

The One World in Judicial Astrology

Lilly and the Philosopher's Stone

*Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
With rocks, and stones, and trees.*

[Wordsworth, Lines A *slumber did my spirit seal*]

Judicial astrology peaked in the early modern period with William Lilly, the renowned seventeenth century English astrologer, practicing in London during the period of the Civil War and the Restoration. He had a popular following and was well connected with the politics and gentry of his times.¹ He moved to Walton on Thames where he became a church warden and continued his astrological work and study. His magnum opus, *Christian Astrology*² is the key text in the English speaking astrological tradition, especially for horary astrology.³ It distils the astrological tradition from Greek, Arabic and Latin sources in a practical manual of both natal and horary astrology, and insists in its frontispiece that it is “non cogunt”, not fated.

We will look here at a horary chart from *Christian Astrology*, Lilly's judgment of a question put to him by an alchemist. It was asked at 10:45am on 27 May 1647, three hundred and sixty-six years ago, and it enables us to hear a symbolic language that speaks from a different era. It addresses us from within the doctrine of correspondences embedded in the medieval and late Renaissance traditions, thereby revealing a pre-enlightenment cosmos. As we have already seen, by 1647 astrology was in its last flowering; the seeds of its downfall had been sown as the classical and medieval Christian cosmos that supported it began to weaken under the new scientific discoveries of the enlightenment.⁴ Yet despite astrology's collapse, its language of the One World is lucidly expressed in Lilly's work, and it continues to be spoken by its practitioners up to the present day. Although astrology's tradition and methods have been adapted for modern times, astrologers today use essentially the same vocabulary as their counterparts in antiquity. Both they and Lilly reveal a cosmic order through the theory of correspondences that has been otherwise lost to the modern age.

The summary of Lilly's analysis that I am now about to delineate may at first seem incoherent and random to any reader not versed in the theory of correspondences. Lilly analyses the planetary positions in the sky for the moment of time at which the alchemist asked him the question – known as a horary chart – and following a specific method of analysis used especially by the Arabic astrologers and Bonatus, he gives an answer to the alchemist's question. Such horary questions were commonly asked of

¹ See Derek Parker (1975), *Familiar To All: William Lilly and Astrology in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Jonatahn Cape) for a discussion of Lilly's social and political connections (Chapter 7, Fame and Disrepute, p.178).

² *Christian Astrology*, London 1647. Republished 1985 (Regulus).

³ Horary astrology casts the horoscope for the time a question is asked and seeks to answer the question posed.

⁴ For a discussion of the reasons that astrology declined, see Roy Willis and Patrick Curry (2004), *Astrology, Science and Culture* (Oxford & New York: Berg), p.51: “astrology became firmly identified as vulgar plebeian superstition – now understood in class more than religious terms – to be contrasted with the new spirit of rationalism and realism”.

astrologers in Lilly's era, but Lilly was an astrological master, reputed to have great skill in this 'art', and his publication of *Christian Astrology* contains many such examples of a wide variety of questions on matters such as love, work, finance, lost horses and so on.⁵ The very idea of answering such questions with astrological charts based on the time they were asked may seem absurd to the modern mind but this need not concern us here; instead my intention is to demonstrate that the theory of correspondences is not an individual act of clairvoyance, but rather, it is an act of inductive divination, concerned with a communicable language of the One World which is not only coherent and consistent, but also, like any art or science, may be done well or done poorly. Lilly's analysis of this horoscope may therefore be judged by any other astrologer who comes across it,⁶ because it is communicable to his peers, in the same way as a musician will recognise a well sung aria, or an art critic will know the difference between a Picasso and my scribblings in the local art class.

I will therefore delineate in detail the mechanics of the horary method that Lilly uses in the alchemist's question, and by so doing, illustrate the precision and logic inherent in his analysis so that we might later appreciate how the correspondences co-emerge in a unity through the symbol. This is impossible to appreciate without some sense of the detail of the astrological language, but as the poetics of any language are often lost on strangers, and the language of correspondences is seldom spoken in an academic context, I aim to make some of its nuances understood. Lilly's judgment is appended, and the reader is advised to consider it now, before continuing here (horoscope and judgment attached). So let us take up Lilly in his own voice as he tells us about the question put to him by an alchemist:

An ingenious man with much seriousness propounded the Question above, viz. *Whether he should obtain the Philosopher's Stone?*, or that Elixar by which such wonders are performed? that there is such a thing in being I verily believe;⁷ that it may be attained I am as confident: but as it is a blessing beyond all blessings upon earth, so I hold, that it is given but to very few, and to those few rather by revelation of the good Angels of God, then the proper industry of man. This Question must admit of this manner of proposal; *Whether the Knowledge of the Querent is so able, or he so cunning, as to produce to effect by his Art what he desires?*

