

Astrology on screen, part 1

In *The Literary Zodiac* I demonstrated how writers very often express the nature of their Sun signs in their work. This is because in astrology the Sun represents (among other things) the urge to create, and the zodiacal sign in which it is situated at birth describes in general terms the mode of an individual's creative energy. The Moon and ascending sign are also sometimes reflected in a writer's work, but not as much as the sign of the Sun.

In the same way, actors often reflect the nature of their fundamental astrology in the parts they play on screen or stage, and we can learn about astrological meanings from observing them at work (just as we can learn from studying the creative work of novelists and poets). Words are limiting and even a very good writer can struggle to capture the specific quality, or nature, of an individual. But if this is being acted out on a big screen then we can observe for ourselves and do not have to filter our comprehension through a biographer's vocabulary.

As with writers in *The Literary Zodiac*, what I am talking about here is something *qualitative*. There is no such thing as an actor's sign or an actor's chart (although we do get more of a pattern than we do with writers). When you think about it, acting has a number of elements to it and these will relate to different astrological factors. Pisces, Neptune and Jupiter are certainly at home in the world of screen or stage, worlds where fantasy and reality interweave. Those with Jupiter (or Leo) strong very often have a larger than life presence which goes well on screen or stage, while Pisces and Neptune relate to deception, so in the eyes of another an actor with these strong readily appears to be something her or she is not. The quality we call presence is also to do with Mars and its signs, and this can be enough to power a successful acting career (at a basic level we associate Mars with action). The craft of acting – gesture, expression, timing, movement – we might relate to Mercury, while a strong Venus, in a man's chart particularly, can also equate with the charisma that makes for a

successful acting career, more so in the earlier days of well-defined romantic male leads. Given the multifaceted nature of what it is we are studying, it is not surprising that we can't isolate a 'writer's chart'. What further confuses any quantitative study of actors is that some people that appear on television (in soaps, for example) or in films plainly have minimal talent. Just because they are saying words in front of a camera doesn't mean they are actors.

The Gauquelins discovered a statistical correlation between actors and Jupiter. It is a statistically significant find, but it is a statement about a group. We can not apply the finding – Jupiter close to the ascendant or MC – to individual cases. Statistics does not work that way (the average family size of 2.4 children being a reminder of this). The majority of actors will still not have Jupiter in those positions, while plenty of people who do will never become actors.

Before looking at some examples we should keep in mind that actors, for a variety of reasons, will not reflect their astrology in every part they take on. For a start, a film is a joint venture, involving actors, producer, director and more than one writer, so that the creative product is not a single one. Actors accept roles for various reasons – sometimes out of simple, economic necessity. Sometimes they are just wrongly cast. But when playing a part that accords with their essential nature, they tend to make a much better job of it.

Leo on Screen

Robert De Niro was Born 17 August 1943, giving him a Leo Sun. There are three films I know of that illustrate his Sun nature well. Probably if we had to single out a scene most associated with De Niro it is the one he improvised in *Taxi Driver* in front a mirror. His 'are you talking to me?' monologue forms an excellent example of the foolish puffed-up pride and self-importance that is one of the more negative (though essentially harmless) faces of Leo. Travis Bickel, with his mission to purify New York, is also illustrative of another aspect of Leo. It can be an obsessive sign. At its best this quality emerges as determination and strong sense of purpose (and the one-pointed pursuit of this). Monomania is a common theme in the works of Leo writers, a notable example being Melville's Ahab in *Moby Dick*.

One of De Niro's lesser known films is *This Boy's Life*, in which he plays the over-bearing, self-centred D'Wight Hansen, oppressive stepfather to Leonardo DiCaprio. Leo is the sign of the natural teacher, someone who can nurture and bring out the best in the young. However, because Hansen is so self-centred his urge to nurture amounts to no more than vanity. He tries to mould his stepson in his own image (rather than bringing out the boy's individuality), even to the point of making DiCaprio wear his old and hopelessly outdated scout shirt (covered in the proficiency badges Hansen obtained as a youth).

