

Nicholas Campion

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

Foreword

Astrology and Culture

This book is an academic first. It is the first published autoethnography of astrology by a student and practitioner of astrology and has emerged out of the qualitative research programme in astrology in the Sophia Centre at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. Astrology is defined broadly as any attempt to identify a relationship between celestial and terrestrial affairs. In practice this overlaps with phenomena such as influences from the Sun and Moon which would generally not be included as astrological. In practice, then, astrology is the attempt to identify significance or meaning in celestial phenomena for human affairs. It depends on perceived relationships between human and celestial phenomena which may be understood as causal or, equally, as non-causal, and may be justified by references to correspondence, correlations or influences. To adapt Robert Peet's term, as applied to his study of species diversity, it is a concept cluster.¹ Beyond the assumption that celestial phenomena provide information about human and/or terrestrial affairs, when we consider the variety of worldwide traditions, there is no single guiding philosophy, method or set of technical procedures, just diversity.² And therefore we have, as in the title of a past Sophia Centre conference, not astrology, in the singular, but astrologies in the plural. This explains Patrick Curry's seminal inclusive definition in which 'Astrology is the practice of relating the heavenly bodies to lives and events on earth, and the tradition that has thus been generated'.³ Every variety is therefore included. Curry also shifted the question which had previously been central to academic inquiry, which was 'what do astrologers believe?', to 'what do astrologers do?' He also developed the notion of astrology as a kind of ecological thought.⁴ Relationships between celestial and terrestrial phenomena are therefore non-linear, complex and chaotic, in the sense set out by chaos theory.⁵

One important question concerns the cultural value of this research. One is that astrology is deeply embedded in popular culture. A 2024 Harris Poll survey reported that 70% of

¹ Robert K. Peet, 'The Measurement of Species Diversity', *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, Vol 5 (1974), pp. 285-302 (p. 285).

² See Nicholas Campion, *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

³ Patrick Curry, 'Astrology', in Boyd, Kelly (ed.) *The Encyclopaedia of Historians and Historical Writing*, 2 Vols. London: Fitzroy Dearborn 1999, Vol. 1, pp 55-7 (p. 55)

⁴ Patrick Curry, 'Grounding the Stars: Towards and Ecological Astrology', in *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, 2007, Vol 1 no 2, pp. 210-219.

⁵ Bernadette Brady, *Cosmos, Chaosmos and Astrology: rethinking the nature of astrology* (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press 2014).

adults in the USA somewhat or strongly believe in astrology.⁶ Another is that a certain demographic, one generally inclined to scientific and/or left-wing political attitudes, tends to regard it as a ridiculous superstition. The high priest of twentieth century thought in this respect is Theodor Adorno, a leading Marxist and pioneer of the Frankfurt school of cultural theorists. In 1953 Adorno applied the Frankfurt school's theory to an analysis of the *Los Angeles Times* horoscope column, and concluded that, as he put it, astrology is 'basically discordant with today's universal state of enlightenment'.⁷ We therefore have two very public narratives: one is that astrology is ridiculous and the other is that it is more popular than ever. It therefore makes sense to ask astrologers themselves what they think and do. Actually, such a question is necessary for an understanding of cultural currents in the twenty-first century.

Let me deal with one further issue to do with astrology's cultural importance. It is often classed as an 'alternative' religion or spirituality.⁸ This claim is properly justified if we consider the established Roman Catholic and Protestant churches of western countries as the mainstream in which case anything else, including minor Christian groups, become an alternative. However, if we accept the Harris Poll's 70% figure for the number of adults in the USA who believe in astrology then it's not so much an alternative as mainstream, which gives us all the more reason to find out about who those people are.

One of the premises of the Sophia Centre's MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology is that astrology was, and therefore remains, a cultural application of astronomy.⁹ As the Centre's remit is cultural then the disciplines which inform its work are cultural studies, history, the study of religions, sociology, anthropology and ethnography. To this end, all students are required to conduct field work in qualitative research. And this begs the question 'what does qualitative research hope to achieve?' The answer is obvious: its goal is to understand qualities. This, in turn, therefore requires attention to feelings, meanings, values, motivations and what is now widely known as lived experience. The qualitative researcher is concerned with what people feel, think and do. What do people *really* think and do? And what do they think about what they think and do? At this point let me consider the academic context.

Qualitative Research

⁶ Harris Poll, 'Astrology Survey: the role of astrology in society', Feb. 2024 [accessed 21 March 2026]. <https://theharrispoll.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Astrology-Survey-February-2024.pdf>
'Astrology is booming, thanks to technology and younger enthusiasts', *The Economist*, 15 Jan 2025. <https://www.economist.com/culture/2025/01/15/astrology-is-booming-thanks-to-technology-and-younger-enthusiasts> [accessed 21 March 2026].

