



The Pluto Square Pluto: A Perspective

*Study me then, you who shall lovers be
At the next world, that is, at the next spring;
For I am every dead thing,
In whom Love wrought new alchemy¹*

Carole Taylor

Hades scattering seeds in a field ploughed by the goddess Demeter, 430 BCE

Because of its elliptical orbit, the square of Pluto to its own place will occur at different times for different generations. Such is its power, many of the people I know who have been through it, including both clients and friends, speak of it as one of the most pivotal times – a time when, either by conscious will or force of circumstance, their life changed in a profound way. For some it is clearly a very testing time indeed, for others a smoother experience, but no one I have spoken to has not on some level understood it as a moment of great significance, nothing less than a transition from one state of being to another.



The Rape of Proserpine, Simone Pignoni, 1650s

All transits have the potential to change us – hopefully to leave us stronger, wiser, more accomplished – and each has its own particular manner of bringing this about. Pluto’s process echoes the myth of the descent into the underworld so evocatively described by the Sumerian story of Inanna and Ereshkigal and the Greek story of Persephone and Hades – the removal by force, the stripping away of the outer shell, the period of despair in a place of darkness and isolation, followed (hopefully) by the slow return to life, conscious that one has been irrevocably changed. With Pluto, the mechanism which brings this about may often feel anything but self-induced, as though we would do anything not to have to go through it, but even when it is something we wish for, we often need to mourn for what has been taken, as part of the process of adjustment to a new state. I have known clients and friends who suffered real material loss at the time of the Pluto square – redundancy, financial difficulty, the death of someone close. For others it was a more overtly joyful event, such as the birth of their first child, and yet some still experienced it as a challenging transition from the freedom of the childless state to the commitment required of a parent. Letting go of their more youthful and carefree self was often not as easy as they had imagined it might be, requiring acknowledgement that something had been sacrificed or lost.

What is discovered during a Pluto transit, though, is often some aspect of the self which is latent or undeveloped – Pluto asks us to dig deep and connect consciously with what has lain hidden or suppressed, as the image of the underworld journey suggests, or to release some talent which has been underutilised, waiting in kernel form for the right moment to flourish. As Rob Hand puts it, *‘Pluto rules forces for change that are inherent within the hidden depths of things’*². Alongside his darker reputation as rapacious kidnapper and keeper of the dead, Hades was also a god of the earth, connected with agricultural abundance, and the story of Persephone was symbolic of the mysterious process taking place underground which enables

the earth to produce crops and fruit. We should remember that Hades acquired the alternative name of 'Pluton', meaning 'he who brings wealth'.

The fruit falling from the tree marks the close of the natural cycle, when the tree's energy becomes focused in the seed as it drops to the ground. Similarly, under a transit of Pluto, something in the way we are currently using or experiencing the planet or angle it is touching has run its course – it is a point of natural closure and drawing in, of connecting once more to the seed of that planet or angle, in a way which releases another aspect of its potential and allows a new phase of its expression to begin. Quite simply, there is more to come, something which has not yet been expressed to its full power.

