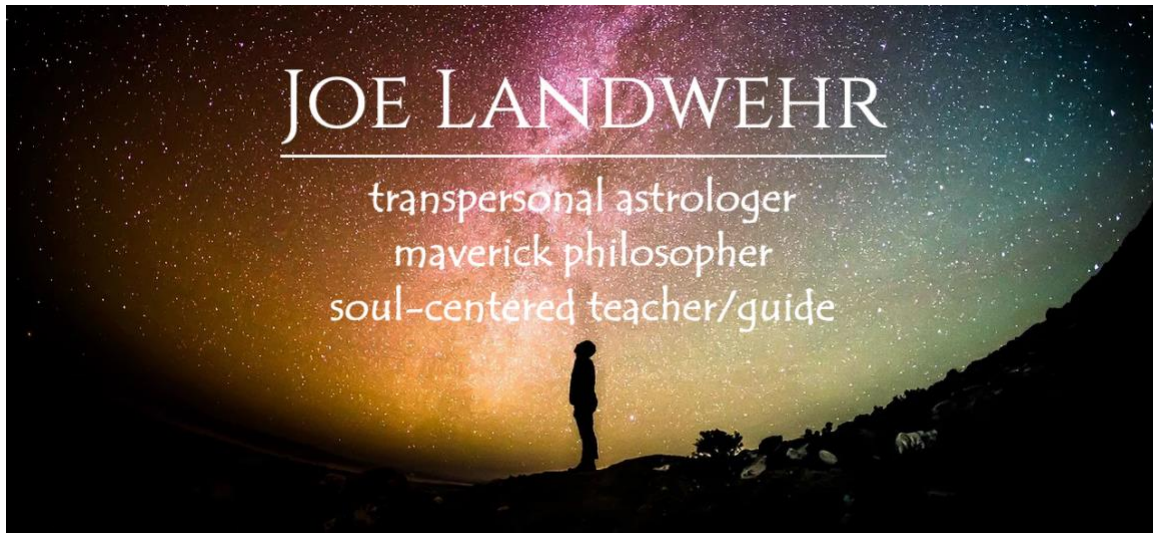


The Astropoetic School of Soul-Discovery

News From The Astropoetic School May 2021

Greetings from [The Astropoetic School of Soul Discovery](http://www.astropoetics.com) back in the Missouri Ozarks, where my conversation with hoot owls, whippoorwills and the occasional distant coyote is more immediately engaging than any I might have with the noisy human world.

Announcing the Launch of My New Website



One of my Covid-19 “lockdown” projects of 2020 has been to revise my website on a new platform under a new URL – simply www.joelandwehr.com. The new website includes everything previously contained in my old websites – [The Astropoetic School of Soul Discovery](http://www.astropoetics.com) (www.astropoetics.com) and [Ancient Tower Press](http://www.ancient-tower-press.com) (www.ancient-tower-press.com). All of my books, articles, consultations, courses, and more can be found in one place, along with several new offerings not on the old sites. Check it out and share your feedback, if you have any. I would love to hear from you.

In the last issue of this newsletter – which may or may not have reached you, due to some technical difficulties – **I offered a 20% discount** on all [books](#), [consultations](#), [courses](#), or anything offered at my new [SHOP](#). To encourage you to visit and engage with the new site, I am extending that offer for another month – through

Memorial Day. Just use the code [NEWSITEOFFER](#) at checkout. This coupon is good for one purchase only, but a purchase can contain as many items as you like.

I will make special note here of [my correspondence course](#) which is [opening to 3 new students in 2021](#). If you are interested in learning astrology, not as an abstract exercise, but at a deeper level, as a multi-layered symbolic language with which to explore your own life experience, this is the course for you. Each 30-40-page lesson comes with a homework assignment to which I provide a written response, plus a 90-minute Skype call during which we can explore your questions about the lesson, about anything astrological, or about how what you are learning applies to you. Other courses are available if what you want is information. This course takes you more deeply into yourself, using your birthchart as an intimately personal portal to self-reflection.

You can start reading about the [Basic Course here](#). Then just follow the links to the registration page. If you are an astrologer, and wish to learn my more advanced system for integrating astrology and the chakra system, you can sign up for my next [Tracking the Soul Webinar Class here](#).

