

**Narcissism, Self-Effacement and Rahu and Ketu**  
**a key to understanding people**  
by Hank Friedman

[Note: For those unfamiliar with Vedic terms, Rahu is the Moon's North Node, and Ketu is the Moon's South Node. Thanks to AstroDatabank for the birth data for the charts in this article.]

Ascertaining the positions of the Moon's nodes, Rahu and Ketu, arose from the need to predict eclipses. During a New Moon or Full Moon, if either of the nodes is near the Sun and the Moon, an eclipse occurs. Therefore, the central theme of both nodes is the principle of eclipsing.

An eclipse is a momentous event, a major omen, respected from the earliest times as representing a change in the wind, a time of great transition. In the context of Vedic astrology, eclipsing carries the meanings of obscuring, negating, diminishing, paralyzing, and blinding, as well as emphasizing, distorting, amplifying, and exaggerating.

Many classical Vedic astrology texts show the meaning of the nodes when in specific houses, e.g. Jataka Parijata (Chapter 8, Shloka 60) states:

"When Rahu occupies the Ascendant, the person born will be cruel, without compassion or moral virtue in his nature and suffering from ailments.

When Ketu occupies the Ascendant, the person born will be sickly and very avaricious.

If the Rahu or Ketu in the Ascendant be aspected by a benefic planet, the person concerned will have princely enjoyments."

As the final shloka indicates, *the nodes are incredibly mutable chameleons who take on the nature of planets with and aspecting them, as well as the nature of their dispositors* (planets that rule the signs that they are in). I have found -- in agreement with classical Vedic astrology -- that when a node is in the sign of a natural benefic, (Mercury, Venus, and Jupiter), it tends to function more positively (all other factors being taken into account), while in the signs of malefics or one of the Lights, (Mars, Saturn, Sun, and Moon), it presents more life challenges.

A planet's aspect on (or conjunction with) a node, however, influences that node more than the sign it occupies. When Rahu or Ketu is with a planet in its own sign or exalted, especially Jupiter or Venus, the node magnifies the positive effects of the well-placed planet, and can give powerful results. The same is true when one of the nodes is with major yoga-forming planets, including the Raja Yoga Karaka. (Note: there are also specific nodal Raja Yogas which signify success in life. When either node is in an angle with a planet that rules house 1, 5, or 9, or in house 1, 5, or 9 with a planet that rules an angle, the nodal Raja Yoga exists.)

As a therapist, I began to notice significant patterns concerning the nodes. One pattern is that Rahu can represent an inflated ego and Ketu an insecure ego. (Of course, people who have big egos often have a repressed and potent deep insecurity.) I've found that Rahu people can fall into the trap of overestimating their abilities, while Ketu people tend to underestimate their skill level.

An interesting psychological study was done by Justin Kruger of the University of Illinois and

David Dunning of Cornell and published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1999, Vol. 77, No. 6., entitled "Unskilled and Unaware of It: How Difficulties in Recognizing One's Own Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-Assessments".

What their research (as summarized in the New York Times of February 6, 2000) showed was, "that few people have any idea how incompetent they really are. Subjects were tested, and were also asked to assess their skill level, in a number of areas. Those who scored lowest on the objective tests scored highest in their own self-evaluation. The same held true in reverse: high-scoring subjects underestimated their skills and how well they compared with others."

Clearly, the study didn't reference subjects' astrology charts. Nevertheless, its results echo a principle that I have seen: that Rahu-dominant people tend to overestimate how skilled they are, and Ketu-dominant people often don't know how talented they really are.

But what defines a Rahu- or Ketu-dominant person? The primary indication is having at least one planet conjunct -- in the same Sidereal sign as -- Rahu or Ketu, and none with the other node.

A secondary (not as strong) indication of which node is emphasized occurs when neither node is conjunct a planet, but one of the nodes receives more aspects from planets than the other node; then that node's themes become dominant.

It is important to reaffirm, however, that everyone has both nodes in their charts, and will manifest the qualities of each of the nodes at different times (e.g. during the dasas and bhuktis of each of the nodes). We all see-saw between doubt and confidence, and between relinquishment and attachment at different times in our lives, and in different settings.

### **The Psychological Qualities of Rahu**

Rahu people can lack the willingness or the ability to listen to others, and can be narcissistic, manipulative, overconfident, self-satisfied, fundamentalist, manic, insatiable, taking, proud, and "Hungry Ghosts". Hungry ghosts, in Eastern religions, are described as having tiny mouths and huge stomachs. They represent themes of greed, jealousy, and never being satisfied.

Many Rahu people are capable of great achievements and great successes (especially if Rahu is configured with benefics), as well as tremendous drive, commitment, and follow-through.

### **The Psychological Qualities of Ketu**

Ketu people can suffer from anxiety, self-doubt, self-effacement, self-martyring, shyness, insecurity, and gullibility; and can be overly impressionable and receptive, too accommodating (with explosions after things have gone too far), over giving (and resentful afterwards), impulsive, fearful and defensive.

