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**Garry Phillipson:  
The Interviewer Interviewed**  
*by Darrelyn Gunzburg*

**Garry Phillipson** emerged from his secluded, contemplative existence as a Buddhist monk to forge new pathways in astrology: Firstly, he anticipated the return of astrology to academia by undertaking his own philosophical–anthropological investigation into the world of astrology with his book, *Astrology in the Year Zero*,<sup>1</sup> which is now on the reading lists at various universities. Secondly, he is the first Ph.D. student to be accepted at the Sophia Centre of Bath Spa University College. Garry's Web site is: [www.astrozero.co.uk](http://www.astrozero.co.uk) and his email is: [garry@astrozero.co.uk](mailto:garry@astrozero.co.uk) .

Readers will recognize Garry as the name behind many interviews published in *The Mountain Astrologer*. Now the microphone is turned towards him. I interviewed Garry at his home in Bradford on Avon in the southwest of England on March 12, 2004.

**Darrelyn Gunzburg: Tell us about yourself and how you came to astrology.**

**Garry Phillipson:** People have been unsure what to make of me ever since *Year Zero* came out. I think I've become known as the person who talks to Geoffrey Dean and the skeptics; a lot of people who don't know much about the book just think of me as an honorary skeptic. So, people are often quite surprised to learn that I've been a practicing astrologer for quite a long time.

To explain how I became interested in (for want of a better word) the occult — and eventually astrology — I suppose I have to go back to my childhood. I come from a family that used to have a regular séance group. That strange component of my upbringing likely helped me to define my path in life; certainly, it sent my thinking along unconventional lines. My grandfather was a trance medium, and I was introduced to the group when I was twelve or thirteen. At that stage, death and what it meant had only just begun to filter into my consciousness. I remember one day thinking about it quite clearly — "Is there a life after death?" — and then bingo! a few days later, I was sitting in the séance group where spirits would take over grandfather and talk through him about their life beyond the grave. That seemed to take care of my question!

I felt I ought to do something with this knowledge that there is life after death; it gave me a sense of having a mission, of being a person who knew what was what in this world, and I had to impart this knowledge to others. However, I must say I found the

actual séances generally quite frustrating, because they were on such a trivial level for the most part: my grandmother talking with dead relatives and friends about living relatives and friends through my grandfather. It was like being given a Ferrari sports car and only ever using it to go around to the corner shop. I did once have the opportunity to speak with a school friend who had died. I certainly believed then — and believe now — that there was something decidedly real going on in those séances. I encountered a number of "phenomena," including some healing sessions, when the sense of power in the room would be quite tangible. In other words, it wasn't just my grandfather having a laugh! He was an extremely taciturn man, so it would have been totally out of character for him to have consciously chosen to make up that sort of thing.

I was still reading books on spiritualism when I went to university in 1973. There was a singularly important moment when one of my philosophy lecturers, Michael McGhee, came back to my room for a cup of tea. He took a look at all my books on spiritualism and asked about my interest. After I had explained my background to him, he asked, "Well, okay, but why would you assume that being dead would necessarily make someone wiser?" So, I asked him how he would see wisdom; he replied, "I would see it in terms of enlightenment," and he went on to talk about Krishnamurti's philosophy. That put me onto a new track altogether, where the secrets of life were no longer the exclusive property of discarnate spirits but were here-now, always. I just had to learn how to see what is already here-now. This would eventually draw me towards Buddhism.

**DG: And when did you become drawn to astrology?**

**GP:** It was also at university. A friend was reading a book by Colin Wilson called *The Occult*. I took one look at it and begged him to let me have it and then read the whole book in a couple of days. I was really thirsty to know about other people's experiences of weird, other-worldly things which validated the experiences that I'd had. The book was full of information about magic, the I Ching, palmistry, and astrology — all kinds of things which were fascinating to me, so I built up a big shopping list of subjects that I wanted to explore.

So, there I was: I'd gone to university, in hindsight as Pluto transited my Ascendant and I wanted (and expected) to be reborn. I started out with high hopes that my major subject, philosophy, was going to give me the keys to the Universe, but I quickly became disenchanted with what was on offer. I can tell you the exact moment when this really hit home. I went to a Philosophical Society debating evening, and the question was: "Is there life after death?" which I thought was promising! However, the first speaker began his presentation by saying, "Well, by definition, death is the end of life;

therefore, life after death is a contradiction in terms. And therefore, there can be no life after death." All the other speakers nodded in agreement. I couldn't believe that anyone would take such a linguistic trick as a guide to truth. I walked out of the meeting, and that was the end of my interest in Western philosophy for quite a long time.

