

LITERATURE

'MY COURTS, THAT HATH SO WYDE FOR TO TURNE,
HATH MOORE POWER THAN WOOT ANY MAN':
THE CHILDREN OF SATURN IN CHAUCER'S *MONK'S TALE*

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ABSTRACT

In the article it is suggested that there might exist a relationship between Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* and his *Monk's Tale*, the latter of which is often listed among other tales about the "victimized children" (*The Clerk's Tale*, *The Physician's Tale* or *The Prioress's Tale*). The ancient and medieval tradition referring to the subject of Saturn's children has to be analyzed as double: the children can be either the individuals born at the time of the planet's domination, or the societies suffering due to the Age of Saturn they live in. Chaucer must have been familiar with that concept as well as interested in both astrology and astronomy in general. The pair: Kronos-Saturn was a significant constituent of that system. The predicament of Dante's and Chaucer's Count Hugolino and his children, who starved to death in *Torre della Fame*, might be interpreted in the light of the tradition of the Age of Saturn. The pathos of the tale has its source in the sacrifice of Hugolino's children.

The children in *The Canterbury Tales*, and specifically the ones depicted in *The Clerk's Tale*, *The Monk's Tale*, *The Physician's Tale* and *The Prioress's Tale* belong to a certain family structure within which they are either subjected to acts of violence or victimized as a result of constituting a part of that configuration. Those characters may be viewed against the background of the allegorical images depicting the children of Saturn. It has partly been done by Peter Brown and Andrew Butcher in the study *The Age of Saturn. History and Literature in The Canterbury Tales* where the two authors maintain that Chaucer "appears to be drawing on a tradition whereby, in both literature and art, each planet was represented, together with an array of human beings (the so-called "children" of the planet), ordering activities over which that deity had particular control" (Brown and Butcher 1991: 215). In the study in ques-

tion the primary instance of Saturnine offspring is Arcite in the *Knight's Tale* who dies as a result of that influence, which was instigated by Palamon's patron, Saturn's daughter Venus.

The mythographic tradition, whose part the 'children-of-the-planets' topic constitutes, was started in the antiquity and then continued in the Middle Ages under the influence of the writings of such oriental astrologers as Albumasar (786-866) or Abd Al-Rahman Al Sufi (903-986) (Śnieżyńska-Stolot 1994: 11). They transferred the late ancient tradition to the Middle Ages, where it was not considerably changed, but rather elaborated, and where it also became a part of what Śnieżyńska-Stolot calls "mimetic literature": the one constituting to a certain extent a reflection of the reality and the laws of the universe shaping it. Klibansky, Saxl and Panofsky indicate that the Arabic astrologers' writings became popular in the Latin west in the twelfth century, when *Liber Alchandri philosophi* started to function in a number of copies. Then the tradition of Saturn's children returned to Europe; its primary shape, however, was different from the later one, connected with the calamities caused by the god. The authors of *Saturn and melancholy* describe the primary image as thoroughly negative: the children of the planet were thieves, hypocrites and miserly (1979: 179). Only later did the topic of malice occur, hence Saturn's children could not be blamed for their misfortune. Significantly, according to the literary historians Chaucer can be treated as a representative of the mythographic tradition, therefore it is fully justifiable to search for Saturn's children in his writings (Śnieżyńska-Stolot 1994: 18). Nevertheless, one has to remember about the double perspective on that offspring: Saturn's children could be both the individuals born under the planet's influence and whole communities suffering at the time when Saturn reigns over the world. The individuals would turn out to be as malignant as their 'father', but the whole communities were merely victims of the planetary influence, which did not ruin their character, but it caused misfortune in their lives. The latter situation will be referred to more frequently in this article.

The list of medieval thinkers interested specifically in the influence of Saturn includes: Bernardus Silvestris in *The Cosmographia*, also known as *De Universitate mundi*, Alanus ab Insulis in *Anticlaudianus*, Arnoldus Saxo in the encyclopedic *De coelo et mundo*, Vincent of Beauvais in *Speculum Naturae* and Bartolomeus Anglicus in another encyclopedic work, *De proprietatibus rerum*. References to the planetary god can be also found in: William of Auvergne's *De universo* or Boccaccio's *Genealogiae deorum gentilium libri*. Obviously, the primary ancient source of the mythographic tradition is Ptolemy with his *Tetrabiblos*. All the subsequent writings on the subject, starting with the Arabian and Persian treatises and including the medieval renderings, derive their mythographic lore from that source. References to Saturn can not only be found in the scientific writing of the antiquity, as it happens in the case of *Tetrabiblos*,

but also, secondarily, in literature: Virgil's *Aeneid* contains such references as the one to "magna parens frugum, Saturnia tellus".

