

Racine's ESTHER and Masfield's Adaptation

by

Sister Mary Charles McGrath
B.S., Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, 1917

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Preface

The purpose of this work is to make a comparative study of Racine's tragedy, Esther, and the English adaptation by Masefield. Mesnard's edition of Racine (Les Grands Ecrivains de la France) and Masefield's Esther published by the Macmillan Company have been used in the study. All Biblical references are to the Douay version of the Bible and the French translation from the Vulgate.

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S. M. C.

Kansas University

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Racine's ESTHER and Masefield's Adaptation

Introduction

When Masefield's Esther, an adaptation of Racine's Esther, appeared in 1922, the literary world was surprised at the turning of this great disciple of realism to the seventeenth century and, in the seventeenth century, to Racine. Critical reviews ran the gamut from "melodrama,"¹ "the worst person in the world to do Racine"² to "a fine dramatic poem"³ of "remarkable insight and power."⁴

When we recall the outstanding characteristics of the English poet, this stir is readily accounted for. Masefield styles himself the poet of the "bottom dog" of life and, in one of his early poems, his "Consecration",⁵ he promises that it is only of "the tramp of the road that his songs shall be fashioned," his "tales shall be told." His life gives little clue to his leaning toward Racine. Born at Ledbury, England, in 1874, he went to sea at the early age of fourteen, and, for many years, with neither friends nor money, he went from port to port, living the life of a seaman who ships before the mast. He spent

a year doing odd jobs in a New York saloon, but, through all this, his awakening to literature was slowly taking place. His one-volume library was a copy of Morte d'Arthur which he carried in his pocket. One day while in New York he chanced to pick up a copy of Chaucer's poems. From that day on he decided to become a poet,⁶ and we see him to-day, one of the greatest disciples of Chaucer that England has ever known.

His poetry is realistic, teeming with slang, colloquialisms and vulgarisms, and the heroic is not so beautiful to him as the pitiful, the rough, the unfortunate. On the other hand, Racine, two of whose plays⁷ Masfield chooses to present anew, is a classicist in every sense of the word. Lytton Strachey,⁸ who reviews Racine from an English but sympathetic point of view, says of him: "The world of his creations is not a copy of our own; it is a heightened and rarefied extension of it; moving, in triumph and in beauty, through an ampler ether, a diviner air". It is a world where the hesitations and the pettinesses and the squalors of this earth have been fired out; a world where ugliness is a forgotten name, and lust itself has grown ethereal; where anguish has become a grace

and death a glory, and love the beginning and end of all."

Because of this extreme classicism, Racine has never been appreciated by the English. Strachey⁹ says that "There is something inexplicable about the intensity of national tastes and the violence of national differences," and that on one side of the Channel "Racine is despised and Shakespeare is worshipped, and, on the other, Shakespeare is tolerated and Racine is adored." Taking this prejudice, usual to an insular people, into consideration, one must admit that Masfield's turning to Racine is hard to account for. It is true that, before his Esther, the English poet had given us The Tragedy of Pompey the Great, perhaps inspired by Corneille's La Mort de Pompee, in which he tried to show that all living beings are alike whether in the present or past ages. So Esther may be another attempt in this same direction, springing from his deep sympathy for humanity in general. Then, too, Esther is an after-war production, and, perhaps, the result of a reaction from the sad realism of the war days. To Masfield, poet, novelist, playwright, journalist, historian, lecturer, orator, editor, critic, could even the field of Racine and the heroic be too remote?

Despite the most obvious dissimilarities of taste between the English people and the French dramatist, the Esther of Racine is not a new field in English literature. The first translation of the play was made by Mr. Thomas Brereton of Brazenose College, Oxford, in 1715.¹⁰ This translation appears to have met with a certain amount of success, as a second edition was issued after four years, but little or no literary value can be attached to it today. In 1803 The Sacred Dramas of Esther and Athalie, translated from the French of Racine, were printed by an Edinburgh firm.¹¹ The translator is unknown, but he excelled Brereton and has given us a very creditable piece of work. Both of these translations belong to a now almost forgotten movement in English literature which was brought about by the restoration of Charles II. to the throne. Its aim was to transplant the French dramatic masterpieces to English soil. The movement was unsuccessful, but the fact that Racine's Esther was one of the most attractive objects of English translators is noteworthy here, and it is interesting to know that Masfield is not without predecessors in his new venture into the field of French tragedy.

In considering the English adaptation, the question presents itself: "How much of the play is Racine, how much Masfield?" One critic suggests the question but leaves it unanswered. In fact he says that it matters not whether Masfield is translator, adapter or originator.

To the reader who is familiar with Racine, however, it is an important question, and it is the object of this inquiry to determine, by means of a detailed comparison of the two dramatic productions, just how much Masefield has kept of the seventeenth century tragedy and how much of his play is his own.

PARALLEL STUDY

I. The Bible Story of Esther as Treated by Racine and Masefield

1. The Bible and Racine

After the production of *Phedre*, his masterpiece, in 1677, Racine ceased to write for the stage and devoted himself, as Lemaitre says, to "une vie simple, une vie pieuse, une vie d'honnête homme, de père de famille et de chrétien." Familiar with the Bible from childhood when, in his own pious family and later as a pupil at Port-Royal, he had been grounded in a thoroughly religious education, he turned more closely than ever, at this period of his life, to the study of Sacred Scripture. Delfour² says of the influence of the Bible at that time in France: "Les poètes et les écrivains en prose ne pouvaient échapper au courant religieux qui entraînait la société éclairée du XVI^e et du XVII^e siècles vers l'étude de la Bible. On a peine à compter les odes, tragédies, épopées qui se donnent, comme inspirées de l'Écriture."

This familiarity with Holy Scripture was to be the avenue by which Racine was to return to dramatic composition. Mme de Maintenon, the foundress of the house of Saint-Cyr, was finding difficulty in procuring appropriate plays which the young ladies of her school might present. Lemaitre³

describes Saint-Cyr as a house "où, se souvenant de son enfance pauvre et humiliée, elle élevait, sous la conduite de trente-six dames, deux cent cinquante jeunes filles pauvres et nobles, à qui l'on remettait trois mille écus à leur sortie pour les aider à se marier ou à vivre en province. Madame de Maintenon jugeait bon que ces demoiselles jouassent la comédie, 'parce que ces sortes d'amusements donnent de la grâce, apprennent à mieux prononcer et cultivent la mémoire."

The superior of Saint-Cyr, Mme de Brinon, formerly an Ursuline nun, had been in the habit of writing the plays which the pupils acted, but because of their inferior literary value, they did not prove suitable. Then they attempted to play Corneille and Racine but: "Elles avaient trop mal joué Cinna et trop bien Andromaque."⁴ As a consequence Mme de Maintenon begged Racine "de lui faire, dans ses moments de loisir, quelque espèce de poème moral ou historique dont l'amour fût entièrement banni, et dans lequel il ne crût pas que sa réputation fût intéressée puisqu'il demeurerait enseveli dans Saint-Cyr; ajoutant qu'il ne lui importait pas que cet ouvrage fût contre les règles, pourvu qu'il contribuât aux vues qu'elle avait de divertir les demoiselles de Saint-Cyr en les instruisant."⁵

This gave to Racine the opportunity to satisfy at the same time both of the great longings of his life: to write a play that would give edification and would not offend any of the Jansenistic principles which were so dear to him. He turned to the Bible for his inspiration and

found the story of Esther, the young queen who saved her people, so full of lessons of the love of God and detachment from the world, that he chose it as the foundation upon which to build his play for the young ladies of Saint-Cyr.

2. Early Uses of Esther in Literature

Esther had long been a favorite theme of French writers, especially during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The first notable use of the story in French literature was the Aman of Andre de Rivaudeau,⁶ printed at Poitiers in 1566 and dedicated to Jeanne de Foix, queen of Navarre. It is written in verse in five acts, each closing with a chorus "des demoiselles et filles servantes de la royne Esther."

Some ten years after this we find Pierre Matthieu, principal of the college of Vercell in Piedmont, the author of Une Tragédie de l'histoire tragique d'Esther,⁷ which was first represented either in Besançon or Vercell in 1578. It had a chorus of princes, a chorus of princesses, and a chorus of Jews, and, as in the Greek chorus, the songs were divided into strophes, antistrophes, and epodes. Matthieu later revised this work into two tragedies, the one which he called Vashti, and the other Aman.

