

“Shadow Work”

by

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Evidence of astrology goes back almost 25,000 years, when the tradition of cave painting appeared representing depictions and drawings of the lunar cycle and how it influenced the tides. This practice expanded as written and spoken language evolved. The first written evidence of astrology appears in the late third millennium BCE. As the second millennium BCE came about, astrology began to be mentioned in letters and other works of text. It wasn't until the end of this millennium that astrology began to be written into standard works. When the Neo Assyrian period approached in 911 BCE astrology gained a new sense of importance in the royal court, where scholars began constantly watching the sky to write horoscopes for the king. (Monroe, 2019, p1).

Once astrology became a more common practice among royalty, it began to appear more frequently throughout the medieval ages in support of government and judicial systems. For instance, elections during the time were much more technical events than interrogations within the court. Practitioners were required to “identify, balance, and temper opposing astrological forces in a horoscope.” Since this was a period before the availability of ephemerides, or birth charts, elections placed heavy demands on an astrologer's computational skills due to a high quantity of potential horoscopes for the same event. This type of skill set was only obtainable for academics or court astrologers who had the time, motivation, and resources to prepare birth charts. In addition to elections, “astrologers might also be asked to make an assessment for grand occasions, such as coronations, the founding of cities, or the celebration of a royal marriage, but he might just as easily be asked to consider everyday events such as starting a journey, having a haircut, or buying a suit of clothes” (Carey, 2010, p.92). Due to the academic requirements to understand astrology and astronomy during this time, it was a practice regarded for those higher up in society. Over time, of course, and as astrology traveled through the west, astrology became a practice that anyone could participate in, even without a degree in the sciences.

Astrology has many definitions but the most concrete comes from the writings of French scholar Nicole Oresme who “between 1361 and 1365, reflected this understanding in the definitions of the branches of astrology which he provides in his *Livre de divinacions*. The first part, he tells us, is close to what we now call astronomy and concerned the measurement of the heavenly bodies and the prediction of events such as eclipses. The second part was introductory to the others, and concerned the quality, influences and physical powers of the stars, planets and signs” (Carey, 2010, p.91). These two branches primarily deal with the assignment of the zodiacs as well as horoscopes.

“The third part dealt with the revolutions of the stars and with the conjunctions of the planets and could be broken down into three further sub-branches. Through an analysis of major conjunctions it was possible to understand ‘the great events of the world’ which he lists as plagues, mortalities, famine, floods, wars, the rise and fall of kingdoms or the appearance of prophets and new religions; secondly, there was the study of the atmosphere and the weather, sometimes called astro-meteorology; thirdly, there was the judgment of the humours of the body which comprised the astrological part of medicine. The fourth branch dealt with nativities, that is the interpretation of an individual’s life and fortune based on the appearance of the heavenly bodies at the time of birth” (Carey, 2010, p.91). These branches have a heavier emphasis on horoscopes as well as the idea that astrology can be used as a way to guide one in life and even predict certain events. “The fifth branch of astrology deals with interrogations: ‘that is, decides and answers a question according to the constellation which is in the heavens at the time when a question is asked’” (Carey, 2010, p.91) This last branch primarily deals with the concept of the tarot, or ancestral astrology. This branch is not truly touched upon within this thesis yet is a key part in spiritual practice and is more dependent on specific issues.

A more simplified definition of astrology comes from author Sasha Fenton, a professional astrologer, palmist and Tarot-card reader who has written for many national newspapers and magazines, and who states in her book *Astrology-Your Personal Guide*, that “Astrology isn’t a religion or a belief. It’s a system that is part astronomical, part psychological, and part forecasting... It can be extremely revealing to have a birth chart drawn up and explained, because it brings a level of awareness about the way we project ourselves to others and the way we feel on an inner level. This awareness makes it easier for us to understand ourselves and others.” (p1) With this definition in mind, as well as the history of astrology in ancient and modern society, this thesis will focus on how astrology can shape one’s life and accelerate personal growth. This thesis acts as a form of documentation which includes: evidence of critical thinking, indepth research, an array of journal entries, as well as a series of digital abstractions all documented through an interactive web experience that will act as an archive of the process of this thesis.

