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978-0-521-81056-2 - English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama

Mary Floyd-Wilson

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English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama

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 disembed 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.

MARY FLOYD-WILSON is Assistant Professor of English Literature at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She has published articles in several journals including *English Literary Renaissance*, *Women's Studies*, and *South Atlantic Review* and is a contributing author to *British Identities and English Renaissance Literature* (2002). She is currently co-editing a volume of essays entitled *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays on the Cultural History of Emotion*.

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For Lanis and Claude

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Race,” will appear in the collection *Writing Race Across the Atlantic World, 1492–1763*, ed. Philip Beidler and Gary L. Taylor (New York: Palgrave, forthcoming). Except for silently modernizing i, j, u, and v, I have retained the original spelling of the primary texts and facsimile editions.

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