Antoine de Montchrestien's Aman,⁸ which was played in 1602, was far superior to either of the plays just mentioned. On reading the chorus of this piece one might think that Racine found there the idea of his beautiful songs.

In 1617 a Tragédie nouvelle de la perfidie du roi

Assuererus was printed anonymously. It is without value, and was written simply to amuse the people. In it we find reminiscences of some burlesque features of the old mystery plays.

La Belle Hesther, tragedie françoise tirée de la sainte Bible, by Japien Marfrière, the pseudonym of Ville-Toustain, appeared about 1620 but has no literary value. It is divided into five acts, without scenes, and is extremely short.¹⁰

A new Esther by Pierre Du Ryer¹¹ was played at Rouen and at Paris in 1643, and printed in 1644, forty-six years in advance of Racine's. The first part of the play differs from the Bible story.¹² Vashti returns from her exile just before the crowning of Esther and for some time there is doubt in the mind of Assuérus as to which queen he will choose. Aman is in love with Esther and urges the king to prefer Vashti, so as thus to leave Esther free for him. Esther is finally chosen and the story continues as in the Bible, concluding with the punishment of Aman and the elevation of Mardochai. This play is not without merit. Like Racine, the author uses the rhymed couplet. It is as superior to Montchrestien's in its theatrical composition and firmness of versification as it is removed from the great Esther of Racine which was to succeed it.

Nearer even to the Esther of Racine than this tragedy by Du Ryer is an heroic poem of Jean Desmarets,¹³ published first in 1670 and reprinted in 1673. The poem is unfinished and worthy of little notice except as a precursor of Racine's play.

Thus finally, step by step, through these stages of production, the way has been paved for Racine, who was to make immortal in the annals of literature the Esther of Hebrew days.

3. Racine's Use of Esther

Racine in his Esther follows the Bible story closely, with only a few changes here and there to heighten the dramatic effect. In its 1,285 verses, four hundred and fifty translate literally, or almost literally, the sacred text; four hundred have something of the Bible, and only four hundred and thirty-five have nothing in common with the Bible.¹⁴ Even the chorus is naturally explained for we read that Esther had "maidens" given her as her attendants.¹⁵

The first noticeable variation from the Bible story appears in the changed character of Esther herself. The Biblical character although "agreeable and amiable in the eyes of all,"¹⁶ was not satisfied with the hanging of Aman: she demanded that his ten sons be hanged also; and when the Jews had slain five hundred men in the city besides those in the provinces, she ordered a new massacre.

"If it please the King, let it be granted to the Jews, to do to-morrow in Susan as they have done to-day, and that the ten sons of Aman may be hanged upon gibbets."¹⁷

This is the bloody Esther whose only vengeance in Racine is to say to Aman:

"Misérable, le Dieu vengeur de l'innocence,
Tout prêt à te juger, tient déjà la balance.

Bientôt son juste arrêt te sera prononcé..

Tremble: son jour approche, et ton règne est passé;"¹⁸

and the bloody massacres in the Scriptures appear in Racine only in this verse of Assuérus:

"Je leur livre le sang de tous leurs ennemis."¹⁹

Racine's Esther, then, in contrast to the Biblical Esther, is sweet and gentle, although she shows a fortitude of character which must be admired, as she fearlessly affronts death and outwits Aman.

Another variation from the Bible story is the date set for the massacre of the Jews which was, according to Sacred Scripture, to take place on the "thirteenth of the twelfth month, which is called Adar," the decree being given in Nisan, the first month.²⁰ Racine makes the time for the massacre but ten days later: "Et ce jour effroyable arrive dans dix jours."²¹

The interview of Mardochai and Esther in the third scene of the first act is fictitious, for the Bible story tells us expressly that Mardochai came only to the gate of the palace and that "Esther's maids and her eunuchs went in and told her."²² The dream of Assuérus, which Racine mentions in his second act,²³ has its source in the Bible in the brief statement "That night the king passed without sleep."²⁴ No mention is made in the Bible of the slavery of Aman, hence "Je gouverne l'empire où je fus acheté"²⁵ is evidently the invention of the author. Esther's fainting²⁶ in the presence of the king and her prayer²⁷ for her people, which Racine includes in his play, are found

only in the Apocrypha and are contained in those verses detached by St. Jerome as not Hebraic and put at the end of the book of Esther. They are found in all translations from the Vulgate.²⁸

4. Masefield's Use of Esther

In the main, the Bible story is followed closely by Masefield in his English adaptation of the French play, and he also preserves the gentleness of character which the French dramatist has made for Esther out of the more fierce Biblical queen.

Masefield's great change is in the treatment of the dream of Ahasuerus which he develops into an additional act, which will be treated of in a later chapter. Another change is in the final climax where Masefield differs both from the Bible and from Racine. The English author has Haman snatched from the gallows and torn piecemeal by an infuriated mob who "drag his corpse to be a public show."²⁹

As to the date of the massacre, Masefield puts the time one day hence,³⁰ instead of ten. This interval seems altogether too brief, but it gives rapidity to the play and does away with any possibility of the condemned Jews saving themselves, as they might have done in the twelve months of the Biblical story, or even the ten days of Racine.

The Bible story is here, however, unchanged in both plays as are the great poetic tableaux of the Jewish captivity, the edict of Assuerus, the intervention of Mardochai, the hesi-

tations and heroic resolutions of Esther, the anger of the king, the downfall of Aman, the triumph of Mardochai, and finally, the song of victory of the Jews.

II. Masefield's Treatment of Racine's Esther.

1. His Adherence to Racine.

Masefield says in his preface to his plays:

"Esther" is an adaptation, not a translation, because in Esther our audience asked for something more than the French formality allowed." As an adaptation then, we are to expect a more or less free handling of the original. One is surprised, therefore, after the introduction of the play as an adaptation, to see that, with the exception of the chorus and an additional act, there is a quite literal translation of the French. The tendency of Masefield throughout has been to gain in rapidity of action by shortening the long speeches. The very first scene illustrates this process. He has abridged the one-hundred and fourteen lines of the corresponding scene of Racine into sixty-three lines, omitting, principally, details of the expository matter of Vashti's disgrace and Esther's elevation.

The first two verses are a literal translation of Racine:

"Est-ce toi, chère Elise? O jour trois fois
heureux!

Que béni soit le ciel qui te rend à mes vœux." 1

"O Rachel, is it you ? Thrice happy day,

O blessed heaven, which sends you to my prayers."²

The next five verses are entirely omitted by Masefield, and the last three verses of the speech lose much of Racine's charm in the directness of Masefield's translation when, for

"Mais toi, de ton Esther ignorais-tu la gloire?

Depuis plus de six mois que je te fais chercher,

Quel climat, quel désert a donc pu te cacher ? "³

he gives us:

"You did not know that I was made the Queen ?

More than six months my friends have sought for you.

Where have you been ?"⁴

Elise's answer has been shortened from twenty lines in the French to thirteen in the English. Otherwise the translation is quite literal, and the only omission that might be regretted is the one verse:

"Et le cri de son peuple est monté jusqu'à lui."

Then follows Esther's long recital of the disgrace of Vashti and her own elevation to the throne of Assuérus, which Mr. Masefield has cut about half, omitting details of history and court customs and among others, Racine's own bit of philosophy which he puts into the mouth of Esther:

"Dieu tient le cœur des rois entre ses mains
puissantes:

Il fait que tout prospère aux âmes innocentes,

Tandis qu'en ses projets l'orgueilleux est trompé."⁵

and further on,

"Et le ciel, qui pour moi fit pencher la balance,
Dans ce temp-la, sans doute, agissait sur son coeur."⁶

This is one of the instances where the influence of the Bible upon Racine is so strongly felt, for not only the thought, but the very words are as a breath of Sacred Scripture.⁷ However, the passage does not suffer in the translation. The English version is still long enough and the details are sufficient to make the exposition of the play clear.