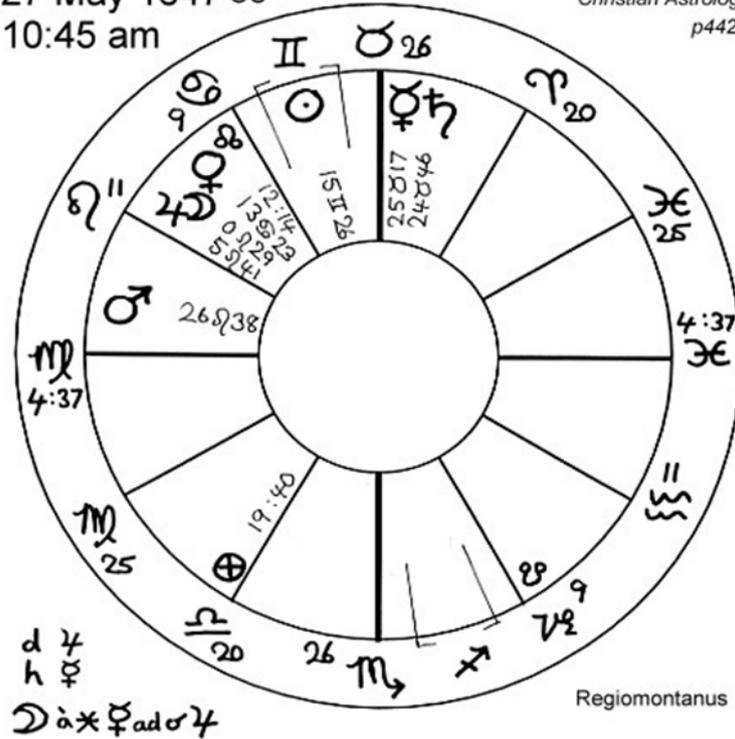
⁵ *Christian Astrology* (832 pages) contains 35 horary judgments, as well as a natal horoscope with a lifetime of prognostications for twenty years. See my review in *Company of Astrologer's Bulletin* No.4 (1991). The book is written as a teaching manual and Lilly's intention is clearly stated and fulfilled: "I have with all uprightness and sincerity of heart, plainly and honestly delivered the Art, and have omitted nothing willingly, which I esteemed convenient or fit, or what might any thing assist the young Students herein."

⁶ See www.skyscript.co.uk for contemporary discussion and reviews of historical astrological judgments, especially the work of David Plant.

⁷ Although alchemy, like astrology, was also in decline by 1647, Lilly had met the alchemist and scholar Elias Ashmole in 1646, only a year prior to this question. Ashmole was to become Lilly's closest, life-long friend, and as is evident in Ashmole's diaries, the two often discussed both astrology and alchemy. This is undoubtedly the context and background of Lilly's stated belief in the existence of the philosopher's stone. There is nothing to suggest, however, that Ashmole was the alchemist making this particular enquiry of Lilly. See *Elias Ashmole (1617-1692), His Autobiographical and Historical Notes, his Correspondence, and other Contemporary Sources Relating to his Life and Work* (Wellcome TrustCentre for Medical History online, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1034127/>)

27 May 1647 os
10:45 am

Christian Astrology
p442f



If attaine the Philosopher's Stone?

To answer the alchemist's question, Lilly first considers the alchemist's own 'proper industry'. Following traditional horary method, he locates the planetary signifiers for the querent and the quesited - the person asking and the thing asked about - and assesses their strengths and weaknesses.⁸ The position of these two planets by zodiac sign and horoscope section (termed 'house'), will describe the alchemist and his work. The planet for the alchemist is Mercury, placed at 25 degrees of the zodiac sign of Taurus, right at the top of the chart, called the Midheaven, placed very close to Saturn, the planet known as the 'greater malefic'.⁹ The alchemist is concerned with matter and money because Mercury is in the sign of earthy, solid Taurus,¹⁰ and he is dominated by material ambition because Saturn, the ambitious planet of matter,¹¹ is placed next to him. Mercury is also moving slowly because it has recently been afflicted by retrogradation or backwards motion, and this, combined with Saturn's affliction as a malefic influence, describes the afflicted state of mind of the alchemist, "for in any operation where Mercury is corrupted, there the fancy or imaginative part is imbecill."¹²

⁸ These are always the first steps in the horary method, see Bonatus, *The Astrologer's Guide*, Consideration 78 p.36 for the location of the quesited, and Considerations 1-30, pp. 1-19 for various conditions related to the signifiers.