After that, I was mostly just going through the motions academically, spending much more time on my extracurricular occult studies. I actually put off reading about astrology for quite a while, in favor of palmistry, but in 1976, I began to delve into astrology. The first book I read was Jeff Mayo's *Teach Yourself Astrology*, followed by the Alan Oken trilogy, Alan Leo's books, *Saturn* by Liz Greene, then books by Dane Rudhyar and Stephen Arroyo. That was my way in, with a strong leaning towards psychological astrology, which was of course the rising wave in the 1970s and '80s. I did quite a few chart readings, and though they generally seemed to be pretty accurate and useful, I always felt that it should be possible to interpret charts in a more comprehensive, systematic way than I had done up to that point. So, in 1985, I started to seriously think of earning a living from astrology and decided to first take the Diploma with the Faculty of Astrological Studies. That was all going well until 1986, when I became a Buddhist monk ...

**DG: How did *that* come about?**

**GP:** I'd left university with no idea of what I was going to do, but I wanted to live in Bath, do something spiritual, and spend lots of time hanging around with my friends. This was an extremely idealistic and impractical take on how I might keep my Sagittarius Sun, Cancer Moon, and Libra Ascendant happy, though in some ways it's very close to what I have actually done. My birth time, according to my mother, is 1:20 a.m. in Bournemouth on December 11, 1954.) Anyway, I'd no idea of a career path and ended up being unemployed for long periods. I was convinced that I wanted to "help people" (whatever that meant), so I worked in old people's homes for a couple of years and started to train as a probation officer. I got seriously disillusioned with that and ended up taking a job loading lorries [trucks] instead. By that point, my ideals were looking threadbare, and I felt that all my philanthropic, spiritual aspirations had been a waste of time. I thought: "To hell with all this spiritual stuff; let me at least earn enough money so I can get seriously drunk every night." So, I got a "proper job" from 1980 to 1984, working for a bank in Liverpool, earning enough money to keep me in beer and electronic musical instruments. I sang and played bass and synthesizer in a band originally called "James Levin and the Great Big Billy Goats," but when the fad for silly band names passed, we changed it to "Part Form." We recorded a tape at home which ended up being played on national radio (the John Peel show). That was quite an astounding feat, for a band to come from nowhere and be played on Radio 1, but the

stuff we were doing was quite left field, and as much as I dearly would have loved it, music never threatened to become something that people would pay me to do.

When Saturn moved back into Scorpio (where he sits in my natal chart), I started to feel that something was missing. The life I was living felt too *male* — that's the way I thought about it at the time. My nights were a whirl of pubs, clubs, and drunken camaraderie. Though it had been great fun for a while, I had to acknowledge that something was missing. I'd continued to practice astrology and got in touch with an astrology group in Liverpool; that seemed like a step in the right direction. I also got in touch with an old university friend who was helping to run a Buddhist meditation center. I visited the center in Bradford on Avon (literally just around the corner from where I live now) and met the teachers, Jacqui and Alan James, whose organization is the Aukana Trust ([www.aukana.org.uk](http://www.aukana.org.uk)). I was greatly impressed and started meditating, thinking that this would be a sort of supplement which would balance my life; I'd carry on with my lifestyle pretty much as it was and just add a bit of meditation to appease the spiritual side of my nature or whatever part of my psyche was unhappy and demanding change. That was the theory, anyhow.