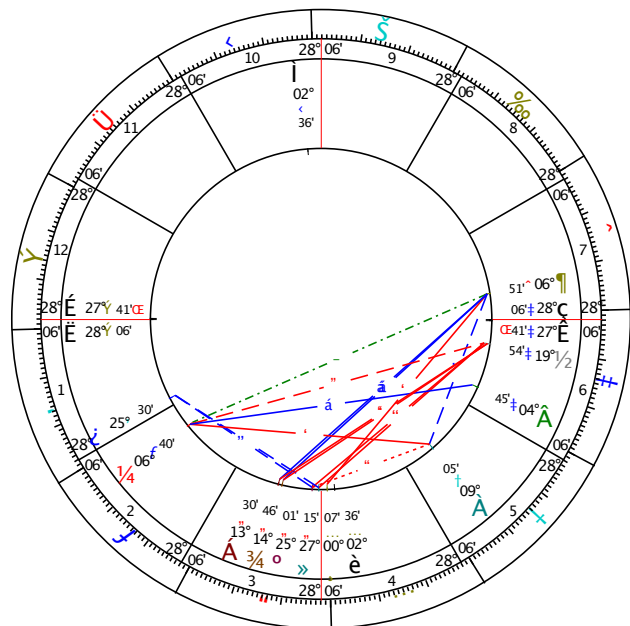


Hades scattering seeds in a field ploughed by the goddess Demeter, 430 BCE

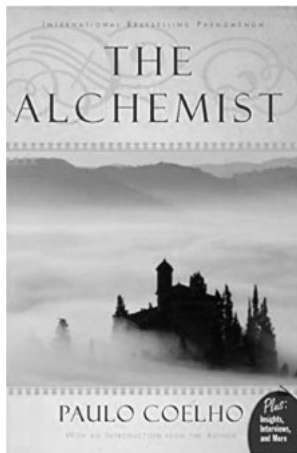
And so it is when Pluto squares its natal place. Pluto in the natal chart is where we seek depth and intensity, to hone some skill or part of ourselves so that it achieves maximum impact, maximum strength and transformative or therapeutic value. Like the planet itself, Pluto in the chart is compact and dark, concentrating energy into itself like a fighter drawing in his fist ready to deliver a knockout punch. It is where we identify that power is located, however we define that, and where we seek to be indomitable, in command of ourselves and our circumstances, but typically also where must undergo a process of transformation in order to uncover it – perhaps because, being an outer planet, we don't initially perceive that its power truly belongs to us, and, being of the underworld, there may be long-held feelings of shame or humiliation in our feelings and experiences around it, going back to very early childhood.

The Pluto square might therefore be viewed as a pivotal moment in life – with all the attendant tension and desire for manifestation suggested by a square, and all the challenge and anxiety of connecting to our deeper passions or potentially revisiting dark times from our past.

One rather uplifting example of this transit in action is in the life of the Brazilian author Paulo Coelho, whose 3rd house Pluto suggests a desire for empowerment through writing, something he achieved despite fierce opposition from his family³. Coelho knew from an early age that he wanted to write, but his parents disagreed with his choice of career, even committing him to a mental institution for part of his teenage years, hoping to purge him of



Paulo Coelho natal chart



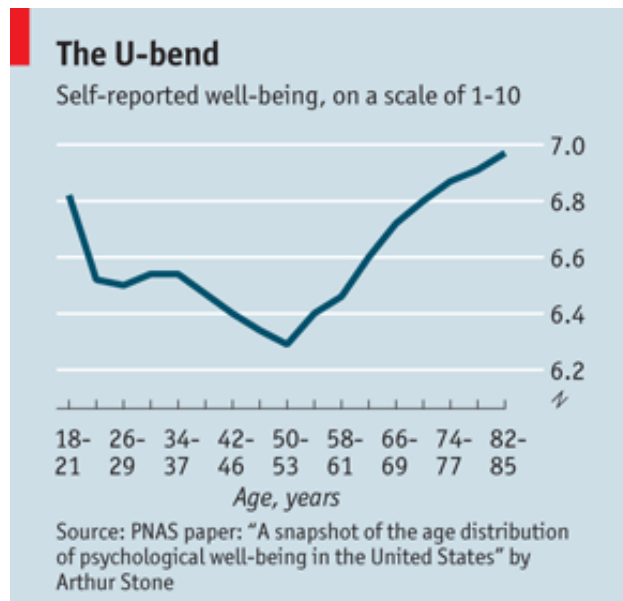
The Alchemist book cover

the idea. As you would expect though, with tough-minded Pluto conjunct Saturn in Leo in the 3rd, along with Mercury and chart ruler Venus, he overcame the resistance to follow his own particular star. Initially working as a lyricist and journalist, he honed his writing skills, publishing his first book, *The Hell Archives*, in 1982. In 1986 (with transiting Saturn conjunct the Moon in Sagittarius and trining Pluto-Saturn), he walked the 500-mile pilgrim road to Santiago de Compostela and experienced a spiritual awakening which he documented in the autobiographical book *The Pilgrimage*. The following year he wrote *The Alchemist*, the book for which he is most famous – only 900 copies were initially printed in 1988, the year of his Pluto square, and his publishers refused a second print run; but such was the depth of Coelho’s belief in the book, and in his destiny as a writer, he simply applied to a bigger publishing house. It has since become one of the best-selling books in history, selling more than 65 million copies. Since his Pluto square, Coelho has written a novel every couple of years – but perhaps none more powerful than the one about the boy who discovered the secret of turning lead into gold.

My own Pluto square occurred when I was 36. I began studying astrology at the Faculty of Astrological Studies in 1995 as Pluto squared my 3rd house Uranus, a process which, over the course of the next few years, completely changed my life. Something which started out as intellectual curiosity quickly became an overriding passion, as my studies progressed and I engaged ever more deeply with the subject. By the time Pluto squared my Pluto-Mars conjunction at 9° Virgo three year later, I was in the heat of the fire – every aspect of my life, from the outer constructs of job and relationship, both of which had seriously run their course, to the inner image I had of myself and my capabilities, was being melted down and re-forged, eventually to be recast with greater definition, strength and authenticity as I came out the other side.