[A Conversation with Sharon Blackie About Astropoetics and the Mythic Imagination](#)

Sometime in June, noted author and mythopoetic teacher Sharon Blackie (perhaps best known for the 2016 Nautilus Book Award Winner [If Women Rose Rooted](#)) and I will have and record a Zoom conversation about astropoetics as a point of entry into the mythic imagination. Sharon has been a client of mine for a number of years, and her work – at the cutting edge where psychology, mythology and ecology meet – and mine seem to naturally complement each other in ways that bear exploration.



Why the mythic imagination? Because the world is changing. The old stories that Western civilization has been living by for the past few centuries – of limitless growth, of the pursuit of progress as the primary purpose of life, of human separation from and domination over 'nature' – are crumbling. These are the stories of the patriarchy, of the heroic. The post-heroic stories which we need to replace those destructive tales will be born from this time-between-stories, and from the imaginations of visionaries and myth-makers like those of you who are gathered here. We especially need the stories of the land; the stories of our native traditions, and the wisdom which is encoded within them.

As an extension of her work, Sharon has created a marvelous network called The Mythic Imagination – “a private space to gather, learn, and deepen your own unique mythopoetic journey through life” that is worth exploring for anyone seeking to rewrite their own story in a way that resonates more deeply with the living cosmos.

My conversation with Sharon will first be exclusively available on her site, and eventually posted on mine. I’ll remind you about it in my next newsletter, but if you can’t wait that long, or if you want to just dive into Sharon’s mythopoetic pool, I would encourage to visit her sites:

Sharon Blackie – <https://sharonblackie.net/>

The Mythopoetic Imagination - <https://the-mythic-imagination.mn.co/>

An Excerpt from my Currently Emerging Book

To whet your appetite for some of what I may be talking about in our conversation, I would like to share an excerpt from Chapter One of my latest book project, the tentative working title of which is:

Astropoetics:

Astrology as a Way of Knowing, Being and Participating in a Living Cosmos

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Chapter One

*The Direct Experience of Truth in the Mythopoetic Era¹:
Thirty Thousand B.C.E. (or earlier) – Second Millennium B.C.E.*

Astrology *per se* would not likely have been recognized as a coherent system – at least in the way we recognize it today in the West – until about 1,800 B.C.E. Eastern forms of astrology, originating in India and China likely go back much farther, possibly to the fourteenth century B.C.E.². Even before this, however, it is clear that the same widespread fascination among the earliest humans with the nighttime sky had practical, mythological and religious application, and by implication, also expressed both proto-scientific and proto-astrological sensibilities (Campion, Nicholas. *A History of Western Astrology – Volume 1: The Ancient World*, 2008, pp. 2-3):

As soon as human beings realized that sunrise, the most dramatic event of the day, was necessarily connected to the experience of heat and light, they were doing astronomy, in the modern sense of the

word. And the moment they attached meaning to this phenomenon, they were well on the way to becoming astrologers.

Neolithic peoples throughout Europe routinely aligned their stone circles, passage cairns, and ceremonial sites – such as Stonehenge (circa 3,000 – 2,000 B.C.E.) and New Grange (circa 3,200 B.C.E.) – with solstices, equinoxes, and the midpoints between these cardinal stations of the Earth’s annual revolution around the Sun. There is some evidence to suggest these structures were imported from north-western France, where they originated several millennia earlier. In Dordogne, France, carved bone plates dated from the Aurignacian period (circa 25,000 B.C.E.) depicting waxing and waning lunar cycles have been found, suggesting that an awareness of celestial rhythms was already present within the earliest human cultures on the planet.

Within such cultures, the interface between astronomical observations, religious rites and daily life was fairly seamless. Although the phenomenon of the personal horoscope – which is the most commonly known expression of astrology today – was a more recent invention of the Hellenistic Era (roughly from the third century B.C.E to the third century C.E., the confluence of these streams in earlier times nonetheless constitutes the fertile mix out of which astrology arose. This astrology was both practical and metaphysical, rooted in a sense of reverence for the Earth that was inextricably intertwined with an awe of the cosmos (Campion, pp. 4-5):

Human beings cannot function without meaning, and this is actually the primary level at which social cohesion is created . . . One respects the earth because it is one’s mother, an animal because it may be a reborn ancestor, and the stars because they are messengers, guardians and protectors. The prevailing myth was what we would call ecological.

Animism

Ecology today is understood as a scientific study of the interactions between living organisms and their biophysical environment. While there are many passionate ecologists at work today who feel a more intimate connection to the natural world, there is still a perceptual distance – endemic to science – that turns passion into a coherent statement of objective truth, stripped of personal considerations. This is quite a different way of knowing than the ecological myth of which Champion speaks.

