

<i>Appearance if out of balance</i>	Fat, with a florid complexion	Fat and pale	Thin, color rises when angry	Thin, pale
<i>Character Traits</i>	Optimistic, cheerful, fun-loving, generous, amorous	Emotional, mild, passive, sensitive, intuitive	Ambitious, energetic, direct	Thoughtful, introspective, reflective
<i>Character Traits if out of balance</i>	Irresponsible, gluttonous, inebriate, lusty	Lazy, vulnerable, cowardly, excessively emotional	Violent, hot-tempered, unscrupulous, vengeful	Depressive, narcissistic, self-loathing

Yellow bile includes gall and urine; think of how we associate an easily annoyed or angered character as being “pissed-off” or “pissy.” Black bile includes feces, but also clotted blood. Note that combination characters also exist. For example, someone can be choleric-melancholic, or sanguine-choleric, etc. In each case, that person would combine the qualities of both humours.

Shakespeare's Characters

Many of Shakespeare's characters recognizably represent a specific humour. Falstaff is the most famous sanguine character in literature. Hamlet, of course, is the melancholy Dane. Laertes is obviously choleric, while he associates his sister Ophelia with “too much of water” — suggesting she is phlegmatic. After the play within the play, Guildenstern tells Hamlet the King “Is in his retirement marvelous distempered.” Hamlet asks, “With drink?” (clearly playing dumb in order to make a pointed insult about Claudius), and Guildenstern replies, “No, my lord, with choler.” Hamlet then suggests Guildenstern should be giving this information to the king's doctor, “for for me to put him to his purgation would no doubt plunge him into more choler” (III.ii.327-34).