In the light of the planetary children's tradition, which is both iconographic and textual, members of the afflicted communities are merely automatons performing in the roles distributed to them by the planet disposing of regal power at the time when they live. To be specific, the children of Saturn have been born in the time of violent transformations resulting in instability and chaos. Such a state of affairs affects their lives as they have hardly any control over them. They seem to be constantly facing the inevitable destruction. The subjective is transformed into the general in the course of their lives since their function is that of puppets in the hands of powerful master-puppeteers.

In the medieval mythographic tradition Saturn is a god whose nature is dual. That duality is a feature that cannot be found in primary representations of the Roman god. In that culture the age of Saturn was the golden one, which led to the flourishing of cities and general happiness of their inhabitants. The ambivalence entered the image of Saturn later, as a result of the hybridization that led to the creation of the Kronos-Saturn figure. Kronos was the god who was highly ambivalent in his potential both for creation and destruction. Klibansky, Panofsky and Saxl (1979: 134) describe Kronos as

[t]he gloomy, dethroned and solitary god conceived as 'dwelling at the uttermost end of land and sea', 'exiled beneath the earth and the flood of the seas', . . . a ruler of the nether gods; he lived as a prisoner or bondsman in, or even beneath, Tartarus, and later he actually passed for the god of death and the dead.

The source of those quotations are the writings of Hesiod, Philo and Macrobius; another source listed by the authors is *Iliad*. On the other hand, Kronos is not only a god associated with downfall and destruction, but also with edification: in the more benevolent version of that figure he is, similarly to Saturn, a patron of agriculture and of the building of cities. When the Roman god Saturn was merged with the Greek Kronos, the latter acquired many positive traits from the former, but the image changed again when the god started to be associated with the planet which is still called Saturn nowadays. The ambivalence associated with Kronos ultimately dominated the image of the Kronos-Saturn hybrid: the planet was believed to be cold, which made it harmful, hence the implication that the planetary god could be highly harmful as well. He started to be imagined as a highly protean figure with a tendency to harm humans and that belief had a reflection also in the literary representations of the figure.

As it is generally known, the role of astronomy and astrology was quite significant in the literature created at the time of Chaucer, hence frequent allusions to those disciplines in the criticism of *The Canterbury Tales*. Astronomy and astrology are listed here together, since they were treated as equal in terms of their

approach to the reality: the division into scientific astronomy and pseudo-scientific astrology did not function in the mentality of the time. The allusions to astronomy and astrology are not surprising in the case of Chaucer's *oeuvre* which mentions the zodiacal sign Aries in its very first lines. At the time when the pilgrimage starts the setting is characterized by the following description: 'the yonge sonne/ hath in the Ram his half cours yronne' (1: 8-9) (Benson 1987).¹ Another of Chaucer's works, this time more didactic than literary, *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, is the evidence of his interest in the scientific disciplines both astronomy and astrology constituted in the Middle Ages. Some of the stories from the *Canterbury Tales* even deserve a more detailed examination of the astrological overtones present in the narrative, to name for example the *Man-of-Law's* or the *Miller's Tale*, where the astrological influence plays a specific role in the characters' lives (Taavitsainen 2000: 378-396). A more extensive treatment of the subject can be found in Walter Clyde Curry's now-classic study *Chaucer and the mediaeval sciences* (Curry 1926b). However, in *Astrologizing the gods* Curry maintains that the poet's fascination with astronomy and astrology was merely a pretext for presenting the subject matter proper of *The Knight's Tale*. The tale is "in no sense presented to illustrate the influence of Saturn and Mars in the affairs of the two heroes", as Curry writes (1926a: 213-243). However, the motif of planetary progeny is important for the analysis of both the plot of *The Knight's Tale* and the motif of victimized children in Chaucer's narratives.

