

PART III: A GUIDE TO LIFE'S POSSIBILITIES

16.

GENERAL GUIDELINES: THE PLANETS AND SIGNS THROUGH THE HOUSES

In every corner of my soul, there is an altar to a different god.

Fernando Pessoa

Ideally, every factor in the chart should be interpreted in the light of the whole chart; it is only then that the true significance of that placement can be appreciated in relation to the broader pattern of an individual's being and becoming. However, as a step or aid in the process of ultimately synthesizing all the important factors in the horoscope, this part of the book explores the possible interpretations of the different planets and signs through the houses. The suggested meanings are by no means conclusive, nor are they intended to be taken as gospel. It is hoped, however, that the information given (most of which is drawn from personal experience) will generate further thought and insight into the various and numerous ramifications of each placement.

General Guidelines for Interpreting Planets in the Houses

What exactly does a planet (or planets) situated in a house show or suggest? To answer this, we need to recall that the astrological birthchart portrays symbolically how an individual's drives and urges are apt to express themselves. Like the seed of a plant or a tree, it contains a blueprint of what the fully developed person could grow into or become. The chart tells us something about the nature of the seed, as well as offering some general indications about the process of the seed's unfoldment. On this basis, the birth map can be understood as a set of instructions showing how a person can most naturally actualize his or her potential.

Bearing this principle in mind, we can infer three basic guidelines for interpreting a planet in a house:

1. When a planet is located in a house, the function or activity represented by the planet finds its most natural area of expression in the field of experience referred to by that house. The sign in which the planet is placed gives further information about how this activity can be approached.
2. The reverse is also true: the area of life designated by the house in which a planet falls is most naturally dealt with and handled in accordance with the type of activity represented by the planet there.
3. A planet in a house also shows the nature of the archetypal principle we are born already expecting to encounter through that area of life or facet of experience. It is the kind of energy we are innately predisposed to perceive or meet in that domain. It is the *a priori* image of that sphere of life which exists right from birth.

General Guidelines for Interpreting Signs in the Houses

Sign placements are slightly more complicated than planetary placements in relationship to the houses. Firstly, there will always be a particular degree of a certain sign on the cusp or beginning point of each house. In the example shown in Figure 15, 11 degrees of Cancer is on the cusp of the 1st house; 29 degrees of Cancer on the cusp of the 2nd house; 20 degrees of Leo on the cusp of the 3rd house, etc. We would then associate the principles of Cancer with what the 1st house represents; the principle of Cancer will also influence the 2nd house (even though only one degree of Cancer remains in the 2nd it is still associated with that house because of its cuspal position there); the principles of Leo would operate in the 3rd house, etc.

However, if we look closely, we will see that there is a variety of ways in which a sign may appear in a house:

1. Some portion of a sign may be in a house even if it is not on the cusp of the house. In the example chart, Cancer is on the cusp of the 2nd, but much of the sign of Leo is there as well. Therefore, the 2nd house will be associated not only with a Cancer influence but also with a Leo influence. Usually the influence of the sign on the cusp is considered more important *even if* more of the next sign is present in that house.
2. If, as in the case of the Quadrant systems of house-division, the same sign falls on two successive house cusps, then all of another sign will be *intercepted* in another house. This