Then my Saturn return kicked in, and all of a sudden things were turned upside down. In a very short time, I became extremely miserable and unhappy. The fact that I knew this was my Saturn return only seemed to add insult to injury. I really didn't know what to do with myself. On top of that, I lost the ability to drink; it wasn't a conscious decision on my part but as though I had become allergic to alcohol, the organism taking over and saying, "No more of this for you, matey boy!" So, with that, I became even more withdrawn and unhappy because, if I couldn't get drunk, then I had no social life. All of the things that you expect from a Saturn return happened: I became very isolated and spent months sitting in my flat trying to figure out where to go from here. I knew that a Saturn return was about facing up to reality, but what reality should I be facing up to? In the end, I concluded that the "spiritual side" of my life (for want of a better term) was demanding a much more central role than I'd had in mind. I think it was around this time that I encountered something the Tibetan teacher, Chogyam Trungpa, once said at the start of a class:

My advice to you is not to undertake the spiritual path. It is too difficult, too long, and it is too demanding. What I would suggest, if you haven't already begun, is to go to the door, ask for your money back, and go home now. This is not a picnic. It is really going to ask everything of you and you should understand that from the beginning. So it is best not to begin. However, if you do begin, it is best to finish.<sup>2</sup>

"Now you tell me!" I thought. This spoke to my experience, though, so I got on with the constructive side of the Saturn return: restructuring and laying new foundations. I reorganized my life so as to focus on the spiritual path. I quit my job, left Liverpool, retrained as a computer programmer, and got a job as a computer operator at Bath University (which is not the same as Bath Spa University College) — all so I could be near the meditation center. I got to know other people who were grappling with similar issues, and that really meant a great deal. I had a few experiences which people who get seriously into meditation often have — as though, I think, to draw them further in: rising up out of the physical body and floating; a bright light in the mind's eye which irradiated me with a sense of meaningfulness and bliss, leaving me wanting to go up to strangers on the street and hug them and tell them I loved them ... which is not something I would normally have felt any inclination to do! *[laughs]* These experiences helped to keep me motivated, and although they're nice at the time, they can't last. What was more important to me was that I found the Buddha's teaching helped me to make sense of my experience. It was a practical guide to living in a meaningful and harmonious way and therefore contained all the things I felt to be lacking in the Western philosophy I'd studied at university. I'd never say that Buddhism is the best or only way; many different paths lead to the top of the mountain. It just so happened that Buddhist philosophy — most especially, the teachers that I found — "clicked" for me.

In 1986, the teachers at the meditation center announced they were going to set up a monastery. I thought this was an exceptional opportunity. My job in computers wasn't giving me anything that I wanted to hang onto, so I was at a point in my life where it was relatively easy to jump off. So, with Uranus transiting over my natal Sun, I decided to become a monk. I never particularly considered the idea of becoming a monk per se, but if becoming a monk was what I had to do to be able to apply myself full-time to the spiritual path, then that's what I would do. I ordained as a monk on December 6, 1986 at 3:00 p.m., as close as I can judge it.

I was there for six years, and I'm still a trustee of the charity that administers the monastery and meditation center. So, I'm still involved, still go to meetings, give the occasional lecture, and take an occasional evening class. I left when I felt that I was no longer growing and that I could develop more understanding by going back out into the world. I could still return to the monastery if I wanted to — and if the teachers agreed that it would be a good thing. The Buddhist regime is very different from how it is in some Christian orders, where you take a lifetime vow. With Buddhism, you can go in and leave as often as you like.

The teachers at the center actually used astrology a bit, and I heard an awful lot about not having any earth in my chart. Jacqui used to tell me that I saw myself as a "head on

a stick” as she kindly put it, someone who lived in a world of ideas and didn’t connect to physical reality. So, to try and balance my nature, I was given an endless series of practical chores. I spent so much time gardening that I actually started to enjoy it. I also heard a lot about how I needed to develop the qualities of my Capricorn North Node and stop living in my Cancer South Node. That meant that I had to stop being a child and become a responsible, hard-working figure with real authority. This was difficult, but I think I learned a lot — however, these days, I’d say that you can be too one-sided with the nodes. It isn’t just about becoming the North Node and getting away from the South Node. You actually have to honor both nodes, and although we often need to develop the North Node and restrain the South Node, it’s possible to go too far with that process and end up denying the South Node altogether. The emphasis on nodes which I encountered in the monastery links back to my Saturn return, in a way, since the dispositor of my North Node is Saturn.

In January 1993, I left the monastery and resurfaced into society. This wasn’t as traumatic an event as you might imagine. Life in the monastery wasn’t too cloistered. There would be at least five hours of silent, seated meditation a day, but there was also a lot of interaction with the other recluses and with the group of meditators (around 60 of them) who would come for weekly lectures. I was also giving lectures, taking classes, and occasionally going to a school or university to talk about Buddhism. So, to be in society wasn’t a problem — in fact, it was much less of a problem than it had been before I ordained!

