

Heaven in a Wild Flower: *Reflections on Imagination*

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We are all familiar with these much-quoted ‘Hallmarked’¹ lines from William Blake’s *Auguries of Innocence*:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour

These four lines prepare the reader for Blake’s soulful poem, which explores the fragility, beauty and paradoxes of life. The lines are not just wonderfully aesthetic but address a deeply resonant truth, not easily explained or articulated; truth recognized by the soul, not the intellect. In these four lines, Blake reminds us of a transcendent sight that sees through nature to other worlds. He evokes the mysteries of time and our participation with it. We could make the case that within an hour there is an infinite number of nanoseconds and attoseconds, but this would probably be the ever restless mind trying to come to terms with the poetic images in a securely sensible way. However, there is another way: Blake invites us to imagine.

I begin with these lines as I can imagine the horoscope as a natural wonder like a grain of sand or nature’s beautiful wildflower that inspires me to see through literal forms. It holds infinity in its ecliptical container as planetary symbols are free to move back and forth through time. While this might sound somewhat fanciful, in essence it is, as it is an imaginative picture to myself. When did imagination become suspicious and fictitious, something unreal and non-existent?

Tonight I would like to speak about the poetry and imagination that is often overlooked when we read from the mythic storybook of astrology. Let’s begin with Emily Jane Brontë’s poem *To Imagination*:

So hopeless is the world without;
The world within I doubly prize;
Thy world, where guile, and hate, and doubt,
And cold suspicion never rise;

Where thou, and I, and Liberty,
Have undisputed sovereignty.

What matters it, that, all around,
Danger, and guilt, and darkness lie,
If but within our bosom's bound
We hold a bright, untroubled sky,
Warm with ten thousand mingled rays
Of suns that know no winter days?²

To Emily Brontë imagination was her *daimon*, her guide to a private world she particularly valued, uncontaminated by pollutants from the outer world. Imagination allowed her to see through to a more soulful world, an inner site canopied under an 'untroubled sky'. This other world, by whatever names we might call it, has always been part of the human experience, never questioned by mystics, artists or children. Astrological imagination also allows us to see through to a more soulful world; it can bare the soul through images brought to light when imagining the symbols of the horoscope.

The question of soul is fundamental to astrological practice and tradition. However we consider soul, whether it is thought of as psyche, our inner life or perhaps the true or divine self, to an astrologer the symbols of the horoscope are keys that potentially unlock a portal into its otherworldly realm. We may conceive of this double or secondary world as imaginary, psychic or spiritual; yet no matter how we conceptualize this place, like astral-archaeologists, it is where we encounter the sacred shards of soul.

For artists, including astrological artists, imagination is another way of knowing and perceiving. It is a means of seeing through the world of literality. William Blake considered imagination as a divine or inspired aspect of being human. Like many artists, imagination was his genius, his guide to another world which existed alongside the literal one. This sentiment can be unsettling to many, especially if there is no framework within their culture to appreciate imagination. In contemporary Western culture, what is not factual, proven, statistically verified or scientifically established is often deemed doubtful, far-fetched, a fantasy or false memory, banished to a wasteland with little credence or respect.

The faculty of imagination resides in a different hemisphere to the objectivity of logic. Often spontaneous and unbound, imagination apprehends a situation through symbols, images, associations, correspondences and metaphors - the poetic language of the soul. It is a subjective skill. A society with little context for imagination or introspection is poorly equipped to understand, let alone appreciate, the profundity of imaginative handiwork like astrology, a prime example of disenfranchised imagination in my culture.

Creativity and artistry are often the exception to an appreciation of imagination. Artistic expressions of imagination are housed in galleries and museums throughout the world. In these modern-day sanctuaries, devoted to the Muses, imagination can be consistently appreciated and valued. But Urania, the Muse of Astrology, does not seem to fare as well as her sisters. Has she become too deeply entrenched in a destined and causal world?

Dane Rudhyar, who was also a musician and painter, compared astrological practice to artistic ability. He encouraged a symbolic deliberation on astrological signatures in order

to liberate astrology from being merely observed from a rational and predictive perspective. Rudhyar felt that astrologers had sold out to science and literalism 'in order to gain some kind of recognition and 'respectability'.³ In a modern world that values technical expertise over imagination, shaking off astrology's affiliation with 'literalism' for a new home in the Faculty of Arts would never be easy.

