

## VOX DEI: THE PRE-CONSCIOUS WORLD – MIND IN THE WORKS OF JULIAN JAYNES AND RAMÓN DEL VALLE-INCLÁN

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"The sleep of reason produces monsters."  
*Caprichos*, Francisco de Goya y Lucientes

Goya's "monsters" are metaphors of the human mind gone awry, of a mind that has lost contact with rationality. Long distanced from the original state of being, its primal holistic nature, the mind has been constrained by the rules of civilization and its processes distorted thereby. As the artist sees it in the etchings collected in *Caprichos* (Wild Desires), *Disparates* (The Follies) and *Desastres de la guerra* (The Disasters of War) and his so-called *Pinturas Negras* (The Black Paintings), anything that cannot be explicated by the norms of logic in modern life can become monstrous.

Monsters created by modern man's mind gone astray demonstrate how disparate its state is from that of the ancients. Rather than Goya's "monsters", the mind of peoples of very ancient antiquity throughout the world produced different results via an openness to divinity in a way that our mind is not. Such a "sleep of reason" then was in fact the state of pre-reason and it produced a body of deities, perceived both as positive and negative depending on the impact of their actions on humankind. Thus, the presence of deific beings in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, the Americas, and islands everywhere.

In his startling book<sup>1</sup>, the late Princeton psychologist Julian Jaynes posits that prior to the second millennium B.C.E., human beings from Mesopotamia to Perú existed without consciousness, their lives directed by auditory hallucinations, voices deemed to be divine. In all the millennia prior to that time there was no will, no projection to the future, no gauging the past, no introspection. This condition, he states, was the result of the operation of the bicameral mind, the left side of the brain for speech,<sup>2</sup> the right hemisphere for communications from the gods. Human life was "cued" to action by such voices, thus the

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<sup>1</sup> Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Houghton Mifflin, Mariner Books, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> In some cases, left-handed people generate speech in the right hemisphere or in both areas of the brain.

notion of the sacred communications and their pervasiveness in ancient societies, thus the rise of religions.

The evidence for the thesis is in the works of Homer. In the *Iliad*, "Zeus holds Odysseus in his *noos*,"<sup>3</sup> that is, as Jayne explains: "He watches over him."<sup>4</sup> And later, in the *Iliad*, which Jaynes analyzes at length: "The characters of the *Iliad* do not sit down and think out what to do. They have no conscious minds [...] and certainly no introspection."<sup>5</sup>

In his analysis, the soldiers who fought the Trojan War were mere automatons: "Thus, Iliadic men have no will of their own and certainly no notion of free will."<sup>6</sup> The same applies to the major characters. Jaynes goes on to list the numerous examples of gods directing the actions of Agamemnon, Achilles, Hector, Helen, Paris, thus causing the Trojan War and its aftermath. As Achilles confronts Agamemnon for having taken his mistress, the latter blames his actions on Zeus: "Not I was the cause of this act, but Zeus [...] Gods always have their way." And in effect, Jaynes sees the *Iliad* as originating wholly in the world of the gods, citing the opening words of the epic – "Of wrath sing, O Goddess" – as evidence that the entire epic is the song of the goddess which the entranced bard "heard" and chanted to his Iron-age listeners among the ruins of Agamemnon's world.<sup>7</sup>

Similar godly discourse is everywhere in the early books of the Old Testament wherein God spoke to the prophets, beginning with Moses, as well as in the oldest Hindu texts in Sanskrit, the Vedas. Numerous other texts and oral traditions of ancient peoples worldwide, in Asia, Africa and the Americas, similarly attest to their communication with their deities and adherence to their commands.

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<sup>3</sup> In Greek, *Noosis* properly *Nous*, with cosmological connotations, as in Anaxagoras, who first introduced the concept. It meant Mind or Intellect. Thus, Zeus holds Odysseus in his mind. The term has many other implications, including divine consciousness, intelligence, perception etc. In *Poimandres, The Shepherd of Men* (in Coptic *The Knowledge of the Sun-God*), the opening text of the *Corpus Hermeticum* (*Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius*, trans Brian P. Copenhaver [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992]), the narrator tells how Poimandres identified himself as "the *Nous* of the Absolute Power" and revealed how "[...] the divine *Nous*, being androgynous, existing as Life and Light, brought forth by a word another *Nous*, the Demiurge [...] god over fire and the breath [...]." The Demiurge's governance of the world is termed *Heimarmene*, i.e., Destiny (Hindu Karma). This is yet another version of the control of the gods over Man, as Jayne posits. In the case of *The Lamp of Marvels*, *Nous* figures prominently, as discussed in my "The Way of Hermes Trismegistos in Valle-Inclán's *The Lamp of Marvels*," *Cauda Pavonis: Studies in Hermeticism* (Spring 1997): 9–15, dbl. cols.

