



STOP TALKING ABOUT THE PLANETS!

by Elisabeth Grace

"What we've got here is a failure to communicate."

— Luke (played by Paul Newman) in *Cool Hand Luke*

Thanks to the November 2016 election and a well-timed ISAR conference, astrology generated a lot of press last fall in mainstream publications. Even *The Wall Street Journal* wrote about Hillary Clinton's unconfirmed birth time and the challenge it posed for astrologers striving to predict the election outcome. *The Wall Street Journal* — wow! That's great exposure for astrology, right?

I'm not convinced — and not because none of the astrologers interviewed predicted that the 45th president would be Donald J. Trump. The Electoral College upset stunned mainstream pollsters and pundits, too. What made the press coverage not so great? Astrologers speaking in technical jargon instead of plain English. It's hard enough for astrology to be taken seriously by mainstream audiences. Using words that mean nothing to those who do not "speak astrology" makes it even harder. We need to stop talking about planets when talking to the press!

Take *The Wall Street Journal*. It put astrology right on the front page as its "A-hed" story on September 29, 2016.¹ The A-hed, for those who do not read the *Journal*, is described on its website as "the code name for a story light enough to 'float off the page.' The A-hed is a headline that doesn't scream. It giggles."²

I first learned the term A-hed in February 2015, when a freelance reporter for the *Journal* interviewed me regarding the blog I write about the astonishing synchronicity of headline news and planetary patterns. While I strive to write with wit and humor, the astonishing synchronicity of headline news and planetary patterns is serious business, perhaps ultimately disqualifying it as a suitable A-hed subject.

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The astrological headline that did qualify as a giggling A-hed was this: "Who's Demanding to See Hillary Clinton's Birth Certificate? Baffled Astrologers."

Heaven forbid the *Journal* should call astrologers who are "demanding" to see Hillary's birth certificate "perfectionist" or "exacting." That would be taking them seriously. "Baffled" makes astrologers sound funny — how can that be good for astrology? Not to mention that hardly any of the 100-odd *Journal* read-

ers who commented on the article said anything positive. Most were outraged that their cherished paper gave any space to astrology at all.³

But I can't fault *Journal* readers for not finding astrology meaningful, given how it was presented:

Mr. [X] is an astrologer. He knows Donald Trump was born at 10:54 a.m. in Jamaica Hospital in Queens on June 14, 1946. From that, it's possible to divine that the GOP candidate "has a very strong Mars vibe going on," he says.

The Red Planet's position in Mr. Trump's natal chart — the precise layout of the heavens at the moment of birth — resonates with Americans fed up with Washington, says Mr. [Astrologer]. Mars exudes the Roman war god's temperament, and Mr. Trump is "basically channeling that energy."⁴

"Very strong Mars vibe"? "Roman war god's temperament"? Sure, I understand it, and I'm sure you understand it, since you're reading a magazine for professional astrologers and students. But we can't expect our astrological code words to mean anything to the average citizen. We must speak in a language a reader understands.

Compare Astrologer X's description of Trump's horoscope with the way another astrologer contrasted the

"Junk the Jargon"

horoscopes of two birth times proposed for Hillary Clinton. This is from an article in *The Washington Post*:

"The 8 a.m. chart indicates someone who is very career-focused, ambitious, someone who could really rise to a high rank," he said. "The 2:18 a.m. time doesn't have those kinds of classic strengths. It's not a chart that looks like someone who is going to rise to a high degree of prominence."⁵

Not a word of technical jargon in that paragraph. No reader could argue that it is unintelligible.

Meanwhile, an article about the ISAR conference published in *The Guardian* began: "The polls are grim, but the cosmos may yet save Donald Trump. Why fret about Florida when you have Orion?"⁶ That's a catchy open, isn't it? But do you think the clever reporter is taking his subject seriously? The article continues, quoting a highly regarded astrologer: "Mythologically [Trump is] Orion — a constellation. It represents giants. It's very important for the whole story of the United States, that's why he finds his place here ..." What does that mean to the press and the public? Nothing!⁷

It also meant nothing when other acclaimed astrologers spoke of the contest between Trump and Clinton as a battle between Mars and Venus⁸ — not to mention this explanation of why an election victory for Hillary Clinton was likely: "If Trump flames out, Clinton can thank her running mate. 'The moon ends up on election day right at Tim Kaine's sun.'"