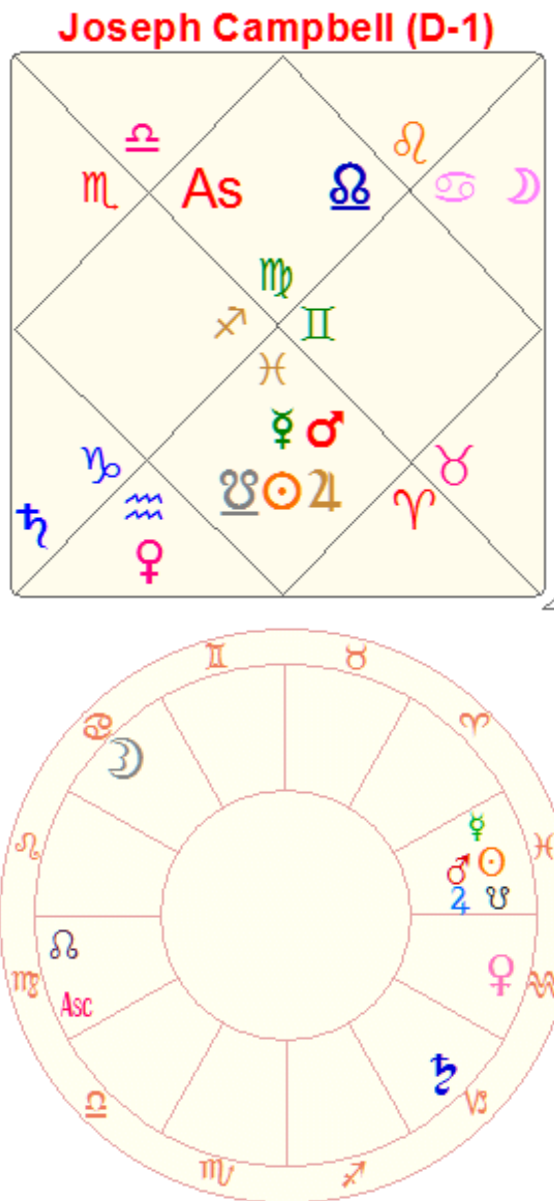
Ketu people, on the high side, can be very generous, compassionate, surrendered to and devoted to Spirit, and contribute much to the world's store of wisdom.

Because these themes show up very clearly in people's charts, I've been able to accurately guess whether friends or famous people have Rahu or Ketu in the same sign as another planet. *When*

either node is configured with the Lagna (Ascendant) or its lord, its themes are especially likely to color the personality of the individual.

### Joseph Campbell: A Classical Ketuvian

**Joseph Campbell** has no planets associated with Rahu, but the Sun, Mercury (the ruler of the Ascendant), Mars, and Jupiter (in its own sign) in the same house as Ketu. He pioneered the Western culture's understanding of mythology, religion, and primal spiritual experiences. A true Ketuvian, as a young man going through his Ketu dasha he wrote in his journal "I am filled with an excruciating sense of never having gotten anywhere—but when I sit down and try to discover where it is I want to get, I'm at a loss." He gradually began to recognize his own talents, as a writer, speaker, teacher, and thinker. He never came across as arrogant; instead he was renowned for his openness to those who corrected his mistakes in scholarship. In other words, he embodied humility.

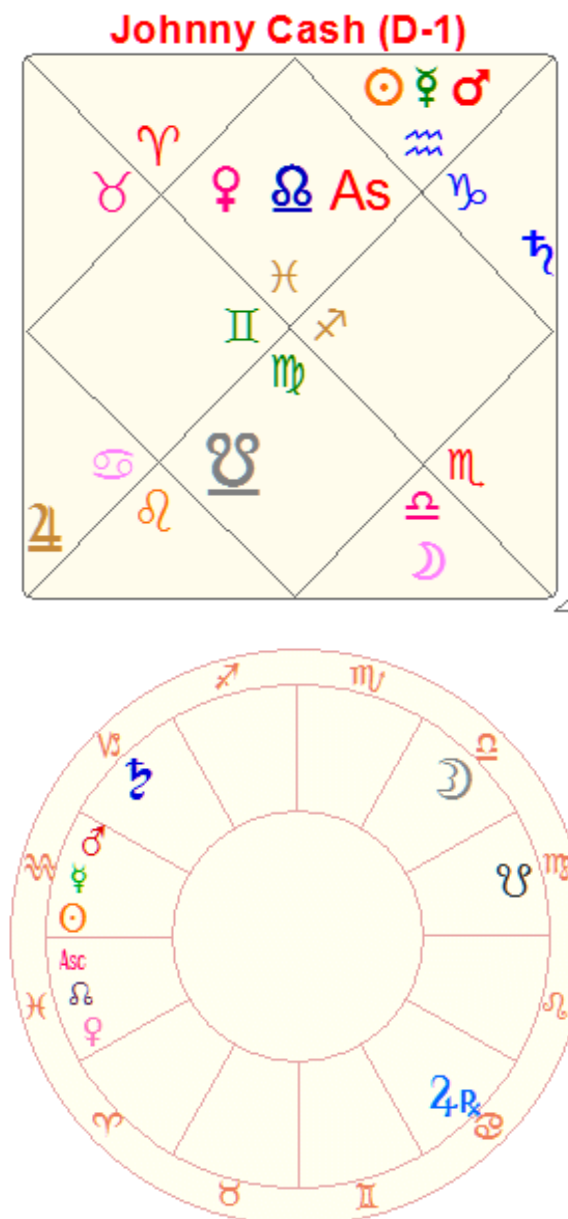


Note: All charts in this article use Whole Sign houses and the Lahiri (Sidereal) ayanamsa.

## Johnny Cash: A Classical Rahuvin

**Johnny Cash** is a noteworthy **Rahuvin**. He has an exalted Venus with Rahu in the First House, aspected by the exalted ruler of the First House, Jupiter. He was born into the Rahu dasa and during it reported, "I knew I was going to be a singer, from the age of four." Rahu magnified both his determination and the blessings that both strong benefics had on him, resulting in world fame and enduring stardom. Despite an impoverished childhood, he became the most famous country singer of all time, and a champion of the downtrodden. Johnny's legendary battle with drug addiction reveals the other side of Rahu, the insatiable aspect of his nature. "The beast in me is caged by frail and fragile bars."

