

Fixed Stars, why bother?

By Bernadette Brady

In the indigenous Australian use of English the word “dreaming” is used to describe the dominant, over-arching power of a place or idea. I was reminded of this on my first visit to the landscape of the Uffington horse near Oxford. To my Australian eyes I saw a place of horse-dreaming, a place where the spirit of the horse has emerged in the landscape. But it is not only ancient chalk figures that can indicate a space of dreaming. A location like the British library can be considered to be a place of book-dreaming and Stonehenge, to me, is a place of stone-dreaming. In this fashion, for many years my astrology has been what I would call star-dreaming, as I have wrapped the night sky around my astrology like a cloak and marvelling at the night skies of both the southern and the northern hemispheres allowed the stars to run through my charts like a river of myth.

With the stars in my focus I therefore notice that for the first time in 4,500 years we have a bright and visible pole star, Polaris. The last time was Thuban in 2,700 – 2500 bce which was the 4th Dynasty in Egypt and the period of the pyramid builders. So before last night (if your local sky was clear and you are in the northern hemisphere) the last time we humans could look up at the night sky and see the moving celestial sphere paying court to a star-of-stillness was in the time of the building of the pyramids. Now if you really are star-dreaming then you would have also noted that the winter solstice, the position of the sun for the winter solstice sunrise or sunset¹, has now precessed to the centre of the Milky Way² – the ancient and sacred place of Egyptian sky goddess Nut. So now in this 100 year period the Sun is annually reborn from the body of Nut – an event which only repeats once every 12,900 years³.

But talk of galactic centres can make many astrologers glaze over, so if you want something a little more local, a little more in your own backyard and you are in the northern hemisphere, then start watching the great bear, Ursa Major. The ancient she-bear walks upon the earth at the time of the annual terrestrial biosphere greening. Every year planet Earth greens in the north and the south at the same time. This of course is the summer for the north and the winter for the south. This, according to biologist, gives the biosphere a type of breath. The earth breathes in CO2 and gives us more oxygen at this time, but in the winter (summer for the south) the greening stops and the earth's breath goes the other way. Since the beginning of our recorded history and human myth, indeed from the period from Thuban to Polaris as our pole stars, the great bear is seen to walk along the local horizon at the time of the greening. Her slow steady plod is provided by the diurnal movement of the night sky. When the winter comes and the growth stops, she is only seen high in the night sky, asleep with her legs in the air. Thus in this period which embraces the dawn of recorded history up to modern times the bear annually awakes as the earth awakes and sleeps as the earth sleeps, indeed in this simple fact could lie the reason for the nature of the naming of that part of the sky.

 Ursa Major

Figure 1. Ursa Major is seen to walk along the horizon (set for the evening at 45 North in current times) in the greening-time of the biosphere. The horizon is the light grey area and the diurnal movement of the earth causes the bear to move from left to right over the course of the night.

What does it mean? I truly have no idea except to think that there are star voices out there that we can no longer hear. Yet we would all agree that at its heart, astrology is about the relationship we have with the sky. The horoscope is our attempt to map this symbolic but also practical relationship that exists in the space between earth and the firmament. In fact the horoscope

is a map of the sacred place that exists between two worlds; the place where life exists in the thin membrane maybe only a few miles wide between the planet and the universe. Your chart is your personal map of the edge of these two worlds, the sacred place of meeting where life hovers between the rock of the earth and the boundless universe of space⁴.

The Greeks tidied this map as indeed they tidied this sacred relationship. Just as they domesticated our minds and laid down methods for human thought, they also domesticated the sky, removing from it all that could not be tabulated, organised, made logical or tamed. They applied reductionist thinking to the sky and in their pursuit of logic they gave us the ecliptic ⁵ (defined as the pathway of the annual movement of the sun) and then, by measuring all other celestial objects against their newly made ruler, the astronomers/astrologers placed the rest of the visible universe within the sun's domain. This reductionism of the sky removed its spherical dimensions, removed the "roundness" and replaced it with a single line. This removed from the astrologer's process the need to observe or look at the sky. Any object in the visible universe which was to be placed onto the astrologer's maps was now only considered as a point located on the new sun-sky ruler.

Sean Kane in his book *Wisdom of the Mythtellers* ⁶ talks of the tendency of humanity only to read myths and literature in relation to ourselves. He calls this attitude anthropocentric (human centred). He suggests that this approach of human-centred literature blinds us to the greater meanings of some mythologies which he indicates may well be written with humans only as secondary characters. Transposing this argument into astrology one can suggest that the practice of astrologers to only consider a celestial object if it is measured on the ecliptic is an ecliptocentric attitude.