As *The Guardian* reporter noted, "To astrology skeptics that will be gibberish based on pseudo-science nonsense, as meaningful as goldfish bubbles."

Ouch. But he's right.

Keep It Simple, Stupid

When your doctor tells you that you have coronary artery disease, does she speak to you in the 24-letter Latin words that were peppered throughout your cardiac catheterization report?

The ones that made your eyes glaze over and/or paralyzed you with fear? No. She tells you that your arteries are blocked in words you can understand. Her clear communication inspires confidence and trust.⁹

Yes, *trust*. Research shows that specialists who speak in "abstract" technical jargon are seen as less trustworthy than those who present their ideas in "concrete" language.¹⁰ This includes financial advisers, engineers, physicists, doctors, and astrologers. Google "junk the jargon," and you will find an avalanche of articles and professional associations — even academic competitions¹¹ — urging specialists to Keep It Simple, Stupid when presenting to a nonprofessional audience. People are more inclined to accept what they can understand.

Words that are not understood are more likely to be met with skepticism, annoyance — or worse. Just last week, an acquaintance was telling me about a friend who is an astrologer. "I know he is brilliant, but I just can't listen to him

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anymore. Everything is 'Jupiter square this' and 'Venus trine that.' I have no idea what he's talking about!"

Learning to Junk the Jargon

Once upon a time, I clung fiercely to my astrological jargon. "Your Moon is in the 8th house, square to Uranus and Pluto, and this means ... blah blah blah," I would say to my client, as she looked at me hopefully. I was primarily self-taught, and the few astrologers who had done my horoscope used technical terms, which I understood — so why not? Then I started to get serious about

studying astrology. In a consulting skills workshop, a teacher stated that fancy jargon is as meaningful to a client as "your Moon is in toasters." (Thank you, Monica Dimino!) And that clients might not ask for clarification for any number of reasons, including not wanting to seem stupid. Still, I resisted the teacher's sage perspective. I resolved to do a better job explaining what "Moon square Uranus" means. Wrong!

Only when a teacher demanded that I *actually write up* horoscope analyses without using a word of jargon did I finally see the light. (Thank you, Noel Tyl!) Putting my analyses in writing forced me to come up with ways to translate astrology into plain English. But let me tell you, I fought this exercise tooth and nail. See, I thought jargon made me sound *smart*. I thought it made astrology more impressive and *valid*. I thought it was important to *teach* clients these technical terms. Wrong again! Clients do not go to astrologers to learn astrology. They go to learn about themselves and how to live their lives better. If you want to speak in jargon, hang out with other astrologers, teach classes, or write a blog tailored for people who understand or who want to learn astrology. (But do not be surprised or dismayed when your blog fails to sustain the attention of readers who are stumped by the jargon.)

Now when I have a client with Moon square Uranus and Pluto, I ask him why patterns in his horoscope suggest a challenging relationship with the mother, or how it is that he needs to run relationships on his own terms. I *translate* the planetary patterns in the horoscope into words that are meaningful to the client. Rarely does anyone who has never studied astrology ask what *planets* in the horoscope sparked my insights.

Putting Planets in Perspective

Of course, most everyone knows that planets are what astrologers study. So, wouldn't we be *expected* to talk about them if a reporter — or anyone else — knocked on our door? Especially if we were asked questions about how the planets influence our lives, e.g., "How is it possible that Mercury in retrograde causes scheduling snafus?" Here's what I would say: "Let's not think of Mercury retrograde as a planet

doing anything. Let's think of astrology as a *language*." Then I would explain:

Languages are systems of symbols and sounds that convey meaning to those who understand them. How do languages work? That's a great question! There is no intrinsic meaning to the letters and words I am typing right now, but anyone who understands English will presumably understand them. Isn't that interesting? Why is that so?