Rudhyar wrote that 'to cast an astrological chart in the way it is done today is just as symbolic a process as painting an oil painting.'⁴ For like an artist, when an astrologer is immersed in the psychic waters of the horoscope, something precious and productive can be created. In this way astrology is a fine art, as like any authentic art it speaks to the ultimate depths of the individual, inspiring images and revelations. While art can be decorative and mesmerizing, its function is to confront, to explore and to investigate. Similarly astrology can be appealing and compelling, but like all art it teaches us how to perceive the world we inhabit and see through to deeper realms. Like an artist, an astrologer constellates insight, finding meaning in reflecting on the heavens symbolized on the canvas of the horoscope.

The language of art, like astrology, speaks through images. It initiates a conversation to explore what is unknown, rather than focus on a fact or a definitive answer. For like art, astrology inspires us to discover the mysteries, confront our realities and question our authenticity. While an artist might use textures, natural materials, illustrations or sounds, the astrologer uses the symbols of the horoscope to commune. The art of astrology is the skilful use of symbols in context of the moment. While an intellectual agility and confidence is needed to be creative, empathy, intuition, perception, sensation and feeling are also essential. But what is also needed is an appreciation of the value of not knowing and uncertainty.

Poet John Keats's 'negative capability' prized the creative values of uncertainty, mystery and doubt over the respected sciences of facts and reason. In writing to his brother, Keats mentions that he was all of a sudden struck with this idea of *Negative Capability*, and that he felt it was this quality that contributed to rewarding achievement. He said:

I mean, *Negative Capability*, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.⁵

Astrology is a remarkable merger of poetry and philosophy. It can be used factually and conservatively, but when reduced to cause-effect explanations and bound by techniques, astrology loses its connection to the divine. In other words the symbol becomes a sign, which leads us in a certain direction towards a conclusion, which is highly useful when seeking certainty or an answer. However this approach can become formulaic, disconnecting from the mystery and soulfulness of astrology. When the mystery of divination and the creative power of the symbol are no longer part of the astrological equation, astrology becomes a system rather than a creative act.

Astrology's Imagination

Astrology's analogies between cosmos and human experience, its archetypal imagery, cyclic time, symbolic language and correspondences to ancient deities open the doors of perception onto other ways of knowing and perceiving the world. Astrological images assist us to pre-tend and pre-view the world we inhabit. Because of its creative and

symbolic language, astrology invites reflection on profound aspects of the human experience, which can acknowledge and confirm deep-seated and intimate feelings. Its affinity with cycles, the eternal return, time and timelessness, along with space and place, invite contemplation on the soul's odyssey. In an individualistic way it addresses the psychic dimension of personal experiences.

The panoramic vault of the night sky, illuminated by the lamps of the planets and stars, rouse the faculty of imagination. It is the marriage of astronomical knowledge with the imagination that is the art of astrology. Astrology is an informed imagination; yet the vast majority of astrological literature concentrates on its techniques and historical application. The role of imagination in astrology can be easily overlooked, due in part to the continued attempt to validate astrological systems from a purely causal approach. Another factor is not just the intricacy involved in articulating the imaginative process, but that the process is so very individual and private. It might be likened to an active imagination informed by symbols, signatures, images and traditions of horoscopy. When we engage with psyche's symbolic process, the sacred features underpinning our outer experiences can be deeply sensed and felt. Astrological imagination is not unbound, nor intuitively uninhibited, but is held and safeguarded by the logic of the art.



Like dreams, astrology resonates with the language of images, symbols, metaphors, riddles. But unlike dreams it does not arise solely out of one person's unconscious. It is a story from the collective imagination and tells its tale through the mystery of each individual's birth. As both a learned and imaginative discipline, astrology engages with personal and collective symbols that facilitate the ability to see through literal events and chronological time into memories, feelings and experiences that are usually obscured or unseen by rational intelligence. Astrology, as a servant of the imagination, is a vehicle for consciousness and a response to the soul's call for deeper meaning. Hence, our first calling to astrology is often a spiritual attempt to find connection to something beyond literal awareness. Carl Jung called imagination 'the mother of human consciousness',⁶ as it nurtured our earliest efforts to be mindful of the soul before the advent of literacy and philosophy. Dialects of the imagination such as myth, allegories, rituals, icons, signs and metaphors are the agents of astrological revelation.

