Exhibit: “And there’s the humor of it:” Shakespeare and the Four Humors
Created and produced by the National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health
Curated by Dr. Gail Kern Paster, former director of the Folger Shakespeare library and probably the foremost expert on the humors and passions in Shakespeare’s works
And by Dr. Theodore M. Brown, Professor of Medical Humanities, University of Rochester

Dora Farona is a senior with a double major in English Literature and Theater Arts. Directing the Red Masquers’ production of Macbeth (which premiers tomorrow at the Genesius Theater) serves as her senior thesis and combines her passion for directing, and her love of Shakespeare's rich poetry. Dora began theater at Duquesne as a stage manager, has done lighting design, and ultimately landed on directing. She won the Keenan-Lane scholarship in 2016. Dora is the Vice President of the Red Masquers.

Dora will be talking about her experiences as a modern director bringing a 17th century play to the stage.

- The Four Humors are not four kinds of jokes, or things that make us laugh
- Fluids in the human body thought to be responsible for the physical and mental health and well-being of individuals, as well as their temperaments or personality types
  - Four humors were
- blood,
- phlegm,
- yellow bile (choler)
- black bile (melancholy)

- Idea of the humors comes from Galen, a Greek doctor of the Roman period
  - 129-210 CE
  - Influential for 1500 years in Christian West and Islamic East
  - Where did the idea come from?: Drain some blood, put in a glass cup, let sit, and you will see various layers of fluids as they separate out: The humors

- When humors were balanced, people had perfect health in body and mind
  - Humoral theory very holistic
    - Humans were part of nature
    - Oneness of body and mind
    - Mind and body influence each other
    - The natural world (macrocosm) influences human beings (microcosm)
    - Eucrasia (good mixture of the humors)
    - Dyscrasia (bad mixture of the humors)
  - Humors associated with the Four Elements (earth, air, fire, water) and each had a pair of the Four Qualities (hot, cold, moist, dry)
  - Balanced humors did not mean all four were present in equal amounts but in proper proportions
the ideal proportions were one quarter as much phlegm as blood, one sixteenth as much choler as blood, and one sixty-fourth as much black bile as blood

- To bring the humors back into balance
  - Treating by opposites
  - changing the patient’s diet
  - exercise
  - sleep
  - music
  - relaxation
  - change of scene
  - inducing vomiting
  - giving enemas
  - blood-letting

- An example of a Shakespeare character with properly balanced humors is Horatio, Hamlet’s friend

- Difficult to keep humors in balance. Many things could make them unbalanced:
  - time of day,
  - what you ate, or drank,
  - the season
  - the alignment of the planets.
  - Events in one’s life (the death of Hamlet’s father and his mother’s speedy remarriage to his uncle, who we will learn is the murderer of Hamlet’s father)
Most people were believed to have a dominant humor that governed their temperament:
- Choler (Yellow bile)—choleric
- Melancholy (Black bile)—melancholic
- Phlegm—phlegmatic
- Blood—sanguine

In Elizabethan times, men were generally considered to be choleric or sanguine. Women were believed to be phlegmatic, though Queen Elizabeth I was in no way phlegmatic, but much more choleric.

Children were also seen to be phlegmatic.

However, the negative traits that went along with phlegm (cowardice, stupidity, sloth) were often seen by the people of Shakespeare’s day in men only, not in women and children.

When Shakespeare created a main character with a pronounced humoral temperament he would surround him or her with characters with contrasting humors, to act as foils:
- Example, the melancholy Hamlet with the choleric Laertes
- The sanguine Prince Hal with the choleric Hotspur

Choler

- Choleric
- Too much yellow bile, believed to be created in the gall bladder.
- Choler makes a person prone to anger, even violence.
- Associated with the element fire,
• Believed to be hot and dry.
• Season was summer
• Time of life was childhood,
• 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.
• Examples: Hotspur (Henry IV Part I), Othello and Iago (Othello), Laertes and Claudius (Hamlet), Kate (Taming of the Shrew), Rosalind (As You Like It), Juliet (Romeo and Juliet), Goneril and Regan (King Lear)

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 adolescence.
• 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 Macbeth and his wife.

• In Shakespeare’s plays they are the favored ones in terms of wealth, social standing, youth, charm and success.

• Examples: Romeo (Romeo & Juliet) Bassanio (Merchant of Venice), Orlando (As You Like It), Viola and Sebastian (Twelfth Night), Duncan (Macbeth), Edgar (King Lear).

Phlegm

• makes a person “phlegmatic.”

• associated with the element water

• also associated with the brain.

• thought to be cold and moist.

• Its season was autumn,

• Its time of life was maturity

• planet influencing it was the Moon.

• The phlegmatic person was thought to be passive, sluggish, dull, slow to be roused to action, lazy,

• But 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.

• Examples: Falstaff (Henry IV, Parts I & 2 and the Merry Wives of Windsor), Dogberry (Much Ado About Nothing), Sir Toby Belch & Sir Andrew Auguecheek (from Twelfth Night), Mark Antony (Antony and Cleopatra), Ophelia (though she will sink into melancholy later, from Hamlet)

Melancholy

• Melancholic
• Result of too much black bile,
• thought to be produced by the spleen.
• associated with the element earth.
• considered to be cold and dry.
• Its season was winter,
• its time of life was old age
• planet influencing it was Saturn
• Melancholy was thought to lead to the most serious humoral imbalances.
• Today when we say someone is “melancholic” we mean they are sad, gloomy, depressed, but in a thoughtful way.
• in the 17th century a cult of melancholy developed.
  o taking up an idea that started with Aristotle who had said that men of genius were often melancholy
The fashionable people of 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.

Robert Burton, in Anatomy of Melancholy warned of the dangers of pretending to be melancholy could really lead to this developing in a person.

At one extreme of melancholy we come to madness and violence and death or suicide.

- Examples: Hamlet, of course, and Ophelia (after the killing of her father by Hamlet, both from the play Hamlet), Richard III (Richard III), Edmund & King Lear (King Lear), Shylock (Merchant of Venice), Caliban (The Tempest)

The exhibit deals with only two of the four humors, melancholy and choler.

For choler it gives examples of Petruchio and Kate from the Taming of the Shrew.

For melancholy it mentions Ophelia from Hamlet and Shylock from the Merchant of Venice.