

Astrology on screen, part2

Libra on screen

The Godfather, which we have touched on in part 1, was based on the book written by Mario Puzo, a Libran Sun, and in the character of Don Vito Corleone we detect a number of traits associated with the sign (even though the actor who played him so well on screen, Marlon Brando, is strongly Aries). On the surface he's a gentleman, polite, gracious and courteous, and his power is rooted in his ability to charm judges, policemen and politicians. Puzo's Moon is in Scorpio and in Don Corleone's strength and ruthlessness we see something of the influences of this sign. But more essentially he is Libra. He is a man of peace. He favours co-operation because he appreciates that the criminal fraternity as a whole benefits from peaceful co-existence. He is feared, certainly, yet on balance rules through Venus rather than Mars, through reverence, respect, affection even. And he respects (and is an embodiment of) the traditions, values and moral codes of Sicily, where he was born and raised.

On the collective level Venus-ruled Libra symbolises that which orders society, which keeps the peace and harmony through a gossamer web of mutual regard and the cherishing of values perceived to be right and good. Libra relates to the mores, those beliefs held in common that not only act as the cement of a society but also constitute in part its morality. Venus and its signs equate to our sense of justice, and also to things such as ethics, attitudes, standards and behavioural codes, where there is a commonly held 'right' way to act. We are not talking about the universal morality of the great religions (which is symbolised by Jupiter and its signs) but by something more limited and secular. Libra represents a set of values which hold for a group, but not necessarily outside of it and which may even conflict with the values of the larger matrix of which the group is a part (such as the criminal codes of the Mafia). Libran values are temporal and localised. They quite quickly ossify and then appear at

best quaint, at worst risible and ridiculous – we think of the affected airs and accents of so-many Mr Cholmondy-Warners that still assail us from films of the 40s and 50s.

One comedian who has generated a lot of humour from the mores is **Sacha Baron Cohen** (Libran Sun). His Borat character is from Kazakhstan, where the accepted and ‘normal’ way of behaving is (apparently) very different from what it is in the countries he visits. In America he has little idea of what is the acceptable way of behaving in a given social situation.

Pivotal to *The Godfather* is a moral choice, a decision whether or not to deal in drugs. In Don Corleone’s moral universe selling drugs is wrong. He is quite happy to operate gambling and prostitution rackets, which although regarded as immoral by some are in his view simply ‘harmless manly vices’. He is unable to adapt to changing times and circumstances. Had his judgment not been clouded by the values of his own past, had he been able to make an objective decision, he would have seen that the future of organised crime lay in the trafficking of hard drugs. But his refusal to co-operate brings about a fall from grace, war between the rival families, the death of his eldest son, and finally the effective destruction of his family.

Other Libran themes permeate *The Godfather* saga. It is about the importance of family, not just blood relationships, but the whole extended network of those who depend upon it, and whose loyalty is to this group rather than to the society of which it is a part. Ideas of justice and revenge are strong (and the point is made that Don Corleone represents justice rather than the law, which often seems divorced from what is fair and right). But perhaps more than anything *The Godfather* is the story of a decline in values. The film begins with that very potent symbol of harmony, a wedding. At the outset, Sicilian traditions still order life to a great extent; children respect their parents and their elders, there is honour, albeit amongst thieves. The code of values by which Don Corleone lives may be flawed and circumscribed, but we can’t help thinking that it shines in comparison to what follows when the ties of family and community dissolve, when brother murders brother and when even the most sacred code – Omerta, the code of silence – is transgressed.

As generations of Italians become assimilated into American life so

their traditional values are diluted. They no longer have the power to command assent, or bind in a cohesive and harmonious whole. And contemporary America has nothing to put in their place, or rather has only empty and ossified values. When we think about it, *The Godfather* saga is a scarifying indictment of modern America. For the implication is that America has corrupted the Mafia, rather than the other way around.

Sagittarius on screen

Stephen Spielberg is a Sagittarian Sun and the film that dramatises his essential (Sun) nature the best is *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, which he directed and wrote. The essential thrust of the film is the human urge to experience something wonderful, superhuman or god-like, something more than the prosaic world of the senses. In this film this urge is focused on benign space aliens from a superior civilisation. Cable repair man Roy Neary's thirst for the extraordinary is quickened by an epiphany while he is about his work (an encounter of the second kind). He becomes obsessed by an image he can't understand, grows more dissatisfied with the everyday world of his job and family and finally abandons both to pursue his quest. He infiltrates the elaborate government operation that has been established to land an alien spaceship in Wyoming, and ends the film travelling to the distant galaxy on the alien craft, where, we assume, he lived happily ever after. Sagittarian directors can think big, and are at home working on a grand scale. The landing of the light-encrusted alien craft in *Close Encounters* remains one of the most impressive cinema scenes of all time.

It has to be said, **Woody Allen** (Sagittarius Sun) does not generally work on a large scale, but a number of his films provide good examples of variations on the meaning of Sagittarius. One problem commonly encountered by Sagittarian artists of all types is the gulf between ideal and reality – the vision one see in one's head and what finally appears on the page, canvas, tape or screen. They can have difficulty coming to terms with what is lost in translation. Using this as a measure Allen has said he regards his best film as *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, because the reality, the final cut, most closely resembled what he envisioned.

In a sense this too is the theme of the film, the contrast between something 'ideal' and something real. On the one hand we have the

(somewhat romanticised) glamorous high life of the wealthy and celebrated as it was commonly portrayed on the cinema screens of the 1930s and the wretched lives of the masses that flocked to see the films. The film, set at the height of the Depression, centres on Cecilia (Mia Farrow) whose only escape from her dreary work and brute of a husband is the cinema. Her life changes one day when a character (Jeff Daniels) in a film she is obsessed by (called *The Purple Rose of Cairo*), as if by magic, steps out from the screen and into the real world.