Imagination is not fantasy, nor intuition, although they are often confused by their similarity. Memory and hallucination are also close allies, but again, subtly different. As an astrological practitioner my experience has led me to value imagination as the faculty that is inspired by the symbols and signatures of the horoscope that reveal meaning from

beyond my tangible and tactile perceptions, a kind of astrological transference. Sometimes this mode of knowing forms a picture, at times it is a moving image; at others it is like a photograph. Occasionally it is as if I hear an inner voice reading a script and at others it is as if someone is telling me a story, as thoughts move through me. I have come to accept this is my imaginative process, as I know other colleagues who experience this differently. One feels it very viscerally like a pressure on the back of his neck, a sore shoulder, heartburn or a pressure on his arm. Another colleague has described her imaginative process as feeling, as her states can range from boredom to being overwhelmed, saddened or angry when engaged with a client and their horoscope. Others use the word intuitive as a way of expressing how their imagination is accessed through a flash of inspiration or a vivid picture. It is as if there is a sudden engagement, like one is being captured by the symbol. And all this seems to occur in a second. I have come to accept that there are many modalities of imagination. In a way they are elemental and I often wonder if each individual may have their own unique access to imagination through a specific astrological element or the alchemy of their individual temperament.

Imagination for an artist or poet guides their brush or pen. Images surface from a creative wellspring onto the canvas or paper, not cogently constructed, but arising from an amalgam of artistry and creativity. The rational plays a major role in their training and preparatory work, but it is imagination that guides the strokes of their brush and pen. Imagination for an astrologer arises from the sweeping symmetry of the heavens. Trained in the astronomy and harmony of the celestial spheres, imagination guides the astrologer to arrange their insights and forecasts through the cycles and symbols they are seeing and reading in the horoscope. Imagination is a form of vision that permits us to see through the material, to read what is not there, what is invisible. Like an X-ray it assists in seeing and reading beneath the situation at hand.

The act of horoscopic interpretation is firmly rooted in astronomical premises, but its art is born from engaging with images that arise through the symbols, then considering and evaluating them in the context of the presenting client or situation. As the capacity to perceive what is not wholly present, imagination validates the presence of absence, inspires us to solve problems, to have theories, to produce, invent and play, but it also allows us to conceive of fictional worlds, create supernatural beings and dream of the structure of the cosmos. Imagination is cognitive flexibility and connectivity, as it brings unrelated ideas together and sees associations which have not been seen before; an act that disturbs the dominance of the rational mind and the sanctuary of the familiar.

A horoscope can also be read directly from a theoretical and/or technical standpoint. Without the spice of imagination, the reading may still be informative and interesting, but it unlikely pierces the mystery or evokes an intimacy that is possible beyond the factual framework of the heavenly horoscope. So for a moment let's examine the interplay between the techniques and the symbols of astrology.

Technique and Symbol

I find it fortunate that there are so many techniques in astrology, yet unfortunate that sometimes the difference of opinion about these techniques is divisive to our community. Is the tropical zodiac more authentic than the sidereal? Is the superior conjunction the beginning of the inferior planets' synodic cycle, or is it the inferior conjunction? And the perennial favourite: which house system is the most accurate? The Equal of course, when

speaking to the English, the Whole Sign for the Hellenistically inclined, and Californians know charts go better with Koch; for the Rudhyarians Campanus please and so it goes. While it is important to understand the logic of the house system (*may I say if you can*) buying into this debate gives power to the argument that the technique is what tells the story, not the symbols underpinning it. For any house system in the palm of an experienced astrologer's hand will speak to them, albeit maybe in a Placidian or Phorphorian dialect, but it is the symbols that reveal the meaning not the technique. In no way does this lessen the importance of technique; it is essential, as it contains and informs the symbol.

Symbols are not fixed in time, but free to move between the past and future. Besides being fluid, they also appear to be limitless and timeless. As astrologers we participate with symbols every time we engage with a horoscope. Astrology invites us to inhabit a symbolic life that values the sacred and the mysterious; a life that nurtures the soul. Entangled in our workaday responsibilities and domestic tasks, we can easily lose contact with our symbolic life. As Yeats wisely said, 'One is furthest from symbols when one is busy doing this or that'.⁷ Yet symbols are all around, even in the midst of our everyday jobs and mundane tasks, perhaps in a chance meeting, a synchronistic event or a song on the car radio. Perhaps dulled, faded or toned down by the ordinariness of life. They are always present if we are open; there to reconnect us to the imaginative life.