In Neolithic times, there was no such thing as ecology. There was instead a web of intimate relationships within the environment in which humans participated. Within such a web, to call the Earth one’s mother was not just a sentimental metaphor; it was an intimately felt experience of the living reality of the Earth as Mother – the source of sustenance for all of Life. From the mythopoetic perspective, the Earth is alive, as are all of its sentient creatures, including not just plants and animals, but mountains, rivers, and stars. Each has a spiritual presence that can be felt, and each is a being with whom one can commune and interact, just as humans can with each other.

Such a perspective is generally understood by contemporary scholars as animism, although as with all such anthropological designations, to call it anything at all,

suggests a capacity to observe and comment on one's own perceptions, which probably didn't exist then, certainly not with anything resembling scientific objectivity. To the extent that animistic peoples were in relationship to the Sun, Moon, planets, stars, and other celestial objects visible in the night sky, they would have not likely known them in any other way than as living beings who had their place within the overall circle of Life. In this way, the astrology of the Mythopoetic Era, though it would not be named as astrology, would necessarily be ecological and animistic.

Participation Mystique

The epistemology that gave rise to this prevailing mythos can be understood in terms of what French philosopher Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857 – 1939) once called *participation mystique* – a way of being (and knowing) that he attributed to “the primitive mind.” Within the perceptual field in which *participation mystique* operates, the barrier between subject and object is essentially erased, and one becomes partially identified with whatever it is one encounters, whether that be a bear in the wild, a dream, or a celestial event. Here direct experience of the object of one's perception – through the registration of sensory input, emotional and imaginal response, symbolic thinking and relational interchange – becomes the basis for knowledge, instead of the artificially manufactured neutrality of the observer in relation to the observed that is the current mythos on which scientific knowledge is predicated.

On the one hand, *participation mystique* can be understood as the projection of human attributes, motives, and understanding into the natural world, at best resulting in the evolution of mythology, folk tales, and essentially the entire zeitgeist of the Mythopoetic Era; at worst in superstition and delusional thinking. On the other hand, this is a mindset in which a more intimate way of knowing was the norm, one in which – despite our sophisticated protestations to the contrary – forms the evolutionary bedrock of our own culture.

Well before Lévy Bruhl coined the term *participation mystique*, French physician and embryologist Étienne Serres (1786 – 1868), building on the work of German anatomist Johann Friedrich Meckel (1781 – 1833), developed Meckel-Serres law, otherwise known as the theory of recapitulation, in which the embryo of an animal revisits successive stages in the evolution of its ancestors as it matures. This discovery is commonly summed up in the maxim, “*ontogeny* (the development of an individual animal from embryo to birth) recapitulates *phylogeny* (the evolutionary history of the species).”

These ideas were rooted in a study of evolutionary biology, but were later adopted and adapted by sociologists and psychologists such as Herbert Spencer, G. Stanley Hall, Jean Piaget and Sigmund Freud to explain the cognitive development of humans. Carl Jung relied implicitly upon this concept to bolster his explication of the collective unconscious. As summed up by 20th century American anthropological linguist, Mary LeCron Foster, the central idea behind cognitive recapitulation is that “both biological evolution and the stages in the child's cognitive development follow much the same progression of evolutionary stages as that suggested in the archaeological record” (“Symbolism: the foundation of culture”. Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology. Ed. Tim Ingold, 1994, pp. 386-387).

If this is so, then the mythopoetic epistemology of an earlier age – informed by *participation mystique* – is hardwired into our psyches as part of the cognitive foundation upon which the more analytical faculties valued by science are based. The truth of recapitulation has been readily observed in the cognitive development of children by the above-mentioned psychologists and many others (Neumann, Erich. "Mystical Man." *The Mystic Vision*. Bollingen Series XXX (6), 1968, p. 24).

In the child the great images and archetypes of the collective unconscious are living reality . . . Hence, the child, whose life as a personal entity is largely determined by the collective unconscious, actually is the living carrier of this ancestral experience.

Participation Mystique and Archetypal Psychology

Jung and many psychologists since have tracked the process of cognitive recapitulation archetypally, that is to say, through reference to various mythological motifs, such as creation myths, the hero's journey and the *hieros gamos*, in which a sacred marriage of masculine (*animus*) and feminine (*anima*) principles takes place – itself an archetypal depiction of *participation mystique* as all polarity melds together in seamless integration. The same archetypal understanding has presented itself in less academic ways in the myths, folktales and teaching stories of civilizations around the planet since humans first gathered around communal fires for comfort and companionship, as well as in dreams, world literature, film and art. Other archetypal expressions prevail in situations of "abnormal" psychology, in which "the hitherto latent primitive mind suddenly bursts forth with contents that are too incomprehensible and too strange for assimilation to be possible" (Jung, Carl. *The Psychogenesis of Mental Disease*, 1960 244).