Equally self centred, but a much more likeable character, is Rupert Pupkin in *The King of Comedy*. Pupkin believes he is funny and wants nothing more than to front his own TV chat show in front of millions of viewers. This is his obsession. He's vain and self important, but also determined, single-minded and self confident. He never doubts that he's going to succeed. And because he also enjoys another common Leo trait – good luck – he does succeed.

Cancer and Capricorn on screen

The character **Ricky Gervais** plays in *The Office*, David Brent, is not wholly captured by his Cancer Sun, but he does exhibit some of the sign's obvious characteristics. He is totally self-absorbed and self-centred (a characteristic Cancer shares with Leo). Cancer is probably the most subjective of the signs and Brent is incapable, it seems, of seeing himself as others do (at least until the very end of the series). His urge to play the role of *pater familias* to the office employees is also Cancerian. There is nothing wrong with his desire to entertain people, but he misses the bigger picture: that the office is a place of work, and he doesn't actually have the talent he imagines he has (we would have to look to other parts of the chart to see a reflection of this delusional nature. It is usually down to Neptune and the Jupiter signs).

Brent is touchy, sensitive and defensive (again all common characteristics of Cancer). The Scorpio placement of his Moon shows up in some of his reactions. When cornered his instinct is to lash out, start accusing other people. But when things get bad he also lapses into helpless-little-boy mode, which is characteristic of Cancer. Cancer is a

sign that has to work to develop a social persona. When we're in our home, or our own environment, we can act as we choose. We don't have to worry about appearance, about what people think about us, and we don't have to worry about rules and regulations. We do as we please, when we please. But in the public world we have to be different, we have to take account of other people and of organisational structures. Creating this social veneer comes naturally to polar Capricorn, but for Cancer it can be a challenge. Brent seemed to find a niche. We can speculate that he must have been reasonably ambitious and competent to get into the position of responsibility and authority that he did. What must have thrown him is the arrival in the office of the documentary team and a vanity-driven urge to play to the camera.

The childish nature of Cancer, in literature or on the screen, quite often seems to come out through polarity. To live out the full potentiality of our Sun-sign we need to look to the polar horizon and somehow embrace the qualities symbolised by that sign. In a similar way, in the creative sphere, a writer or actor will sometimes create a character that is his polar complement. The characters can be memorable, but are often also freakish in some way. **Rowan Atkinson** was born 6 January 1955, a Capricorn Sun, but his Mr Bean character is a self-absorbed child bumbling through a world he doesn't really understand (as such, better described by Cancer). In my opinion he is far less funny than Atkinson's other well-known creation, Edmund Blackadder, who fits the Capricorn mould well, with his coolness, his dry wit, his world-weary cynicism, his desire and ability to control events and an ill-disguised ambition to further his own ends. **Michael Crawford** (born 19 January 1942) is an accomplished actor who has played many roles, but he is probably best remembered for playing Frank Spencer, a little boy lost in the adult world.

Aries on film

Aries is ruled by Mars, which in part symbolises anger and violence. Those actors capable of violent displays that terrify us, even when we know it is make-believe, very often have strong Aries. **Joe Pesci** does have a line in comedy but the five foot four inch power pack makes a much bigger impression in roles involving extreme violence, in films such as *Goodfellas*,

Casino and *Raging Bull*. His natal Moon is in Aries.

Robert Carlyle has played quiet, thoughtful roles, but his Aries Sun was a good qualification for his memorable performance as the rabid, head-butting Begbie in *Trainspotting*.

In this hard world Mars is sometimes necessary in the workplace. I've worked under two Aries Moon editors. One was okay: forceful, sometimes aggressive, but fine so long as you didn't cross his will. The other was a nightmare, an out-and-out bully who seemed to enjoy intimidating and belittling others. Morale on the paper plummeted under his editorship. I've never worked for Sir Alan Sugar but with Sun and Moon in Aries he comes across as a very Mars figure, with his stern, unsmiling, cut-the-crap bluntness. But I don't believe he is as nasty as the character Blake played by **Alec Baldwin** (Aries Sun) in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, whose 'pep-talk' leaves the team of land salesmen battered and bewildered.

