

Senior Thesis, History of Science
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*The Dignity of an Exact Science:
Evangeline Adams, Astrology, and the Professions of the Probable, 1890-1940*

*Uncertain whether the stars of my
inner canopy are part of this
brittle crust I watch them often.
—J.H. Prynne, “A Dream of Retained Colour”*

—

Dear Miss Adams:

*You will oblige me by seeing what
the stars have for me during the
consecutive months of 1908. Your
forecasts for the present months
were singularly correct.*

*Yours truly,
Jacob Stout*

*Formerly President of the New York
Stock Exchange¹*

¹ Evangeline Adams, “The Law and Astrology” (pamphlet) (New York: The Schulte Press, 1914), 16.



Figure 1 Evangeline Adams, modest witness to the stars, eschews the stereotypical headdress and crystal ball of the fortune teller. From "Seeress Dies as Broadcaster Who Gained Fame," *Chicago Tribune*, November 11, 1932.

Introduction: Capital Demands Prophecy

In a 1905 Supreme Court decision, Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote:

People will endeavor to forecast the future, and to make agreements according to their prophecy. Speculation of this kind by competent men is the self-adjustment of society to the probable. Its value is well known as a means of avoiding or mitigating catastrophes, equalizing prices, and providing for periods of want. It is true that the success of the strong induces imitation by the weak, and that incompetent persons bring themselves to ruin by undertaking to speculate in their turn.²

In this case, *Board of Trade v. Christie*, Supreme Court justices decided on what practices would count as legitimate financial speculation on commodity prices, and what would count as illegal gambling. As Holmes' words suggest, the commodity speculation fight was, more broadly, over what sorts of "prophecy" were to be deemed legitimate in the social, economic, and intellectual life of the United States, a country increasingly self-aware about its need for disciplined foresight to ensure economic flourishing. The Supreme Court was ruling not only over financial matters, but over who got to "forecast the future," and how. Questions of authoritative knowledge, professionalism, and expertise were implicit in Holmes' notion of the competence needed to provide a newly crucial service to society, its "self-adjustment...to the probable." This fight over the politics of the future, and who could be seen as a reliable prognosticator of its fortunes, hinted at larger changes in the American economy—in particular, the rise of risk capitalism and the need for methods for navigating uncertainty—that had been under way for decades.³ From the mid-19th to mid-20th century, the cast of characters "competent" to prophesize expanded to include actuarial scientists, commodity futures traders, and economic forecasters.

One of the most prominent American forecasters in the early twentieth century was the astrologer Evangeline Adams. From her office in New York City's Carnegie Hall she gave astrological readings to thousands, and reached over a million more through mail-order horoscopes, a radio show, newspaper columns, and books. Members of the highest order of the financial and cultural elite, including J.P. Morgan, looked to her advice.⁴ During her career,

² *Board of Trade of the City of Chicago v. Christie Grain and Stock Company*, 198 U.S. 236 (1905).

³ Jonathan Levy. *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 4-5.

⁴ Adams widely advertised the use of her services by prominent members of the worlds of finance and culture, as is apparent by her inclusion of the letter from a former president of the New York Stock Exchange in a promotional pamphlet from 1914. In some cases it is difficult to establish the credibility of her claims, but I have not found any contemporary sources that doubted that people like Morgan, two heads of the New York Stock Exchange, and Enrico Caruso used her services. In her autobiography, she gave detailed accounts of her interactions with some of these figures. In the case of Morgan in particular, journalistic accounts of Adams' practice repeated that the famed financier had used her services. Even a recent biography of Morgan by Ron Chernow repeated that he got

astrological practices were often classified as fortune telling, a pursuit banned by law in New York. To become as successful as she did, Adams had to convince clients and courts that her astrology was not fortune telling, and that it had scientific merits; in fact, these two classifications were intertwined. For Adams, advocating for the scientific nature of her practice was part of establishing in public that she had, in Holmes' language, the 'competence' to make judgments about the future's fortunes, and thus about how individuals and society should adjust to the probable. To accomplish this, Adams structured her astrological practice using norms she articulated as scientific, and fashioned herself and her practice in the model of the expert professional. In a 1914 case in which she was charged with fortune telling, her practice was validated when a magistrate found that she had "raised astrology to the dignity of an exact science," and that she was not a fortune teller.⁵ This classification of her discipline outside of the realm of fortune telling was bound up in complex ways with its classification as a science. To build the "the greatest astrological business in history," as the *New Yorker* called her practice in 1928, Adams had to command a certain level of intellectual, professional, and—yes—scientific authority, which was built in and mediated through courts, popular media, and the local sites of her practice and person.⁶

Adams' astrology complicates the picture that philosophers, sociologists, and historians of science have drawn about the demarcation between science and non-science. Philosophers of science searched for a standard by which to decide whether something counted as science. The most famous of these was Karl Popper's falsifiability criterion. Popper argued that a theory was scientific if it was falsifiable or refutable.⁷ This standard proved unhelpful for explaining the messiness of historical instances of science. For example, scientists have often disagreed about what counted as falsification for a given theory, and over whether supposed pieces of refutatory

astrological readings from Adams for years "on everything from politics to the stock market," but did not provide any primary or secondary source citation. See Ron Chernow, *The House of Morgan: An American Banking Dynasty and the Rise of Modern Finance* (New York: Grove/Atlantic, 1990), 51. When Walter Friedman contacted the Morgan Library inquiring about the connection, it "[acknowledged] no correspondence between the two and no notes in any date books," but pointed to the zodiacal design of the library itself that had been planned by Morgan. See Walter Friedman, *Fortune Tellers: The Story of America's First Economic Forecasters* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 217, note 1.

⁵ *The People ex rel. Adele D. Priess v. Evangeline S. Adams*, printed in Charles Mills (ed.), *The New York Criminal Reports*, vol. 32, (Albany: W.C. Little & Co., 1915), 326-345.

⁶ Alva Johnston, "Lady of the Stars," *New Yorker*, October 27, 1928, 29.

⁷ Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2002 [1963]), 44-47.

data constituted trustworthy evidence or flukes due to instrumental error.⁸ More recently, historians and sociologists have abandoned the project of discovering a transhistorical essence to science in order to analytically demarcate it from non-science. Instead, they have studied demarcation as a historical process enacted by practitioners to gain power and intellectual authority. The sociologist Thomas Gieryn defined “boundary-work” as the practical efforts scientists make to distinguish their practices from other intellectual activities.⁹ Gieryn highlighted the diversity of content and strategies of boundary-work, depending on local context and who and what was being disputed. The same scientists could at different times point to different and even contradictory aspects of their practice to promote it as science, depending on what they thought would successfully advance their professional interests to whom. This led Gieryn to conclude that “‘science’ is no single thing: characteristics attributed to science vary widely depending upon the specific intellectual or professional activity designated as ‘non-science,’ and upon particular goals of the boundary-work.”¹⁰

The story of Evangeline Adams presents historical examples of what Gieryn called boundary-work, but it also points to new possibilities suggested by his cartographic metaphor. Adams carved out territory for herself using courts and the media, transforming herself in the process from a fortune teller, whose practice was illegal, into a professional astrologer, who could comfortably read the stars for the stars in an office in Carnegie Hall. The question of scientific legitimacy was central to Adams’ quest for intellectual authority and professional legitimization. While the scientific status of Adams’s astrology was never uncontested, she *did* obtain enough of it to advance her professional interests. To the magistrate presiding over her trial, John Freschi, she gave astrology “the dignity of an exact science.” By contrast, to another observer of the case, hers was a “well-developed pseudoscience.”¹¹ Despite their seemingly opposite conclusions, both formulations point to the persistent middle ground that Adams opened up between science and non-science, a space that is often glossed over in discussions of demarcation. Gieryn did observe that science’s boundaries are “ambiguous, flexible, historically changing, contextually variable, internally inconsistent, and sometimes disputed,” thus

⁸ Michael D. Gordin, *The Pseudoscience Wars: Immanuel Velikovsky and the Birth of the Modern Fringe* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 7–8.

⁹ Thomas F. Gieryn, “Boundary-Work and the Demarcation of Science from Non-Science: Strains and Interests in Professional Ideologies of Scientists,” *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 6 (1983), 781.

¹⁰ Gieryn, “Boundary-Work,” 792.

¹¹ Blewett Lee, “The Fortune Teller,” *Virginia Law Review*, vol. 9, no. 4 (1923), 256.

suggesting that the strict science/non-science binary is only rhetorically enacted.¹² He recognized the blurriness of the boundaries between science and non-science, but highlighted the unstable, shifting nature of the liminal space. Adams carved out a territory for herself that was contestedly scientific, and yet at the same time *stable* and *powerful*. Her story points to the need to study the in-between—frontier, we could say—spaces between science and non-science not only as sites of contestation, but also as sites of durability and authority.¹³ Rather than boundaries, however ambiguous, between science and non-science, which still suggest an inevitable sorting out, we could speak of contested frontiers, where secure settlements can be established and persist.

Before moving to the tale of Adams' astronomical rise as a prominent judge of the future's fortunes, it is necessary to outline the economic, cultural, and intellectual context in which her practice developed. Changes in American capitalism summoned professionals who could speak with competence about the future, an exemplary case being the economic forecaster, which emerged around the same time as Adams' practice developed and flourished, in the first three decades of the twentieth century.¹⁴

As the historian of capitalism Jonathan Levy recently argued, over the course of the 19th century, and into the Gilded Age, radical uncertainty and risk became essential features of American capitalism, commodified in practices like life insurance, mortgage-backed securities, and commodity futures contracts.¹⁵ These changes constituted a redefinition of the very moral idea of selfhood. The self-ownership of the free liberal subject was no longer identified at the very least with his or her ability to sell his or her own labor power, but also to assume and manage personal financial risk.¹⁶ The institutions and practices—life insurance companies, commodity futures traders, and actuarial science—that facilitated the emergence of these new risky subjects, what came to be our contemporary corporate financial system, made up “the central nervous system of a rising capitalism that fed off radical uncertainty and ceaseless change.”¹⁷ In the midst of this uncertainty, new notions of expertise, including in the emerging fields of what would come to be classified in America as “social sciences,” were constructed.

¹² Gieryn, “Boundary-Work,” 792.

¹³ I thank Bill Rankin for the frontier metaphor.

¹⁴ Walter Friedman, *Fortune Tellers: The Story of America's First Economic Forecasters* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 1-5

¹⁵ Levy, *Freaks of Fortune*, 1.

¹⁶ Levy, *Freaks of Fortune*, 5-6.

¹⁷ Levy, *Freaks of Fortune*, 6.

