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When two stars collide

by CLODAGH MULVEY

The Merging of Astrology and Psychology makes more sense than you might at first think

WE HAVE all certainly heard of psychology and astrology, but as disciplines, well, to many of us they would seem to be planets apart. Putting them together in the form of the holistic therapy psychological astrology sounds like an oxymoron - an uneasy balance of science and sun-signs. But Dublin-based practitioner Margaret Gray says the truth about her work is that it is an integrated astrological tool and healing modality which is not divinistic or predictive, but rather illuminates for people who they really are and what their life's purpose is.

Further, Gray says it can assist people as they take their personal journey along, what acclaimed psychologist Carl Jung called, the "individuation" process. A representative of the Centre for Psychological Astrology (CPA) in London, and a professional astrologer with a clinical social work background and years of training in depth psychology, Gray says it is this illumination process that helps her clients in the US, UK and Ireland to "go beneath the layers to the core of what their purpose is", where invariably people regain a "renewed trust in themselves".

Stemming from Jung's study of the unconscious mind, his training in astrology and his use of fiction - archetypal myths and stories in relation to the planets - this therapy seeks to reveal the "shadow" aspects of the subconscious personality, so as to help the individual integrate a fuller awareness of themselves into their conscious daily life.

Using the myth of the hero/heroine who undergoes an archetypal adventure or journey of personal discovery - similar to Percival's mythological quest to find the "Holy Grail" - Gray interprets a client's astrology chart using astrological typology rather than personality profiling and with consideration of planetary aspects, mother and father archetypes and "transits" - "times when you are called to fulfill your purpose and go on your journey".

"Of course, we don't have to cross that threshold, we can actually keep the door closed and it will come knocking again.

"But if we don't answer it, we almost do so at our peril because, basically, we need to listen to our true calling in life," she says.

In her one-to-one sessions with clients at Oscailt on Pembroke Road in Dublin, Gray says she has found that people often come to her at times of life crisis or transition - such as the recession.

"Due to the recession, people are in a lot of turmoil," she says.

Her work, she explains, is about helping people to understand themselves more completely and to see what their real vocation might be by drawing their talents and creativity to the surface.

"If people enjoy what they are doing, it reverberates and the effect spirals into the collective unconscious," she says.

Gray insists her work is not "airy fairy", but is an important tool which provides people with "a sense of relief" and "renewed hope" when they uncover parts of themselves they had forgotten were there."Individuation is about becoming true to oneself, but we can't be true to ourselves if we don't understand ourselves," she explains.

Tessa Gibson, former research psychologist at St John of God's in Dublin and amateur psychological astrologer, agrees and says the therapy is credible and has obvious merit."As a psychologist I quickly realised the richness of this ancient discipline. It is the oldest model of the psyche and is based on the greatest physical reality known to man," she explains."Is it so strange to assume a connection between man and the planets that surround us? Would not the same creative force be responsible for both and reasonably make use of the same principles of operation? Even the fact that planets orbit a central sun echoes the way electrons orbit a central nucleus in every cell of our body," she argues.

"Psychology as a discipline has had its own struggle to prove its scientific nature. But the study of personality and the practice of psychotherapy have always drawn on art and intuition as much as science and direct observation. Psychological astrology is equally an art as much as a science," she adds.

Gray insists she has never drawn any criticism from psychologists for her brand of astrology. "I wouldn't call myself a psychologist. But a lot of psychologists are very interested in the work I do," she says.

One such person is International Association for Analytical Psychology (IAAP) certified, Jungian analyst Bianca Daalder, whose practice in Los Angeles in the US, she says, is enhanced by her attendance for sessions with Gray."Astrology is not an easy science, but I feel it can be an exceptional added tool to understand people," Daalder says. With the permission of her clients, who provide her with their birth date, place and time, Daalder works with Gray to come to a better understanding of her clients' journey.

Although she never discusses their charts with them, Daalder says what she learns through working with Margaret helps her see "yet another picture, another map of people's lives".

"It also helps me see where I may have a blind spot," she adds.

Psychological astrology, Gray claims, reconnects the strands of the term "psychology", which in the Greek language literally means the "study of the mind" - "logia" meaning study and "psykhe" meaning spirit, breath or soul.

"Only in the last century were these ideas separated," she says.

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