THE LXX BOOK OF ESTHER AS A SATIRICAL DRAMA

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to show that the LXX book of Esther is to be read as a satirical drama. The paper will focus on the literary aspects of this narrative and will discuss the genre; sub-genres; characters and literary devices used in the narrative. It will be shown that when the book is read in the light of a Satire, it becomes possible that the author of LXX Esther never intended the book to be history. It will also be shown that satires have often had festivals such as Purim connected to them throughout history.

INTRODUCTION

The mere mention of the "book of Esther" can cause a variety of questions in scholarly circles today. The problems with the book of Esther are legion, and have been debated since shortly after its composition (Gordis 1981:359). Even though Esther was always read during Purim (the festival authorised by this book), in the Talmud (*b. Meg*. 7a & *b. Sanh*. 100a.) there is a question whether the book "*defiled the hands*".[1] Esther is the only part of the Hebrew Scriptures not present in the Qumran library (Fuerst 1975:41)[2] and the only Old Testament book not quoted in the New Testament (Laniak 1997:3). According to Mulder (1988:70), the fact that Esther is the only book not found at Qumran, and that Mordecai and Esther are absent from Ben Sira's list of biblical worthies in

[1] According to Mulder (1988:61), the term "defiled the hands" in fact meant that the book was inspired. The general feeling among the rabbi's was that Esther did not defile the hands (Mulder 1988:64). He further makes it clear that this does not mean that it was not a respected text.

[2] De Troyer (2000:2), however, notes that there are a small number of fragments which are referred to as "Esther fragments". She further states that their relationship to the Hebrew Esther scroll remains disputed.

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Sirach 44-49 (which was probably not written later than ± 180 BCE), suggests that Esther was one of the last books (maybe even the last) to be included in the Jewish canon.

Some of the problems of the book of Esther include the complete absence of the name of God in the Hebrew Esther; the cruelty exhibited by the Jews; the large number of additions in the Greek texts (LXX, A, L and Josephus) of Esther; the historicity of the book; the genre of the book; the origin of the book; and the relationship between the book of Esther and the origin of the Jewish feast of Purim.

This paper will be a literary study on the LXX text of Esther, in other words the so-called B-text of Esther (cf. Jobes 1995:1). This paper will perceive the LXX text as a literary unit in its own right and will not be concerned with its *Vorlage* or dependence. In this study it will be assumed (on the basis of studies on this problem) that the book of Esther is not to be seen as a historical account of events.[3] Furthermore, the history of the Jewish feast of Purim is obscure. There have been several attempts to link it with non-Jewish festivals held at the time of the composition of the book, in which the Jews participated.[4] It is,

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[3] Paton (1908:64) is of the opinion that the author intended the book to be history, because it begins with the conventional formula "*and it came to pass*". He does, however, not believe the book to be historical because there are so many unconfirmed and even contradictory statements in the book (1908:66). Some of the main problems are: 1) Herodotus' claim that during the 7th and 12th year of Xerxes' reign his queen was Amestris (cf. Her. vii. 114; ix. 112). 2) According to Esther the Persian Empire was divided into 127 satrapies, but Herodotus knows of only 20 (cf. Her. iii. 89), and the Achaemenian inscriptions name 27 (Moore 1975:70-71). Greenstein (1987:227) states that the lengths to which some scholars will go to try and defend the narrative as historical proves the weakness of their claim.

[4] The feast of Purim has been connected to Nicanor day (the victory of Judas Maccabees over Nicanor), but several facts suggest against this argument (Paton 1908:80-83). Paton further possibly links the feast to the Persian spring-festival, to the Persian New Year's festival, to the Persian feast *Farvardîgân*, to a Babylonian feast where Esther is connected to Ishtar, Mordecai to Marduk and Haman to Humban. For a very detailed study of all these possible origins of Purim and a critical discussion of each, consult Paton (1908:77-94)

however, noteworthy that according to the Palestinian Talmud (*P.T. Megilla* 1:4), there was at first a widespread resistance to the feast of Purim based on two reasons: 1) they felt that such a nationalistic feast would make them hated by foreigners, and 2) that one should not make additions to the Mosaic Law.[5] This, however, is not within the scope of this study.

This paper will discuss the genre of LXX Esther. Attention will be given to the various literary devices the author employed in this book. The hypothesis of this paper is that the author of the book of Esther never intended it to be history, and that it forms part of a completely different genre. Through the discussion of the sub-genres, characters and literary devices it will be shown that LXX Esther should be read and understood as a satirical drama.

THE PROBLEM

Greenstein (1987:225) correctly states that one of the most important influences on our responses to a story, are our expectations of what the story is supposed to be and what it is supposed to do. We cannot escape the fact that we bring to our reading certain presuppositions and interpretative strategies. Therefore, as a Christian, one would read the text different from a Jew since the book of Esther occupies a different place in the respective canons. In the Protestant Old Testament it takes its place in the chronological 'history' of Israel[6], while in the Jewish Scriptures Esther's position is determined by its function in the Jewish liturgy. In the Jewish canon Esther counts not so much for its real place in

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5 The feast of Purim is the only Jewish festival not instituted in the Torah (Mulder 1988:68).

