

Review

Liz Hathway: *Daughter of Saturn: An Auto-ethnographic Enquiry into Contemporary Astrological Practice*

Michael York

Professor Emeritus, Bath Spa University, author, *The Emerging Network: A Sociology of the New Age and Neo-Pagan Movements*.

In her new book, *Daughter of Saturn* Liz Hathway combines the dual role of researcher and astrologer to explore the wealth of characteristics, contradictions, and correspondences associated with Saturn. The major part of her research took place on-line and involved conversations with various people, some not personally known to her, but through the sharing of astrological language there was common ground to explore mutually specific themes. As an ethnographer and academic, Hathway claims to stand outside the world of astrology, but simultaneously as a deep insider, she believes that to work with a planet is also to evoke it. Her underlying argument is that academics need to take astrology and its increasing role in popular culture seriously. To this end, she desires to give astrology a voice within academia. Accordingly, the robustness of astrology's collective cultural memory extends back over thousands of years to the myth and astronomy of the ancient world. But now, Saturn's bonds to its malefic past are being re-framed in modern psychological terms - reflecting wider cultural developments within esoteric discourse which emphasise self-actualization and the idea of wholeness.

In providing an overall introduction to astrology for the wider general public and employing an insider/outsider ethnography, Hathway acknowledges indebtedness to Alan Leo as well as the employment of intuition along with the Theosophical notions of *karma*, reincarnation and the soul and, in particular, the emphasis on the sun which has led to the popularity of sun-sign astrology. Generalisations themselves are important in that they help to reduce chaos. The danger with stereotyping is in the creation of rigid boundaries, but it is still relevant and useful in the recognition of consistent sun-sign characteristics. Nevertheless, Hathway insists that sun-sign astrology (as found through newspapers, etc.) is to be discerned importantly from sun-sign delineations that have resulted mythopoetically through the historic interactions of mythology and astrology. While allowing that critics of sun-sign astrology frequently base their criticism on what is perceived as its reductionist nature, she stresses that stereotypes and archetypes still cannot be easily separated.

Among both the negative Capricorn stereotypes and the malefic qualities assigned to Saturn as the task-maker are coldness; being disciplinarian, mechanic, serious, authoritarian, pessimistic, fearful, depressive, expecting worst case scenarios, suspicion and doom thinking; as well as old people, crankiness and emotional distance. The astrological associations between Kronos/Saturn and Capricorn extend at least as far back as Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* and the second century CE. In her research, however, Hathway found two notable Hesiodic omissions, namely, the 'ambition' linked to Kronos' dethronement of his father, and 'the end justifies the means' which has been linked to Kronos' epithet of 'crooked-schemer'. But this additionally raises the question of whether ambition is necessarily a negative Capricorn quality. And while control of others may be an adverse Saturnian/Capricornian trait, control in the form of self-discipline is to be seen as a positive.

Acknowledging the diversity of opinions held by contemporary astrologers, the ancient link of Saturn to fathers and old men, namely the father archetype, remains a fundamental aspect of the Kronos/Saturn mythology. Moreover, the modern psychological perspective has expanded astrological vocabulary. In the connection between myth and astrological function,

the strength of the father theme in Saturn's astrological narrative and the robustness of this association throughout Hathway's research results seem to confirm the longevity of the long-standing mythical association between Saturn and the father.

But perhaps the most crucial findings concern astrology and the Saturn Return which the astrologers who participated in Hathway's research were most keen to discuss, and mythology, both themes sharing a strong narrative element. The comments made in her Saturn Focus Group on Facebook in response to the questions about the planet's return to its original position in an individual's horoscope constituted the most personal of all her research threads. Specifically, these involve life changing events at the time of the second Saturn return which often result in the confrontation with aging and the taking on of the role of an elder. The conceptual framework offers the possibility of providing meaning and context to events that can be shared with the experiences of other astrological 'insiders'. This also allows the feeling of being part of a larger, supportive community. In addition, as a rite of passage, Hathway suggests that the Saturn return acts as a marker which singles out and gives chronological sequence to important transitional moments in the astrologer's personal narrative and life story. If society itself is defined as 'an organized community', then Saturn appears to have become a recognisable symbol of cyclical transition. But as important, it is also possible to view the Saturn return within the context of enchantment and Saturn's ancient link with the Golden Age. Consequently, the Return presents the possibility to wipe one's slate clean and somehow start life anew. In other words, this potential to renew one's life, to experience a rite of passage, introduces the chance to re-enchant one's own life, to re-invent one's self anew. The only disappointment for some of us with the research is that there is no mention of Saturn's third return; none of the available respondents as well as the investigator herself appear to have been close to that reflective stage.

In conclusion, Hathway observes that, like archetypes, stereotypes are available for intelligent adaptation, but she rejects the more unpalatable Capricorn clichés which stem from a collective memory of a malefic god. Instead, the preferred key words to be associated with the planet Saturn include those of 'structure', 'responsibility', 'time', 'harvest', 'necessity', 'restrictions', 'borders', 'goals' and 'organisation'. In short, the Saturn Return fulfils a cultural need that was formerly satisfied by religion, but which nevertheless lies outside the remit of science. Hathway's thorough and most impressive research indicates that astrologers enjoy story-telling and that, when viewed as a symbolic language, astrology engenders an approach to narrative that imaginatively weaves knowledge with intuition and allegory with instinct.