

Geomancy and Alchemy: Providing Clues to Characters in *Harry Potter*

S.P. Sipal

Introduction

Geomancy, a system of divination highly popular in the Middle Ages, utilized contact with the energies of the earth, along with the intuitive understanding of the geomancer, to determine the answers to various types of questions concerning the future. Though many methods of chance were used to draw the earth's energies, the most common was for the geomancer to cut a series of lines or dots in the soil or sand. These dots were then formed into "characters" using a well-developed system of interpretation (based on binary numbers), resulting in a total of sixteen character possibilities.

Caput Draconis and *Fortuna Major* are two of these geomantic characters. "Caput Draconis" (Head of the Dragon) is the first password Harry learns for Gryffindor tower in *Sorcerer's Stone* (130). According to John Michael Greer in *Earth Divination, Earth Magic: A Practical Guide to Geomancy*, *Caput Draconis* is defined as: "A doorway leading in. Favorable for beginnings and gain" (7). It signifies the beginning of something new and positive — highly appropriate for the beginning of Harry's new life.

Similarly, in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, "Fortuna Major" (Greater Fortune) is used as the Gryffindor password. *Fortuna Major*, when relating to relationships, means an important and intimate relationship, which will profoundly affect one's life, is about to come one's way. Again, right on the mark for the book in which Harry meets Sirius.

Albus and *Rubeus* are two other geomantic characters with a special relationship. The sixteen geomantic characters are divided into eight pairs of opposites. *Albus* and *Rubeus* form one set of opposing figures. *Albus* (White) represents peace, wisdom, and purity, while *Rubeus* (Red) indicates passion, power, and violence.

Rowling's accurate use of the geomantic passwords makes it clear to me that she was aware of geomancy. Thus the implications behind her choice of first names for Dumbledore and Hagrid, and their role in the heptology, probably carries geomantic hints as well.

This paper will analyze how Dumbledore and Hagrid reflect their geomantic characteristics, how they relate to each other, and their interaction with Harry. Then, I will delve briefly into a few related symbols from alchemy that refer not only to Dumbledore and Hagrid, but bring in Sirius Black and Severus Snape as well. Finally, I'll conclude with an overview of how these geomantic and alchemic clues could play out in the final books.

Note: Throughout this discussion, when using the terms *Rubeus* and *Albus*, I am referring to the geomantic characters. When referring to Rowling's characters, I shall use *Hagrid* and *Dumbledore*.

Albus and Rubeus

To explore where the geomantic clues lead, we need to delve a bit more into the geomantic characters of Albus and Rubeus. First, let's look at a chart which highlights the major geomantic differences between the two figures:

	Albus (White)	Rubeus (Red)
Planet/Element	Mercury/ Earth	Mars/ Fire
Sign/Element	Gemini/ Air	Scorpio/ Water
Character	Peace-loving, honest, pure, and charitable.	"Hot, passionate, and fond of strong language. Tends to stir up trouble." (Greer 44)
Description	"Illumination, wisdom...Spiritual growth and harmony. Patience, thoughtfulness and the ability to balance all areas of life." (Powers) Related to intellect and mysticism.	"Rubeus is a figure of passion and involvement in life, balancing the abstract detachment of Albus" (Greer 44). Rugged and emotional. Good with agriculture and animals.

Note: This chart uses the planet, element, and sign attributions of Henry Cornelius Agrippa — who as coincidence would have it, Ron mentions three times (SS 102) on the Hogwarts Express in his desire to collect Agrippa's Chocolate Frog card. Agrippa, an alchemist of the 16th century, was both feared and revered in his day as a sorcerer. He was most famous for his book *Occult Philosophy*, in which "Of Geomancy" was a part.

Albus is considered a positive figure, while Rubeus is negative — meaning that if Albus appears in your geomantic chart in regard to a question, the outcome you seek is usually favorable, whereas if Rubeus appears, except in certain situations (love, war, and agriculture), your answer is unfavorable.

Hagrid

First, let's look at Hagrid in regard to his geomantic description. If you put aside the looming negative implications, I think the geomantic description of Rubeus fits Hagrid quite well. Harry's beloved Hagrid is rugged, emotional, and definitely good with plants and animals — the latter, the more dangerous the better. Furthermore, Hagrid possesses a volatile nature, which he expresses at various times — starting from his first encounter with Dudley Dursley (e.g., the pig-tail incident, SS 59), to his self-defense against Umbridge's minions during the astronomy O.W.L.s in *Order of the Phoenix* (though definitely deserved) (OotP-US 720–2).

