

ATHALIAH: A TRAGEDY

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Athaliah: A Tragedy by J. Donkersley

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J. DONKERSLEY

**ATHALIAH:
A TRAGEDY**

ATHALIAH:

A TRAGEDY,

INTENDED FOR READING ONLY,

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH BLANK VERSE,

FROM RACINE,

(A. GOMBERT'S EDITION, 1825.)

By J. DONKERSLEY.



HUDDERSFIELD.

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1873.

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PREFACE.

RACINE, the author of *Athalie* (*Athaliah*), flourished in the latter half of the 17th century. At his appearance, Corneille, the great French Dramatist, was in the full splendour of his fame, whose rival he was afterwards recognised to be. *Athalie* is a Tragedy in rhyme, consisting of six Iambic feet, similar to the Alexandrine verse found occasionally in our English poets at the termination of a sentence or paragraph. Dryden, and a few others of less note, in the reign of Charles II., introduced the rhyming drama to the English public; but the clank of its fetters was unpleasant to the British ear, which had become attuned to the freedom and majesty of blank verse. Blank verse, therefore, being our recognised vehicle of dramatic productions, has been employed in this translation. I did, however, intend in the first place to render the chorus into rhyme; but after maturer consideration it appeared to me that irregular blank verse would be more capable of tragic expression; and that it would also be more in harmony with the

Hebrew rhythm as represented by the scriptures, from which the plot was appropriated.

In carrying out my conception of what the translation ought to be, I have endeavoured to preserve the dignity of the subject, without sacrificing the freedom of dramatic force. It has, therefore, not been my aim to produce smooth monotonous numbers, but to harmonize the whole versification with the spirit and conditions of the theme.

I have retained several of the French names, on account of their measure and euphony. Joas and Joad I have, I believe, invariably versified as one syllable, and Baal also, with one exception, which occurs in the first page; these words, to my judgment, being scarcely of greater quantity than thought, wrought, brought, &c.

Should the reader realize the same amount of interest in the perusal of this translation that I have had in its production, I shall be amply rewarded for the genial labour bestowed upon it.

J. DONKERSLEY,

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HISTORICAL OUTLINE.

"ATHALIAH was the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, who exercised a sanguinary dominion over Israel, and both, (more especially Jezebel,) rendered their reign infamous by their worship of idols, and their cruel persecution of prophets. She had been espoused by Jehoram, king of Judah, son of Jehosaphat, and the seventh king of the race of David. His son, Ahaziah, seduced into idolatry, as well as Jehoram, by the example of Athaliah, after a reign of one year was put to death, together with all the princes of the house of Ahab, by Jehu, whom God had anointed by his prophets to reign over Israel, and to be the minister of his vengeance. Athaliah, irritated by the massacre of her family, undertook on her part to exterminate the royal race of David, and accordingly perpetrated the murder of all the children of Ahaziah, her own grandchildren, Joas, at that time an infant in the cradle, alone escaped the fury of her slaughtering sword: he was rescued by Jehosabeth, the half-sister of Ahaziah (being daughter of Jehoram by a different mother), and wife of the high-priest Joad. It is the establishment of this scion of David upon the throne of his ancestors that forms the subject of this drama."

Dramatis Personæ.

JOAS, King of Judah, son of Ochoziah.
ATHALIAH, widow of Joram, Joas's grandmother.
JOAD, the High-priest.
JOSABET, wife of the High-priest, and Joas's aunt.
ZACHARIAH, son of Joad and Josabet.
SALOMITH, Zachariah's sister.
ABNER, one of the principal officers of the kings of Judah.
AZARIAH, ISHMAEL, and three other priests and Levite chiefs.
MATHAN, apostate priest, pontiff of Baal.
NABAL, Mathan's confidant.
AGAR, a woman in Athaliah's suite.
Troupes of Levites and priests.
Nurse of Joad.
CHOIR, daughters of the tribe of Levi.

The Scene is in the Temple of Jerusalem, in a vestibule of the High-priest's apartment.

ATHALIAH.

—o—
ACT FIRST.—Scene I.
—o—

JOAD, ABNER.

ABNER.

TO worship the Eternal, yea, I come
Into his temple, come to celebrate,
According to our ancient, solemn use,
In company with you, the hallowed day
On which upon Mount Sinai unto us
The law was given. How changéd are the times !
No sooner did the sacred trumpet sound
That day's return, than holy people thronged
In multitudes the temple's porticos ;
And all in order 'fore the altar placed,
Bearing the fields' new-produce in their hands,
Those first-fruits offered up to the One God :
The sacrifices overtaxed the priests !

Stopping that concourse, an audacious woman
 Has changed those glorious days to days of gloom.
 Scarce a small number of true worshippers
 Dare give faint semblance of the ancient times;
 The rest have shewn a fatal thoughtlessness
 Towards their God, or worse, have even rushed
 To Baal's altars to initiate
 Themselves into his shameful mysteries;
 And curse the name their fathers have invoked,
 To speak right openly, I am in dread
 That Athaliah from the altar will
 Tear you, yourself; and casting off, at length,
 The remnants of her forced respect, complete
 On you her deadly vengeance.

JOAD.

Whence comes to-day this dark presentiment?

ABNER.

Think you that with impunity you can
 Be just and pure? since, for so long a time
 The queen has hated that rare constancy
 Which adds, in Joad, new splendour to his office;
 Since, for so long, your ardour for your faith
 Has been construed sedition and revolt.
 The jealous-minded queen hates, above all,
 The dazzling worth of Josabet, your wife.
 Though Joad is the successor of the priest—