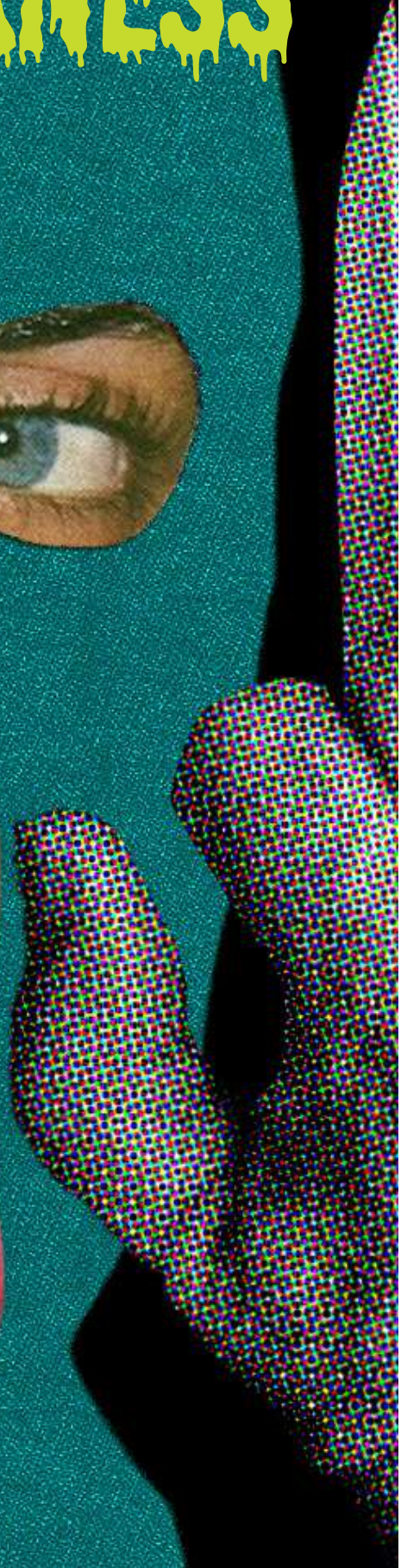
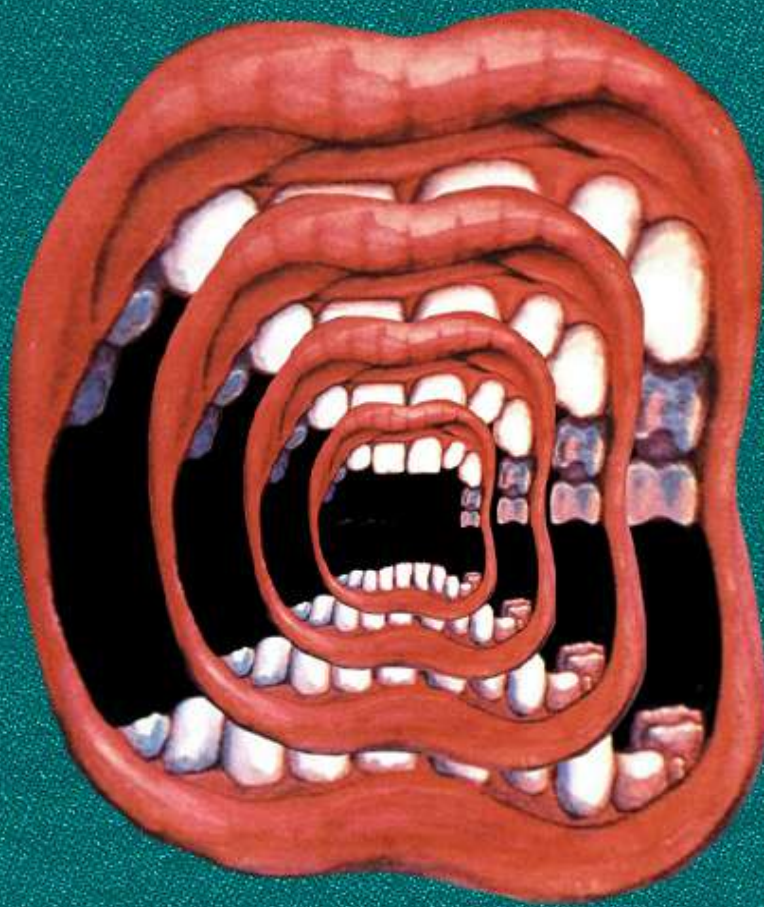