A language evolves over time, reflecting the shifts in consciousness of those who speak it. Chaucer and Shakespeare can be challenging for present-day English speakers. English has evolved, reflecting the consciousness of 21st-century speakers. Is English more valid or less valid than other languages? Of course not. Chinese, Spanish, Swahili, and Inuit are equally valid, each with nuances that reflect their respective values and cultures.

Is one language preferable over the others? It depends. What would you like to talk about? If you want to have an in-depth conversation about snow, learn Inuit,¹² not Swahili. If you want to have an in-depth conversation about patterns and cycles that reflect life events and experiences, learn astrology. Or talk with someone who speaks astrology and can translate it into a language you understand.

Languages have accents and dialects. Go to Barcelona and you'll hear a different version of Spanish than in Mexico City. The Italian spoken in Palermo is not what you'll hear in Venice. Astrology also has dialects, as we see in the different house systems: Placidus, Equal, Regiomontanus, etc. Not to mention Vedic vs. Traditional vs. Evolutionary vs. Modern vs. Uranian astrology. All are valid and meaningful. How do you know? Sit down with any skilled astrologer who "speaks" them, and she will translate the symbols and patterns into plain English with astonishing accuracy.

Always Be Translating

I do not know why astrology works. Do you? Sometimes I think astrologers are like doctors who rely on objective measurements, which are then interpreted — artfully — in a way that is meaningful to the physical reality of the patient. Our objective measurements are planetary patterns and cycles. We in-

terpret the potential of these patterns based on what we discover about our client's unique reality. It is amazing that these patterns reflect patterns in life experience.

Perhaps we should tout astrology's analysis of planetary patterns at every opportunity. An article in Forbes was one of many I found online noting that "seeing patterns where others see

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nothing but a chance collection of objects' [is] the core of all innovation and new understanding — what people call genius."¹³

How about that? We are geniuses. (And by the way, another sign of genius is the ability to think metaphorically, like the astrologer who compared Trump to Orion.)¹⁴ Alert the media!

Other times I think astrologers are like particle physicists, chasing after tiny bits of matter that may never be seen. How do physicists know that the particles they write about exist? By observing and measuring the consequences. Isn't this what astrologers do? Case in point: One of my clients recently experienced three hits of a pattern suggesting sudden changes of fortune involving assets and worth.¹⁵ On the first hit, his parents sold the family summer home, which he had always been told would be part of his inheritance. Surprise! On the second hit — exact to the day — he received a check in the mail for an insurance claim he'd filed two years before and forgotten about. Surprise! On the third hit — also on the exact day — he won \$50 on one lottery ticket and \$30 on another. How astonishing that this pattern reflected the consequences in this man's life as we would expect!

Astrologers may never be able to explain why there is a correlation

between planetary patterns and the consequences that follow. It is a mystery. But let's make it our mission to explain what we do know in a language everyone can understand.

References and Notes

(All URLs were accessed in April 2017, unless otherwise indicated.)

1. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/whos-demanding-to-see-hillary-clintons-birth-certificate-baffled-astrologers-1475167293> (accessed 12/28/2016). Please note that in order to access the *Journal*, you must be a paid subscriber — or at least sign up for a free trial subscription that you can later cancel.

2. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303362404575580494180594982> (accessed 12/28/2016).

3. See Note 1.

4. *Ibid.*

5. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/local/wp/2016/10/14/this-is-not-to-be-trusted-astrologers-are-battling-over-hillary-clintons-true-birth-time/?utm_term=.0e8b825dfb4d

6. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/oct/12/astrologers-predict-us-election-trump-clinton-zodiac>

7. Let the record show that during the editing phase of this article, I received this note from *TMA*: "Elisabeth, even *our* readers aren't likely to understand this astrologer's reference to *Orion* in connection with a birth chart. Was he even speaking from an astrological perspective?" Right-o — even *TMA* readers aren't likely to understand the reference. And we'll never know if it was meant to be an astrological perspective or what the context was, as the reporter didn't say. Rarely (if ever) will an interview subject have any control over what goes to press. Avoid saying anything that isn't crystal clear!