Note: Neville Lang points out that Saturn (the planet that represents the color black) in its own sign strongly aspects Rahu in Johnny Cash's chart, and that perhaps that's why he chose to wear black and became known as "the man in black".



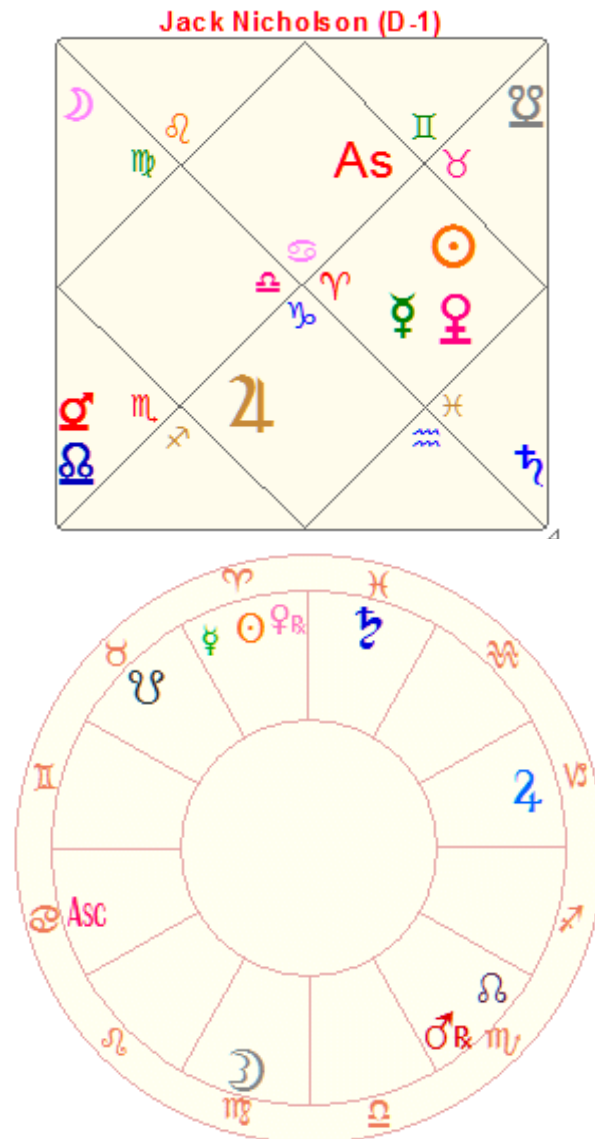
## The Shadow of Rahu

Both **Jack Nicholson** and Warren Beatty (who inspired the song "You're so vain") are clearly Rahu people. They are notorious for their narcissism and ambition, and they have Rahu in the same house as other planets, and no planets with Ketu.

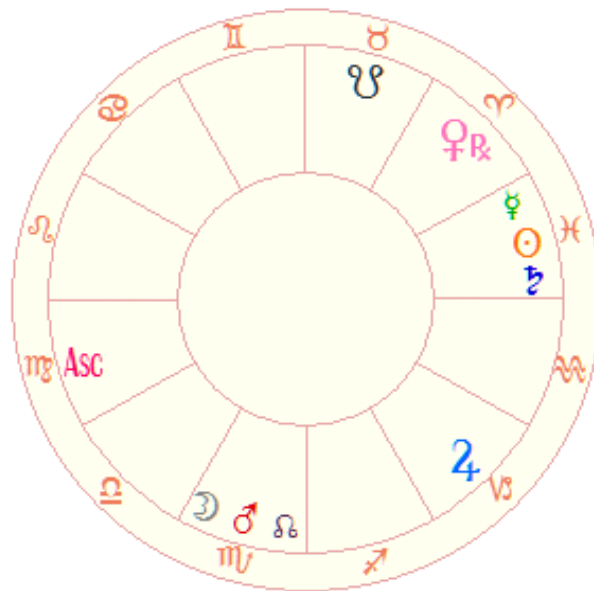
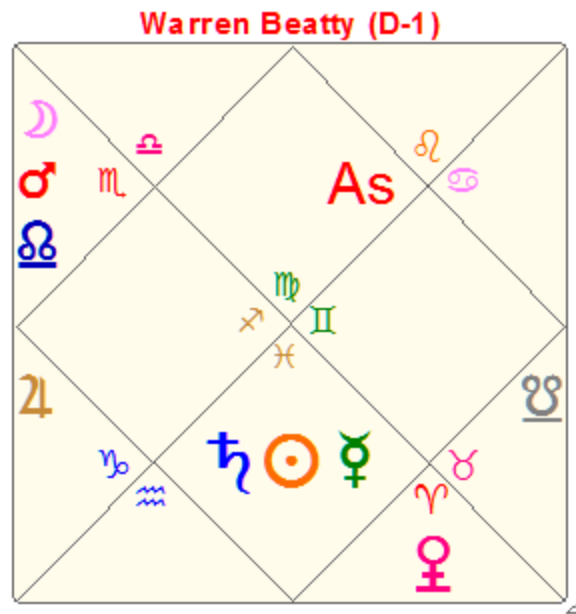
Because they both have Rahu with a planet in its own sign, that planet (Mars) became incredibly powerful. Thus, in both of their lives, Mars gave them great drive, assertiveness, and passion.

