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Boanthropy

Boanthropy is a psychological disorder in which a human believes himself or herself to be a bovine.^[1]

Contents

Historical accounts Contemporary Totemism In popular culture See also

References

Historical accounts

The most famous sufferer of this disorder is claimed to be <u>Nebuchadnezzar II</u>, who in the <u>Book of Daniel</u> "was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen". <u>Carl Jung</u> would subsequently instance 'Nebuchadnezzar...[as] a complete <u>regressive</u> degeneration of a man who has overreached himself^[2].

According to Persian traditions, the Buyid prince Majd al-Dawla was suffering from an illusion that he is a cow, making the sound of a cow and asking that to be killed so that his flesh could be consumed. He was cured by Avicenna.^[3]

Contemporary

Boanthropy 'still occurs today when a person, in a delusional state, believes himself or herself to be an ox or cow...and attempts to live and behave accordingly'.^[4]

It has been suggested that hypnotism, suggestion and auto-suggestion may contribute to such beliefs.^[5]

Dreams may also play an important part. Jung for example records how a stubborn woman 'dreamed she was attending an important social occasion. She was greeted by the hostess with the words: "How nice that you could come. All your friends are here, and they are waiting for you." The hostess then led her to the door and opened it, and the dreamer stepped through – into a cowshed!'.^[6]

Freud had long since noted 'cases in which a mental disease has started with a dream and in which a delusion originating in the dream has persisted'.^[7]

R. D. Laing offers an autobiographical account of a brief reactive psychosis in which the protagonist had a 'real feeling of regression in time...I actually seemed to be wandering in a kind of landscape with – um – desert landscape – as if I were an animal, rather – rather a large animal..a kind of rhinoceros or something like that and emitting sounds like a rhinoceros'.^[8]

Totemism

Eric Berne considered the first years of life as a time when the child 'is dealing with magical people who can perhaps on occasion turn themselves into animals,' and thought that even in later life 'a great many people have an animal...which recurs again and again in their dreams. This is their totem^[9] – something which may offer a route back for early regressive identifications.

Derogatory cultural identifications of people 'like cattle, with their eyes always looking down, and their heads stooping to the earth, that is, to the dining table...they kick and butt at each other with horns and hoofs that are made of iron'^[10] go back at least as far as <u>Plato</u>; while the 'direct identification of woman and cow'^[11] in folk humor offers another potential source for delusional identification. Anthropological evidence such as 'a Burmese buffalo dance in which masked dancers are possessed by the buffalo spirit'^[12] would seem to confirm such totemic/cultural influences.

In popular culture

• The Cow, an Iranian movie by Dariush Mehrjui

See also

- Clinical lycanthropy (or Zoanthropy)
- Hathor
- lo
- Therianthropy

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