**DG: What happened after you left the monastery?**

**GP:** My return to lay life was an interesting experience. As monks, we wore what looked like dark blue karate outfits, and whenever I was outside the monastery, I was aware of people looking at me and thinking: “Why is he dressed like that? Is he a dangerous lunatic? Is he in some kind of weird cult?” However, when I emerged in ordinary clothes, nobody looked twice at me. After six years of being conspicuous when I walked down the street, it was as if I had suddenly become invisible. My 1st-house Neptune liked that very much! And another thing about returning to the world: It was like I imagine an experience of a past life would be. All of a sudden, I was back in my old clothes with some of my old things, hanging out with friends in the way I used to do. In some ways, it was as if those six years had never happened, and I had just gone back to being the previous “me.” Yet, at the same time, I was clearly aware that I was no longer that person.

My first priority on leaving the monastery was to find somewhere to live and to get a job. I was offered a room in London and moved there, figuring that was as good a place

as any to start job-hunting. Getting a job is interesting when you have six years as a Buddhist monk on your CV [résumé]. It would probably be fair to say that prospective employers said little but thought much. However, later that year, I was offered a job with a small software company and I'm still there. After a few years, I was able to negotiate myself down to a three-day week to make space for my astrological work.

I wouldn't want to say that you need to be a Buddhist or an *anything*-ist in order to practice astrology well, but I think the Buddhist practice can help in some ways. In my case, it helps me to be more aware of what's going on inside me during a reading. One doesn't change as much as one would ideally like to in this life. You doubtless know the Serenity Prayer: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." Nobody seems to agree where this originally came from, but I think there's an enormous amount of practical wisdom in it. So, for example, I've tried, over the years, to *change* — to be better able to just read the chart without being influenced by the desires of the client. But there's no point in pretending that I've become a different person. That desire to please is still there, so another part of the equation is recognizing that — but I don't have to act on it.

When it comes to the work of interpretation, again, this prayer is a useful dictum to bear in mind, because I think there are two distinct things that an astrologer needs to do: One is to acquaint people with the possibilities for changing and growing — how to make the most creative use of upcoming transits and progressions. But equally important is to make clients aware that they aren't going to escape from all of the things that they don't like and that they need to learn how to accept and cope with those things. I guess that means I believe in Fate — if Fate means that we can't become whatever we want to be in this life.

**DG: Your book, *Astrology in the Year Zero*, is really where people know you from. What motivated you to undertake that journey and where did it begin?**

**GP:** It was 1995. I'd started edging back into the world of astrology by going to the Faculty's evening classes and picking up the threads with the Diploma. I went to a set of classes given by Christeen Skinner, and they were great. Christeen was a really inspiring teacher, and she got me back into the idea of doing astrology for a living. Yet, at the same time, I had questions that were niggling at the back of my mind because things had changed while I had been in the monastery, and nobody really seemed to be talking about this. When I'd gone in, we were still riding on the Gauquelin wave: The prevalent view was that astrology was a science and that the first steps to proving it and setting it on a scientific footing had been made and more was surely coming soon.

When I came out, there was a bashful silence on that score, and people were no longer talking about astrology as being a science. There were other things, too, like the fact that David Hamblin, whom I'd known through an astrology group in Bath, had given up astrology, saying that he'd lost his faith in it. I knew that David was a good astrologer and a serious, intelligent man, so I wanted to know what had happened there. I was also aware that traditional astrology was starting to emerge. William Lilly had been republished, and people were talking about his approach as "real astrology" and much more serious than the modern psychological astrology. There was also Vedic astrology, which seemed to have a great deal to offer as well.

For my part, I wanted to look for answers to the questions which the modern astrological world evoked in me. For instance, if astrology was not a science, what was it? Why were the various schools of astrology practicing along very different lines, yet all claiming equally good results? With such questions at the back of my mind, I asked Christeen if I could interview her. Initially, I was simply interested in what she had to say, and I thought it would make a good article for the AA [Astrological Association] *Journal*. Halfway through the interview, she said: "You know, Garry, I think there's a book in this!" So, that was really when the idea of doing a book of interviews with astrologers was born. It felt like that was what I needed to do, to get answers to the questions I had. Plus, let's be honest, it was a wonderful device which would enable me to interview lots of amazing people, even if the book never actually happened.

