FEHER

Welcome to our program entitled “In Performance: Shakespeare and the Four Humors.” During this presentation you will learn about the fours humors, and through the enactment of scenes and dramatic readings from some of Shakespeare’s plays, see in action selected characters reflecting humoral ideas. The Red Masquers, Duquesne University’s own theater company, will perform illustrative scenes from their current show (pause), ah, (hesitantly) The Scottish Play, and special guests will also take part in dramatic readings of revealing speeches. I am Bill Feher, one of your co-hosts for this program. I am joined by my colleague, Gesina Phillips. We are from the Gumberg Library. This performance today is just one of the events the library is presenting in conjunction with a poster exhibit from the National Library of Medicine currently on display at the Gumberg Library. The exhibit is entitled “And there’s the humor of it”: Shakespeare and the four humors.” If you have not seen the exhibit, please stop by and take a look.

About this play that the Red Masquers are currently doing, it is not really called The Scottish Play. However, in the traditions of the theater, it is considered bad luck to say the name of this play in a theater. We will respect that tradition here today. So that play by Shakespeare—you know the one—title has two syllables, begins with “M” and ends with “th”—Don’t say it! (Here Gesina holds up a poster for the show)—we will refer to as The Scottish Play. The main character will be designated “M” and his wife, “Lady M.” Just to be on the safe side.

PHILLIPS

To begin, from ancient times, through the days of Shakespeare, when someone talked about the humors, they were not talking about jokes or slapstick, or things that make you laugh. They were talking about fluids in the human body. The four humors were blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. The Elizabethans inherited the idea of these liquids from a great Greek doctor of the Roman period named Galen, who was influential in the western and Islamic worlds for almost 1500 years. Galen lived between 129 and 210 of the Common Era. He taught that these fluids were responsible for the life, health, well-being, and temperament of the individual. When the four humors were in balance people were healthy and happy (in Greek this state would have been called eucrasia, or a “good mixture.”). But when they were out of balance
people became physically sick and mentally unstable. This state would have been called *dyscrasia* or a “bad mixture.” A proper balance of the humors did not mean that they were all equally present in a person, but that they were in the proper proportions, the ideal proportions being one quarter as much phlegm as blood, one sixteenth as much choler as blood, and one sixty-fourth as much black bile as blood. Some of the methods doctors used to bring the humors back into balance were mild, commonsense measures, such as changing the patient’s diet, prescribing exercise, sleep, music, relaxation, or a change of scene, while others were less pleasant, such as inducing vomiting, giving enemas, even blood-letting, all to drain off excess humors.

By the way, an example of a character in Shakespeare’s works whose humors are in perfect balance—and there are not many of them—is Horatio, Hamlet’s friend and fellow student from Wittenberg.

The problem is it was very difficult to keep the humors in balance. They changed with the time of day, with what you ate, or drank, with the season, or even the alignment of the planets. Events in one’s daily life had a continually disruptive effect, particularly if they were major events. So very often, individuals (whether in real life or on stage) found themselves out of balance, and since one humor or another usually dominated in a person, he or she would exhibit a particular temperament associated with their dominant humor. Those with excess blood were “sanguine”, with excess phlegm were “phlegmatic”, with excess yellow bile (also known as choler) were “choleric,” and with an excess of black bile, were “melancholic.” While humoral theory was disproved long ago, we still use these words today to describe certain temperaments.

If this sounds complicated, it gets more so. Each of the four humors was related to one of the traditional four elements: melancholy with earth, choler with air, blood with fire, phlegm with water. Each of the humors also exhibited two of the four traditional qualities: hot, cold, moist, and dry. And for two of the humors, choler and phlegm, there were more or less extreme
manifestations of them depending on whether an individual was born under the influence of one planet or another.

If you want to learn more about humoral medicine check out the webpage we have made to accompany the poster exhibit. You will find the URL for it in the program for today’s show.