Commodity futures traders, for example, “drew on the ‘scientific knowledge’ of professional economics and used it to create professional speculation,” to distinguish themselves from other commodity price speculators whose businesses they wanted to destroy; the use of established scientific authority allowed them to construct a position of “competence” that Holmes drew on in the decision, quoted above, that ultimately legitimated them.¹⁸

One of the most prominent examples of the competent prophet that emerged in the 20th century was the economic forecaster. Walter Friedman wrote that the rise of economic forecasting in America is in fact the story of “how fortune telling was professionalized.”¹⁹ Particularly following the Panic of 1907, economists began to speak of economic disasters not as chaotic, externally imposed events, but as components of regular fluctuations in “business cycles.”²⁰ Businesspeople, academics, politicians, and judges, Friedman argued, legitimated economic forecasting and “[embedded] the practice in every corner of business and government,” in part by creating “a distinction between the ‘respectable’ profession of scientific forecasting, on the one hand, and the practices of fortune telling and speculation, on the other hand.”²¹ Forecasters like the Yale economist Irving Fisher, who received the first PhD in Economics from that institution in 1891, circulated data analyses, charts, and models through private forecasting agencies, newsletters, and weekly newspaper bulletins, to convince the public that there were patterns in economic phenomena, and thus that they were predictable and worth taking chances on. It took what Gieryn called boundary-work to make it normal for the prophecies of the economists to be considered trustworthy.

Fisher, spoken of today by some of the foremost American economists in reverential terms as the prime mover of mathematical economics, was a prominent early practitioner of forecasting and a pioneer of economic indexes. Entrepreneurs, financiers, and politicians looked to the professor’s advice. He corresponded with American presidents about economics, and in 1927 even travelled to Italy to advise Benito Mussolini on monetary policy. The prominent economist’s predictions were not uncontested, including in the radical uncertainty of the aftermath of the 1929 stock market crash. Fisher corresponded with all sorts of people—

¹⁸ Ann Fabian, *Card Sharps, Dream Books, & Bucket Shops: Gambling in 19th-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 194.

¹⁹ Friedman, *Fortune Tellers*, 3. Not coincidentally, Friedman opens his book with an anecdote about Evangeline Adams, who was prosecuted for fortune telling.

²⁰ Friedman, *Fortune Tellers*, 2.

²¹ Friedman, *Fortune Tellers*, 4-5.

supporters and critics alike—from Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Ezra Pound, to the owner of a small electric welding business named Royal Mattice, a three-war veteran, who would become an avid supporter of Roosevelt and the “decapitation” of the stock-holding classes. In a scathing letter dated November 18, 1932, Mattice called Fisher a “false prophet.”²² In October, 1929, Fisher had infamously announced that the stock market had reached a permanently high plateau. Mattice denounced Fisher for having publicly (and wrongly) predicted the end of the economic downturn a further seven times. “Somebody should take out an injunction,” the angry, entrepreneurial engineer went on, “to keep you and Forbes from making a lot of wild statements.” The small business owner was concerned that, while entrepreneurs knew not to trust the forecasters’ predictions, the public, without the knowledge and experience that comes with owning a business, were vulnerable to deception of prophets who falsely advertised their competence. He questioned the good faith of forecasters like Fisher, wondering whether they engaged in their practice to profit from deception or for the good of the public. For Mattice, Fisher’s social position and lack of experience in the business world cut him off from the qualifications needed to be a competent and trustworthy forecaster of the future of economic conditions.

Many of the same concerns surrounded another preeminent forecaster of the time, the astrologer Evangeline Adams: questions of expertise and professionalism, the legitimacy of speaking about the future from a given social position in a certain style, and questions of good faith. Fisher and Adams were both at the top of their professions and fields and, in important ways, created them by carving out scientific territory for their practices.

‘To Be Forewarned is to Be Forearmed’: Adams’ Astrological Forecasting²³

In the same year that Mattice called Fisher a false prophet, Adams’ astrological practice in New York was flourishing like never before. In that year, which would mark her death, *Harper’s* called her the “most comfortably established American astrologer.”²⁴ Over a million people

²² Royal Mattice to Irving Fisher, November 18, 1932, Box 7, Folder 113, Irving Fisher Papers, Yale Manuscripts and Archives.

²³ Evangeline Adams, “Astrology and Palmistry” (pamphlet), 1900, 4.

²⁴ Travis Hoke, “The Heyday of the Fortune Tellers,” *Harper’s Monthly Magazine*, January 1, 1932, 237.

looked to her, as to Fisher, for advice on how to navigate the uncertainty of the rising chance-world, in Jonathan Levy's phrase, of American capitalism. She gave analyses to clients that guided them on investing, but also employment, romance, and other concerns of economic and social life. Her thrice-weekly WABC radio show reached more than 1.3 million listeners, and her business received 4,000 letters per day.²⁵ She had put out four books with Dodd, Mead, and Company, the American publisher for William James, Sigmund Freud, and Carl Jung. She printed a monthly "Forecast" of world conditions with a circulation of over 100,000. By the year of her death, she had given over a quarter of a million in-person readings to more than 100,000 clients from her tenth floor studio in Carnegie Hall, and her office had sent out many more mail-order personalized analyses, advertised through Forhan's toothpaste box tops.²⁶ While it is difficult to substantiate in all cases, it was widely believed and repeated that some of the most prominent members of the financial and cultural elite made up her clientele, including J.P. Morgan, Charles Schwab, two presidents of the New York Stock Exchange, the opera singers Lillian Nordica and Enrico Caruso, and the actress Tallulah Bankhead. Her income was reported to be \$50,000 per year.²⁷

It was not inevitable that Adams's practice would be said by a magistrate to have the "dignity of an exact science," nor that she would emerge as the most successful professional American astrologer of her time, nor even that "professional astrologer" would be something one could be successful at. By 1926, Adams could report in her autobiography that, with regard to astrology, a great "change in public opinion" had occurred "in something less than thirty years....To-day, the practice of Astrology by *competent Astrologers* is a respected, honorable profession. The law recognizes and protects it in many parts of the country as it does the practice of medicine. Prominent men and women come openly to my studio in Carnegie Hall. They consult the stars as naturally and confidently as they would consult a reference book at the Public Library."²⁸ By 1953, Theodor Adorno could comment on how many Americans took "astrology for granted, much like psychiatry, symphony concerts or political parties."²⁹ Even if it never

²⁵ Hoke, "The Heyday of the Fortune Tellers," 236; Orrin Dunlap, "Listening In," *New York Times*, January 11, 1931.

²⁶ Hoke, "The Heyday of the Fortune Tellers," 236; Johnston, "Lady of the Stars," 30.

²⁷ Johnston, "Lady of the Stars," 30; "Astrologer's Life Filled With Curious Happenings," *Reading Eagle*, November 18, 1932.

²⁸ Evangeline Adams, *The Bowl of Heaven* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1926), 32. Emphasis mine.

²⁹ Theodor Adorno, *The Stars Down to Earth and Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 49.

achieved the unambiguous scientific status that she hoped for, Adams was one of a number of important astrologers—perhaps the most important of the early twentieth century—who made astrology able to be taken for granted, like symphonies, political parties, weather forecasts or economic forecasts, and the work she did to carve out scientific space for astrology was crucial for that.

Born in 1868, Adams grew up in Andover, Massachusetts. She reported in her 1926 autobiography that a Boston University professor, who incorporated astrology into his medical practice, exposed her to the science of the stars. Through his astrological reading of her, he decided that she would make a good astrologer, and encouraged her to pursue the practice. She studied, began to give readings to her friends, and eventually opened up a small practice in the Hotel Copley in Boston, before moving to the bigger, more glamorous market of New York in 1899. In Boston, she also studied palmistry, something that she would practice until sometime after her high-profile prosecution in 1914.³⁰

Around the turn of the century, as Adams put it in her autobiography, astrology, “the oldest of the sciences,” had come to be held in “disrepute.”³¹ It was considered unscientific, and associated with “disorderly persons” and games of chance that were thought to be against the public interest. For some, astrology was simply an outdated version of astronomy. A representative formulation of this appeared in a 1919 legal review article about the relationship between the law and science: “Theories can be corrected. This is the way we have got our science: we have corrected astrology into astronomy, alchemy into chemistry, magic into medicine.”³² In this model, science progresses teleologically from outdated older forms to “corrected,” newer, generally accepted ones. Related to this belief in astrology as proto-astronomy, some argued that it was anachronistic because it presented no compelling explanation for the causal relationship between heavenly bodies and human lives. An 1887 British judge wrote in a decision for a case in which an astrologer was prosecuted for fortune telling, “it is absurd to suggest that this man could have believed in his ability to predict the fortunes of another by knowing the hour and place of his birth and the aspect of the stars at such time. We

³⁰ Adams, *Bowl of Heaven*, 19-37.

³¹ Adams, *Bowl of Heaven*, 32.

³² A.G. Keller, “Law in Evolution,” *Yale Law Journal*, vol. 28, no. 8 (1919), 771.

do not live in times when any sane man believes in such a power.”³³ For this judge, astrology was so disreputable that its status justified rejecting the defendant’s argument outright.

Astrology was identified according to dominant classifications of the natural sciences, but that was not the only context in which it was talked about and stigmatized. It was also associated with street performers, gambling, and games of chance. In 1921, for example, the *New York Times* reported on a sermon delivered by the Columbia sociologist Samuel Henry Prince, in which he declared the “religion of luck” “public enemy No. 1.” The spread of gambling and betting facilities was a sign of the “worship of the god of chance.” He painted the ethos of luck as having spread from “the bridge table,” “the golf course,” and the “circus midway” to the “religious, educational, commercial and political spheres of life.” Part and parcel with the “religion of luck” were “numerology, astrology, and tea-leaf prophecy,” which, he estimated, cost the American people \$125,000,000 per year.³⁴ Astrology was in a semantic field not just with alchemy and magic, but also with practices and pastimes thought to be counter to the public interest.

Arriving in New York, Adams began to look for a location for her business. On March 16, 1899, Adams approached the proprietor of the Fifth Avenue Hotel, which was between 23rd and 24th streets. He refused her: he did not want an astrological business on his premises. Adams, from her vantage point of success in 1926, chalked up this rejection, and the general anti-astrological sentiments in New York and Boston, to backward, ignorant, anti-scientific bias. “Provincial prejudice in supposedly broad-minded New York,” she wrote, exasperated in retrospect.³⁵

By the time of the publication of her autobiography in 1926, her practice was not uncontested, but its intellectual status was high enough to be reported in the media as something other than simple superstition. Trend pieces in the press, even if skeptical of astrological practices, corroborated Adams’ conception of its meteoric rise. A 1932 article in *Harper’s* wrote that “fortune tellers”—particularly astrologers—“are flourishing as never before in generations.” The article pointed out that the trend was not the result of the economic depression—it had been emerging for over ten years—and highlighted Adams as one of the main practitioners responsible for its increased popularity. Crucially, what made the trend notable to *Harper’s* were

³³ James Kirby (ed.), *The Legal News*, vol. 10, no. 32 (1887), 249.