Masefield's closing lines equal the original in clearness and directness:

"But grass is growing in Jerusalem,
The stones are scattered from the holy Temple.
The God of Israel's worship is no more."⁸

"Et de Jérusalem l'herbe cache les murs!
Sion, repaire affreux de reptiles impurs,
Voit de son temple les pierres dispersées,
Et du, Dieu d'Israel, les fêtes sont cessées,"⁹

The scene continues until the entrance of the chorus with little variations from Racine. However, the omitted:

"Cependant mon amour pour notre nation
A rempli ce palais de filles de Sion,
Jeunes et tendres fleurs, par le sort agitées,
Sous un ciel étranger comme moi transplantées.

Dans un lieu séparé de profanes témoins,
 Je mets à les former mon étude et mes soins;
 Et c'est là que, fuyant l'orgueil du diadème,
 Lasse de vains honneurs, et me cherchant moi-même,
 Aux pieds de l'Éternel je viens m'humilier,
 Et goûter le plaisir de me faire oublier."¹⁰

would certainly have given grace to the English page,
 but such unmistakable allusions to Mme de Maintenon and
 the demoiselles of Saint-Cyr or perhaps to Racine's own
 beloved Port-Royal, could not well have place in the
 translation.

The scene with Mordecai continues the translation
 with, here and there, lines omitted in the English."¹¹

Again Masefield makes use of the shortened speech to in-
 dicate the tenseness of the moment, but it is with regret
 that we see the beautiful grace of such lines as :

Un ange du Seigneur, sous son aile sacrée,
 A donc conduit vos pas et caché votre entrée?"¹²

converted into the abrupt,

"An angel of the Lord has helped you here."¹³

Mordecai delivers the fatal news to Esther in much the
 same terms in both plays until we come to the day set for
 the massacre, which Masefield has changed as previously
 mentioned.¹⁴

Again in Esther's next lines, Racine's fondness for
 Biblical language shows itself:

"O Dieu, qui vois former des desseins si funestes,

As-tu donc de Jacob abandonné les restes?"¹⁵

And in Masefield's translation, we see his change to the simple English,

"O Heaven who sees such plots,

Hast thou forgotten us?"¹⁶

In Mordecai's long appeal to Esther, Masefield has again shortened the translation to about one half of the original. Racine clings closely to the language of the Bible and the translation as a whole does justice to his rendering, but many of his most sublime lines do not appear in the English. The omission of such verses as:

"Il parle, et dans la poudre il les fait tous
rentrer,"¹⁷

and

"Il voit comme un néant tout l'univers ensemble;
Et les faibles mortels, vains jouets du trépas,
Sont tous devant ses yeux comme s'ils n'étaient pas."¹⁸

makes the later version seem shorn of its strength.

After this speech Masefield has added nineteen lines¹⁹ which serve to heighten the dramatic tenseness of the situation. Mordecai and the chorus entreat Esther more pressing-ly than in the French play to save them, and she finally yields after Rachel's touching appeal:

"Esther, dear friend, for these sweet children's sakes
Dare do this deed. Think, Esther; but for you

Their tender limbs will pasture the wild beasts,
And these most innocent lips that sing God's praise
Be silenced, and our Zion desolate ever.
O, I beseech you, hasten to the King!"

In Esther's final yielding to the appeal of her people, Racine has used almost literally the words of the sacred text.²⁰ Masefield shortens the text and changes the three days' fast to a one night's watch and fast, which is of course necessary since his massacre is set for the following day. Then follows the beautiful prayer of Esther which in Racine is a close paraphrase of that given in the Apocrypha.²¹ Masefield has entirely omitted the first twenty-six lines of the prayer,²² and reduced the last twenty to twelve which are, however, a fairly close translation of the original.

Act two in Masefield, as already stated, was added by that author and will be considered separately.²³

In the third act, which corresponds to the second act of Racine, the translation is almost entirely faithful to the original. The first scene is a careful rendering of the Haman-Hydaspes scene with here and there a changed or weakened figure, as

"What backing has he?"²⁴

for

"Sur quel roseau fragile a-t-il mis son appui?"²⁵

However the translation is close and in many of the best

passages the English loses little, if any, in the translation.

Such passages as,

"Je veux qu'on dise un jour aux siècles effrayés:
Il fut des Juifs; il fut une insolente race;
Répandus sur la terre, ils en couvraient la face;
Un seul osa d'Aman attirer le courroux:
Aussitôt de la terre ils disparurent tous."²⁶

Masefield repaints for us in true colors:

"I wish that some day in the startled centuries
A man shall say: 'Yes, once there were the Jews,
An insolent race that covered all the world.
But one of them dares stir the wrath of Haman:
Immediately they disappeared from the earth.'"²⁷

With the exception perhaps of the compact, eloquent

"Il fut des Juifs"

which the English language weakens in the translation, both the translation and the original are masterpieces of eloquence and vividness, the one depending on the other, yet unfettered by it. Further on in the progress of Haman's story, Masefield of necessity makes the ten days' wait, one of ten hours, to agree with the change in his time element.²⁸ The hour is so near which, in the Masefield scheme, is to witness the end of the hated Mordecai, that it seems almost exaggerated that the irate Haman cannot endure to wait even ten hours to

satisfy his murderous cravings. The act continues with, perhaps, the closest translation that Masefield uses in the whole play. Once, however, the poet of "emotional English,"²⁹ impatient of the dignity of French tragedy, has Esther say in the midst of formal, weighty pleadings that have to do with life and death:

"Indeed a thrilling business brings me here."³⁰

In the last act Masefield soars away from Racine and in a flight of imagery opens the first scene:

"Here, by the still shut gate of Esther's hall "³¹

while Racine has:

"C'est donc ici d'Esther le superbe jardin."³²

But it is only for one verse, for, in the next, the English poet returns to his master and the translation continues, as in the preceding act, quite literally, until Racine says of the fate that is threatening Haman:

"Aux plus affreux excès son inconstance passe,"³³ which

the translation tersely expresses by "Fortune is fickle."³⁴

Later on he becomes too Masefieldian again when he has Zeresh, the wife of Haman, say:

"Leave me to manage; I will take the children"³⁵
for Racine's

"Vous pouvez du départ me laisser la conduite;

Surtout de vos enfants j'assurerai la fuite."³⁶

The next variation from the original is Masefield's rather striking rendition of:

"On a payé le zèle, on punira le crime."³⁷

by

"The Jews have been rewarded, but the next time
Will be beheaded."³⁸

The act continues with the appearance of Haman before the King and Queen. Some lines are translated with a charm that, at times, equals the original,³⁹ like the opening words of Ahasuerus to Esther:

"All that you do displays a noble mind
Beyond all price, beyond all gold or purple.
What wisdom reared you in your infancy?"⁴⁰

The long brilliant appeal of Esther⁴¹ to Ahasuerus has been adapted by Masefield to suit the exigencies of the English stage. Only the first five verses are a direct translation. The recital of the glories of Persia is entirely omitted, and the praises of the King reduced from five to two lines. After this the close translation is taken up again and continues until the seventh scene in Racine, where Assuerus gives to Mordecai his just reward. Here Masefield adds some hundred lines which are devoted to a long speech by Asaph. He relates the details of Haman's murder according to the changed climax already mentioned,⁴² in some of the best verse used by Masefield. The play then concludes as Racine's does, with the conferring of Haman's goods upon Mordecai and the institution of Phurim⁴³, the day of triumph for all posterity. A close translation is avoided, However, until Esther's final words before the chant of the chorus:

"O Dieu, par quelle route inconnue aux mortels
Ta sagesse conduit ses desseins / éternels,"⁴⁴

Likewise Masfield concludes his version in the brilliant
translation:

"O God, by roads unknown to mortal men,
Thy wisdom brings eternal plans to be!"⁴⁵

2. Masefield's Divergences from Racine

a. Minor Changes and Additional Act

Although the English poet has followed closely his French model, he varies from an exact translation to an imitation at times very free and foreign to the spirit of Racine's play. This gives it the originality that warrants its holding a distinct place in English literature.

The adaptation manifests itself principally in (1) a few minor changes and the addition of another act; and (2) a different handling of the chorus.

Among the minor changes we find that the English author modified the manner of Haman's death, as has been already shown.¹ There is no division of the acts into scenes as in the French play, and at the beginning of Act IV there is a difference in stage setting: Zares and Haman speak in front of the curtain on a platform or avant-scene, after which the curtain rises on the banquet hall of Ahasuerus and Esther; whereas the earlier play represents the gardens of Esther with the banquet place at one side. A slight change in the names of the characters completes the list of minor variations in the two plays. Masefield gives a more Hebraic atmosphere by using the name of Rachel for Elise, the confidante of Esther, and the form Zeresh for Zares, the wife of Haman.