Notice that in Jack Nicholson's chart, he has Mars with Rahu in the 5<sup>th</sup> house, hence his success as a performer. The conjunction clearly takes precedence over the fact that his Ketu is aspected by two planets. That his Mars is exaggerated in its expression is of no doubt, as he smashed the windshield of a car that cut him off, and has had sex with over 1,000 women.

In a very Rahuian twist (since Rahu signifies deception and obscured truths), Jack thought that his grandparents were his parents, and only found out otherwise after a magazine reporter researched his life when he was 37 years old!



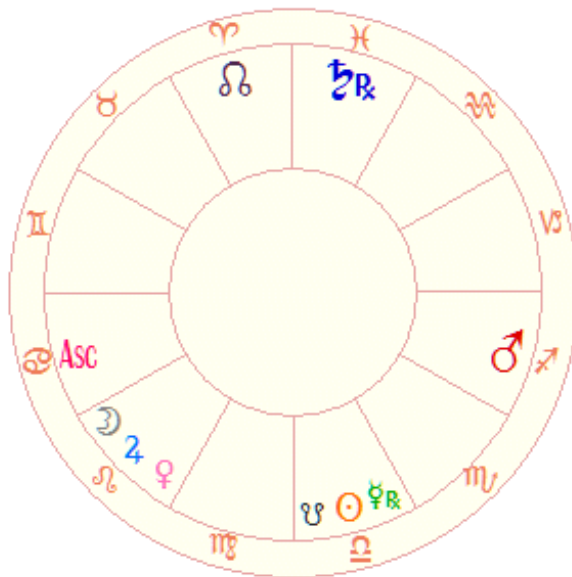
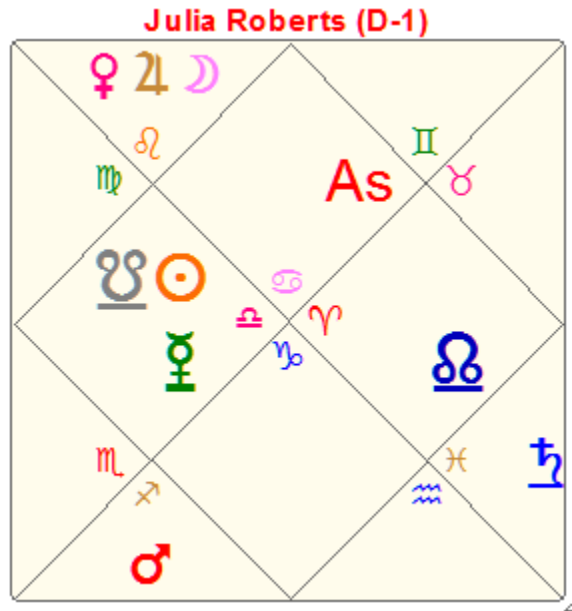
**Warren Beatty**, who's known for his legendary success with famous women, has a chandra-mangala yoga (which also happens to be a combination for sexual passion) exaggerated by Rahu, again with Mars in its own sign, giving Mars great strength. Warren Beatty was urged to be successful and to achieve (both Rahuvin themes) from a very early age. He has exhibited great prowess (a third house quality, with Rahu and Mars in the 3<sup>rd</sup>) both as an actor and as a film director.



## The Shadow of Ketu

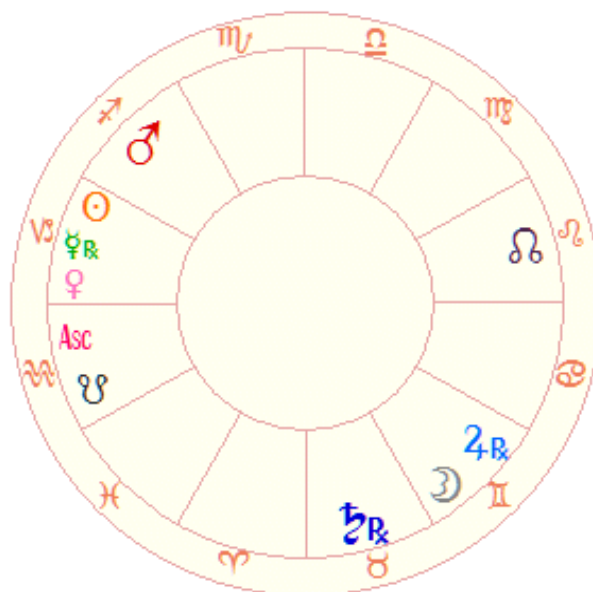
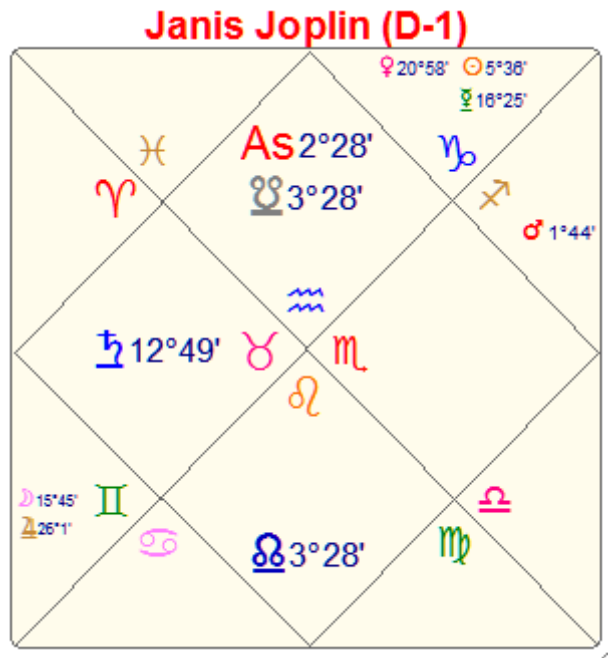
**Julia Roberts** has Ketu (and not Rahu) in the same house as other planets. As presaged by the total Solar eclipse four days after her birth, her father, who was the one parent who doted on her, was removed from her life, first by the divorce from her mother (when she was 4) and then by his death (when she was 10). Her step-father, teachers, and peers mistreated her, and she was filled with insecurities. She went through many relationships before she finally settled down.

