

Profile: Alan Turing



Perhaps many of my readers don't know very much about Alan Turing. Certainly, he was not well known to the public during his lifetime. Today there are statues of him and streets named after him. A computer innovation award was named for him; he was the subject of the well-received play and TV production *Breaking the Code*; and there is speculation that the bite off the apple in the Apple Computing logo is in homage to him, memorializing the manner of his death that we will discuss below. Last month, when his hundredth birthday passed, there was abundant commentary on his life and contribution that inspired me to write this segment here.

Turing's fame was disproportionate to his achievement, for he is today credited with:

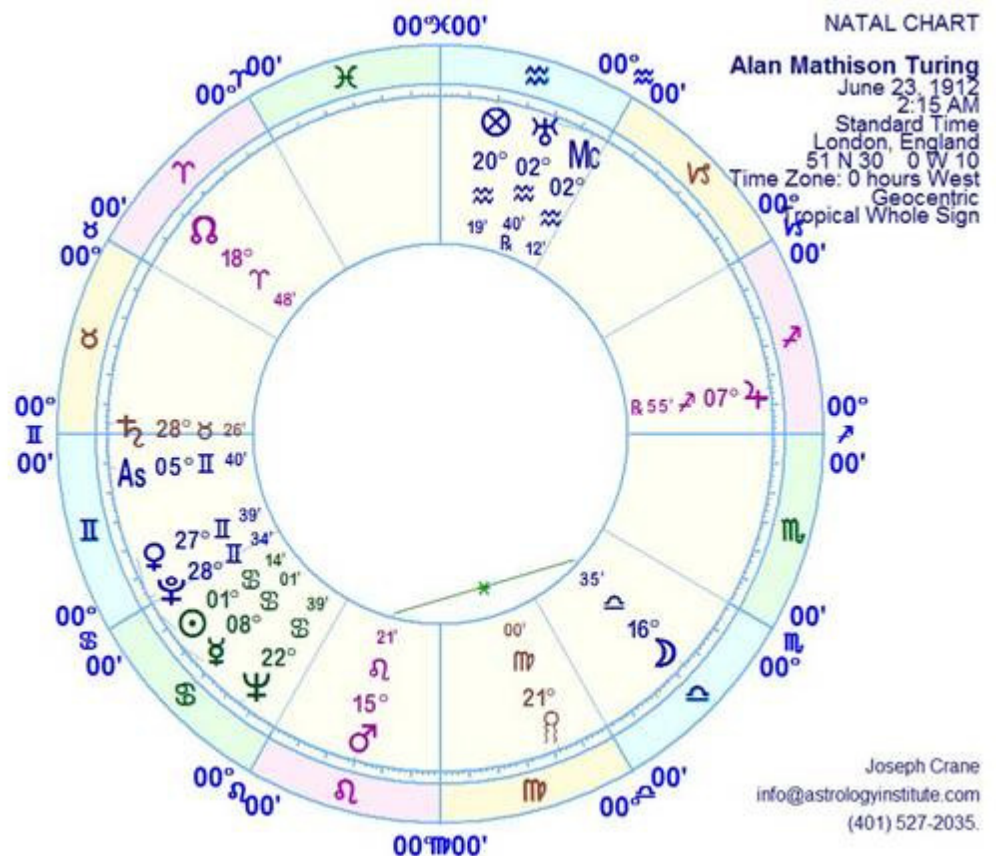
- (1) Developing the first computers,
- (2) Breaking the Enigma mechanism of the Germans during the first years of World War II and did a great deal of other work on encryption during the war, and
- (3) Developing the theory and research into the possibilities of artificial intelligence.

From the chip in your car to the smartness of your phone to the fact that we didn't all have had to learn German, we owe much to this man.

His story becomes even thicker when we add details of his personal life: he was gay but not quite "in the closet" during a time in which there were laws against homosexual activity. Due to his sexual orientation and his work with British and American intelligence, Turing was considered a security problem by some of his superiors.

Turing's Interesting Midheaven

His astrological chart is to the right, in Whole Sign house



format. This chart and its conjunction of Uranus and the Midheaven degree (MC) gives me a chance to discuss a particularly important question for any astrologer working with a Whole Sign House format : if the houses of this chart are arranged by the successive signs of the zodiac following the sign of the Ascendant, then what is to become of the degree of the Midheaven that is so important in modern astrology?

