

“My Remedy is Then to Pluck it Out’:

The Early Modern Humors and the Curing of a Shrew

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Petruchio: Come, come, you wasp! I’faith you are too angry.

Kate: If I be waspish, best beware my sting.

Petruchio: My remedy is then to pluck it out. (2.1.222-224)¹

When Kate and Petruchio meet for the first time in Act 2 scene 1 of *The Taming of the Shrew*, they launch into a verbal battle of wits, countering each other at every move, gaining point for point, hit for hit. This encounter eventually ends in an engagement and from thence a marriage. This scene is the first skirmish in a long and arduous war of words that ends in Kate’s “taming.” Critics have interpreted this scene as Petruchio’s first move to dominate Kate, the meeting of two minds truly matched, and as Kate’s successful resistance to Petruchio’s heavy handed attempts to subdue her.² What they have overlooked is the way that this passage relates to contemporary medicinal theories about imbalances of humor. Kate is clearly portrayed here, and throughout the play, as a choleric or hot tempered woman. The central characteristic of the choleric type is a warlike personality, bordering on violence and disposed to fits of anger. Kate’s “waspishness,” and “sting,” identify her propensity for being “too angry.” Elsewhere in the play Kate is described as “intolerable curst,” and “shrewd”(1.2.90), “stark mad” and “froward”

¹ Quotations from *The Taming of the Shrew* follow the Folger Shakespeare Library edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine.

² See John C. Bean, “Comic Structure and the Humanizing of Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew*,” David Daniell, “The Good Marriage of Katherine and Petruchio,” and Corrine Abate, “Neither a Tamer Nor a Shrew Be: A Defense of Petruchio and Katherine.”

(1.1.70), of an “impatient humor”(3.2.29), and “choleric” (4.1.174). Here Petruchio proposes a “remedy” to cure what is clearly, in early modern terms, a physiological illness.

A humoral reading of the play presents a new way of negotiating the controversial issues involved in Shakespeare’s version of the taming of a shrew. Early modern humoral discourse defines Petruchio’s treatment of Kate as a cure for a troubling medical problem, an imbalance in humors. Petruchio becomes a sort of physician figure whose “remedy” allows Katherine to control her psychological and physiological state as well as take on the roles prescribed to women in a patriarchal society. Petruchio must teach Kate how to regulate her body temperature, her diet, and her bodily functions. Only after this will she be able to also watch her tongue and be obedient to the men her life.

Humoral theory was one aspect of the Elizabethan concept of the great chain of being which taxonomically separated everything on the earth and in the heavens into a hierarchy. In this theory, man became the microcosm of the universe and thus modeled the order of the heavens. It was believed that macrocosm and microcosm should be modeled on the “platonic idea of perfect harmony. Thus the state, the church, and the family all resembled one another because they resembled (however distantly) the kingdom of God” (Bevington xxiv). The humoral system, as part of a socially conservative patriarchalism, categorically placed women beneath men and “was instrumental in the production and maintenance of gender and class difference as part of what Foucault has called ‘the hysterization of women’s bodies’”(Paster, *The Body Embarrassed* 7). Medicinal theory of the time postulated that women were physiologically weaker than men. If a woman was imbalanced then she was in danger of unbalancing the family, and on a larger scale her community, and the kingdom. The “great chain” philosophy linked the physiological control of women to their remaining in the prescribed

subordinate place in the social and cosmic hierarchy. By examining the language of the play that suggests Petruchio is a physician who provides a “remedy” to Kate’s humoral imbalance, it becomes clear that the play is a socially conservative text that sustains coercive efforts to control not only women’s tongues, but also their bodies. Petruchio’s curing of Kate justifies the patriarchal control of women by portraying such control as curative.

By suggesting that Kate is “sick” and needs to be cured, the play portrays female resistance as a disease, and the rigid control of women’s bodies as a benign and humane patriarchal effort to relieve women of offending behaviors. In this way, a humoral reading supports interpretations by critics such as Linda Boose and Francis Dolan, who have discussed the play’s connection to violent Elizabethan taming rituals of cucking the scold and the scold’s bridle, as well other public and private shaming rituals.³ Though a humoral reading of Kate does not identify such outwardly violent forms of control, it nonetheless supports a patriarchal vision of maintaining firm control over female bodies. It is the evidence of this control that mitigates other romanticized readings of the play, readings that imply that Kate is not really tamed but performing a role at the end of the play, or that she and Petruchio are soul mates and in love.⁴

³ Lynda Boose’s work on Elizabethan taming strategies in her articles “Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Woman’s Unruly Member” and “*The Taming of the Shrew*, Good Husbandry, and Enclosure.” Other texts that link the play’s taming with historical methods of taming are Laurie E. Maguire’s “Cultural Control in *The Taming of the Shrew*” where she overviews how hunting, music, and marriage are used as forms of control over women’s bodies; Gary Schneider’s “The Public and Private, and the shaming of a Shrew” discusses the many customs of shaming used both publicly and privately to coerce women into filling their prescribed roles in a Patriarchal society.

⁴ Shrew criticism has been divided into two camps: the revisionists and the anti-revisionists. Robert Heilman first coined the phrase “revisionist” in 1966 in “*The Taming Untamed, or, The Return of the Shrew.*” Also see John C. Bean, “Comic Structure and the Humanizing of Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew*,” for a further discussion on the revisionist and anti-revisionist camps. The revisionists view Katherine as being in control of her own destiny, thus either duping her family and her husband or achieving a true match made in heaven with Petruchio. Some noted revisionists include David Daniell (1984), Laurie E. Mikesell (1989), Margie Burns (2002), and Corrine Abate (2003). The anti-revisionists generally support a negative view of Katherine’s taming, using historical context to argue that the play actually supports the patriarchal system. For anti-revisionist arguments see Margaret L. Mikesell (1989), Lynda Boose (1991, 1994), Katherine Sirluck (1991), Barbara Hogdon (1992), Laurie E. Maguire (1995), Natasha Korda (1996), Gary Schneider (2002).