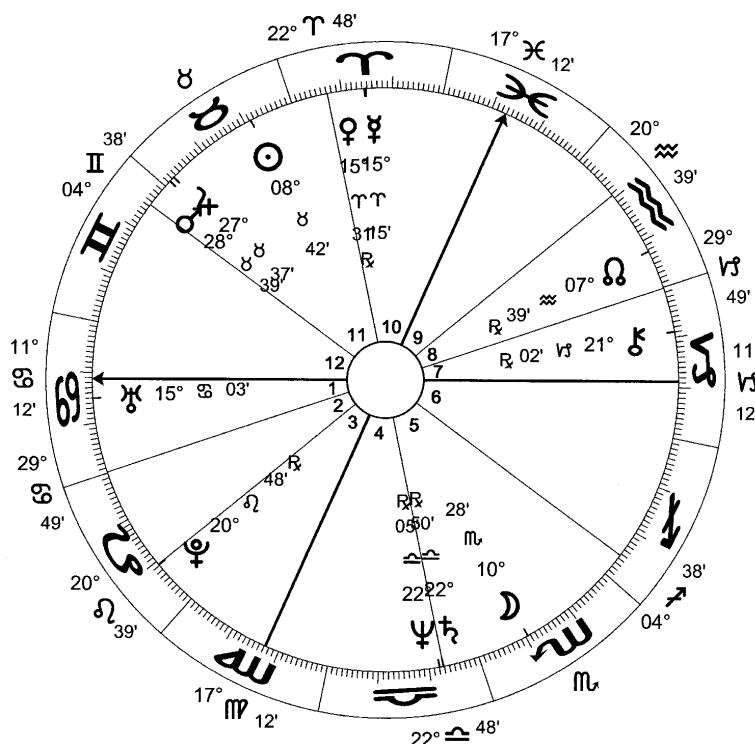


Fig. 15 Eliot, born 29 April 1953, 09:00 CET (-1), Florence, Italy (43N46, 11E15)

means that a house begins with one sign on the cusp, has the next sign intercepted or totally contained within the house, and has the following sign completing the house. There are then three signs influencing an intercepted house (again the sign on the cusp is usually the most important influence). In the example chart, Cancer and Capricorn are both on the cusp of two houses (the 1st and 2nd, and 7th and 8th respectively). Consequently we can look for other houses with intercepted signs. In this case, the 5th house begins with 23 degrees of Libra on the cusp, has all of Scorpio intercepted in it, and ends with the first few degrees of Sagittarius. A similar situation exists with the opposite signs in the opposite house, the 11th.

The guidelines for interpreting a sign (or signs) in a house are similar to those for interpreting a planet in a house, except that it should be remembered that the sign on the cusp of the house is considered more important than other signs that might be in that house:

1. The sign or signs in a house find their most natural area of expression in the field of experience referred to by that house.
2. The sign or signs in a house indicate the types of experiences which allow the native to best realize his or her potential in that field of life.
3. The sign or signs in a house also suggest what kind of archetypal energies the person is predisposed to expect in that area of life.

House Rulerships

There is another factor to be considered in analysing the influence of planets and signs in the houses. When a planet is located in a certain house there is a connection between the affairs of that house and the house or houses in which the sign(s) that the planet in question rules is placed. For instance, in the example chart, Venus is in the 10th house; but because Venus is the ruler of both Libra and Taurus, the 10th house Venus will have an influence on the houses in which Libra and Taurus are found. In this case, Libra is associated with the 4th house (23 degrees of that sign is there) and the 5th house (the 23rd degree of Libra is on the cusp). All of Taurus is intercepted in the 11th. So, Venus in the 10th house (career), through its rulership of Libra and Taurus, will have bearing on the 4th house (home), the 5th house (children) and the 11th house (groups). This man has worked (10th) running groups (11th) in his own home (4th) geared to helping parents relate better (Venus) to children (5th).

To sum up: a planet has an influence on

1. The house in which it is placed.
2. The house on whose cusp is found the sign that planet rules.
3. The house in which any number of degrees of the sign the planet rules is found (even if the sign the planet rules is not on the cusp).

Generally, the weighting of the influence of the various factors can be taken in the order given above.

Empty Houses

Over and over again when teaching astrology to beginners I hear the question 'What does it mean if a house is empty?' Some students are very troubled by empty or untenanted houses – that is, a house in which no planets are found. 'My 5th house is empty – does that mean I won't have any children?'; 'my 3rd house is empty – does this mean I don't have a mind?'

Because there are only ten planets to go around the twelve houses, invariably certain houses will be untenanted. This does not mean that nothing is happening in that area of life. Nor does it necessarily imply that the area of life in question is unimportant.