The reporter did include one additional quote: "His [Trump's] hair, source of so much mockery, actually matches *Orion* mythology, according to [the astrologer] who said he predicted Trump's implausible rise in August 2015. 'He's a giant, even physically, with golden hair.'" *OMG, the astrologer predicted Trump's implausible rise in 2015!* Why isn't that the focus of the reporter's story? Answer: Unintelligible jargon makes the reporter skeptical.

8. See Note 6.

9. Unless you have the Moon in Gemini or the South Node in Virgo or ten planets in the 8th house — in which case you will look up every single one of those 24-letter words in any medical report your doctor orders. But this is the exception, not the rule.

10. <https://listen.statestreet.com/detail/2016/jargon.html>

11. <https://sites.google.com/site/junkthejargon/home>

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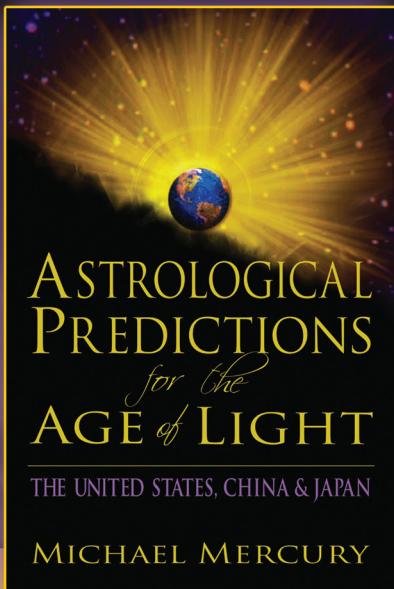


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"This work is, indeed, the product of a sensitive's gaze at the soul of the Japanese nation, the United States, China, and the world. I value Mercury's courage to make specific predictions about the outcome of the changes we face as a society."

- Maria Mateus, professional astrologer, writer, consultant

916-834-4321

mercuryminute@gmail.com



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12. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/there-really-are-50-eskimo-words-for-snow/2013/01/14/e0e3f4e0-59a0-11e2-beee-6e38f5215402_story.html?utm_term=.0509782e089b
13. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/erikaandersen/2013/01/07/three-things-you-can-do-to-think-like-a-genius/#c4efe9f6771b> (*don't you love the typo in "genius"?*)
14. http://www.creativitypost.com/create/how_geniuses_think
15. Transiting Uranus was conjunct the IC; Uranus rules the client's 2nd house.

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Elisabeth Grace earned her B.A. in Philosophy from Wellesley. She speaks modern psychological and classical horary and electional astrology. She is ISAR CAP and STA-certified. Freelancing at WNBC and CNBC (<http://www.graceastrology.com>) inspired her to cover the astonishing synchronicity of headlines and planetary patterns in a daily forecast — now in its eighth year. She also writes for NCGR and other publications and is thrilled to be in The Mountain Astrologer! She has lectured in the United States and Japan. To schedule a personal consultation, book a lecture, or read the forecast, visit <http://www.graceastrology.com>; e-mail: eg@graceastrology.com; telephone: (917) 743-2571.

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of the Mars Effect. He also published, in 2009, a clear argument against the Carlson Double Blind Test (1985) that has been used by skeptics to refute astrology. Throughout his life, he pursued research with great clarity and objectivity.

Irene E. Goodale, known to the astrological community as "Rene," died at home in Mystic, Connecticut on March 31, 2017. Having met her, I can honestly say that she had a unique way of bringing light into a room, and her heartfelt generosity was one of her trademarks. Born July 24, 1927, she was a licensed astrologer with a keen interest in Cosmobiology. A co-founder and former president of the Atlanta Chapter of NCGR, she was also a president of the Metropolitan Atlanta Astrological Society and editor of the *Atlanta Astrologer* newsletter. Moving to Connecticut in 2008, she continued to be actively involved in the development and promotion of astrology and metaphysics.

Note: Also see TMA's Conference Calendar and an obituary for astrological publisher Donald Weiser on page 100.

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