You will find an interesting discussion of this topic by Rob Hand in his *Whole Sign Houses: The Oldest House System* (2000). He suggests using the MC degree itself as a “first house” marker, so that we can interpret planetary influences in the area of career and reputation by a planet’s house position from the Midheaven; e.g., Saturn would be in the Fourth House from the MC, Moon in the Ninth. This is an intriguing modern possibility, in line with the twentieth-century Hamburg School. Although ancient astrologers would project houses from other places from the Ascendant (Sun, Moon Lot of Fortune, Lot of Mother, Lot of Father), there is no evidence that this was done in the ancient tradition.

A second possibility is that the MC, falling in the Ninth House, means that the Ninth House also carries the signification of career. This is particularly applicable to Turing, since his many scientific and technological achievements were philosophically inspired. Although gifted in science from a very early age, he became an atheist and materialist when a close friend in school died of tuberculosis. He began to believe that the human mind and its thinking could be rendered as a machine and its computations – today we can see easily the implications of his idea for the development of the early computers.

When he was a young man he was interested in the question of whether decision-making could be reduced to computation according to specific rules, and conceived of a machine that could do these kinds of things. Although he was to prove that one could not reduce decision-making to computation, the idea of such a machine had traction and he proceeded to work on building such a machine. His explorations of artificial intelligence were also rooted in philosophy that was rooted in his interest in “questions of ultimate concern” for which he had a materialist perspective. For his the Ninth House Midheaven degree would bring together his career and the philosophical roots of his work.

This solution to the MC degree problem does leave one factor that must be accounted for: if Turing’s Ninth House also becomes a place of career and fame, what is the role of his Tenth House that is Pisces? For this must also be a place of career. In Turing’s chart the Tenth House from his Ascendant is governed by a strong Jupiter in its own sign Sagittarius in the angular Seventh House. In his case we see less what he did than how he did it – although a richly independent thinker his work always had a collaborative context and he developed a strong band of friendships and associations. Although Turing had difficulties with bureaucratic superiors and was not known for being socially graceful, his work did have a strongly social context.

A third possibility for the MC degree is to think of it as a “personal sensitive point” – this is an approach pioneered by twentieth-century astrologers such as Reinhold Ebertin in his classic *Combinations of Stellar Influences*. The MC wouldn’t be just a point but an axis that would include its opposite point, the IC. Interestingly, Ebertin defined the MC degree as “the soul”. This move works marvelously with Turing, especially as we considered the MC conjunct Uranus, for he was an unusual as well as a brilliant and creative man. There are indeed stories about him: that he chained his coffee mug to the radiator for its safekeeping and that, to protect himself from seasonal allergies he would bicycle to work in one of those gas masks that were abundantly

available in wartime England. He was even an avid long-distance decades before such an activity would be “cool.” Turing did seem to lack the imperiousness of many people who have strong Uranus placements.

Onto other chart factors. We begin with Venus conjunct Pluto in the First House in Gemini. Venus in the First attests to his charm and affability (especially as we factor in Moon in Libra in its house joy in the Fifth), but the conjunction with Pluto has a darker and a more passionate side. As mentioned above, Turing’s sexuality got him into trouble. At the end of 1951 he had a brief liaison with a younger man who led one of his friends to rob Turing’s apartment. When Turing reported the burglary and his suspicion about its perpetrator, his homosexual behavior became subject to his arrest and trial for “gross indecency.” The result was that we was put on probation and received estrogen injections for a year. After this time was served he soon went travelled to continental Europe for some romantic adventures.

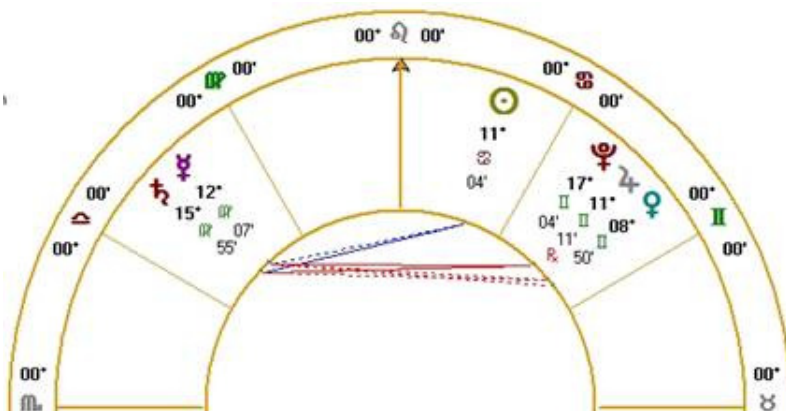
His Sun in Cancer in the Second doesn’t say so much. The Second sign is not a place of prominence for any planets inhabiting that house; money was not particularly an issue for him, as he was able to make a decent living working for the government and in academia. His Sun gains in importance when we note that it is the antiscion of the Venus-Pluto conjunction, since the midpoints of both planets to the Sun is the 0° Cancer/Capricorn axis. This gives his Sun those additional qualities of charm, emotionality, and a dark intensity.

