



## ***Grendel* and Allusion: Astrology Assignment**

**Allusion:** A brief reference to a person, place, thing, event, or idea in history or literature. Allusions conjure up biblical authority, scenes from Shakespeare's plays, historic figures, wars, great love stories, and anything else that might enrich an author's work.

Allusions imply reading and cultural experiences shared by the writer and reader, functioning as a kind of shorthand whereby the recalling of something outside the work supplies an emotional or intellectual context, such as a poem about current racial struggles calling up the memory of Abraham Lincoln.

- the Bedford Glossary of Literary Terms

In John Gardner's *Grendel*, allusions pervade the novel and add a depth beyond the surface story of a supposed monster. The concept of the novel itself is an allusion, and the character Grendel comes from the ancient epic *Beowulf*. One of the most interesting and challenging uses of allusion in *Grendel* is the novel's association with astrology and the signs of the Zodiac. In Craig J Stromme's "The Twelve Chapters of *Grendel*," he explores the significance of these allusions within the novel, stating that "Gardner explain[s] the organization of the novel:

"It's got twelve chapters. They're all hooked up to astrological signs, for instance, and that gives you nice easy clues."<sup>21</sup> These statements seem to be an instant explication of the novel, but they really only add up to a clue. The problem with the "nice easy clues" is that no two astrologers agree on anything. For example, one tells us that Arians are "outgoing," another that they "like to-live in the mind," and a third that they are "originators" and "sympathetic." It is difficult to see how one could blend these traits into a coherent whole, but even more difficult to see how the whole would point inexorably to some main idea of Western Civilization.

In examining each of the twelve chapters, we shall attempt to discern the philosophical center of each. By studying the philosophical discussions that occur between characters and in the musings of Grendel, we should be able to arrive at conclusions at least as reliable as those suggested by astrological charts."

**For your first assignment, research the 12 signs of the Zodiac, listing the supposed characteristics of each sign in your Writer's Notebook.** You may want to draw from a few different sources to gain a broader understanding of the complexities associated with each sign.

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|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Aries, The Ram    | 6. Virgo, The Virgin     | 9. Sagittarius, The Archer     |
| 2. Taurus, The Bull  | 7. Libra, The Scales     | 10. Capricorn, The Goat        |
| 3. Gemini, The Twins | 8. Scorpio, The Scorpion | 11. Aquarius, The Water-Bearer |
| 4. Cancer, The Crab  |                          | 12. Pisces, The Fish           |
| 5. Leo, The Lion     |                          |                                |