6 Gunkel (1928:16) stated on the possibility of Esther being a historical narrative: "It cannot be read by a Christian or a non-Jew without great distaste, for it fires up intense Jewish nationalism, celebrates anti-Gentile Jewish vengeance, and promulgates Purim, a festival that means nothing to the church".

history, as for its function as the proof text and publicity for Purim (Greenstein 1987:226).

The artistic devices and literary superiority of Esther have long been recognised (Gordis 1976:44). The author of Esther employed a great deal of literary devices very successfully. Wills (1995:2) argue that Greek Esther falls within the genre of Jewish novels and was likely to have been perceived as fiction before being canonised. According to Wills (1995:3) the authors of these Jewish novels used many techniques and motifs in their works. These include a hint of history, importance of place, grave dangers (often to the Jews as a group), the depiction of emotion, and woman characters. All of these techniques and motifs mentioned by Wills (1995) can definitely be found in Esther. One must, however, readily admit that these motifs are definitely not limited to such an independent genre. In this paper it will be argued that while LXX Esther definitely falls into the wide genre of prose, the literary devices such as irony, comedic hyperbole, parody, antitheses, etc. are so overwhelming that the genre should be understood as a satire.

THE NARRATIVE

DEFINITIONS

NOVEL

"Derived from the Italian *novella* 'tale, piece of news', and now applied to a wide variety of writings whose only common attribute is that they are extended pieces of prose fiction … It is a form of story of prose narrative containing characters, action, and incident, and, perhaps a plot. The subject matter of the novel eludes classification" (Cuddon 1999:560-561).

NOVELLA

"Originally a *novella* was a kind of short story, a narrative in prose. It is a

fictional narrative of indeterminate length (a few pages to two or three hundred), restricted to a single event, situation or conflict, which produces an element of suspense and leads to an unexpected turning point so that the conclusion surprises even while it is a logical outcome. Many *Novellen* contain a concrete symbol which is the heart of the narrative" (Cuddon 1999:600).

SATIRE

"The satirist is a kind of self-appointed guardian of standards, ideals and truth; of moral as well as aesthetic values. He is a man (woman satirists are *very* rare) who takes it upon himself to correct, censure and ridicule the follies and vices of society and thus to bring contempt and derision upon aberrations from a desirable and civilized norm. Thus satire is a kind of a protest, a sublimation and refinement of anger and indignation … The history of Greek satire begins with the early Greek poets Archilochus (7th century BCE), and Hipponax (6th century BCE). The greatest satirist of Greece was, however, Aristophanes (448-380 BCE)" (Cuddon 1999:780-781).

SATIRIC COMEDY

A form of comedy usually dramatic, whose purpose is to expose, censure and ridicule the follies, vices and shortcomings of society, and individuals who represent that society. It is often closely akin to burlesque, farce, and comedy of manners (Cuddon 1999:785).

GENRE

It is uncertain whether the book of Esther existed in some form before its adoption as the Purim text, or whether it was from the beginning connected to Esther. Greenstein (1987:226) makes it clear that the story of Esther was not canonised and read in the synagogue except as the Purim text, and that it was always heard within the context of Jewish communal festivity.

According to Greenstein (1987:226), the book of Esther has always been taken with a lack of seriousness that can be attributed to the constant *Sitz im*

Leben of a festive celebration. We have evidence that from around the Medieval times Jews have customarily observed Purim by having satirical plays of the Esther tale (Greenstein 1987:231). Scholars like Dommerhausen (1968:128-133) have imagined that the biblical story itself originated in this way. Greenstein (1987:227), however, states: "But whether the Esther narrative began in ritual drama or not, historical Jewish celebration of Purim would readily find in Esther a reflex of its own activities".

Wills (1995) in his book *The Jewish novel in the ancient world* address the fact that we have some Old Testament books that do not fit into the biblical categories of history, prophecy, wisdom, etc. He discusses Daniel, Tobit, Esther, Judith, and Joseph and Aseneth in this book. He argues (1995:1) that between 200 BCE and 100 CE Jewish authors wrote many entertaining narratives, which were probably considered "fictional"[7] and were prose writings that involved a new reading experience. According to Wills (1995:4) the increase of literacy during the Hellenistic age is the key reason for the creation of the Jewish novel within Jewish literature. He states: "The Jewish novels arose from storytelling traditions that were mainly oral, influenced by Persian traditions, and also from the interpretation of biblical precedents, but we are here following the evolution of these narratives into an era of a new written literature" (1995:5).

The author of this paper agrees with Wills (1995) in the reason for the development of this type of Jewish literature, but the definitions given above seem to point more in the direction of a satire or at the very least a novella. The discussion will now turn to the sub-genres within the text of Esther.