Symbols express what cannot be characterized through the agency of thoughts or rational explanations, nor can they be defined or fully understood. Symbols are agents for what is nameless - ambassadors for what is unidentified. Therefore the intellect can find great significance in symbols, as they add value to what cannot be conveyed through a philosophical or conceptual framework. A symbol is uncommitted in that it does not stand for something specific, but directs us beyond itself to a meaning or revelation.

Symbolic language and images are used by all religions in an effort to honour the realm of the divine or what is beyond the scope of human comprehension. Symbolism enriches our myths, stories, poems, novels, films and dreams. Symbols are the poetry of the soul and, as Paul Tillich suggests, open the gates of the soul:

Every symbol opens up a level of reality for which non-symbolic speaking is inadequate...But in order to do this, something else must be opened up - namely, levels of the soul, levels of our interior reality. And they must correspond with the levels in exterior reality which is opened by a symbol...So every symbol has two-edges. It opens up reality and it opens up the soul.⁸

Astrological symbols are two-edged. The language of astrology is an intricate symbolic language which bridges the two worlds of earth and heaven, night and day and literality and imagination. To paraphrase Tillich: astrology reveals the literal world and the soul. To invest the literal world with meaning we need imagination and 'imagination must speak in the language of symbolism, for imagination speaks from the soul and of the soul and, like the messengers of God, it brings two worlds together as one.'⁹

The word symbol has evolved in meaning from the early Greek *symbolon* which combines the prefix *sym*, meaning together and *bol* to throw. Hence the idea of a symbol was 'to throw things together' referring to what is brought or cast together. This also suggested contrasting or comparing. Symbols were seen as tokens or permits, outward signs which

were pointing to something else. Symbols bring things together to reveal what cannot be seen literally or known cognitively.

Symbols have manifold associations and numerous possible meanings. For instance a snake might suggest a phallic symbol to a Freudian, a deeper layer of unconscious material for a Jungian, fear to someone who has no experience of snakes, transformation to an astrologer or a matriarchal icon to an archaeologist. In religion and myth the serpent is a potent figure whether it reveals itself in the Garden of Eden, in a dream in the temple of Asclepius, in Medusa's hair or on Athena's aegis. Astrological symbols are underpinned by a potent amalgam of heavenly and mythic information and images. A plethora of astrological literature attests the various ways astrological symbols can be described and interpreted; however they are mainly portrayed objectively like out of a text book or dictionary. They open up the literal reality but not the soul. And without the stirring of the soul, symbols lose their numinous nature.

Astrological Symbols

As astrological practitioners I feel we do not have to know what the symbol means to the client. What we do need to know is the astrological traditions and meanings of this symbol, our own experiences with the symbol and skills to articulate this in the best way we can. Our task is to illuminate the symbol adequately enough so the client resonates with the symbol in themselves. As the client begins to amplify this symbol in the context of their lives then we hear what it means to them. When we try and define the symbol in the context of their lives our focus narrows onto a literal landscape; whereas when we open up the symbol and invite participation with the symbolic process we begin to hear how this finds expression in their world. Symbols also belong to the mundane world but they are connected to something else. If we only equate an astrological image with a literal manifestation, we perpetuate a causal world which keeps us bound on a mortal grid without the life-sustaining nutrients of the soul.

Students who joined my classes from other teachers would sometimes become agitated when they were confronted with the proposal that symbols did not have fixed meanings, nor came with a fact sheet of keywords that nearly fitted the situation. Astrological symbols are contained by tradition and technique, but are not confined to a methodology of manifestation.

In our astrological learning we may easily be disconnected from the symbol through interpretive information. When astrological students first encounter astrology, the symbols are often highly evocative and revelatory, as they are experienced openly and subjectively. They have not yet been yoked to representing some-thing. Learning the tradition of calculations, rulerships, considerations, associations, meanings and interpretations, while essential, can dull the life of the astrological symbol. The energy of the symbol is still there, but it becomes objectified by analytical knowledge when tied to a causal explanation. Symbolic systems demand participation in their mysteries, not an objective view. Objectification conceives informational systems, which in themselves are helpful, but their language is no longer symbolic. Becoming skilled at the traditions, techniques and systems of astrology is an essential prerequisite to its practice. But the art of astrology is not detached; it is participatory, allowing the symbol to reveal itself, held in the sanctity of the moment.