I started recording interviews, and when they were published in magazines, I added a little piece at the end: "This interview will be included in Garry's forthcoming book." This was a crafty thing to do, since at that stage, I didn't have a publisher. Then Jenni Harte, whom I knew from Christeen's classes, got in touch with me and said, "Look, I know in the magazine it says 'forthcoming book,' but if you've not signed up with a publisher, don't — because Frank [Clifford] really wants to publish it." So Jenni, Frank, and I met up, and in short order, we struck a deal.

My conversations with Frank showed me that not only was he an astrologer with astrology in his blood, but he wanted to publish a book which would do justice to astrology — and he'd let me do the book the way it should be done. If I'd tried to get a more mainstream publisher, I would have had to compromise a lot. I wanted to look at all sides of the picture, including the skeptical case. I was fascinated that there are astrologers who've done all these really strong pieces of work where it seems blindingly obvious that astrology is working; yet, there are also perfectly intelligent, sincere people who've looked at the whole thing and concluded that it's all smoke and mirrors. I think I always knew that my book was not going to be a smart move, commercially. People want to read "the amazing mystic science of astrology and how it will change your life."



They don't want to read a book which says: "These people say it works, and these people say it doesn't; now you figure it out." In the end, I was satisfied with the final product. I feel I can look at it with a fair amount of objectivity these days, partly because of the time that's passed since it came out, but also because a lot of the text isn't me anyway. There are some great interviews in there, I think — no, not great interviews, interviews with great astrologers! *[laughs]*

I'm certainly not the only person to think about astrology as I do. Geoffrey Cornelius's *The Moment of Astrology* is a superb book which I love dearly. I discovered it when I was halfway through *Year Zero*. If I'd read it before I started, then I might never have bothered to assemble my book, because he looks at the kinds of issues that I was just beginning to formulate, and he does a superb job of pulling them apart, setting out the skeptical case, and examining why we need to move on from the astrology-as-science model because it's not going to work. He's been a big influence on the way I think about astrology, and somebody who reads both books would see a certain commonality of thought.

One thing has to be said: I think that looking into the philosophy of astrology and its various schools is not necessarily a clever thing to do, if you want to be a practicing astrologer: Then, every time you look at a chart, your mind is filled with so many different questions and options. It does hinder my work a bit. It seems to me that lots of astrologers are quite blinkered in their approach to the subject ("My way is the right way, end of discussion"). For a long time, I thought this was just wrong and foolish on their part, but now I see a certain benefit to those blinkers. I am convinced that different systems of astrology can work equally well. However, for effective practice, you need to be clear about which set of techniques you are going to use. If you look at a chart and think: "Oh, yes, the traditional method shows ... but then midpoints and harmonics show ... and then Vedic shows ...," you will not get very far.

As for me, I'm transferring slowly and painfully to the traditional approach. When preparing my book, I was particularly impressed by astrologers such as Robert Hand, Robert Zoller, John Frawley, Geoffrey Cornelius, Maggie Hyde, and Bernadette Brady — all of whom base their work largely (or entirely) on the tradition. So, before I'd finished the book, I signed up for John Frawley's horary course (which is primarily, though not exclusively, based on Lilly), and I'm at the end of that now. When it comes to natal work, I am in a transitional stage where there are still elements of my psychological astrology background, but I am gradually introducing more of a traditional approach.

**DG: So how do you see astrology? And is it possible to define astrology?**

**GP:** I think there's an innate faculty in human beings to symbolically evaluate certain things at certain times, and astrology is one system for doing that. Now, we take the planets and stars as our language, rather than cards or yarrow stalks or lines on the hands. Does this give astrology a status which is in some way superior to other divinatory systems? That, it seems to me, is a big question, and I'm still pondering it. At the moment, my answer would be no — a symbol is a symbol, wherever it springs from.

