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words

From Greek tragedy to a psychiatry lexicon

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A variety of Greek terminology used in tragic drama is translated simply as 'madness': *anoia* is absence of *nous* (mental reasoning); *paranoia*, a sidestep away from *nous*; *paraphron*, movement away from *phren* (the mind); *oistros*, a fly that bites cows (irritating and persistent) and might refer to an unrelenting passion; *lussa*, a violent rage closely associated with wolves. Most commonly *mania* was used, a term related to *menos* – a violent force, perhaps originally meaning 'blood'. The terminology of the theatre has proved an enduring influence on psychiatric nomenclature, in contrast to ancient Greek clinical diagnoses such as melancholia and hysteria.

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