

HAPPY RETURNS?

This was going to be about Saturn Return. It is, partly. At least, the beginning is. I'm about to reach Second Saturn Return. There seems to be some divergence of opinion about the timing, but certainly a person's 56th year, entered after the 55th birthday, marks the beginning of this important time, and that's where I am now. I was born soon after the discovery of fire, and a little before the invention of the wheel, and the drums that beat at my birth were skinned with dinosaur hide.

The Second Saturn Return worries me. It feels like being called for National Service all those years ago. Peacetime National Service was a Life Horizon for most, and only, young British men in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The idea was that at the age of 18 you were drafted into Her Majesty's armed forces and trained to defend the Islands of Britain against foreign aggression, by military means. Young men of 18 in 1954 were not like young men of 18 now. We were kids, most of us, despite slicked-back DA haircuts. We knew nothing – except that on the due date we would be seized by powers beyond our control and transformed by suffering and hardship into different people. This would Make a Man of Us, as the saying went. The prospect blighted many a sixteen- and seventeen-year-old life. It drove us to drink and tobacco, and even to College and something called 'deferment', which I for one didn't discover until too late.

This is how I feel about my Second Saturn Return. A force beyond my control, viz. Saturn, is going to get hold of me and cause me unimaginable suffering, and there's nowhere to run: at least, nowhere I've found yet.

Can there be readers of W&W who don't know what a Saturn Return is? It is an astrological concept, and as I understand it works like this: at your birth Saturn, like all the other planets, occupies a certain position in the heavens, and is an important influence on the person you might become and the life you might lead. (Astrologers will at this point write in disagreeing strongly with this simplistic view ...) Saturn begins to drift out of the picture, but unlike the Sun, Moon, Venus etc., its drifts very slowly, being a very long way indeed from the warm heart of the Solar System. Remember the years Voyager took to travel to the planet and photograph those incredible rings? Saturn in fact takes 28 (or 29) years to move around the sky and find its way back to its original natal position in your personal sky, and that marks the First Saturn Return. During its long journey the planet has stored up all sorts of surprises for you; like an aged Great-Uncle who, after years of absence on foreign shores, returns with embarrassing presents and reminders of how you used to play with the doo-dos you did in your potty. And then he goes off again, to reappear in another 28 (or 29) years with even more dreadful home truths tucked away in his steamer-trunk. That is the Second Saturn Return.

Readers aged 28 (or 29) who didn't know anything about this may now be experiencing a whitening of the knuckles. What has this to do with us? you are asking: and why is it all so worrying? I will tell you. Saturn has a bad reputation: or at least, a bad press. The Saturn myth is cognate with Cronus or Chronos or Kronos, commonly thought of as the consort of Rhea/Euoyme/Pandora, also known as Titania, Queen of the Titans or Old Goddesses and Gods who were finally sunk, like the Titanic, in the Atlantic, by the Greek God Zeus. Cronos as 'Father Time' (a title he stole from Rhea who was once known as Coronis, Mother Time) is notorious for having castrated his father Uranus, and eaten up his own children. This then, as you can see, is a very heavy Great-Uncle indeed.

Cronus/Saturn is a dark god, a god of death, patron both of Saturday (the end of the week) and Saturnalia (the end of the year). Both these are also occasions for celebration and drunken hilarity – but all the same they are clearly low times, before the (possible) rebirth of the new. Traditionally Saturn is gloomy and dark, heavy as lead, livid of complexion, Christopher Lee on a wet December afternoon. The ancients characterised Saturn as the very type and spirit of Melancholy, to whom belonged qualities of sadness and depression, a tendency