We need astrological theory and insight to engage the symbol. But we also need to suspend our rote interpretations to be symbolic. This process allows reengagement with the life of the symbol and its capacity to assist us to see through to a meaningful situation. Symbols contain potent meanings, but they are not accessed through the intellect. It is the fluidity of imagination and intuition that help the symbol reveal itself. Astrological language is full of interpretive meanings which are easily forgotten, but once a symbol reveals its meaning, it is remembered effortlessly.

I always encourage advanced students and astrological practitioners to return to the beginning of their astrological journey, when the terrain was novel and uncomplicated; when we knew nothing, yet were open to and in awe of astrology's mysteries and revelations. So many personal experiences of when I stepped across the astrological portal into another way of seeing the world spring to mind. Most were ordinary experiences that confirmed to me astrology constellated something beyond rational thought that was revealing and extraordinary, like these two simple examples from the very early stages of my astrological career.

It was 1978 and I was just beginning to teach classes and sponsor workshops. I would get my pamphlets and brochures reproduced at the local print shop. One day the printer engaged me in a conversation about astrology and agreed that there must be something to it; for instance he wondered if there was a pattern to times when his printing machines broke down or jobs were done incorrectly. Of course he asked my opinion on this and I idealistically obliged. I mentioned the sub-cycle of Mercury retrograde three times a year for three weeks and I offered to flag these dates on his calendar for the next year, suggesting that these might be opportune times to service and repair the machines, re-schedule the backlog and attend to re-visioning the next four months of work. We spoke about the inherent wisdom of moving forward, re-grouping then moving forward again. I do not recall any direct feedback about whether his printing machines were more efficient, but I do remember he told me that since our discussion he was less anxious about getting everything done immediately! He was heartened by the rhythms of Mercury who he could now imagine watching over his business. As he was very appreciative, he would not take any payment for the next few jobs I had printed.

Ironically, 40 years later the internet is awash with Mercury retrograde warnings and instructions. Sometimes though it feels as if the symbol is no longer there - just a matter of fact!

The second instance was with a psychotherapist I had met during a training seminar. At this point I was already seeing clients. He was aware I was an astrologer and being open to astrological symbols and images he was interested in my opinion about a difficult client he saw twice, sometimes three times a week. He explained that the client was difficult to 'pry open', unable to free associate, hesitant at sharing his dreams and a concrete thinker. Were there any times I could think of that might be more favourable to him being open to imaginative explorations? Consulting the client's chart or having a conversation about him I felt was unethical; therefore I wondered about the technique of the Void-of-Course Moon. During this time the Moon is symbolically released from aspect or definition, perhaps more liberated to free associate or be unbound. I thought this was an appropriate symbol for both the client and psychotherapist. The psychotherapist was open and

thought it would be a great experiment. The Void-of-Course Moon can last anywhere from a few minutes to many hours, even at times last two days when all the planets have a low zodiacal degree. I listed the dates for him for the next six months explaining that many of these times would fall out of office hours, but if it were possible why not make an effort to schedule the client at these times. He agreed. When we met a few months later he thanked me, not because the client had been perceptibly more open during the two times the appointments converged, but because of the permission to feel part of a something larger and to honour this mystery. The astrological symbol honoured something greater than his psychotherapeutic techniques. In these simple ways astrology connects us once again to an imaginal and symbolic way of thinking and in doing so reconnects us to soul making.

Both instances were before the widespread use of computers, the internet, social media and blogging. As I reflect back I recognize the naiveté and how little I knew. Yet not knowing does not prevent the pattern, nor eliminate the cycle or prohibit the symbol from working. In fact it encourages participation in the mysteries of pattern, cycles and symbols to become revelatory. Ironically it is often the knowing, the expert and scholarly opinions and the reasoning of other systems that harness the symbol. Before we knew what the symbol meant, there was engagement and participation with the symbol, which was revelatory and inspiring. Today we can ask the great god Google¹⁰ about Mercury Retrograde and over a million and a half results are available, some of which are fascinating commentaries on its cycle, its influence, its pattern, its celestial symmetry including endless advice and warnings for the next period. And even more results for the Moon Void-of-Course along with specialist opinions and anecdotes. But the symbol has become buried beneath the rubble of beliefs, comments, case histories and judgments. In this way symbols can become prescriptive and informative, but they no longer engage us with a mystery nor do they transform the client or the astrologer.