As for Saturn's influence, for the poet's contemporaries the planet represented simultaneously plenty and lack, multiplication and deprivation, excess and shortage. The influence of Saturn would thus be paradoxically manifested in things being enhanced and diminishing because of the fact that they are falling apart, monstrous in their capacity for both enlargement and destruction. Chaucer's knowledge of the consequences of Saturn's power must have come from the sources dependent to some extent on Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* (*Quadripartitum*), as J. D. North insists. In Ptolemy the passage referring to violent deaths caused by the planet's impact runs as follows:

For if Saturn is in quartile aspect to the Sun from a sign of the opposite sect, or in opposition, in the solid signs, he causes death by trampling in a mob, or by the noose, or by indurations; and similarly if he is setting, and the Moon is approaching him. In the signs that have the form of animals, he causes death by wild beasts, and if Jupiter, who is himself afflicted, bears witness to him, death in public places, or on days of celebration, in fighting with the beasts; but in the ascendent, in opposition to either of the luminaries, death in prison ...

(North 1988: 410)

¹ All the numbers of the lines from the *Canterbury Tales* refer to that edition.

The times when violent deaths resulting from Saturn's agency take place are themselves turbulent: they are the days of public feasts and riots and the deaths are on the hands of people or caused by beasts. The bestial element seems to be significant at that point, since the element of bestiality may be conceptually related to the motif of human deformity. Excess, alongside with lack and disfigurement, constitutes a teratological category often included in the classificatory systems of monstrous organisms. Saturn influences societies by making them excessively active: the activity can be either positive or it acquires a negative dimension, when rioting of certain parts of the society takes place. The instability is monstrous: it may equally lead to human life or death, either sudden or resulting from imprisonment.

As for the mythographic portrait of the planetary god functioning in the medieval culture, Klibansky, Saxl and Panofsky describe the image that can be found in Bernardus Silvestris. Their rendering is quoted here because it is associated with the figure of Saturn as it is presented in Chaucer. The authors of *Saturn and melancholy* refer particularly to that description when describing the medieval tradition since they claim that it is "perhaps the most vivid of all" in the mythography of the time:

Here Saturn appears as the wicked old man, cruel and despicable, constantly watching over women in labour so as to mercilessly devour the new-born infant. How powerful the demoniac notion was can be seen by the fact that the poet was able to give it a new image without in any way departing from tradition. Saturn is here the reaper, whose sharps sickle destroys all that is lovely and bears blossom: he lets no roses or lilies flower, and cannot bear fructification. In only one respect is he worthy of veneration, in that he is the son of eternity, the father of time.

(Klibansky, Saxl and Panofsky 1979: 185)

In *Universitate Mundi* Saturn's wicked inclinations are prevailing. The astrologized god decides to wreak havoc and destruction even in the world of nature, not to mention his potential for causing misfortune among humans. Chaucer must have been familiar with that image associating Saturn with the power to cause death when he described the god in his *Knight's Tale*. However, in Chaucer the planetary god differs from Bernardus' one due to his motivation. He instigates Arcite's death not because of his dislike of everything that is young and beautiful, but because of the love he shows to his literal child. An often-quoted passage in the tale constitutes an example of the portrayal of Saturn's impact, where the planet is presented as a divine character, who voices his temporary reign over all the humanity. Saturn's portrait here is that of a senile man, who calls Venus his 'deere doghter' (v. 2453). A stereotypical image juxtaposes the goddess's youth with 'the pale Saturnus the colde/ who knew so manye of adventures olde' (vv. 2443-2444). The tradition of representing the god as an old

man is of Neoplatonic origin, where he simultaneously was wise and Chaucer's version is similar in this respect (Klibansky, Saxl and Panofsky 1979: 166). In the *Canterbury Tales* Saturn's famous self-presentation is the following:

My cours, that hath so wyde for to turne,
 Hath moore power than woot any man.
 Myn is he drenchyng in the see so wan;
 Myn is the prison in the derke cote;
 Myn is the stranglyng and hangyng by the throte,
 The murmure and the cherles rebellyng,
 The groynynge, and the pryvee empoysonyng;
 I do vengeance and pleyn correccioun,
 Whil I dwelle in the signe of the leoun.
 Myn is the ruyne of the hye halles,
 The fallynge of the toures and of the walles
 Upon the mynour of the carpenter,
 I slow Sampson, shakynge the piler;
 And myne be the maladyes colde
 The derke tresons, and the castes olde;
 My lookyng is the fader of pestilence.