The process for this thesis began in December of 2019 and focuses solely on one subject, myself. During this key month, I was introduced to an incorrect, yet very popular form of astrology which focused primarily on love related horoscope readings and love spells. This form of astrology is not recommended, as it has its users focus primarily on other people instead of themselves, which goes against the main themes of astrology; all of which focus on issues within one's self. It wasn't until the early months of 2020 that I broke free of this insufficient practice and began my journey into learning what astrology was and how it could benefit my life. The first step of this process was learning about the 12 zodiac signs that make up the astrological birth chart and learning their key traits and characteristics. The twelve zodiac signs are: Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius and Pisces. Each sign has a set of positive and negative traits that define them; Aries are bold and ambitious, Taurus are calm and indulgent, Leos are vivacious and passionate, Virgos are logical and practical, Scorpios are passionate and secretive, Sagittarius are constantly on the pursuit for knowledge, Capricorns are strong willed, Aquarius are closed off yet extremely caring, and Pisces are emotional yet give great support.

Gemini, Cancer, and Libra are not included in the summary of the zodiac signs above as they are the signs that comprise my astrological "Big Three". The "Big Three" is any person's sun sign, moon sign, and rising sign in their birth chart that represent and identify a person's character, along with how they present themselves and their emotions to others. When an individual is able to recognize the positive and negative traits that the zodiac lines out for their "Big Three", it allows them to analyze the traits they highly resonate with and go on to either enhance or correct them. During this time period I learned that Cancers, which represent my sun sign in the "Big Three", are people with expansive and wild imaginations. They are very emotionally intense, yet extremely intuitive and compassionate, which allows them to be very nurturing. Despite this there is a blindness towards loved ones and things are often overlooked within personal relationships, most specifically boundaries with others. They are the most sensitive sign of the zodiac, and find great difficulty in communicating their real feelings. The sun sign in a birth chart is reflective of how one experiences life and how they express themselves as an individual. Learning what it meant to be a Cancer, I realized I resonate with all of these traits. This was highly important in the process of personal growth, as this experience allowed me to figure out what had been going wrong within interpersonal relationships on my end, allowing me to work and improve on these areas in my life.

It wasn't until April of 2020, when the country entered lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, that I began to look into the other two signs in my "Big Three", Libra and Gemini. This was a time spent mostly in solitude, which allowed me more time to focus inward on myself and reflect on past decisions. I learned that Libras, which represent my moon sign, are people who are natural peacemakers. They are able to choose their words carefully and have a strong sense of justice. They have a tendency to be people pleasers and regard commitment with disdain, often leading to being non confrontational, self pitying, and unreliable in interpersonal relationships. The moon sign in a birth chart represents an individual's emotions, dealing with how they both handle and react to others on an emotional level. Discovering the traits associated with this zodiac sign allowed me to look into myself once more and break down how I handle interpersonal relationships. This was a key development in personal growth, as for the first time it allowed me to acknowledge my own emotions, and give myself the time to step back and understand what they meant and how to respond to them in a healthy manner.

There was also the discovery of what it meant to have Gemini as a rising sign in one's birth chart. The rising sign, also referred to as one's "ascendant sign", represents how others perceive you and the outward projections we cast of ourselves. Geminis are people who are willing to try anything once. They're very flexible, enthusiastic, and social individuals who love to engage in deep conversations. Despite this, they are also incredibly indecisive, overly critical and struggle with commitment. This can lead to impulsive behavior as they can change their mind in a heartbeat, and struggle heavily with responsibility. A common misconception in modern astrology is that the sun sign is the most significant sign in one's birth chart. However, in traditional vedic astrology the rising sign is deemed the most significant as a tool in self reflection as "accurate sun sign horoscopes are, strictly speaking, big-picture oriented they're not fine-tuned to the nitty-gritty details of the here and now," states Astrologer and horoscope writer Mackenzie Greer, in an interview for Well and Good, a website focusing on spiritual health. "Your rising sign determines where all the houses or areas of life are set up in your birth chart, so reading for your rising sign gives your horoscopes, if they're reliably written, a dead-on accuracy that you just can't get from sun signs."