HEARTS OF DARKNESS





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The Astrology of Serial Killers

by Frank C. Clifford

Mass murders, serial killings, Mafia-style executions. How many of us disapprove of and deplore these most heinous of crimes, yet devour and digest days of *48 Hours*? How many of us are shocked and sickened and appalled ... and can't get enough of true crime Netflix originals?

The astrology of homicide is a fascinating and extensive study, but in this article I'll be profiling the most notorious of murderers: the serial killer.

If we accept that the birth chart is *not* a nonnegotiable, fated map laying out an inescapable destination, then there can be no horoscope that screams "serial killer" or identifies the individual who will grow up to commit murder. A chart is a blueprint of potential patterns and energies that each of us can use to navigate our way from cradle to grave. We are also reminded that so many other non-astrological factors come into play in the early and social development of a personality and lifestyle. Murder goes beyond what can be seen from a birth chart.

The act of homicide itself has a wide spectrum of root causes, motivations, and methods. It's been said that unravelling the conditions that create a serial killer is like trying to align a Rubik's Cube. Many serial killers are abused or neglected as children; some aren't. Many exhibit similar early tendencies (cruelty to animals, acts of arson), and while some appear to be misfits, others are active members of the community. Some kill for greed or revenge, or to demonstrate intellectual or physical superiority over others. And many have compulsive or addictive natures that drive their repeat killings, which give them a sense of purpose or identity (the Sun) they lacked previously.

In *The Encyclopedia of Serial Killers* (Headline, 1992), authors Brian Lane and Wilfred Gregg list three categories of killer:

1. Visionaries: psychotics who feel possessed or kill in response to voices;
2. Missionaries: "clean-up" killers — so-called single-issue fanatics — intent on ridding society of those perceived as "undesirables";
3. Hedonists: (a) lust killers fuelled by fantasy to hunt and kill for sexual gratification; (b) thrill killers whose acts of murder offer a psychological adrenaline "high" of pleasure; (c) gain killers (rare) who murder for financial reasons; (d) power-seekers who dominate and control victims.

Already, our astrological “ear” can detect some planetary culprits from these various groups. But once we look at a few charts of serial killers, it can be easy to fall into the trap of demonising a set of planetary placements and seeing these as the “reason” someone has committed a set of murders. Pluto usually gets the blame; sometimes Mars is the guilty party. For instance, Pluto on the Ascendant opposite the Moon (seen in the chart of notorious killer Edward Gein) or Sun–Mercury in the 8th square Pluto (as seen in Jeffrey Dahmer’s horoscope). But many of us know people who share these placements yet live murder spree-free lives. People who are abused, isolated, misunderstood, or put under enormous stress may act out their chart placements (their primal energies) in ways that others never feel compelled to. The key is that, at pivotal moments, the serial killer makes a *different* choice to most people.

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Many of you will know my approach from previous *TMA* articles: looking for common astrological links in the charts of those who share a set of traits (or life experiences) — in this case, methods of serial killing — rather than starting with a narrow frame of reference such as “all murderers *have/should have/need* a strong Pluto (or Mars).”

Let’s take a look at some observations, which include the strong presence of mutability, certain degrees of the zodiac, and the main planetary culprits for different types of serial killer.

Mutability

Many years ago, my data collector pal Dana Holliday left me her notes and charts in her will. She was an avid collector of the horoscopes of killers, and told me back in the 1990s that most have charts that are heavily mutable (particularly Sun, Moon, and Ascendant placements, and especially the signs Gemini and Sagittarius). I wrote about it in a textbook ten years ago. This connection is now so well known, there are memes online reiterating the findings. How very mutable!

Dana’s assertion prompted me to consider the psychology of the four mutable signs. Other than their adaptable and resilient temperament, there’s often an array of problem-solving skills — particularly to circumvent obstacles — and a desire to keep on the move or be engaged busily in some kind of process. I also saw a link between mutability and the issues of repetition as well as avoidance (of commitment, responsibility, and blame).