This ecliptocentric astrology only permits a celestial object a voice in humanity's dialogue with the heavens if through mathematics it is made to walk the single line of the sun. Or another way of seeing this is to realise that we have adjusted our sacred and personal relationship between earth and sky to encompass only the sun's point of view.

As a result, the astrology we have developed is what can more aptly be called planetology or solarsystemology, as it is really about the relationship we have with the planets and the seasons on earth and very little to do with the dome of the starry sky. Indeed the only star that is represented in the map is Helios our sun and the planets in a horoscope are measured in one dimension in relationship to Helios' journey. Therefore, the prefix of astro which means "of the stars" should not really be used.

However, do not misunderstand my sentiments here. I regard planetology as a very powerful technique; nothing is more revealing than a horoscope with its circle of the ecliptic and the sun and planets located on this band, falling into houses, zodiac signs and geometrical relationships with each other.

But in any chart there are planetary aspects that will have a range of expressions, a spectrum of potentials. Indeed when we combine planets in a horoscope we relate these to large collective patterns and suggest, via the art of astrology, how the individual will find a way to reveal these patterns in their life. Hence a Mercury-Pluto combination, to use just one example, is a pattern of mental intensity, a pattern of idiosyncratic behaviour or neurotic tendency that exists within the human condition. To see it in a person's horoscope indicates to the astrologer that this person has the potential for this particular motif to unfold in their life.

But to delineate a chart one must first develop the art of identifying these collective archetypes or issues and then (and most certainly the hardest part of the process) to synthesise the unique blend as represented in the chart into a meaningful life story or life-expression. Consequently, the question that plays around the edge of the astrologer's mind as one stirs the soup of aspects, planets and houses is that, although one can see the basic qualities and issues in the chart, just how strong will be its flavour and what will be the final nature of the mix? There are never certain answers to these questions, but we may be able to see more if we can raise our eyes away from our ecliptocentric view.

As we can see from the great bear, planets are not the only celestial lights to walk upon our earth and although the Greek approach effectively ignores the star's own language and position in the sky and thus removes this voice from astrology's sacred maps, the myths and deep symbolic meanings with which humanity has empowered the stars – here I mean the stars, not the planets - are still walking amongst us. The stellar myths and stories are still involved in humanity's relationship with the sky and the earth. In Sean Kane's (1998) opinion old gods do not die but have found refuge in the trees and rivers. In the case of astrology where our trees and rivers are the stars and the constellations, they have not died; it is just that we have stopped listening to their stories.

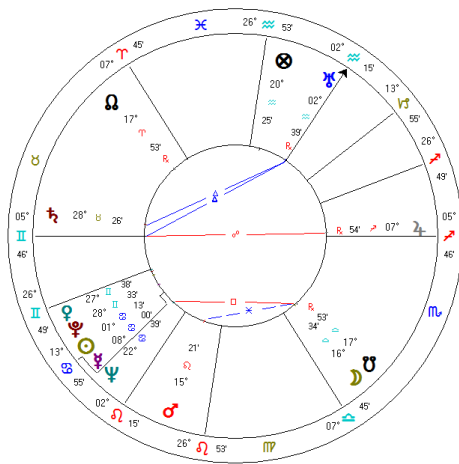
So how do we move away from our ecliptocentric view? How can we return the sacred spherical dimension to our maps? It is the rotation of the earth itself on its axis that provides us with the answer. As the earth rotates it divides the celestial sphere into four quarters, indeed it actually squares the circle. These four quarters are made up of the contact that the earth has with the boundary of the sky (the horizon) which gives us the Ascendant and the Descendant, and the turning point in the sky where an

object, rising above the earth, then turns to come tumbling back down which provides the MC and the nadir or IC. These four points are how the earth “touches” the sky. If a planet rises with a star, then that star walks with that planet as they both touch the horizon line together. If a planet culminates, sets or is on the nadir at the same time that a star occupies one of the sacred earth-generated angles, then that star walks with that planet. Both star and planet are interacting with the earth in the same instance. This relationship is called a paran. Put more poetically, if a planet and a star are both touching the earth-generated angles simultaneously, the meanings of the two celestial lights are merged. The human archetypal issues of the planet are blended with the Palaeolithic and Neolithic myths of the stars. The old gods speak but now they are not being forced to speak only the sun’s language.

The outcome of this interaction is that the nature of the planet is not altered but rather it is directed, focused, calibrated by the nature of the star. The result of this blending, for the astrologer, is to gain information about the level of intensity and focus of a planetary combination.

This is the starry river that can flow through a chart.