The humoral system—based on the hierarchal structure established by the early Greeks, particularly Hippocrates and Galen—divided physical matter into four elements: earth, air, fire, and water.⁵ These four elements contained the “qualities” of the universe: cold, dry, hot, and moist. Thus the earth was a mixture of cold and dry; air combined hot and moist; fire was hot and dry; and water was cold and moist. According to prevalent beliefs at the time, the four fluids of man—blood, yellow bile, phlegm, and black bile—corresponded with the four elements of physical matter. Like the air, blood was hot and moist; like fire, yellow bile was hot and dry; phlegm was cold and moist, like water; and black bile was cold and dry, like earth (Bevington xxv). The predominance of one of these fluids divided men and women into four different personalities: choleric, sanguine, phlegmatic, and melancholic. It was believed that the four fluids determined the character, behavior, or mental “complexion” of that person. For instance someone disposed to an overabundance of choler was known as choleric. Added to this division was the long-standing belief that women, in general, were less perfect in their humor than men, and so more unstable. Female flesh was more cold and spongy, and this “cold temperature tamp[ed] down individuality by preventing the free flow of bodily humors necessary for its real expression” (Paster, “Love Will Have Heat” 80). Women’s cold and spongy flesh, “relative to the flesh of men, [became] traits of great ethical consequence by explaining the sex’s limited capacity for productive agency, individuality, and higher reasoning. As with everything else in this cosmology, states of consciousness and cognitive awareness were ranked in terms of cold/hot, moist/dry” (78-79).

The understanding that women were believed to be naturally more cold than men complicates Katherine’s physiological condition. Katherine’s behavior defines her as choleric.

⁵ For other overviews of the humoral system see Gail Kerns Paster’s “The Body and Its Passions,” and Lester S. King’s overview of Galenic medicine in “The Transformation of Galenism.”

Choler was “hot and dry in direct contrast to the cold and moist phlegmatic; it gave strength to the body and the mind, and so was proud and independent” (Draper 44). The choleric type was subdivided astrologically into two categories, “those more violent under the planet Mars, appropriate to soldiers and ambitious schemers, and those more pleasing under the benign influence of the sun” (45). Those under Mars’ warlike influence were described as “fiery,” “intemperate,” “envious,” their actions are often “madcap” and “rebellious”(Draper 44; Paster, *The Body Embarrassed* 11). Sir Thomas Elyot attributes the choleric type with a “Voyce sharpe,” and “wytte sharpe and quycke” (1.3). Choleric people were usually depicted in the medical texts by Galen, Elyot, Bright, and Burton as red headed or with bad skin. Choler was associated with the color red, with iron, and with fire (Draper 45). “Heat, fire, dryness, Shakespeare again and again associates with the humor . . . indeed, the plays repeatedly use *fiery* in the metaphoric senses of *spirited* and *irritable*” (45). The 1565 edition of *Touchstones of Complexions* states that under the sun the choleric woman or man “approached the sanguine humor; but . . . [were] hastier in speech, more scornful, bitter, and scurrilous” (46). If the humor and fluids in the body were in harmony, a choleric person could be happy and healthy.

Though according to common belief, every person was predisposed to a certain humor, different circumstances, passions, temperatures, and foods could “induce choler or augment to the danger point a choleric humor already dominant: the time of life or of the year, a heating or dry diet, envy of others or disdain by them, ambitious pride and professional or sexual jealousy. These were causes and also symptoms of the choleric humor” (54). These peaks in choler were also influenced by “the position of the planets and constellations at his birth or from his age or from the season of the year; but the Elizabethans seem to have thought of it as arising more particularly from some immediate cause, physical or psychological” (49). Certain events,

seasons, and even times of day could disrupt the delicate balance of humor. It was believed that only when the four fluids, the four humors, the four elements were all in harmony could an individual enjoy perfect health and happiness.

Kate's erratic behavior points to an imbalance of predisposed humor. Her symptoms fall into two categories: her inability to control and maintain her humor, as evidenced by her strong emotions, and her refusal to conform to traditional female roles. These are, of course, parallel problems, given the relationship between humoral theory and the idea of the great chain.

Katherina, daughter of Baptista Minola, is in the best of circumstances "with wealth enough, and young and beauteous, / Brought up as best becomes a gentlewoman" (1.2.82-83). She should be happy. Kate's "only fault—and that is faults enough— / Is that she is intolerable curst, / And shrewd and froward so beyond all measure"(1.2.85-86). She has a reputation for being shrewd and ungovernable. "Katherine the curst--A title for a maid of all titles the worst" (1.2.123-124). These descriptions of Kate and others throughout the play pinpoint that her "impatient humor" causes an imbalance within herself and an imbalance within the power structure of her family (3.2. 29).

The first clear sign that Kate suffers from a medical imbalance is that she is constantly identified with heat, the temperature associated with choler. Gremio calls her a "fiend of hell" (1.1.88), and associates Kate with Hell and devils, and thus the fires of Hell (1.1.67). In her first meeting with Petruchio, she is also associated with fire. As Petruchio prepares for his first meeting with Katherine, he boasts to Baptista and the other suitors that he is as "peremptory as she proud-minded, / And where two fires meet together / they do consume the thing that feeds their fury" (2.1.138-140). This prologue to his wooing and taming of Kate describes his interaction with her in terms of heat.

In the Galenic system of humors, “[m]en’s bodies were thought to be hotter and drier, women’s bodies colder and more spongy. . . . But generally, as part of the order of things, females started off their lives colder in temper than males of the same age and, with rare exceptions, stayed that way” (77). Kate, as a young woman should be “colder in temper” than the men around her, yet she is choleric, too hot and dry. Her overabundance of heat and dryness put her dangerously close, in thermal terms, to the independence of men. In a harmonious state, choleric characters are strong, independent, and dynamic. A woman who was independent in a system where hierarchy supports patriarchy, would be a woman who walked the line between a legitimate harmonious life and an illegitimate subversive life.