The greater change in the English play is the addition of an act. As already noted, throughout the play Masefield shortened the long speeches. As a result, he tells

us, "when we came to rehearse the play, we found it too short; we therefore lengthened it."² He accomplished this by putting into his play an act which is not in the French Esther. In this act, which he makes the second in his play, Masefield dramatizes the dream of Ahasuerus based on the sleepless night of the king which the Bible mentions³ and which Racine has Hydaspe suggest in his interview with Haman in the second act:

"Quelque songe effrayant cette nuit l'a frappe.
Pendant que tout gardait un silence paisible,
Sa voix s'est fait entendre avec un cri terrible.
J'ai couru, le désordre était dans ses discours:
Il s'est plaint d'un peril qui menaçait ses jours:
Il parlait d'ennemi, de ravisseur farouche;
Même le nom d'Esther est sorti de sa bouche.
Il a dans ces horreurs passé toute la nuit."⁴

This new act as introduced by Masefield is a rare example of what poetic imagination can do in expanding a single allusion. The disturbed monarch cannot sleep and a thousand sounds and visions startle his wakefulness. The opening lines are ominous, vivid:

"What is the time? I hear the water drip
Telling the time; and all the court is still,
Still as the midnight; not a footstep stirs
Save the slow sentry on the palace wall.

.....

O Weary Time, I cannot sleep tonight.

All still, all sleep, save only I, the King."⁵

Masefield is no longer the translator but, unpinioned, he makes live again the dream-stirred night of King Ahasuerus, and we, too, almost "hear the water drip" as he peoples his chamber with plotting Jews. The soldiers hum and sing together to assure him they are watching, and the troubled King settles to sleep again, only to continue his wild soliloquies which reveal the workings of his conscience. He awakes at the horror of

"Someone at the footing of the bed.

Someone, a Jew, with bones instead of face

And blood that dripped."⁶

Then it is that he realizes that he can expect no peace.

"Ah! I know it now,

What the Chaldean told me long ago,

That I should know no quiet rest at night,

Being a King, unless I ate of bread

Baked in a house where sorrow never came.

O blessed bread, would I could eat of thee!"⁷

Finally after the guards have assured him that there is "no armed man moving, no suspicious thing" to disturb him,

"Nothingbut silent darkness,

And here and there a priest of the great sun

Praying long life and blessing on our monarch,"⁸

he sings himself to sleep with a soothing little song of the sea,

"Made long ago by one who could not sleep,

To help his fellow-sufferers":⁹

"Along the beach a wave comes slowly in,
And breaks, and dies away, and dies away;
The moon is dimmed and all the ropes are taut.
Along the beach a wave comes slowly in,
And breaks and dies away, and dies away,
and dies away."¹⁰

As a climax the Ghost of Thares comes to torment him,
"The shadow of what I was,
Come for your blood."¹¹

Ahasuerus offers gold, his kingdom, but he cannot buy off
his tormenter.

"I cannot, Ahasuerus.

I want your life, the soul out of your body.
See, I come nearer, and a little nearer,
A little nearer still, and put out hands--
Lean, skinny hands that used to serve your food,
Thin hands to put your powerless hands aside
And take you by the throat as now I do,
And squeeze, and squeeze the life out of your
flesh!"¹²

The avenging spirit disappears, and the act comes to a quick
close as Ahasuerus calls for the Chaldean Scribes that by
their magic they may tell what evil portends, and the guards
cry "God save the King."

It is magnificent, this second act, in its picturing
of the disturbed monarch's troubled sleep, but has it added
to the dramatic value of the play? The following act of the

translation begins where Racine's does, as though there had been no interpolation. Then what is the purpose? Thus would Racine have questioned, too. One of the articles of the dramatic creed of the French author was to discard all that was not essential to the conflict. He aimed primarily at one thing---dramatic effect.¹³ It can hardly be said that Masefield's act hinders the action, yet, according to Racine's principle, it does not add to it, hence it is superfluous. The literary value of the poetry, which is Masefield's best, and the quick, vivid development of the act give it its chief value and it very creditably serves its primary purpose of lengthening the play.

b. The Chorus

The use of the chorus in Esther is an innovation. In the request of Mme de Maintenon for a play with both spoken and singing parts, and in his choice of Esther as a subject, Racine realized his opportunity to bring into French tragedy something that had been lost. He says in his preface to the play.¹

"Je m'aperçus qu'en travaillant sur le plan qu'on m'avait donné, j'exécutais en quelque sorte un dessein qui m'avait souvent passé dans l'esprit, qui était de lier, comme dans les anciennes tragédies grecques, le chœur et le chant avec l'action, et d'employer à chanter les louanges du vrai Dieu cette partie du chœur que les païens employaient à chanter les louanges de leurs fausses divinités."

Masefield, who, singularly enough, like Racine, wrote his play for a particular company of amateur players, decided to keep the chorus, but, as he tells us in his preface to the play, after an attempt to use Racine's choruses in translation, gave them up and substituted others. Under these conditions it is necessary to consider the choruses of the two plays separately.

Mesnard, in Les Grands Écrivains de la France,² says of Racine's chorus: "Ce n'est pas assez d'avoir parlé des chœurs d'Esther comme ayant introduit avec tant de bonheur dans notre tragédie un des éléments essentiels du drame antique. Considérées en eux-mêmes,

et à part de la constitution du drame, ces chœurs, par leur savante harmonie, par la pureté parfaite de leur style, par leur poésie tour à tour tendre et énergique, douce et sublime, toujours naturelle et simple dans son élégance et sa grandeur, ont un caractère particulier qui les distingue des plus belles odes de notre langue, et, sans qu'il y ait à en comparer les beautés avec des beautés toutes différentes, leur réserve un rang qui ne leur sera jamais disputé. La pièce tout entière est tellement pleine de l'inspiration des livres saints qu'il ne suffit pas de rechercher et de signaler les passages directement imités. L'esprit même de l'Écriture est partout, tant le génie de Racine en était pénétré. Mais cela est vrai surtout des chants du chœur: ce sont vraiment les harpes de Sion qui y résonnent."

At the first representation of the play away from Saint-Cyr, in 1721, after the death of Louis XIV. and Mme. de Maintenon, all the singing was discarded and only a few verses of the chorus were kept. The play was given eight times but the authors of l'Histoire du Théâtre françois³ say that "le poème, supérieurement rendu par les acteurs, ne fit pas tout l'effet qu'on s'en étoit promis." Various reasons are found for this lack of success, but critics agree that it lay principally in the omission of the chorus. Mesnard says:⁴ "La suppression des chœurs, que le poète avait si bien liés à l'action, n'étoit pas un

médiocre dommage apporté à son oeuvre, et ne la dépouillait pas seulement d'un des plus magnifiques ornements de poésie, mais encore la mutilait dans une des parties les plus nécessaires et les plus vivantes de son ensemble." Moland says:⁵ "ces choeurs sont tellement essentiels, que toujours, lorsqu'on s'est permis de les supprimer, Esther en a été comme découronnée;" and Deschanel:⁶ "Supprimer les choeurs d'Esther, c'est enlever à la pièce une partie non seulement de sa beauté, mais de ce que l'on pourrait nommer sa vérité idéale."

The songs of Racine's chorus are admirable examples of the author's skill in lyrical composition. His words are simple, and his sentences short, but there is a peculiar music about them which cannot be imitated. The first song of the chorus, giving full vent to the play of emotions, is a fair example of this style:

"O rives du Jourdain! Ô champs aimés des cieux!
 Sacrés monts, fertiles vallées
 Par cent miracles signalées!
 Du doux pays de nos aïeux
 Serons-nous toujours exilées?"⁷

In their varying moods of despair, supplication or triumph, these lyrical outpourings express the sentiments of the Hebrew people. At their first appearance, the maidens lament the walls of Sion and the banks of the

Jordan.⁸ In the second song⁹ they sing of the Hebrew faith and trust in God and implore His aid in their affliction. The "Pleurons et gémissons, mes fideles compagnes"¹⁰ of the Israelite maiden is the signal for the great musical lament that Racine has so successfully woven into the succeeding choral scenes. A few representative lines well illustrate the whole movement of the chorus:

"O Dieu, que la gloire couronne,
Dieu, que la lumière environne,
Qui voles sur l'aile des vents,
Et dont le trône est porté par les anges!