Another impressive Mars performance comes from **James Caan** (Aries Sun) as Sonny in *The Godfather*. At one point in the film Don Corleone brands his son a 'hot-head' and in the book on one occasion is disgusted by Sonny's crude, violent way of dealing with things. Indeed it is the son's impetuous behaviour that starts the war and eventually seriously weakens the Corleone family. Sonny has the courage and strength of his father but not the wisdom to use them properly. Particularly he lacks decorum, charm and a sense of measure, which are qualities of polar Libra. In fact *The Godfather* was written by a Libran (Mario Puzo), and tells us much about the sign (we'll return to it in Part 2).

But Aries can express itself more gently. Aries, despite its independent nature, has a strong urge for relationship and this can take the form of romantic projection – and if there is a maiden to rescue from a dragon, all the better. This is a common Aries theme, both in life and in literature (*The French Lieutenant's Woman*, for example) A good example in film is **Dudley Moore** (Aries Sun) in *10*, who is smitten by Bo Derek and spends much of the film pursuing a seemingly remote object of desire. **Doris Day** has the bright, assertive chirpiness that might be expected from an Aries Sun and Gemini Moon. I've seen her described as 'spunky', which is unfortunate as the word means different things in Britain and America. And yet Mars, in a sense, does connect the two meanings – spirited courage, and semen. The Vedic Indians (about 1000BC) whose thought forms the

basis of Hinduism, equated *Savitri*, the force which animates natural life (symbolised by Mars and its signs) with semen. The chief of their gods, Indra, was known as 'he with a thousand testicles' (and yes, he did have trouble buying trousers). But we digress. A good Aries display from Day was as tom-boyish Calamity Jane.

Scorpio on screen

Scorpio is the second of the Mars sign, and it can sometimes make for disturbing shows of violence, a notable example being the ferocious Captain Hadley (**Clancy Brown**) in *The Shawshank Redemption*. The prison guard's controlled, suspicious, menacing persona is quite well described by Brown's Capricorn Sun and Scorpio Moon. Hadley does not erupt in blind rages, but administers extreme violence in a controlled and calculating manner.

John Cleese is a Scorpio Sun with Aries Moon and Virgo rising and he has managed to extract a good deal of humour from pent-up rage and displays of intense feeling. His Virgo side comes out in his way of working, which involves a lot of rehearsal and refining of material. His role in the film *Clockwise* is also suggestive of Virgo, being the story of a rather anal character who is obsessed with punctuality and whose sense of security is based on things running according to plan (it was written by a Virgo Sun, Michael Frayn).

There is no doubt that Mars and both its signs impart a strong screen and stage presence. A lot of screen goddesses of the past had strong Aries/Scorpio/Mars, which suggests that their popularity was as much down to straightforward sex appeal as acting. Then there is the story of **Richard Burton** (Scorpio Sun) who as a young actor played a role that involved sitting at the side of the stage and commenting now and then on the action. It was a relatively small part, but such was his magnetic presence that the audience found it very difficult not to focus on him, rather than the leading actors centre stage.

This Christmas just past, immobilised by a formidable lunch, I sat for twenty minutes in front of the television watching *Polyanna*. It was typical of too many films of its type in that it was bland, poorly-paced, weakly scripted and with acting ranging from wooden to barely adequate. Until,

that is, **Karl Malden** came on the screen. With a Scorpio Sun and Aries Moon he has presence, strength and passion to go along with his craft. It is fair to say he was the only one in the film who was doing any serious acting (although I'll excuse Haley Mills, on whom I had a serious crush as a ten-year-old boy, and who was a delightful child actress.) Malden also has Jupiter and Neptune conjunct a Leo ascendant, which have contributed to his success as an actor.

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