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XLVII: THE
MAGNETIC LADY: OR,
HUMORS RECONCILED**

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Jale Studies in English XLVII: The Magnetic Lady: Or, Humors Reconciled by Ben Jonson & Harvey Whitefield Peck & Albert S. Cook

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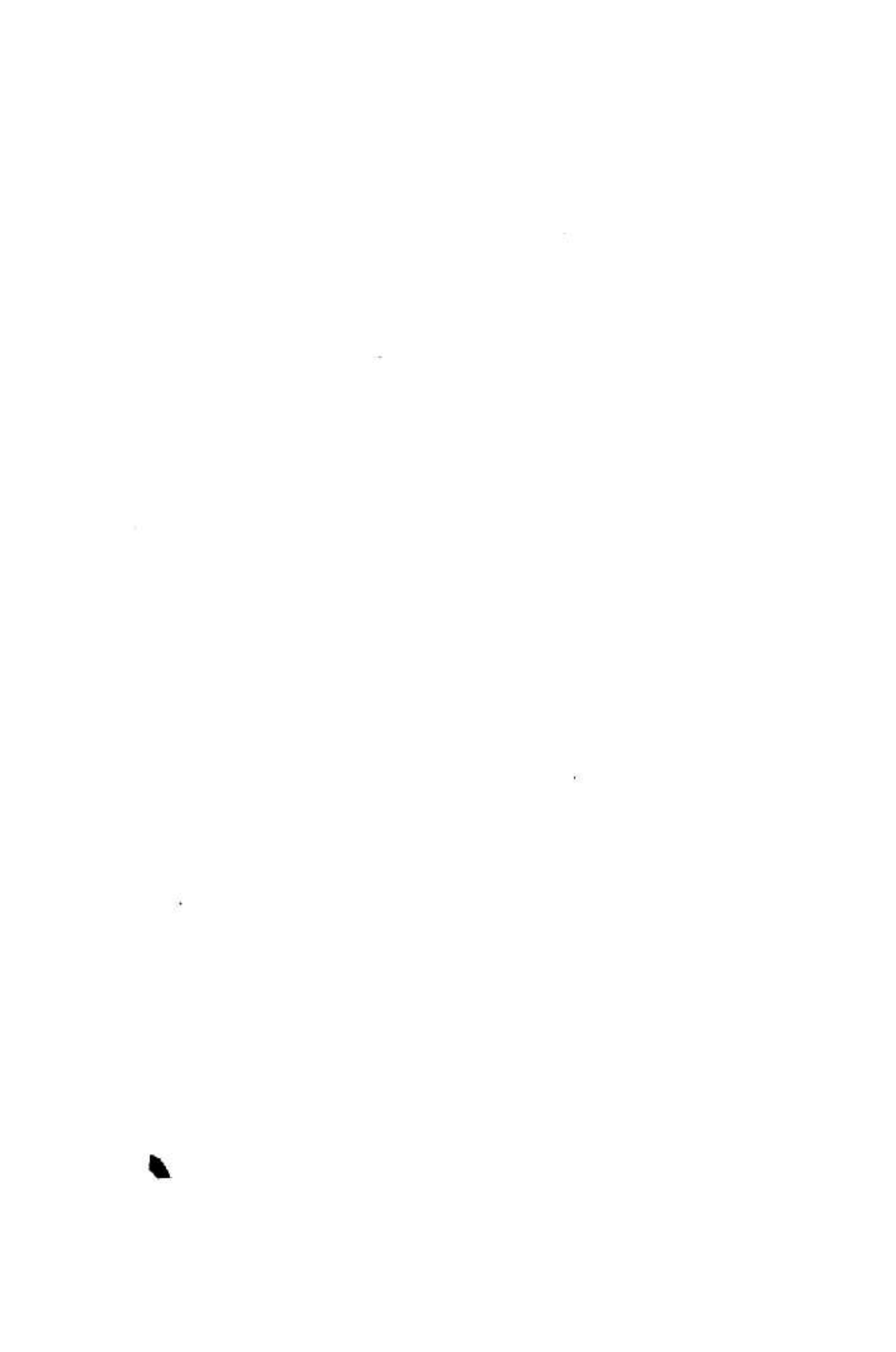
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CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	
A. EDITIONS OF THE TEXT	vii
I. The Folio of 1640	vii
II. Subsequent Editions	viii
B. DATE AND RECEPTION OF THE PLAY	viii
C. ALLEGORY IN <i>THE MAGNETIC LADY</i>	x
D. THE SATIRE	xii
I. Specific Objects of Satire	xii
II. Satire of Types or Classes	xiii
III. Prototypes of the Characters in Jonson's Earlier Plays	xviii
E. SOURCES	xx
I. Chaucer	xx
II. Greek Philosophy	xxi
III. Other Classical Borrowings	xxiii
IV. Jonson's Earlier Plays	xxiii
V. Relation of <i>The Magnetic Lady</i> to Elizabethan and Jacobean Satire and the Sa- tiric Drama	xxiv
F. EXTRACTS FROM THE CRITICS	xxvii
G. CRITICAL ESTIMATE	xxxiii
TEXT	1
EXPLANATORY NOTES	109
GLOSSARY	206
BIBLIOGRAPHY	225
INDEX	280