**DG: You have been accepted as a Ph.D. student at Bath Spa University College — the first one, I believe? What was your motivation for stepping into that field?**

**GP:** Well, it was a strange thing: As Jupiter transited over my Moon and MC, I found a new home here in Bradford on Avon, in a church just around the corner from the meditation center. Then, as if that weren't enough Jupiterian symbolism, I found that Bath Spa, which is only a few miles away, was starting a school of "Cultural Astronomy and Astrology" and that my book was on the reading list. So, I started sitting in on the M.A. classes. One thing led to another, and soon I'd signed up to do a Ph.D. It seemed like the path was already laid out, and I had no choice but to walk it. Of course, I did ask myself: "Do I really want to do this?" The downside was that delving further into the academic study of astrology was going to take away from my actual practice of astrology; the time that I would have used to read charts was instead going to be spent studying the philosophy behind astrology. But when it came down to it, I just felt that if I didn't seize the chance now, I would always regret it. One has to go with these things when the opportunity's there, because who knows what will happen with the University in the future? So, I ended up feeling that I had to go for it now, and maybe I could do something useful in terms of creating a framework for the further study of astrology since, at the moment, other disciplines just don't know how to deal with astrology at all.

**DG: What is the topic of your Ph.D.?**

**GP:** It's looking at why some people believe astrology works and why other people believe astrology doesn't work. It asks what worldviews are invoked in both cases and what kind of understanding of the world is appropriate for addressing astrology. Should we be using the scientific approach when we look at astrology, or is that not suitable? Is there a case for saying that we should look at it in terms of the philosophy of religion, rather than the philosophy of science? Personally, I'm convinced that "belief" is an essential component of astrology, that astrology works better when the astrologer

has a strong belief in what they're doing, which of course is why all of this involvement in skeptical issues and different systems of astrology can be potentially undermining to the astrologer. It also helps if the client believes in the efficacy of astrology. If they don't have that belief, then desperation is a good second best! *[laughs]* And, let's face it, when people approach an astrologer, they are often pretty desperate. For many people, astrology is what they try when they've run out of options, so many clients automatically have the focus and the need to know which I see as being essential for astrology to really work.

So, there will be no more books from me for a while, but my academic work might well spawn articles in the interim. In fact, I figure that it would be a smart tactic for me to convert segments of the Ph.D. research into articles. This gives me nice bite-size chunks to aim at, meeting deadlines as I go, and also perhaps getting feedback along the way.

**DG: How do you see astrology fitting into the 21st century?**

**GP:** I don't share the vision of those people who see astrology emerging as a totally accepted, respectable part of society. In theory, sure, it would be nice, but I don't think astrology does "respectable" very well. As far as I can see, it has always been a nebulous kind of subject, difficult to pin down and (ironically enough) unpredictable. I think that quality is an intrinsic part of its nature. When one becomes too complacent about astrology working, it stops working, so it's never going to be completely reliable. I would *not* hope for astrology to become part of the establishment, like, say, astrophysics is now. I can't see that happening at all. Rather, I would hope that the establishment begins to recognize that "truth" is more ambiguous, elusive, and symbolic than science currently allows, and with that, perhaps a (probably grudging) tolerance of astrology will develop.

**DG: A twofold question arises from this: Firstly, do you see astrology gaining greater status because more university courses are incorporating modules of astrology into their curricula? Secondly, do you see a split occurring in the astrological community between those who are walking down the academic pathway and those who are pulling back from that or choosing not to go that way?**

**GP:** If I could take the second part first, I do think there is a danger of a split, because thinking about astrology is a very different activity from actually doing astrology. Clearly, there are people who are happier looking at the history of astrology and the philosophy behind it than actually sitting down with clients and doing charts — and people for whom the converse is true. So, I think there is a danger that the academic study of astrology could become divorced from astrology per se. Those of us who are

involved in the academic study of astrology have a certain responsibility, therefore, to keep in touch with the actual day-to-day use of the craft.

As for the first part of the question, of course, if the average person on the street hears that astrology is now being studied at university, the subject will go up in their estimation, as it suddenly seems to be so much more respectable — and that, in itself, can help to correct a cultural bias. Astrology has been part of human culture since records began, and it's right that people should recognize this. However, in a deeper sense, "status" always goes back to astrology's ability to disclose things which are true and useful, so I'd like to think that university training will better equip astrologers to discuss questions of truth and utility with authority and to debate these issues in a sensible way. Skeptical attacks on astrology are always based on beliefs about how the world is and what we can know about it, and skeptics generally present what they say as absolute, certain knowledge. Uncover the skeptics' beliefs and assumptions, and their arguments become fallible, sometimes even absurd. That is one way (of many) that academic training can benefit astrologers.

