personal responsibility, not take it away and hang it on the planets, or even worse, on the astrologer!

People are better not to become too dependent on a symbolic context: astrology and astrologers, like relationships, drugs,

sex, alcohol or the national lottery, can become highly addictive. So I think my role is to support the other person's courage to lead their own life, using their own judgement as far as possible. If any of my clients consulted me to discuss when they should get a haircut, or whether to take their holiday in August or January, then my response would be to take myself immediately into therapy to examine why I was producing such a high level of dependency. The great symbolic arts, astrology, tarot, palmistry, I Ching, should in my opinion be consulted with great respect, and with considerable restraint.

Offering a Realistic and Respectful Content

A major criticism levelled at 'new age' practitioners, one from which astrologers are not immune, is that they should put things across in a relentlessly positive way. Telling someone who has been through absolute tragedy that this is perhaps something that was meant to happen, a growth opportunity, I find disrespectful, to say the least. Having now had my share of experience of people coming to me who have had terrible trauma, I think that it's insensitive, glib, and probably very upsetting to tell somebody who is in pieces that this is a learning and a growing experience. I don't think that I have the right to say that. And I certainly wouldn't say it.

However, if they were trying to grope for some sense of meaning and understanding in order to cope better, then I would very gently and tentatively use the symbolic context which astrology provides to attempt to help them to do that. But it is not my job to tell people how they should receive their personal experience.

And I've been through sufficient personal and family tragedy of my own to respect people's struggle to come to terms with life's brutalities in their own way.

The Bigger Social and Political Picture

One of the many fascinations of the subject is how it shows the ever-changing patterns of the planets symbolically reflecting different kinds of energies in our collective life. If you are strongly plugged into collective patterns (which can be assessed through comparing the natal horoscope with the prevailing patterns) it seems as if you are given a wee chip of the current pattern to work with in your individual life. Let me give a specific example. From the end of 1992 until the beginning of 1995 there was a particularly difficult combination of planets, which when it shows up tends to symbolise warring, destructive energies at work in our world. I'm talking about the Saturn-Pluto combination.

Every time these planets have connected this century the collective context has been war: they were linked early in World War I, then at the end of the Second World War when we were confronted with the horrors of the two holocausts, Nazi and nuclear. Their conjunction was the backdrop to the Arab-Israeli war (the state of Israel was born under this combination in 1948) in the 60s; the Falklands war in the 80s; and 1992 saw the upsurge of the Balkan War. Over the following three years we saw in Europe a fierce and brutal period

of terrible carnage — as well as genocide in Rwanda and various other horrors at different locations.

From 1992 to early 1995 I observed more individuals whose horoscopes showed them to be strongly plugged into this pattern than I had ever seen before going through deeper and darker traumas in their personal lives, much of it involving family fate issues. Because my own horoscope involved this pattern I had to face some very painful and difficult times regarding my own family of origin. It seemed to me that I drew, as a practitioner, clients plugged into the same overall pattern as myself.

So I was aware of having to struggle hard to keep a balance between compassionate feeling and dispassionate judgement during this period — the danger of projecting my own experience was high. But at least I was aware of it. This is an illustration of how astrologers need both professional supervision and, when appropriate, personal therapy to ensure that they are fully aware of their own issues and avoid projecting them into their astrological work.

As an astrology practitioner you are made aware on a daily basis that there is a dynamic interrelationship between individual and collective experience. Shakespeare says "There is a tide in the affairs of men . . ."; if you practice astrology often enough, and for long enough, you can see the tides of history, the changing patterns of the times, running through the lives of individuals whose charts you read. It's fascinating . . . and awesome.