A serial killer is one who is not defined by a single moment of aggression or insanity. They kill, *evade* detection, and *repeat* the act. They commit a *similar* crime against a new victim, usually picked at random, who has something *in common* with the previous victim (mutable signs are also known as “common” signs). They often have a modus operandi that reveals why and how they kill and the type they prey on. After the first killing, it can become a psychological game with law enforcement of cat and mouse, in which the mutable signs are adept. A serial killer enacts, of course, a highly distorted, extreme expression of the mutable temperament.

We know that 80% of serial killers are white males under 40 whose victims are white females. Reports state that they have high IQs, but what appears most is a wily opportunism and ability to manipulate with deftness. Here is where we can see some negative mutable traits, and Mercury plays a role, too: a killer’s Mercury is often conjunct or in major hard aspect to at least one of the outer planets.

The term “serial killer” became popular in the late 1970s following the media focus on mass murderers John Wayne Gacy and Ted Bundy. Gacy had a mutable-heavy chart (a total of six planets including the Sun, Moon, and all four angles), and Bundy had four planets (including the Sun and Moon) in mutable signs. They’re joined by scores of serial killers who have dominant mutability.

Degrees

Certain zodiacal degrees seem to appear with greater regularity. The encompassing areas of 20–23° Cancer and Capricorn were defined by famed astrologer Dennis Elwell as the axis of sadism (*Cosmic Loom*, Unwin Hyman, 1987). Killers Peter Kürten, Peter Sutcliffe, Dennis Nilsen, Harold Shipman, and even the Marquis de Sade himself (who didn't kill but inspired the term) have key planets at these degrees.

From my own research, around 19° Libra and 19° Aries are common in those who are noted for killing as well as those who are fascinated by serial killers. Dana Holliday used to write to serial killers in prison under a *nom de plume* to obtain their data. She was shy about her own birth chart, but when she died, I found her horoscope in the notes she left to me. Her Sun was at 19° Libra.

From Hell

The media's gruesome fixation with serial murders escalated in the United States in the 1970s, but it was a set of unsolved murders in Victorian London that prompted a wave of fear and fascination that continues to this day. On August 31, 1888, at 3:40 a.m., the body of Mary Ann Nichols was discovered less than an hour after her brutal murder in Whitechapel, East London (See **Chart 1**, bottom right.) It was considered to be the first of five savage murders by Jack the Ripper. In the sky, there were six planets in mutable signs, while Mars was conjunct Jupiter in Scorpio. A solar eclipse earlier that month, calculated for London, placed Jupiter on the Midheaven (MC) in Scorpio. Over the next several months, as the murders and media panic increased, Jupiter would oppose the applying Neptune–Pluto conjunction in the media sign of Gemini, the traditional sign ruler of London. In hindsight, this aspect and the Ripper murders were a portent of the 20th century's fascination with psychology, surveillance, detective work, and crime. (The United Kingdom had just been introduced to the first Sherlock Holmes story, too.)