Strictly speaking it is incorrect to say that a house is empty. Even though there may be no planets in that house, there is still a sign (or signs) placed there which will influence that sphere of experience. Thus, the *first step* in interpreting what is happening in an untenanted house is to relate the qualities of the sign or signs found there to the area of life associated with the house in question. The *second step* is to refer to the planet which rules the sign on the cusp of the 'empty' house. What house is the ruling planet in? What sign is the ruling planet in? How is the ruling planet aspected? In this way, we glean a great deal of information about the house in question. The *third step* is to examine the planet which rules any other signs found in that house (not just the sign on the cusp). Where is that planet by house, sign and aspect?

In the example chart, the 6th house is empty. Following the three steps outlined above, much can be learned about that house. Sagittarius is on the cusp of the 6th house: on one level, this could mean that Eliot should develop skills (6th) of a Sagittarian nature – techniques for expanding or broadening the vision of other people, for instance. The ruler of Sagittarius is Jupiter, which is placed in the 11th house of groups. The group setting could then be an appropriate place to employ his skills (ruler of the 6th in the 11th). Since Jupiter is in Taurus and conjunct Mars, his temperament is suited to leading (Mars) the groups he might establish (Taurus). But we mustn't forget that Capricorn is also in the 6th house. Therefore, Saturn's position in the chart will exert an influence in relation to the 6th house as well. Saturn is in Libra very close to the 4th/5th house cusp. Again, we have the idea that the work (6th) might take place in the home (Saturn in the 4th ruling Capricorn in the 6th). Saturn is so near to the 5th house cusp that it could also have some bearing on that house. One of the associations with the 5th is that of children, so we are back to a connection between work (6th) possibly being linked to children in some way (Saturn near the 5th house cusp rules Capricorn in the 6th). We have previously arrived at the same interpretation through examining Venus in the 10th and its influence (see page 109). Anything which is important in the chart will usually manifest in a number of ways; this is sometimes called 'the rule of three'.

Obviously, a house with many planets in it is very important, but we should not overlook the significance of so-called empty houses. Should the planet ruling the sign on the cusp of an empty house be the focal point for a particular chart shaping, such as the handle to a bucket type chart or the leading planet of a locomotive shaping, then the affairs of the house in question could figure prominently in the native's life. The empty house might also contain the missing element to a T-square and this would increase the relevance of that area of life in contributing to the overall balance of the person's psyche.

Packed Houses

A house may contain more than one planet. Indeed, some houses are 'packed' – that is, three, four or even more planets may fall within one house. In this case, each of the

principles, urges, drives or motivations suggested by the different planets will be expressing itself through that area of life. Obviously, should the nature of the planets be contradictory, such as the expansive effects of Jupiter versus the cautious and limiting effects of Saturn, then that sphere of life will be met with greater tension and complexity. Any house containing two or more planets will assume extra significance in the person's life-plan or purpose.

Planets Near House Cusps

Generally, if a planet falls a few degrees before the end of a house and therefore close to the cusp of the next house, its effect may be felt in both spheres – in its own house as well as in the house which it is near. The orb of influence can even be slightly increased to roughly five degrees, providing that the sign the planet is in is the same sign as the next house cusp.

The sphere of experience associated with one house naturally leads to the next. A planet at the end of a house, and just prior to the cusp of the next, may bring the junction point of these two areas of life into focus. For instance, if Venus is near the end of the 6th house and close to the 7th house cusp, a person may fall in love with and marry (7th) someone he or she has met through a working situation (6th). If Mercury is between the 10th and 11th houses, professional connections (10th) may develop into friendships or contacts with new groups of people (11th).

The astrologer is so often working with an estimated or approximate birth-time that a planet near the cusp of a house might actually belong to the adjacent house. Likewise, given the kinds of discrepancies which occur depending on which house system is used, a planet near a cusp in one system may fall in the neighbouring house in another method. For these reasons, some astrologers believe that a planet placed in the middle of a house has the most reliable influence because it is so firmly established in that domain.

Inequality of Houses

In Quadrant systems of house-division, unless the birth is on the equator, the houses will be of unequal size (especially for births in extreme northern or southern latitudes). Some houses may span sixty degrees while others may be as small as fifteen degrees or less. Many students enquire whether bigger houses are more important. To some extent, this is probably true since transits (the ongoing daily motion of the planets) will spend a longer time in the larger houses than the smaller houses, thereby stirring the affairs of that area of life for a more extended duration. However, a small house, especially if there are two or more planets in it, can still have an important influence. Even untenanted, the ruler of the sign on the cusp of a small house might be significant by placement or aspect and in that way emphasize the affairs of the house in question. Also, though planets transiting through the smaller houses spend less time there, they often 'do their job' in a more condensed and concentrated way, driving lessons home harder and faster.