Being involved with the symbol

How can we engage with the symbols of astrology if we continue to codify and present them as straightforward and objective, as if each transit of Uranus is a psychological separation or a Neptune - Mercury aspect manifests as a dubious trickster or that Pluto in the 7th is an encounter with the demon other. No doubt these are subjectively verifiable, but does this approach keep the symbols alive.

Foremost is the imagination, the essential faculty that unhinges the doors of perception. Imagination is a type of disciplined consciousness that is not empirically determined nor focused on the literal world. It inspires perception beyond the ego and permits an experience of something deeper and meaningful. Secondly we must recognize that the symbolic process is participatory. Astrological techniques lead us to the archetypal territory, but it is our imagination that makes contact with the symbol and our intuition and feeling responses that are midwives to the process of revelation. Listening and engaging are crucial aspects of the participatory process, as is the appreciation of the illogical nature of the psyche. Working with symbols we learn to value their inconsistencies and contradictions. To be involved is to also 'stick to the image'¹¹, not reduce it to a concept, nor dart off to another part of the chart that reiterates the theme, but to continue to hear its metaphoric essence and deepen our participation with it. As we deepen our involvement with the symbol, analogies arise which open up meaning; the more we stay with the image the more we participate with psyche.

To participate with astrological symbols it is of great importance to recognize their archetypal dimension. For instance the planets are profound personifications of archetypes that are placed in a unique way in the horoscope and in varying degrees of relationship with the other planets. Being archetypal symbols, planets are metaphoric and best expressed through image. Astrology's archetypal nature allows the astrologer to imagine the nature of the soul, not conceptually nor literally, but symbolically. It also allows an organization of various behaviours, feelings and experiences through the planet's archetypal perspective. Astrological knowledge differentiates the archetypal nuances and allows a more specific representation of the image.

Astrological symbols begin to find meaning when the astrologer utilizes archetypal resonances and organizes these through their own understanding and imagination. Astrological training helps to differentiate and deepen the archetypal terrain of astrology, but it is the individual's participation, imagination and engagement with the symbols that constellates awareness.

Stories from the Imagination

There are many ways to imagine a horoscope. I imagine the horoscope as the dream of one's life. Another way I imagine the horoscope is as the storybook of the soul. Like all fictional narratives it has the potentiality to awaken the imagination, to stir the soul and inspires me to reflect and remember.

If the horoscope is the narrative and the soul is its author, I, the astrologer, become its reader. The storybook is programmed in the code of the soul through the night sky's symmetry and symbols; therefore, as the reader I have to be both skilled and ignorant of the symbolic arrangements in the horoscope. Adept enough to be able to recognize the archetypal landscape and province of the symbol, technically proficient to gauge the archetypal condition, yet sufficiently unaware to know what the symbol suggests to its author. Through poetry, metaphors, time-frames, associations and correspondences I amplify the horoscope symbols so the imagination of the client, or other whose horoscope I am reading, potentially stirs memory, connection, empathy, insight and meaning, which can be brought back into our consultation. Astrological imagination brings disparate sensations, experiences and times of life together in a coherent pattern that offers a soulful way of thinking.

Being a reader of horoscopes is complex, as the reading is an intimate and private practice. When called to interpret a horoscope, I am drawn away from my own experience to engage in relationship, not only with the person whose chart is before me, but the soul of this person as well: their ideals, their morals, their beliefs, their experiences. Yet in the intimacy of the encounter my own feelings, memories and experiences are stirred, both by my imaginative response to the horoscope and by the client/other who is sharing their story with me. I am also reliant on their participation and imagination to assist in connecting and linking the images that arise from the reading into a consistent pattern. In reading the narrative I become involved and intimate with the horoscope and its author, the soul. When I connect with the horoscope as the story of the soul I enter a realm outside my personality, which invites empathy, non-judgment, consideration and kindness. When the world beyond the factual and the literal is evoked, boundaries soften, a veil lifts and

the spiritual, psychic, unworldly realm becomes more accessible. It is as if astrological imagination evokes the stories of the soul making them accessible and available to the self.