⁹ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, I.5, p.39 (Loeb).

¹⁰ *ibid*, I.11, p.67 (Loeb) and Abu Masar, *Introduction*, p.15 (Brill).

¹¹ Abu Masar, *Introduction*, p.61 (Brill).

¹² See Bonatus, *The Astrologer's Guide*, Consideration 16 p.14 for maleficity, Consideration 25 p.18 for retrogradation.

Following the traditional method, alchemical endeavours are indicated by a specific sector of the horoscope, the 9th sector or 'house', connected with philosophy or science.¹³ This sector is indicated here by Mars, placed in the zodiac sign of Leo, the natural sign of the lion, the Sun and therefore of gold.¹⁴ Mars is a planet of aggression¹⁵ and indicates that for the alchemist, his search for the Elixar is a desire for gold. Mars is a 'minor malefic'¹⁶ and it is also unfortunate in this chart because it is placed in the 12th sector or house of the horoscope, indicative of suffering and ambush.¹⁷

After these descriptions of the condition of Mercury and Mars, which to Lilly indicate the alchemist and his work, he must next consider if there is any relationship (aspect) between the two planets in terms of their distance apart in the zodiac wheel because any such spatial relationship will mirror the relationship of the alchemist and his work.¹⁸ This will determine whether or not the planetary motions will bring the signifiers together by aspect in a beneficial way that will indicate, in the world, the alchemist coming together with the stone. We have already seen that Mercury is conjoined to Saturn but prior to this, while it was moving backwards it had been at right angles (a square aspect of 90 degrees) to Mars:

From hence I judged, the Querent had formerly spent some time in the search of this admirable Jewel the Elixar, but in vain and to no purpose.

Now, at the time of asking the question, Mercury is next to Saturn but is moving away and will move towards a second square aspect of Mars. Hence these three planets - **Mercury** at 25 Taurus, separating from **Saturn** at 24 Taurus, applying to square **Mars** at 26 Leo - describe the alchemist and the difficulties he has in seeking his stone.

The prognosis is not good. Mercury is moving by difficult aspect *between* Saturn and Mars, so in traditional terms, it is besieged by malefics.¹⁹ The alchemist moves from one malefic onto another, as we might think, 'between a rock and a hard place'. Moreover, although normally Mercury's motion should be faster than that of Mars,²⁰ at the time of the question, Mars is moving faster than Mercury, indicating that the alchemical endeavour is moving faster than the alchemist. He cannot keep up and will be outwitted. When Mercury and Mars make their second square, they will have moved into different zodiac signs but Lilly sees this as no help:

his second application by square happening not long after, while Mercury was in Gemini, and in his own Terms,²¹ intimated a stronger desire, greater hopes and resolutions to endeavour once more the attaining of the Philosopher's Stone.

¹³ Abu Masar, *Introduction*, [117] p.31 (Brill).

¹⁴ *ibid.* [33] p.17 (Brill).

¹⁵ *ibid.* [11] p.63 (Brill).

¹⁶ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, I.5, p.39 (Loeb).

¹⁷ Abu Masar, *Introduction*, [120] p.61 (Brill).

¹⁸ Bonatus, *The Astrologer's Guide*, Considerations 20-23, p.17.

¹⁹ Abu Masar, *Introduction*, [21] p.57 (Brill).

²⁰ The average daily motion of Mercury is normally faster than that of Mars, except on several occasions a year when it is retrograde and appears to be moving backwards.

²¹ The 'terms' of a planet refer to its relation with zodiac signs connected to other planets.

Yet no matter how determined the alchemist may be, the square aspect is so difficult that Lilly judges:

I advised the Querent to decline his further reasons, advertised him how incapable he was, and the improbability of the thing intended, according to naturall causes, and advised him to desist: I also said, that he erred in his materials or composition, working upon things terrene, or of too gross and heavy a substance; part of which judgment I collected by Saturn his square unto Mars, part by the affliction of Mercury, his intellective, part by the proximity of Saturn, both cohabiting in an earthly Sign, for in any operation where Mercury is corrupted, there the fancy or imaginative part is imbecill; but where the Lord of the Work itself is unfortunate (as here Mars Lord of the ninth is), there the groundwork or matter it self of the principall part of the operation is defective, as here it was:

Not only does the alchemist lack the intellectual strength for this work, but he also has a wrong plan and wrong material. He isn't sharp enough to grasp the true nature of the work. If he continues to behave with the stubborn and literal-minded persistence of Mercury in Taurus, motivated by a desire for material gold, he will bring harm upon himself.

