

# **A Tale of Two Doctors:**

## **Part 1**

### **An Interview with Patrick Curry**

*by Darrelyn Gunzburg*

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*Liz Greene was Patrick Curry's first astrology teacher in the mid 1970s. Both of them gained their Ph.D.s early in their lives and, after making contact, veered off on different pathways. Now, in 2004, their paths have crossed once more, only this time they are peers, co-teaching the Psychology module for the MA course at Bath Spa University College. What are their different styles of astrology, and how did they reach them? What is their philosophy regarding astrology? Where do they see astrology leading in the next decade?*

We begin this two-part interview with Dr. Patrick Curry, a Canadian-born writer and scholar and an on-camera Tolkien expert featured on the extended DVDs of the films of *The Lord of the Rings*. He is the author of *Introducing Machiavelli*, *Defending Middle-Earth*, and most recently, *Astrology, Science, and Culture: Pulling down the Moon* (with Roy Willis). He also gave the 2004 Carter Memorial lecture at the Astrological Association's Bath Conference in September 2004. I interviewed Patrick at Bath Spa on May 24, 2004.

**Darrelyn Gunzburg: Patrick, let's begin with your background. You're a lay Buddhist. How did that come to be?**

**Patrick Curry:** I was a student of Shunryu Suzuki, Roshi, in San Francisco, for the last year and a half of his life. That was just luck, as you might say. He died in 1971, but since he was a real teacher, he left something with me. However, when he died, I stopped actively practicing Buddhism for many years. Then I discovered that, although I'd left the practice, the practice hadn't left me — so I found another much-younger teacher, Kobun Chino, Roshi, who was in San Francisco at the time, and I hooked up with him. He was a wonderful, remarkably kind man. Three years ago I took my lay Buddhist vows with him. Taking my vows doesn't mean I'm a monk or a priest. I took the basic Buddhist vows along the lines of trying not to do bad, trying to do good, and trying to purify the mind or heart. I saw this not as a narrowing-down event that said "now you're Buddhist and nothing else" but as a widening out and opening up, which is how I experienced it, and that's why I was willing to do it. For me, it was more like putting the seal on the matter. There were three of us taking our vows at the time and it was an absolutely marvelous ritual, I have to say. Kobun is dead now, sadly. (He died three years ago.)

**DG: Can you Talk more about what happened, in simple terms, as your eyes totally lit up just now. (Jan/Nan, I prefer to leave in the first two words as it was originally as it sounds quite dictatorial by cutting them out.)**

**PC:** I'll give you one little example. I took my vows at a centre started by one of Kobun's senior students in Austria in the Alps and on the altar was a large and interestingly shaped rock, a vase of flowers, an incense bowl and a bell, and no human image. Since I'm also, by the way, a bit of a pagan, I really enjoyed that. I experienced that as liberating. Not that I'm anti-human, but I am very aware of what David Abram, the author of *The Spell of the Sensuous*, calls "the more-than-human world" which embraces

humans but also animals, plants, rocks, water ... and the stars! The ceremony included chanting the Heart Sutra, which is the fundamental text of Mahayana Buddhism, and taking those vows that I already mentioned. Another part of it involved the teacher conducting the ceremony walking behind all three of us, who were kneeling, dipping a small sprig of leaves from a tree in a little bowl of water and sprinkling drops of water on the tops of our heads, again bringing in nature in a way that I really enjoy. Ironically, the image that popped into my head during the ceremony was from my culture; it was of the Prodigal Son and I had a good laugh about that afterwards. Something like that's bound to come from one's own cultural background, isn't it? I think because of things falling apart in my life at the time, I was more open to change and more aware of the need to get more serious in my life. After all, that is part of the midlife crisis: awareness of mortality and of time passing.

