Working with both popular and elite sources from the period’s drama to medical texts to historiography Mary Floyd-Wilson intervenes in the current literary scholarship on race to disembled and recover the complex basis of early modern ethnic distinctions: an interdisciplinary discourse that she terms “geohumoralism.” The importance of *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* lies in its recognition that the English were afflicted in the sixteenth century by a profoundly unstable sense of identity derived from the British Isles’ northern, marginalized status in a set of classical texts that were revered and considered authoritative. Simply put, humoralism, for the early modern English, was ethnology. Floyd-Wilson demonstrates that the English were not only driven to rearrange, discursively, this inherited knowledge in an effort to revalue those traits conventionally identified as “northern,” but they also aimed to alter or remedy their northern natures through the manipulation of their environment whether that meant the air, temperature, diet, and terrain, or the effects of travel, education, rhetoric, impersonation, or fashion. To follow Floyd-Wilson’s application of contemporary geohumoral theory to a succession of major canonical texts is exhilarating, surprising, and unsettling, as Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson and others emerge as unwittingly complicit in ways of thinking about English selfhood that enabled the growth of the Atlantic slave trade and British imperialism.

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English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama

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University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
For Lanis and Claude
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