⁷ Theodor Adorno, *The Stars Down to Earth* (London: Routledge, 1994[1953]), p. 36.

⁸ See Stephen J. Hunt, *Alternative Religions: A Sociological Introduction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 171-3.; Kocku von Stukrad, 'Under the Radar of Hegemonic Perception: Alternative Spiritualities', *Counterpoint: Navigating Knowledge*. <https://counterpointknowledge.org/under-the-radar-of-hegemonic-perception-alternative-spiritualities/> [accessed 21 March 2026].

⁹ Nicholas Campion, 'Astrology as Cultural Astronomy', *Handbook of Archaeoastronomy and Ethnoastronomy* (ed. Clive Ruggles) (Heidelberg, Springer-Verlag, 2014), pp. 103-116.

Qualitative research differs from quantitative research in that, while it can collect quantitative data, this is regarded as what we call 'indicative'. It might point to some cultural pattern but, unlike much quantitative research, it never attempts to reach firm generalised conclusions about a real state of affairs. In quantitative research, the larger the sample, the better. In qualitative research, small is good. We are interested in the individual or in small groups. Here's Alan Bryman, addressing this problem:

The qualitative researcher frequently conducts research in a specific milieu (a case study) whose representativeness is unknown and probably unknowable, so that the generalisability of such findings is also unknown.¹⁰

We find things out, but we never know how far we can generalise from these into any *real* state of affairs. David Hufford put it well:

All knowing is subjective, and the 'objective world' is what knowers claim to know about. Reflexivity in knowledge-making involves bringing the subject, the "doer" of the knowledge-making activity, back into the account of knowledge.¹¹

Most qualitative researchers engage with groups, their aim being to establish how the group thinks, feels, believes and behaves. But there's always a concern with the individual. A researcher may conduct five interviews, or twenty-five, or fifty. Some patterns may emerge, but each individual has their own story, which is always, in the final analysis, unique. The smallest unit of qualitative research is the case study. The case which is studied can be a group or it can be a single person. Here's an authoritative view:

the case study researcher typically observes the characteristics of an individual unit - a child, a class, a school or a community. The purpose of such observation is to probe deeply and to analyse intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit.¹²

The single case is also particular and complex, as Robert E. Stake argued, and has to be studied both in itself and in relation to its 'interaction with its contexts' with the aim of understanding 'its activity within important circumstances'.¹³ Anything which might be studied only exists in relation to everything else. The individual astrologer exists within a network of other astrologers and astrological ideas, which may exist in the present but are also part of a lineage which dates back well over two thousand years, connecting with the temple priests of ancient Mesopotamia and in parallel with the astrologers of India and Southeast Asia.

¹⁰ Alan Bryman, *Quantity and Quality in Social Research* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001[1988]), p. 100.

¹¹ David J. Hufford, 'The Scholarly Voice and the Personal Voice: Reflexivity in Belief Studies', in Russell T. McCutcheon, ed., *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion* (London: Cassell 1999), p.295.

¹² Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion, Keith Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*, 5th edn., (Routledge: London, 2005) p185.

¹³ Robert E. Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (London: Sage, 1995), p. xi.

There's another twist. Individuals can be studied as a single case, but individuals can also study themselves. This is known as autoethnography. Tessa Muncey wrote the definitive text, *Creating Autoethnography*, published in 2010. As she says, 'None of us live in a disconnected world'.¹⁴ Here she is in her own words, setting out the premise and approach:

Autoethnography is a research approach that privileges the individual. It is a artificially constructed piece of prose, poetry, music or a piece of art work that attempts to portray an individual experience in a way that evokes the imagination of the reader'...It somehow emerges out of the iterative process of doing research while engaging in the process of living a life...In order to take the leap into creating an autoethnography one first has to recognise that there is no distinction between doing research and living a life...the autoethnographer is both the researcher and the researched.¹⁵

Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner are a little more poetic:

Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth ethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focussing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations.¹⁶

In other words, focus on what the individual experiences and avoid loading the evidence with psychological, sociological or anthropological theories. Let the evidence speak. Observe the phenomenon, the lived experience, for what it is, free of any preconceptions at least as far as such a thing is possible.¹⁷ And to be aware of our preconceptions we need to reflect on them and the ways in which we respond to our lived experiences and those of others. Like all forms of qualitative research autoethnography exists on a spectrum, as Kim Etherington explains.¹⁸ It can be entirely autobiographical and self-centred. But, equally, it can emerge in hybrid forms which may include textual analysis, surveys, interviews or participant observation. In all these cases the autoethnographic component is complemented by the researcher's consideration of their own position, difficulties,

¹⁴ Tessa Muncey, *Creating Autoethnography* (London: Sage 2010), p. 3.

