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## psychiatry in literature

### Bartholomew the Englishman: *On the Properties of Things* – Wikipedia of the Middle Ages

Greg Wilkinson

Bartholomaeus Anglicus, a 13th-century Franciscan, wrote the encyclopaedic *De proprietatibus rerum* (*On the Properties of Things*) between 1220 and 1240. It became one of the most widely read books in medieval times, spreading knowledge and shaping attitudes and behaviour, with 17 editions in the 15th century and 200 original copies extant today. Nineteen books encompass heaven and earth, with over 100 sources, from Adamantius to Zoroaster. Trevisa (1397) and Batman (1582) produced English translations; and Steele abridged extracts in 1893.

Book 5 links brain, feelings and behaviour: ‘In the foremost cell and wombe imagination is conformed and made, in the middle, reason: in the hindermost, recordation & minde [...] If the braine be let [*injured*], all that is in the body is let: And if the braine be well, all that is in the bodye is the better disposed’.

Book 7 comprises 70 medical conditions, including frenzy and madness – severe disorders requiring humane treatment.

5. ‘These be the signs of frenzy, woodness [*insanity*] and continual waking, moving and casting about the eyes, raging, stretching, and casting out of hands, moving and wagging of the head, grinding and gnashing together of the teeth; always they will arise out of their bed, now they sing, now they weep, and they bite gladly and rend [*tear with force*] their keeper and their leech: seldom be they still, but cry much. And these be most perilously sick, and yet they wot [*know*] not then that they be sick. Then they must be soon holpen [*helped*] lest they perish, and that both in diet and in medicine. The diet shall be full scarce, as crumbs of bread, which must many times be wet in water. [...] All that be about him shall be commanded to be still and in silence; men shall not answer to his nice [*foolish*] words. [...] Over all things, with ointments and balmings men shall labour to bring him sleep. [...] If after these medicines are laid thus to, the woodness dureth three days without sleep, there is no hope of recovery.’

6. ‘Madness [*Batman specifies melancholy and mania*] cometh sometime of passions of the soul, as of business and of great thoughts of sorrow and of too great study, and of dread: sometime of the biting of a wood hound, or some other venomous beast: sometime of melancholy meats, and sometime of drink of strong wine. And as the causes be diverse, the tokens and signs be diverse. For some cry and leap and hurt and wound themselves and other men, and darken and hide themselves in privy and secret places [*Batman says: “of whose disposition & difference it is rehearsed before in the fifth booke, where it is treated of the passion of y<sup>e</sup> braine”*]. The medicine of them is, that they be bound, that they hurt not themselves and other men. And namely, such shall be refreshed, and comforted, and withdrawn from cause and matter of dread and busy thoughts. And they must be gladdened with instruments of music, and somedeal [*someway*] be occupied.’

*À la recherche du temps perdu!*

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