I can’t pretend that it was easy at the time – under a Pluto transit of any kind, one does not simply rearrange the furniture and hope that this will do. *‘Hades is not to be soothed, neither overcome, wherefore he is most hated by mortals of all gods’*⁴– so says Agamemnon in Homer’s *Iliad*, and there is much truth in this. As a budding astrologer, ultimately I knew that the process would be empowering – at the time I’ll admit that it sometimes seemed impossible. The breaking apart of an old life is just one stage of the process, and perhaps not necessarily the easiest – it is followed by a time when it can be hard to see how anything new might

arise, a necessary state of stillness as things begin to reorientate within. Before resurrection comes death; the fruit falls from the tree and the seed lies motionless in the ground awaiting the longed-for change of circumstance that encourages the first shoot. With Pluto in Virgo in the 3rd (in tight conjunction to Mars and square Mercury-Venus on a Gemini Ascendant), much of my Pluto square experience seemed to concern itself with an obsession about gaining knowledge and deepening my understanding of astrology to the point where I could articulate my thoughts in ways which would then seem effortless to others. To say that I worked hard at this during the Pluto square would be an understatement – I discovered an academic and linguistic capacity within myself which has proved an invaluable skill for life as a professional astrologer, not to mention the triumph of gaining the Faculty’s Diploma at the final pass of the transit. The empowerment I felt was extraordinary – I had discovered a language which spoke to my soul and I had mastered it sufficiently well to begin thinking of it as the foundation of a new life.



U-bend of life

Some years ago, an astrological colleague introduced me to the phenomenon of the ‘U-bend’ – nothing to do with Pluto’s rulership over plumbing, but the findings of psychologists studying the relationship between age and happiness, and recounted in an article in *The Economist* in 2010⁵. It would seem that, far from being a ‘long slow decline from sunlit uplands towards the valley of death’, life is more like a U-bend – allowing for variations of gender, culture and personal circumstance, self-reported happiness tends to decline from youth to a low point at mid-life, after which many people begin to record a far greater level of happiness and well-being, unrelated to their level of income. There may be several reasons for this of course – for instance, there’s nothing like ageing to make you realise that it would be worth making the most of the time you have left – but one of them must surely be the greater degree of wisdom and life experience that marks the period beyond mid-life. The U-bend neatly reflects the challenges of the Saturn return, followed by the mid-life transits of the Pluto square, Neptune square and Uranus opposition, charting an upward trend after the Chiron return at age 50 – and although the Pluto square is positioned at the low-point of the trough, suggesting it to be one of the toughest periods of anyone’s life, I would agree with those astrologers who see it as a major watershed and a catalyst for the internal reshaping which occurs during the mid-life years, when (potentially) whatever is no longer authentic and real begins to drop away, and we become more accepting of who we are, and more confident in our capacity to navigate life.



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She gained a Diploma from the Faculty of Astrological Studies in 2000 and has held a variety of roles at the Faculty since then, including Summer School Organiser, Head of Classes and Director of Studies. She pioneered the Faculty's online seminars and online classes programme, shaped its syllabus and has contributed extensively to its course material over the years. She was Vice-President of the Faculty for nine years and President for three years, being awarded a Fellowship in 2012 for her unique contribution to the life of the school. She continues to teach on the Faculty's Foundation and Diploma training programmes.

She holds an honours degree in Geography from the University of Cambridge and an MA with distinction in Myth, Cosmology and the Sacred from Canterbury Christ Church University. She is a tutor on the MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology at the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David teaching on the Sky & Psyche and the Researching Contemporary Cosmologies modules.

When we are in the white heat of a Pluto transit, it can be hard to find words that really do justice to the experience and articulate how we truly feel. So I will hand the final thought to the poet David Whyte, who so rightly describes poetry as 'language for which we have no defences'. The following is taken from his poem '*The Journey*'⁶, written admirably for a friend who was going through a very traumatic time, as he watched her (in his own words) 'become ever more present' as she went through it. Appropriately enough, he wrote the poem in secret, mindful of not wanting to suggest to her at the time how she should feel:

*Sometimes with
the bones of the black
sticks left when the fire
has gone out*

*someone has written
something new
in the ashes of your life.*

*You are not leaving
you are arriving.*

Footnotes:

1. John Donne, from A Nocturnal upon St. Lucy's Day, Being the Shortest Day
2. Rob Hand, *Planets in Transit*, Whitford Press, 2001, p.518
3. Paolo Coelho, 24th August 1947, 00:05, Rio de Janeiro (www.astrodatbank.com)
4. Homer, *Iliad*, Book 9 line 158
5. www.economist.com/node/17722567 – accessed 21st October 2012
6. David Whyte, 'The Journey', from *The House of Belonging*, Many Rivers Press (1996)

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