Planetary Types and Culprits

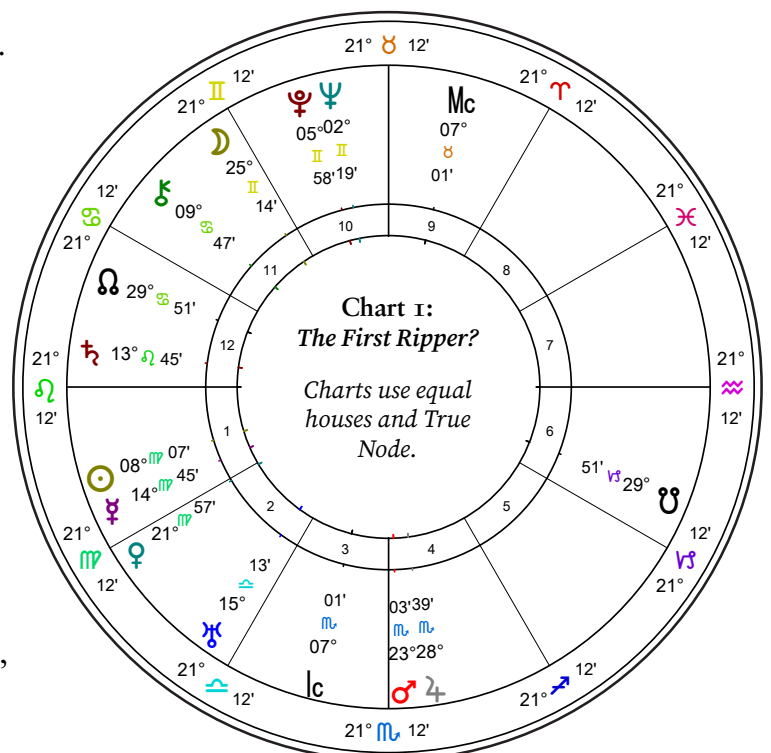
Although I don't believe the natal chart can show guilt or a consistent pattern that cries "criminal," the horoscope has a remarkable way of reflecting the *motivation* behind the killing and the *style* of the act. So, astrologically, almost every planetary "type" (e.g., the Jupiterian,

the Uranian) is implicated in the pantheon of serial killers. Let's take a look at some of these types, planet by planet.

The Moon and Venus

Many killers grew up with a weak connection to their father and a dominant or destructive relationship with their mother. Bearing this in mind, it's not unusual to find some heavy planetary aspects from Mars, Saturn, Uranus, or Pluto to the Moon and/or Venus (both symbols of mother and women in general). The earlier example of Ted Bundy, who charmed and killed many women, confirms this hypothesis: Moon–Mars opposite Uranus, and Venus in Scorpio square Pluto. (See **Chart 2**, p. 44.) Bundy grew up thinking that his mother was his sister, a lie woven by her family to protect his illegitimacy and father's identity. Humiliated when he made the discovery, Bundy had a lifelong hatred of his mother's choices, and many of his victims bore some resemblance to her.

But John Wayne Gacy (who seduced and murdered young men and boys) doesn't have these heavy planets involved with his Moon and Venus. His crimes may stem instead from early Neptunian experiences: his father was abusive and alcohol-dependent and victimised Gacy's mother and terrorised the family. In Gacy's chart, Neptune opposes the Moon in Pisces in the 4th house, and sesquiquadrates Venus. Moon–Neptune or a Virgo/Pisces Moon is common in those who carry a sense



of early victimisation into adulthood.

We may not always be privy to facts about a difficult relationship with the mother, but it can be hinted at by the method of killing. Sadist and “torso killer” Richard Cottingham (the subject of Netflix’s recent *The Times Square Killer* documentary and born one day after Ted Bundy) admitted to torturing more than 80 female victims (mostly prostitutes, now referred to as sex workers) and often severed their breasts. His natal Moon (breasts) opposes Uranus (severance), and Venus in Scorpio squares Pluto (a common aspect amongst serial killers).

Pluto

From my research, Pluto-type killings often involve rituals of sacrifice or torture. Pluto and Scorpio are prominent in killers who have extreme tastes and brutal behavioural patterns. Dominant, masterful, and manipulative, these are serial killers who exert control and power over others (cult leaders can be included in this description) and dabble in occult practices such as spell-casting and voodoo.

Pluto homicides are not for the faint-hearted. Crimes of vengeance and intimidation (the Kray twins had the Sun at 0° Scorpio square Pluto), Mafia-style killings, stalking, sadomasochism, necrophilia, torture, strangulation, mutilation and dismemberment, sodomy, debasement, and cannibalism all fall under the domain of Pluto and Scorpio.

The horrific, unspeakable actions of Marc Dutroux, who was born with Pluto on the MC and Sun–Mercury rising in Scorpio, will never be forgotten in Belgium. He kidnapped, raped, and then starved children in his basement. With “lucky” trines involving mutable planets (Moon in Sagittarius trine MC, and Mars in Pisces trine Ascendant) and despite his having been imprisoned for rape some time earlier, the gross negligence and amateurism of the investigators kept his secrets safe for years.