(vv. 2454-2469)

The god-like figure appears to be the behind-the-scene instigator of the violence performed by humans and the performer of destruction as far as annihilation of cities is concerned: 'the ruyne of the hye halles,/ The fallynge of the toures and of the walles'. It is very likely a consequence of sheer looking, as it happens in the case of spreading contagious diseases ('My lookyng is the fader of pestilence', as the character monologues, stressing his position as the father of the calamities, or more specifically of the look which 'fathers' the destruction of human bodies as a consequence of a disease). His domain are the 'privee' actions, so the ones performed secretly and clandestinely, since it has to be remembered that in the Middle Ages the term *privy* 'private' had mostly negative connotations. In the speech Saturn delivers the motif of multiplication usually associated with reproduction refers to the number of misfortunes the planet causes, specifically the ones concerning imprisonment and death. In that respect Saturn 'fathers' the calamities that befall the humans. He is presented as the source of destruction, and no creation is viable under his influence. His fatherhood is paradoxical, since even though as a father he is a creator, instead of instigating further creation, he paralyzes any such activity.

He fathers his metaphorical children in order to deprive them of their lives as a consequence of such paternity. Klibansky, Saxl and Panofsky describe the god's mixture of wisdom and malignancy as his intrinsic characteristics and they maintain that his conception was "distinguished by a marked internal contradic-

tion or ambivalence" (1979: 134). The astrologized god or the deified planet is a personification of the life-giver's wisdom and simultaneously of the destroyer's spite. It is the masculinized version of a mother to a certain extent, as it is associated with the ambiguity of motherhood. A mother is also both a life-giver and a potential annihilator, if the mere fact of humans being born in order to die as a consequence in the future is considered. The paradoxical effect of Saturn's fatherhood is enhanced if the reader considers the fact that the speech is delivered for the planetary god's beloved daughter, Venus, and it is meant to be a declaration of fatherly devotion. The misfortune that will influence the life of Palamon's adversary Arcite will result from Saturn's loyalty to Venus. The astrologized god does not devour his literal child, the young goddess: he only spoils the lives of his metaphorical children, the humans born at the time of his reign or influenced by it.

J. D. North not surprisingly calls that "chilling", as he puts it, speech "the astrological centre of the entire poem" (1988: 409). The chilling speech well suits the 'colde' speaker. The planetary god is a forcefully metaphorical figure whose nature was interpreted in diverse modes. As Theresa Tinkle writes in *Saturn of the several faces*, "scholars have explained the Saturn . . . as a figure for time, as a sign of a dark destiny, an evil planetary influence, a force of chaos and violence, an embodiment of age as wisdom, and a pagan astrologized god" (1987: 289-307). Those interpretations are not mutually exclusive, since Saturn in Chaucer's tale may be characterized by all of those "definitions". Tinkle even refers to "oversimplification and confusion in the literary studies", which results from the attempts at finding the only "true" interpretation of the figure (1987: 289-307). The range of the existing interpretations only testifies to the wealth of the mythographic tradition associated with Saturn.

Tinkle analyses the complexity of the mythographic tradition associated with the god. She divides the representations into the following categories: fables, astronomical accounts, instances of euphemism and the so-called "natural" interpretations (1987: 289-307). The fables are various ancient and medieval versions of the Uranos myth, according to which the Greek god Uranus is castrated with a sickle by his son Kronos (Saturn in the Roman terminology). When Gaia, the mother of Kronos' children prophesizes to him that he will be defeated by his own son, he devours them. The details of the fable, also those referring to Saturn fathering Venus, differ in various versions created in the antiquity and the Middle Ages, yet, the motif those narratives have in common are associated with his troublesome childhood and monstrous fatherhood. The gruesome genealogy of the astrologized god is continued into the present where he perpetuates violent acts within the family structure.

The earliest visual representations of Saturn's children that survive were created in the 15th century, but they are known to be copies of the 14th century or

even earlier images. The iconography depicts Saturn's metaphorical children playing dice, being tortured and finally devoured by him. The word *children* is applied to those representations due to the relationship of power between the mythographic figure of Saturn and the humans regardless of their age, which manifests individual variation. The concept of the child is used figuratively here, since it implies the relationship of respectively subjection and domination and inevitability of the misfortunes that affect the lives of those humans.

The other interpretations referring to Saturn are: astronomical accounts, such as the one presented by Boccaccio in *Genealogie deorum gentilium libri*, from which the image of the 'colde' Saturn emerges, instances of euphemerism, where the planetary god is a historical character, and neoplatonistic readings of that figure presenting it as a metaphor of time and *sapientia*. The astrologized god from Chaucer's tale is a character originating from all of those interpretations. Nonetheless, the most significant theme seems to be the motif of Saturn's children with the violence presented as a perennial element of the relationship between the god and the humans subjected to his will.