The spring of 2020 had been spent mostly learning and trying to understand the zodiac signs in my “Big Three” and within my birth chart, and was a huge push forward mentally on how I viewed life. I noticed myself becoming more interested in learning who I was; I started picking up new hobbies such as learning guitar and how to make candles. Leaning into the traits I had learned about my “Big Three” I allowed myself to get close to my intermediate family for the first time and open up new connections, as Cancers are said to thrive on support from their families. I found this aspect to be true and overall extremely beneficial towards my mental health.

In June of 2020 I was introduced to the term “Shadow Work”, which is the title for this thesis. The Love Story Media, Inc., a non-profit multimedia publisher and educational platform dedicated to spreading information about personal growth and healing describes Shadow Work as “the act of illuminating the shadow parts of ourselves. Shadows by nature are everything and anything that reflects the absence of love. We do Shadow Work so we can learn from our mistakes, stop repeating and perpetuating toxic patterns, and build self-respect, self-esteem, and self-love. Shadow Work is designed to help you heal from things that you are still unaware of. It gets to the root of the problem. Shadow Work returns the power of choice back to you so you may discern your true passion from your false one. The process of confronting your shadows can help transform you from stressed, depressed, and frustrated into inspired, encouraged, and empowered.”

The introduction to Shadow Work opened my eyes to how astrology could specifically help me accelerate my own personal growth. At the time, I had found solace in a community of people on the social media platform Twitter who were also interested in astrology and how the zodiac can influence one’s personal life. Being in this community was a wonderful experience as each time I went online, I was able to access an array of information and tips about how to deal with the struggles of daily life and coping with past traumas. One of the most important tools in self-growth that I learned during this time was how to assert clearer and stronger boundaries with others. On top of this, I noticed a shift during this time in how I was able to handle my emotions. Instead of reacting rashly in situations, I learned the importance of responding honestly to others in a clear communicative fashion.

In September of 2020, I returned to the SUNY Purchase campus for a new semester with a new perspective on life and how to care for myself. I no longer wanted to sit in my negative emotions and had found a strong desire for change. At this time I started working with a therapist and a psychiatrist in order to learn even more tips for handling emotions and interpersonal relationships. I was diagnosed with Anxiety, Depression, and a mild case of Bipolar Disorder and was given the medication to deal with such issues. After receiving a diagnosis and medication my life became exceptionally better. I could wake up before noon and actually start my day instead of just laying in bed, I had a stronger desire to create art and engage in my school work, and communication with my peers was at an all time high. One key thing this experience brought to my attention was the fact that astrology is not a clear cut instruction manual on how to grow. It is instead a guide that offers you the tools to find growth in your own unique way, and can act as an introduction to other forms and practices of improving your wellbeing.

October of 2020 is when the documentation of this thesis began. I began to keep a journal of my day to day emotions, occasionally accounting and reflecting on specific cases when astrology had a direct impact on my day. In correlation with the journal entries, digital abstractions were created on photoshop in an 8x8in format to represent the emotional themes depicted in the journal by involving an array of colors, textures, and patterns. These two elements act not only as a log to track daily emotional growth but also as a visual guide representing the change from a rigid, unfulfilling lifestyle to one with much more freedom and joy. The presentation of this thesis has gone through many forms throughout its process; the final production and presentation of this thesis, however, is presented as an archive of my personal journey through astrology and growth. It is represented as an interactive website including an explanation of this thesis, a brief history of astrology, and all journal entries and digital abstractions created.

As a final observation, the process of this thesis and the introduction to astrology allowed me to grow in ways I didn't think were possible for myself. I was given a way to utilize the tools, people, and experiences in my day to day life to create a more fulfilling and satisfying experience. Learning the historical context of astrology and how it contrasts with its modern counterpart, showed me all the possibilities astrology offers in creating a unique experience for learning more about oneself. This thesis has proved that astrology had a direct impact not only on my personal growth in an emotional sense, but led to improved interpersonal relationships and a better perception of myself.

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