Another way I imagine the horoscope is as a wise counsellor and witness that challenges and inspires me to contemplate my own and my clients' struggles. Its symbols help me to imagine the consequence of my actions and confront me with the ethical and moral aspects of any situation. Symbolic arrangements in the chart encourage me to see different ways of action through a playful encounter with the signs and images. They also support me to ask 'what if' broadening my worldview from a fearful and self limiting position to a more soulful and expansive one. The gift of imagination is that it offers hope and the possibility of improvement. At other times, specific and pragmatic counsel is revealed through the marriage of my astrological training with my imagination.

Imagination is fictional by nature; therefore to demonstrate it through a case study or chart example seems paradoxical. Horoscope case studies are excellent learning tools, but are often devoid of the imaginative story that lies underneath the attempt to demonstrate an interpretive version of a particular technique. Imagination may be better revealed through telling a story that brings the narrative of the horoscope into play, as if the horoscope were a moderator between the worlds of soul and literality. Each encounter with a client and their horoscope can be a moving and soulful exploration. However this is never guaranteed, as it is dependent on the receptivity and participation of the client, as well as my own openness.

Ruth had barely sat down when she burst into tears. I pushed the box of tissues that are permanently on my consulting table closer towards her. She took one, looked down and said: 'I'm sorry'. I poured her a glass of water and waited a moment before I asked what she was sorry for. 'I have been a mess lately' she replied, 'crying all the time and I don't know why'. I was mindful that something much deeper might be stirring beneath the mask of tears.

That was not surprising to me: her Moon in Gemini in the 12th house was being aspected by Neptune on its passage through Pisces. I was alerted to treading water with Ruth carefully. This was the major transit in her chart at the time. An image arose in me of her standing on an isolated island with floodwaters arising around her. The image accompanied a feeling of being alone, trapped, helpless. Another image arose of her standing on a beach with wild waves crashing on the shore. When my imagination is stirred I know the consultation has begun for me. I wondered if aloneness and helplessness were the feelings that brought her for the consultation. Or perhaps a tsunami was unsettling her, but where do I begin? How might I engage with her?

I felt confident that it had not been the first time these feelings had arisen. Since I had been drawn to the Neptune transit of the Moon, I stayed with this image. Ruth was 51, so I thought I could begin with exploring the timeline of the transit, as it would have been astrologically significant about 41 years ago, when it opposed her Moon in the 12th house. There were other times in the Neptune/Moon cycle I could have chosen, but I instinctively chose this time. I felt strongly about this, so it was as if I were following an imaginative trail through her horoscope. I asked her: 'What can you remember around the age of 10?'

She seemed upset. 'Why are you asking?' she said. I tried to explain that I was trying to find a way to begin to understand the feelings that may be speaking through her tears.

‘But what does being 10 have to do with anything?’ Ruth was puzzled, but so was I; so I explained that I was drawing on an image in her chart that linked these times together and wondered if there was a connection and if so, perhaps we could unravel that. If not, we could try another door.

Ruth grabbed another tissue, wiped away more tears and told me when she was 10, her sister drowned. Many other symbols in her chart were resonant with this image of loss and suffering. My task was to reflect back a meaningful way to think about all of this. Astrological techniques and psychological theory can open windows to the soul, but it is imagination that can breathe new life into the wounds that encase it. ‘Where were you when this happened?’ I asked.

‘I was there’ she sobbed. She began to remember the flood of feeling: panic, loss, guilt, helplessness, as she stood on the shore watching her sister be swept away by a forceful wave that had suddenly appeared. Then she felt all her feelings freeze in the aftermath of the search for her sister, the mangled body, the parent’s grief, the fatal silence. She did the best she could to return to life.

Ruth had come for the consultation because her daughter was leaving to work overseas for at least a year. She would be alone. Her husband had left after 10 years of marriage, another period of loss and helplessness, resonant with the psychic watermark outlined by the trauma of her 10-year old self. Ruth had then raised Jenny, her only child, on her own. Her initial reason to come for an appointment was to see if the chart could offer any insight into what she might do to fill the space of her daughter’s absence. She had no idea she would burst into tears as she sat in my consulting-room chair. But now a series of losses had been strung together that helped her recognize patterns in time when she felt alone and helpless.

Feeling adrift, at sea, tearful, she recognized her apologetic surrender to the force of her feelings, which at times were overwhelming. She likened it to the wave that took her sister. She recognized that she disconnected from these feelings by freezing them, leaving her in the cold, yet there they were in her unbidden floods of tears. Her next question was forceful: ‘How do you think I could work with this pattern?’ I felt permission to be able to address the symbol as if it were freed for that moment from the fear of loss. We returned to the present. From there we focused on the horoscope, imagining ways to participate with the overwhelming feelings in a personal way, to find the genuine sense of aloneness her 12th house Moon needed. My technical understanding of the horoscope was my guide and container to explore the images in a hopeful and soulful way.