<sup>4</sup> Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness*, 70.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 72–73.

But with the “breakdown” of this divinely-connected system between 2000 and 1000 B.C.E. for reasons that can only be speculated upon, as Jaynes acknowledges, Greek civilization entered a new phase in which consciousness began to prevail. He conjectures that social and natural upheavals, invasions and migrations, perhaps along with other radical events, contributed to a weakening of the bond between man and the gods; as he puts it: they “drove the wedge of consciousness between god and man”<sup>8</sup>; thus, creating Consciousness.

Nonetheless, the previous state of communion with the gods was not forgotten. There was a search for new access to that “unconsciousness” in which humanity existed since its inception prior to the “breakdown” of the bicameral mind; this led post-2000 B.C.E. Greeks to rely on oracular prognostications (as at Apollo’s shrine at Delphi), on seers (the blind Tiresias of the Oedipus tragedy), bards, on initiation into orgiastic cults (as in honor of Dionysus), and the Demeter/Persephone rites of Nature’s death and rebirth.

Ultimately, that seeking after the old way of bicamerality led to myriad systems – formalized religions with many or one deity, the mythification of nature, Druidism, Spiritism, Eastern and Western mysticism, transcendental meditation, Voudoun, the use of mind-altering drugs such as peyote and LSD, and the twentieth century’s Scientology, among many others—as well as the endeavors of the creative individual to express through art, music, dance, theatre, poetry and lyrical prose that attempt to understand and hopefully recapture the ability of ancient peoples to comprehend life in ways drastically different from our own.<sup>9</sup> It is a seeking to free the mind as now configured from the prison of logical strictures, a condition that can lead to such monstrous constructs as appear in many of Goya’s paintings and etchings of war and social dissolution.

Gnosticism promotes one way of attaining entry into that pre-conscious level of being through the personal communication with the Deity, a noetic venue, that attains upon awakening to the individualized knowledge termed *gnosis*.<sup>10</sup> Within the framework

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>9</sup> It can be postulated from Jaynes’s premise that the ability of ancient peoples to quarry, shape and move massive stones in order to build such wonders as the Egyptian pyramids, England’s Stonehenge, the megalithic sites of Malta and Gozo, the nuraghe of Sardinia, Peru’s Sacsayhuaman and Machu Picchu, and the moai of Easter Island resulted from the “instructions” provided by the voices of their gods.

<sup>10</sup> See the works of Hans Jonas, Elaine Pagels and Kurt Rudolph. Jonas presents heresiological and basic texts (prior to the Nag Hammadi manuscripts, which were published subsequently), including “Poimandres” and “Hymn of the Pearl,” as well as assessments of Simon Magus, Valentinus, the Mandeans and the Manicheans: Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963). Pagels analyzes the individualized Gnostic search for salvation through a personal relationship to the deity in contrast to the Church’s view of salvation through its

of art, literary genres, music, and film, Surrealism attempts to accomplish the same toward the tapping of the unconscious mind, as is most evident in the Manifestos of André Breton and the paintings and drawings of Salvador Dalí but also in the works of many other international surrealists, especially Max Ernst, Leonor Fini, Man Ray, Jean Arp, Marcel Duchamp, Méret Oppenheim, Wifredo Lam, and Leonora Carrington.<sup>11</sup> And Swedenborg scattered throughout his work's descriptions of the mind's hidden levels, as did William Blake, while Freud and Jung each added to the viaducts leading to the exploration of the non-conscious mind through formulaic paths towards facilitating the decipherment of dreams and myths.

In *The Lamp of Marvels* (*La lámpara maravillosa*, 1916), Ramón del Valle-Inclán (Spain, 1866–1936) foreshadowed Jaynes' bicameral hypothesis in his own perspective when he assessed the state of being of ancient Greeks.