In these three planets, we have a wonderfully apt description of this alchemist and his situation which any astrologer who knows the language of correspondences would take delight in, just as a musician would delight in hearing a piece of well-played music. There are nuances and connections that do not have to be laboured or elaborated to a person who speaks such language. For example, alchemy has always been associated with Mercury because the transforming agent was considered to be the metal mercury, or the spirit Mercurius,²² so it is fitting that this alchemist is symbolised by the planet Mercury, looking for the stone. He thinks it is an earthy, material thing and his desire is to transmute the base metal (lead, Saturn), literally and physically, into actual gold (Mars in Leo). He does not understand something fundamental about the nature of the philosopher's stone, which Lilly has already told us:

it is a blessing beyond all blessings upon earth, so I hold, that it is given but to very few, and to those few rather by revelation of the good Angels of God, then the proper industry of man.

The philosopher's stone is given by **revelation**, and there is nothing of revelation and the good angels for our alchemist, besieged as he is by malefics.

At this point we are also reminded that the Sun, universal symbol of gold, is placed in the zodiac sign of the Gemini Twins in this chart, suggesting two types of gold. There is the physical gold desired by the alchemist (Mars in Leo), and a second type, often described in alchemical literature as the 'philosophic gold'.²³ It is with this latter that the philosopher's stone can be found, and it is indicated in the chart by Jupiter, the greater benefic,²⁴ the planet of philosophy, also in the sign of Leo in the 11th section

²² Jung, CW13 *Alchemical Studies*, The Spirit Mercurius.

²³ Jung, CW 12, *Psychology and Alchemy*.

²⁴ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, I.5, p.39 (Loeb).

or house of the horoscope, next to the Moon. This area of the horoscope is known as the 'house of the good daemon'²⁵ and is related to friends and 'good angels'. Lilly's reference to the "good Angels of God" refers to the Moon-Jupiter conjunction in this house, indicating benefits given by the grace of God, "a blessing beyond all blessings upon earth". This is the gold of the Holy City discussed in the Book of Revelation, and the equation of God/good and gold. However, the beneficial Moon and Jupiter do not symbolise the alchemist or connect with the planets that do symbolise him, so he is not blessed in this matter, and despite all his efforts, he will not succeed in achieving his desire. Lilly then makes a very interesting move. He comments:

And that the gentleman should think I spoke not in vain, I acquainted him he had more necessity to cure himself of a consumption he was entering into, nay entred, than of advancing his paines further in the scrutiny of this labyrinth.

Following this prediction of misfortune, Lilly gives his astrological reasoning:

For seeing Mercury Lord of the Ascendant, and Saturn in conjunction in Taurus, Saturn being Lord of the sixth, of evil influence naturally, and finding Mars afflicting Mercury out of the twelfth, and Mercury not receded from but applying to a further evil square of Mars, no Fortune interjecting his benevolent aspect betwixt Mercury and the two Infortunes, but that *he stood single of himself without any assistance*, (my emphasis) and thereby was incapable of resisting their malevolent influence. I advised to have a care of his health speedily, & c.

This is a technically perfect judgment about ill health in this horoscope. The alchemist's health is shown by Saturn, which governs the 6th sector of health,²⁶ but as we have seen, Mercury, the alchemist, separates from Saturn and applies to a square of Mars. This indicates the rock and the hard place, the physical danger faced by the alchemists.²⁷ Lilly suggests that the alchemist has already made himself ill and become consumptive by his imbecill works and if he carries on, he is likely to make himself worse. The alchemist is on his own, he has no assistance, and by this we are to understand that he has no *divine* assistance, the good daemones are not with him. Why does Lilly give such a harsh judgment here? I suggest it is because he knows that the only way to make the man stop is by evoking a *material* matter, in this case, the alchemist's own body. Lilly can see that the alchemist is a stubborn literalist, afflicted by Saturn and deaf to anything but material reality. The only things he will hear are those things that concern material, bodily matters. Lilly judges that he cannot understand the concept of 'good angels' in relation to his work, so there is no point talking to him about them.

The Unifying Power of the Symbol

Having looked at Lilly's judgment, I would now like to explore this text in relation to the multi-faceted nature of astrological symbols, and consider the ways in which, based on a pre-enlightenment view of correspondences, the power of the symbol is able to **unify** the many diverse and particular issues that cluster around its core

²⁵ Abu Masar, *Introduction*, [119] p.31 (Brill).