As somebody who developed the first computers and cracked the impregnable German Enigma machine, we must look at his Mercury. This is augmented by the fact that Mercury is the ruler of the Ascendant, the Lot of Spirit, and the prenatal New Moon. We are at first a bit disappointed – it’s in Cancer, of no particular dignity, and in the mediocre Second House. Like the Enigma machine itself, Turing’s Mercury reveals its secrets slowly and with some work. A traditional perspective would note that his Mercury is leaving the Sun’s rays very quickly, over two degrees a day, and would rise from the Sun about a week after his birth. This attests to a youthful and supple mind, even in the sign Cancer.

At this point a modern astrological perspective helps fill things out for us. First, Mercury is applying to *Neptune*, usually a place that is very strange to that planet that prefers linear thinking and communication. In his case, Neptune provided Turing with the imaginative qualities a groundbreaking scientist requires. And when we look further at Neptune it’s in contra-antiscion (symmetrical to 0° Aries/Libra, the “Aries Point”). In this way Mercury has a role with the visionary nature of the Jupiter/Neptune combination.

Things also become interesting when we look at Turing’s modern harmonics, the Ninth Harmonic in particular. Think of this harmonic as a trine-cubed, denoting not just ease and comfort (like a trine aspect) but some kind of inspired joy. The Ninth Harmony seems to give very good information about Turing’s Mercury.

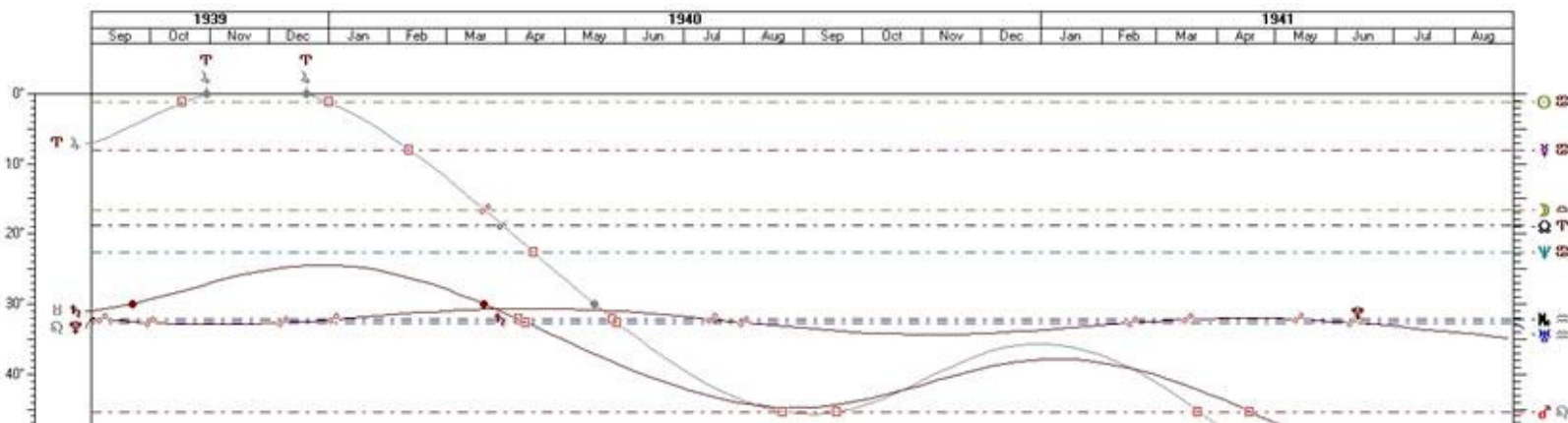
Here is the top half of his Ninth Harmonic. The Ninth Harmonic divides the planets in their zodiacal positions into nine chunks that have their own zodiacal set up within them. All aspects close to 40° (360÷9) or its multiples will be a conjunction; 20° or its multiples will be a Ninth Harmonic opposition. In modern harmonics, we are not concerned with signs or houses, only aspects between planets.