[Ketu conjunct planets can make a person feel invisible. I'm sure Ms. Roberts felt that her need for her father was invisible to her mother, that she was powerless to influence her mother to let her father remain in her life after the divorce.]



Another good example of a Ketuvian is **Janis Joplin**, who has Ketu one degree from her Lagna (the Ascendant). She grew up an unattractive social outcast, with terrible self-esteem throughout her life, even after she achieved fame. She also was plagued with addiction issues that eventually killed her. Her Ketu is both aspected by and disposed by a retrograde Saturn, accentuating her self-effacing personality.

Janis' chart illustrates several principles. She has Ketu closely tied to the Lagna instead of with a planet, she has Ketu -- and not Rahu -- aspected by planets, and her chart illustrates another principle of low self-esteem, Saturn aspecting the Lagna. Clearly, Rahu and Ketu are not the only planets that can influence self esteem, and one must always take the whole chart into account.



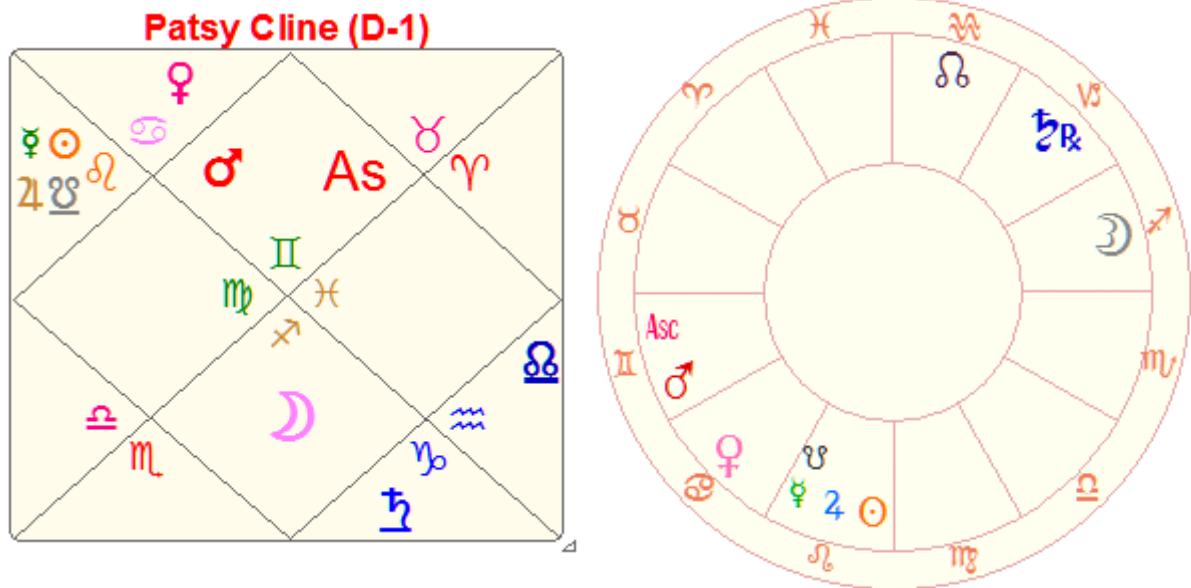


## Mitigating Factors in the Expression of the Nodes

There are, of course, astrological factors that can make a Ketuvian brave and a Rahuvian insecure. A primary factor is the nature of any planets that are in the same house as, or aspect, either node. A secondary factor is the condition of the lords of the signs that the nodes occupy.

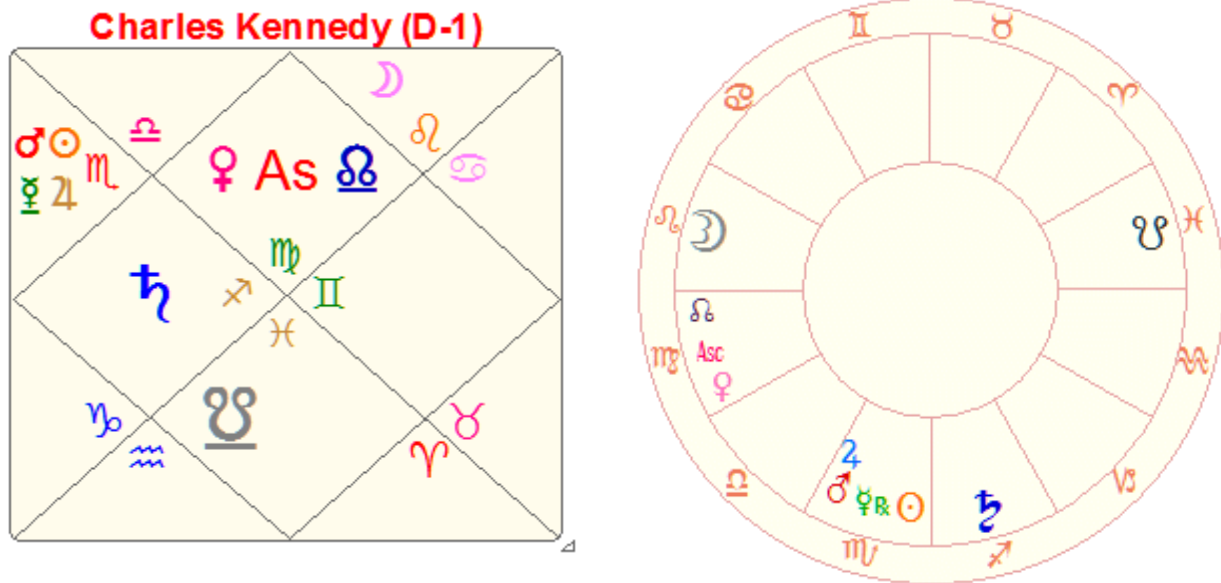
Take the famous signer **Patsy Cline**. There is no doubt Ketu had a strong effect on her life. It's placement in her 3<sup>rd</sup> house of moving (the 3<sup>rd</sup> house is the 12<sup>th</sup> house from the 4<sup>th</sup> house, and as such represents loss of home), and conjunct the 4<sup>th</sup> lord, expressed itself when her family moved about 20 times during her childhood. Accidents also come under the purview of Ketu, and she had two car accidents (one nearly killed her) and died in a plane crash. (Note that Ketu is with Mercury, the Lord of the First House and indicator of one's body and oneself.)