CHOLER

FEHER

We will begin our examination of the individual humors with choler. Choler is dominant in a person when there is too much yellow bile, which was believed to be created in the gall bladder. Associated with the element fire, choler was thought to make a person prone to anger, even violence. It was believed to be hot and dry. Its season was summer, its time of life was adulthood, and the planet influencing it was Mars. Today when we say someone is “choleric” we mean that they are bad-tempered and irritable. Too much choler might induce a person (or character in a play) to be in conflict with those around them, but when going into battle a spike in choler would be no bad thing.

PHILLIPS

Our first scene today will be from the Scottish Play, and the character we will be observing is Lady M. Even though a shrewd and powerful queen was on the throne during much of Shakespeare’s life, it is still safe to say that Elizabethan England was a man’s world. Elizabethan thought held that women were phlegmatic—despite the fact that Queen Elizabeth One was anything but! People who were phlegmatic were thought to be generally calm and unemotional, not easily excited or moved to action, even apathetic or sluggish. This was believed to be due to a preponderance of the cold and moist humor, phlegm. (We will speak more on this later.) So it might be assumed that Lady M was by nature phlegmatic and not easily roused. But she seems to have leaned, decisely, to the choleric. When M is told by the three witches that he would be named Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland, he immediately sends a letter ahead of him to his wife in which he tells her these things. But, instead of being sluggish and slow to act, this ambitious lady immediately determines that she and her husband
cannot wait to let fate put M on the throne, but that they must take matters into their own hands and kill the king. I think it is safe to say she is somewhat prone to violence. But as we shall see, while her choler is rising in this scene, she seems to realize she is going to need all of that fiery humor that she can raise to carry her, and her husband (who, she says, has too much of the milk of human kindness in his nature), through the doing of this deed. So she invokes the aid of dark spirits to thicken her blood (the humor which, when it is dominant, makes one sanguine and easy to get along with). She asks them to turn her milk to gall (or yellow bile), which is the very humor that makes one choleric. She calls on these spirits to dry up in her all that would tend to mercy and to fill her “with the direst cruelty.”

Macbeth, Act 1, Scene 5 (Lady Macbeth, Messenger, Macbeth)

Enter Macbeth’s wife alone, with a letter.

Lady Macbeth
They met me in the day of success, and I have learned by the perfectest report they have more in them than mortal knowledge. When I burnt in desire to question them further, they made themselves air into which they vanished. While I stood rapt in the wonder of it, came missives from the King, who all-hailed me Thane of Cawdor, by which title before these weird sisters saluted me, and referred me to the coming on of time with "Hail, king that shalt be." This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee. Lay it to thy heart, and farewell.

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be
What thou art promised. Yet do I fear thy nature:
It is too full o’th’ milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,
That wouldst thou holily, wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou’dst have, great Glamis,
That which cries, "Thus thou must do" if thou have it,
And that which rather thou dost fear to do,
Than wishest should be undone. Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear
And chastise with the valor of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round,
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crowned withal.
Enter [Messenger].

What is your tidings?

**Messenger**
The King comes here tonight.

**Lady Macbeth**
Thou'rt mad to say it.
Is not thy master with him, who, were't so,
Would have informed for preparation?

**Messenger**
So please you, it is true our thane is coming.
One of my fellows had the speed of him,
Who, almost dead for breath, had scarcely more
Than would make up his message.

**Lady Macbeth**
Give him tending,
He brings great news.

Exit [Messenger].

The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements. Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood,
Stop up th'access and passage to remorse
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose nor keep peace between
Th'effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts
And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief. Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark
To cry, "Hold, hold."

Enter Macbeth.
Great Glamis, worthy Cawdor,
Greater than both by the all-hail hereafter,
Thy letters have transported me beyond
This ignorant present and I feel now
The future in the instant.