³⁴ “Dr. Prince Attacks ‘Religion of Luck,’” *New York Times*, July 30, 1934, 14.

³⁵ Adams, *Bowl of Heaven*, 32.

the social class and education level of the people using astrology: “If it appeared only among the humble and unlettered,” the article went on, “it would show nothing more than the tenacity of superstition.” But rather, because “in a literate day, the converts include such supposedly intelligent people as bankers, Cabinet officers, and Governors of States,” “the phenomenon grows extraordinary enough to warrant examination.”³⁶ Who subscribed to the practice was important for its consideration for intellectual recognition in the press.

In her promotional materials, she aimed to counter both negative opinions of astrology: that it was unscientific, and that it was an idle indulgence counter to the public interest. Adams argued for the scientific status of astrology by articulating a causal mechanism between the heavenly bodies and human life based on developments in astronomy, chemistry and physics. An early pamphlet from 1900 distributed by Adams described her “scientific astrology,” citing innovations in the application of photography to astronomy that revealed the chemical composition of stars. She hypothesized that the connection between light and chemistry might explain the physical effect of the celestial objects on humans at birth: “Changes of the electric and magnetic interaction of the planetary bodies are due to certain angular distances formed between them in respect to a common center, and that there is a special vibratory action set up between planetary bodies at certain geometrical angles is beyond dispute, vibratory waves having been found either constructive or destructive to cell life according to the angle of transmission.”³⁷ In a pamphlet published following her 1914 court case, she would develop this model in terms of variations of vibrations of atoms due to the number of electrons occupying them. Spectroscopic analysis had revealed the varying chemical compositions of the planets, thus accounting for their differential effects on human lives.³⁸

For Adams, articulating a model of causation for astrology distinguished it from the “vagaries of horoscopic pretenders wholly unqualified to practice the art.”³⁹ The conflation of the latter with her practice was the result of “ignorance” and “prejudice” which she aimed to correct. Adams’ promotional materials worked to distinguish her practice from others that sullied its reputation. Beyond the specifics of the causal mechanism, Adams pointed to more general qualities of her work that marked it as scientific. Adams argued that her astrology was a science

³⁶ Hoke, “The Heyday of the Fortune Tellers,” 236.

³⁷ Evangeline Adams, “Astrology and Palmistry” (pamphlet), 3.

³⁸ Evangeline Adams, “The Law and Astrology” (pamphlet) (New York: The Schulte Press, 1914), 7.

³⁹ Evangeline Adams, “Astrology and Palmistry” (pamphlet), 1900, 1.

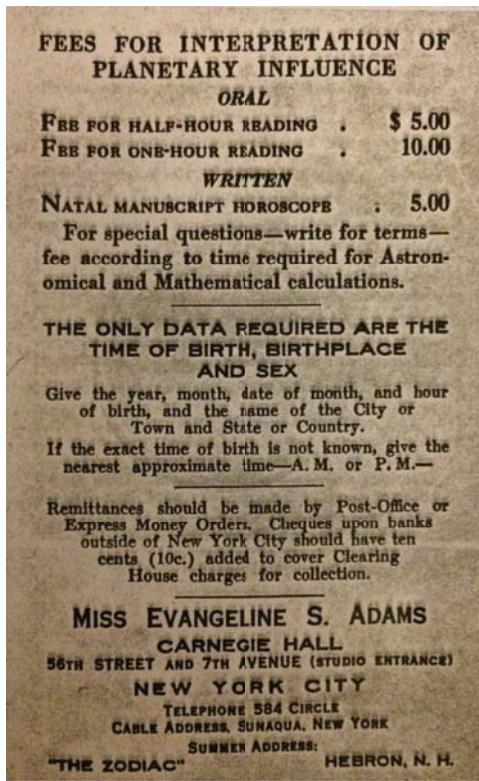


Figure 2: A promotional pamphlet from 1914 outlines the data needed to conduct a forecast for a client. The cost of her services is linked to the "time required for Astronomical and Mathematical calculations." The fee for an in-person consultation would rise to \$50 by the end of her career. Evangeline Adams, "Law and Astrology" (pamphlet), 1914, back cover.

by saying that it was based on "geometrical principles and mathematical law" and "verified by" "long and patient observations," and that it required "the highest education for its full understanding."⁴⁰ She also charged that astrology being not generally accepted did not constitute its refutation: "the *abuse* of anything is no argument against its *use* or *truth*."⁴¹ She claimed scientific territory for her practice not by arguing for its general acceptance, but through its methods and lack of positive refutation.

In articulating her astrology's scientific status, Adams also aimed to distinguish it from the semantic field of gambling and games of chance by articulating its usefulness to the public. Adams distanced her practice from—opposed it to—the capricious idea of "luck" with which it was associated, as Samuel Prince's sermon would later suggest. As she put it in 1914, her astrology was an "applied science," under whose guidance "living becomes a science in control of the human being instead of blind luck of which he is frequently victim."⁴² For her, her astrology was not part of the world of luck and games of chance; it was a method for taming chance and dissolving luck. According to her model, the influences of heavenly bodies gave

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1-2.

⁴¹ Ibid., 2.

⁴² Evangeline Adams, "The Law and Astrology" (pamphlet), 1914, 3.

“inherited tendencies” and “natural proclivities” to human beings, knowledge of which could let them better pursue their “enlightened self-interest.”⁴³ Adams’ astrology was a means of detecting probable outcomes and tendencies in human life, in order to account for them and flourish. “It behooves all thoughtful and prudent people,” she concluded, “to make provision for the future, and especially those who have others dependent upon them.”⁴⁴ In particular, she highlighted how astrology could help determine whether an individual would be successful at speculation, that it made for “efficiency,” and pointed to its use by bankers and brokers, and even by “fidelity companies” and “insurance companies” for selecting employees.⁴⁵ She included in her promotional materials what she claimed to be a letter from the former president of the New York Stock Exchange, who asked for a personal forecast for some months in 1908, calling her previous judgments for him “singularly correct.”⁴⁶ Adams was forecasting in and for the institutionalizing chance-world of capitalism.

A representative example of Adams’ analysis of astrological conditions was reported in the *Hartford Courant* under the headline “Noted Astrologist Blames Saturn for Business Depression.”⁴⁷ The newspaper picked up a segment from Adams’ radio show, in which she told her audience that cosmic conditions were more favorable for the nativity of the United States than they had been in months, arguing that it was likely that relief to the unemployed and homeless would be implemented successfully. That said, she added that “depressing Saturn and the upsetting Uranus are still afflicting the horoscope of the United States,” and that total recovery would be unlikely before these forces went away. “We should all take these astrological facts into consideration and take courage from them,” she added. There were external forces at work, and Adams was helping the American society adjust to the probable. She argued that, due to the unfavorable forces, consumers were not spending, which made the continuation of the Depression a self-fulfilling prophecy—a now-familiar argument for increasing consumer demand to invigorate business activity. “That is the best way,” she told Americans, “to solve the unemployment problem, to restore business confidence, to make this Christmas month a season of real happiness on earth.” Using her astrological analysis, in a sort of celestial proto-Fireside

⁴³ Ibid., 3; Evangeline Adams, *Astrology: Your Place Among the Stars* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1931), vi.

⁴³ “Noted Astrologist Blames Saturn for Business Depression,” *Hartford Courant*, December 7, 1930, E10.

⁴⁴ Evangeline Adams, “Astrology and Palmistry” (pamphlet), 1914, 4.

⁴⁵ Adams, “The Law and Astrology,” 4-5.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁷ “Noted Astrologist Blames Saturn for Business Depression,” *Hartford Courant*, December 7, 1930, E10.

Chat, she attempted to encourage consumers to spend, despite the likelihood that economic conditions would seem bad to them for a while. Her astrology disentangled for listeners what she saw as immediately contingent and controllable from what was beyond human agency. Without this distinction, consumers were losing all hope and belief in their control of any aspect of economic conditions, leading to further turmoil. As Adams put it in that article, “Astrology’s job is to point out the pitfalls. Man’s job is to go round them. Astrology’s job is also to point out the opportunities. Man’s job is to go to them.” In a society growing accustomed to economic forecasting, financial advising, and other means of navigating uncertainty, Adams provided services outlining the field of the possible and probable, in order for individuals to maximize life outcomes, and even for society to mitigate catastrophic economic conditions.

To understand how Adams achieved the status where her astrological analysis of the Depression could be reported as news, we must examine the social position of astrology in the early 20th century in America. This requires reviewing the legal history of fortune telling, which reflected and deeply influenced its uncertain status. Adams successfully defended herself against a charge of fortune telling, which was made illegal under a law intended to control different sorts of “disorderly persons,” including men who deserted their wives, pimps, and street performers. Adams’ astrology’s declassification in a court of law as fortune telling was bound up with its partial, contested classification as a science.

Witness to the Stars: Fortune Telling, Astrology, and the Law

“Fortune telling” has been a legal category at least since the sixteenth century, whose contours have been defined and policed in courts. Embedded in it were ideas about authoritative knowledge, magic, and prediction, but also xenophobia and classism. There is a direct genealogy from British anti-vagrancy laws to the “disorderly persons” statute through which Adams was prosecuted. What counted as fortune telling was not just determined by epistemological questions; they were bound up with social and legal history. These lineages had profound effects on the American law that would be used to prosecute Adams.

Anti-fortune telling statutes originate in acts dealing with vagrancy, which extend back to the sixteenth century. The 1530 Vagabonds Act required permits for beggars, which would only

be issued to the elderly and non-able-bodied. Included explicitly under the group of unsanctioned vagabonds were ‘scholars’ who went begging, “some of them using subtle, crafty, and unlawful games and plays, and some of them feigning to have knowledge of physic, physiognomy, palmistry, or other crafty science, whereby they bear the people in hand that they can tell their destinies, deceases, and fortunes, and such other like fantastical imaginations, to the deceit of the King’s subjects.”⁴⁸ Fortune telling was introduced into the legal code as a practice of economically dependent scholars, the authority of whose advice was called into question in the context of their attempts to support themselves. In the same year, an act was passed concerning “people calling themselves Egyptians,” i.e., the Romani people, who would for centuries be known as ‘gypsies.’⁴⁹ This was an anti-immigrant law that enacted the seizure of property and exile of this people, who were identified as going “from shire to shire,” using “crafty means to deceive people,” including palmistry to tell fortunes and thereby extract money. The association between Romani stereotypes and fortune telling persists to this day. In a promotional pamphlet aimed to articulate the scientific status of her practice, Adams explicitly distanced herself from the “meaningless jargon of the itinerant gypsy fortune teller.”⁵⁰ The history of “fortune telling” cannot be separated from its identification by those in power with people of deviant social positions, through which the former controlled the latter.