But she was far from an insecure, over-accommodating Ketuvian. In fact, she pioneered women's rights in the male-dominated country music industry, acted with great determination, and developed the reputation "don't mess with the Cline". Why did Ketu express itself so differently in her chart? No doubt Mars in the First House gave her assertiveness and directness, but in addition, Ketu was influenced by its dispositor, the courageous Sun in its own sign of Leo in the house of valor (i.e. the 3<sup>rd</sup> house), which was further reinforced by being with benefic Jupiter.



**Charles Kennedy**, on the other hand, who was the leader of the Liberal Democrats in the U.K. for five years, is an example of a Rahu-vian whose successes were sabotaged by his weaknesses.

His Rahu is with a debilitated Venus, is aspected only by Saturn, and is in the sign of a totally combust (2° from the Sun) Mercury, who is in an enemy's sign. This reflected a weakness in his character that made him an addictive personality (alcoholism was his downfall) and gave him a lack of leadership and follow-through (he was criticized as being too "laid-back"). Typical of a Rahu-vian's misdirection, he publicly repeatedly denied his addiction to alcohol, and even tried to lower the drinking age in the U.K. to 16!



The nodes have many faces, more than we can possibly cover in this short article, but their contribution to the psychological qualities of narcissism and low-self esteem cannot be denied. We can counsel those with Ketu-dominant charts to see their strengths and accomplishments more clearly, and those with Rahu-dominant charts to be careful to listen to others, and to recognize their limitations.

## Western Astrology's approach to the nodes.

Revising and posting the above article was inspired in part by a question from one of my astrology clients, "Why is the North Node seen as all good in Western astrology when Vedic astrology sees it as a powerful malefic?"

Western astrologers started using the nodes in their birth chart delineations primarily after Isabel Hickey's seminal work: **Astrology: A Cosmic Science** introduced the modern Western interpretation of them in the 1970's (in other words, only for the past 30+ years).

Vedic astrologers have used the nodes as two of the nine planets, in other words as a major part of their delineations, for at least 3,000 years; and have come to much deeper understandings about them. Rahu and Ketu -- like the other planets -- are treated as *Beings* in Vedic astrology, with their own myths, rulerships, colors, dignities, attributes, planetary periods (dasas), lunar mansions (Nakshatras), aphorisms (yogas), mantras, and extensive significations. The wealth of information about the nodes in classical Jyotish works is huge.

Many Western astrologers today glorify the North Node (Rahu) and relegate the themes of the South Node (Ketu) to the past. How did this fundamental misunderstanding come into being?

Very simply, by making the same mistake in the approach to the nodes that modern Western astrologers made with respect to their understanding of retrogradation: *They applied Horary principles to Natal Astrology.*

Horary astrology is an excellent tool and works well in answering questions, finding objects, etc. *but it is a self-contained system* whose rules and approaches should never be transferred indiscriminately into natal astrological work.

Since both the South Node and retrograde planets *as signifiers of a question* in a Horary chart mean that the outcome will not occur (you will not get that job or marry that spouse), they developed a negative connotation in Horary. This is fine, and works.

But to apply these meanings to Western natal analysis is poorly done. The fact is that, like a Full Moon, retrograde planets are "full", closest to the Earth (and therefore at their largest in appearance), and brightest\*. In other words, retrograde planets are incredibly strong influences in the chart, and appear that way in the sky!