**DG: From sitting in on the M.A. Course at the Sophia Centre at Bath Spa, have you observed any changes in your thinking around astrology?**

**GP:** *[pause]* Not a change in my thinking about astrology as such — rather, that it's come into sharper focus. I've also learned an awful lot about the context in which it resides, the philosophy of science, and the sociological and anthropological thinkers whose works can potentially act as reference points for astrology.

**DG: So, has the background that you bring to client work changed, when you step back into reading a chart for a client? It's obviously not going to change the reading, but do you feel like you fit more securely into this happy band of astrologers?**

**GP:** *[laughs]* Yes, it does help. It's an indirect thing. Being an astrologer, you're going against the stream. You believe in things which most people don't believe, and no matter how strong one thinks one's beliefs are, we aren't separate from the rest of society. The fact that we're going against the stream of thought of our fellows will inevitably have a negative impact on us at an emotional level. We are, in our own small way, outcasts from the tribe, and of course that hurts. So, it helps enormously to associate with other astrologers, just to be reassured that one really isn't a lone weirdo. On top of that, to be able to study the history of thought and to see how astrology fits in the stream of humanity's ideas about itself through the ages gives a sense of context and validity to one's practice of astrology.

So, it is a real joy to be involved in the Bath Spa setup for many reasons. I'll tell you one thing I think is important: Usually, when astrologers get together, there is a level of rivalry based on technical details: "Oh, that guy over there uses *eight-degree orbs*, can you imagine ... Don't look now, that woman who uses the *draconic zodiac* has just come in ..." In the university setting, all of that is swept aside. Everyone is focused on trying to understand this spectacular, chaotic craft, and individual differences become insignificant. There is a sense of shared purpose and community which is quite magical.

**DG: It is interesting that you returned here of your own volition, without knowing that the Bath Spa course was being set up. People have been drawn to it ever since: Liz Greene moved back to England from Switzerland to teach part of the Psychology Module; this is a huge imprimatur for the course. Bernadette Brady moved here from Australia to be a student of the M.A. course. Well-known astrologers such as Darby Costello (a current M.A. student) and Bernard Eccles, former President of the Astrological Lodge, and Wendy Stacey, current Chair of the AA (both M.A. graduates) now commute or have commuted each week from London. Other astrologers like Faye Cossar, now also an M.A. graduate, commuted from Amsterdam, and current M.A. student José Prudencio commutes from Portugal. The support and commitment are phenomenal.**

**GP:** It *is* a phenomenon. It's glorious, hugely inspiring, and I think it's important to add that we don't know how long it's going to last. Of course, we all hope it will endure, but here's a vital point: it is for astrologers to seize the moment, to take the opportunity whilst it's here - not to be complacent and think, "Astrology is now in the universities, and maybe I'll do a course some time." Astrologers everywhere must do what they can to breathe life into the fledgling study of astrology in the universities and get involved, because there's no guarantee that it's going to take root and grow, though we obviously hope it will.

What can also help astrology in universities to grow is if it breaks out of its isolation and emphasizes the links between itself and other disciplines. For example, issues of belief are invoked when we look at astrology; this means that there are parallels with the philosophy of religion. There's also a lot of research going on in parapsychology these days; the links between that and astrology have not really been explored. And there are also many points of reference in the philosophy of science, in anthropology and sociology, psychology ... well, I don't want to run up an endless list of "-ologies," so suffice it to say that there are lots of interdisciplinary links to be explored!

**DG: These interdisciplinary possibilities have already begun. Nick Campion was awarded his Ph.D. in February 2004 from the Study of Religions Department at Bath Spa (his official post is senior lecturer) and has recently been asked to write a module, together with Dr. Roberta Anderson from the History Department, called "The Occult in Society." He will be teaching half of it with her for the History Department.**

**Garry, thank you so much for taking the time to share your thoughts. We all wish you an exciting and fruitful six years as you embark on your Ph.D. studies.**

#### **References and Notes**

1. Garry Phillipson, *Astrology in the Year Zero*, Flare Publications, 2000.
2. See: <http://nepenthes.lycaenum.org/Misc/buddhism.html>

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