**Macbeth**
My dearest love,
Duncan comes here tonight.

**Lady Macbeth**
And when goes hence?

**Macbeth**
Tomorrow, as he purposes.

**Lady Macbeth**
Oh, never
Shall sun that morrow see.
Your face, my thane, is as a book where men
May read strange matters. To beguile the time,
Look like the time, bear welcome in your eye,
Your hand, your tongue. Look like th'innocent flower
But be the serpent under't. He that's coming
Must be provided for, and you shall put
This night's great business into my dispatch,
Which shall to all our nights and days to come
Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom.

**Macbeth**
We will speak further.

**Lady Macbeth**
Only look up clear,
To alter favor ever is to fear.
Leave all the rest to me.

*They exit*

**FEHER**

Trusting king Duncan comes to stay the night at M's castle. M and his wife decide to perform the bloody deed. Yet M, so fierce in battle, now vacillates and draws back from shedding the
king's blood. Since we first met her, Lady M has been the driving force in this plot. What has happened to Macbeth? At the start of the play we hear a description of his martial choler, where he is described, with smoking sword and blood up to the elbows, as if he were an unstoppable god of battle. But, as we have already stated, humors were not constant. They were changeable. Has the recent intensity of M in battle used up his supply of choler? Later in the play he will act as the decisive and bloody tyrant. Will his choler by then have had time to replenish itself?

Or is the immorality of the proposed action—the murder of an innocent man, and a king, no less, who has been so good to him—simply more than M can stomach? Here we move into the realms of morality and theology, into areas of human action and response beyond the explanations offered by the theory of the humors. Questions about Macbeth and his humoral states offer rich opportunities for scholarly debate. Suffice it to say, at this point in the play, Lady M, afire with choler, takes her husband to task for drawing back from the planned murder and M finds himself swept away in the lava flow of her humor.

*Macbeth, Act 1, Scene 7 (Lady Macbeth, Macbeth)*

*Macbeth enters*

**Macbeth**

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly. If th'assassination
Could trammel up the consequence and catch
With his surcease success, that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases,
We still have judgment here, that we but teach
Bloody instructions which, being taught, return
To plague th'inventor. This even-handed justice
Commends th'ingredience of our poisoned chalice
To our own lips. He's here in double trust:
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against
The deep damnation of his taking off;
And pity, like a naked newborn babe
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye
That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on th'other—

*Enter Lady [Macbeth].*

How now, what news?

**Lady Macbeth**
He has almost supped. Why have you left the chamber?

**Macbeth**
Hath he asked for me?

**Lady Macbeth**
Know you not he has?

**Macbeth**
We will proceed no further in this business.
He hath honored me of late and I have bought
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon.

**Lady Macbeth**
Was the hope drunk
Wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since?
And wakes it now to look so green and pale
At what it did so freely? From this time
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valor
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would"
Like the poor cat i'th' adage?
Macbeth
Prithee, peace.  
I dare do all that may become a man;  
Who dares do more is none.

Lady Macbeth
What beast was't then  
That made you break this enterprise to me?  
When you durst do it, then you were a man.  
And to be more than what you were, you would  
Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place  
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both.  
They have made themselves and that their fitness now  
Does unmake you. I have given suck and know  
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me;  
I would, while it was smiling in my face,  
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums  
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn  
As you have done to this.

Macbeth
If we should fail?

Lady Macbeth
We fail?  
But screw your courage to the sticking place  
And we'll not fail. When Duncan is asleep,  
Whereto the rather shall his day's hard journey  
Soundly invite him, his two chamberlains  
Will I with wine and wassail so convince  
That memory, the warder of the brain,  
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason  
A limbeck only. When in swinish sleep  
Their drench'd natures lies as in a death,  
What cannot you and I perform upon  
Th'unguarded Duncan? What not put upon  
His spongy officers who shall bear the guilt  
Of our great quell?

Macbeth
Bring forth men-children only:  
For thy undaunted mettle should compose  
Nothing but males. Will it not be received
When we have marked with blood those sleepy two  
Of his own chamber, and used their very daggers,  
That they have done't?