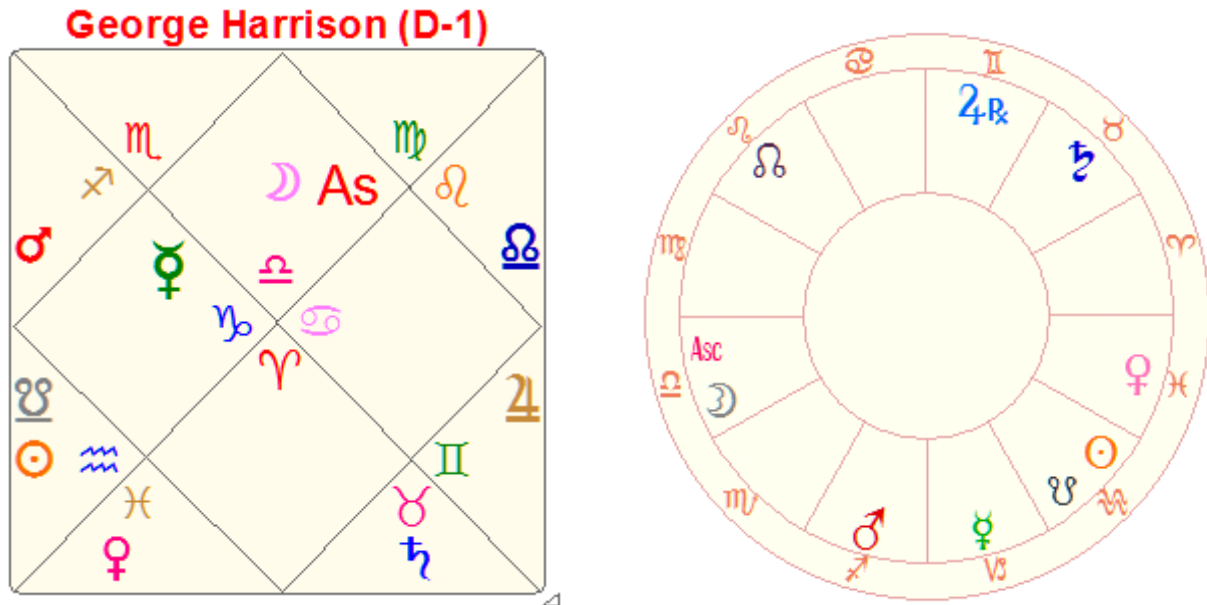
\*Mercury and Venus can be combust and retrograde at the same time. When they are combust, they are not visible.

In some ways, it is no wonder that Rahu (the North Node) is glorified in today's world because Rahu represents the drive to success (the Doing, instead of the Being of Ketu). This drive can be selfish, compulsive, out-of-balance, and materialistic **or** committed, dedicated, persevering, and incredibly productive.

Ketu (the South Node) is one of life's most incredible teachers, since the houses and planets it influences teach lessons concerning loss, relinquishment and surrender, and lead to

transcendence and enlightenment. Ketu leads us, however willing or unwilling we are, to learn to value the Eternal over the transitory.

**George Harrison**, the famous "quiet one" of the Beatles, is widely on record as often saying, "Everything else can wait, but the search for God cannot wait; love one another." He exemplifies Ketu in many ways, including the fear that ended up making him reclusive, his mild manner, and his devotion to Spirit. His "Concert for Bangladesh" was the first high-profile rock concert to raise money for humanitarian causes. His Ketu in with his Sun, and aspected by two planets.



It is vitally important for Western astrologers to realize that *the influences of either of the nodes can blur, bias, and imbalance ones perceptions and values*, and that whenever either node holds us sway, we need to be sure to make decisions from as grounded and as realistic a place as possible.

The impulsiveness, obsessions, distortions, suspicions, exaggerated emotions, and zealotry of the nodal influence must not be trusted nor allowed to initiate actions. Instead we must see and act from poise, centeredness, and serenity. Then, what a wonderful world it will be.

## Other Qualities of Rahu and Ketu

Since Rahu represents the top half of a Demon (in Vedic astrology) or the Dragon's Head (in Western astrology) and Ketu represents the bottom half of the Demon (or the Dragon's tail), there is an implicit implication that *Rahu is more deliberate in its actions* and *Ketu more unconscious, reflexive, and impulsive in its actions*. A dragon may choose to bite you, but it flicks its tail more involuntarily.

The thrashing of a Dragon's tail can knock things over without thinking, and Ketu can represent blind and rash impulsive actions, movement, or speech. That's why, in fact, accidents are represented by Ketu.

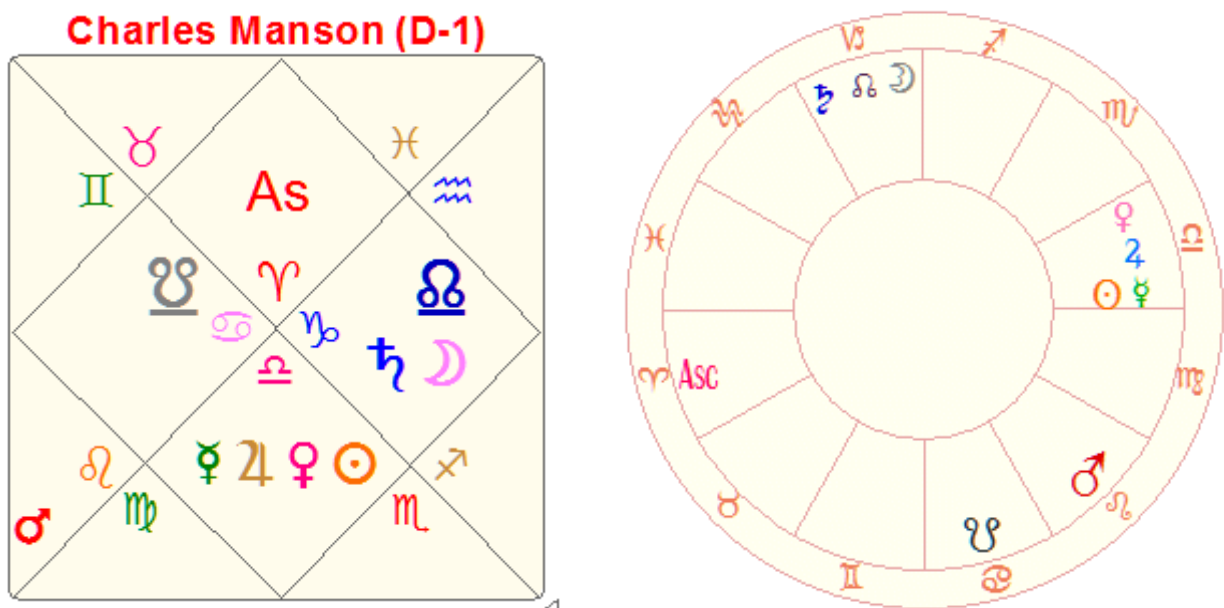
Rahu, on the other hand, can weave elaborate tales to captivate itself or others, deliberately disguise its intentions (Rahu represents spies), gossip and manipulate others secretly, and expertly rationalize its behavior. Rahuvians are often pioneers or rebels, going their own ways in life.