²⁶ Abu Masar, *Introduction*, [114] p.31 (Brill).

²⁷ In their efforts to transmute the base metal, usually lead (Saturn's metal), the alchemists heated it with mercury. Both substances give off poisonous vapours that, in the case of mercury, are invisible.

meaning. The symbol does something extraordinary in its ability to cut across the subject-object split and create unity. In so doing, it gives a sense of the sacred. It does not just stand for something, as an allegory, representing this or that in the world or in our psychology. Rather, it has an affective, moving, spiritual power, and I will take this up now by demonstrating how this is manifest in Lilly's judgment.

We begin with the way in which symbols come to life, and the meaning known from them. They are empty signifiers, meaning nothing, but they become radical and meaningful in the context in which they become present to us. Let us take, for example, the Mercury-Saturn conjunction in the Philosopher's Stone horoscope and look at its arrays of meaning. Lilly, as a pre-enlightenment thinker, has no need to address this explicitly but he evidently knows of it because we can see him relate symbol to context whenever he naturally moves his interpretation to a different register. This occurs towards the end of this judgment in his key comment, "so that the gentleman should think I spoke not in vain..." He gives the alchemist the prediction about his health, and in so doing, Lilly himself speaks (Mercury) with absolute authority (Saturn), just like the Mercury-Saturn.

There are various meanings, then, which cluster around this symbol of Mercury-Saturn. We have the alchemist with his health and physical body, we have his persistent endeavour to seek the Stone, we have his deafness to advice, but we also have the harsh words of Lilly's judgment, naming the alchemist's misfortune. Lilly has taken up the symbolism and spoken like Mercury-Saturn in Taurus, the sign of the throat and voice, giving his judgment of an ill fate. He is deliberately speaking (Mercury) with authority (Saturn), taking up the word (Mercury) of the father (Saturn). This is the father in every sense of the word, father and Father. Mercury and Saturn sit on the Midheaven, the point of highest authority in the horoscope, the voice of total authority. In moving to that different register, in speaking with a different voice, I suggest that Lilly is doing what Jacques Lacan uses as a deliberate technique in psychoanalysis. He moves to 'full speech', rather than the empty speech of ordinary, everyday chatter. The analyst evokes full speech when he or she stands in the place of the father and speaks from a different place. Such speaking has a ring to it that resonates with the patient in a different way.²⁸ I suggest that Lilly moves to full speech here, prompted by the Mercury-Saturn. He stands behind his words, takes them up and speaks from another register. Here I would describe the other place he speaks from as divinatory space,²⁹ the space opened up through divination. This sacred space of divination opens up an alternative realm for us, another reality, giving us a sense of the sacred and the One World.

This leads us to the idea of symbolic instantiation, discussed in my paper *The Cock and the Chameleon*.³⁰ It suggests that in divination, the interpreter as well as the querent or issue inquired about may be shown by the same set of symbols, whether or not the interpreter is aware of this. The diviner is suddenly implicated and revealed, shown in the same symbolism as the issue he or she is talking about. Lilly himself

²⁸ Sherry Turkle (1992), *Psychoanalytic Politics: Jacques Lacan and Freud's French Revolution* (The Guildford Press).

²⁹ See my *Pigs and Fishes: Inner Truth In Divination*, p.3. Unpublished MA paper, University of Kent.

³⁰ 'The Cock and the Chameleon – Divination, Platonism and Postmodernism' in: Angela Voss, Jean Hinson Lall, *The Imaginal Cosmos: Astrology, Divination and the Sacred* (Canterbury: The University of Kent, 2007) pp. 47 - 54

becomes the Mercury-Saturn conjunction in his act of speaking the judgment. This means that the symbols in astrology allow themselves to be interpreted in multiple but consistent ways, depending on the context in which the symbols present. This idea of a 'take' comes from the film world where the same scene is shot from different angles, or is shot again and again. Lilly of course does not name the use of the symbols in this way, or talk of them as multiple, because he is part of a world-view of symbolic correspondences in which this approach is implicit. In modernity, we have to find new ways of naming this phenomenon because of our loss of the theory of correspondences. However, this unity of the symbol, with its potential to instantiate, is in play in depth psychology in the analyst's interpretation of the dream symbols, and in the transference situation between analyst and patient.