**Lady Macbeth**  
Who dares receive it other,  
As we shall make our griefs and clamor roar  
Upon his death?

**Macbeth**  
I am settled and bend up  
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.  
Away, and mock the time with fairest show,  
False face must hide what the false heart doth know.

*They exit.*

**PHILLIPS**

Having decided on this act of regicide, the night hours finally arrive and the traitorous couple performs their wicked deed. But the force of his wife’s fiery choler is no longer enough to shield M who is now victim to an onslaught of guilt and regret, a moral repugnance—not an effect of humoral fluctuation—that thrusts him beyond the influence of his wife’s choleric intensity.

*Macbeth, Act 2, Scene 2 (Lady Macbeth, Macbeth)*

*Enter Lady [Macbeth].*

**Lady Macbeth**  
That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold,  
What hath quenched them hath given me fire.

*[An owl shrieks]*

Hark! Peace!  
It was the owl that shrieked, the fatal bellman  
Which gives the stern'st goodnight. He is about it.  
The doors are open and the surfeited grooms  
Do mock their charge with snores. I have drugged their possets  
That death and nature do contend about them  
Whether they live or die.
Enter Macbeth.

**Macbeth**
Who's there? What ho!

**Lady Macbeth [to herself]**
Alack, I am afraid they have awaked
And 'tis not done; th'attempt and not the deed
Confounds us. Hark! I laid their daggers ready,
He could not miss 'em. Had he not resembled
My father as he slept, I had done't. My husband?

**Macbeth**
I have done the deed. Didst thou not hear a noise?

**Lady Macbeth**
I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry.
Did not you speak?

**Macbeth**
When?

**Lady Macbeth**
Now.

**Macbeth**
As I descended?

**Lady Macbeth**
Ay.

**Macbeth**
Hark, who lies i'th' second chamber?

**Lady Macbeth**
Donalbain.

**Macbeth [looking at his hands]**
This is a sorry sight.

**Lady Macbeth**
A foolish thought to say a sorry sight.
Macbeth
There's one did laugh in's sleep, and one cried "Murder,"
That they did wake each other. I stood and heard them,
But they did say their prayers and addressed them
Again to sleep.

Lady Macbeth
There are two lodged together.

Macbeth
One cried "God bless us" and "Amen" the other,
As they had seen me with these hangman's hands.
List'ning their fear, I could not say "Amen"
When they did say "God bless us."

Lady Macbeth
Consider it not so deeply.

Macbeth
But wherefore could not I pronounce "Amen"?
I had most need of blessing, and "Amen"
Stuck in my throat.

Lady Macbeth
These deeds must not be thought
After these ways: so, it will make us mad.

Macbeth
Methought I heard a voice cry "Sleep no more":
Macbeth does murder sleep, the innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the raveled sleeve of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast.

Lady Macbeth
What do you mean?

Macbeth
Still it cried "Sleep no more" to all the house,
Glamis hath murdered sleep and therefore Cawdor
Shall sleep no more: Macbeth shall sleep no more.”
Lady Macbeth
Who was it that thus cried? Why, worthy thane,
You do unbend your noble strength to think
So brainsickly of things. Go get some water
And wash this filthy witness from your hand.
Why did you bring these daggers from the place?
They must lie there. Go carry them and smear
The sleepy grooms with blood.

Macbeth
I'll go no more.
I am afraid to think what I have done,
Look on't again I dare not.

Lady Macbeth
Infirm of purpose!
Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead
Are but as pictures. 'Tis the eye of childhood
That fears a painted devil. If he do bleed,
I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal,
For it must seem their guilt.

Exit.

Knock within.

Macbeth
Whence is that knocking?
How is't with me when every noise appalls me?
What hands are here? Ha! They pluck out mine eyes.
Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red.

Enter Lady [Macbeth].

Lady Macbeth
My hands are of your color, but I shame
To wear a heart so white.

Knock.