The motif of diminishing and consequent annihilation as opposed to reproduction is present in *The Monk's Tale*, a part of which might be interpreted as referring to the theme of Saturn's children. Brown and Butcher (1991: 205) argue that the late fourteenth century was perceived as the Age of Saturn, since

[o]ne way in which contemporaries came to terms with their perception of the significance and unity of their experiences in late fourteenth-century England, moving from a series of crises to a general sense of crisis, was by reference to the explanatory system of astrology. In particular, astrologers and other writers looked to the governing influence of Saturn, the planet held to be responsible for such matters as plague, treason, revolt, violent death, bad weather and crop failure.

Therefore, when analyzing *The Monk's Tale*, the fact that the author visualized himself as living in the Age of Saturn has to be taken into consideration. Such a perspective may have influenced the mode in which the characters are depicted. A melancholic mood prevails in the tale and the predicament of the described people consists of nothing else but misfortunes.

When analyzing the tale the iconography associated with the theme of Saturn's children is especially significant. The images depict both the mythological scene of Kronos devouring his own children and the activities of his metaphorical children at the time of his reign. Mutilation is a frequent element within that tradition, since it is an act both referring to the destruction of the devoured children and to the predicament of the humans. Chaucer's tale seems to be associated with the topic of downfall and destruction, as it presents the misfortunes of heroes and the greatest rulers, such as Samson, Hercules, Nabuchodonozor, Julius Cesar, Alexander or Holofernes.

The motif of not metaphorical but literal children appears in one of the stories, namely *De Hugelino Comite de Pize*, an account very likely taken from Dante's *Inferno* (33.1-90). Multiplication impersonated in the earl's 'litel children thre' (v. 2411) is juxtaposed with diminishing of their bodily forms due to 'langour' (v. 2406), that is long starvation. Fortune, stereotypically treated here as a goddess, which was characteristic of the Middle Ages, is blamed for their misery:

Off the Erl Hugelyn of Pyze the langour
Ther may no tonge telle for pitee.
Nut litel out of Pize stant a tour,
In which tour in prisoun put was he,
And with hym been his litel children thre;
The eldest scarsly fyf yeer was of age.
Allas, Fortune, it was greet crueltee
Swiche briddes for to putte in swich a cage.

(vv. 2406-2414)

Under the planetary influence in the Age of Saturn the begetter of three small children is suddenly imprisoned with them in a tower. Saturn, who paradoxically has the power to raze towers and walls, also has the ability to imprison and torture humans, causing their sudden and unexpected death:

Dampned was he to dyen in that prisoun,
For Roger, which that bisshop was of Pize,
Hadde on hym maad a fals suggestioun,
Thurgh which the peple gan upon hym rise
And putten hym to prisoun in swich wise
As ye han herd, and mete and drynke he hadde
So smal that wel unnethe it may suffise,
And therwithal it was ful povre and badde.

(vv. 2415-2422)

Hugolino's predicament is caused by a plot referred to as a 'fals suggestioun', which gave rise to rioting on the part of lower parts of the community: exactly 'the murmure and the cherles rebellyng' Saturn mentioned in *The Knight's Tale*. Thus the earl is presented as a fertile character who gradually loses both his own life and the lives of his children. Human fertility was broached on by the poet in the second story within *The Monk's Tale*, that of Adam. Sexuality was stereotypically judged there to be a filthy element of human existence, since Adam was described as "nat bigeten of mannes sperme unclene" (v. 2009). The commonplace is also present in Innocent III's *De miseria conditionis humanis*: "Formatus est homo ... de spurcissimo spermate" and in Vincent de Beauvais: "Homo autem noster exterior: de immando semine conceptus est" (Benson

1987: 930). The earl's children are products of unclean sperm, yet, their attitude at the time of imprisonment may either be interpreted as angelic, or as monstrous. The effect their sacrifice produces is softened by the fact that their father is not, as Dante's rendering of the story is often interpreted, a cannibal who actually devours his own children's bodies. However, the motif cannibalism that emerges from the English translations of *La Divina Comedia* is a result of the later interpretations of the tale, namely the ones based on the old chronicle which refers to the count as a man-eater. Such erroneous interpretation results from the primary passage of the story, which is an account of Ugolino chewing a fragment of his adversary's skull:

