



CYRIL FAGAN

The Father of Western Sidereal Astrology

by Kenneth Bowser

The main point at issue in contemporary astrology devolves onto the zodiac itself: whether trait characteristics derive from the tropical signs, invented by the Greeks, or the sidereal signs, discovered by the Babylonians. The entire controversy is the consequence of the work of Irish astrologer Cyril Fagan.

In the sidereal system, the positions of celestial bodies are reckoned from the stars — it is a stellar frame of reference. In the tropical system, the positions of celestial bodies are reckoned from the equinoxes and solstices — it is a seasonal frame of reference. There are two schools of sidereal astrology: Eastern or Indian astrology and Western or Babylonian astrology. Western sidereal astrology is the rediscovery of an ancient astrology that was originally practiced in Babylonia and Assyria, and spread throughout the Near and Middle East and the Mediterranean world.

Fagan is known as the father of Western sidereal astrology. He was a student of astrology from the age of 20 until his death. He was an extraordinary technician, interpreter, and lifelong researcher. His interpretations were so amazing that some people, unnerved by them, insisted that he was psychic, although he made no such claim.

In February 1944, with transiting Uranus stationary direct conjunct his natal Taurus Midheaven, and transiting Jupiter in Cancer sextile his natal Mercury in Taurus (see **Chart**, following page), Fagan fully grasped that Babylonian astrology and astronomy were wholly sidereal. This came after years of studying the work of scholars who had translated ancient Babylonian astronomical and astrological texts excavated in the 1840s from what is now Iraq.

Fagan had been a tropical astrologer since 1916, and by the 1930s, he was well regarded as a prominent figure in the tropical world — the *only* astrological world at the time for a Westerner. The epiphany that astrology was at one time resting on a different foundation from that of the current one instantly begs the question of why it was changed. It was the search to address this issue that engaged Fagan during the second half of his life. In other words, if the world was sidereal for the people who discovered the zodiac, how did tropical astrology, which separates the art from the stars, become a standard in the West?

Until the Greeks introduced tropical reckoning late in the first millennium B.C.E. — probably during the lifetime of Hipparchus of Rhodes (who flourished 146–127 B.C.E.) — the equinoxes and solstices were described in sidereal terms. That is, as time wore on, the equinox was described in ten, eight, five, or four degrees of Aries as precession carried it inexorably toward the zero degree.

Precession, from the Latin root *praecedere* (“to precede or go before”), is the agency that separates tropical from sidereal. Precession causes a different part of the zodiac to appear with the Sun at the time of the equinoxes and the solstices, at the rate of change of 1° every 71.6 years. Tropical advocates say that this doesn’t matter, that the arrival of the Sun at the intersection of the ecliptic and the celestial equator is the central issue. Siderealists think that it very

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much matters because, otherwise, astrology is disconnected from the sky. The various astrological ages, like the Age of Pisces that we are in now, are sidereal issues. This means that, during the age of Pisces, the Sun rises with the stars in the constellation Pisces at the March equinox. One can see that. It was these matters that engaged Fagan, like no other astrologer before him.

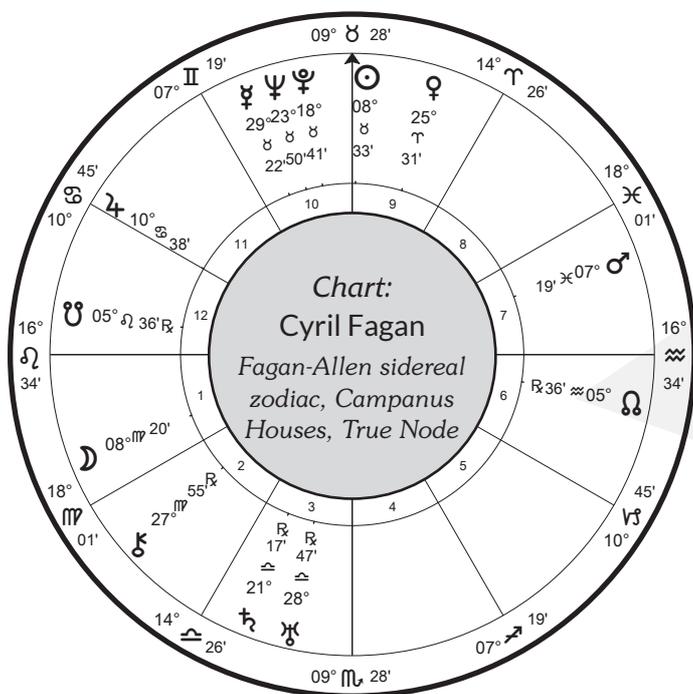
Like Fagan, and because of him, I was powerfully influenced by these issues, too. All the siderealists I know were affected that way; Fagan’s work struck a chord in us that was revelatory. The great majority of the siderealists in the United States are tropical heretics who learned the rudimentary