The Golden Age was dawning and the Greeks, divine herdsmen, were still contemplating pale stars. They did so wrapped in the silence of flocks, on hills dappled with olive trees, among guardian dogs. Their souls came forth at dawn; those goatherds possessed the sovereign eyes of eagles and an intuition wrenched from the celestial core of the Sun. Their souls were filled with sacred paths leading to groves, crystalline brooks, grottoes out of which flew long-winged birds at twilight, the shadows of laurels, and distant, golden shores of a blue sea. With eyes open in amazement to the light, they received all images as if they were the eucharistic species, images so frequent and diverse that they summed up the norms of all knowledge. [...] They did not receive their understanding of the world like a cold inheritance from the urn of words [...] To those herdsmen, ideas meant numbers and forms under the rhythm of the Sun. [...] What they learned impulsively was enjoyed in quietude.<sup>12</sup>

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institutionalized interpretation of God: Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979). Rudolph incorporates the Nag Hammadi texts into his discussion of the Gnostic belief system: Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983; 1987); *Die Gnosis: Wesen und Geschichte einer spätantiken Religion* (Leipzig: Koehler und Amelang, 1977). See also the esoteric texts collected in Willis Barnstone, *The Other Bible* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984). (Contains texts from Jewish pseudepigrapha, Christian apocrypha and Gnostic scriptures.)

<sup>11</sup> See Robert Lima, "Leonor Carrington: The Fine Art of Alchemy, or the *Mysterium Coniunctionis*," *Cauda Pavonis: Studies in Hermeticism* 18 (Fall 2000): 17–22.

<sup>12</sup> Valle-Inclán, Ramón del, *La lámpara maravillosa: Ejercicios espirituales* (Madrid: Sociedad General Española de Librería / Imprenta Helénica, 1916); English version: *The Lamp of Marvels: Aesthetic Meditations*, trans. Robert Lima (W. Stockbridge, MA: Lindisfarne Press / Inner Traditions, 1986), 55–6. See also: *Obras completas*, 2 vols (Madrid: Editorial Espasa / Calpe, 2002). (Contains all the works referred to in the text.)

The Greeks knew their gods intimately. Their lives were filled with the dictates of the gods. And the actions instigated by the voices from Mount Olympus led ultimately to a magnificent society. Both Valle-Inclán and Jaynes intuited such a relationship between man and his gods in ancient societies.

But the dual aspect of the mind in ancient Greece, as elsewhere, was not the only foundation for Valle-Inclán's perception of bicamerality. The processes employed by such Spanish mystics as St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross and Fray Luis de León opened a path toward union with The All that Valle-Inclán delineates at the onset of *The Lamp of Marvels*:

There are two paths to knowledge that mystics term Meditation and Contemplation. Meditation is that sequence of reasoning through which a truth is attained; Contemplation is that same deduced truth once it becomes part of our being [...] Contemplation is an absolute mode of knowledge, an amiable, delectable, and quiet intuition through which the soul enjoys the beauty of the world without discourse while in the divine tenebrae. Thus, it resembles a mystical exegesis of total knowledge and is the supreme method of achieving communion with The All.<sup>13</sup>

He also integrated into his treatise the precepts of the Gnostics,<sup>14</sup> whose search for The All, The God of Light, The Alien God, The Logos, was foregrounded by personal revelation (Gnosis) from the deity – another variant of the concept posited by Jaynes. As Valle-Inclán instructs in *The Lamp of Marvels*:

[...] unfold your Gnostic wings to soar, to comprehend. Only ecstatic sight can make you center of love and knowledge.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Valle-Inclán, *The Lamp of Marvels*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> See Robert Lima, "Toward Gnosis: Exegesis of Valle-Inclán's *La lámpara maravillosa*," *The Hermetic Journal* (Summer 1990): 112–22; "The Triads of Valle-Inclán: *La lámpara maravillosa*," *Letras Peninsulares* (Fall 1990): 309–19; "The Path to the Origin in Valle-Inclán's *La lámpara maravillosa*," in Antonio Carreño, ed., *Actas do Segundo Congreso de Estudios Galegos: Homenaxe a José Amor y Vázquez* (Vigo: Editorial Galaxia, 1991), 241–50; "Renaissance Esoterica in Valle-Inclán's *La lámpara maravillosa*," in Charles Ganelin and Jeanette Beers, eds., *Romance Languages Annual* (W. Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1992); "The Gnostic Flight of Valle-Inclán," in *Neophilologus* (Discusses *La media noche. Visión estelar de un momento de guerra* and *La lámpara maravillosa*) 78 (April 1994): 243–50; "Three: The Mystical Integer in Valle-Inclán's *La lámpara maravillosa*," in Giuseppe de Gennaro, ed., *Atti del Congresso Internazionale di Semiotica del Testo Mistico* (L'Aquila: Edizioni del Gallo Cedrone, 1995), 240–45; "The Way of Hermes Trismegistos."