INTRODUCTION

A. EDITIONS OF THE TEXT

I. THE FOLIO OF 1640

The Magnetic Lady was first published in the second volume of the 1640 folio of Jonson's collected works. The play reappears in all subsequent collected editions. These are: (1) the third folio, 1692; (2) a bookseller's edition, 1716 (1717); (3) Whalley's edition, 1756; (4) John Stockdale's reprint of Whalley's edition (together with the works of Beaumont and Fletcher), 1811; (5) Gifford's edition, 1816; (6) Barry Cornwall's one-volume edition, 1838; (7) Lieut. Col. Francis Cunningham's three-volume reissue (with some minor variations) of Gifford's edition, 1871; (8) another reissue by Cunningham, in nine volumes (with additional notes), 1875. The catalogue of the British Museum shows that Jonson's works were printed in two volumes at Dublin in 1729. Of these editions, the original of 1640 is the only one calling for a detailed description; and of the others only the first, second, third, fifth, and eighth will be discussed.

As this play was published after the death of the author, we cannot expect to find that it underwent any degree of correction in the course of printing off. The two copies of the original folio which I have collated—one belonging to Professor J. M. Berdan, the other found in the Yale University Library—are almost identical. There are only two variations in the form of words (which are recorded in the variants to the text), and about a dozen minor differences in punctuation.

II. SUBSEQUENT EDITIONS

The inaccuracies of the 1640 folio were gradually eliminated in the subsequent editions. The edition of 1692 corrected some of the most obvious errors. It also attempted, not very consistently, to modernize punctuation, spelling, and capitalization. The edition of 1716 made several emendations of value, but introduced new errors. It made a further attempt to modernize spelling and punctuation. The designation of the act, which in earlier editions appears at the beginning of each scene, is omitted except at the beginning of the act. Whalley's edition of 1756 is the first attempt at a critical text. It made several valuable emendations, re-arranged or made insertions in verses for better metrical effect, and indicated a change of speaker which was unnoticed in earlier editions. It still further modernized capitalization and spelling, and replaced elided vowels. Gifford's edition is the nearest approach to a critical text. His chief contribution was the addition of stage-directions and side-notes. He reduced the number of scenes, making each one represent an actual change of place rather than a single situation. He also re-arranged verses for metrical effect. A number of the changes, however, are of questionable value; and his habit of spelling out elisions does violence, in some cases, to the metre. For a detailed discussion of these various editions of Jonson's works, see W. S. Johnson's edition of *The Devil is an Ass*, Introduction, pp. xiv-xvii.

B. DATE AND RECEPTION OF THE PLAY

The Magnetic Lady was acted by the King's Majesty's Servants at the Blackfriars Theatre. The license for performing it, which was quoted by Malone from the

Register of Sir H. Herbert, bears the date of 12th October, 1632. The following item is copied from Fleay (p. 336):

1632. Oct. 12.—(For the King's men) £2 'received of Knight (the Blackfriars bookkeeper) for allowing of Ben Jonson's play called Humours Reconciled or The Magnetic Lady to be acted.'