.....

Tu vois nos pressants dangers:
Donne à ton nom la victoire;
Ne souffre point que ta gloire
Passe à des dieux étrangers."¹¹

In Act two the chorus continues to lament the miseries of the chosen people, concluding with a sublime act of faith in God. The two choral scenes in the last act rise to a high degree of sublimity. The short, quick verses bring out admirably the alternating fear and joy of the maidens. In these last two scenes they add to the praises of the God of Israel who has delivered them, the praises of the King and of Esther, in verses that must have been highly complimentary to the royal audience that listened to them.

No poet has ever been more deeply imbued than Racine with the spirit and language of the Bible, and he holds his place among the greatest of sacred poets. A detailed study of his choruses shows that many lines are close paraphrases of Holy Scripture. Compare these lines in the second appearance of the chorus:

"Levons les yeux vers les saintes montagnes
D'ou l'innocence attend tout son secours"¹²

with that sublime canticle:

"Levavi oculos meos in montes unde veniet
auxilium mihi."¹³

or

"O Dieu, que la gloire couronne,
Dieu, que la lumière environne,
Qui voles sur l'aile des vents,
Et dont le trône est porté par les anges."¹⁴

with

"Amictus lumine sicut vestimento..... Qui ambulat
super pennas ventorum..... Qui facis angelos tuos, spiritus."¹⁵

"Qu'ils soient comme la poudre et la paille légère
Que le vent chasse devant lui."¹⁶

is beautifully suggestive of

"Sed tanquam pulvis, quem projicit ventus a
facie terrae."¹⁷

In the second act the chorus sings:

"Tel qu'un ruisseau docile
Obeît à la main qui détourne son cours,
Et, laissant de ses eaux partager le secours,
Va rendre tout un champ fertile,
Dieu, de nos volontés arbitre souverain,
Le coeur des rois est ainsi dans ta main,"¹⁸

just as Solomon sings in the Old Testament:

"Sicut divisiones aquarum, ita cor regis in manu
Domini: quocumque voluerit, inclinabit illud."¹⁹

Other closely paraphrased Scriptural verses,
like the following are beautiful, both for their Scriptural
imagery and their expression of sentiments in keeping
with the spirit of the play:

"Que les démons, et ceux qui les adorent
Soient à jamais détruits et confondus."²⁰

"Confundantur omnes qui adorant sculptilia, et
qui gloriantur in simulacris suis."²¹

"Le glaive au dehors le poursuit;
Le remords au dedans le glace."²²

"Foris vastabit eos gladius, et intus pavor."²³

"J'ai vu l'impie adorer sur la terre;
Pareil au cèdre, il cachait dans les cieux
Son front audacieux;

.....

Je n'ai fait que passer; il n'était déjà plus."²⁴

"Vide impium superexaltatum, et elevatum sicut cedros Libani. Et transivi, et ecce non erat."²⁵

The yearning of the followers of Esther for their native land is touchingly expressed in the following lines:

"Réjouis-toi, Sion, et sors de la poussière.

Quitte les vêtements de la captivité,

Et reprends ta splendeur première."²⁶

just as the Jews sighing in their captivity, sang in the Old Testament:

"Consurge, consurge, induere fortudine tua, Sion, induere vestimentis gloriae tuae.....Excutere de pulvere, consurge."²⁷

The number of citations might be increased, but it is often difficult to decide just what Scriptural passage has suggested the verses of the poet. In fact it seems that the Scripture has become so much a part of him that he uses its languages without conscious quotation. Such lines as:

"Puisse-je demeurer sans voix."²⁸

"Des offenses d'autrui malheureuses victimes."²⁹

"Quand sera le voile arraché

Qui sur tout l'univers jette une nuit si sombre?

Dieu d'Israël, dissipe enfin cette ombre:

Jusqu'à quand serastu caché?"³⁰

"Le bonheur de l'impie est toujours agité;

Il erre à la merci de sa propre inconstance,"³¹

have borrowed not only their language but their imagery from Holy Scripture. The whole choral scenes present a carefully drawn Jewish panorama over which the "Cedars of Lebanon" raise their pointed spires and the censers of the "Holy of Holies" waft their sweetest perfumes as the lament of "captivity led captive" rises from the earth heavenward.

Now let us turn to the English chorus. The critics say that Masefield has adapted the play in the spirit of a man writing a play of his own rather than as a mere copyist in another tongue.³² The first thing, then, that the English poet did, in moulding his play out of the material of another, was to do away with Racine's chorus, and with the chorus went the Scriptural language and imagery. Nothing is more unscriptural than

"Our games and birthday feasts, and times at night
When lamps were lit"

of which the first chorus sings in the first act. With the exception of various references to "Zion," "God's great Temple," and "Jordan's blessed river," the only direct reference to the Scripture that Masefield makes in his entire chorus is when the maidens sing of the flight from Egypt: the parting of the waters, the gushing of water from the rock and the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night.³³ What seems to be the only approach to

Scriptural language and imagery is in the following lines:

"Now like a cedar that the storm uproots on
windy Lebanon,

He lies on earth: I passed his haunt, but God
had blown and he was gone."³⁴

This with the allusion to the Babylonian captivity³⁵
practically ends Masefield's direct use of the Scriptures
in his chorus. There is a breath of the "Lamentations"
over it all, but such an elusive one that when we try to
fix on certain passages it resolves itself into merely the

"O lamentation, misery, woe, woe ! "

that concludes each song of the chorus.

His first song is purely narrative in
matter, telling the story of the Jewish captivity. At the
second appearance the maidens sing of their present pitiable
condition

"With the corn-mill and the stranger"

and of the ramparts of Zion, which they see in fancy from
their prison gate, down

"The long, long road, the stones that we should
tread

Were we but free, to our beloved dead."³⁶

Some of Masefield's best lyrical verses are here
where the chorus sings of the springtime when the ships
set sail for the west.³⁷

The next appearance of the chorus, in Act three,

is very short and in no way comparable to Racine's corresponding scene. In the last act the verse in the opening lines of the choral song approaches nearer to that of Racine than anywhere else in the chorus. The following beautiful lines:

"Bountiful mercy of our guardian God,
O star in darkness, O white light of dawn
After the night; O blessed touch of rain,
Changing the desert's salty sand to flowers."³⁸

show that the English poet has given us here some of the imagery and music of Racine's words. They are in every way comparable to such lines as:

"O douce paix!
O lumière éternelle !
Beauté toujours nouvelle !
Heureux le coeur épris de tes attraits !"³⁹

The final part of the chorus in Masfield's play is short and falls far below Racine's closing choral song. There is force in Racine's chant of praise that culminates in the powerful, vibrating

"Rompez vos fers,
Tribus captives;
Troupes fugitives,
Repassez les monts et les mers:
Rassemblez-vous des bouts de l'univers."⁴⁰

Masefield has appealing lines

"Esther has saved us

.

We may go home to Zion's hill, forgetting all
our slavery.

We may rebuild the sacred town and tread the
dear green fields again;

We are set free to love and live, forgetting all
these years of pain;"⁴¹

And his final lines, with their carefully worked out moral
truth:

"The evils that the wicked shape

Come by one road, but God has made a myriad
pathways of escape.

And when the evil presses worst seeming to
triumph over good,

There comes, as here, the thing that saves, by
secret ways not understood,"⁴²

stand out in vivid contrast to Racine's final burst of song:

"Que son nom soit béni; que son nom soit chanté;

Que l'on célèbre ses ouvrages

Au delà des temps et des âges,

Au delà de l'éternité."⁴³

The first is written to be read; you forget that it is the
final chant of a chorus: the other is music, movement;

you can almost hear the echo as it resounds at 'the towers of Sion,'

"Au delà de l'éternité."