Returning to Lilly, we now see how the same symbol of Mercury-Saturn in Taurus is about the alchemist, it is about the stone, it is about his health, it is about Lilly's words and it is also about the power of interpretation itself. Like Russian dolls, when one is taken away there is always another one there. So this multiple *array* of the symbol, its multiple interpretations, moves in two different directions. In the first movement, everything related to the symbolic arrays of Mercury-Saturn expands **outwards**, multiplying in many different forms and contexts, into many particulars. Yet it can also move the other way, moving **inwards**, pulling everything back to itself, back to a source, to a universal principle. Symbolic arrays can therefore be interpreted either as multiple takes outwards, in which case they become contextual and relative, or they can pull back into the symbol as the ability of the symbol to gather disparate factors towards itself. This is the innate emptiness of the symbol, so that, for example, everything in the judgment from Lilly pulls back to Mercury-Saturn. If we ask what Mercury-Saturn means, it only means Mercury-Saturn. It is empty. This wonderful power of emptiness, the ability of the symbol to pull back to its emptiness, allows it to create the One World.³¹

In this context, the One World expresses the classical concept of Plato's ontotheological synthesis in the *Timaeus* in that the astrological symbol is an expression of Sameness and Difference, the Equator and the Ecliptic, uniting the celestial sphere in Existence.³² This uniting power of the symbol distinguishes it from *diabol*, that which separates. It unites across sameness and difference, across the subject-object divide, which loses its diabolic power. With the multiple arrays we have seen in the particular manifestations of the universal principle of Mercury-Saturn, where is the stone, where the alchemist, or Lilly, or the interpretation, or our hearing of it? They come together and identify as Mercury-Saturn. Even as I delineate this interpretation to you now, I write like Mercury-Saturn on the Midheaven, seeking to express this interpretive (Mercury) tradition (Saturn) to which I am bound and have submitted to. For the diviner, it remains a remarkable thing that the heavens themselves give this symbolism, the gift of the good Angels of God, revealed in divination. In this sense, in some mysterious way, to Lilly and the medieval mind, all turns together around the same symbol, and this identity of diviner, querent and world takes an individual back to the source, in either a Platonic or Christian sense, turning the soul back to the divine source or to God. This is the cosmology of Plato's *Timaeus*, that we witness and are party to the One Turn of the celestial sphere on its

³¹ See my *Cosmology for Modern Time: Recreating the One World* (2006), p.45-47. Unpublished MA dissertation, University of Kent.

³² Plato, *Timaeus*, p.29 Warrington commentary.

axis, and this very witnessing and participation of the cosmos allows the soul to know its desire and thereby make its own turn. In the Platonic world view, this desire is the desire of the soul to return to the One.³³

I will illustrate this theme with a woodcut of the celestial sphere attributed to Erhard Schon in 1515.³⁴



It shows the great pole of the celestial sphere, with the celestial north and south poles going through the centre of the earth, and the great circles of the Equator and Ecliptic (or Zodiac) encircling the sphere. The two great circles meet at the 'eyes of God',³⁵ the points where the Sun crosses over them at the spring and autumn equinoxes. In this image of the celestial sphere, Ptolemy and the astrologers look up to interpret the

³³ Plato, *Timaeus*, (28A) Jowett, p.234, and (37D) Jowett, p.241.

³⁴ Derek and Julia Parker (1971), *The Complete Astrologer* (DK Adult, 2009 reprint).

³⁵ Dante, *The Divine Comedy: Paradiso*, Canto X 10-12, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers and Barbara Reynolds (London: Penguin Classics 1962).

heavens for humanity, and what is being watched is not just the movement of planets and signs but the whole turn of the celestial axis on its pole. It is always difficult to convey a sense of the celestial sphere to people in urban settings who have little astronomical sense, and in modern times the celestial sphere is rarely imaged because modern art seeks to express an infinite modern cosmos, not the bounded classical and medieval cosmos.

In this image of the celestial sphere, the inscription around its frame reads: *'animus altio incubate subimaginae mundi'*. This translates: 'under the power of the symbol the soul (or spirit) settles itself (finds a home) at a higher level than the ordinary world'. Thus the symbol, as expressed in the turn of the celestial sphere, has a transforming power, a power to turn us away from the unreal sublunary world of appearances to the eternal realm of the real. Moreover, humanity and the soul move as part of the sphere, because the one turn of the celestial sphere *includes* us. Graphically in this picture humanity is shown observing the celestial sphere above us, but the earth is at its centre, and as the sphere turns, its one turn is turning the many into one, and it is our awareness of the heavenly bodies as symbols that makes this possible. This suggests the tropological level of the Christian four levels hermeneutic, the trope or moral turn of the soul towards God.³⁶ By gazing on the movement of the celestial sphere we are able not only to see its turn but we are turned by it, and with it. This is what is meant by the transmuting power of the symbol.