**DG: Can we pursue the nature of ritual a little further? When did you first become aware of how important it was and what part it plays in your life?**

**PC:** Sure. Well, one point is that we in the West - particularly the secular West and the Protestant West (it's sometimes hard to tell the difference) - are relatively starved of ritual. Now, of the different kinds of Buddhism, Zen is the most Protestant. It's remarkably strict. Even so, I found the small amount of ritual involved — chanting and bowing and incense, primarily - highly enriching and nourishing. Of course, that could have been available to me through a native religion. Christianity would be an obvious choice in my case. However, I have an enormous problem with the idea of God and, in particular, with the idea of there being only One True God. So that meant that the ritual in the service of that idea was closed to me. I did dabble with paganism for awhile. I still respect it and, I would add, respect many individual Christians and Jews, and so on, whom I know. But ultimately, I found paganism a bit thin and unsatisfying. I attribute that to the fact that, as a religion, it was pretty comprehensively trashed, through no fault of its own, and pagans have had to reconstruct and patch together what they can. For me, it just doesn't have that feeling of a relatively unbroken continuity and richness which the major world religions do have. So, to be able to engage in ritual in affirmation of a set of ideas or values to which I *do* subscribe was a great thing for me. In the context of the present-day culture of instant gratification, and the array of technological aids to gain that gratification, I think we've really missed something important about ritual. I think the human animal needs ritual. It's a basic need connected with religion but not confined to religion.

**DG: So you feel this is a personal pathway, rather than an organized pathway?**

**PC:** I like the idea of what I once heard described as a "collective spirituality," which is not quite the same thing as religion. When spirituality is completely privatized – made a purely individual thing – we get people who are personally Christian, for example, but out in the world behave very differently. At the other end of the spectrum, a completely collective religion is a theocracy, complete with religious police, like in Iran. Somewhere in between, I think there's an apprehension of spiritual ideas and values — a genuine personal apprehension on the individual's part – which can also be shared with other people, and which affects your public behavior, so it's not entirely privatized. I mean our Prime Minister, Tony Blair, is a Christian, but is that how you would describe what he actually does? I don't think so!

**DG: You've lived in the U.K. for a number of years now. When did you leave San Francisco, and where did you go?**

**PC:** I left California in 1972 to come here and apart from a little bit of time in the late 1970s finishing my BA in California, I have been here ever since. I contacted Kobun in 1998 which coincided with a lot of personal upheaval in my life. I had the mother of all midlife crises, my marriage broke up, and I had the requisite affair with an inappropriately young woman. I did it in great style, if I say so myself, and since then I have spent a lot of time picking up the pieces and mending fences, with some success (which is good, as there's children involved). So, asking Kobun to take me on as a student was part of the same process.

I made a decision quite a long time ago which I don't entirely understand but to which I've stuck and it is to never to force my Buddhism into any of the other things I do. If a coherence arose between my Buddhist practice and beliefs and, say, my astrological practices, I would give it every encouragement,

but I decided not to force a consistency. Somehow I feel that's the right way to go about it. So if you were to ask me if one has influenced the other, I would say I'm sure they have, but not directly — only indirectly, as it were, and organically.

**DG:** [smiles] **I wasn't going to ask you, but it's a good thing to bring up. Indeed, it's interesting that you took your Buddhist vows three years ago, as that coincides with the setting up of Bath Spa.**

**PC:** Yes, yes, all these extraordinary things occurring together. I don't mind trying to make things happen. It's a human thing to do. However, for something important or good or *real* to take place, I think there has to be cooperation with the cosmos whereby an important part of whatever's being experienced wasn't your idea but is offered to you to work with. That's what has happened to me.

**DG:** **And how did astrology come into your life?**

**PC:** My older sister was a practicing astrologer (still is), so I grew up with it, which means I was aware of it, studying it, and to some extent practicing it from about the age of fourteen or fifteen. My sister was a great influence on me, and I took to astrology like a duck to water. Now, this may be related to my natal Sun-Uranus square (Patrick's birth data is 4:55 p.m. on March 24, 1951, in Winnipeg, Canada) but there were also long periods of time when I didn't practice astrology; in fact, I stopped for a long time because I didn't like how I was relating to it — in a rather neurotically needy, dependent sort of way. I really didn't like that. That was sometime in my twenties. It got obsessive, so I cut myself off from astrology and I think that was a good idea, because when I did come back to it, I had a much more balanced relationship with it.