Intercepted Signs

Students also ask whether signs which are intercepted (not on a house cusp but surrounded entirely by a house) are less important than signs on the cusp of the house. The sign on the cusp is generally more important, but the intercepted sign will

definitely be felt in relation to the affairs of that house. The effects of planets in intercepted signs appear to be as strong as planets in the other signs. Some astrologers claim that when a sign is intercepted its nature is introverted or directed inward. I have not found this particularly to be the case.

Bearing these general guidelines in mind, we will now examine more specifically the implications of the different signs and planets in the twelve houses, as well as a discussion of the Moon's nodes and the recently discovered Chiron in this respect. In the main, in order to save space and avoid repetition, except for the Ascendant/Descendant axis (or 1st and 7th house cusps), I have not examined separately the meaning of each sign in a house. However, the reader should remember that the significance of a particular planet in a house is similar to the influence that the sign it rules has on a house. For instance, if you have Cancer on the cusp of the 8th (or contained in the 8th) then you can read the section headed the Moon in the 8th to learn more about the way in which Cancer in the 8th might operate. Or if you have Pisces on the cusp of the 5th, then you can refer to the section headed Neptune in the 5th to glean how the closely related principle of Pisces might evince itself in that house.

Also, there is the problem that any aspects to a planet in a house from other planets in other houses will modify the effect of the planet and house combination in question. For instance, if Venus is in the 7th we might expect an ease and receptivity in partnership. But if Saturn in the 4th, let's say, should square the 7th house Venus, then the expression of Venus will be tempered by the nature of Saturn. Occasionally, I make a distinction between a well-aspected planet in a house or an adversely aspected planet in a house. Please keep in mind that it is not necessarily the case that a difficultly aspected planet will manifest in a negative way, although it may require more effort or struggle to use the adversely aspected planet constructively. For further insight into how stressful aspects can be used productively, the reader is referred to Christina Rose's excellent book *Astrological Counselling* (Aquarian Press, Wellingborough, 1982). As she articulately reminds us:

Behind every aspect (as with everything in the birth chart) stands the individual himself. His outlooks, philosophies, conditioning and experience so far in his life will all bear upon the way the aspect functions; it is he who lives it, or is seeking to live it, and his actual experience may not read exactly like a textbook interpretation. (page 87)

17. ASCENDANT TYPES

The sign on the Ascendant informs us of the qualities we should consciously strive to manifest in the process of self-discovery and unfoldment. However, it would be misleading to consider just this sign alone, and not take into account the meaning of the opposite sign which will fall on the Descendant or 7th house cusp. While the Ascendant is the point of self-awareness, the Descendant is the point of awareness of others. We find ourselves through the Ascendant, but the Descendant is what we find in others. What rises above the horizon and into the light of consciousness (the Ascendant) is complemented by what sinks beneath the horizon into the dark (the Descendant). When I consciously identify certain qualities as 'who I am', then implicitly there are other qualities which I am identifying as 'not-me'. The qualities I identify as 'me' are shown by the Rising sign; the qualities I identify as 'not-me' are shown by the Descending sign.

But the name of the game is wholeness: what we do not 'own' in ourselves, we will invariably attract to us. The more we develop those attributes on the Ascendant, the more we will meet the opposite attributes of the Descendant in others. The two points of the Ascendant and Descendant form a coupling or polarity which are inextricably linked. None of us exists in a vacuum, and our sense of self (Ascendant) will be reshaped by what we meet through others (Descendant). The nature of the Descending sign will attempt to modify and balance the qualities of the Ascendant until a stalemate, a compromise or a synthesis is achieved. Therefore, in discussing the significance of the Rising sign, some understanding of the implications of the Descending sign are included.