¹⁵ Muncey, *Creating Autoethnography*, pp. 2 – 3.

¹⁶ Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, 'Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject' in *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.), ed. by N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln, (Sage Publications), p. 739.

¹⁷ See Max van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); Gavin Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999); Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994).

¹⁸ Kim Etherington, *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher: Using Ourselves in Research* (London, Jessica Kingsley Publishing, 2004), pp. 137-49.

advantages and responses to their findings. Liz's own research opens by revisiting the reaction of her teenage self to discovering that she was a Capricorn. This had a big impact on her at the time. The book then records her struggle with organizing her research, traces her intellectual development, and reports on the challenges of bringing the project to completion. The book charts Liz's personal Saturnian journey, while at the same time exploring the cultural role that the planet plays in contemporary communities of astrologers and the astrological way of life.

And from there we move to the final academic consideration: the insider-outsider debate.¹⁹ We need some background on this. Back in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the first anthropologists would go and study what were then called native peoples. It was considered an advantage to be a western educated academic, or what later came to be called an outsider. This, it was thought, provided the objective distance which was required to reach correct conclusions about the nature of native culture. Through a gradual process anthropologists realised that, if they were to understand native culture, they had to participate in. The next step was to realise that if they were to participate they had to have an inner experience of native culture as well as an outer one. And then, it was thought, perhaps natives could study themselves, if they acquired the investigative research methods the outsider. Along the way, the term native lost any perjorative associations. Anyone could be a native. One academic who breached the old outsider/western academic versus insider/non academic binary was Joanne Pearson, a practicing Wiccan who became a noted scholar in the Study of Religions, and studied the nature and culture of Wicca as both an academic and a Wiccan.²⁰ And this is where Liz Hathway comes in as the astrologer studying the culture of astrology through her own experience, as an autoethnographer. Liz cites Pearson's influence on her.

There's one more academic variant to consider on the insider-outsider question. On the one hand the very act of academic training enable the insider to stand back and observe themselves and the world around them as an outsider. On the other, all groups include sub-groups, drawn together by shared ideas or emotional affinity or any other social quality, so insiderness and outsidership become variable and flexible characteristics. Clifford Geertz's model may, in this respect, be a useful one. Observing the difficulties that arise from the simple formulation of polarities such as insider-outsider and subjective-objective, he cites the psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut's differentiation between 'experience-near' and 'experience-distant', which may be linked by a graduated scale.²¹ From Geertz's

¹⁹ Elizabeth Arweck and Martin Stringer (eds.), *Theorising Faith: the Insider/Outsider Problem* (Birmingham: Birmingham University Press, 2002); Thomas N. Headland, Kenneth L. Pike and Marvin Harris, *Emics and Etics: the Insider/Outsider Debate*, (London: Sage Publications, 1990); Russell T. McCutcheon (ed.), *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (London: Cassell, 1999).

²⁰ Jo Pearson, "Going Native in Reverse": The Insider as Researcher in British Wicca', *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Vol 5, no 1 (October 2001, pp. 52-63.

²¹ Clifford Geertz, 'On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding', in Russell T. McCutcheon (ed.), *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: a Reader* (London: Cassell, 1999), pp. 50-53 (p. 51).

perspective, insidership and outsidership then become questions of degree which may vary with time, place and mood.

Saturn, Astrology and Process

Saturn's imagery in western culture is pervasive. A search for the word Saturnine in online dictionaries comes up with this unpromising description: unfriendly, gloomy, melancholic, moody, sombre, cold, glum, grouchy, surly, sardonic, and physically dark and swarthy. In western astrology his (he is masculine) nature is derived from the fact that he is the slowest moving and faintest of the planets. When the Greeks worked out that the planets orbited the Earth on crystalline spheres, Saturn, being the furthest away, and therefore the coldest.²² His other characteristics are justified by this simple observation. In the seventeenth-century English classic, *Christian Astrology*, when ill placed he is

envious, covetous, jealous and mistrustful, timorous, sordid, outwardly dissembling, sluggish, suspicious, stubborn, a liar, malicious, murmuring, never contented.²³

And yet, he is also,

profound in imagination, in his acts severe, in words reserved, in speaking and giving very spare, in labour patient, in arguing or disputing grave, in obtaining the goods of this life studious and solicitous, in all manner of actions or austere.²⁴

All these are characteristics to be valued and are precisely those set out as the qualities of the of the melancholic temperament.²⁵ Saturn is the solitary scholar, the lonely wanderer, the serious thinker, the person who thinks deeply, has high principles, does their duty and fulfils their responsibilities, no matter with the cost. The Saturnine person is a stoic, who endures failure with dignity but does not baste about their success. Yet both sets of qualities set out in *Christian Astrology* were repeated in one of the most important English-language text books of the twentieth century, *The Modern Text Book of Astrology*, published in 1951.²⁶ To this was added an understanding of psychological processes. People born with Sun-Saturn conjunctions find difficulty in expressing themselves, perhaps due to feelings of inadequacy but can learn the lessons of duty and self-control; those born with Saturn in easy sextiles or trines to the Sun are wise, patient and accepting

²² Claudius Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, trans. F.E. Robbins (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1940), 1.4.