We see a strong tie between Mercury and Saturn, a combination of mental tenacity and stubbornness and critical precision. Although an affable man he did not suffer fools gladly. Mercury and Saturn are both in aspect to Pluto and Jupiter, and we get a strong ambition to make a difference. (We may also note that the two benefics Jupiter and Venus are conjunct, although the happiness of love denoted by this combination was manifest more in his aspiration than in the events of his life.)

Let's take a look at Turing's astrology at the beginning of World War II. Because of his interest and previous work with inscription, Turing was invited to join a special team to help break the codes of the Germans. The most difficult German code was from the Enigma Machine that was developed by the Germans at the end of the previous war. It consisted of rotating wheels so that the same letter would be rendered differently at different times, and the overall settings were changed daily. This code was being used to direct the U-boats that had surrounded England and were threatening to isolate and starve the island, so breaking this code was of paramount importance. After months of working on this project Turing realized that a machine would have to be built that could parallel the German machine but be organized to throw out inconsistent logical chains and whole stacks of possibilities so that the correct answer would come by eliminating gazillions of other possibilities. Many of these machines were devised and they worked well. The Germans would not believe that their code could be broken. Breaking this code became indispensable to the early stages of the War against the Germans. I will let the historians judge whether it helped prevent the German occupation of England that might have won the War for them.

We look at Turing's astrological indicators for 1939-1941. He has one interesting progression, a waning square between progressed Moon and Sun, but nothing more specific to his wartime contribution. However, during this



time Pluto was in early Leo and therefore in aspect to his Uranus-Midheaven conjunction. This is indeed significant, since this was to be Turing's achievement with the greatest impact (transiting Pluto oppose MC) but also tested his ability to think "outside the box" (transiting Pluto oppose Uranus.) In the section of his graphic ephemeris provided here, you can see the flat wavy line that notes the long-term Pluto transit. Within this larger period of time we can focus on the summer of 1940 that featured a Jupiter-Saturn conjunction that was in Taurus that was in square to Turing's Mars in Leo. This was probably a time of decisive activity. By 1941 Jupiter had moved into Gemini, the sign of his Ascendant, and he was on his way to further adventures working with wartime intelligence in the United States.

Using Hellenistic planetary periods, his decennials had a Saturn-Mars period from the end of 1939 to the spring of 1941: this again a period of activity, especially since Mars is in sect in Turing's nocturnal chart. Other Hellenistic systems say more about this being more the peak of his career – at least from a historical perspective.

The “zodiacal releasing” from Fortune follows the signs of the zodiac from his Lot of Fortune, for years that correspond to the planetary number of the ruler of the sign); for shorter periods one goes through the zodiac for months that correspond to the numbers of the planets. (For further information see Chapter 13 of *Astrological Roots: The Hellenistic Legacy*.) With Turing's Lot of Fortune in Aquarius, the first thirty years of his life would have Aquarius as the general signifier that had come full circle back to Aquarius as the specific significator. This is critical because Aquarius is the sign of his Uranus-Midheaven conjunction.

On January 17, 1942, his zodiacal releasing from Fortune entered Pisces, the sign of his tenth house of fame and reputation and career. By this time Turing would have been at the peak of fame – in a top secret kind of way. (The information about Turing and the Enigma Machine wouldn't be declassified until the 1970's.) This fame (in an secret manner) may be indicated earlier, when in 1941 his directed MC by circumambulation approached a square to his Sun position, making the Sun the planetary lord of all matters related to the Midheaven. (See Chapter 14 of *Astrological Roots*)

I need to close briefly by discussing the manner of his death. He died in June, 1954, having eaten part of a cyanide-laced apple (hence the logo for Apple). It was officially judged a suicide and this subsequently made Turing a victim and martyr to the cause of gay rights. However, there is no evidence that Turing has been contemplating suicide or was even in a difficult state of mind at the time of his death. He was, however, fascinated with Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) that, of course, featured a poisoned apple.

His mother, knowing that Turing did scientific experiences in his apartment and knowing that he was a very messy person, felt it may have been an accidental death. It is also possible that Turing was murdered: he had been working on projects dear to the intelligence community; however, there is no positive evidence for this. My inclination is that his mother knew best, especially considering that Jupiter had been transiting over his Venus, Pluto, and Sun the week before his death. This sounds more like carelessness born of exuberance, not the extreme pre-suicidal state of mind. Future intelligence archivists may uncover something yet.