It was under the 1824 Vagrancy Act that many practitioners of astrology were prosecuted in 19th century England. The act classified as “Rogues and Vagabonds” those “pretending or professing to tell Fortunes, or using any subtle Craft, Means, or Device, by Palmistry or otherwise, to deceive and impose on any of His Majesty’s Subjects.”⁵¹ These cases set precedents that were cited in opinions in American cases and in reviews of fortune telling law in legal journals.⁵²

Around this time, polemics were circulating against the practice of astrology, classifying it as fortune telling. Astrology’s popularity had been rising among the urban middle classes in

⁴⁸ E.P. Hewitt, “The Witchcraft and Vagrancy Acts,” *The Solicitor’s Journal and Weekly Reporter*, vol. 71, July 23, 1927, 595.

⁴⁹ Danby Pickering, *The Statutes at Large from the First Year of King Richard III to the Thirty-first Year of King Henry VIII, inclusive*, vol. IV (Cambridge: Joseph Bentham, 1763). 205-206.

⁵⁰ Adams, “Astrology and Palmistry” (pamphlet), 1.

⁵¹ Vagrancy Act 1824 (5 Geo. 4. c. 83), accessed March 30, 2014:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo4/5/83/contents>.

⁵² Hewitt, “The Witchcraft and Vagrancy Acts,” 595-597.

England since its decline in prominence there in the late 17th century.⁵³ A Christian moralist in 1838 attacked astrology as a “system of imposture,” citing the Bible’s restriction on magic and divination. An 1844 conviction of an astrologer from Manchester under the Vagrancy Act prompted the prominent astrologer Zadkiel, whose works Evangeline Adams owned, to organize the “British Association for the Advancement of Astral Science &c., and the Protection of Astrologers,” which advertised 107 members by 1845.⁵⁴ Astrologers recognized the need to gain scientific and professional recognition for their practice, or face the law.

Adams was influenced by mid-to-late 19th century British astrologers like Raphael, A.J. Pearce, Sepharial, and Alan Leo, who were confronted with the classification of their practice as fortune telling. Their works lined her shelves.⁵⁵ This period saw the rise of the urban middle class occultists, who tried to carve out a position of respectability for astrology by articulating it as a science. Especially toward the end of the 19th century, the astrologers among them rejected the “wand,” “robe,” and “mystic lore” associated with the practice, as one contemporary observed, and built bustling businesses from which they consulted with clients, published textbooks, and made annual almanacs that sold tens of thousands of copies per year.⁵⁶ A.J. Pearce in particular was a precursor to Adams’ astrological self-presentation. The son of a doctor, Pearce assisted his father by drawing up horoscopes that supplemented medical diagnosis. Pearce wrote textbooks and almanacs, and crusaded throughout his career for the public acceptance of astrology as an “applied mathematical science,” distinguishing it from “magic and spiritualism.”⁵⁷ Another astrologer whose works were in her library, Sepharial, similarly wrote that “the sooner we bring the science [of astrology] down from the clouds where the would-be esotericists have incontinently harried it, the sooner will it gain a proper recognition in the practical world.”⁵⁸ For these astrologers, classifying astrology as a science was crucial to its future success. The danger of the anti-fortune telling statute of the Vagrancy Act was a central motivating factor in the astrologers’ drive to demarcate their practice as a science.

The 1887 case *Penny v. Hanson* (1887) was a high-profile prosecution of an astrologer that would be cited in many subsequent cases of similar content. The practitioner, known as

⁵³ Curry, *A Confusion of Prophets*, 10-12.

⁵⁴ Curry, *A Confusion of Prophets*, 63-64.

⁵⁵ Catalog of the Norm Winski Astrological Library. Mr. Winski purchased Adams’ personal library, and generously shared with me a catalog of the works she owned.

⁵⁶ Curry, *A Confusion of Prophets*, 11-12.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 110-11.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 127.

Neptune the Astrologer, was contacted by a detective, who had seen one of the astrologer's advertisements in a newspaper. Neptune replied to the detective with "a circular setting forth his views of astrology as a science, and stating that by the position of the planets in the nativity and their aspects toward each other, he was able to tell any applicant's fortune in the various events of life in return for certain remuneration."⁵⁹ The astrologer was convicted of pretending to tell fortunes and appealed. Given the words "pretending" and "deceive" in the wording of the law, there was a question of whether intention to deceive was necessary for conviction, and how good faith might be established in court. In this case, there was no evidence put forth as to the astrologer's belief, or lack thereof, in his practice. The justice cited *res ipsa loquitur* ("the matter itself speaks"), the common law doctrine of criminal negligence, writing that it was "absurd" for anyone to believe in the causal relationship between the heavenly bodies and human life.⁶⁰ Thus, the judge's opinion of the scientific status of astrology nullified the legal question of the good faith of the practitioner raised by the wording of the law. Another legal review argued that the justice's words "mark the fall of an old belief. It is certain that two centuries ago, men of first rate ability believed that fortunes could be foretold from the aspect of the stars. We may even doubt whether his lordship's enlightenment does not mislead him as to the average condition of modern belief....From a theoretical point of view, Mr. Penny might have a good deal to say for himself; practically, it is no doubt desirable that Neptune the Astrologer and the like should be treated as the rogues which they are generally found to be by their dupes."⁶¹ This observer was aware of both the consensus argument—"the average condition of modern belief"—and the "refutation" argument—that the astrologer may have "a good deal to say for himself" "from a theoretical point of view" independent of consensus. Conceding these two points, he *still* argued that the decision marked "the fall of an old belief," highlighting the practical point that the astrologer's practice worked against the public good, even if it was trusted in by many and supported by a potentially strong theoretical framework. The law was one site of the regulation of the scientific and intellectual authority of astrology, and its demarcation of science from non-science cannot be mapped onto any simple criterion. Astrology occupied a space where "theoretical" arguments could still be anticipated as strong in a legal journal, even if the judge himself dismissed its scientific authority outright. Its association with roguishness could

⁵⁹ "Fortune-Telling," *Albany Law Journal*, vol. 44 (1891), 45.

⁶⁰ Kirby, *The Legal News*, vol. 10, no. 32 (1887), 249.

⁶¹ Quoted in *ibid*.

contribute to its disrepute as much as a lack of belief in its causal mechanism.

The anti-fortune-telling clause of the 1824 Vagrancy Act was the basis for the New York statute under which Evangeline Adams was charged.⁶² She and a number of other practitioners considered to be telling fortunes in the state of New York were charged under Section 899 of the New York Code of Criminal Procedure, which classified as “disorderly persons,” to name a few, individuals who abandoned their wives or children and left them a burden on the public; “persons pretending to tell fortunes, or where lost or stolen goods may be found;” keepers of “bawdy houses;” those who had no visible profession but sustain themselves through gaming; and “jugglers, common showmen, mountebanks, who exhibit or perform for profit puppet shows, wire or rope dancers, or other idle shows, acts or feats.”⁶³ Under this law, Adams became the victim of entrapment in 1914. A New York Police Department detective named Adele Preiss had visited Adams at her office in Carnegie Hall, and asked for a reading. The detective had her prosecuted under the “pretending to tell fortunes” clause of the “disorderly persons” statute. This was not the first time Adams had been charged with fortune telling. She did not report the year of her first brush with the law in her autobiography, but wrote that, while this first case was immediately thrown out of court, it had a profound effect on her. After that experience, she settled on three goals for her life: to take care of her mother, to make herself the most prominent astrologer in America, and to legalize astrology in New York.⁶⁴

So when she was confronted with the law again in 1914, she hired a prominent criminal defense attorney, Clark L. Jordan, who had defended a Tammany Hall politician against charges of conspiring to violate election law in a high-profile case in 1910.⁶⁵ She ordered him not to get the case thrown out, but to have it tried thoroughly, so that a decision affirming her practice could be entered into case law. “In those days,” Adams wrote, “astrology had no legal standing in the great state of New York. It ranked with fortune telling, palm reading, and other much abused experiments with the occult; and its exponents were open to arrest and prosecution.”⁶⁶ In a twenty-page decision, the city magistrate, John Freschi, ruled that Adams had not violated the statute. Her astrological practice was officially classified outside of the realm of fortune telling.

⁶² E.J. Dimock, *Reports of Selected Cases Decided in Courts of the State of New York Other than the Court of Appeals and the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court*, vol. 185 (Albany: William Press, 1945), 875.

⁶³ *The Code of Criminal Procedure of the State of New York*, (Albany: Weed, Parsons, and Company, 1881), 219-220.

⁶⁴ Adams, *Bowl of Heaven*, 57.

⁶⁵ “Feeling Runs High at Williams Trial,” *New York Times*, May 14, 1910, 6.

⁶⁶ Adams, *Bowl*, 54.

The testimony of the trial highlights a number of the strategies that Adams used to turn herself from a “fortune teller” into a professional astrologer, laying the groundwork for her to become, even by 1921, “leading exponent of astrology in this country,” according to an article from *The American Magazine* in that year.⁶⁷ The defense’s arguments and the magistrate’s decision dramatize how Adams carved out a provisional space of scientific authority for her practice. The scientific status of Adams’ astrology was central to her arguments, and to the magistrate’s deciding that it was not fortune telling.

In his decision, Magistrate Freschi framed the case by saying that it turned on the meaning of “pretending to tell fortunes,” and whether Adams’ practice fell under that phrase’s purview. The judge ultimately found that “a prophecy of future events involving a negative or affirmative deception by a person professing to tell fortunes constitutes a violation of Section 889 Code of Criminal Procedure,” but if someone “prepares a [sic] astrological horoscope of one applying therefor and gives the relative position of planets at the time of her birth basing the horoscope on the well known and fixed science of astronomy it is not a violation of law.”⁶⁸ Adams’ astrological analysis did not count as fortune telling because, in the magistrate’s view, it based its method on a “well known and fixed science,” astronomy, but also, as Freschi would later go on to say, because it had the workings and presentation of a science in itself.

The defense argued that Adams did not pretend to or claim actually to reveal particular future events. As her attorney put it, “all that occurred was an attempt on [Adams’] part to explain the positions of the planets and read their individuations without any assurance by the defendant that such reading was a prognostication of future events.”⁶⁹ To substantiate this argument, they attempted to articulate the scientific status of the practice by highlighting its repeatability, verifiability, its community of scholars, its causal model, and other norms that they thought made Adams a competent analyst of present conditions to guide future action.

The reasoning that Adams and her lawyer used drew on the logic of the pamphlet she published in 1900 that described her “scientific astrology.” The defense argued that Adams’ practice was procedurally determined by the laws of astronomy, itself recognized as a legitimate and “fixed” scientific domain. The magistrate was convinced that “in the reading of the

⁶⁷ Allison Gray, “People Who Try to Get ‘Tips’ from the Stars,” *The American Magazine*, December, 1921, 34.