elements of the art as tropicalists, became disaffected with that school of thought, and subsequently became converts to the sidereal zodiac — not as novices, but as journeymen.

Fagan suffered a disaster at the age of seven, when he contracted scarlet fever; this may well have turned him toward astrology. His hearing was so badly damaged, as a result of the infection, that he had great difficulty hearing a lecture in a classroom situation. Fagan’s father was a surgeon, and the boy was unable to follow in his father’s footsteps. Instead, as a natural intellectual with the Moon in Virgo, he became a denizen of archives, museums, and libraries — places where he could work alone. All of this was done in his spare time and after he retired in 1956 from the British Civil Service, but Fagan never retired from astrology. His real job was always astrologer extraordinaire.

Sidereally, Cyril Fagan had both the Sun in Taurus and the Moon in Virgo sextiling Jupiter in Cancer, which gave him a good early life, a good marriage, two healthy children, and success in his true profession: astrology. His Mercury was conjunct Neptune and closely quincunx Uranus. Mercury–Uranus combinations can be seen as a signature for astrologers, and Mercury–Neptune natives are often intuitive. Leo rising made Fagan an authority and a figure of consequence in his art. The Neptune–Pluto conjunction of the early 1890s in his 10th house was symbolic of one whose career would be a harbinger of things to come. Perhaps most importantly, he had the Moon opposite Mars. Though a gentle man with a Taurus Sun, he was also tough: He had to endure considerable opposition to the sidereal zodiac, but he was more than adequate to the task.

He was a delightful, friendly, and lively person — described as charming by most people. However, in championing the sidereal zodiac, Fagan disturbed a hornet’s nest. The passions unleashed on both sides were (and still are) extremely heated. The firestorm from the 1950s onward was a wild free-for-all exchange of ideas, which I think has been good for the art.



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Fagan repeatedly crossed swords with Dane Rudhyar, especially in the 1960s. Rudhyar wrote for *Horoscope* magazine, and their ongoing battles in print fueled the tropical–sidereal debate to an extreme degree, drawing in many people from the periphery who became interested in the points at issue. The controversy sold a lot of magazines and stirred up interest in astrology like never before in the U.S.

Fagan’s notoriety and the profound interest in sidereal astrology that he evoked were the result, not so much of his three books (*Zodiacs Old and New: A Probe into Antiquity and What Was Found; The Symbolism of the Constellations; and Astrological Origins*), but of his monthly column in *American Astrology* magazine, entitled “Solunars.” It ran from 1953 until his death in 1970, and then for more than three years afterward in reprint form. Fagan’s 200 “Solunars” articles and his three books educated an entire generation of modern siderealists — a whole generation before the arrival of Vedic astrologers on the American scene.

My wife, Colleen Mauro, and I have since obtained the rights to Fagan’s first book and the “Solunars” columns in *American Astrology* from the Fagan family. We plan to publish an edited edition of *Zodiacs Old and New* and the first of what will be a four-volume series of the “Solunars” articles later this year. We hope that this will keep his work alive and be of interest to new generations.

Chart Data and Source

Cyril Fagan, May 22, 1896; 12:00 p.m. Dunsink Time (12:25:21 p.m.); Dublin, Ireland (53°N20', 06°W15'); AA: From Fagan to Arthur Blackwell by letter (February 20, 1963), “recorded time.” Kenneth Bowser adds, “In 1896, the local mean time of the Dunsink Observatory just outside Dublin was the time standard in Ireland. The observatory is at longitude 06°W20'15", which is 25 minutes 21 seconds slow of Greenwich.”

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