

The Correct use of Reception In Traditional Astrology

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This paper deals with the problems encountered when dealing with archaic language and examines how this relates to “reception”, as used by William Lilly.

In order to obtain correct understanding when addressing old texts it is necessary to deal with them on their own terms. We must try to comprehend something of the author’s culture, of his personality and of his opinions. We need also to understand the “form” of his language and how he structures his prose. At that point we can begin to read the words with some sensitivity to the author’s intention. In this regard, the original texts, or facsimile editions, form a vital part of our studies. Too much of the message these texts carry can be lost through a failure to apply ourselves to the linguistic nuances of the particular period.

The correct meaning conveyed in *Christian Astrology*¹ (all the quotes in the paper are from that work) is essential to our astrological practice. Yet, that meaning must be viewed through a veil of antique language.

This veil can create problems for those of us looking through the eyes of the Modern world. Care needs to be taken when excavating the meaning from often complicated passages. Even inattention to simple grammar can lead to great loss, the simple overlooking of a semi-colon leads to a mistake. It is one of the reasons why an accurate transcription of *Christian Astrology* would be very difficult to achieve. It requires the skills of the linguist, translator and experienced Traditional astrologer.

For these reasons the Academy of Traditional Astrology only recommends to its students that original or facsimile copies of *Christian Astrology* are used. We are aware of the difficulties, but it is the only way to ensure that errors of transcription are avoided and the true meaning of the text, and thus Lilly’s teaching, is preserved.

¹ William Lilly, *Christian Astrology*, Regulus facsimile edition, 1985.

Discovering the Meaning of *Received*

A case in point is Lilly's use of the word "receive" seems obvious until we examine the matter in depth.

Lilly states in *Christian Astrology*²:

"If you find the Lord of the eleventh in an angle received, judge the thing shall come to passe as he would wish. If you find the Receiver of the disposition of the Moon in a common Signe, judge he shall have but a part of the thing hoped for: If the same Receiver be in a movable Signe, he shall onely have the name, or a probability of having thereof, or else very little of it: but if the same Receiver be in a fixed Signe, he shall have the thing whole and compleat: but if the Receiver of the Moon be infortunate, the matter shall receive damage or hurt, after he hath the same, or is in possession thereof. If you find the Receiver of the Moon received, he shall likewise obtaine the same, and more than he looked for: if you find the Lord of the ascendant received, he shall obtaine whatsoever he hoped for: this must be understood in things feasible and possible. "

This section raises questions about the meanings of "received", "disposit", "disposition", and "reception". The following explanation results from an investigation of each as used in Book 2 of *Christian Astrology*.

Lilly uses received in two ways and it is left to the reader to decide which one applies. The first relates to essential dignity, that is, to receive a planet in an essential dignity. When talking about collection of light, he says: *...and they receive him in some of their essential dignities*; He says this means: *"...that a Person somewhat interested in both parties...shall performe, effect and conclude the thing which otherwayes could not be perfected."*³ This person, or collector of light, is "somewhat interested" in these others through dispositiveing the significators in one dignity or another. This suggests a familiarity and through receiving both significators "welcomes" them.

The notion of receiving equating to "welcoming" is quite a revelation, in view of the way the word "receiving" is often used. We generally think about receiving and dispositiveing as being the same thing, but while it operates in the same way, there appears to be a different connotation.

² Page 458

³ Page 126

So, *to be received is to be found in another planet's position of dignity*, this latter planet being the receiver or welcomer.

It does not mean the same as “reception”, which requires a two-way relationship, as in mutual or mixed reception, as he says⁴, and as explained below.

Lilly also uses “receive” regarding aspects. This is what he means in our first passage⁵. A little earlier in the book⁶ the puzzle is solved:

If the Lord of the ascendant and the tenth commit their disposition to any Planet by any aspect, with or with no Reception, whether the Receiver be a Fortune or Infortune (so that he be not Retrograde, Combust or Cadent, or goe out of that Signe wherein he is before the conjunction of the Lord of the first and tenth with him) and if the Moon be joynd to the Lord of the first or tenth, the querent shall achieve the preferment expected.

In modern English: if the ascendant and 10th house rulers cast any aspect to any planet, with or without receptions, whether or not the receiver of that aspect be a malefic or benefic, the querent will get the preferment; as long as, that is, the planet receiving the aspect is not retrograde, combust or cadent. Also, that aspect should perfect within the current sign. For the desired outcome to take effect, the Moon should aspect the ruler of the Ascendant or 10th house.

