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words

## Hysteria

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Ancient Egyptians and Greeks knew the pregnant womb enlarged and later might prolapse. Mediaeval physicians fancifully supposed it moved freely. Post-Renaissance doctors called many organic and affective symptoms hysterical or hypochondriacal. In the 19th century Littré wrote of hysteria, Russell Reynolds recognised motives for symptoms, Janet created 'dissociation' – and Freud 'repression'. Shell-shock made hysteria a reality. Multiple personality and false memories destroyed dissociation and wounded repression, which dies on close inspection. Physiological responses are now often mislabelled as 'somatoform', implying motivated. Hysterical symptoms still occur, often briefly, with neurological conditions, mass complaints and subjective awareness of their physical improbability.

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