The sheer presence of a horoscope invites the imagination to play, for no matter the expectation or conscious agenda, the reality is that neither client nor astrologer knows where the symbols will lead. To the uninitiated the horoscope is a chart of squiggles and glyphs. To the astrologer it is a map of revelatory symbols; either way it evokes an imaginal space. Therefore in an astrological consultation, despite the intention or contract, there is a psychic reality that encloses both the astrologer and the client. And the shared psychic space that is created invites the client and the astrologer to imagine and participate in a meaningful discovery of the horoscope.

In this imaginal space I experience connections beyond explanation, what we might call synchronicity; sometimes spontaneous insights, which some may call intuition. For

instance, why did I choose the time when she was 10 when I could have chosen another transit to the Moon or another time in the Neptune cycle? Certainly my imagination was informed by the archetypal imagery of Neptune and its cycle as well as the 12th house Gemini Moon, hence the waves, the flooding, the helplessness; but how these images would have meaning to Ruth's life events and felt experience was a mystery. However we conceive of it, engagement with the horoscope invokes distinctive intervals where sensual and physical boundaries become porous, where a participation mystique can take place on levels beyond a rational paradigm.

As the reader of the horoscope I am not immune to becoming involved; at times, I am torn away from my observing and analytic perspective and also affected by the atmosphere of the in-between space. At these times my own memories and wounds are opened. Ruth did not know my best friend had drowned when I was 19 years old, and when she described her terror-filled feelings on the day her sister drowned, I held tightly onto my memories of that Labour Day weekend when David drowned. Nor did Ruth know we shared the same Ascendant - Descendant degree, an astrological image that expressed a mutually sympathetic viewpoint on life. I now recognize that these synchronies are part of the topography of an astrological consultation. I have also learnt to contain my feelings and responses in service of the client.

While I feel it to be of great value to try and conceptualize imagination, as an astrologer I find it difficult to be succinct or specific about it, since it is a process always in flux. Imagination allows us to amplify the symbols which open up universal and collective correlations in a particularly individualistic way, dependent on the signatures of the horoscope. As we begin to discuss these associations with the other, a relational dialogue develops that can engage both the client and myself in a potentially transformative process, offering both a profound, often sacred acceptance of the Self. And that cannot be explained, nor clearly articulated, but it can be experienced and deeply felt.

As astrologers, we need not question our world of astrological imagination. However, we do need to question how we can let imagination infuse our art.

¹ Here I am also referring to the wide use of these lines on greeting cards. See https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Pickering_Manuscript/Auguries_of_Innocence [accessed 26-11-18]

² Emily Jane Brontë, "To Imagination" from the *Complete Poems of Emily Jane Bronte*, edited by CW Hatfield, Columbia University Press, New York: 1995, 205-6.

³ Dane Rudhyar, *The Astrology of Transformation*, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, IL: 1980, back cover.

⁴ Dane Rudhyar, *The Astrology of Transformation*, 193.

⁵ John Keats in a letter to George and Thomas Keats, Hampstead 28/12/1817 from H. Buxton Forman (ed.), *The Complete Works of John Keats Volume IV*, Gowars & Gray, Glasgow: 1901, 50.

⁶ Carl Jung, from an interview in *Neues Wiener Journal* on November 9, 1932 translated by Ruth Horine; see *C. G. Jung Speaking*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ: 1977, 58.

⁷ W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Volume IV, Early Essays*, edited by George Bornstein and Richard J. Finneran, Scribner, New York, NY: 2007, 119.

⁸ Paul Tillich, "The Nature of Religious Language", *Theology of Culture*, Oxford University Press (Oxford: 1959), 56-7.

⁹ Jules Cashford, *Symbolism as the Language of Imagination*, Kingfisher Art Production (Somerset, UK: 2015), 16.

¹⁰ Thanks to Darby Costello, as she was the first person I heard mention this phrase.

¹¹ James Hillman used this expression in his work – see Thomas Moore (ed.), *The Essential James Hillman, A Blue Fire*, Routledge, London: 1990, 75.