As Sirius says in *Order of the Phoenix*, "the world isn't split into good people and Death Eaters" (OotP-US 302). Good and bad reside in each of us. Which aspect wins out depends on the choices that we make.

Hagrid does indeed harbor a dark side. He comes from half-giant blood, and according to

Hagrid in *GoF*, maternal instincts were not in his giant mother's nature. Ron agrees, "they're just vicious, giants. It's like Hagrid said, it's in their natures, they're like trolls ... they just like killing" (*GoF*-US 430).

Ron states this as a matter of fact everyone knows. Whether we should believe Ron or not, however, is a good question. "Hermie" seemed to make a bit of progress with Grawp after all, and Hagrid is one of the most compassionate characters in the *Harry Potter* world. He apparently makes the right choices.

Still, Hagrid does have a violent side, including a temper that's spun out of control more than once. He also has a passion for large, dangerous, lethal creatures, and indeed in *Chamber of Secrets* almost gets Ron and Harry killed with his edict to "follow the spiders" (*CoS*-US 264). Geomantic Rubeus' zodiac sign is Scorpio (the scorpion), often described as intense and powerful. In *GoF*, ironically, Hagrid breeds a creature (a skrewt) with a hard shell body and a stinger in its tail—very similar to the scorpion (*GoF*-US 295).

One mystery which still remains concerns what Hagrid was doing in Knockturn Alley in *Chamber of Secrets*. True, the clue Ms. Rowling is hiding in this instance could point toward the Flesh Eating Slug Repellent he's buying...but it still looks suspicious. Furthermore, loose lips sink ships, and Hagrid definitely has loose lips. How many times has he said something that he "shouldn'ta" said? (*SS* 193, 266). His actions could have caused significant problems more than once.

I think we are deliberately deceived by Hagrid's low education into believing that he is not a powerful wizard. He's easier to gloss over when compared to wizards of Dumbledore's or Voldemort's caliber. But I think this is a false perception. Just as Lucius Malfoy does not recognize Hagrid's worth, I think the reader is led to misjudge it as well.

If asked to give names of the most powerful adult witches and wizards in the final battle, whom would you choose? Dumbledore and Voldemort, certainly. Probably Snape and McGonagall as well. Possibly Malfoy Sr., Molly or Arthur Weasley...definitely Bellatrix. You might even mention Umbridge and Fudge. But would Hagrid appear anywhere in your top listing of powerful witches and wizards?

Hagrid, important in a magically powerful sense? In fighting a wizard's duel? Of course, he plays an important role in the story, but with his lack of magical education and broken wand, his role is more behind the scenes, allying the giants, and in playing the older brother / friend to Harry et. al. Surely, he's not a five-star general in an all-out war.

Or are we being lulled into a false security where Hagrid is concerned? A person can fail without being evil. A good heart does not always win the day. I could see Hagrid inadvertently betraying Dumbledore, then sacrificing himself to save his mentor. His temper could lead him into an unwise choice. True to the geomantic Rubeus, Hagrid's passion dominates his reason.

As many *Harry Potter* fans believe (and as the geomantic clues highlight), Hagrid, keeper of keys and grounds at Hogwarts, may also be the keeper of a major septological secret.

Dumbledore

Albus, while being a positive geomantic character, is also rather a weak one. Surely no one would ever associate weakness with Dumbledore! He's the most powerful wizard of his day, the only one Voldemort ever feared, the defeater of Grindelwald. Maybe Rowling did not intend the

“weak” attribute of the geomantic *Albus* to apply to her Dumbledore. But...no one is perfect, as 15-year-old Harry comes to realize at the end of *Order of the Phoenix*. Harry was not the only one who made a mistake that resulted in Sirius’ death.

Dumbledore’s greatest strength is also his weakness — he sees the good in people and trusts them. Although the most spectacular example of Dumbledore’s—perhaps—misplaced trust comes with the Snape killing Dumbledore surprise cliff-hanger ending to *The Half-Blood Prince*, each book has given us an example where Dumbledore did not accurately perceive another wizard’s true nature — Quirrell in *SS*, Lockhart in *CoS*, Sirius (initially) in *PoA*, imposter-Mad-Eye in *GoF*, and Harry’s maturity in *OotP*. However, I must concede that the reader does not yet know the whole story about Dumbledore’s perception of these individuals. Plus, Hagrid states that indeed Lockhart was the only applicant (*SS* 115), so Dumbledore had no choice there — or did he?

Imposter-Mad-Eye said that Dumbledore’s “a trusting man, isn’t he? Believes in second chances. But me — I say there are spots that don’t come off” (*GoF*-US 472). You’d think Barty Crouch would be one to know this, but just whose perception is skewered? Crouch’s or Dumbledore’s? Also, note the high foreshadowing of Crouch making this observation to Snape two books before *Half-Blood Prince*.