Katherine’s hot nature is exacerbated by her jealousy of her younger sister. Medical theory of the time believed that “[s]trong emotional reactions could be explained in terms of the physiology of the humors: in anger, the blood rushed to the head and thereby produced a flush of red color and staring eyes; in fear, the blood migrated to the heart and thus left the face and liver pale, and so on”(Bevington xxv). Jealousy and anger increased blood and heat and thus could augment an already dangerous nature to violence. Katherine is jealous of her younger sister Bianca, who is both beautiful and desirable. Bianca has flocks of suitors and seemingly follows the commands of her father. She has a “maid’s mild behavior and sobriety” (1.1.100). Baptista shows a marked deference in his address to Bianca. When he asks Bianca to leave, he is kind and loving. “Bianca, get you in, / And let it not displease thee, good Bianca, / For I will love thee ne’er the less, my girl” (1.1.76-78). He cares for Bianca’s state of mind; he does not wish to “displease” her, or for her to think that he loves her less because he asks her to go into the house. Bianca immediately acquiesces to Baptista’s command and comments to Kate as she leaves:

Sister, content you in my discontent.—

Sir, to your pleasure humbly I subscribe.

My books and instruments shall be my company,

On them to look and practice by myself. (1.1.81-84)

Through her language and actions Bianca shows the deference to her father that supports a patriarchal order. She “humbly” will follow his desires; she will “look and practice” by herself, away from her suitors and her other family members. This behavior supports obedience to patriarchal values. Kate’s verbal reaction to Bianca’s show of obedience is bitter; either through jealousy or experience, Kate has seen Bianca’s true nature. She exclaims “A pretty peat! It is best / Put finger in the eye, and she knew why” (1.1.79-80). Kate seems jealous of Bianca’s ability to take commands, and Bianca’s ability to cry whenever it is most beneficial to improve her circumstances. Bianca is the picture of womanly weakness. Kate is the picture of a “devil” (1.1.123).

Kate’s responses to Bianca further demonstrate the independence and heat of a choleric type, and distinguish her from the “mild havior” of her properly “cold” and pliable sister. Kate blatantly speaks out against her father when he gives her a command to stay instead of showing him the proper deference like Bianca. “Why, and I trust I may go too, may I not? What, shall I be appointed hours, as though belike I knew not what to take and what to leave? Ha!”(1.1.102-104). Her language is harsh, sarcastic, sharp. She refuses to be “appointed hours” as if she didn’t know how to take care of herself. Kate’s refusal to be told when to come and when to leave is a stark foil to Bianca’s quick obedience to their father. This foil may be the “fire” that feeds Kate’s jealousy of Bianca. That jealousy increases the heat in her body, thus creating more choler and increasingly more violent behavior. This behavior becomes another outward symptom of Kate’s illness.

Kate's refusal to be told when to come or go indicates a larger problem, that of her froward and ungovernable nature. These too are symptoms of choler, but they are behaviors that are further linked to disorder on a wider social scale. Earlier in the scene Kate jeers at Grumio and Hortensio in their jostling to become Bianca's husband. She calls them cuckolds and fools (1.1.65-66). Her sharp humor prompts Gremio to call upon Baptista to make his daughter, "bear the penance of her tongue"(1.1.88-89). Being hot and being ungovernable, combined with the belief that women were supposed to be naturally colder than men, creates a problem for Kate and for other women at the time. Gail Kern Paster sees this thermal patriarchal construction as having "disastrous consequences for early modern constructions of the psychophysiology of women" (Paster, "Love will Have Heat" 77). This theory allowed men the power to define or diagnose any inflammatory behavior by women as unnatural, or too heated. If a female showed too much wit, or raised her voice, she was then associated with heat and choler. Choler was hot, and women were not supposed to be hot. Kate's speaking out against her father and other men, contextualized in humoral theory, becomes a symptom of illness or imbalance. Men "being hotter than most women, were thought to have better perceptual and cognitive apparatuses—better hardware and software—and were able to report more rationally and reliably about the world. The relative heat in bodies thus becomes a paradigmatic case," to separate the differences in men and women (79). According to humoral theory Kate should be unable to get the better of any man, verbally or physically. Yet she is able to taunt the suitors, refuse obedience to her father, and verbally jab at her sister. Any barb in Katherine's speech that is a visible victory over a man becomes evidence the case against her independence, a case where men were invested with the power to question her psychological and physiological state in order to modify her behavior.

Kate's increasing show of physical violence also places her in the choleric category. She is unable to control her jealousy of Bianca, and this increase of heat leads her to anger and then to physical violence. In the beginning of Act 2, Kate's jealousy prompts her to bodily bind Bianca in order to discover which one of the suitors Bianca loves. Kate charges her "Of all thy suitors here I charge thee tell, / Whom thou lov'st best. See thou dissemble not" (2.1.8-9). Bianca's ability to "dissemble" and to make herself cry seem to be a bitter point with Kate. Bianca is able to control her own humor, and that control provides her with the rewards of her father's love and many suitors. Kate seems physiologically unable to control her strong temper and sharp tongue and this frustrates her. The language of this scene builds on Kate's heightened state of thermal and emotional heat. In struggling with Kate, Bianca first feigns submissiveness, then teases Kate about her marital status, then offers Katherine her cast off suitors. As Bianca feeds the fire in Kate's choler through her actions and words, Kate becomes increasingly agitated. Bianca, in the guise of compliance, slyly teases Kate about her elder and unmarried state when she comments, "Or what you will command me will I do, / So well I know my duty to my *elders*" (2.1.6-7 italics added).⁶ The situation here is extremely ironic. If Bianca does in fact know her duty to her elders, then she should humbly submit to Kate's request and tell her who she loves. In fairness to Bianca, she has not yet met Lucentio and so has not met "that special face" which she could "fancy more than any other" (2.1.11-12). But Kate's choler clouds her mind with emotion and she sees Bianca's admission as just another act of dissembling, hence Kate's fierce ejaculation of "Minion, thou liest" (2.1.13).

⁶ This scene not only showcases Kate's shrewishness or choler, but also Bianca's ability to be shrewd and sharp. Bianca's name means light, and in the humoral system, light and heat were synonymous with the choleric type under the benign influence of the sun (Draper 46). It would seem the Baptista has two choleric daughters. The difference is that Bianca seems better able to control her humor to her best advantage. Some of the characteristics of Choler, such as those of ambitious schemers, and sharp voiced, quick witted people seem to fit Bianca as well a Kate. In fact, Bianca shows her true type after her marriage when she and the widow refuse to come when their husbands call them, behavior that Kate previously exhibited by refusing to follow her father's command of when to go and when to stay.