To be sure, Jung and others, including Lévy Bruhl, aspiring to scientific credibility, considered *participation mystique* to be a regressive state, inferior to that experienced by contemporary humans with a more differentiated consciousness. Nonetheless, the fact that psychoanalysts working in the field still encountered it in their patients, and educators still observed it in the children under their charge, meant that it was still a factor to be reckoned with in an understanding of human psychology. By extension, an astrology capable of addressing human psychology at the deepest possible level, where the ancient repository of the collective unconscious still forms the bedrock of our experience, even now, tens of thousands of years after it was not just an "aberration," but the norm, must pay homage to this way of knowing that also lies at its primordial roots.

Spanning the gamut of human experience, normal and "abnormal," this more fundamental understanding speaks to the possibility of a psychological astrology in which cosmos and the psyche, soul and the sacred, human culture and the biosphere are in symbolic dialogue – an astrology that is rarely practiced today, but was at one time, but one expression of a more general way of knowing much closer to the ontological roots of our species.

Participation Mystique and Mythopoetic Astrology

As conducted through the lens of *participation mystique* within the Mythopoetic Era, astrology was not just a dispassionate observation of the night sky – as it is today in the hands of astronomers – or an extraction of meaning from abstract symbols on a piece of paper as it is for most contemporary astrologers – but a felt participation in the celestial order of things, as revealed through a communion, across the subject-object barrier, with Sun and Moon, planets and stars. Jung, for whom the work of Lévy-Bruhl made a significant contribution to his own understanding of symbolism in general, wrote (“Transformation Symbolism in the Mass.” *The Mysteries: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, 1955, p. 320):

{Participation mystique} is an irrational, unconscious identity, arising from the fact that anything which comes into contact with me is not only itself, but also a symbol. This symbolization comes about firstly because every human being has unconscious contents, and secondly because every object has an unknown side.

If so, then pursued as an exercise in *participation mystique*, the same smorgasbord of celestial phenomena that is open to scientific observation, or intellectual abstraction, also potentially becomes a window into the workings of the unconscious psyche of human beings, as well as to the relationship between the individual and the cosmic order in which each individual and all human beings collectively participate. As we will explore in more detail later in the book, the possibilities encompassed by such a participatory approach to astrology restores what the science of our era is unprepared to offer.

Whether the night sky of the Mythopoetic Era was actually experienced this way must of course be a matter of speculation, but as Carl Jung wrote about *participation mystique*, it seems plausible that as early peoples encountered the night time sky for the first time, without the aid of astronomy, symbolic logic, or psychology, they learned about themselves and their relationship to the cosmos through just such an approach, and this way of knowing was the basis for the proto-astrology of the early Mythopoetic Era.

In many ways the opposite of analytical thinking, which was to rise in importance parallel to the development of science over the course of the next three to four thousand years, *participation mystique* precluded the categorization and dissection of experience. While we might consider that a disadvantage today, it also behooves us to consider that the price to be paid for the cultural value we place on distancing ourselves from the object of our observation (Rifkin, Jeremy. *The Empathic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis*, 2009, p. 608).

Children are introduced to the scientific method in middle school and informed that it is the only accurate process by which to gather knowledge and learn about the real world around us . . . (Yet) the scientific observer is never a participant in the reality he or she observes, but only a voyeur. As for the world he or she observes, it is a cold, uncaring place, devoid of awe, compassion, or sense of purpose. Even life itself is made lifeless to better dissect its component parts. We are left with a purely material world, which is quantifiable but without quality . . . The scientific method is at odds with virtually everything we know about our own nature and the nature of the world. It denies the relational aspect of reality, prohibits

participation, and makes no room for empathic imagination. Students in effect are asked to become aliens in the world.

An astrology rooted in the mythopoetic mindset of *participation mystique* – which is inherently unscientific, at least as science is practiced now – might just possibly help restore a more integrated approach to understanding the world, one in which we are no longer aliens, but rather conscious participants with an integral though not dominant part to play in a larger story that includes us all, humans, creatures of the wild, deities of upperworld and underworld, mountains, rivers and stars. At the very least, it would help restore what was lost when astrology – and our culture at large – entered the age of scientific dominance, and so much of that story was repressed and denied.