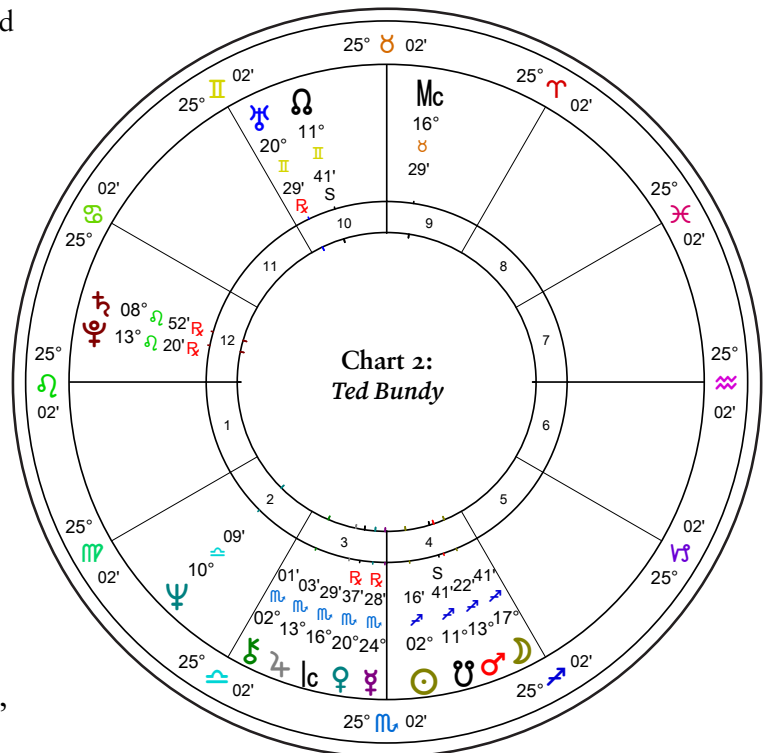
Myra Hindley had the Sun in late Cancer conjunct Pluto in Leo. She was — and perhaps always will be — depicted by the press as the epitome of female evil; a shadow side of the Cancerian caregiver/mother that members of British society would prefer not to examine (the conjunction is on the IC — the buried angle of her chart). With lover Ian Brady, she abducted, tortured, and killed five children over a two-year

period. Their synastry is revealing. Hindley’s Sun is exactly conjunct Brady’s Pluto at 29° Cancer. Her Jupiter is opposite his Sun in Capricorn (the elevation and projection of a powerful authority figure), while his Jupiter is on her MC and opposite her Sun. The Jupiter inter-aspects are apt, as both killers considered themselves invincible and boasted of their despicable crimes.

Jupiter

Jupiterian killers are often charismatic, hedonistic, risk-taking, or boastful, attention-seeking criminals who have an inflated sense of their own importance and intellect. Many are motivated by greed, power, or potential infamy — preferring, when caught, to go down in history as brilliant criminal masterminds (once again Bundy, with his strong Jupiterian chart, comes to mind) or recognised for the sheer number of their victims. There’s sometimes moral righteousness, a misguided belief (especially if Neptune is in the mix), or some crusade (if combined with Mars) that drives them to play God. Killings may also involve Jupiter-type confidence schemes and grand theft.

These are the killers who may have good public reputations (or a high rank that grants them special access) who take advantage of others’ confidence or goodwill (Jupiter).



Perhaps one of the most atrocious acts of betrayal and avarice is that of a fraudulent doctor, Marcel Petiot, who offered for 25,000 francs to move Jews to safety during the Second World War. Instead, he injected his victims with cyanide and disposed of their bodies. Petiot was born with Jupiter on the MC in Virgo (the reputation of an honourable man of service) opposite Venus in Pisces on the IC (the fraudulent promise of rescue). Note, too, the all-important apex of Mars–Pluto–Neptune in duplicitous Gemini in the 7th house. (See **Chart 3**, right.)

Many Jupiteritians have evaded the authorities through lucky escapes, oversights, or police errors. That is, until Jupiter runs out of luck (usually for Jupiterian reasons: feeling superior or too clever, tripping up, pushing their luck, or making errors in judgement). David Berkowitz taunted police with mocking letters and, once apprehended, revelled in his newfound celebrity status. He was born with a Gemini Sun conjunct Jupiter (trine the Moon in Aquarius and sextile a Leo MC).