Alan M. Turing
Natal Chart
23 Jun 1912, Sun
02:15 GMT+00:00
London, England
51°N31' 00.00°W06'
Greenwich
Tropical
Planetary
Mean Node



Let us take an example of two people both with Mercury ruling their Ascendant, both with Mercury in their 2nd house and both with Mercury lightly aspected. The first is Agatha Christie [7](#), the famous crime writer, whose Mercury is unaspected and in Libra and the second is Alan Turing [8](#), the genius of WW2 who broke the Germany codes and built the first computer. Turing has Mercury in Cancer and only forming a quincunx to Jupiter and a wide conjunction to the sun.

Now it is clear that both people have quite different charts which of course would have an impact on the astrologer’s delineation of their natal Mercurys. Nevertheless we can gain considerable insight into the nature of their interest and their approach and attitude to their mental endeavours by looking at the stars that are in paran with their Mercurys.

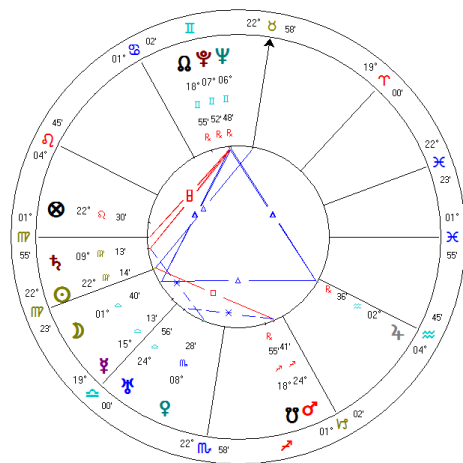
For Alan Turing, with his Cancer Mercury and Gemini rising, we would read a love of ideas, a natural curiosity but an emotional nature to his thinking. He would go on his instincts more than follow the rules. The following stars are also in paran to his Mercury [9](#):

Mercury - Education, business skills, intellect

- Rising when **Regulus** is On Nadir orb 00 mins 11 secs -
Receiving recognition for noble ideas, provided one avoids intrigue
- Culminating when Alkes is Rising orb 01 mins 01 secs -
To undertake detailed and precise work
- Culminating when Facies is On Nadir orb 01 mins 07 secs -
A pessimistic attitude, or one who is judged, or speaks, harshly
- Setting when Mirach is Rising orb 00 mins 29 secs -
The translator, a person who builds rapport between ideas or languages
- Setting when Menkar is On Nadir orb 01 mins 48 secs -
To speak for the collective
- On Nadir when Vega is Culminating orb 00 mins 40 secs -
A visionary with a very persuasive voice, or charismatic ideas - Circumpolar

Turing was not given any recognition for his work because it was of a secret nature. Even after the war the British government did not want the world to know that they had broken the code of the Enigma machines, since they had issued them to commonwealth countries and wanted to be able to spy on those nations. The warning of intrigue with his Regulus paran is blatant. Turing, after being the genius to decipher codes, create new ways of thinking, and build the first problem solving machines, eventually committed suicide because of bias and the medical treatment he received in an endeavour to cure his homosexuality. The stars really do speak for themselves in their combination with his Mercury for they show us his genius but also his difficulties.

Agatha Christie
 Natal Chart
 15 Sep 1890 NS, Mon
 04:00 +0:00
 Torquay, England
 50°N28' 00S°W30'
 Geocentric
 Tropical
 Placidus
 Mean Node



In contrast to this we have the other Mercury-strong chart of Agatha Christie. Her Mercury is in Libra with Virgo rising. Such a Mercury will also love detail but in a more artistic than mathematical context. Christie's parans are quite different to Turing's and are as follows:

Mercury - Education, business skills, intellect

- Rising when Scheat is Setting orb 00 mins 49 secs - **The innovator, gifted with ideas, words or rhythm; far-sighted**
- Culminating when Antares is Rising orb 00 mins 42 secs - **Mental obsession with a subject or a person**

So Christie is obsessive, but gifted, with her Libra Mercury, and she uses this to become a prolific crime writer as the Antares paran would be too intense to allow her to tolerate the idea of the romantic novel.

This is quite a simple example. I have not even explored the constellational meanings of these stars. But the key point is that the star parans have not overpowered the meaning of the planetary combination but rather they have simply, effectively and easily focused it, allowing the astrologer to give a far more detailed delineation of the chart. By unambiguously using the star's basic meanings when combined with Mercury, I hope the reader can see that by moving away from the biases of ecliptocentric astrology and allowing the stars to have their own voice, an enriching field of information awaits the astrologer's eye.

Maybe I am star-dreaming but with a pole star back in the centre of the visible world it may just be possible that astrologers will start once again to reach out for the stars. We need to remember that astrologers are the traditional guardians of this sacred relationship between the earth and the sky and by stretching our awareness beyond ecliptocentric thinking and including the whole dome of the sky, we can open our minds once more to the other voices of the sky, the old myths and stories placed by our ancestors onto our "trees and rivers".