The question now presents itself, why did Masefield abandon Racine's chorus? and it is a difficult one to answer. Just as Masefield's turning to Racine at all has been a puzzle to all literary critics, so has his treatment of the chorus been. Certainly Racine's chorus, wholly Scriptural, a pure chant of divine praise, speaks more of the seventeenth century France, the age of faith, than the modern England for which Masefield writes. Moreover, to preserve both the simplicity and the musical charm of Racine's words must have seemed a hopeless task to Masefield. Here then was a salient point at which the poet's restless English personality might exercise that freedom for which it had been longing under the yoke of a translator.

Whether the English play gained or lost in thus breaking away from the original is hard to say. It probably gained in the direction of its greatest strength, for all critics agree that Masefield is at his best when untrammelled. Nevertheless, he omitted an exquisite and significant part of Racine's great play when he threw away its chorus, and his work lacks the beauty and dignity that the sublime chants of divine praise add to the French play.

III.

A Comparison of Style

In style, Racine and Masefield are entirely dissimilar. Strachey¹ says of Racine: "Besides his lack of extravagance, besides his dislike of exaggerated emphasis and far-fetched or fantastic imagery, there is another characteristic of his style to which we are perhaps even more antipathetic--its suppression of details. The great majority of poets--and especially of English poets--produce their most potent effects by the accumulation of details--details which in themselves fascinate us either by their beauty or their curiosity or their supreme appropriateness. But with details Racine will have nothing to do; he builds up his poetry out of words which are not only absolutely simple but extremely general." It is little wonder then that Masefield, "thoroughly English both in the careless rapture of his emotional expression and in the vivid close-packed vigor of his style,"² is pronounced a failure as a translator of the eloquence of French tragedy even before he is read. However, after the close comparison we have made of the two plays, we cannot, in all justice, call Masefield, as a translator of Racine, a failure. It must be granted that Masefield in the role of an originator is more effective than in that of a translator, yet, as a translator he is worthy of note. The comparison has shown that in the main he has been true to Racine, and has given us a simple, idiomatic, English trans-

lation in which, with the exception of the occasional flights which have been pointed out, he has respected Racine's love of simple imagery and his aversion to the out-of-the-way or the unexpected. Racine's similes and metaphors are simple, direct, inevitable.³

"Sur quel roseau fragile a-t-il mis son appui?"⁴

"L'avenir l'inquiète, et le présent le frappe;
Mais plus prompt, que l'éclair le passé nous
échappe."⁵

"Quand sera le voile arraché

Qui sur tout l'univers jette une nuit si sombre?"⁶

For beauty of imagery in simple suggestion, what could be more effective than the plaint of an Israelite maiden:

"Je tomberai comme une fleur
Qui n'a vu qu'une aurore;"⁷

or for power and effect, what more forceful than

"D'un souffle l'aquilon écarte les nuages,
Et chasse au loin la foudre et les orages.
Un roi sage, ennemi du langage menteur,
Écarte d'un regard le perfide imposteur."⁸

Although, as has been shown, Masfield, in his translated portions preserves the figure of the original, in his own parts, the second act and the chorus, he is true to his own style, so opposed to that of Racine, and delights in figures that are big, bold, expressive:

"The shadow on the wall

Is like the black head of an African

Thrown back in mockery."⁹

"Wisdom is life upon the tickle edge;
Not the blind staring of the stupefied
At nothing out of nothing."¹⁰

"These Jews are secret like that desert tribe
Whom none has seen, who walk the moonless night
And strike men dead, and go, and leave no trace
Save the dead body."¹¹

"They were as silent as a forest is
In the great heat before a thunderstorm."¹²

Masefield is fond of these vigorous figures which mark the
individuality of his style. He has climax, suspense:

"They have no home except the black felt tent
And the great plain and the great sky and silence."¹³

"We shall go home, to death, to-morrow night;"¹⁴

or repetition:

"Weariful days of wearying out distress."¹⁵

He loves to paint a picture in which his people truly seem
to move before the reader:

"The ankle bells
Tinkled as women passed; the old priests shuffled,
Lighting the incense in the temple braziers,
And acolytes in red came to the gates;"¹⁶

or in which we feel the tenseness of the situation:

"Those silent watchers there, the multitude,

His victims from of old, the men ground down,
The women bartered and the children stunted."¹⁷

He is often a little too rhetorical as when Ahasuerus, sleeplessly pacing the room and remembering the men he has done to death, apostrophizes them thus:

"Yes, you pale ghosts, I mastered you in life,
And will in death. I hold an Empire up,
A thing that IS; no glimmering dream of boys
Of what might be, but will not till men change;
No phantom Paradise of vengeance glutted
By poor men upon rich men, but a world
Rising and doing its work and lying down
Because my fierceness keeps the wolves at bay;"¹⁸

or again in:

"Now we can crouch and pray and count the hours
Until our murderers' feet are on the stair,
And bright steel spirits the blood upon our hair
And lays us motionless among the flowers,
White things that do not care."¹⁹

Continuing these lines we read:

"And afterwards, who knows what moths we'll be
Flying about the lamps of light at night
In death's great darkness, blindly, blunderingly."

Just what did Masfield mean by these lines? One can hardly think of a Hebrew maiden, daughter of a nation that had talked with God, singing of the hereafter in the terms of unknown moths, or "white things that do not care," and cer-

tainly Racine's Jansenistic soul would have cried out in horror at the thought of such verses being linked with any of his lines. They are fair sounding words and phrases and Masefield rejoiced to use them, but they ring false in a play of the setting of Esther.

In poetic form, Masefield is just as unlike his French model. Racine uses the Alexandrine verse of French tragedy and the rhymed couplet, which is relieved in parts of the chorus by an alternate rhyme. Masefield has written his play in blank verse of irregular meter, but he often verges on the prosaic and the close comparison he has invited, shows the older poet to be by far the master in careful workmanship. There is more color and movement in Masefield, but there is more dignity, more grace, and more emotion in Racine. The great beauty of his style lies in the simplicity of his words and his way of using them. They possess a musical charm that defies translation. Strachey²⁰ says of him: "To his lovers, to those who have found their way into the secret places of his art, his lines are impregnated with a peculiar beauty, and the last perfection of style. Over them the most insignificant of his verses can throw a deep enchantment, like the faintest wavings of a magician's wand.....How is it that words of such slight import should hold such thrilling music? Oh! they are Racine's words."

Although Masefield fails, as any imitator would, to preserve the music of Racine's words, he clothes his verse in an energy peculiar to his own vigorous personality and makes us forget the model in the brilliance of his own style. However, the mark of the genius, which we find in the French play, is lacking and we see only the prolific writer who is essaying greatness in many lines but who has not yet achieved it.

Conclusion

Critics have not failed to condemn Masefield for attempting what was so far removed from him, just as now and then some over-ardent one is unstinted in praise of his treatment of the French play. The notice that the play has attracted in the press has brought forth such diverse comments as: "Mr. Masefield was one of the worst people in the world to do Racine. He is especially unfitted for the psychological logic and the colorless eloquence of French tragedy. The result of his attempting to render it is a strange and depressing anomaly,"¹ or "Whenever Mr. Masefield has changed Racine he has done so in the direction of melodrama; when he has taken him as he is, he has reduced him to a boyish simplicity."² On the other hand we read: "The expression of Racine's plot is most simple, fluent and forcible. The idiomatic English is so perfect as to carry the conviction of independent inspiration. His characterization is bold and colorful and the descriptive passages, wholly devoid of verbose or decorative writing, are extraordinarily vivid. The nobility, unity, simplicity, appropriateness and rhythm of the diction are certainly Masefield's."³

These are only hasty estimates as an entire reading of the article will prove, but they point to the fact that there must be a sane, middle point of view of Masefield's Esther; and that is precisely what this study has endeavored to bring out.