For pre-enlightenment mind, a transmuting power is given in the heavenly symbols. What could such a thing with such powers of transformation be called? Is it not the Philosopher's Stone?³⁷ The astrological symbol is said to have the power of transmuting the everyday world into something higher, and the Stone's transmuting ability creates the Elixir of eternal life, the sense of the eternal and of a unity that expresses the One World. Yet as we have seen, the symbol itself is empty and this may be its true gold. What is often said of the philosopher's stone is that it exists but it does not exist at all.³⁸ The alchemists understood the gift of grace, but they also saw it as their task to help God perfect nature, to assist in the divine creation by their proper industry, to work towards the Stone.³⁹ In this, the work is done through Mercury, Mercurius being the agency of transmutation because of his power to unite the opposites. Mercurius bridges the worlds, he brings together the alchemical King and Queen, sun and moon, all things that are separate, and enables a bridging of worlds.⁴⁰ In relation to the symbol, Mercury as Hermes is the act of interpretation itself, the hermeneutic move.⁴¹ Hermes is the god of language who has to be spoken, and it is in the power of speech and the word that transmutation becomes possible through the interpretation of the symbol. The symbols in astrology mean nothing and in our

³⁶ See Geoffrey Cornelius (2003), *The Moment of Astrology*, Chapter 14, p.277-291.

³⁷ See Ashmole's comments: "Iudiciall Astrologie is the Key of Naturall Magick, and Natural Magick the Doore that leads to this Blessed Stone". (*Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, London 1652).

³⁸ See the description of Mercurius as the poison-dripping dragon in '*Aurelia occulta*', (*Theatrum Chemicum IV*): "By the philosophers I am named Mercurius; my spouse is the [philosophic] gold; I am the old dragon found everywhere on the globe of the earth I am known yet do not exist at all".

³⁹ Jung, CW13 *Alchemical Studies*, *The Spirit Mercurius*.

⁴⁰ Jung, CW 12, *Psychology and Alchemy*, p.312 para 420: "alchemy is interested in the fate and manifest redemption of the substances, for in them the divine soul lies captive and awaits the redemption that is granted to it at the moment of release ... For the alchemist, the one primarily in need of redemption is not man, but the deity who is lost and sleeping in matter."

⁴¹ For discussion on the hermeneutics of divination, see Geoffrey Cornelius, *A Field of Omens*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Kent (2010).

example from Lilly, they would have no turning power for the alchemist unless Lilly turns with them, interprets them, speaks and makes his judgment.

It would appear that pre-enlightenment astrological practice, exemplified by its greatest exponents such as Lilly, is wholly rooted in the transforming power of the ontotheological cosmos. This is not seen as objective or 'out there'. Through the symbol, it is creatively taken up by the astrologer's act of interpretation, without which it does not exist. The nature of this symbolic material is that, like the philosopher's stone, it exists but it does not exist at all until we take it up in interpretation. Even then, you can speak as much as you like but if the good Angels of God have deserted you, the gift of the gold may not be granted. Similarly, if you do not participate, the Platonic cosmos becomes an objectified, monolithic structure that is abstracted and unreal, but once you engage it, it becomes manifold and multiple, so that the One becomes the Many and the Many become the One. The One World is experienced in the moment of interpretation as the symbol crosses all divides. However, what is important to emphasise here is that interpretation is not a loose display or a private intuition, but is an act of inductive divination. Astrological language has a common ground, an objective ritual and tradition that go back to antiquity, with a language and craft that are consistent and communicable. This is quite different to psychic or intuitive processes that are incoherent and cannot be shared or communicated with others.

This interpretation from Lilly is a move of great art. He is the astrological equivalent of Shakespeare, and those who know the astrological language realise that, like any good wordsmith, Lilly could have used many different ways to say a thing but he has chosen a perfect use of English to say precisely this and not that in his interpretation of the symbols, and he has artfully chosen his words. There is a tendency in modern astrology to think that astrological symbols are a set of subjective impressions where one interpretation is as valid as another, but this misses the pre-enlightenment understanding. In the craft there are given meanings that cannot be read some other way, and yet they are readable for a manifold reality. This horoscopic craft is evident in many of Lilly's other horaries in which symbolic instantiation or the very words he uses in the judgment are the move of the horoscope itself. In *Christian Astrology* he demonstrates a philosophy, language and worldview that stretch back to medieval, Arabic and classical culture. The presence of symbolic instantiation is also to be found in the symbolism and practice of depth psychology, and this is one of the reasons that, alongside the interpretation of dream and other symbols, depth psychology is very related to inductive divination. Before then, however, the medieval cosmos, with its theory of correspondences, underwent an almost total collapse.