I've never thought of it this way before but perhaps it parallels the Buddhism, in that, although I left astrology, it never left me. I think William Blake said something like this: Never neglect an unrealized desire or talent, because it's dangerous; it will turn against you. In any case, I wanted to take up astrology again and because by this time I was back in England, I took private lessons with Liz Greene, which was a real treat and an honour. This was 1974–75, when Liz was living in South Kensington. I'd show up once a week with my offering of fruit and we would look at charts together. It was a wonderful experience which lasted about a year. Then I realised that I urgently wanted to go back and finish my BA at university. I was beginning to feel uncomfortably marginal, so instead of going down the formal astrological route, I went back and got my BA in psychology from the University of California at Santa Cruz. In 1979, I returned to London (which was by now really my home), and I did a master's degree in Logic and Scientific Method at the London School of Economics: I still can't believe it! [laughs loudly] And then I followed that up with a Ph.D. at University College, London, looking at the history of astrology in early modern England. I had an unusually sympathetic supervisor whose name was P. M. Rattansi. He had co-authored the very first academic paper bringing to people's attention Newton's intense involvement with alchemy, so he was an ideal supervisor. Without him, I don't think my Ph. D would have happened.

**DG:** **How on earth did you find him?**

**PC:** Luck, if you can call it that! Luck and Fate — I don't know, they seem to be closely related. The idea of Fate is something I'm increasingly thinking about lately. I discuss it to some extent in my latest book, *Astrology, Science, and Culture: Pulling down the Moon* [with Roy Willis], because I feel fate has been misunderstood by a lot of people, including many astrologers who are tempted to see astrology in one of two lights: either that Fate is pre-ordained and cast in stone, that you maybe have a little bit of latitude (not much), and then the temptation is to ally that with the birth chart: "Here it is. You're stuck with it. This is it for this life. This is what you've got." Or on the other hand, they reject Fate entirely and say everything is up for grabs. I don't feel that either alternative is plausible or desirable. What I lean towards is the idea that you have a relationship with your Fate, you work with it as you go, and it's an ongoing relationship which is just as fulfilling and frustrating as any other. In fact, I was discussing this with Liz [Greene] the other day, and I was interested to find out that she has a similar feeling, it seems. The whole thing doesn't become clear until the Fat Lady sings. The way it manifests in my experience is of working with a daemon— a guiding spirit. Christianity retained some of this much older idea as the guardian angel, and turned the rest into demons — a very different idea. My daemon seems to like to work through divination

although not exclusively, so I use the I Ching a lot, and in some ways I find that easier or more natural than astrology.

**DG: Are you saying that you can have a dialogue with your daemon through the I Ching?**

**PC:** That's how it feels. And the same thing is true of astrology, when I approach it that way and when it cooperates. I have found this from experience, although I have been strongly influenced by the work of the Company of Astrologers, especially Geoffrey Cornelius' book, *The Moment of Astrology*, for which I wrote a Foreword. So, I come to astrology with a sense of ritual. Divination is inseparable from ritual. It is a ritual where you are creating a sacred space for a dialogue with the gods or the fates. Now I don't even see the birth chart in a fixed, deterministic way. Every time you come back to a birth chart, your own or someone else's, it's a different take. No two rituals are ever exactly the same. It's impossible that they could be. Heraclitus says you can never step into the same river twice — which brings me to another point: I am totally sympathetic to the pre-Socratics and I have enormous problems with Plato. This relates to my problem with the Christian God: the idea of abstract, universal truth which Christianity combined with the Jewish deity to produce universal monotheism. I think this is such a dangerous idea and has wreaked such havoc that I'd rather not touch it.

**DG: The world at present seems to be mad, not learning or changing for the better. What do you see going on in the world at this moment in history?**

**PC:** Hegel once stated: "What experience and history teach is this — that people and governments have never learned anything from history, or acted on the principles deduced from it." When the world is like it is at the moment, it's difficult to resist the temptation to try to shut it out and get on with cultivating one's own quiet patch, one's own garden. Another one of my interests, as you know, is Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings*, and one of the lessons of *The Lord of the Rings* is that you can't do that, not forever. You have to get involved in some way, as best you can, because not even The Shire was proof against what was happening. So the question is: How do you get involved? You don't do it by trying to be someone else. You start with who you are and where you are, your own life. The playwright Arthur Miller once gave some very good advice. A young man asked him: "How can I be a force for good in the world?" and Miller replied: "Pick an occupation that speaks to you, that turns you on, and you'll soon have your hands full!" [laughs] So, that's what each of us can do. In the lives that we have, we already have a lot of opportunities for doing whatever we can to decrease suffering and increase compassion, probably more than we know what to do with already. People think, "Oh, if I was the President, I could do a lot," but that's ridiculous. You are who you are, and you are *where* you are, and this is the only opportunity you've got. I realise increasingly as I get older that I've spent a lot of time working against the grain. It takes me longer to recognise things, particularly simple things. [laughs] Now, I'm finally coming round to working with who I am and, hopefully, causing less havoc, personally. Who knows — maybe even doing some good!