La bocca sollevò dal fiero pasto
 Quel peccator, forbendola a' capelli
 Del capo ch'elli avea di retro guasto.
 Poi cominciò: "Tu vuo' ch'io rinovelli
 Disperato dolor che 'l cor mi preme
 Già pur pensando, pria ch'io ne favelli.
 Ma se le mie parole esser dien seme
 Che frutti infamia al traditor ch' i' rodo,
 Parlare e lacrimar vedrai in seme." (XXXIII: 1-9)

(Dante 1961: 404)

[Lifting his mouth from his horrendous meal,
 this sinner first wiped off his messy lips
 in the hair remaining on the chewed-up skull,
 then spoke: "You want me to renew a grief
 so desperate that just the thought of it,
 much less the telling, grips my heart with pain;
 but if my words can be the seed to bear
 the fruit of infamy for this betrayer,
 who feeds my hunger, then I shall speak – in tears."]

(Dante 1971: 370)

Even though the count satisfies his hunger with the body of his one-time associate Archbishop Ruggieri, the words "then hunger proved more powerful than grief" (v. 75) referring to Ugolino devouring the corpses of his children have to be treated as an over-interpretation. The destruction of the opponent's skull is an act of revenge which does not have to be interpreted as cannibalism. It is generally acknowledged now that in the story presented by Dante the father does not eat the bodies of his own children.

As for Chaucer, he achieves the effect of pathos in presenting the predicament of the father, who is not blamed for his children's annihilation, either. The source of that pathos itself is ambiguous: Hugolino was rightly punished and only his children and not himself could be described as innocent victims. The

figure of Fortune deciding about human life or death can be associated with the iconography presenting the children of Saturn throwing dice, the ultimate effect of which may be their mutilation and subsequent death. The form of the tale enhances the impression of pathos on the reader: the terseness of the narrative contributes to the existence of a potential for the reader's highly emotional reaction associated with the children's situation.

The act of devouring the imprisoned children is perhaps implied but not described. The gruesome act begins quite innocently, as on the death of the youngest child the father bites the corpse's arms out of grief:

Thus day by day this child bigan to crye,
 Til in his fadres barm adoun it lay,
 And seyde, "Farewel, fader, I moot dye!"
 And kiste his fader, and dyde the same day.
 And whan the woful fader deed it say,
 For wo his arnes two he gan to byte,
 And sayde, "Allas, Fortune, and weylaway!
 Thy false wheel my wo al may I wyte."

(vv. 2439-2446)

The other children's reaction is instantaneous since they straightforwardly offer their own bodies as a source of alimentation for their begetter:

His children wende that it for hunger was
 That he his arnes gnou, and nat for wo,
 And seyde, "Fader, do nat so, allas!
 But rather ete the flessch upon us two.
 Oure flessch thou yaf us, take oure flessch us fro,
 And ete ynogh" – right thus they to hym seyde,
 And after that, withinne a day or two,
 They leyde hem in his lappe adoun and deyde.

(vv. 2446-2454)

The circle of life and death is closing: the father once gave life to the children, who are now potentially the cause of his survival. The children are liminal creatures: half angelic and half monstrous, and at the moment when they offer themselves as mere objects fit to be devoured by the father they are situated between life and death. They are still alive, yet, ready to transcend the border of death. Their existence in prison is already life-in-death and their actual death seems inevitable under such circumstances. The children's bodies are monstrous in their constant capacity to become a part of another body and their potential for being destroyed.

The reader witnesses the construction of martyrdom and the birth of sainthood. Yet, Hugolino's children are simultaneously monstrous, being the progeny

of a nearly-cannibal. Chaucer's version of the story ends in the father's death: "hymself, despeired, eek for hunger starf" (v. 2455). The bodies of the children do not become the source of alimentation in the end, yet, their monstrosity is visible in the image of their offering themselves as food on seeing Hugelino bite into their brother's corpse.

It may be postulated that the gloomy story of Hugelino's children might have been conceived as a description of the predicament associated with the Age of Saturn. The tradition associated with the Kronos-Saturn hybrid is variegated and, as it might even be stated, confusing due to its lack of uniformity. Yet, when analyzing the *Monk's Tale* it seems that there exists a relationship between the mythographic narrative and the tale of the children who starved to death in *Torre della Fame*, the Tower of Famine.

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