Kate is further agitated by Bianca's continual reminders of her suitor-less state. Again, in the guise of being submissive, Bianca offers Kate all of her suitors one by one, in case Kate has a secret passion for one of them. "If you affect him, sister, here I swear / I'll plead for you myself, but you shall have him" (2.1.14-15). Bianca has more suitors than Kate because she is able to show womanly weakness, or at least dissemble that she is weak. This weakness increases Bianca's desirability among men. Kate becomes incensed at Bianca's offering of her cast-off suitors, those Bianca does not "affect." This violent scene is contextualized by one of Bianca's retorts, "Is it for him you do envy me so?" (2.1.18). Bianca is very aware that Kate is jealous of her and her use of the word "envy" signifies one of the reasons for this tête-à-tête. For Kate, an increase of heat caused by jealousy would augment her choler. Add to that the disdain and envy she feels for Bianca and her suitors, and Kate becomes physically violent; she strikes Bianca. When Baptista finds them in such a state he immediately takes Bianca's side, calling Katherine "thou hilding of a devilish spirit" (2.1.27-28). Again Kate's behavior is associated with devils and Hell. There is a direct correlation between Katherine's increasing jealousy and physical violence with her physiological state. Kate is taunted to feel jealousy, and jealousy exacerbates a choleric condition by increasing the heat in the body. She becomes violent and then in exasperation she exclaims:

What, will you not suffer me? Nay, now I see
She is your treasure, she must have a husband,
I must dance barefoot on her wedding day
And, for your love to her, lead apes in hell.
Talk not to me. I will go and sit and weep
Till I can find occasion of revenge. (2.1.34-39)

Baptista's siding with Bianca prevents Katherine from being able to vent any more of her fury, to be able to "revenge" herself on Bianca. The language of this speech delineates Katherine's problems. She is jealous of Bianca's relationship with Baptista; Bianca is his "treasure."⁷ Also, Kate foresees only more subordination for herself in an expedited marriage that would facilitate Bianca's happiness. When the younger sister weds before her elder sister, according to tradition, the elder must dance barefoot at the wedding as a shaming technique for her inability to catch a husband (Mowat and Werstine 36n).⁸ Also according to tradition she, like other unmarried women, will "lead apes in hell" (37n). It is also dangerous that Kate's jealousy and desperation have brought her to tears. Choler is hot and dry, so the expelling of moisture through the tear ducts rids her of her last hope, her natural moisture. This leaves her in a most unnatural and volatile state.

Kate's physiological imbalance reflects a parallel refusal to accept the role in the social hierarchy that contributes to the larger balance of a well ordered society. Her actions are distressingly violent and rebellious in the context of a patriarchal hierarchy. She is rich, beautiful, and smart; she is also young and should already be married. But she is not. In fact, she has a reputation of scorning suitors. The scorning of her suitors reflects this refusal to take up a woman's prescribed place in the world. Hortensio says that she is "too rough" (1.1.55), and that she would have more suitors if she "were of a gentler, milder mould"(1.1.60). Katherine's failure to fit the "milder mould" and inability to quell her choler and be more "gentle" are exactly what prevent her from participation in the matrimonial rituals that ensure order.

⁷ For an interesting discussion of Baptista's relationship with Bianca see Katherine A. Sirluck's "Patriarchy, Pedagogy, and the Divided Self in *The Taming of the Shrew*."

⁸ Gary Schneider discusses several other shaming tactics used on unmarried women in his "The Public and Private, and the Shaming of the Shrew." See also Lynda Boose's "Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Woman's Unruly Member," and Gail Kern Paster's *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*."

According to the early modern medical practices, erratic behavior was something to be cured as quickly as possible in order to preserve the tenuous balance of society. Thus a physician figure was needed whose task was to identify and remove “any obstruction caused by a ‘malignant’ humor in a part of the body” and restore “a more harmonious humoral balance in the patient” (Hoeniger 234). In order to carry out the balancing of humors, a physician would follow certain steps of diagnosis and cure. Physicians were to retain the strength and health of the patient by regulating the patient’s “diet, exercise and mode of living” (235). “Through regimen, the doctor assists Nature in her work as healer. He will resort to more extreme means only if milder measures prove inadequate”(235). Regimen includes the daily schedule, sleeping habits, and the mode of living to which the patient was accustomed. By studying regimen a physician could find what was causing the humors to be imbalanced.

Kate’s problem from the beginning of the play, then, is that she is in need of a physician to diagnose and treat her physiological condition. The violence of her symptoms demands a firm hand and strong cure that none of the other men in the play has been able to provide. They had neither expertise nor the motivation to spend the time that it would take to cure such an extreme case of cholera. Just as Kate’s behavior was presented in medical terms, so Petruchio’s “taming” is throughout identified with the language of early modern physicians. Before Petruchio even meets with Kate, in fact, he defines their relationship in the language of heat and temperature, and begins to establish what will become one of his strategies for curing Kate: to match her cholera with his own. In his declaration to Baptista he uses language that alludes to the humors, especially heat.

I am peremptory as she proud-minded,
And where two raging fires meet together

They do consume the thing that feeds their fury.

Though little fire grows great with little wind,

Yet extreme gusts will blow out fire and all.

So I to her, and so she yields to me,

For I am rough, and woo not like a babe. (2.1.138-144)

Petruchio uses a fire analogy for his wooing. Fire is the element that is attributed to a choleric or irascible temperament. Two fires will combine; two choleric people will meet and burn each other out. Petruchio foreshadows that his cure will be extreme if needed in his analogy of wind feeding a fire—the “extreme gusts” will cool and extinguish the “fire” in Katherine. Every past attempt to curb Kate’s temper has failed miserably and made her worse. Minor cures have not worked and so it is time for extreme measures from a physician who understands the disease.