It has made clear how much of the work is Racine's and how much Masefield's, and has shown that, while Masefield in general, adhered faithfully to the original, making a translation that is quite close at times, but never mere copywork, he has also done original work, adding another act, and substituting a chorus of his own. Finally, with unique imaginative strength, he has seized and created afresh the characters and their setting and has given us a highly dramatic poem with a rousing, swinging rhythm. Although one would never read Masefield to know Racine, still the English play has achieved much: it has brought Racine closer to the English reading public. It has helped bridge the chasm of the English channel with its dividing line of prejudices, and "it suggests to English readers that there is actually some sort of life in a celebrated writer whom they have usually considered hopeless; and the Anglo-Saxon may at least learn that there is a genuine poignancy of emotion behind that flawless marble façade."⁴

NOTES

Introduction

- 1 Lewisohn, Ludwig, The Nation, 114:49
- 2 Wilson, Edmund, The New Republic, 30:291
- 3 Lynch, Robert, The New Statesman, 18:533
- 4 Towse, J. Rankin, The Literary Review, 2:464
- 5 See Appendix A
- 6 Current Opinion, 60:194
- 7 Masfield has also made an English translation of Racine's
 Bérénice
- 8 Strachey, Lytton, Books and Characters, pp. 25-6
- 9 Ibid. pp. 3-4
- 10 Canfield, Dorothea F. Corneille and Racine in England, p.204
- 11 Ibid. p. 252
- 12 Towse, J. Rankin, The Literary Review 2:464

The Bible Story of Esther as

Used by Racine and Masfield

- 1 Lemaître, Jules, Jean Racine p. 277
- 2 Delfour, La Bible dans Racine, p. XVI
- 3 Lemaître, p. 278
- 4 Ibid. p. 279

- 5 Lemaître, p. 279
- 6 Mesnard, M. Paul, Les Grands Écrivains de la France,
vol. 3, p. 446
- 7 Ibid. p. 11
- 8 Moland, M. Louis, Œuvres de J. Racine, vol.5, p.6
- 9 Mesnard, vol. 3, p. 448
- 10 Moland, vol. 5, p. 10
- 11 Mesnard, vol.3, p. 449
- 12 Moland, vol. 5, p. 10
- 13 Mesnard, vol. 3, p. 450
- 14 Delfour, p. 107
- 15 The Bible, Esther, II, 9
- 16 Ibid.II, 15
- 17 Ibid.IX, 13
- 18 Racine, Esther, ll. 1156-60
- 19 Ibid.l. 1183
- 20 The Bible, Esther, III, 7
- 21 Racine, Esther, l. 180
- 22 The Bible, Esther, IV; See Appendix B
- 23 Racine, Esther, l. 384
- 24 The Bible, Esther, VI, 1
- 25 Racine, Esther, l. 452
- 26 Ibid, ll.634-5; The Bible, Esther, XV, 10
- 27 Racine, Esther, ll. 248-292; The Bible, Esther, XIV
- 28 The Bible, Esther, X-XVI
- 29 Masfield, Esther, p. 104
- 30 Ibid.

Masefield's Adherence to Racine

- 1 Racine, Esther, ll. 1-2
2 Masefield, Esther p. 1
3 Ibid.
4 Racine, Esther, ll. 8-10
5 Ibid. ll. 67-9
6 Ibid. ll. 72-3
7 See Proverbs XXI, 1; Romans VIII, 28, etc.
8 Masefield, Esther, p. 4.
9 Racine, Esther, ll. 85-90
10 Ibid. ll. 103-11
11 Lines 167, 168, 173, 174, 176, 177, 187-89, 192 193, 207,
213, -18, 220, 226-8, 321-4 are entirely omitted and
the thought of many others is condensed into one or
two lines.
12 Racine, Esther, ll. 157-8
13 Masefield, Esther, p. 10
14 See p. 11
15 Racine, Esther, ll. 181-2
16 Masefield, Esther, p. 11
17 Racine, Esther, l. 224
18 Ibid. ll. 226-9
19 Masefield, Esther, pp. 14-15;
20 See Appendix C
21 See Appendix D
22 See Appendix E

- 23 See pp. 12 ff.
- 24 Masfield, Esther, p.52
- 25 Racine, Esther, l. 444.
- 26 Ibid.,ll. 476-480.
- 27 Masfield, Esther, pp.545.
- 28 Ibid.p.56.
- 29 Wilson, Edmund, The New Republic 30:291.
- 30 Masfield, Esther. p.69.
- 31 Ibid.p.75
- 32 Racine, Esther, l. 826.
- 33 Ibid.l. 888
- 34 Masfield, Esther, p.79
- 35 Ibid.p.80
- 36 Racine, Esther, ll. 900-1
- 37 Ibid.l. 916.
- 38 Masfield, Esther, p.81
- 39 See Appendix F
- 40 Masfield, Esther, p.83
- 41 Racine, Esther, ll. 1044-88.
- 42 See p. 12
- 43 The Bible Esther, IX 26-28.
- 44 Racine, Esther,ll. 1198-9
- 45 Masfield, Esther, p.105
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- Minor Changes and Additional Act.

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- 1 See p. 12
- 2 Preface to Esther p.IX.

3	The Bible, <u>Esther</u> , VI, 1.
4	Racine, <u>Esther</u> , ll. 384-92.
5	Masefield, <u>Esther</u> , p.25
6	" " p.40
7	" " p.40-1
8	" " p.42
9	" " p.42
10	" " p.43
11	" " p.44
12	" " p.44-5

The Chorus

1	Preface to <u>Esther</u> , p.455
2	Mesnard, Vol.3. pp. 441-2
3	<u>Histoire du Theatre français</u> , Vol. XV, p. 441.
4	Mesnard, Vol.3. p. 434
5	Moland, Vol.5, p. 113.
6	Deschanel, Emile, Racine, Vol.2.p.208.
7	Racine, <u>Esther</u> , ll. 141-145.
8	" " Act I, Scene 2.
9	" " Act I, Scene 5.
10	" " l. 293.
11	" " ll. 353-63.
12	" " ll. 295-6.
13	<u>Psalm</u> CXX, 1
14	Racine, <u>Esther</u> , ll. 353-6.
15	<u>Psalm</u> CIII, 2, 3, 4.

- 16 Racine, Esther, ll. 367-8.
17 Psalm I, 4.
18 Racine, Esther, ll. 729-34.
19 Proverbs XXI, 1.
20 Racine, Esther, ll. 769-70.
21 Psalm XCVI, 7.
22 Racine, Esther, XXXII, 25.
23 Deuteronomy, XXXII, 25.
24 Racine, Esther, ll. 1208-14.
25 Psalm XXXVI, 35-36
26 Racine, Esther, ll. 1237-9
27 Isaias, LII, 1, 2.
28 Racine, Esther, l. 138; See Psalm CXXXIV, 6.
29 Racine, Esther, l. 332; See Exodus XX, 5.
30 Racine, Esther, ll. 746-9; See Psalm XII, 1.
31 Racine, Esther, ll. 798-9; See Isaias LVII, 20-21.
32 Lynch, Robert, The New Statesman, 18:533
33 Masfield, Esther, p.95; See Appendix G.
34 Masfield, Esther, p.105; See Psalm XXXVI, 35-36 Appendix H.
35 Masfield, Esther, p.8.
36 Ibid. p.19.
37 See Appendix I.
38 Masfield, Esther, p.94.
39 Racine, Esther, ll. 822-5.
40 Ibid. ll. 1246-50

- 41 Masefield, Esther, p.106.
42 Ibid.
43 Racine, Esther, ll. 283-6.

A Comparison of Style.

- 1 Strachey, Books and Characters, pp. 16-17.
2 Wilson, Edmund, The New Republic, 30; 291
3 Nitze and Dargan, History of French Literature, p. 321.
4 Racine, Esther, l. 444.
5 " " ll. 545-6
6 " " ll. 746-7
7 " " ll. 328-9
8 " " ll. 985-8
9 Masefield, Esther, p. 28
10 " " p.33
11 " " p. 36
12 " " p. 101
13 " " p. 32
14 " " p. 24
15 " " p. 21
16 " " p. 101
17 " " p. 102
18 " " p. 30
19 " " p. 23
20 Strachey, Books and Characters, p. 26

APPENDIX

A. A Consecration.

Not of the princes and prelates with periwigged
charioteers
Riding triumphantly laurelled to lap the fat of
the years---
Rather the scorned--the rejected--the men hemmed
in with the spears.

Not the ruler for me, but the ranker, the tramp
of the road,
The slave with the sack on his shoulders pricked
on with the goad,
The man with too weighty a burden, too weary a
load.

Theirs be the music, the colour, the glory, the
gold;
Mine be a handful of ashes, a mouthful of mould,
Of the maimed, of the halt and the blind in the
rain and the cold----
Of these shall my songs be fashioned, my tales
be told.

B. And he came lamenting in this manner even to the
gate of the palace: for no one clothed with sackcloth
might enter the king's court.

