

Mary Floyd-Wilson. *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xii + 256 pp. + 10 illus. \$65.00. Review by JONATHAN BURTON, WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY.

Even for experienced readers of early modern texts, sixteenth- and seventeenth century theories of humoral medicine can appear esoteric, convoluted, or downright nonsensical. Given the genre's characteristic contradictions, reading a second or third text in the hope of corroborating one's knowledge often yields greater confusion. Where, for example, one text insists that "southerners" are hot, dry, and melancholic, another finds them cool, moist, and phlegmatic. By indicating how these "scientific" texts are never socially neutral and are in fact ideologically malleable, Gail Kern Paster's *The Body Embarrassed* (1993) spearheaded a body of scholarship seeking to untangle, or at least explain, these contradictions. Paster's work illuminates the gender and class valences encoded in a hierarchy of physiological differences. *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* by Mary Floyd-Wilson extends Paster's project by arguing that regionally inflected humoralism, or "geohumoralism," was "the dominant mode of ethnic distinctions in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries" (1). This is not to say that early modern humoralists simply carried on a classical tradition. Instead, Floyd-Wilson argues, forces such as the rise of the Atlantic slave trade and developments in British historiography encouraged British authors to reassess and reconceptualize inherited ideas in order to rectify England's debased and marginal status in the classical model. The updated geohumoral models that they produced would, Floyd-Wilson suggests, act as a bridge to modern racialism.

English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama is neatly divided into two parts. Part 1 provides a very useful primer on classical climate theory before indicating how early moderns engaged with and reconfigured this knowledge for their own purposes. Part 2 then employs geohumoralism as an animating context for a series of readings of early modern plays by Marlowe, Jonson,

and Shakespeare. While those readings may sometimes feel limited or speculative, this book's contribution to early modern studies of race is undeniably momentous.

Crucial to Floyd-Wilson's arguments throughout the book is her observation that while scholars have recognized the continued predominance of a tripartite classical model in early modern ethnography, "they have overlooked the significance of Britain's decentered position in this paradigm" (3). Classical models of the world, developed by Herodotus, Hippocrates and others, situated the British on the northern margins of a three-part world where their hyper-white barbarism amounted to a simple inversion of southern blackness. Both the frigid north and the burning south were understood as unbalanced extremes in relation to a temperate Mediterranean. For as long as the British accepted the myth of their Trojan ancestry, they could disassociate themselves with stereotypes that figured northerners as uncivil, slow-witted, and more bodily-determined than those people living in more temperate zones. Likewise they could ignore the implications of an intertwined northern whiteness and southern blackness. However, as the English came to doubt the myth of Brutus and acknowledge their northern roots, they "confronted the possibility that they were the barbaric progeny of a dissolute, mingled and intemperate race" (15), whose history was marked by conquest and corruption.

Considering a range of early modern texts including William Camden's *Britannia*, Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Francis Bacon's *Sylva Sylvarum*, and Thomas Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, Floyd-Wilson indicates how anxieties over northern barbarism lead English writers to rearrange geohumoral knowledge and locate value in "northernness." The recuperative strategies outlined in her book's first three chapters include the emergence of philobarbarism in regard to the Anglo-Saxon past simultaneous with a demotion of Africa's elevated past. In some instances this involved the appropriation of prized southern qualities (such as the sagacity associated with melancholy); in others it meant the reassessment of those qualities so that, for example, southern pursuits of medicine, math, and astrology are deemed the fevered prac-

tices of wily artificers. Above all, Floyd-Wilson indicates that blackness was reinvented in the seventeenth century “to carry the formal humoral connotations of extreme whiteness” (81).

Turning to its literary subject, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* does not merely trace the same patterns of anxiety and recuperation in the drama. Instead Floyd-Wilson indicates how geohumoralism informs the responses of English dramatists to the social and political controversies of their day. Thus, in Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine*, Floyd-Wilson finds a distinctly northern protagonist whose spectacular eloquence and obduracy defends the theater against the attacks of anti-theatricalists who worried over the impressibility of English audiences. Chapters on Jonson’s *Masque of Blackness* and Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* contribute new insights to discussions of these works as commentaries on the proposed Anglo-Scottish union under James I. In each case, Floyd-Wilson finds the drama engaged with anxieties over the Scots’ potential corruption of Englishness. Thus, after examining the language of blackness and blanching in Jonson’s masque, she concludes that the “real point” of the spectacle may be “the presentation of a genealogy of people who transmitted southern wisdom and culture to a region that eventually granted them external whiteness” (124). In regard to *Cymbeline*, Floyd-Wilson argues that Shakespeare participates in the emerging philobarbaric tradition by imagining a history where Scots and Britons submit to Roman rule, while the English “emerge as a naturally civilized race, unaffected by Britain’s ancient history of mingled genealogies and military defeats” (163). The book’s longest chapter considers the contest of older, geohumoral knowledge and nascent racialism in Shakespeare’s *Othello*. More specifically, Floyd-Wilson argues that the jealousy that is central to the play needs to be understood in a geohumoral context where it would be most often associated with Italians such as Iago, rather than a Moor-like Othello. Although I can think of no one who continues to argue for Othello’s innate savagery, Floyd-Wilson offers an important insight in her argument that “Iago’s manipulation of Othello does not awaken the

Moor's repressed passions or provoke his innate savagery: it utterly transforms the Moor's humors" (146).

It is in this chapter on *Othello* that the book's only significant weakness seems apparent. That is, in its attention to regionally inflected humoral identity, *English Ethnicity and Early Modern Drama* tends to slight the importance of religious identity, especially in relation to the discourses of impressibility and vulnerability. Floyd-Wilson's discussion of Iago's Italianate "civility" makes virtually no reference to English concerns with apostasy, recusancy, or Roman Catholic conspiracies. Along with Reformation politics, the emergence of English mercantilism likewise receives scant attention here. Thus the history of developing racialism that emerges is compelling and important but perhaps too neatly delineated. *English Ethnicity and Early Modern Drama* does not promise a history of race in the West, but it would benefit from a more focused discussion of precisely how the shift from geohumoral ethnology to racialism matters in terms of socio-cultural relations. What kind of work did racialism perform that geohumoral ethnology could not? Might one simply argue for racialism as a reassignment of the roles apportioned by geohumoralism? These questions aside, Mary Floyd-Wilson's study of English ethnicity offers an important contribution to the study of race in the early modern period. Its account of geohumoral ethnology is innovative and fascinating. Furthermore it offers an important supplement to Ania Loomba's largely overlooked but nonetheless excellent study of *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism* by indicating how seemingly archaic climate theory was remade to engage with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English anxieties in regard to historiography, politics, and the theater.

Katherine O'Donnell and Michael O'Rourke, eds. *Love, Sex, Intimacy, and Friendship Between Men, 1550-1800*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. xiv + 206 pp. \$65.00. Review by GEORGE KLAWITTER, ST. EDWARD'S UNIVERSITY.