I hear a knocking
At the south entry. Retire we to our chamber;
A little water clears us of this deed.
How easy is it then! Your constancy
Hath left you unattended.

*Knock.*

Hark, more knocking.
Get on your nightgown lest occasion call us
And show us to be watchers. Be not lost
So poorly in your thoughts.

**Macbeth**
To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself.

*Knock.*

Wake Duncan with thy knocking--I would thou couldst.

*They exit.*

**FEHER**

In certain plays, some Elizabethan playwrights, like Ben Jonson, created characters whose every action was governed by their dominant humor, as in his comedy *Every Man in His Humor*. Even Shakespeare at times created minor characters like this, such as Fluellen and Pistol, in the *Henry the 4th* plays, who are more like caricatures. Shakespeare also created some more important figures, like Hotspur and Laertes, both of whom were very much governed by their humors (in their cases, choler), who serve as foils for the main characters in the plays in which they appear, Hotspur being a foil for the more sanguine Prince Hal in *Henry the 4th, Part 1* and Laertes for the melancholy Hamlet. In fact, in a Shakespeare play, a main character with a dominant humor is often surrounded by supporting characters with contrasting dominant humors.

While taking the humors into account when creating characters, Shakespeare’s major figures are often much more subtly developed. They may evolve throughout a play. Even the effects of humors are not always steady and uniform, but they might ebb and flow throughout a play, just as they were thought to change in daily life and throughout the life span.
Lady M is a case in point. Her great blaze of choler carries her through the doing of horrible deeds, including regicide. But, then, a change begins to occur. While she consciously still believes herself to be ready to do whatever dark deeds she must to retain the power she and her husband now have, she begins to walk and talk in her sleep and to express a deep guiltiness as she does so. Just as M had wished he could cleanse his hands (and conscience) of Duncan’s blood, Lady M now also wants to cleanse herself of the “damned spot.” But it is too late. Is this an example of her choler having dried up? If so, what humor seeps in to takes its place? While this is certainly a debatable point, could that replacement humor be melancholy (which we will discuss in more detail later)? In humoral theory, at one end of the spectrum of melancholy we come to madness. Is the sleepwalking the beginning of madness? When melancholy morphs to madness the end can be in suicide—and this is how Lady M seems to end her life. Or is her guilty reaction, as it may be in her husband’s case, a moral repugnance for her crimes, something going far deeper than the effects of her humors?

Phlegmatic

The second of the humors that we will examine is phlegm, which makes a person “phlegmatic.” Phlegm was associated with the element water. It was also associated with the brain. Phlegm was thought to be cold and moist. Its season was autumn, its time of life was mature adulthood, and the planet influencing it was the Moon. The phlegmatic person, as we have heard, was thought to be passive, sluggish, dull, slow to be roused to action, lazy, though when it manifested more positively in a person they might become a poet or artist. The best-known phlegmatic characters in Shakespeare’s plays are usually clownish, buffoons who make us laugh. They are often n’er-do-wells, who like nothing better than to sleep until noon, overeat, drink too much, and frequent houses of ill-repute.
FEHER
One iconic example of the phlegmatic figure in Shakespeare’s works is Sir John Falstaff. He is a knight without the slightest hint of knightly virtue. Falstaff is a large man with larger appetites and his one purpose in life is to feed those desires. A shifty liar, he is also a knave, and a coward, who will flee, if he can, when danger arises. He makes his living as a highwayman—a thief. He is also a silver-tongued devil, who will say whatever he needs to—truth be damned—to come out on top. Aside from all this, he is also a very charming character, and has, down through the years, been a great favorite with audiences worldwide. Unfortunately, we do not have time to meet him today. You can make his acquaintance in the plays Henry the 4th, Parts 1 & 2, and The Merry Wives of Windsor.

PHILLIPS
However, we meet another such phlegmatic character in The Scottish Play, in the person of the Porter (or door-keeper). As you may recall, at the end of the scene where Macbeth and his wife have just killed Duncan, there is a loud knocking at the gate of the castle. The following scene takes up where that leaves off and shows us what a phlegmatic character looks like.