⁶⁸ *The People ex rel. Adele D. Priess v. Evangeline S. Adams* (hereafter *People v. Adams*), printed in Charles Mills (ed.), *The New York Criminal Reports*, vol. 32, (Albany: W.C. Little & Co., 1915), 326.

⁶⁹ *People v. Adams*, 338.

horoscope the defendant went through an absolutely mechanical, mathematical process to get at her conclusions. She claimed that astrology never makes a mistake and that if the figures are correct, the information given is correct.”⁷⁰ The replicability of her practice was crucial to her argument. As Magistrate Freschi wrote, “her chart here, as made out, may be verified, as she states, by those who may be disputatious on the subject of its accuracy in the books and records of astronomers for years.”⁷¹ Adams made claims to the mathematical objectivity, highlighted by the accepted regularity of the rotations of the heavenly bodies. She was simply a modest witness to the revolutions of the stars.⁷²

Mathematical rigor was crucial to the defense’s characterization of Adams’ astrology, but did not exhaust its argument for the discipline’s scientific status. In his brief to the magistrate, Adams’ counsel wrote that astrology

is the science which describes the influence of the heavenly bodies upon mundane affairs and upon human character and life. It is a mathematical or exact science as it is based upon astronomy which describes the heavenly bodies and explains their motions, etc. It is an applied science in that it takes the established principles of astronomy as its guide in delineating human character, and all its judgments are based on mathematic calculations. It is an empirical science, because its deductions are based upon accurate data that have been gathered for thousands of years. Astrology is the oldest science in existence. It is not only pre-historic but pre-traditional, and must not be classed with fortune telling, or any of the many forms of demonology as practiced in ancient and modern times. Astrology is the science of the effects of the Solar Currents, on the living things of our earth, especially on human life. The earth in revolving around the sun passes through twelve different currents of Solar Fluid which also have twelve distinct parts, thus causing the great diversity in human life.⁷³

Adams’ attorney went on to cite the *Encyclopedia Britannica* article on astrology, calling the reference a “leading authority of the world.” He quotes (loosely) the Britannica article, which itself talked about how “men of intellectual eminence” still thought that astrology had a “foundation of truth,” referencing a Dr. Garnet who argued that “it was a mistake to confuse astrology with fortune-telling, and maintained that it was a physical science just as much as geology depending on ascertained facts, and grossly misrepresented by being connected with magic.”⁷⁴ The defense used dominant ideas about the classification of the natural sciences—it

⁷⁰ *People v. Adams*, 339.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 343.

⁷² Simon Schaffer and Steven Shapin describe the literary techniques Robert Boyle used to construct an image of modesty for himself, in order to convince his audience that he was a reliable witness to his experiments. See Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 65-69. Donna Haraway added to their conception of the modest witness by showing how the figure of this seemingly neutral, ‘self-invisible’ knower was in fact constituted as European and male. See Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Modest.Witness@Second.Millennium.FemaleMan.Meets.OncoMouse: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 23-39.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 339-340.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 340.

explained how Adams' astrology was at once "exact," "applied," and "empirical"—along with the intellectual authority of the *Britannica* and the explanation of a causal mechanism uniting the heavenly bodies with human lives (the "Solar Currents") to make the case that Adams' astrological practice was a science. For the lawyer, astrology was a science because of its basis in mathematical calculations, the "established principles of astronomy," reliable data, a historic tradition, and a theoretical framework that established a causal mechanism. The defense took for granted that its classification as a science removed it from the category of fortune telling.

The magistrate was largely convinced by the argument of the defense that astrology could be called a science. In describing how Adams drew up her charts, Freschi wrote that "the defendant raises astrology to the dignity of an exact science—one of vibration, and she claims that all the planets represent different forces of the universe." As the magistrate understood it, the 'science' of astrology seems to be the generalization of certain principles gathered from the concrete phenomena presented by the heavenly bodies and their application to mundane affairs. Those who work with it have a form of tables and a co-ordination of instances upon which they act and create their axioms, and one must be led to believe that there is considerable force in their arguments. In this, as in all new theories and discoveries, so in the field of endeavor and thought, there are to be found those who hesitate and doubt until a masterly has fixed it in the minds of the majority, as a science. Whether minds are prepossessed or limited, the sincerity of the defendant's determination upon the opinion of her work from her own perceptions and a study of authorities cannot be questioned. She certainly does seem to have a thorough knowledge of the subject. And in this, she claims no faculty of foretelling by supernatural or magical means that which is future, or of discovering that which is hidden or obscure; but she does claim that nature is to be interpreted by the influences that surround it.⁷⁵

For Freschi, the scientific dignity of Adams' astrology arose from its attempt to generalize principles from "concrete phenomena" using "tables" and "axioms." This process gave "considerable force" to Adams' argument. The magistrate did not claim that astrology was a "fixed" science in the way that astronomy was. He recognized that there was still hesitation or doubt—it did not have consensus of the majority—but this did not preclude it from being deemed to have the "dignity of an exact science" in a court of law. In fact, "all new theories or discoveries" went through this phase.⁷⁶ Freschi added that the lack of "supernatural" or

⁷⁵ Ibid., 340-341.

⁷⁶ This decision comes nine years before the institution of the "Frye Standard," which held that expert witnesses were admissible in cases where the matter under consideration requires special knowledge to evaluate, and thus is unlikely to be able to be judged competently by a layperson, and that where specialized techniques are presented as evidence in court, they must have "gained general acceptance in the particular field in which it belongs." The opinion that formalized the rule, *Frye v. United States* 293 F. 1013 (D.C. Cir 1923), was specifically concerned with the admissibility of lie-detector tests as evidence in a trial, but it was interpreted to cover all instances of scientific evidence. More research is needed to decide whether prosecutors attempted to use this new standard to convict astrologers of fortune telling by bringing expert witness astronomers into court, and how the very scientific and relevant status of expert witnesses was determined: would only an astronomer be admitted, or only an astrologer, or both? What happens when there is disputed territory between communities. The decision also

“magical” elements claimed in the practice bolstered its plausibility as a science. Adams’ presentation of her learning in the subject of astrology signaled her good faith in the practice, and this was recognized from her own testimony. The magistrate also suggested that he compared what Adams said to astrological authorities, thus acknowledging that there were precedents, norms, and a community of practitioners who could command intellectual authority. Again, Freschi held that this community ascribed to a ““science”—in scare quotes to acknowledge its provisional status. Moreover, for the magistrate, Adams *seemed competent*. She seemed to have “thorough knowledge of the subject” that was legible to Freschi as such, as knowledge. Astrology here is a provisionally ‘unfixed’ science: it may have been contested, but so were all theories that won out in the end at some time. It occupied a middle ground on the frontier between science and non-science. For the magistrate, it was not yet a fully fixed science like astronomy, but it had its dignity.

There were other elements in the case that led the magistrate to find Adams to be a competent practitioner of an unfixed science. In the text of the decision, professionalism and expertise were not just attested to by mathematical process. Just as important to Adams’ practice was *who* she was, and *how* she presented herself. Thus appearance, persona, and education could be mobilized as evidence in the trial, and these were inextricable from the judgment of astrology’s provisional scientific status. In his decision, Freschi wrote that “there is no claim here that the defendant was garbed in special garments or that there was any air of mysticism about the place; it was a simple apartment with library furniture without signs of any kind in or about the studio, except to indicate that it was the office of the defendant.”⁷⁷ Adams and her practice appeared competent: she followed norms associated with office professionalism. Class-inflected visual and social cues could be marshaled in a court of law to establish credibility. Later, the magistrate wrote that “the defendant has given ample proof that she is a woman of learning and

highlighted the difficulty of deciding when something is solidly scientific or generally accepted: “Just when a scientific principle or discovery crosses the line between the experimental and demonstrable stages is difficult to define. Somewhere in this twilight zone the evidential force of the principle must be recognized.” The decision did not propose a test for deciding where that “somewhere” is.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 339.

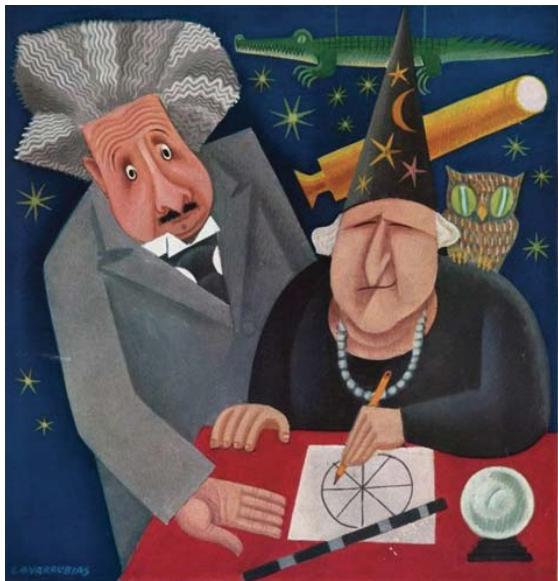


Figure 3: An "impossible interview" between Adams and Albert Einstein. When Adams was presented as the antithesis of science, she was depicted with the stereotypical cap and crystal ball of the fortune teller, which in her actual practice she eschewed. "Impossible interviews—no. 2," *Vanity Fair*, January, 1932.

culture, and one who is very well versed in astronomy and other sciences."⁷⁸ The specific professional type that Adams was fit into included certain scholarly norms. Several "works on modern astrology" were submitted as evidence in the case, and it is highlighted that Adams did "research work" in astrology before becoming a practitioner. Of the works presented, Magistrate Freschi noted that "in particular one claimed to be among the best authorities on astrology written by Richard Garnet, who has correlated many instances in which people have gone insane or met with accidental death."⁷⁹ As Adams put it in her autobiography, "I had gone into that court room with a pile of reference books that reached nearly to the ceiling and a mass of evidence that reached as far back as the Babylonian seers."⁸⁰ To argue her case, Adams used culturally available norms about the importance of communities of scholars to the legitimacy of knowledge.

For Freschi, the goal of the statute was to protect the public interest. As he wrote, "it is really a certain degree of quackery practiced to the detriment of the community, in general, that is made unlawful by this statute....The plain object of the statute here is to protect the fool and the credulously weak from the knavery of those who claim wisdom and who resort to trickery

⁷⁸ Ibid., 343.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 339.