The meeting of these raging fires in Act 2, when interpreted using humoral theory, suggests the extremeness of Katherine’s psychological and physiological state. Kate’s crying has increased her hot and dry state and her actions show her increased imbalance. Her cleverness and wit are showcased in her “wooing” scene with Petruchio, but also her potential for violence. Petruchio has already outlined his wooing strategy when he says “If she rail, why then I’ll tell her plain / She sings as sweetly as a nightingale” (2.1.178-179). Yet at every attempt to calm or flatter her, she just gets more sharp and biting. Her verbal stings prompt Petruchio to exclaim that she is “too angry” (2.1.222). Her anger and sting prompt him to carry out his “remedy” to take control of her angry choler and “pluck it out”(2.1.224). And unknown to Kate, Petruchio does know “where to find where it lies” (2.1.225). Petruchio recognizes Kate’s symptoms, in her acidic repartee and her unwillingness to be wooed. He also has seen her anger that has previously made Hortensio cry: “I think she’ll sooner prove a soldier! / Iron may

hold with her, but never lutes” (2.1.152-153). These are blatant symbols of her choleric state. The choleric temperament under Mars is the sign of soldiers and associated with iron. Kate, who is naturally choleric, should be more womanly under the influence of the Sun. Her open insolence to Petruchio, who as a suitor has the power to take her out of her unmarried state, is a blatant refusal to be a part of the marriage game. This insolence becomes utterly intolerable when she actually strikes Petruchio when his banter becomes too much for her. This warlike action shows Petruchio that she is imbalanced and prompts him to respond in a different way in his wooing tactics. He warns her that he will get violent if she is unable to give him respect, “ I swear I’ll cuff you if you strike again” (2.1.234). This response shows that Petruchio is also able to be violent, yet he is still controlled, for he does not hit her, he only holds her down so she cannot “scape” from his next strategy (2.1.254).

Petruchio’s next strategy is to fight choleric with choleric—to become hot, or exacerbate his own choleric temperament. Kate’s act of physical violence against him prompts Petruchio to be blunt with her. He puts aside all playacting and states in no uncertain terms that Kate will become his wife:

Thus in plain terms: your father hath consented
That you shall be my wife, your dowry ‘greed on,
And, will you, nill you, I will marry you.
Now, Kate, I am a husband for your turn . . .
Thou must be married to no man but me.
For I am he am born to tame you, Kate,
And bring you for a wild Kate to a Kate
Conformable as other household Kates. (2.1.284-293)

Through this language, Petruchio sets up his authority as her new physician. Kate has no choice in the matter; she will have to marry him. Not only that, but Petruchio warrants that he is the only man who could be her husband, for he is a “husband for [her] turn” or just right for her. He too is choleric and can be warlike when necessary. Petruchio will pluck Kate’s stinger out, or in humoral terms, purge her of her “malignant humor”(Hoeniger 234). His remedy will follow that of other Elizabethan physicians: identify the symptoms, remove the irritant, regulate temperature, and prescribe a change in regimen. Then and only then can Kate become less “wild” and more “conformable” as other women or “household Kates” in a patriarchal society were supposed to act.⁹

In the process of curing Katherine, Petruchio’s behavior becomes a mirror of Kate’s own volatile behavior. Petruchio “is taking a great risk; for he himself appears to have a tendency toward her humor” (Draper 53). He begins the mirroring process during the wedding ceremony and celebration. He arrives late, inappropriately dressed, and shows physical violence by striking the priest during the wedding ceremony. By showing Katherine what true choleric behavior is, he is putting himself in danger by exhibiting behaviors that could augment his own choleric state. The account of the ceremony is second hand through Gremio, who leaves the church “for very shame” (3.2.182).

But after many ceremonies done,
He calls for wine. “A health!” quoth he, as is
He had been aboard, carousing with his mates
After a storm; quaffed off the muscatel
And threw the sops all in the sexton’s face,

⁹ Natasha Korda discusses the interesting etymological ramifications of Petruchio’s word play on “cates” in “Household Kates: Domesticating Commodities in the Taming of the Shrew.”

Having no other reason

But that his beard grew thin and hungerly,

And seemed to ask him sops as he was drinking. (3.2.171-178)

To Gremio, Petruchio is exhibiting the worst kind of choleric behavior during a very important part of the marriage ceremony. His violence in throwing the sops further suggests cholera. He drinks all of the muscatel and does not allow anyone else to partake of it. He seems to have “no other reason” for doing this than that the sexton provokes him through appearance. But there is another reason. Food and drink could calm or exacerbate one’s humor. Sweet muscadell was thought to “augment cholera” (Draper 52). Petruchio’s cholera would be heightened through drinking, as would Kate’s. But Petruchio does not allow Kate to drink. It is thus Petruchio’s wild antics that offend the crowd, not Kate’s usual protestations of independent will. Petruchio is in essence showing Kate her own behavior through allowing his own cholera to be inflamed. Further, by brandishing a sword as he carries Kate off, he play-acts the kind of soldier-like behavior attributed to the choleric type. In carrying her off and protecting her from her own family, he is literally removing her from the environment that has been so physiologically and psychologically upsetting to Kate as to imbalance her humors.

Petruchio continues with his remedy through applying an additive cure. “Certain foods, drinks, or *materia medica* were often chosen for the strength of their dominant humor, opposite in its qualities and therefore counteracting the one believed to have been involved in the patient’s disease” (Hoeniger 234). If one wanted to cure a melancholic person, hot and moist food would be administered to combat the cool and dry nature of black bile. Katherine’s disease stems from too much heat and not enough moisture. Therefore, to begin an additive cure Petruchio allows

Kate to be “bemoiled” in the cold mud from the wayside. Grumio accounts the action to Curtis as they wait for the couple to arrive.

Thou shouldest have heard how her horse fell, and she under her horse; thou shouldest have heard in how miry a place, how she was bemoiled, how he left her with the horse upon her, how he beat me because her horse stumbled, how she waded through the dirt to pluck him off me, how he swore, how she prayed that never had prayed before (4.1.67-74)

In allowing Kate to remain in the cold mud with the horse on top of her, Petruchio is applying the additive cure of using *materia medica* that has the opposite qualities of Kate’s malady. She is covered with mud which combines water, which is moist, and earth which is cold and dry. Therefore it becomes a combative poultice for Kate’s hot and dry cholera. This first form of therapy seems to work because Kate forgets herself in trying to help Grumio when Petruchio berates and beats him when the horse falls. When “[s]he prayed that never prayed before,” she is finally thinking of someone other than herself.