Macbeth, Act 2, Scene 3 (Porter, Macduff, Lennox)
Enter a Porter.

Knocking within.

Porter
Here's a knocking indeed. If a man were porter of hell-gate, he should have old turning the key.

(Knock.)

Knock, knock, knock. Who's there, i' th' name of Beelzebub? Here's a farmer that hanged himself on th' expectation of plenty. Come in time, have napkins enow about you--here you'll sweat for't.

(Knock.)
Knock, knock. Who's there, in th'other devil's name? Faith, here's an equivocator that could swear in both the scales against either scale, who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven. O come in, equivocator.

(Knock.)

Knock, knock, knock. Who's there? Faith, here's an English tailor come hither for stealing out of a French hose. Come in, tailor, here you may roast your goose.

(Knock.)

Knock, knock. Never at quiet. What are you? But this place is too cold for hell. I'll devil-porter it no further. I had thought to have let in some of all professions that go the primrose way to th'everlasting bonfire.

(Knock.)

Anon, anon. I pray you remember the porter.

Enter Macduff and Lennox.

Macduff
Was it so late, friend, ere you went to bed that you do lie so late?

Porter
Faith, sir, we were carousing till the second cock. And drink, sir, is a great provoker of three things.

Macduff
What three things does drink especially provoke?

Porter
Marry, sir, nose-painting, sleep, and urine. Lechery, sir, it provokes and unprovokes: it provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance. Therefore much drink may be said to be an equivocator with lechery: it makes him and it mars him, it sets him on and it takes him off, it persuades him and disheartens him, makes him stand to and not stand to; in conclusion, equivocates him in a sleep and, giving him the lie, leaves him.

Macduff
I believe drink gave thee the lie last night.

Porter
That it did, sir, i’the very throat on me. But I requited him for his lie and, I think, being too strong for him, though he took up my legs sometime, yet I made a shift to cast him.

*They exit.*

**Melancholy**

**FEHER**

The third of the humors that we will concern ourselves with is melancholy. Melancholy was believed to be the result of too much black bile, which thought to be produced by the spleen. Melancholy was associated with the element earth. It was considered to be cold and dry. Its season was winter, its time of life was old age, and the planet influencing it was Saturn. Melancholy was thought to the worst of the humoral imbalances. Today when we say someone is “melancholic” we mean they are sad, gloomy, depressed, but in a thoughtful way.

It was believed that dominant humors not only gave people certain temperaments, but also influenced their appearance and how they presented themselves to the world. So choleric people were often believed to be red-haired. The sanguine, whose dominant humor was blood (more on this later) were thought to be rosy-cheeked. One aspect of the physical appearance of the melancholy person was that their faces were drawn and pale.

**PHILLIPS**

As to other aspects of the physical appearance of melancholy persons, Hamlet, the “Melancholy Dane,” who we might call the poster child for melancholy, gives a good description of what a melancholy figure, including himself, looks like to those around him. He does this in an answer he gives to his mother, Gertrude, in Act 1, Scene 2. After the death of her husband—killed by his own brother (though she does not know this) and her quick remarriage to the killer, Hamlet’s uncle, Gertrude exhorts her son to let go of his grief (and melancholy), and to be friendly to his uncle, Claudius. She says that Hamlet—I paraphrase--needs to come to grips with the fact that parents die, but that this is something he (Hamlet) does not *seem* able to do. It is
in answering these statements that Hamlet gives a good description of how a melancholy person would be seen by those around him:

*Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 2, lines ??*

*Reader takes center stage*

**Hamlet**

"Seems," madam? Nay, it is. I know not "seems."
'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
Nor the dejected havior of the visage,
Together with all forms, moods, shows of grief
That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
For they are actions that a man might play.
But I have that within which passeth show;
These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

*Hamlet reader stays on stage*

**FEHER**

Prince Hamlet embodies melancholy to a t. I do not know if it was because of the popularity of this character, but in the 17th century (taking up an idea that started with Aristotle who had said that men of genius were often melancholy), a cult of melancholy developed. The fashionable people the time would dress in black, would often stop to think deep, sad thoughts (or seem to be), sigh, look dejected, all to show that they were melancholy geniuses. The more wealthy had portraits painted of themselves in dark outfits, book in hand, lounging by rivers, lost in sad thoughts. Today these fashionable melancholics would just take selfies and post them all over Instagram and SnapChat.