**DG: Now since, by your suggestion, Fate doesn't become clear until the Fat Lady sings, maybe this realization of yours is the Fat Lady starting to speak?**

**PC:** [laughs] We could look at it that way! Whilst it really depends on the individual, I also think that there's a general truth here: that we underestimate how long it takes to become wise. We're living in time, and it takes time, and that's something that an instant gratification culture finds difficult to accommodate but it's a fact. For example, in my case, the books that I want to write now are not ones I could have written when I was any younger. It's all very well being a Brilliant Young Turk, but have you got anything interesting to say? Well, I think having something interesting to say comes increasingly with age and with time.

**DG: Were you a Brilliant Young Turk?**

**PC:** Oh, not that I have anything substantial to show for it but I was quite clever. I met my second wife at that time, and she was a great help in pulling me back from the brink of excessively cold hyper-intellectualism which doesn't do anyone any good. Just because you *can* do it doesn't mean that it's worth doing. This pursuit of one's Fate can be related to a calling (and quite often is, in terms of career) but it

takes place in the context of a life: how you affect people that you meet everyday and with whom you have the most mundane of dealings. For me life is the context and work is part of that — not the other way round. I've got a lot of oppositions in my chart, so I'm always trying to juggle things in my life and give everything its due which, of course, is pretty frustrating sometimes because you always fail in one respect or another. Someone's always unhappy.

**DG: And once you gained your Ph.D.?**

**PC:** After my Ph.D., there weren't really any jobs available. I thought I could cut it as a freelance writer whilst I helped raise my family. [We had a son by my previous marriage, then a stepson from my wife's previous marriage and then in 1990 my daughter (from my second marriage) was born.

I wrote two fairly academic books on the history of astrology: one on astrology in 17th- and 18th-century England and another on astrologers in Victorian and Edwardian London, which was fun. Then I tried to get a bit more populist (for me!) with a book called *Introducing Machiavelli* [1] and another on J. R. R. Tolkien called *Defending Middle Earth*. [2] They're both still in print, I'm happy to say, but they weren't exactly money-spinners. There's still a chance, though — a new American paperback of the Tolkien book comes out in October! Luckily, though, I had the remnants of some inherited money from my grandparents to live on, but I was starting to become significantly impoverished right around the time that the lectureship position at Bath Spa University College opened up. Without that I wouldn't have managed at all and the striking thing about the lectureship position was that it could have been designed with me in mind: I've been thinking about astrology for a long time, and here was a lectureship on the very subject. It's almost enough to make you wonder who's in charge around here!

During this time, I wasn't looking at astrology all that actively. I thought (again ) that I had left it behind, and maybe I had, but it hadn't left *me* behind. This could reflect how Saturn completes my T-square with Uranus and the Sun ... or vice versa. Anyway, the Bath Spa lectureship isn't just a job, it's also an opportunity to make use of material which I had spent years thinking about and studying and to share whatever fruits I might have gleaned from those studies with other people. So I really couldn't say no. With that decision, astrology came back into my life in a big way.

The two basic modules of the MA Course in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology currently being taught at Bath Spa are an introduction to the subject matter and another module on different ways of doing research. I contribute some classes to both those modules. Nick Campion is in charge of two modules, one called Stellar Religion and the other on the History of Astrology; I'm in charge of two modules, one on Psychological and Psychoanalytic Perspectives and another called Science and Scepticism. Both of these discourses have had a big impact on astrology and, to some extent, astrology has also impacted on them back. So, it's important for people who want to understand astrology to know more about these subjects.

**DG: Now you have come full circle. You're teaching the psychological module with Liz Greene. How did you feel, when you knew that that was going to happen?**

**PC:** I am abundantly happy about Liz's entry into that module and her role in it. We've now done one complete module together and, for obvious reasons, she's been able to bring qualities to it that I couldn't: an insider's knowledge and immense experience. I think what we've discovered is that we met halfway: I'm philosophically inclined, but I've had enough life experience, including difficulties, to appreciate the psychological dimension of things. She's tremendously experienced with psychology as a practitioner, but she's also a highly reflective person. So, we seem to have met in the middle. It's not exactly psychology and not exactly philosophy but something involving the two. For example, we shared a class the other day; I took the first half on Hillman and archetypal psychology and she took the second half on Assagioli and transpersonal psychology. Without a great deal of planning, as such, it all fitted together beautifully. I take that as a highly encouraging sign.