Endnotes

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- ¹ My delineation of eras in this introduction departs somewhat from that in common usage. I take ahistorical liberties with these dates to emphasize a different sort of development particularly pertinent to the co-evolution of astrology and science. What I call the Mythopoetic Era, for example, begins in far antiquity in what is generally referred to as the Neolithic period, or possibly as far back as the Paleolithic, otherwise known as the Stone Age, so named because during this period, wood and stone were the most common building materials.
 - ² Without denying the development and complex interweaving of the astrologies developed by prehistoric Eastern cultures, this present work will focus primarily on the evolution of Western astrology, arising through ancient Greece, and partially adopted and adapted from Mesopotamian sources.

Quotes of the Month

from *If Women Rose Rooted*
by Sharon Blackie

Stories matter, you see. They're not just entertainment – stories matter because humans are narrative creatures. It's not simply that we like to tell stories, and to listen to them: it's that narrative is hard-wired into us. It's a function of our biology, and the way our brains have evolved over time. We make sense of the world and fashion our identities through the sharing and passing on of stories. And so the stories that we tell ourselves about the world and our place in it, and the stories that are told to us by others about the world and our place in it, shape not just our own lives, but the world around us. The cultural narrative is the culture.

from *Original Wisdom: Stories of an Ancient Way of Knowing*
by Robert Wolff

Science is so sure that is it the only truth that it has become incapable of accepting other ways of learning about reality . . . Such arrogant insistence has eradicated much knowledge and wisdom in the world . . .

My agony over what I thought of as a great loss stayed with me until one day when I was in Tonga, an island kingdom in the South Pacific . . . I mentioned my despair

over what we had lost to a woman who had been pointed out to me as a gifted native healer. So much knowledge and wisdom, I said, was lost through our crude but persistent effort to eradicate native cultures.

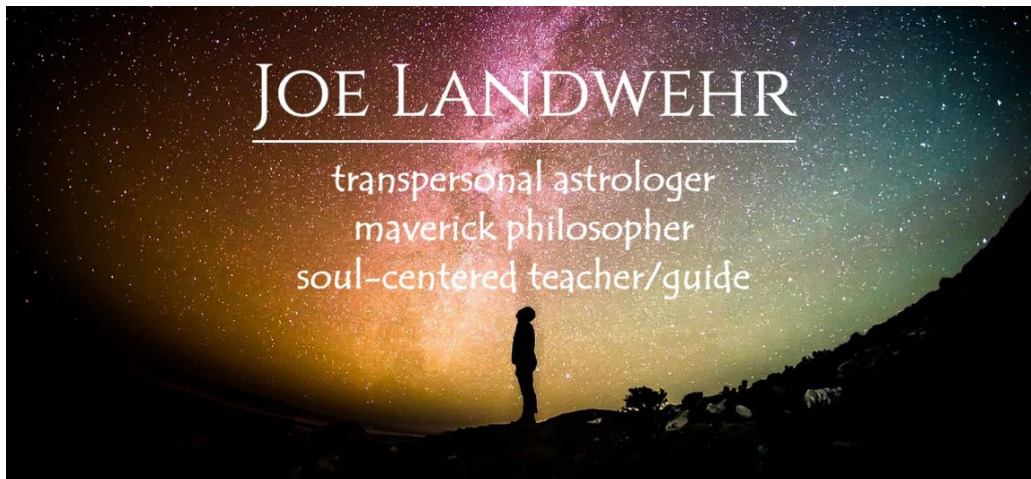
She thought about that for a long time. Finally she said, "Yes, I know what you mean. Yes, we too used to have healers and much knowledge of healing and herbs. Most of that is gone."

She paused again for at least a minute, then she sat up straight and looked me in the eye, her voice becoming stronger and more affirmative: "But – and she pointed her finger for emphasis – that is not the whole of it. You see, there have always been people who know. When we most need it, someone will remember that ancient knowledge."

She sat back, smiling. "So, you see, traditions may be lost, but the information is in here and in here," she said, pointing to her head, then her heart, "and when we need it most, it will be inside us, for us to find."

from *Inside the Neolithic Mind*
by David Lewis-Williams & David Pearce

We do indeed have a "neurological viaduct" that carries us over the abyss of the centuries, and even millennia, to thought-lives and religious experiences that archeologists have long considered beyond recovery. Those ancient experiences were neither random nor irretrievably unique.



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