⁸⁰ Adams, *Bowl of Heaven*, 58.

and every device known to cunning as a means of gain in some form.”⁸¹ Freschi could accept an argument from good faith only because he was convinced that Adams was not an exploitative ‘quack’ or ‘knave.’ These categories were inextricable from her presentation of her practice and herself as dignified intellectually and socially. Definitively, the magistrate stated that

every fortune-teller is a violator of the law; but every astrologer is not a fortune-teller. I believe that there is a line of distinction between the person who pretends to be able to read the future and tell with positiveness what will or shall happen; and the one who merely reads a sign as indicating what ought to happen but is particular to make it plain that he is not attempting to predict future events. The former is a charlatan, an oppressor and an imposter; the latter is surely not a fortune-teller as he is commonly understood.⁸²

Ultimately, Freschi wrote that the decision turned on the fact that, in the judge’s opinion, Adams had not made a positive prediction about the future. But Adams had to get Freschi to recognize her as a legitimate professional expert before she could prove to him that she had not made a positive prediction about the future.

At the end of the decision, the magistrate intimated that at stake in his decision was the very health of the apparatus of knowledge production, cautioning against litigating against contested disciplines of knowledge:

No doubt many many-years ago for anyone to have attempted to say that the conformation of the head of that the physiognomy of a creature determined the character of the individual and that such and such a type would some day turn out to be a criminal would have been guilty of fortune telling. But the history of specific cases has furnished us with a working basis, for these new theories that nowadays seem to be accepted by noted criminologists and the public in general. So it is claimed here in behalf of the defendant that records prove that certain personages of note classed under certain planets in the ascendancy of the time of their birth have come to death in a certain way and that therefore all others born in similar conditions should meet the same fate.⁸³

For physiognomy or astrology to be recognized as a “new theory” in a court of law and thus, warrant protection from prosecution, they had to be *recognized* as such: they had to be made legible as dignified systems of scientific inquiry. The magistrate appealed to the existence of a provisional scientific status of a theory and practice before general acceptance both by relevant scientific authorities (“criminologists”) *and* “the public in general.” Since a wide range of scientific practices end up making predictions, Freschi pointed out that many sciences could have been classified as fortune telling, and thus illegalized. He argued for restraint in the case of Adams’ astrology because he was convinced that it *was* legible as a science (it had the dignity of an exact one), even if it had not yet been generally accepted, as had been the case for all “new

⁸¹ *People v. Adams*, 342-343.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 343.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 344-345.

theories” in their infancy. Adams’ astrology never achieved the fixed status of an exact science, but maintaining the position of its unfixed and yet dignified status, it dramatically expanded its reach to over a million Americans, adding a popular radio show, a *Washington Post* column, and a mail-order horoscope advertised through toothpaste boxes, over the next two decades.

The ruling in the Adams case was received in different ways. The *American Law Review* simply reported in a headline that “An Astrologer is Not a ‘Fortune Teller,’” providing quotations from the decision.⁸⁴ Adams herself argued that through this case she had legalized astrology in New York and gained professional recognition. In her autobiography, she wrote that, as the result of the case, “the law recognizes and protects it in many parts of the country as it does the practice of medicine.”⁸⁵ To consolidate the legitimacy she gained from the decision, Adams quickly published a pamphlet in 1914 entitled “Astrology and the Law.” It stated on its cover that “the scientific practice of astrology” had been “upheld by the New York Courts,” and contained summaries of her defense and excerpts from the magistrate’s decision.⁸⁶

Other astrologers repeated the contention that the *Adams* decision had constituted a legalization of astrology. In a 1962 *New Yorker* profile of the Astrologers’ Guild of America, which was started by Adams in 1927, the Guild’s vice president said that “Miss Adams legalized astrology in New York.”⁸⁷ On the other hand, a 1923 review article on fortune telling law summarized the case thus: “an astrologer was so guarded in her representations and frank in her performance that the judge held she was not telling fortunes,” calling astrology a “well-developed pseudoscience.”⁸⁸ While this observer was skeptical of the scientific status of astrology, he was sensitive to its “well-developed” appearance, mirroring the “dignity” that the magistrate attributed to it. For the skeptic, Adams’ performance was deceptively “guarded,” but his attribution of the advanced development of the “pseudoscience” only further corroborated the difficulty to classify Adams’ astrology as science or non-science at that time.

The legacy of the decision was tested a number of times by the police and in courts. In 1923, Adams was again charged with fortune telling, but the case was quickly dropped. According to a 1928 *New Yorker* profile, by 1923 “Miss Adams was a public institution.

⁸⁴ “An Astrologer is Not a Fortune Teller,” *American Law Review*, vol. 49, no. 4 (1915), 614.

⁸⁵ Adams, *Bowl of Heaven*, 32.

⁸⁶ Adams, “Astrology and the Law” (pamphlet).

⁸⁷ Henry Cooper, “Starry,” *New Yorker*, March 24, 1962, 30.

⁸⁸ Blewett Lee, “The Fortune Teller,” *Virginia Law Review*, vol. 9, no. 4 (1923), 256.

Arresting her was ridiculous, but the policewoman, as it was her first serious indiscretion, was let off with a light reprimand.⁸⁹ Adams had so well established that her prosecution at this time was not only unlikely; for the *New Yorker* writer, it was *ridiculous*.

The magistrate had decided in the Adams case that while not *all* astrologers were fortune tellers, some astrological practices might still count as fortune telling. In a case only a year after Adams' major one, *People of the State of New York v. Maude Malcolm*, an astrologer was charged with pretending to tell fortunes. The judge agreed with Freschi that not all astrologers were fortune tellers. He maintained, influenced by the *Adams* decision, that it was not a violation where a practitioner "merely deduces the character of the person consulting, and gives general advice as to the future, based upon such reading of character."⁹⁰ The judge simply ruled that it was a matter of fact that the astrologer in question *had* given concrete predictions that fell under the purview of "fortune telling." Malcolm violated norms about what was an acceptably modest and well-founded forecast of the future by offering extravagantly specific predictions about the year of the client's future marriages and aunt's death, and the complexions of her future spouses. Adams' case had not set a precedent for the legality of all practices recognizable as astrological. The magistrate's decision had established specific norms about the acceptable scope of astrological analysis and forecast that could allow clients to adjust to the probable. While Adams' astrology was not generally and uncontestedly accepted as a science, its legal standing was rooted in its possession of the "dignity of an exact science." The law enrolled Adams to defend the legitimacy and competence of her practice, and this encounter itself added legitimacy to it. Its contested but relatively stable status made it an object of interest for journalists, and enabled Adams' to extend the reach of her practice to over a million Americans.

Dignifying Astrology: Adams Defends Her Position

Adams' experience with the 1914 case exemplified and anticipated a number of the strategies she used to maintain her status as a competent, professional astrologer later in her career. Roughly a

⁸⁹ Johnston, "Lady of the Stars," 31.

⁹⁰ Joseph Lawson, *The Miscellaneous Reports: Cases Decided in the Court of Record of the State of New York Other Than the Court of Appeals and the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court*, vol. 90 (Albany: J.B. Lyon Company, 1915), 520.

decade after the decision, the *Hartford Courant* could write that “by her genius” Adams had “made a considerable section of the public regard as legitimate that which is so often held to be mere charlatanism.”⁹¹

To accomplish this, Adams carved out a territory of science and professionalism for her practice, and defended it in her writings and in the press. Adams emphasized throughout her career that her astrological system was coherent, even if its practitioners might not always interpret or implement it skillfully. As she wrote in her autobiography, “the stars make no mistakes. They are Divine. But the Astrologer is human—and, although she is dealing with a strictly mathematical problem, she may make mistakes. I claim infallibility for the stars. I do not claim it for myself.”⁹² In this way, Adams fashioned herself into a “modest witness,” who, by admitting her ability to make mistakes, delimited criticism to contingent human error, directing it away from the system itself. Despite her admission of the possibility of making mistakes, she emphasized her competence through experience: “My thirty years’ experience is my guarantee to myself of that accuracy upon which the reliability of my deductions wholly depend.”⁹³ Indeed, when asked if she ever made any mistakes by the *New Yorker*, she replied that she was “only right something more than ninety-five per cent of the time.”⁹⁴

The success of Adams’ case turned largely on the nature of her forecast: particularly on whether she was providing an analysis of present conditions to guide future actions, or claiming privileged and direct knowledge of particular future events. Adams was responding to and, through legal precedent, helping to create norms about what counted as legitimate forecasting of the future, what was competent prophecy and what misleading jargon. For the rest of her career, she took great pains to highlight that she only calculated and interpreted forces at work, but did not have any privileged, direct access to knowledge about future events. A 1932 *New Yorker* article that profiled some of Adams’ protégés intimated that she and another astrologer had differing predictions of that year’s presidential race, thus suggesting in a major New York publication that Adams had violated her forecasting norms by revealing what specifically must happen, rather than simply outlining the field of the probable.⁹⁵ In response, Adams sent in a

⁹¹ Preston Wright, “How They Were Discovered: Miss Evangeline Adams,” *Hartford Courant*, December 5, 1926, D5.

⁹² Adams, *Bowl of Heaven*, 251.

⁹³ Adams, *Bowl of Heaven*, 5.

⁹⁴ Johnston, “Lady of the Stars,” 29.

⁹⁵ “Stargazer,” *New Yorker*, October 8, 1932, 11-12.

strongly-worded letter, asserting that she had been mis-quoted, and that “neither I nor any other really responsible astrologer would definitely ‘predict’ the results of an election, or the ups and downs of the stock market.”⁹⁶ Adams took to the media to defend her integrity as a professional, ‘responsible’ practitioner, whose norms she had worked to create.

Adams’ books—autobiographical and astrological—were another line of defense for the status of her practice. A skeptical *New York Times* review of her 1928 book *Astrology: Your Place in the Sun* was wary of her formulation of astrology as an “exact science”; but rather than asserting astrology’s affinity with magic or alchemy, the reviewer compared it to other disciplines which it held also not to count as exact sciences: “psychology, sociology, or—though this is heresy—psychoanalysis.”⁹⁷ In the pages of the *Times*, Adams had raised astrology to the dignity of—if not an exact science—a practice legible as scientific alongside other contested systems of inquiry like psychology, sociology, and psychoanalysis.

To reinforce astrology’s scientific reputation, Adams crafted a narrative of progress in her domain of knowledge. In her autobiography, she described the time in her days she devoted to research, and resolved at the end of the book to devote more and more of her time to research. She highlighted two concrete “contributions” she made to astrological practice: one, what she called the “New Horary,” a modified approach to answering questions of clients based on the time they entered her office; and what she called the “New Natology” or “astrological eugenics,” a technique for helping parents plan when to conceive based on the predicted birth date and thus nativity of the child. The *New Yorker* called the latter Adams’ “greatest original contribution to modern knowledge,” describing it as the “common-sense application of the known facts of mathematics and biology to the known facts of astrology.” Astrological eugenics was imagined to make “it possible for judicious parents to shop about and compare the admirable selection of future careers [for potential children] which the sky affords....Muttering over her tables and charts, Miss Adams mixes the personalities and life histories of children yet to be.”⁹⁸ By advertising her contributions to her field, Adams further made her practice legible as a science.

