

Julian Jaynes' Bicameral Brain

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 28 Oct 1998

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1228>

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Ye Olde Mothman — 28 Oct 1998, 20:57

Has Julian Jaynes' theory expressed in "The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind" ever been discussed in relation to Wolfe's "Soldier of the Mist?" If I read it right, Jaynes beleives that self consciousness didn't develop until about 500 B.C. and that any internal voices, motivations, or initiative, prior to this thinking shift, would have been attributed to Gods -- that in the Iliad, when the gods speak they are only heard by the heroes they are speaking too -- this is what makes humans act. Sounds like the situation the character in Wolfe's book finds himself -- hallucinating gods, being at their mercy, no real concept of having a say in what's going on around him. Maybe not...

"Even Bedouins hate their Phone Company!"
-The President's Analyst

Alex David Groce — 29 Oct 1998, 09:36 · follows Ye Olde Mothman

Mothman said:

Subject: (urth) Julian Jaynes' Bicameral Brain
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I don't think we've discussed this, but it sounds as if Wolfe might have had it in mind. On the other hand, I think Latro actually has a fairly developed self-consciousness (at least of the same peculiar kind as Severian, his mnemonic opposite, has)--it seems that there IS a line between the gods and the self to be found. For example, his desire to get home seems to be a tool the gods use to manipulate him--hardly possible if he had no self to dangel a carrot in front of.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." - John 8:32

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Michael Straight — 29 Oct 1998, 10:21 · follows Alex David Groce

On Thu, 29 Oct 1998, Alex David Groce wrote:
Mothman said:

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Exactly. Following Mothman's hypothesis, one would expect Latro's desire to manifest as regular visits from Hestia urging him to search out his kindred and get home. Except that Wolfe would find three other more obscure names for her and use them interchangeably with one he made up.

I've heard of Jaynes' theory before and find it intriguing, but never read the book to see how (she?/he?) defends it. Thanks for reminding me of the book, I'd like to check it out.

It reminds me of C.S. Lewis's argument that ancient peoples did not make the same distinctions we make between physical and spiritual; that there didn't need to be different words for spirit and wind because they were the same thing; that no one bothered to ask to what extent "seated at the right hand of God" was literal or figurative; that no one would think to ask, "Am I really participating in this liturgy, or am I just going through the motions? Am I really worshiping or just dancing?"

-Rostrum