The Dragon's Eyes (Rahu) can hypnotize you; the North Node represents charisma, a magnetic personality, and swaying and seducing others with promises of power, wealth, or pleasure.

Unless Rahu is bolstered by strong planets or benefics, the confidence a Rahuvian expresses may strike others as exaggerated or wobbly, as trying to prove their point, and can have a certain fragility. [In fact, there's a new concept in psychology: fragile self-esteem vs stable self-esteem.]

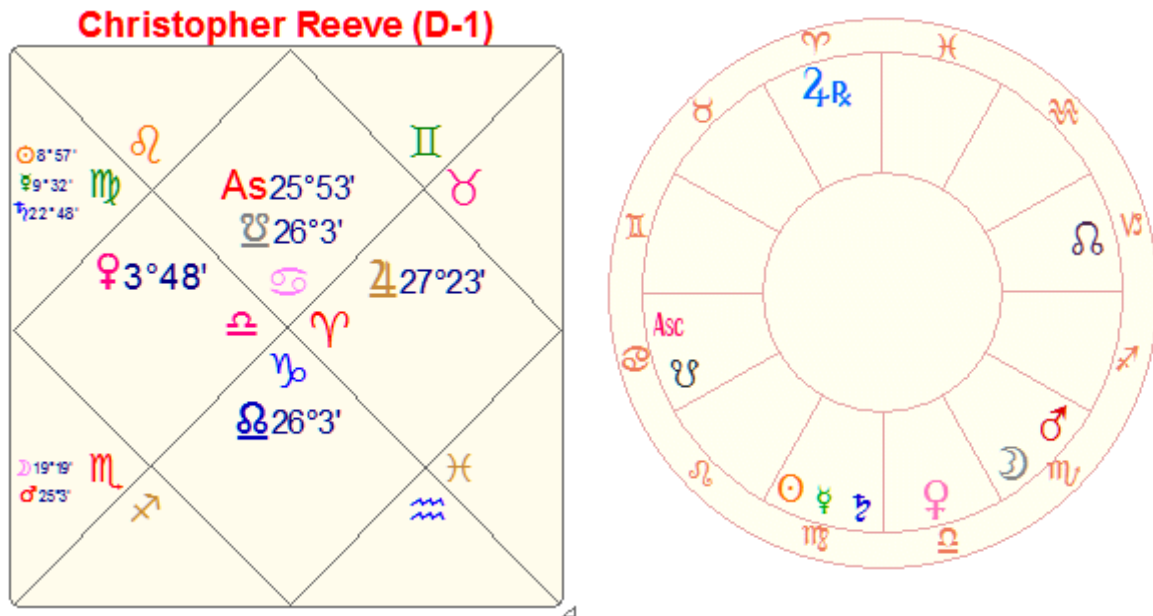
Both nodes also represent weak or fuzzy boundaries, i.e. being overly impressionable, subject to astral influences, and having an over-active imagination.

**Charles Manson** is such a perfect example of both the strengths and weaknesses of Rahu. He mesmerized people and had a following that included many famous people. His Rahu is with a strong Saturn, which gave him great authority in the eyes of others.



Mr. Manson seduced his followers with drugs and sex and visions of greatness. Because, however, his Rahu is exactly conjunct his Moon, he profoundly distorted reality, was flooded with astral influences, and was a master of self-deception.

Rahu and Ketu can also "paralyze" a planet (or point, like the Ascendant) that they conjunct. A classic example is **Christopher Reeve**, who was paralyzed after he fell off of a horse and became an archetypal symbol of courage in physically disabled people. His Ascendant is exactly conjunct Ketu.



Both Rahu and Ketu are also signifiers of 12<sup>th</sup> house themes. Rahu signifies foreigners, foreign countries, and heterodox viewpoints; while Ketu signifies meditation, losses in general including loss of self, monasteries and ashrams, and achieving enlightenment.

As I mentioned earlier, we all see-saw, go back and forth, between Rahu and Ketu. During Rahu times, we go after we want and feel compelled to act or, at our best, find ourselves with the ability and determination to achieve more than we ever believed we could. During Ketu times we act very instinctively (even lash out) or find ourselves paralyzed with fear or doubt, or at our highest, turn our lives over to God, and really listen deeply to our own core, or to our teachers.

Rahu can give us great dreams that we may or may not be able to attain, while Ketu can give us great doubts that we must learn to overcome if we are not to be discouraged from pursuing our dreams, and can also give us profound gifts of insight that come after acceptance and surrender.

The nodes present us with life challenges that in the end help us to realize how important it is to live in reality and to be grounded, and to keep our minds and hearts as clear as possible.

When we live as aligned beings, Rahu and Ketu can bring us extraordinary experiences and blessings.