Understanding Lilly's use of Disposition

It appears that Lilly uses “disposition” as he does “virtue” or “influence”, although it could be that there are variations of aspecting implied in his use of different words. However, we can assume that he means the characteristics of the planet. Lilly states:

We understand a Planet to be ill disposed, when Peregrine, Retrograde, Combust, Cadent from the Ascendant or house of the thing demanded, so that he beholds not the house or at least the Lord of the house, in this nature the aspect to the house is better than to the Lord thereof; so that any planet in his Fall or Detriment, may properly be called Destroyer or Obstructor, or Planet impeding.⁷

⁴ Page 171

⁵ Page 458

⁶ Page 446

⁷ Page 182

So, if a planet is in none of these conditions it can be said to be well disposed. He explains further: *...and see if the more ponderous Planet of the two, that is the receiver of the Disposition...⁸*, so it is clear that the receiving planet needs to be the slower, or the planet being aspected. The planet that is committing its disposition is that which is faster and therefore doing the aspecting.

This type of receiving needs a great deal more thought before a full account can be made of its astrological significance. Receiving in this way does not always need to be in relation to significators: Lilly often says that it can be with any planet. It seems to be concerning relationships or opportunities, after all 'contacts' do not happen only in the horary chart, we all hope to have helpful contacts when we want something.

One further point: it is not clear whether committing disposition is a forward moving event or relationship and thus, application. He uses the word "aspect" in seemingly the same contexts as he does the other terms. It appears that when he uses the word aspect, he means application, so perhaps committing disposition can be either applying or separating.

What is the difference, then, between receiving by dignity and disposing? When Lilly uses the word "disposit" he usually means to disposit by sign, when he refers to any other dignity he uses the word "receive". There is an exception, but he does make it very clear what he means: *...the Moon did dispose of Saturn in her Exaltation, and of Jupiter in her house,...*⁹

Dispositing and disposition are not linked and are completely different in meaning, as has been explained. He might also use "the lord of..." in this respect, too and it is a clearer phrase.

Reception

This is much easier to understand because when Lilly *does not* use this word he makes it clear what he means. Unless he specifies otherwise, to be in reception with another planet means to be in mutual or mixed reception with it. This view has support, for example:

The Significatrix of the woman in her owne Essentiall Dignities, or in trine to the Sun or Jupiter with any Reception, or the Moon and the

⁸ Page 447

⁹ page 387

*Significatrix in trine or sextile, in Reception out of any mutuall Dignities,...*¹⁰

Another example:

*If there be reception between the Lord of the fifth and seventh, and any amicable aspect, your Messenger was well received and entertained by him to whom he went, yea though the application be by square or opposition, yet he was well received; but the party sought after, framed some excuse, or framed some matter in his owne defence, concerning the thing sent unto him for.*¹¹

This not only shows the ambiguity of his use of this word it is also a good example of how to interpret reception. In this case, it would be unwise to dismiss the use of mixed receptions, since they would furnish the same end result and would depend on the status of the parties in each other's eyes, plus the quality of the welcome the messenger received.

Lilly says:

...but finding Reception betwixt Jupiter and the Moon,¹² and betwixt the Sun and Moon, she in his Triplicity, Sun in her house,¹³

Thus, ***reception can mean mutual or mixed***. Mutual reception occurs when planets are in positions of equality, such as the example mentioned in footnote 12. The Moon when in Sagittarius is in mutual reception with Jupiter in Cancer by sign. If the Moon were to be in Leo in a nighttime chart,¹⁴ it would be in the fire triplicity ruled by Jupiter at night. With Jupiter in Cancer it would form a reception of mixed dignities.

¹⁰ page 312

¹¹ Page 237

¹² The Moon is in Sagittarius and Jupiter is in Cancer, so the reception is mutual.

¹³ Page 387

¹⁴ That is, a chart set for a time after sunset.

Conclusion

The important point is that we do not make assumptions based on the modern use of the English language and just as importantly, that we do not take what we read on face value.

Thus, we cannot make assumptions about exactly what Lilly meant. It takes careful study and examination and ultimately those meanings have to be put into practise. That has to be our primary aim.

Once we have established the meaning – as we think Lilly meant it to be – then we have to apply it. This is the proof of the pudding, but unless care is taken initially in the extraction of meaning, then we will fail. To reiterate: wherever possible use original texts in your investigations and avoid those that try to “update” them. The intention to make these texts clearer is admirable, but it often leads to reconstruction and causes time-consuming error.

There are other factors involved that have not been addressed in this paper. Over time, an astrologer’s understanding of the Art evolves and so it is important that we read widely and examine their work over as long a period of time as possible. We are fortunate with Lilly in that we have more than 30 years of his work from when he first published *Christian Astrology* in 1647 to his death in 1681. We can draw on his unpublished works and notes and examine client charts. These are an untapped resource that we must focus on if we are to fully appreciate the brilliance of this astrologer. The Traditional Horary Course puts a lot of time and effort into this type of research and is always happy to place it before the serious students of astrology.