All through Act 4 scene 1, there are allusions to fire and ice, hot and cold that suggest both Kate’s continued affliction, and Petruchio’s efforts to cure it through an additive cure. Petruchio’s servants define Kate by her temperature. Having heard of Kate’s shrewish reputation, Curtis asks Grumio if his new mistress is, “so hot a shrew a she is reported” (4.1.17). Grumio replies, “She was, good Curtis, before this frost; but thou know’st, winter tames man, woman, and beast, for it hath tamed my old master and my new mistress”(4.1.18-20). Grumio’s comment about winter taming both Petruchio and Kate is supported by the medical literature of the time. Sir Thomas Elyot, in *The Castel of Helthe*, links cholera with late spring and the summer months, and writes that cholera is strongest in warm weather (3.70). Both Petruchio and

Kate's cholera would be cooled by traveling through the cold air of winter, and their hot and moist tempers would be soothed if not completely extinguished by such cold and icy weather. The change from heat to cold is a necessary part of Kate's cure, but it also allows Petruchio to maintain some control of his muscadell-inflamed cholera.

Petruchio's next step in bringing Kate back into "a more harmonious humoral balance," is regulating Kate's diet and regimen (Hoeniger 234). The physicians of the time believed that diet was a large contributor in a humoral imbalance. The stomach, liver, and spleen were thought of as "seats" of certain emotions. The stomach and liver were especially important because they "converted food into humors" (Bevington xxv). Thus, diet would be a main key to diagnosis and cure. If a person was eating too many hot and dry things, the stomach would convert that food into choleric emotions. Therefore physicians used food as a "withdrawal" cure. By enforced abstinence to food and drink a physician could purge the body of a "malignant humor" (Hoeniger 234).

In order for Petruchio to "remedy" Kate's cholera, he must control not only what Kate eats, but also when she eats it. When the wedding party finally makes it to Petruchio's home after the freezing mud therapy, Petruchio does not allow Kate to eat or drink anything. It is late in the evening when they finally arrive home. Sir Thomas Elyot attributed peaks in cholera with the late afternoon and evening hours (Elyot 3.70). It would be extremely dangerous for Kate to eat in the evening, especially if it were food that engendered cholera. When Peter brings the couple mutton for the meal, Petruchio berates him for the state the meat is in:

'Tis burnt, and so is all the meat.

What dogs are these? Where is the rascal cook?

How durst you, villains, bring it from the dresser

And serve it thus to me that love it not?

There, take it to you, trenchers, cups, and all! (4.1.161-165)

He then throws the meat, the bowls, and the glasses at them. This will prevent anyone from eating or drinking that night. The food is burnt and it has been prepared wrong. These actions may seem to be a further extension of Petruchio's augmented cholera, but he too was frozen on the way home. He has been as much a participant as a practitioner of the additive cure. With a knowledge of the food cures for the humors his seemingly cruel words actually sound like a wise prescription from a physician:

I tell thee, Kate, 'twas burnt and dried away,

And I expressly am forbid to touch it,

For it engenders cholera, planteth anger,

And better 'twere that both of us did fast,

Since of ourselves ourselves are choleric,

Than feed it with such overroasted flesh (4.1.170-175).

The meat is hot and dry and not appropriate for a choleric person. Early Modern medicine taught that "strong drink or highly seasoned or burnt foods put cholera in the blood and this in turn caused anger" (Draper 49). Elyot cites the qualities of meat and its preparation that can cause certain physiological changes in the humoral body: "Cold asswageth the burning of cholera. Moist humecteth that which is dried. Dry, consumeth superfluous moisture . . . Bytter, clenseth and wypeth of, also mollifieth and expelleth fleume" (2.16). Cold and moist meat was best to rid the body of the heat and dryness of cholera. Dry and bitter meat was only good for someone with an over abundance of phlegm, those of the melancholic or phlegmatic types. Elyot also outlines that mature mutton was not good for any of the types. "Galene dothe not commend it," (1.18).

Petruchio also regulates Kate's intake of fluids in order to control the heat of her choler. She is also not allowed to drink anything, though Petruchio calls and calls for water. If she were to only drink water she would be able to increase the moisture in her body. But when Petruchio abuses the servants, he shoves the "trenchers, cups, and all" back at them. This scene has often been dramatized as having the servants get doused with water, but also with Kate getting a good portion of the water thrown upon her. Her only other option is to drink the wine, but that would be disastrous for her to drink. "[I]f one were choleric one got drunk more quickly and also was more likely to be 'intemperate,'" according to Dr. Dariot, who in 1583 wrote that, "drinking gave 'unnatural heat,' and this in turn increased both thirst and choler, and so set up a vicious circle" (Draper 49).

Petruchio continues Kate's remedy by enforcing a prolonged fast. "Be patient. Tomorrow 't shall be mended, /And for this night we'll fast for company" (4.1.176-177). Fasting was a withdrawal cure often used by physicians to purge bodies of offending humors. Here Petruchio is partaking of the cure, perhaps to make sure that his own choleric temperament is not inflamed through the heat of playing "a shrew." In his soliloquy in Act 4 scene 1, he outlines the various steps of his remedy. "She ate no meat today, nor none shall she eat. / Last night she slept not, nor tonight she shall not." In this line, he is analyzing Kate's consumption and sleep as a physician would in order to manage his cure of purging her of her overabundance of choler. He is also continually monitoring her internal heat. Instead of consummating their marriage, Petruchio will keep Kate out of bed that whole evening.

As with the meat, some undeserved fault

I'll find about making of the bed

And here I'll fling the pillow, there the bolster,

This way the coverlet, another way the sheets,
Ay, and amid this hurly I intend
That all is done in reverend care of her.
And, in conclusion, she shall watch all night,
And if she chance to nod, I'll rail and brawl,
And with the clamor keep her still awake. (4.1.197-207)

In order to regulate both Katherine's sleeping habits and her sex life as withdrawal cures, Petruchio outlines his changes in Katherine's physical environment. He will tear the bed apart and make sure that "she shall watch all night" nor will she sleep. Humoralism postulated that "the onset of sexual maturity in girls and their passage to wifhood [were] understood to involve a significant increase of bodily heat and of the aggressive agency such heat entails" (Paster, "Love Will Have Heat" 87). According to this belief, if Petruchio wants to maintain a cooler temperature in Kate he will make sure that their wedding is not consummated as the heat of sexual intercourse would undo all of the work he has done.¹⁰ Though sexual abstinence is not mentioned in the medical literature of the time as a cure for a humoral imbalance, any kind of heat regulation in Kate's body brings her closer to being cured. "This is a way to kill a wife with kindness, / And thus I'll curb her mad and headstrong humor"(4.2.208-210). Through detailed care of her regimen, changing her diet, her sleeping habits, and sex life, Petruchio is able to control Kate's regimen and thus her body in order to bring her back into balance. This control is further contextualized by the patriarchal framework Petruchio is building; all of his actions are

¹⁰ Gail Kern Paster discusses the thermal state of women's bodies under the influence of love and sexual intercourse in her essay "Love Will Have Heat" in *Humoring the Body: emotions and the Shakespearean Stage*. She systematically explores how changes in temperature affect many of Shakespeare's romantic female leads including Desdemona, Rosalind, and Katherine.

to be “done in reverend care of her” in order to “curb her mad and headstrong humor.” His actions not only are coercive but portrayed as benign.