Adams also built a narrative of progress in astrology by recasting astronomers as the suppliers of raw data to astrologers, rather than simply as their modern, enlightened counterparts.

⁹⁶ “We Stand Corrected,” *New Yorker*, October 22, 1932, 36.

⁹⁷ Charles Willis Thompson, “Don’t Blame Your Parents for the Way You Look,” *New York Times*, January 29, 1928.

⁹⁸ Johnston, “Lady of the Stars,” 32.

The reason astrology had fallen into disrepute, she suggested to the *New Yorker*, was not a lack of theoretical rigor, but a lack of raw astronomical information. The discoveries of Uranus and Neptune, far from refuting astrology, she argued, accounted for its past failures and hinted at its future success, since astrologers would have a more complete picture of the astrological forces at work. Adams convinced the *New Yorker* that “modern astrologers are handicapped to some extent by the negligence of astronomers in finding out just what is in the sky. As the *New Yorker* framed it, astronomy was playing catch-up to astrology. Its profile of Adams ends with her saying, “every new discovery by astronomers makes us happy...Astrology has already been perfected far beyond the other sciences, but the future will see it still perfected.” This perspective was common to publications that paid attention to Adams. The discovery of Pluto, *Harper’s* wrote in 1932, was “not taken as a blow to the validity of the science [astrology], but was gladly hailed as a missing link which accounted for the failure of various predictions in the past.”⁹⁹ Adams used the progressive narrative that was seen as essential to science to cast her own discipline as scientific, and linked it to the very development of the “fixed” science of astronomy.

Magistrate Freschi in the 1914 case also emphasized the appearance of Adams and her office as evidence for her professionalism: they contributed to the “dignity” of her “exact science.” Throughout her career, journalists commented on Adams’ professional presentation. The category of “fortune telling” was associated as much with certain appearances and visual cues as it was with the epistemological status of its practices; or, rather, appearances were *part* of the epistemological status of practices. The co-founder with H.L. Mencken of *The American Mercury*, George Jean Nathan, in an op-ed on anti-fortune telling prosecutions, speculated what would happen if a millionaire engaged in fortune telling. He set up his thought experiment by imagining “if there were so many as two millionaires or two men with political power who were to don black velvet peignoirs, smell up their back parlors with corner drugstore incense.”¹⁰⁰ Fortune telling was not just simply an epistemological category; it was a sartorial one. While her office was known as the “studio of a thousand elephants,” because there were hundreds of elephant figurines adorning the waiting area, *The New Yorker* felt it important to note that this was only because one of her clients had gifted one to her once, and it became customary for

⁹⁹ Hoke, “Heyday of the Fortune Tellers,” 241.

¹⁰⁰ George Jean Nathan, “Clinical Notes,” *The American Mercury*, July, 1926, 370.



Figure 3: Adams makes measurements on a celestial globe, eschewing the traditional visual cues of the ‘wise woman,’ like the crystal ball, peignoir, or headdress. Gray, “People Who Try to Get ‘Tips’ from the Stars,” 35.

her provisionally scientific position of competence by fashioning herself and her office with visual cues that suggested professionalism.

Adams made all of these choices self-consciously. In her autobiography, she compared herself to a doctor or lawyer, calling hers a respectable profession, recognized as such like “the practice of medicine.”¹⁰⁴ The first sentence of her autobiography goes, “my working day begins, as a business man’s does, with the never-ending task of answering letters.”¹⁰⁵ Before she even mentions astrology, she compares herself to a more generally recognized professional, showing how her practice engaged in the prosaic tasks that were recognizable as such, like writing letters. She constantly refers to her friends “in other professions,” such as doctors.¹⁰⁶ She calls those who use her services “clients.” In avowing her commitment to confidentiality, she writes that “I

clients to do so—not for any occult reason. It went on, “she does not believe in amulets, good-luck signs, or any other forms of superstition.”¹⁰¹ Similar, *Harper’s* wrote that Adams did not “have the air of the traditional ‘wise woman’, nor any eerie atmosphere in her quarters in Carnegie Hall. She is placid and even jolly looking, and her studio home is rather businesslike with thirteen assistants typing horoscopic charts and mailing mimeographed prophecies to subscribers.”¹⁰² The *Hartford Courant* wrote that her office was “dignified and beautiful and utterly lacking in the bizarre,” comparing her practice to that of a doctor or a lawyer.¹⁰³ Adams carved out

¹⁰¹ Johnston, “Lady of the Stars,” 30.

¹⁰² Hoke, “Heyday of the Fortune Tellers,” 238; Johnston, “Lady of the Stars,” 29.

¹⁰³ Wright, “How They Were Discovered: Miss Evangeline Adams,” D5.

¹⁰⁴ Adams, *Bowl of Heaven*, 32.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

always take a doctor's attitude toward my 'patients.'"¹⁰⁷ And she highlights how many doctors, "surgeons, especially," use her services, especially for setting the dates of surgeries.¹⁰⁸ In her repetition of references to doctors and lawyers, it seems that she hoped astrology to become the third in a trinity of paradigmatic professions. Discussing the question of accuracy in her practice, she suggested this triad: "The doctor's mistake is buried, the lawyer's mistake is hanged, but the Astrologian must not make a mistake."¹⁰⁹ In her autobiography, Adams attempted to solidify in writing the professional status of her job.

Another major strategy of Adams later in her career was an argument from the authority of the individuals who patronized her practice. Because she was not able to argue from the authority of the consensus of the community of scientists, from which she was excluded, she mobilized the weight of the names of people who used her services who had economic or cultural capital. These included members of the financial class, like J.P. Morgan, Charles Schwab, successive presidents of the New York Stock Exchange; and actors and singers like Tallulah Bankhead, Mary Garden, and Enrico Caruso. Her autobiography constantly referenced the famous people who sought out her services. She wrote that her clients were part of "an interesting and influential class of people; the class whose continuing support has been the bulwark of my success."¹¹⁰ She acknowledged the contested status of astrology, but marshaled the authority of those who used it to give it legitimacy and frame its goal: "If you have never had your horoscope read it may seem strange," she wrote in her 1931 book *Astrology for Everyone*, that "great personages" came to her for "advice as to how to make money, how to make love, how to make happiness."¹¹¹ Adams also highlighted her own dignified American lineage. She advertised in her autobiography and elsewhere that she was a descendant of John Quincy Adams.¹¹² Upon her death, newspapers repeated this genealogy as one of the most relevant facts about her.¹¹³ Given the association of astrology with street performance, vagabonds, and immigrant 'gypsies,' it was crucial for Adams to associate it with *socially* dignified people in order to disassociate it from the epistemological indignity of fortune telling.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 84.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 114.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 5.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 51.

¹¹¹ Evangeline Adams, *Astrology for Everyone* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1931), v.

¹¹² Adams, *Bowl of Heaven*, 60-61.

¹¹³ "Evangeline Adams Dies; Was Famous Astrologer," *Washington Post*, November 11, 1932; "Evangeline Adams, Astrologer, Dead," *New York Times*, November 11, 1932.

Just as the commodity futures traders had had to differentiate theirs from other forms of speculation, Adams had to distinguish her practice from others, astrological and otherwise, that were associated with the occult, supernatural, or fortune telling. Up until the 1914 trial, Adams had practiced palmistry in addition to astrology. Some time after, though, she gave it up, according to a 1928 *New Yorker* profile, “because it lacked the exactitude and comprehensiveness of astrology.”¹¹⁴ Indeed, in her autobiography, she called practices like physiognomy, graphology, and numerology “minor methods” which were not “to be compared with Astrology.” “I have excluded them all from my practice,” she went on, adding that she did not “claim to be psychic or clairvoyant.”¹¹⁵ Adams did work to distinguish herself from practices designated as occult, imprecise, and capricious, in order to carve out a position of authority for her astrology.

While Adams reported that in the 1914 decision astrology had been legalized as such, if it had been legalized at all, it was a very particular practice of astrology—her version of the practice—that had been legally recognized, as the successful conviction of the astrologer Malcolm in New York in 1915 attests. In her autobiography, Adams distanced herself from the emerging practice of sun-sign astrology, the use of a simplified horoscope familiar today in newspapers. Calling the new practice “Solar Biology,” she wrote that it was “found in many so-called Astrological books of a popular sort,” which could not “be relied upon as accurate guides.” For Adams, this was “great fun,” but not astrology, since it only looked at the influence of the sun at the expense of the effects of the planets. Indeed, this popularized practice did not embody the level of competence needed to adjust individuals to the probable: “No competent Astrologer,” she wrote, “believes that it is possible to say, for instance, that a person born under one sign should marry a person born under another without more information than Solar Biology conveys.”¹¹⁶ To solidify the reputation of her version of astrology, Adams helped to found the Astrologers’ Guild of America in 1927, which would arrange lectures, and in which membership would serve as a token for a commitment to a certain professional responsibility and competence. Adams not only did work to demarcate between astrology and other practices, but also delineated what counted as competence within the domain of astrology.

In distancing herself from the palmists, numerologists, graphologists, psychics,

¹¹⁴ Johnston, “Lady of the Stars,” 30.

¹¹⁵ Adams, *Bowl of Heaven*, 69-72.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

physiognomists, and Solar Biologists, Adams went on to compare them to, and distance herself from, certain business and financial practices. In outlining what she saw as the hypocrisy of the enforcement of the “disorderly persons law,” Adams quoted at length an article from H.L. Mencken’s magazine *The American Mercury*, which argued that the singling out of astrological fortune tellers was unfair, since “chiropractors,” the “clergy,” “stock and bond dealers of Wall street,” “Florida realtors,” and certain “advertisers” all, like fortune tellers, preyed on the credulity of the weak, promising something “on the presumption that they are privy to the secrets of the future...and [can] suggest the means of future well-being.”¹¹⁷ The difference between fortune tellers and the others is that they had *power*, in money or professional associations. Adams’ inclusion of this quotation in her autobiography prefigured the founding of the Astrologers’ Guild of America the next year. Adams was not defending the “fortune tellers” here, but merely trying to identify other sorts of people who engage in similar practices but were not prosecuted under the “disorderly persons” law. She concluded, “in short, I am for equal rights under the law—even for fortune-tellers. All of which has nothing to do, or should have nothing to do, with Astrology. For even the most ignorant people know that Astrologers are not fortune tellers—or shouldn’t be if they are true to the teachings of their science.” Adams distanced herself from fortune telling *and* from speculative practices she saw as acting against the public interest by showing how the latter could be classified as the former. This historical affinity between astrology, speculation, economic discourse, and fortune telling points to the usefulness of Adams’ case for thinking about other contested or ‘unfixed’ sciences wielded by those in power.