Aries on the Ascendant and Libra on the Descendant

With the fiery sign of Aries rising, the person should meet life in a straightforward and energetic manner: 'Here I am, notice me, now let's get things started.' There is a need to be decisive, take action, and 'own' the power to create and direct the life. The core of Aries rising is finding this creative potency within, not waiting around for things to happen. Life is best viewed as an adventure, quest and challenge. If other placements in the chart indicate a meek or withdrawn nature, there will be more struggle in developing the Aries qualities. If the Aries Ascendant is denied expression, the inner frustration which accumulates could periodically explode in illness, dramatic or wild outbursts, unruly fits of anger, or other forms of self-destructive behaviour. If the rest of the chart is already fairly fiery, the Aries Ascendant allows the assertiveness to flow freely, but with the danger of being too forceful or overly egocentric – which in the end may be self-defeating.

If Aries is rising then the opposite sign, Libra, will be on the Descendant, beckoning the person to balance rampant autonomy with some degree of consideration for another person. However, if those with this Ascendant have to choose one extreme or the other, it is probably wiser that they err in favour of self-assertion and daring rather than hold back too much for the sake of keeping the peace or adapting to the requirements of others. After their own power has been found and the courage to be the self is freed,

then they can learn to regulate, adjust and temper the nature accordingly. Ultimately, the Libran qualities of grace, forethought and consideration for another person's case and point of view will need to be included.

Physically, Aries rising may evince a lively, energetic face with intense but darting eye-contact. Movements are usually quick and impulsive, as if the person is ready at any moment to plunge headlong into some new activity. 'Don't stand in my way' may be the message subtly (or not so subtly) communicated to others.

The controversial writer, Henry Miller, author of a number of books which were banned in America, had Aries rising with its ruler Mars in Scorpio in the 7th. Sexual adventures and exploits (Mars in Scorpio in the 7th) were integral to his daring voyage of self-discovery (Mars rules the Aries Ascendant).

Taurus on the Ascendant and Scorpio on the Descendant

If Taurus, a fixed earth sign, is on the Ascendant, then life needs to be met more slowly and steadily. Rather than rushing into things, Taurus rising should plan, structure and work systematically towards its goals. The fixity of this sign on the Ascendant suggests that the person may need to hold onto or remain in one phase of experience much longer than Aries rising types. The danger is becoming too lazy or indolent and staying with something purely out of habit, attachment, and security when it has truly outlived its purpose or usefulness. It will be necessary for the Taurus rising to learn when to hold on and when to let go.

Those with Taurus rising also have a need to feel comfortable with the earthy and material sphere of life, and to see concrete and tangible results for their efforts. A sensible regard for the body and its requirements should be developed. Being too driven or ruled by the instincts is not the ideal, but cutting the self off from the basic instinctual nature is not a healthy situation either.

When Taurus is ascending, then Scorpio is found on the Descendant. This means that strong and intense emotions (Scorpio) will be evoked in the sphere of relationship. Jealousy and possessiveness can be the root of many interpersonal problems, and those with Taurus rising will have to confront, examine and gain greater mastery over the destructive side of their emotional nature. In other words, Scorpio on the 7th house cusp forces them to look inward, to probe hidden motivations and underlying causes in order to transform the way they use their power. The Scorpio Descendant does not allow them to take life at face value. Through relationship problems they are jarred from their lethargy and periodically required to cleanse and eliminate what they have stored up inside, changing old and outworn habit patterns.

I have noticed two different physical types associated with Taurus on the Ascendant. The more usual embodiment of this sign is solid, earthy-looking, and heavy-set: a healthy, 'country' look just right for 'a roll in the hay' or a Falstaffian appearance, often with the characteristically thick Taurean neck. On the other hand, some Taurus rising individuals exhibit a more delicate and chiselled look, emphasizing the aesthetic side of the Venus rulership of the sign. The actress Vivien Leigh (famous for her role as Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With The Wind*) is an example of this type: she was born with Taurus rising and Venus, its ruler, in Libra.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, the English lyric poet described as fragile and delicate, also had Taurus rising and its ruler Venus in the 5th house of creative expression. Walt Whitman, with his rich appreciation of life and nature, had Venus rising in Taurus.