The effects of Petruchio’s cure are exposed through Kate’s changing attitudes in her interpersonal relationships. As Petruchio is giving her a “sermon of continency” in her bedchamber, instead of responding in her usual way, Kate “(poor soul) / knows not which way to stand, to look, to speak, / And sits as one new-risen from a dream” (4.1.184-186). It is Petruchio who “rails and swears and rates” (4.1.184). As Peter, Petruchio’s servant, comments, “He kills her in her own humour” (4.2.180). Katherine is not exactly sure of what is happening to her. She questions his reasons for marrying her: “did he marry me to famish me?” (4.3.3) Yet she is able to see that her own father was kind to beggars and gave them food. “But I, who never knew how to entreat, / Nor never needed that I should entreat, / Am starved for meat, giddy for lack of sleep” (4.3.7-9). She begins to understand that in her old life she never wanted for anything, though she felt she was miserable. What is more perplexing to her is that he does it all “under the name of perfect love, / As who should say, if I should sleep or eat / ‘Twere deadly sickness or else present death” (4.3. 12-14). In humoral terms, what she eats and how she sleeps is of vital importance to her future happiness and life.

Petruchio’s cure is heavily dependant on the control of Kate’s intake of food. The stomach had to constantly be watched as the seat of emotion and the converter of food to humors. If Kate is able to make correct choices in food, it will allow her to maintain her humor once she is cured. So when Kate pleads for something “wholesome” to eat, Petruchio’s servant Grumio taunts her with neat’s foot and tripe, which she likes. But as he says, “I fear it is too choleric a meat”(4.3.22). Elyot recommends pig’s feet over neat’s foot for it “above all kyndes of fleshe is nouryshynge the body” (1.16). Neat’s foot should only be eaten by those with healthy

stomachs, “being welle boyled and tender, in a holle stomake, dygesteth well, and maketh good juyce and passeth forth easily” (1.22). Kate is still not totally cured and thus neat’s foot would be as Grumio says, “too choleric.”

Grumio’s next suggestion is beef and mustard, but he fears that the mustard would be, “too hot”(4.3.25). Beef for those “which are in helth, bringeth stronge nouryshynge” but Elyot cautions that it “maketh grosse bloude, and ingendereth melancholy” (Elyot 1.16). The beef would be an appropriate meal for Kate because it would put more moisture in her stomach and thus her stomach would produce a better humor. Kate chooses the beef without the mustard: “Why then the beef, and let the mustard rest” (4.3.26). This is a good choice for her because the mustard would counteract all of the health benefits of the beef. In her medieval herbal *Physica* the German mystic and healer Hildegard von Bingen cites mustard as the most harmful of all substances. It is defined as being warm and dry:

This herb is harmful to eat because its strength is weak and unstable. It destroys a person inwardly who eats it . . . it brings fogginess to the brain and a certain bitterness to the head since it draws out some humor from the head. It brings great evil and more harm into a person’s head. It does not bring good and right digestion but rather makes the digestion painful, and makes, as it were, smoke in a person. (Bingen 87)

Kate is still exhibiting the symptoms of her illness; she is very short with Grumio who tests the cure also by trying to bate her hunger. He will not give her the beef without the mustard, because she loves it so, and not the mustard without the beef. Her angry beating of Grumio is further evidence of how sick or imbalanced she really is. An early modern physician was supposed to maintain the health and well being of a patient and only resort to harsh measures if

the mild cure would not work. Petruchio's actions are harsh and degrading to Katherine, but in the context of the humors, a strong illness needs a strong cure. Kate has not eaten anything as a married woman, and it seems to be Petruchio's intention that she not be allowed to choose what she eats until she can choose that which won't hurt her. He is constantly testing the cure to see if it has worked in rebalancing her humor. He allows her to eat only what he has prepared himself, so he can be sure that it will not hurt her. "Here, love, thou seest how diligent I am, / To dress the meat myself and bring it thee" (4.3.40-41). Instead of thanking him immediately for providing food for her, Katherine must be prompted to thank Petruchio. Petruchio must train Kate, through control of her eating, to appreciate the work done by males for females. Only when Petruchio threatens to take away the food, is Kate forced to say "I thank you, sir" (4.3.49). She is then rewarded with food, but only a little as Petruchio charges Hortensio to "Eat it all up, Hortensio, if thou lovest me" (4.3.52).

Katherine still manifests the symptoms of too much heat—independence, and ingratitude—and so Petruchio must continue his cure to bring her back into the sphere of colder, weaker, female flesh. Her reticence to enter this sphere continues throughout the encounter with the haberdasher and tailor where she is constantly "crossing" Petruchio's commands to the tailor (4.4.200). Katherine's protestations that "gentlewomen wear such caps as these," provide Petruchio with further opportunities to "remedy" Kate's anger. "When you are gentle, you shall have one too, / and not till then" (4.4.75-76). Though Kate has only been allowed a little food, her stomach has still not been trained, as evidenced in her outburst to Petruchio's "teaching" moment. ". . . I am no child, no babe. / Your betters have endured me say my mind, / And if you cannot, best you stop your ears. / My tongue will tell the anger of my heart" (4.3.79-82). She

is still too angry, unable to control her stomach or her tongue, and thus the cure must continue until she fits the prescribed roles of women.