And, of course, we both know astrology from the inside. That's so important in the teaching of this module, and that includes Nick [Campion] as well. If you don't have that experience of astrology, the

practice of it, from the inside, then no matter how much you know about the subject intellectually, you're probably never going to be able to bring it to life. It's this ability to move back and forth between inside and outside that really makes the difference to the teaching in this Centre. What I mean by 'inside' is the experience of astrology actually working, as distinct from the 'outside', what it looks like considered critically: for example, the influences on astrology (from religion, science, society, politics) as well as effects it has had.

I briefly did consultations professionally — really briefly. What I have done more of is consulting for friends and I prefer to keep it that way, as I don't regard astrology as my profession. Also, of course, it leaves me free to decline. It's pretty clear that I'm a natural intellectual. That's just how it is. That may be a good thing, it may be bad thing; it probably depends on the context. In any case, the subject matter of my reflections are things like divination and enchantment and astrology. So that's what I have to give, that's how I can contribute, not by being an astrologer as such.

**DG: Yet, the questions of where astrology fits in historically and how it fits into being a human being are just as valid as being able to sit with someone and talk about their chart with them — and, in a way, the connection between the two sides has been lacking, hasn't it?**

**PC:** I was just going to say I think that is what has been lacking and one reason many astrologers are coming to Bath Spa to study is because they feel that lack. The Sophia Centre at Bath Spa is meeting a need. I think the historical connection has been neglected. I don't quite know why. It may be part of astrology's historical isolation from the mainstream in Western society. There hasn't been an opportunity for this sort of learning in such a concerted way until recently.

**DG: How do you think that's going to change and shift astrology's place in the community? A lot of people have said it would be disastrous if astrology ever became mainstream. Do you agree with that?**

**PC:** On the one hand, I tend to agree with that. I think astrologers should count their blessings, and there are blessings in being marginal. It's only from a marginal position that you can clearly see what's going on. (Not too marginal, of course — relatively marginal.) If you're *too* marginal, you're just completely unconnected and that's no use either. Also, not being mainstream means that astrology is much less likely to be corrupted in a major way which, of course, is a danger for any discipline that becomes widely accepted. It would be really upsetting to see astrology co-opted for various commercial purposes — let's say, military purposes — and this is not beyond the realm of possibility, not by any means. On the other hand, I think the chances of astrology becoming mainstream in any significant way in the near future are pretty small. So, I don't see what we're doing here as leading to astrology ruining the world (or vice versa) anytime soon. It is helping astrologers to become much more aware of their own tradition in the bigger world and sending lots of them out into the world, able to argue with people, on an equal footing for a change, speaking the language of an academic discipline — say, anthropology or history — but asserting something really different from what those people are used to hearing. That's a new and interesting situation. They are more willing to listen to you because they recognize the terms and they may even have to consider what you're saying and that has to be good, I think.

I've long been in a position of marginality. Mercury is my ruling planet, and my involvement with the Sophia Project from the beginning, was as somebody who was comfortable moving between the worlds of the academy and astrology. I was one of only two people in the U.K. who had a Ph.D. in astrology and I was happy to be able to act as a liaison between those two worlds. The Sophia Project is the project, backed by a benefactor, to help make the study of real astrology an accredited subject to study in British institutions of higher education. It began about four years ago.

**DG: Can you expand on what the Science and Scepticism module that you teach entails?**

**PC:** Sure. Science in modern times has had more impact on astrology than any other single discourse, probably even more so than religion. For that reason, if for no other, it's important for astrologers to know something about science, to understand its strengths but also its weakness. I am sometimes dismayed by how naïve astrologers are about science. That naïveté can take two forms: the first is that they are unremittingly hostile to science but in a way that shows they don't really understand what science is trying to do, and that's not very productive. The other form, which is perhaps even more common, is placing their hopes for astrology with science, something like: "Well, astrology is really scientific, and when science evolves sufficiently, they will understand this, and then everything will be fine, and we'll get admitted to The Club." I think that's a big mistake. I don't think modern science will ever admit astrology to "The Club," and I'm not sure this is a Club we want to be a member of, in any case. So, it's really a process of mutual education.

