

## **"A fine lunatic language, i'faith": Neurodiversity in Ben Jonson's *News from A New World Discovered in the Moon***

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The concept of neurodiversity suggests that variation in human minds is an inevitable part of human existence; brains which differ from the dominant norm, or the socially imposed standard of what a mind "should" be, are different, not necessarily deficient, and not inevitably disabled. The language of the neurodiversity paradigm, when applied to Ben Jonson's masques, illuminates how particular intellectual or cognitive characteristics are praised or devalued, without automatically imposing pathologizing language and leaving room for complex definitions of "folly" in the early modern era. Using this terminology to look at masque accounts of fools, I argue that, in the masques credited to playwright and poet Ben Jonson, fools and foolishness are typically staged alongside other kinds of neurodivergence or deviations from culturally constructed standards of ablebodiedness (e.g., fools depart from expectations of intelligence developed in the masque, rendering them neurodivergent). These forms of neurodivergence, associated with the antimasque and its preceding material, contrast the ablebodiedness modelled by King James or his representatives in the main masque. While King James is invariably established as the standard of ablebodiedness, expelling the neurodivergence of the antimasque from the stage, the masque concurrently undermines his authority and provides a space to imagine other definitions of disability and ability, particularly representations of neurodivergence. I demonstrate these conclusions through the masque *News from a New World Discovered in the Moon* (1620).

## **Fletcher's *Humorous Lieutenant*, Soldierly Identity, and Disability**

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My paper will explore the connection between disability and soldierly identity in John Fletcher's comedy, *The Humorous Lieutenant*. The eponymous Lieutenant feels chronic pain from an unnamed condition. He cannot access ease or rest, and thus cannot enjoy a social life. Armed combat temporarily relieves the Lieutenant's agony, however, and on the battlefield his condition becomes an advantage, driving him to reckless feats that make him a superior fighter. Fletcher's Lieutenant inverts the increasingly common early modern figure of the combat-injured soldier experiencing difficulties reintegrating into society, as recognized in Elizabeth I's 1592 "Act for Relief of Souldiors," which, as Katherine Schaap Williams points out, registers "disabled" as "the veteran's inability to work" (58). But inversion does not capture the full complexity of the Lieutenant's condition in terms of its stage representation. The Lieutenant is

subjected to intrusive questions, explications, and advice regarding his “ailment” and is manipulated and exploited via his condition for the state’s benefit. Language in response to his disease echoes in exhortations to other characters experiencing intense emotion rather than a similar physical condition. Characters employ misogynistic rhetoric that links the female gender to weakness, impairment, and lack in explicit contrast to the conquering strength of the male soldier. My provisional argument is that, through these and other threads, the play consistently troubles notions of, and distinctions between, ability and disability, health and illness. This troubling destabilizes what it means to be a soldier – a profession with a long tradition of admitting members based on ability.

### **Performing Neurodiverse Pedagogy** **Sonya Freeman Loftis, Morehouse College**

One of the unspoken challenges of being an autistic professor is that you have to navigate the differences between neurodiverse culture and neurotypical culture in your own classroom. The challenges faced by neurodiverse professors are often “unspoken” largely because we haven’t yet fully developed a scholarly language to speak about and analyze them. The neurodiversity movement is still in its youth, and English is an inherently neurotypical language. Being autistic in the classroom isn’t just about a lack of eye contact (although I’m not great at eye contact) but also about fundamental differences between my life experiences, habits of thinking, and methods of communication and those of many of my neurotypical students. But the opposite side of the (all too often) unspoken challenges I face as an autistic professor is also a world of unspoken pedagogical possibilities. What does it mean to recognize and welcome diverse minds in the Shakespeare classroom? How does it change our classrooms and instructional methods when we do so? Although the study of teaching and learning has focused on inclusivity as it relates to gender, race, social class (first-generation college students), and LGBTQ identity, it has less often focused on neurodiversity as diversity. In this essay, I explore how core values from autistic culture and the disability rights movement can impact on classroom pedagogy. Specifically, I examine the ways that a focus on accessibility, interdependency, crip time, and honesty/vulnerability can change the shape of the way we teach Shakespeare. In doing so, I provide some practical tips for professors who are trying to reach and welcome their neurodiverse students while simultaneously delineating and defining (and thus rendering spoken and speak-able) some of the challenges faced by neurodiverse students and faculty in the college classroom.

## The Pardoner's Harm

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When Chaucer's narrator intones in *The Canterbury Tales* that he thinks the Pardoner was "a gelding or a mare," a characterization neither he nor the Pardoner confirms, the reader is led to believe that the man wants for masculine power or its traditional physiological signifiers: penis, testicles, facial or body hair, basso profundo voice. Critics have therefore paid special attention to what look to be the Pardoner's compensatory provisions—his "walet, biforn hym in his lappe," as he "Bretful of pardoun comen from Rome al hoot" (1.686-87), and his "male" or bag. That's where he keeps his pardons and his fraudulent relics, an obvious supplementary power source. However, the true locus of his force (some would say fraud) is his rhetorical and acting skill. While Chaucer's hint about the Pardoner's morphological and hormonal disability mostly disappears in the course of the man's prologue and tale, it receives possible articulation in some elements of the Pardoner's performance: his philippic against "the tavern sins"; some of his biblical references; the self-projection as the Old Man; and finally the homoerotic taunt that ends his sermon, delivered to the execrable Host. All these suggest frustration with the perilous body and an anticipated failure to consummate a linguistic exchange. That is, the Pardoner's hinted-at corporeal insufficiencies have a discursive, and as many critics believe, eschatological analogue (the *eunuchus non Dei*). But I shall argue that the Pardoner's brilliant sermonizing leads to the Tale's great surprise: the Host's wish to castrate the supposedly lacking speaker. Harry Bailley's violent outburst at the end reveals that he does not think his interlocutor is sexually disabled at all. The Pardoner secures his potency precisely through his marvelous, disorienting performance, accusatory and self-harming though it is.