Dumbledore may or may not trust too easily, as all the Harry Potter boards are running over with conspiracy theories at the moment. Regarding Dumbledore’s trust of Hagrid, however, Ron’s words rest uneasy with me: “Neville will play Quidditch for England before Hagrid lets Dumbledore down” (*SS* 264). It remains to be seen whether Dumbledore’s trust in Hagrid is as well placed as his trust in Snape.

My Analysis and What This Means for Harry

In my opinion, while I do suspect Hagrid has a darker and more powerfully magical side than he is given credit for, and while I think it entirely possible Dumbledore is not quite the god-like all-knowing wizard when it comes to deciphering others’ characters (I think he tends to see their potential rather than the reality), in the end it is my belief that these two characters are as upfront as they appear to be.

What I believe Rowling has done with the geomantic opposites of Albus and Rubeus is to show two sides of the same coin. Even though Dumbledore and Hagrid are diametrically opposed, they’re on the same team. They will fight side-by-side, yet their personalities are complementary.

This dichotomy suits their relationship with Harry just perfectly. Each offers a fatherly example to Harry in his own way. Harry can garner their different strengths and go to each for his own brand of support and understanding. As always, diversity contributes to growth, in this case, to Harry’s growth.

What do I think will happen in the last book of the heptology based on this geomantic interpretation? I believe that in the last book, we will see a different, perhaps more terrifying side of Hagrid. What lengths will this giant of a man go to in order to avenge the only man who trusted him when the rest of the magical world turned their backs on him? Of course, one of the biggest questions left unanswered is whether Dumbledore will be vindicated in his trust, whether it will remain a fatal weakness, or strength of salvation.

Finally, just a side note of interest—the zodiac sign associated with geomantic Albus is Gemini. Gemini is, of course, the twin. Could Albus and Aberforth be twins? And if so, how would

that relate to the heptology ? Will Aberforth play a more prominent role in the last book with the removal of his brother? And if so, what type of role?

The Alchemical Link

Ultimately, however, I think Rowling's geomantic clues regarding Rubeus and Albus are leading the reader in another direction. Whereas she has included a few geomantic symbols and metaphors in her work, the *Harry Potter* series is far richer in alchemical symbolism. Alchemy flourished alongside geomancy, and indeed shared a similar jargon of symbols and an understanding of the laws of nature and our place in the cosmos. Many alchemists practiced geomancy, including Agrippa and Paracelsus.

A key factor to emphasize here is that most alchemists, and definitely Agrippa and Paracelsus, understood alchemy not only as the transformation of lead into gold, but the transformation of a person's base character into spiritual enlightenment.. Thus the philosopher's stone that these alchemists sought most ardently was their own self-enlightenment.

Mercury and Sulfur

According to the table presented earlier on Albus and Rubeus, Albus (white) represents Mercury (and thus the element mercury), while Rubeus (red) represents Mars (and thus the corresponding element, sulfur).

Mercury and sulfur were the two essential elements in alchemy for the production of the philosopher's stone. "In alchemy red, standing for sulfur, forms a duality with white" (Biedermann 282). White was a symbol of mercury. Mercury is also known as quicksilver, and I think quicksilver is a very adequate description for Dumbledore himself. Indeed, maybe that is the way he seems to seep through the very cracks of Hogwarts and be everywhere at once. Plus, in his lair, his office, he is surrounded by various silver instruments, and his beard is always described as silver.

Sulfur is also known as brimstone, and could easily be linked to Hagrid's volatile personality and temper. Sulfur is a fiery, passionate element.

Salt

In his work with alchemy, Paracelsus added a third primal element—salt. According to Paracelsus, mercury represented the spirit (or intellect), sulfur the soul, and salt the body. Salt, at times, was symbolized by the color black because of its relationship with the earth. In Rowling's world, I think, this earthy, physical element is embodied by Sirius Black.

There is a famous alchemical plate in the work of Salomon Trismosin, the reputed mentor of Paracelsus, called *Splendor Solis* (1535) (Hauck 217; "Spendor Solis Image 13"). The plate depicts three birds in an alembic (alchemist's glass still): one red, one black, and one white. The birds represent the "three essentials":

white = mercury = spirit/intellect
red = sulfur = soul
black = salt = body

According to Dennis Hauck in *Sorcerer's Stone: A Beginner's Guide to Alchemy*:

Salt is actually the key to alchemy, the beginning and end of the Great Work. It is the imperfect matter at the beginning of the experiment that has to be destroyed and

dissolved to release its essences, which are reconstituted into the more perfect form at the end of the experiment. (59)

Furthermore, the process of alchemical transformation was divided into three stages characterized by the colors black, white, and red, in that sequence. “According to alchemy, the end result of the Black Phase is that the ‘soul departs from the body’” (103).