It would seem, from a passage in a letter to Jonson by James Howell, dated 27th Jan., 1629, that the play had already been written and acted; but the discrepancy is accounted for by Oldys. 'He tells us, in his manuscript notes to Langbaine, that Howell first published his letters without any dates, and that when he attempted to subjoin them in his subsequent editions, he confounded the time: "hence," says he, "so many errors in their dates."' ¹ 'The time of the completion of the Magnetic Lady is fixed by the following sentence in a letter from John Pory to Sir Thomas Puckering, dated Sept. 20, 1632—"Ben Jonson (who I thought had been dead) hath written a play against next term called the Magnetick Lady."' ²

As to the reception of the play, Langbaine wrote (before 1691): 'This play is generally esteemed an excellent play: tho' in those days it found some enemies.'³ Alexander Gill's satire, *Uppon Ben Johnson's Magnetick Ladye*,⁴ shows who some of these enemies were: Nathaniel Butter, Inigo Jones, Richard Allestree, and the writer, Gill. Jonson's quarrel with Inigo Jones began (1630-31) a short time before the composition of this play. He satirized Jones as Vitruvius Hoop, as In-and-in Medlay in a Tale of a Tub, and as Coronat Vitruvius in the *Entertainment to the King and Queen at Bolsover* on July 30, 1634. In *The Magnetic Lady*, although asserting

¹ Gifford, *Works of Ben Jonson* 6. 2.

² Collier, *Annals of the Stage* 2. 43-4.

³ Langbaine, *Account of the English Dramatick Poets*.

⁴ Gifford, *Works* 6. 113-5.

that 'a play, though it apparell and present vices in general, flies from all particularities in persons,' Jonson made satiric allusions to Allestree and Butter, and probably also to Gill (4. 2. 34; 3. 5. 139, and note). Fleay conjectures¹ that Damplay, who in the Induction derives *Magnetic* from *Magnus*, and who cites Vitruvius pedantically, is Inigo Jones. It would be interesting to know whether the king or queen ever saw *The Magnetic Lady* acted. The absence of any reference to it in *The Account of the Revels*² argues against a presentation at court. However, the king was a liberal patron of the drama, and might have seen this play at the Blackfriars.³ At any rate, Jonson's expression of deference and gratitude (I. Ch. 48), and the Epilogue to the King, make it probable that he expected a royal auditor.

C. ALLEGORY IN *THE MAGNETIC LADY*

The element of allegory in *The Magnetic Lady* is slight. The play, as a whole, is a humor-comedy, satirizing under typical figures pronounced follies of the time. But Jonson does not keep consistently to his main satiric purpose, occasionally introducing a thrust at a personal enemy, or deviating into the obscure regions of allegory. This element, however, has no organic function in the play: it is sporadic and trivial; and what in some cases seems a touch of allegory is nothing more than a pun on the name of a character. The three personages in the play who may be considered allegorical are Lady Loadstone, Captain Ironside, and Compass. In Woodbridge's *Studies in Jon-*

¹ *B. Chron.* i. 386.

² Fleay, *History of the Stage*, p. 318.

³ H. B. Baker, *The London Stage*, p. 28.

son's *Comedy* (p. 37), there is the following observation: 'In *The Magnetic Lady* . . . Lady Loadstone's powers of attraction are continually alluded to, though with no apparent reason unless it be perhaps the sound of her name, and at the end she is married to Captain Ironside, presumably because magnet attracts iron.' But this statement, I think, reverses the process which Jonson would more naturally have followed—that of adapting the name to the character and the plot, rather than the reverse. And reflection upon the nature of allegory inclines me to the opinion that these personages should not be classified under that type. Allegorical characters are personifications of a single, abstract quality; but these are typical characters, each with a predominant trait. Lady Loadstone is the rich and gracious hostess to whose hospitality is added the attraction of a wealthy and marriageable niece; Compass is the astute observer and critic, the scholar with a satiric bent; and the typical soldier swaggers in the person of Captain Ironside. In one passage, however, Lady Loadstone and Compass are mentioned as if they were merely symbolic personifications:

As Doctor Ridley writ, and Doctor Barlow?

They both have wrote of you and Mr. Compass.

(1. 4. 5; see note)

Again, in Act 5, scene 5, Alderman Parrot's widow is described in such terms that one is doubtful as to whether the subject of conversation is a gentlewoman or a parrot. With the exception of these passages, the seemingly allegorical touches in the play may rather be explained as puns on the names which suggest the predominant traits of typical characters than as genuine personifications. The marriage of Lady Loadstone and Ironside is a natural result of the situation; rather hastily executed, to be sure, but not more so than the union of