²³ William Lilly, *Christian Astrology* (facsimile edition London: Regulus Publishing, 1985 [1647]), p. 58.

²⁴ Lilly, *Christian Astrology*, p. 58.

²⁵ Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, Fritz Sazl, *Saturn and Melancholy, Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art*, (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1964).

²⁶ Margaret Hone, *The Modern Textbook of Astrology*, (London: L.N. Fowler, fourth edition reprinted 1973, [1951]), p. 31.

while those with squares or oppositions respond to their personal limitations and failures with self-pity.²⁷

These ideas were all significantly expanded by Liz Greene in her major work on psychological astrology, *Saturn*.²⁸ She develops the idea of the dynamic relationship between the unconscious, consciousness and external circumstances. If one struggles to understand one's deeper self then a measure of self-control can be learnt and negative outcomes can be replaced by positive. Fate is engaged and the inner feelings of inadequacy which are a feature of the Saturnine temperament no longer need result in destructiveness but, through an often painful and difficult process, can result in greater consciousness, the integration of different parts of the psyche and outer wisdom. There is, though, always a subtext in Saturn's personality, often unspoken in astrological texts but familiar in learned culture: the Greek Cronos, the ancestor of the Roman Saturn, was far removed from the grim figure of the horoscopic interpreters. He was the ruler of the lost era of the golden race, a time when people lived

without sorrow of heart, remote and free from toil and grief: miserable age rested not on them; but with legs and arms never failing they made merry with feasting beyond the reach of all evils.²⁹

It was to this tradition that the Renaissance philosopher Marsilio Ficino referred when set out practical measures by which the difficulties of being born under Saturn, which he experiences, could be transformed. He explained how to counter Saturn's life-shortening effects by enhancing the expansive qualities of one's life:

If someone were to accuse Saturn and Mars of being harmful by nature, I would not believe it, for they, too, are to be used sometimes, the way doctors must sometimes use poisons, as Ptolemy in his *Centiloquio* says. When the power of Saturn is cautiously taken, it is useful, just as the things doctors use are useful for binding up and holding together. After all, they even use things to stupefy, like opium and mandrake. The same goes for Mars, with euphorbia and hellebore. The Pythagorean maguses seem to have been extremely cautious in this matter, when they would become frightened that their constant philosophizing was the tyranny of Saturn, so they would dress up in white garments, and each day sing songs and make music with Jovial and Apollonian things, and in this way they lived a long time under Saturn.³⁰

²⁷ Hone, *The Modern Textbook of Astrology*, p. 186.

²⁸ Liz Greene, *Saturn: a new look at an old devil* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press 1976), pp.12-13.

²⁹ Hesiod, 'Work and Days', p. 11, in *Theogony and Works and Days*, trans. Dorothy Wender, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1972.

³⁰ Marsilio Ficino, *The Book of Life*, trans. Charles Boer (Irving, Texas: Spring Publications, 1980), p. 93.

In some readings of Saturn, then, one is fated to suffer. In another, one can work on one's self to banish suffering. It is into this rich, complex philosophical, cultural heritage and ecology that Liz steps as both the insider turned outsider, and the outsider turned insider, the astrologer as academic and the academic as astrologer.

Research, Reflexivity and Conclusions

Liz's research is a model of inquiry by an insider into their own world. It extends Joanne Pearson's reflections on the research of a Wiccan into the world of Wicca into research by an astrologer into the world of astrology. Liz talks about her engagement with astrology, her personal journal and her reflections on both astrology and her research. She coordinated a focus group of astrologers and reports on the resulting conversations. And she surveys the literature, not to learn about astrology as a student of astrology might, but to ask what it is that astrologers write and, therefore, what it is that they read. And it's in this that lies Liz's contribution to a richer and more nuanced understanding of a substantial and mainstream feature of modern western culture, avowing the extremes of ridicule and unquestioned acceptance. Much academic inquiry aims to establish a precise answer to a defined research question. Qualitative research, though, does not need to arrive at answer but at an enhanced understanding. As Liz concludes, 'One major aim of my research was to open a window from the inside on astrology's rich culture'. It is in this spirit that the Sophia Centre Press has published this book.