Appendix

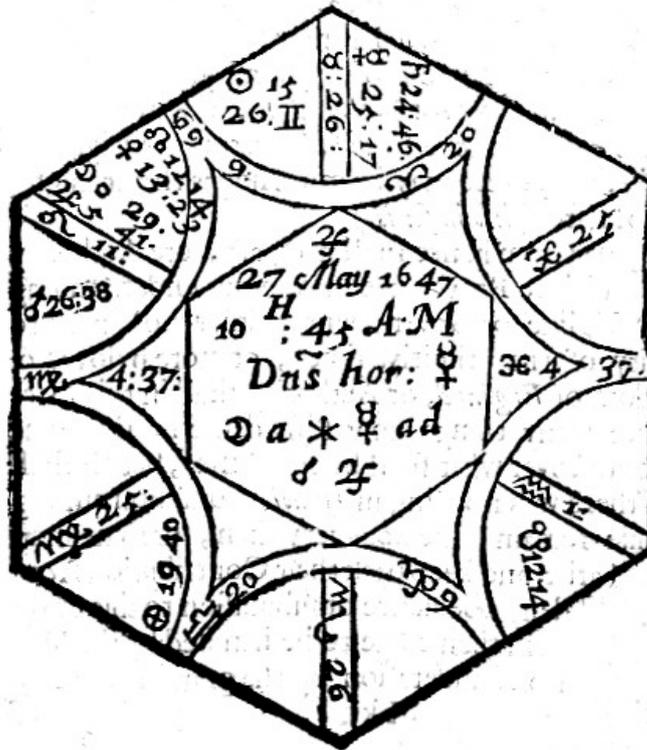
If Attaine the Philosopher's Stone?

*A Judgment from William Lilly
(Complete original text)*

An ingenious man with much seriousness propounded the Question above, viz. *Whether he should obtain the Philosopher's Stone?*, or, that Elixar by which such wonders are performed? that there is such a thing in being I verily believe; that it may be attained I am as confident: but as it is a blessing beyond all blessings upon earth, so I hold, that it is given but to very few, and to those few rather by revelation of the good Angels of God, then the proper industry of man. This Question must admit of this manner of proposal; *Whether the Knowledge of the Querent is so able, or he so cunning, as to produce to effect by his Art what he desires?*

CHAP. LXXXI.

If attain the Philosopher's Stone?



The Querent is signified by the ascendant, and Mercury Lord thereof; his knowledge by Mars Lord of the ninth, and the aspects which may be cast unto him from other Planets.

I find Mars Lord of the Querent's Science in a cadent house, but in his own Term and Face.

Mars is in a square aspect both of Mercury and Saturn, and they and he in fixed Signs, they in the Terms of Saturn, falling into the ninth house; I finde Mercury lately Retrograde, and in square of Mars, now moving slowly in his direct motion, and applying again to a second square of Mars: From hence I judged, the Querent had formerly spent some time in the search of this admirable Jewel the Elixar, but in vain and to no purpose; his second application by square happening not long after, while Mercury was in Gemini, and in his own Terms, intimated a stronger desire, greater hopes and resolutions to endeavour once more the attaining of the Philosopher's Stone, but I advised the Querent to decline his further reasons, advertised him how incapable he was, and the improbability of the thing intended, according to naturall causes, and advised him to desist: I also said, that he erred in his materials or composition, working upon things terrene, or of too gross and heavy a substance; part of which judgment I collected by Saturn his square unto Mars, part by the affliction of Mercury, his intellective, part by the proximity of Saturn, both cohabiting in an earthly Sign, for in any operation where Mercury is corrupted, there the fancy or imaginative part is imbecill; but where the Lord of the Work it self is unfortunate (as here Mars Lord of the ninth is), there the groundwork or matter it self of the principall part of the operation is defective, as here it was: and that the Gentleman should think I spoke not in vain, I acquainted him, he had more necessity to cure himself of a Consumption, he was entring into (nay entred) then of advancing his paines further in the scrutiny of this Labyrinth.

For seeing Mercury Lord of the Ascendant, and Saturn in conjunction in Taurus, Saturn being Lord of the sixt, of evill influence naturally, and finding Mars afflicting Mercury out of the twelft, and Mercury not receded from, but applying to a further evill square of Mars, no Fortune interjecting his benevolent aspect betwixt Mercury and the two Infortunes, but that he stood single of himself without any assistance, and thereby was incapable of resisting their malevolent influence. I advised to have a care of his health speedily, &c.