<sup>15</sup> Valle-Inclán, *The Lamp of Marvels*, 114.

And he goes on to explicate the search for enlightenment:

All Gnosticism teaches that matter was actuated as the substance of form only after light, and that in light resides Universality. To those initiates [...] the Sun is the Logos.<sup>16</sup>

The mystical treatise *The Lamp of Marvels* is the culmination of its author's lifelong involvement in esoteric pursuits. Through these he believed that one solution to "the problem of Spain"<sup>17</sup> was to bring about the spiritual re-awakening of the nation, but not in the tradition of orthodox Christianity with its problematic conflicting Gospels, with its exclusion of texts deemed heretical, and its controversial geo-political history (although Franciscanism remained important in his perception of Nature). Rather, he posited norms founded on the heterodox writings of such as Miguel de Molinos, Meister Eckhart, Juan de Valdés, Pico della Mirandola, Johannes Tauler, Cabalistic texts and, earlier, the revelations of Hermes Trismegistus, he reiterated concepts out of Plato and the Neo-Platonists, especially Plotinus, and numerous Gnostic speculations, that of Valentinus for one, and he identified with the alchemical quest for spiritual integration. In the context of his own era, he was conversant with the ideas of Theosophy, as posited by Madame Blavatsky and her circle, and the experiments of Cesare Lombroso through the mediumship of Eusapia Palladino, one of which sessions he attended in Rome, witnessing her feats of psychokinesis and levitation. Had he lived to see their founding, he might have affiliated with the Scientology center in Madrid and become a guru to New Age seekers.

In his native Galicia, the most northwestern region of Spain, Valle-Inclán was one of the prime movers in the renaissance of the area's Celtic lore, as were fellow writers William Butler Yeats, John Millington Synge and Lady Augusta Gregory in Ireland. The Celtic tradition also encompassed beliefs in and practices towards oracular communication with the gods, not infrequently facilitated through Druids, who often interpreted natural and phenomenological signs as deific mandates.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>17</sup> Valle-Inclán was a member of Spain's famed "Generation of 1898," a confederation of writers, painters, musicians, philosophers, critics and cultural historians who diagnosed the malaise that led to Spain's decline at the close of the nineteenth century, culminating in the nation's defeat in the Spanish American War. Through a variety of venues, the "Generation of 1898" sought to restore the country's health. In the field of literature, Antonio Machado was its finest poet, Miguel de Unamuno its greatest philosopher, Pío Baroja its existential novelist, Jacinto Benavente its Nobel Prize-winning social dramatist, "Azorín" (José Martínez Ruíz) and Ramiro de Maeztu its outstanding essayists, and Valle-Inclán its most creative aesthete, stylistic novelist and innovative playwright.

The scope of Valle-Inclán's knowledge of esoterica past and present was vast, and *The Lamp of Marvels* displays it admirably under the headings "Gnosis", "The Ring of Gyges", "The Musical Miracle", "Trinitarian Exegesis", "Aesthetic Quietism", and "The Philosopher's Stone", each section replete with adages reminiscent of medieval exempla. Through each of these contexts, which eschew the rational venue, Valle-Inclán discloses his personal path towards self-knowledge and the mystical union with The All. He said:

The person who is inspired has to intuit communications from the invisible world [...] Let us seek the mysterious and subtle allusion, that which makes us tremble like a breath and permits us to discern an occult meaning well beyond human thought.<sup>18</sup>

The concept of bicamerality, as viewed in *The Lamp of Marvels*, is also manifested in other of Valle-Inclán's writings, including poems in the collections *La pipa de kif* (The Pipe of Kiff) and *El pasajero* (The Passenger or The Traveler). The most notable examples among his dramatic works appear in *Luces de bohemia* (Bohemian Lights) and *Los cuernos de don Friolera* (Don Friolera's Horns). No matter the genre, in the process of pursuing his own quest, Valle-Inclán became a mage, instructing the reader through personal example how to become an adept in the search for Gnosis by listening to the voice of the divinity within his own human mind.

It is the same voice that Julian Jaynes deciphered at work in the bicameral minds of ancient Greeks and those of other cultures worldwide. As Jayne posits, only with the breakdown of the bicameral mind did human beings come to recognize, through an as yet unexplained process, that the emanations of divine discourse came from the human mind itself, namely from its right lobe.

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<sup>18</sup> Valle-Inclán, *The Lamp of Marvels*, 26.