The strength of the film is how this idea (not entirely original) is skilfully and entertainingly spun out by Allen. Daniels maintains his romantic screen persona in the real world, so that he comes over as faintly absurd yet with an endearing saintly quality. He's a perfect gentleman when it comes to women. In the idealised screen world he usually inhabits love, sex and babies don't go together. In his film world keys are always left in cars for the convenience of the hero who needs a quick getaway. In real life if someone is punched hard in the face it generally means a hospital operation to repair a shattered jaw. In the romantic film world of the 30s, blows that would kill an elephant, judging by the sound effects, cause little real damage. When Jeff Daniels is pummelled by Cecilia's husband he simply gets up and brushes the dust from his clothes while Cecilia remarks that his hair isn't even out of place.

One interesting aspect of the film is the notion of the script. In the film within the film we are very aware that the actors are governed by the script. They have no freedom (although the fact that people can leave and enter the film sows the seeds of freedom for some of the cast). Sagittarius is a sign traditionally related to freedom, but this is only when the sign is operating in its polar mode. The Jupiter signs are essentially about submissiveness to a higher principle (this can be religious or political) which in itself brings a sort of freedom. But living out the fullness of any sign entails a turn to the polar horizon, in this case Gemini, which is symbol of what the western world regards as freedom, that to realise our potential as individuals according to some unique inner seed pattern.

Crimes and Misdemeanors is probably Allen's most philosophical film, and once more it touches on themes that are common in Sagittarian literature (Allen wrote, directed and acted in the film). Judah (Martin

Landau) is a wealthy and respected ophthalmologist whose successful world looks set to come crashing down when a spurned mistress threatens to reveal his infidelity to his family. Judah has her murdered by his gangster brother. A second strand to the film is of 'serious' film-maker (Allen) who sells out and becomes part of a team making a documentary about a celebrity, Lester (Alan Alda), who displays traits found in certain types of Sagittarians, for as well as being opinionated and outspoken, he inflates himself, imagines himself to be much more important, wise, witty and intelligent than he really is.

The core meaning of Sagittarius is suggested by the sign's symbol, a centaur, half-man half-beast, indicating the contrast between man's god-like and animal natures. The challenge is to aspire upward. Generally in Sagittarian literature when a character rejects the higher self he suffers life in a world devoid of spirit or higher meaning, and we get the likes of William Blake (a Sagittarius Sun) talking about England's 'dark satanic mills' to describe a society that has lost sight of the spirit and buried itself in materialism. And we get Conrad's (also a Sagittarian Sun) 'heart of darkness' and 'the horror' to describe the absence of the God principle. But in *Crimes and Misdemeanors* the central character does not seem to suffer for choosing the convenient rather than the morally correct decision (just as the essentially empty-headed Lester seems to prosper). In fact, the film draws to a rather nihilistic conclusion. This suggests (and reports on his private life bear this out) that the sense of Divine is not strong in Allen and that he is held in check by his 'equine' carnal nature.

Pisces on screen

Pisces writers have a natural affinity with the lowest stratum of a society, the poor, the oppressed, the victims, those driven to crime or prostitution (John Steinbeck's work is a good example). **Mike Leigh** is a writer/director who has brought out this side of the sign, and in *Mean Time*, he hits on the theme that many Piscean writers hit on: the need for those that are powerless to find a way to resist.

This story, written for television, is set in the 1980s amongst the tower blocks, poverty, defeated lives and unemployment of London's East End, and focuses on the Pollock family, particularly its two sons. One, Colin, is

dull-witted and seems to accept and gain social acceptance through the role of village idiot thrust upon him. His brother, Mark, is far sharper than Colin, although provocative and anti-social. His rebellion is formless, however, simply an assertion that he refuses to be sucked down by his circumstances. He verbally bullies Colin and appears at first to be the villain of the piece.

At a critical point in the play fortune seems to smile on Colin through an affluent aunt who offers him work. Partly this is altruism, partly, we suspect, the surfacing of a repressed maternal instinct from the childless woman. Mark, however, does all he can to sabotage the arrangement, and it is not immediately plain why, although his family put it down to jealousy and bloody-mindedness. But there is more at work than this. What the brother really objects to is the fact that Colin is put upon, is tossed around like a rag-doll, a receptacle for everyone else's needs and feelings. Indeed Mark's wounding nickname for his sibling is Muppet.

The play ends with the small act of defiance that seems to characterise Pisces literature. Colin shaves his head, and the significance of this lies in the fact that it was his own choice. It is a willed act, an indication that he has begun to swim against the tide. His brother, who has perhaps consciously been working to this end, is pleased by the turn of events. His attitude towards Colin changes, with a new-found respect symbolised by a change in nick-name to the more flattering 'Kojak'.

A more recent Leigh film is *Vera Drake*, the story of a woman who brims with the milk of human kindness. She wants to help everyone, particularly those who are lonely or suffering in some way. She wants to help young girls who have 'got themselves into trouble,' for this how she regards her work as a part-time abortionist. She doesn't take money for her service, simply regards it as an act of charity. Vera's problem is she doesn't see the bigger picture, the fact that she is destroying life. She is like Mary Tudor (a Pisces Sun) who was beyond the call of duty kind in small ways to the sick and poor and yet who was quite happy to condemn Protestants to be burned at the stake. Those who know Vera also fail to see the bigger picture. It is only her son who concedes she has done something morally wrong.

Vera Drake is a marvellous evocation of dreary, austere Britain in the 50s. What lights it all up is the human warmth of the family group. It is a

telling contrast, the happy home of the Drakes, and that of the Pollocks
in *Mean Time*.

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