**PHILLIPS**

In the answer given by Hamlet to his mother, the prince claims that the outward shows of his melancholy and grief are true reflections of his inward state, that he has within him “that which
passes show.” He vividly expresses the melancholy that has filled his being in the following lines, probably the most well-known passage from any work of literature ever written:

**Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 1, Lines 56-88**

*Hamlet*

To be, or not to be, that is the question,
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them. To die, to sleep--
No more--and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to; 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep;
To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil
Must give us pause. There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life.
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
Th'oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of disprized love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of th'unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? Who would these fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveler returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of.
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action.

*Reader exits.*
FEHER

Hamlet is a younger man and the Elizabethans would have expected his usual dominant humor to be choler or blood, since melancholy was a humor that was more associated with people as they aged, whose inner fires were cooling and whose vital juices were beginning to dry up. In older people as melancholy began to manifest itself, they could become grasping and miserly, feeling the need to hang onto the good things of life as so much began to drain away. We see melancholy manifesting itself in this way in the character of Shylock in the Merchant of Venice. He is a money-lender, quite wealthy, a shrewd business man who takes every advantage of those in his debt. He is also miserly and his daughter and servants find that living in his house is hellish because of his stinginess and bitterness.

PHILLIPS

But that is not all there is to Shylock. He has good reason to be bitter and melancholic. Being a Jew in the majority-Christian world of Venice, all his life he has been mistrusted and maligned, continually disrespected, even spat upon in the streets. So it is no wonder that his hatred of Antonio, the merchant who has shown him the most disrespect, is so great that when he gets Antonio under his thumb, he wants to squash the life out of him.

The depth of Shylock’s melancholy is best expressed in the lines that follow. There is certainly a bit of choler in the mix as well. To set the scene: Shylock is asked by Solanio, a friend of Antonio, why he would insist on a pound of Antonio’s flesh, rather than accept repayment in cash of the amount owed to him. Solanio asks Shylock what that pound of flesh would be good for. Shylock responds:

*Merchant of Venice, Act 3, Scene 1, lines 50-69*

*Reader takes center stage.*

SHYLOCK

To bait fish withal: if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million; laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies; and what’s his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections,
passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villany you teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.

*Reader exits.*

**Sanguine**

**PHILLIPS**

We will now consider the final of the four humors: blood. A person with an excess of blood was called “sanguine.” This is the most positive of the humors in its expression, and sanguine individuals could be easily mistaken for people with well-balanced humors. This humor is associated with the element air, and the season of spring. Its age is youth. Its qualities are hot and moist. It is associated with the heart and the planet Jupiter.

When we say someone is sanguine, we mean they are cheerfully optimistic, hopeful and confident, even in the face of difficulties and overwhelming odds. Their weakness is that they are often too trusting and can be fooled by those wishing to take advantage of them, as King Duncan is by M and his wife.

A good example of the sanguine humor in Shakespeare’s works is the character of the young King Henry the Fifth in the play of the same name.

**FEHER**

Medieval kings of England claimed to have a right to the throne of France. In *Henry the Fifth*, the king takes an army to France to assert his rights. At the climactic moment of the play, the English forces find themselves facing a French force many times larger than their meager numbers. They are near a place called Agincourt. Spoiler Alert! The English kick French butt because of their archers who can easily pierce French armor with the clothyard arrows fired from their longbows.