After many assessments, the cure is given its final test in Act 4 scene 5, where on the way back to her father's house, Kate is forced to say that the sun is the moon, an old man is a young virgin, and then beg pardon for being wrong. It is no coincidence that the sun and moon are used in this scene. In humoral astrology, Kate's choleric temperament should be benign or happiest in the influence of the sun; as a woman she is also under the influence of the cold and distant moon that controls her cold and moist flesh. Petruchio seems to use these heavenly bodies to test the state of Katherine's corporeal body, and she passes that test. At first Kate's refusal to call the sun the moon spurs Petruchio into heated frustration, "[e]vermore crossed and crossed, nothing but crossed!" (4.5.12). Hortensio cautions her to "[s]ay as he says, or we shall never go" (4.5.13). In previous encounters Kate has been unable (at least from the male perspective) to take commands or even advice without throwing herself into chaos and anger. Here she takes the hint and is able to make the conscious decision to play along with Petruchio in order to get what she wants, to go her father's house.

Then God be blest, it is the blessed sun.

But sun it is not, when you say it is not.

And the moon changes even as your mind.

What you will have it named, even that it is,

And so it shall be so for Katherine. (4.5.22-26)

This scene is the turning point for Katherine. In her previous interpersonal encounters she has been unable to control her choler and breaks into violence or tears. If her humor were balanced and brought back into the sanguine influence of the Sun from the red anger of Mars' influence,

she would be able to control her violence and show her wit and vivacity. By controlling her internal temperature and regimen, she is now able to make conscious decisions about how to act, and even take advice from Hortensio, whom she has previously threatened to beat for impudent and unsolicited advice (1.1.61).

It is only when Kate shows that she is able to control her own humors that Petruchio is satisfied with his cure. When she proves that she can pass his tests of her control he rewards her with food and fashionable clothes. These symbols of her cure also act to uphold Kate's subordinate position in a patriarchal society. Her food and her clothes must be of her husband's making. When she accepts them, she accepts his authority. By choosing to follow his authority she is in essence cured; he has taught her to control the humor she is disposed towards.

When re-read in the context of humoral theory, Kate's final infamous speech to Bianca and the Widow, in Act 5 scene 2, can be seen to reflect the "cure" of her humoral imbalance at the hand of her physician-husband, Petruchio. In this speech Kate provides an image of a patriarchal society ordered as a microcosm of a well-ordered patriarchal society and universe, and as a macrocosm of the necessary ordering of individual bodies. The language of the speech supports a patriarchal society, in that Kate's words call all women, not just Bianca and the rich widow, to obedience and subservience. By calling their husbands "thy lord, thy king, thy governor"(5.2.153), Kate reiterates the idea of the great chain of being that paralleled the authority of husbands to political authority, and that well-being in the body would reflect well-being in the body-politic. In a society prescribed by men for men, Kate's words support balance between man and wife, father and child, ruler and subject, God and mortal. That balance seems synonymous with obedience, for only when that order is protected and upheld can women achieve happiness and harmony. Petruchio's cure of Kate becomes exalted in the language of her

speech, supporting the curative measures for “forward, peevish, sullen, sour and not obedient” women (5.2.172-173). Before her cure Kate was in chaos and could not find happiness because she was not able to take up her role in society:

A woman moved is like a fountain troubled,
Muddy, ill-seeming, thick, bereft of beauty,
And while it is so, none so dry or thirsty
Will deign to sip or touch one drop of it. (5.2.156-161)

When her humors became balanced she was able to find clarity, beauty, and enjoy the love or protection of a man. Her language continues to support subservience, exalting men as the protectors of women, for which they should be paid with “love, fair looks, and true obedience— / Too little payment for so great a debt” (5.2.170-171). Her language also mirrors the humoral belief that women were physiologically colder than men. A “fountain,” moist and cold, symbolizes women and when they are troubled, the naturally more “dry” and “thirsty” men are not attracted to drink. Her speech, contextualized by humoral theory, becomes a mantra of psychological and physiological change.

The end of Katherine’s speech supports the supreme dominance of men over women’s bodies, and in Katherine’s case the supreme remedy or cure for her previous status as a “foul contending rebel” (5.2.175).

My mind hath been as big as one of yours,
My heart as great, my reason haply more,
To bandy word for word and frown for frown;
But now I see our lances are but straws,
Our strength as weak, our weakness past compare,

Then vail your stomachs, for it is no boot,
And place your hands below your husband's foot;
In token of which duty, if he please,
My hand is ready, may it do him ease. (5.2.186-195)

The language recounts Kate's own experience of an imbalanced humor. Her problem was bodily: not only her mind but her heart fought against the control of the men around her. She was unable to control her natural humor and so was unable to control her anger and independence. She returned "word for word and frown for frown," filled with too much heat and anger, an imbalance of choler. This inability to control herself precluded her from enjoying the full status of a marriageable young woman. She scorned her suitors, she disobeyed her father, she was jealous of her sister. The proof of Katherine's cure is that she sees these defensive actions, these "lances" as nothing stronger than "straws." Kate's speech is evidence of the psychological and physiological change she has gone through in Petruchio's remedy. Her "strength" is gone, her "weakness past compare," no longer is she warlike under the influence of Mars, but properly weak, cold and spongy, able to fulfill her role, her "duty" to do her husband "ease." Kate as a symbol of men's remedial medical practices calls on all women to "vail" their stomachs, the seat of emotion where food is transformed into humors. Then and only then will Kate and other women be able to take up their roles as wives and mothers.

By placing *The Taming of the Shrew* in the historical context of the humors and the diagnosis and cure of an imbalanced humor, Kate can be seen as a female character who is unable to cure herself and is in need of a male physician figure to do it for her. Kate is balanced only when she shows that she can be obedient to the decrees of men. She cannot cure herself and must rely upon Petruchio, the man specified by her father, to cure her and to restore the order of

Padua's society. Kate's speech then becomes the proof that as the ultimate cure, Petruchio's "remedy" is not only curative, but also in her best interest. This true proof that Kate's cholera has been subdued allows Kate to enter into a new physical role, of sexual and economic partner to Petruchio, who rewards her obedience with an invitation to intimacy. "Why, there's a wench! Come on and kiss me, Kate" (5.2.196). By presenting Kate's taming as benign and restorative, Shakespeare's play naturalizes male power over women, making it seem not only one element of the overall hierarchal order of the universe but also physiologically beneficial.

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