

Spellbound

psychotherapist and counsellor thinks that fortune telling is fine if people have the right attitude to it. "As long as it's kept in context and people remember that they have their own free will, it's okay," Paul O'Donoghue, a clinical psychologist and co-founder of the Irish Sceptic Society, is hugely doubtful of the veracity of telling the future. "A lot of people go for fun in which case there's no real problem - if they take it with a grain of salt," he says.

As Irish society has gradually loosened up and become more open, people are more proactive about sorting out their own problems. For some, getting a tarot reading is merely an affirmation or a less formal means of getting advice from someone who will listen. The Mind, Body, Spirit section of most bookshops are heaving with self-help tomes, so is it time to make a proper classification once and for all? Réamonn O'Byrne sees the changing face of modern Irish life as one factor. "The rise in self-help has definitely affected the increase in people seeking to find their way in life. Organised churches don't always have all the answers so people look for alternatives." U Magazine's resident astrologer also feels that changing lifestyles have fuelled an interest in the area. "People have more leisure and time to develop a healthy curiosity about spirituality," says Christina Kosmopoulos. "They ask themselves questions like: 'Why am I here?', 'What is my purpose?' and 'How can I be a better person?' These answers can be found over time by studying books but arcane knowledge has always been passed on by a 'master' or expert in this area."

Those working in the astrology/reading industry find that they get used to people being uninformed about what they do. Much of the scepticism comes from people who

either haven't tried it or think it has a darker side. Helen Weight, a tarot reader and astrologer based in Dublin feels that the industry is misunderstood. "People often think it's mysterious or like voodoo but it's not, a lot of it has its basis in psychology."

Réamonn O'Byrne agrees, pointing out: "What people forget is that astrology and predictive reading is very earth-based, very nature-based and dates back to ancient Pagan and Druidic times." It's a booming business and there are more readers now than you can shake a crystal ball at.

Helen Weight has 14 years experience, most of which she spent working full-time. She has a large client base, many of whom are repeat clients and she believes that people wouldn't come back



“People ignore the incorrect aspects of astrology and reinforce the things that apply to them, which is a deep-rooted psychological thing in all of us.”

if it was 'a load of rubbish'.

There are of course die-hard cynics who will never be convinced by the various methods of telling fortunes or predicting the future. Everyone from lawyers to estate agents are regarded with suspicion because of their profession but there is a distinct enmity reserved for the psychic fraternity. Christina Kosmopoulos is ambivalent about such criticism. "Funnily enough I don't mind sceptics at all and I actually welcome a healthy debate! It's not my job to convince people. Astrology proves itself statistically and it's up to an individual to use it to their own benefit or not, as they choose."



THE CASE AGAINST:

There are many camps that retch at the very mention of the words 'astrology' or 'fortune-telling.' Scientists, those sticklers for tangible proof, are most vocal and numerous studies have been carried out to verify the authenticity of claims by readers and mystics. David Moore, the chairperson of Astronomy Ireland and Editor of *Astronomy & Space* magazine explains some. "There have been lots of studies done involving astrologers using the methods of Ptolemy (2nd Century Greek Astronomer), which require your exact date, time and place of birth. The study found that 95% of people agreed with what their horoscope said about them in terms of personal characteristics. In the same test, they reversed the characteristics (without telling the subjects) so that they were wrong - but still 95% of people believed them to be correct! People ignore the incorrect aspects of

astrology and reinforce the things that apply to them, which is a deep-rooted psychological thing in all of us. The astronomy side doesn't work, unfortunately for me! You may as well just make up horoscopes. Similarly, in predictive astrology tests, 3,000 predictions about the future were made and only 10% actually came through." If scientists claim they can prove categorically that astrology is fictional wish-

fulfilment, why are there so many of us interested in it?

Psychotherapist Catherine Keers believes that uncertainty in a hostile world is one reason. "People often go for readings when they're feeling uncertain about their lives. These days, society doesn't believe in religion the way it used to so people are looking for other maps and external guidance on how to live. They try other options rather than looking for the answers within themselves. Big life decisions should be arrived at by a process of reflection and fortune telling is fine if it's for fun or if you do learn something about yourself, but not if it's about handing over responsibility and power."