As battle approaches, dejection and fear find a voice among the English officers with the Earl of Westmorland saying:

“Oh, that we now had here
But one ten thousand of those men in England
That do no work today.”

On overhearing this, King Harry confronts these doomsayers and delivers what could be the most rousing words in the whole Shakespearean corpus. This passage is a good example of sanguine speech from a person with that dominant humor, in which Harry quickly turns from the possibility of loss and death, to present a picture for his men of how their victory will be remembered in years to come:

*Henry V, Act 4, Scene 3, lines 16-67*

Reader takes center stage.

King Henry
What's he that wishes so?
My cousin Westmorland? No, my fair cousin,
If we are marked to die, we are enough
To do our country loss; and if to live,
The fewer men, the greater share of honor.
God's will, I pray thee wish not one man more.
By Jove, I am not covetous for gold,
Nor care I who doth feed upon my cost.
It earns me not if men my garments wear;
Such outward things dwell not in my desires.
But if it be a sin to covet honor,
I am the most offending soul alive.
No, faith, my coz, wish not a man from England.
God's peace, I would not lose so great an honor
As one man more methinks would share from me
For the best hope I have. Oh, do not wish one more.
Rather proclaim it, Westmorland, through my host
That he which hath no stomach to this fight,
Let him depart. His passport shall be made
And crowns for convoy put into his purse.
We would not die in that man's company
That fears his fellowship to die with us.
This day is called the feast of Crispian.
He that outlives this day and comes safe home
Will stand a tiptoe when this day is named
And rouse him at the name of Crispian.
He that shall see this day and live old age
Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbors
And say, "Tomorrow is Saint Crispian."
Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars.
Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot,
But he'll remember, with advantages,
What feats he did that day. Then shall our names,
Familiar in his mouth as household words --
Harry the king, Bedford and Exeter,
Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester --
Be in their flowing cups freshly remembered.
This story shall the good man teach his son,
And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be rememberèd,
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers.
For he today that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition.
And gentlemen in England now abed,
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

_Reader exits._

**FEHER**

I don’t know about you, but those words always make me want to storm the battlements.

**PHILLPS**

Sad to say, we have now come to the end of our show. Many people say that reading Shakespeare’s plays is a chore and a bore, but that when they see them performed, they have no trouble following him and find the experience stimulating and enjoyable. We are happy to have given you a taste of Shakespeare in performance this afternoon and hope that what you saw and heard from the mind of the Bard was stimulating and enjoyable as well. If you would like more live Shakespeare, the Red Masquers run of *The Scottish Play* continues here at the Genesius Theater this coming weekend, with shows on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday at 8 pm, and Sunday at 2 pm. And if you like to read the works of the Bard, and want to know more about his life and times, the Gumberg Library can supply you with a wealth of resources in print and electronic formats.
FEHER

We would like to thank the following people who read or performed parts or scenes from Shakespeare this afternoon:

Dr. Timothy Austin, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, for his reading from the Merchant of Venice,

Brandon Habron from the Gumberg Library for the readings from Hamlet,

Dr. Stuart Kurland of the English Department for the reading from Henry the Fifth.

We would also like to thank John Lane, Director of Theater Arts, Dora Farona, director of The Scottish Play, and the Red Masquers without whom we could not have pulled this off, particularly

Dana Demsko as Lady M
Nate Yost as M
Anise Jordan-Dorsey as the Messenger
Eric Mathews as Macduff
and Grant Jones as the Porter

We would also like to acknowledge the Red Masquers stage managers and tech crew serving behind the scenes, without whom the magic could not happen: Anna Cunningham, Christina Levi, Olivia LeSuer, Heather Umbel, Stephanie Connell, Anthony Del Grosso, and Olivia Higgins

And many thanks to Justin Sines, Technical Director and manager of the Genesius Theater.

Once more, I am Bill Feher, and along with my colleague, Gesina Phillips, we wish you all a Good Evening.