Thus, alchemically speaking, Sirius had to die for the completion of Harry’s transformation.¹ However, if Rowling continues with alchemical symbolism relating to salt, I think there is an excellent chance we shall see a more purified version of Sirius in the final books.

Vitriol

There is one more primary substance worth mentioning here, and that is vitriol (sulfuric acid), the most important liquid in alchemy. Distilled from an oily green substance, vitriol is a highly corrosive acid. In the words of Paracelsus in *The Aurora of the Philosophers*, vitriol contained “viscous imperfections...take care above all that the matter [purified vitriol] shall not be exposed to the sun, for this turns its greenness pale” (Paracelsus).

Vitriol was sometimes referred to as the Green Lion, and sometimes as the Green Dragon. Green in alchemy signifies possessing life, but not fully mature. The fully mature philosopher’s stone is red. The Green Lion, or Green Dragon, are both symbols of power, intense and deadly. The Green Lion is sometimes seen as a symbol of corrosive rage and fury. Snape, anyone?

Vitriol’s corrosiveness was an absolutely necessary component for the alchemical process of making gold out of lead. The prime matter had to be broken down before it could be reborn into a new, more refined, material. Most writers agree that a character does not grow and develop without significant conflict being applied to his life. Snape definitely provides significant daily conflict for Harry to develop. And at the end of *Half-Blood Prince*, released enough vitriol to energize Harry into leaving behind all he loves and hold dear—including Hogwarts and Ginny—to set out on his ultimate quest of vanquishing the Dark Lord.

An Alchemical Recipe

With good authors, a character usually serves more than one purpose or can be symbolized in more than one way. And thus it is with *Harry Potter*. This elemental correspondence of characters, I believe, is repeated with Harry and his friends (see table below), supporting each other on their path of personal development. Hermione is a Dumbledore in process with her strong intellect and fair judgement. Red-haired Ron is like Hagrid, emotional, loyal, and possessing an affinity for animals (except spiders—but, he was really upset about losing his pet Scabbers). Harry relates to Sirius, having suffered in “prison” at the Dursleys, preferring action, and living on the fringe of society — both in the Muggle and Wizarding worlds. Draco, of course, is a mini-Snape in his relationship with Harry. At the end of *Half-Blood Prince*, we saw Draco lower his wand at the end of the confrontation with Dumbledore—perhaps a good sign of a reconciliation to come.

¹ I’m not saying the alchemical symbolism is the only reason Sirius had to die, just the one pertaining to the scope of this article.

Color	Element	Relation	Adult Personification	Youth Personification
White	Mercury	Spirit/Intellect	Dumbledore	Hermione
Red	Sulfur	Soul/Instinct	Hagrid	Ron
Black	Salt	Body/Physical	Sirius	Harry
Green	Vitriol	Conflict	Snape	Draco

Note: Alchemy was never static. It was practiced over hundreds, thousands, of years throughout various parts of the world. Thus the colors and symbols in this table could be used in more than one manner.

Thus we have a metaphorically abbreviated recipe for creating the philosopher's stone. A bust of Paracelsus doesn't have to fall on me to see a link between Paracelsus' symbols and metaphors for transformation of character and Rowling's little orphan.²

A Bit of Divination

My prophecy for the ending of the series circles from the beginning: the philosopher's stone. In the view I have proposed, Dumbledore (mercury) even in death, Hagrid (sulfur), Sirius (salt), and Snape (vitriol) come together as the primary agents acting to create the alchemical transformation of base metal, the prime matter, into gold. And that prime matter is — Harry Potter.

Harry is not only the Seeker after the Golden Snitch on the Quidditch field, but the alchemist seeking the gold within his own soul. No alchemical transformation could be complete without transforming the body, mind, *and* soul. Through Harry's mental studies at school, his physical prowess in Quidditch, and his inner development assisted by his friends — all forged by the pressures of his struggles against Voldemort — his transformation will be complete.

By the end of the heptology, Harry will be the living embodiment of the philosopher's stone. What he did not seek to possess for personal gain in the first book will be earned through his character, actions — and most likely a noble sacrifice — by the end of the seventh. He will be a truly resurrected epic hero. Let's just hope his resurrection occurs on this side of the veil.

² In Paracelsus' *The Aurora of the Philosophers* he notes: "That wisest of the philosophers, Mercurius, making the same statement, called the Stone an orphan."

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