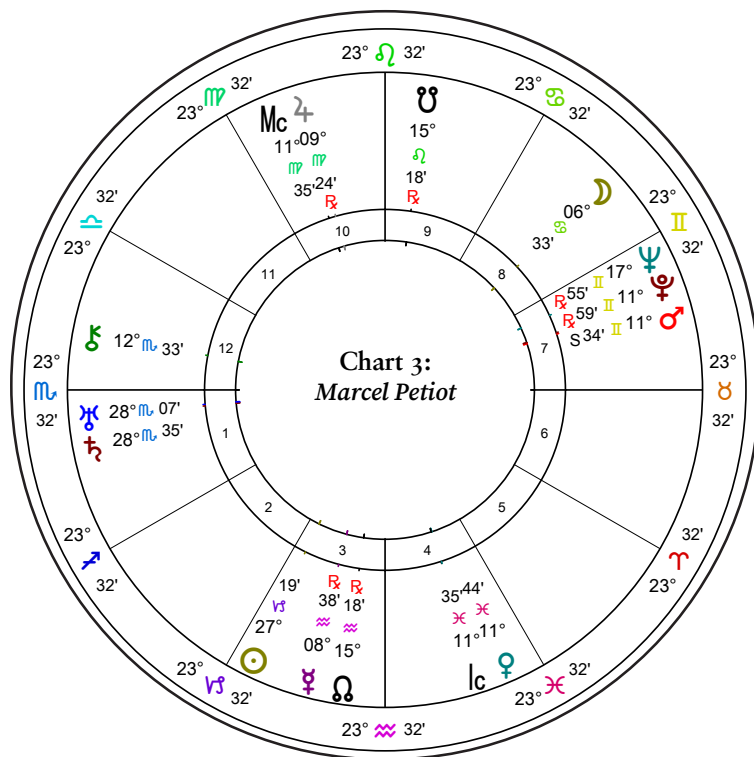
In my early 20s, I was the foreman in the jury trial of a cab driver accused of assisting drug smugglers. He pleaded ignorance of what he was transporting. The inept police, plus a flimsy case from the Crown Prosecution Service, established reasonable doubt, and although we felt that he had turned a blind eye to what he was carrying, we found him not guilty. As I left the court, I saw a document that had his birth date on it. He was born a lucky man with the Sun conjunct Jupiter in Sagittarius.

Mars

The link to Mars and murder is as simple and direct as the planet itself: 65% of murders are crimes of passion or violence that explode from pent-up stress in domestic or other everyday situations (although these are not usually the triggers for serial killers). Stabbings, explosions, guns, burnings, rapes, and other acts of physical violence fall under Mars, the planet of libido, anger, and aggression.

Neptune

Neptune is often prominent in the charts of terrorists and serial killers with a cause, a mission, or dedication to an “-ism.” There may be a break with reality, with killers hearing voices to compel



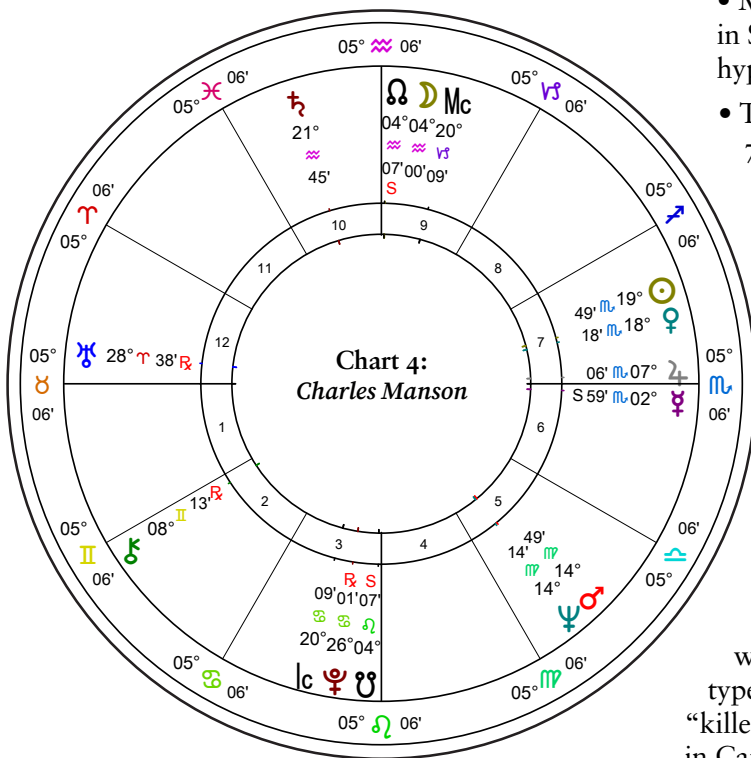
them to rid the world of a particular type. Some have an array of chameleon-like disguises or appear so regular-looking that they slip under the police radar.