Conclusion: Science, Competent Prophecy, and Power

We often think in black and white terms about science and non-science. Adams’ career illustrates just how blurry the line can be, and even that the “line” metaphor may not be the most useful. Of course, Adams is only one practitioner, and to understand Adams’ legacy, and the broader story of the status of astrology in America in the 20th century, we would have to take a longer view,

¹¹⁷ Adams, *Bowl of Heaven*, 55-56.

and look at more astrologers and sites of practice.¹¹⁸ But it is clear that Adams occupied a space between science and non-science, where her practice and discipline were made legible as scientific—as having the dignity of an exact science—without gaining general recognition in the scientific world. Her astrology was ‘unfixed,’ and yet scientifically dignified. In other words, it was scientific enough: through her articulation of her practice as scientific, she gained enough intellectual authority to maintain and expand her practice. The contested middle ground of scientific authority is often deemphasized as a space of stability and power. Recognizing it as such gives us room to think more broadly about other contested disciplines, whose uncertain status as science may nevertheless constitute a position of power.¹¹⁹

For example, economics holds a position of scientific authority that is widely contested, and yet undeniably powerful. Observers have long noted an affinity between economics and astrology. Both seek to analyze social phenomena to outline the field of the probable and thereby guide future action. In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, economists were called on to justify their status as scientists, and the specter of astrology returned. At that time, economists seemed to be the very incompetent forecasters Holmes wrote of, who brought society to ruin rather than adjusting it to the probable. A cliché was revived in the wake of the crisis: “economic forecasting only exists to make astrology look respectable.”¹²⁰ Prominent economists like Robert Shiller and Raj Chetty were forced to write articles with headlines like “Is Economics a

¹¹⁸ Nicholas Campion has written a study of twentieth century astrology in England and America, but he primarily situates it in the history of Swedenborgian religion, rather than examining it in the history of science. See Nicholas Campion, *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West: Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012).

¹¹⁹ Astrology is a particular useful case to study because it is often held up as the exemplary non-science. This was the case in Popper’s formulation of the falsifiability criterion. See Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 44-45. From a completely different universe of scholarship, postcolonial historian Partha Chatterjee argued for a heterogeneous model of the development of capitalism and modernity in India by citing “industrial capitalists delaying the closing of a deal because they hadn’t yet had word from their respective astrologers.” While he acknowledged that this phenomenon is less well understood as a “[survival] of the premodern past” than as a production “of the encounter with modernity,” he still implied that it epitomized the essential difference of capitalist development in India. Adams’ story attests to astrology’s prominent use in the context of the development of risk-capitalism in America, and how seriously it could be taken there, even as it was contested, suggesting that Chatterjee’s example might not be as useful for arguing for heterogeneous development as he might think. See Partha Chatterjee, “B.R. Ambedkar and the Troubled Times of Citizenship,” in *Political Ideas in Modern India: Thematic Explorations*, ed. V.R. Mehta and Thomas Pantham (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006), 76, quoted in Bruce Robbins, “Subaltern-Speak,” n+1, December 23, 2013, <http://nplusonemag.com/subaltern-speak>.

¹²⁰ This rough formulation appeared in the first episode of season one of *The West Wing*, and has been attributed to the economist John Kenneth Galbraith. See, for example, Eamonn Fingleton, “God Invented Economists To Make Astrologers Look Good—So Why Do Economists Get All The Nobel Prizes?,” *Forbes*, October 13, 2013, accessed April 3, 2014. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/eamonnfingleton/2013/10/13/god-invented-economists-to-make-astrologers-look-respectable-so-why-do-economists-get-all-the-nobels/>.

Science?” and “Yes, Economics is a Science.”¹²¹ Shiller invoked the history of demarcation between “astronomical science” and astrology, suggesting that the “economic sciences” were in a similar state of contestation to where astronomy was in the late 19th century. Around the same time, the economist Paul Krugman wrote that “economics as practiced doesn’t look like a science,” arguing that the field had lost its scientific dignity due to bad incentives.¹²² The incompetence of the economists’ prophecies forced them to account for their discipline’s scientific status.

Understanding economics—and this could apply to other social sciences, and even human sciences—not simply as a contested science in an eternal struggle to gain pure scientific recognition, but as a discipline and set of practices occupying a position of strength on a vast frontier-like spectrum between science and non-science gives us the beginning of a model for interpreting the puzzling debates that emerged in the wake of the financial crisis. Economics facilitates the adjustment of society to the probable. Its hegemony—which is not mutually exclusive with the contestation of its scientific authority, its ‘unfixed-ness,’ as Magistrate Freschi might have put it—means that the field of the probable, what counts as probable, is decided on the terms of economists. Achieving an adjustment of society that is just will require not only competent prophecy, but also an understanding of how competence is constructed in the first place.

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¹²¹ Robert Shiller, “Is Economics a Science?,” *The Guardian*, November 6, 2013, accessed April 3, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/business/economics-blog/2013/nov/06/is-economics-a-science-robert-shiller>. Raj Chetty, “Yes, Economics is a Science,” *New York Times*, October 20, 2013, accessed April 3, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/21/opinion/yes-economics-is-a-science.html>.

¹²² Paul Krugman, “The Real Trouble with Economics,” *New York Times*, August 27, 2013, accessed April 3, 2014, <http://krugman.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/08/27/the-real-trouble-with-economics/>.

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Bibliographic Essay

When I first embarked on this project I set out to use Evangeline Adams' astrology as a window into the social history of ordinary people's knowledge about their own financial futures. This was inspired by conversations with friends who used astrology as a means of articulating interpersonal dynamics; my own interest in the relationship between the social sciences, the social history of knowledge, and economic agency; and Adorno's critical essay on the *Los Angeles Times* astrology column, *The Stars Down to Earth*, which combined the former two themes.

The social history of knowledge component of my project dropped out because of a lack of material that could attest to how ordinary people interpreted and used astrology, and how wide-ranging its effects were. The sources that were available to me—in particular, journalistic accounts of Adams' practice, her published writings, and court records and legal journals—lent themselves to an analysis of how Adams' astrology was understood and received, and how she framed it, in the public sphere and in court. Ordinary people, who listened to her radio show, read her books, and ordered her personalized horoscopes became a black box in my analysis. It was clear from her enormous popularity that individuals other than the financial and cultural elite were using her product, but I was not able to get a sense of *how* they were interpreting and using them. She received as many as 4,000 letters per day in response to her radio show. These would have been an endlessly rich source, but I was not able to locate any of what must have been over a million letters she received during her career.

The very middling position of scientific and intellectual authority that I described in the essay affected what sorts of sources were available. Court documents, legal journals, and newspaper and magazine articles are saved by default. Even Adams' published books were available either at Yale's library or a nearby one. But the ephemera of her practice that would have been useful, on the other hand—the monthly forecasts she issued, individualized horoscopes she would send out—I for the most part could not locate. Similarly, I was not able to locate Adams' personal papers: her diaries, her letters, her notes. This is in marked contrast to the access I had to the extensive papers of the economist Irving Fisher at stored at Yale. All of the words I have of hers were intended for public consumption, which is indeed an important set of texts to have when you are studying how an individual tries to gain credibility for her- or himself in public. I got a real sense that all of Adams' written materials were contraptions for demarcation. There is a remarkable formality and lack of personal detail in her autobiography.

Interestingly, the only ways I *did* gain access to primary sources on the astrologer that were not published articles, books, or records were through the community of astrologers who have tried to preserve Adams' legacy. In searching for information about Adams on the Internet, I came across a note from a man named Norm Winski, advertising that he owned Adams' personal library. Not coincidentally, he had worked in the Chicago commodity futures trading pit on which Holmes ruled in 1905. When he happened upon the Adams library, he bought it because he believed it might help him to improve his investment returns. He was generous enough to send me the catalog of his collection, which marked off volumes which were owned

by Adams, thus giving me a window into what astrologers she was reading. Winksi also put me in touch with Karen Christino, who wrote the only two published books on Adams that I am aware of. Christino was kind enough to send me photocopies of the two pamphlets cited in the essay, one of which was copied from the New York Public Library, another of which had been given to her by an elderly astrologer. When I thanked Christino for the materials, she replied by mentioning that hers might be the only copy in existence of one of the pamphlets, so she said it was good that another person had a copy. Communicating with Winksi and Christino brought home how important it is to a community of practitioners to preserve this history in itself, and not just toward the end of better understanding questions of historical demarcation and how ways of thinking about the future become naturalized.

The primary sources I used gave a sense of how people in relative positions of power—journalists for publications like *Harper's* and the *New Yorker* and judges—judged the status of astrology. Because she was explicitly arguing for a “scientific astrology,” and this argument was central to her being allowed to practice her craft, Adams’ own writings were useful in understanding what she thought would contribute to the scientific dignity of her profession. Journalistic accounts allowed me to see how these efforts were received by a certain segment of the American population. Obscured were the voices of ordinary people who used her services. I also did not focus on the efforts of astronomers and other scientists to classify astrology outside of the realm of science. Adding in that discourse would have given a more balanced picture of the broader conversation about astrology in American public life. That said, that is the story that is often told, and highlighting the realms of the law and popular journalism added nuance to the status of astrology at that time that focusing on the testimony of scientists would have obscured. If I continue this project, I would like to move more in the direction of social history. I would seek archives in which, for example, the letters that Adams’ radio audience, or those of other astrologers, wrote. In doing this I would want to situate astrology in a broader nexus of institutions and practices like insurance, lotteries, and self-help books to understand how ways of being and understanding oneself as an economic agent for ordinary people were constructed in the twentieth century, and how they fit into the history of the social sciences.

Secondary sources were crucial for situating Adams’ practice in the history of American capitalism, the sciences of the probable, and the history of astrology. Works like Jonathan Levy’s *Freaks of Fortune* and Walter Friedman’s *Fortune Tellers* allowed me to understand the cultural, intellectual, and economic forces Adams was responding to, and how other forecasters of the future were responding to similar influences. Nicholas Campion and Patrick Curry are the only two historians I am aware of who have written monographs devoted to 19th or 20th century astrology in England or America. Curry’s work brought to life the precedents to Adams’ business in England, and dramatized how their practitioners dealt with similar legal circumstances there. The publishing circumstances of the secondary sources available on the history of astrology reflect the neglect of academic attention to the astrology of the past two centuries. Mainstream academic publishers print works on early modern and ancient astrology, but I have not found a work on nineteenth or twentieth century astrology published in a major

academic press, with the possible exception of Adorno's *The Stars Down to Earth*. For example, Patrick Curry's work on early modern astrology, *Prophecy and Power*, was published by Princeton University Press, but his next work, on nineteenth century astrology was limited to the popular non-fiction press Collins & Brown. Campion's book *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West* is the only historical monograph I am aware of entirely devoted to twentieth century astrology, and it was published through an independent academic press. If anything, my bibliography and primary research suggest the need for more academic attention—in, say, cultural history and the social history of knowledge—to astrology from the past two centuries.