On the other side, there are people involved with science who are extraordinarily ignorant of what astrology is and what it isn't, because being ignorant of astrology is so easy to get away with. A few students are coming at it from that side. Their mistake would tend to be along the lines of: "There really isn't any good scientific evidence for astrology, therefore astrology is rubbish." Well, of course, that isn't necessarily so at all. There may not be good scientific evidence for astrology. Let's say there isn't. It still doesn't follow that astrology isn't significant, compelling and important — or anything else. That only follows if you allow science to be the ultimate judge of value, and that must be refused. That's what I call scientism, and I hope the students who study here at Bath Spa will end up with, among other things, a clear idea of the difference between science and scientism. Many people who attack astrology on the basis of science are actually adherents to this crypto-religion of science, which itself is not scientifically validated and never *can* be, because it's essentially a faith position.

**DG: You said earlier that divination, enchantment, and astrology are the subject matters of your reflections. Can you speak a little more about enchantment?**

**PC:** Enchantment is a key issue for me and is going to form the subject of my next book. My starting point is Max Weber's idea of the disenchantment of the world and, of course, modern science plays a major role in that process. I see astrology, when it works, as an experience of enchantment, so it's useful for all of us, students and myself, to look at questions like: How has enchantment survived this process of disenchantment? Because it has! Under what kind of conditions? When does it happen, and when doesn't it happen? What's the difference between magic and enchantment? Where does science fit into all this? From my point of view, science is much more closely aligned with magic than with enchantment. Indeed, I would say that modern science is our magic which makes things happen. Enchantment's a totally different kettle of fish. An astrological consultation is potentially a form of enchantment but since it can't be entirely commanded or ordered or made to happen (which is the province of magic), you can never rely on it working; this is one reason that it's a ritual and, as part of that ritual, there has to be a lot of humility. You ask for the process to happen, you do everything you can to make it happen but you are not ultimately in charge. You can't literally make it happen. There's a lot of this in all our lives, but it goes unrecognized, unacknowledged, untheorized and that's one of the things I want to do. Theorizing is simply trying to think seriously about something through trying to put together a theory about it that seems adequate to your experience of it. It may be an intellectual activity but is certainly not just academic, either in the sense of only found in universities OR not mattering much! Theorizing (as defined above) is something one does – it's an activity - and it is something I want to do.

Somebody could say: "Why do you want to theorize it?" My answer would be: "To encourage it, strengthen the case for it, make it possible for it to happen more often." I don't place absolute value on theory, not for its own sake, although I admit that I enjoy doing it, too.

**DG: I want to ask you a little more about Tolkien and Machiavelli. How relevant do you think these two icons are in today's world?**

**PC:** Well, Tolkien's obviously relevant, because millions of people read him. Since the movies were released even more people have gone back to read the books. The movies haven't replaced the books by any means. I got my basic idea about enchantment from Tolkien, from his essay on fairy stories which is a marvelous piece of work. I must have read the essay when I was still a teenager and I've reread it many times since then. I first read *The Hobbit* when I was nine and *The Lord of the Rings* when I was fifteen. The story of *The Lord of the Rings* is about the near-destruction of the enchanted world. Obviously readers feel they are living in precisely that kind of situation. Reading this parallel account of how it nearly happens but doesn't gives people hope, I think, and hope is in short supply these days.

So, what are the elements of that enchanted world? Well, an enchanted world is one that's alive in all its parts *and* as a whole, not in any mechanical way but in an unpredictable and ultimately uncontrollable way. Nature is entirely central to that enchantment and Tolkien was greatly aware of that. With the current ecological disaster and the wars and so on, what is happening now is the same sort of thing that Tolkien was describing in his story. So I think Tolkien has a tremendous amount to say to today's audiences. He was asked, towards the end of his life, if he thought that Mordor had won in the real world and he said no, but he thought Saruman was doing very well indeed! I think one could say that the spirit of Mordor is doing uncomfortably well in the United States these days. It's not the only place where it exists, by any means, because obviously - I hesitate to use the word "evil," but I think it's unavoidable in this context - we see evil on all sides of the conflicts. I mentioned Hillman earlier, and I think an enormous part of the problem with America is its collective refusal to recognise its own shadow. Completely identifying with *white and light* and *right* is highly dangerous. Ironically it breeds evil in practice because you give all that projected part to the other side and then you try to destroy the ones onto whom you have projected that part.