Neptunian killers may target people whom they assess as vulnerable, compliant, nomadic, or forgotten by society. They use poisons or gases, or employ the excuse of “mercy killing” to avenge their pasts.

Neptune is also prominent in the charts of those who are wrongly accused or martyred like Derek Bentley (Pisces rising, Neptune conjunct the Descendant), or “patsies” like Lee Harvey Oswald (Neptune opposite his Pisces MC), said to have been framed as the sole killer of JFK.

There’s often a mystery or tabloid frenzy surrounding the killer’s identity long before they are discovered. Peter Sutcliffe was born with Neptune on the MC, and terrified the public for years as the elusive “Yorkshire Ripper” before eventually being caught. According to Sutcliffe, voices in his head called out to him to kill sex workers.

As an aside, those who deliver murder as entertainment on film or the small screen are often Neptunian, with more than a hint of Scorpio, too. For instance, Ryan Murphy, the creator of the gruesome and addictive anthology *American Horror Story*, was born with the Sun conjunct Neptune in Scorpio.



- Mercury conjoins Jupiter on the Descendant in Scorpio (the messianic cult leader with a hypnotic effect on his followers).
- The Scorpio Sun–Venus conjunction in the 7th squares MC ruler Saturn in Aquarius (the delinquent beaten down by society who became an unapologetic anti-establishment manipulator).
- Uranus rises and opposes Mercury (a nonconformist whose ideology intended to incite revolution).
- Mars closely conjoins Neptune in the 5th (the struggling musician who singled out lost souls to dominate and indoctrinate).

Some Final Observations

But what of Saturn? Saturn is prominent when the killer has a depressive, loner, Saturn-type temperament (such as Dennis Nilsen, who “killed for company” and had Moon–Saturn in Cancer on the MC). Or a killer who has experienced a grievous “lack” in their childhood, or has felt the burden of parental expectation or subjugation. Some Saturn types are fixated by doomsday premonitions, too.

But in the charts of many serial killers, Saturn is often unsupported by aspect or is weakly positioned, leading us to the conclusion that its strong anchoring in a chart implies conscience and a moral compass that steers a human away from murder — almost always.

Birth data of these subjects can be found at www.astrodatbank.com and are rated B or higher except Harold Shipman and Ryan Murphy (untimed; birth dates from various media sources).

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Uranus

The Uranian serial killer often feels like a misfit or rejected by society or the community. He may take a 180° turn, suddenly detaching from a pedestrian life path to begin killing. Uranus features strongly in the charts of those who involve BDSM in their murders, and is linked to child killings, pedophile rings, and sex trafficking — proving that taboos aren’t purely Plutonic.

Uranus is linked to sporadic, explosive, sudden crimes — often defended as “temporary insanity” (although a violent reaction to a build-up of frustration or years of abuse, however, is more Mars-like or Plutonic in nature). There may be excitement in inducing pain or inciting shock in victims. Uranus is linked to manic-depressive behaviour, plus attempts to create a “perfect” society, a master race, or simply to commit the perfect crime.

Notorious drop-out Charles Manson, whose followers committed a series of brutal killings on his instruction, is an interesting example of how some key signatures in his chart come together (see **Chart 4**, above):