Then Esther's maids and her eunuchs went in, and
told her. And when she heard it she was in a con-
sternation: and she sent a garment, to clothe him, and
to take away the sackcloth: but he would not receive it.

And she called for Athach the eunuch, whom the
king had appointed to attend upon her, and she command-
ed him to go to Mardochai, and learn of him why he
did this.

And Athach going out went to Mardochai, who
was standing in the street of the city, before the
palace gate:

And Mardochai told him all that had happened.

-Esther IV, 2-7.

C. Allez: que tous les Juifs dans Suse repandus,
A prier avec vous jour et nuit assidus,
Me prétent de leurs vœux le secours salutaire,
Et pendant ces trois jours gardent un jeûne austère.
Déjà la sombre nuit a commencé son tour:
Demain, quand, le soleil rallumera le jour,
Contente de périr, s'il faut que je périsse,
J'irai pour mon pays m'offrir en sacrifice.

-Racine, Esther 11. 239-246.

Vade et congrega omnes Judaeos, quos in Susan repereris, et orate pro me. Non comedatis, et non bibatis tribus diebus, et tribus noctibus; et ego cum ancillis meis similiter jejunabo, et tunc ingrediar ad regem, contra legem faciens, non vocata, tradensque me morti et periculo.

-Esther IV. 16.

D.

The Prayer of Esther (Racine II. 247-292.)

O mon souverain roi,
Me voici donc tremblante et seule devant toi !
Mon père mille fois m'a dit dans mon enfance
Qu'avec nous tu juras une sainte alliance,
Quand, pour te faire un peuple agréable à tes yeux
Il plut à ton amour de choisir nos aïeux:
Même tu leur promis de ta bouche sacrée
Une postérité d'éternelle durée.
Hélas! ce peuple ingrat a méprisé ta loi;
La nation chérie a violé sa foi;
Elle a répudié son époux et son père,
Pour rendre à d'autres dieux un honneur adultère:
Maintenant elle sert sous un maître étranger.
Mais c'est peu d'être esclave, on la veut égorger:
Nos superbes vainqueurs, insultant à nos larmes,
Imputent à leurs dieux le bonheur de leurs armes,
Et veulent aujourd'hui qu'un même coup mortel
Abolisse ton nom, ton peuple, et ton autel.
Ainsi donc un perfide, après tant de miracles,
Pourrait anéantir la foi de tes oracles,
Ravirait aux mortels le plus cher de tes dons,
Le saint que tu promets et que nous attendons?
Non, non, ne souffre pas que ces peuples farouches
Ivres de notre sang, ferment les seules bouches
Qui dans tout l'univers célèbrent tes bienfaits;
Et confonds tous ces dieux qui ne furent jamais.
Pour moi, que tu retiens parmi ces infidèles,
Tu sais combien je hais leurs fêtes criminelles,
Et que je mets au rang des profanations
Leur table, leurs festins, et leurs libations;
Que même cette pompe où je suis condamnée,
Ce bandeau dont il faut que je paraisse ornée
Dans ces jours solennels à l'orgueil dédiés,
Seule et dans le secret je le foule à mes pieds;
Qu'à ces vains ornements je préfère la cendre,
Et n'ai de goût qu'aux pleurs que tu me vois répandre.
J'attendais le moment marqué dans ton arrêt,
Pour oser de ton peuple embrasser l'intérêt.
Ce moment est venu: ma prompte obéissance
Va d'un roi redoutable affronter la présence.

C'est pour toi que je marche; accompagne mes pas
Devant ce fier lion qui ne te connaît pas;
Commande en me voyant que son courroux's'apaise
Et prête a mes discours un charme qui lui plaise.
Les orages, les vents, les cieux te sont soumis:
Tourne enfin sa fureur contre nos ennemis.

Esther XIV

Domine mi, qui rex noster es solus, adjuva me
solitariam, et cujus praeter te nullus est auxiliator alius.
Periculum meum in manibus meis est.

Audivi a patre meo, quod tu Domine tulisses
Israel de cunctis gentibus, et patres nostros ex omnibus
retro majoribus suis, ut possideres haereditatem sempiternam,
fecistisque eis sicut locutus es.

Peccavimus in conspectu tuo, et idcirco tradidisti
nos in manus inimicorum nostrorum;

Coluimus enim deos eorum. Justus es, Domine.

Et nunc non eis sufficit, quod durissima nos
opprimunt servitute, sed robur manuum suarum idolorum
potentiae deputantes,

Volunt tua mutare promissa, et delere haeredi-
tatem tuam, et claudere ora laudantium te, atque extinguere
gloriam templis et altaris tui,

Ut aperiant ora gentium, et laudent idolorum
fortitudinem, et praedicent carnalem regem in sempiternum.

Ne tradas Domine, sceptrum tuum his, qui non sunt,
ne rideant ad ruinam nostram; sed converte consilium eorum
super eos, et cum qui in nos coepit saevire, disperde.

Memento, Domine, et ostende te nobis in tempore
tribulationis nostrae, et da mihi fiduciam, Domine, rex deorum,
et universae potestatis:

Tribue sermonem compositum in ore meo in conspectu
leonis, et transfer cor illius in odium hostis nostri, ut et
ipse pereat, et caeteri qui ei consentiunt.

Nos autem libera manu tua, et adjuva me, nullum
aliud auxilium habentem, nisi te, Domine, qui habes omnium
scientiam,

Et nosti quia oderim gloriam iniquorum, et detester
cubile incircumcisorum, et omnis alienigenae.

Tu scis necessitatem meam, quod abominer signum
superbiae et gloriae meae, quod est super caput meum in
diebus ostentationis meae, et detester illud quasi pannum
menstruatae, et non portem in diebus silentii mei,

Et quod non comederim in mensa Aman, nec mihi
placuerit convivium regis, et non biberim vinum libaminum;

Et nunquam laetata sit ancilla tua, ex quo huc
translata sum usque in praesentem diem, nisi in te, Domine
Deus Abraham.

Deus fortis super omnes, exaudi vocem eorum qui nullam aliam spem habent, et libera nos de manu iniquorum, et erue me a timore meo.

E.

Masefield's Version

O sovereign Lord, kept here among the pagans,
Thou knowest how I loathe their heathen rites;
Thou knowest that this crown, which I must wear
In solemn feasts, I spurn beneath my feet
When I'm alone, preferring ashes to it.
O Lord, I waited for Thy word to come.
Now has the moment come, and I obey;
I go to dare to stand before the King.
It is for Thee I go; Lord, come with me,
To this fierce lion who knows not Thy law;
Grant that he be not angry, let me charm him;
Lord, turn his rage against our enemies.

F.

Une noble pudeur à tout ce que vous faites
Donne un prix que n'ont point ni la pourpre
ni l'or.
Quel climat renfermait un si rare trésor?
Dans quel sein vertueux, avez-vous pris naissance?
Et quelle main si sage éleva votre enfance?
-Esther 11. 1017--1021.

G.

Once, when of old the Kings of Egypt followed,
With hosts of horse, our father as they fled,
God made the sea a road for us to tread,
Made the rock give us drink, the desert bread,
But smote our foes. His sea rose, they were
swallowed.
And as our fathers wandered then
God guided them to their desire
By a bright angel in the hearts of men,
And in the day by cloud and in the night by fire.
-Masefield Page 95.

H.

Racine uses the same figure in his chorus: (11.1208-14.)
J'ai vu l'impie adoré sur la terre
Pareil au cèdre, il cachait dans les cieux
son front audacieux;
Il semblait à son gré gouverner le tonnerre,
Foulaît aux pieds ses ennemis vaincus:
Je n'ai fait que passer; il n'était déjà plus.

I.

And in the Spring the birds fly to the west
Over those deserts that the mountains hem,
They fly to our dear land; they fly to nest;
We cannot go with them.

And in Springtime from the windows of the tower
I can see the wild horses in the plain,
Treading stately but so lightly that they never
break the flower,
And they fade at speed to west-ward and they
never come again.

And in Springtime at the quays the men of Tyre
Set their ships towards the west and hoist
their sail,
And our hearts cry "Take us with you to the
land of our desire!"
And they hear our cry but will not take the
crier:
The crying of a slave can be of no avail.
-Masfield, Esther, pp.20-21.

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