**DG: And Machiavelli?**

**PC:** [*smiles*] Yes, Machiavelli seems to sit oddly with Tolkien and enchantment, doesn't he? I have quite a strong political streak and something about Machiavelli's realism attracted me. I do like the realism of people who recognize the existence of the shadow — both individual and collective shadows. Incidentally, I find that this is true of Liz [Greene]. She's well aware of the reality of the shadow and I find that attractive. This is also true of Machiavelli. When I started to look into him for this short book I was asked to write, I discovered that he'd been pretty grossly misunderstood and misrepresented, that he actually was, in some fundamental way, an idealist, almost a romantic idealist, and what he believed in was a self-governing citizenry (citizens governing themselves) — a republic. It's tantalizing that Tolkien described The Shire as "half republic, half aristocracy." The central value of civic republicanism (which was Machiavelli's faith, if you will) is freedom but it's a freedom that's accompanied by, maintained by, and inseparable from duties. So, Tolkien's free peoples certainly have duties, that's what they're doing in *The Lord of the Rings*; otherwise, they would have turned their back on what was going on. They greatly valued their freedom.

I was also interested to learn that Machiavelli believed in classical paganism which was one reason that the Jesuits were so instinctively hostile to him. In other words, he rejected the One True God or the One True Truth approach. He said, in effect: Sorry, the fact is that life is plural and multiple; there are different principals or gods and goddesses, and you can't keep them all happy; and conflict is part of life. It was that idea which Weber took from Machiavelli because Weber was also a pluralist, along with people like Isaiah Berlin, one of the most formidable defenders of philosophical liberalism and distinguished thinkers about the history of ideas.

Although the connections weren't at all clear to me at first, now if I look at this apparently weird congeries of subjects — Tolkien, Machiavelli and astrology — I'm starting to be able to see the threads. So there's a political dimension to enchantment: What kind of society respects and enables enchantment? What does the experience of enchantment contribute to our understanding of a healthy society? — and so on. Those are questions few people seem to have asked and they are ones that I'd like to look into.

**DG: We've embraced a wide range of topics in this interview. Is there anything else you want to add that we haven't covered yet?**

**PC:** Yes, I do want to say one last thing, although I'm not all that articulate about it. Even though I teach at the Sophia Centre, I'm not entirely clear what is unfolding here but I do have a strong sense that it is something new in and for astrology, which is pretty exciting, and I can see that reflected in the astrologers who come here as students. A lot of them seem to experience the teaching at Bath Spa as particularly liberating, once they get into it. I think probably the most careful and neutral way to describe what is happening would be to say that astrology is developing a new relationship with the mainstream world, to some extent coming in out of the cold. I think people could have fears that somehow it will take away what is special about astrology or overintellectualize it. I understand those fears but I don't think they are justified. The people who teach here have a fundamental respect for astrology. That's incredibly important. This isn't like the Koestler Chair of Parapsychology which is always given to a so-called sceptic, or the Exeter University Chair of Alternative Medicine which was given to somebody who hates alternative medicine. We're not doing that. Thanks to the way the Sophia Project was put together, we have been able to ensure that the matter of real astrology gets properly studied. As for over-intellectualizing the subject, one of the students recently said something like this: "I was afraid that learning about the subject might destroy my spiritual beliefs about it but I have not found that to be true. Indeed, what comes out the other side is even stronger spiritually." I was **so** happy to hear that because I think that's what we're aiming to do. Since nobody here is making a fetish of intellectualization, and *I'm* certainly not, I don't think that danger is a real one, either. Intellect is an extremely important part of life and it's one that's particularly important part to the teaching at Bath Spa but it's not the only part of it and as long as we hold onto that existential fact, I think we'll be OK. I just wanted to say that.

**DG: Patrick, thank you for a stimulating and inspiring interview. We wish you the best of luck in all your endeavors, for the book on enchantment that is yet to be born, and particularly for your input into the future of astrology as it reveals itself to us in time through your teaching at Bath Spa University College.**

#### **References and Notes**

1. Patrick Curry, *Introducing Machiavelli*, Icon Books, 2002.
2. Patrick Curry, *Defending Middle Earth: Tolkien, Myth, and Modernity*, HarperCollins, 1997.

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