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[7] Fiction: the general term for invented stories, usually applied to novels, short stories, novellas, romances, fables, and other narrative works in prose, even though most plays and narrative poems are also fictional. The adjective "fictitious" tends to carry the unfavourable sense of falsehood, whereas "fictional" is more neutral (Baldick 2004: 96).

DREAM

Addition A is an artificial apocalypse according to Wills (1995:117) that does not arise of the rich ancient Near Eastern visionary traditions. It merely gives a notice of the rousing adventures to come. They serve the same function as did dreams and oracles in Greek novels (Baldick 2004:72). In Daniel 6 and Genesis 41, however, we find that dreams were also used to warn Jews of possible disasters.

LETTERS/DECREES[8]

The decree of the king in Addition B describes a difficult situation for the Jews. The position of Haman is described in great detail while the "obstinacy" of the Jews are exaggerated and made to sound like a capital crime (B:5). Addition E is the text of the counter edict. In this edict the role of Mordecai is weighty, his descriptions as a saviour and benefactor were public terms for the role of the patron of a city. The serious misconduct of the Jews in B:5 is now countered in E:15-16.

PRAYERS

Addition C serves to represent more the piety of the two protagonists Esther and Mordecai. Wills (1995:120) state that the insertion of prayers was common in the literature of this period (Hellenistic). The prayer of Mordecai is quite different from the prayer of Esther. While the prayer of Mordecai is more universal the prayer of Esther is a personal appeal.

COURT LEGEND

According to Wills (1990:153-192) the Court Legend is the original source of the book of Esther, and can therefore be seen interweaved in the narrative as we have it today. The court conflict was constructed around the fortunes of two

[8] According to De Troyer (2000:276) the same terminology and imagery found in the LXX Esther decrees can be found in the decrees of Antiochus IV Epiphanes and Antiochus V Eupator. De Troyer (2000:276) further states that LXX Esther made use of these decrees.

courtiers – Mordecai the wise, and Haman the foolish. This source/legend is in some ways similar to the *Onkhsheshonq,*[9] the tale of *Ahiqar* and Daniel 1-6 (Wills 1995:109).

CHARACTERS

Mordecai is mostly portrayed as quiet and does not speak directly once. He is the wise courtier, and appears to be the main character. The king himself summoned Mordecai himself to participate in the court. Mordecai is later portrayed as the king's right hand. Mordecai is presented as a high-priestly figure in line with Jonathan and Simon. It is noteworthy that in the A text (from 7:14-41) the emphasis of the narrative changes significantly to Mordecai. He is the one who asks the king to destroy Haman's letter, he is the deliverer of the nation and writes a letter after the edict of the king (De Troyer 2000:396). **Esther** is introduced as a multifaceted character that develops from timid and withdrawn to bold and assertive. The prominent role of the woman is used to emphasise the vulnerable state of the Jewish nation. They need to hide their nationality to fit in, and will always be scared to approach the ruling party. In the A text (7:14-41) Esther has no role in the destruction of Haman's letter, and thus is not the deliverer of her people. She does, however, still punish her enemies (De Troyer 2000:396). **Haman** is introduced as a cunning, overambitious courtier who is overwhelmed by hatred for one man, Mordecai. Although Mordecai and Haman never speak to one another, the silence of Mordecai seems to be at the centre of many dramatic scenes (Wills 1995:114). He is the Macedonian10, the model of the threat from the West. **Ahasueros** is introduced pompously, and in a humorous style (1:1-2). His reign and his wealth are described in exaggeration. He is not described as very intelligent,

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[9] A Persian-era narrative from Egypt.

[10] This name-calling is a stylistic technique called 'invective'. It is closely associated with satire, lampoon and caricature (Cuddon 1999:425).

since he often needs advice in supposedly difficult situations11. He, however, keeps a good distance from the evil elements of the scenario. He is also portrayed as having a good relationship with Esther (from chapter 8 onwards it becomes obvious in the I-you discourse).

STRUCTURE

The macrostructure of LXX Esther:

I. Mordecai's Dream	A 1-11
II. Partial fulfilment of dream	A 12-17
III. Complete fulfilment of dream	1:1 – 10:3
A. Frame Prologue	1:1-3
B. Novella Proper	1:4-9:19
1. Exposition	1:4-2:23
2. Complication	3:1-15 + B 1-7
3. Plan and 2 New Complications	4:1-C/D-5:24
4. Crisis Major / Pivot	6:1-5
5. Dénouement: Peripety	6:6-E-8:14
6. Triple Conclusion	8:15-9:19
C. Aetiology	9:20-31
D. Frame Epilogue	10:1-3
IV. Mordecai's Dream Interpreted	F 1-6a
V. Homily	F 6b-9
VI. Final 7-part Command	F 10

[11] This is also known as "burlesque" which refers to ridiculous exaggeration in language, usually one which makes the discrepancy between the words and the situation or the character silly. For example, to have a king speak like an idiot or a workman who speaks like a king (especially, say, in blank verse) is burlesque (Johnston 1998).

LITERARY DEVICES

NARRATIVE HOOK

The dream that we find in Addition A serve as a narrative hook, in other words it catches the attention of the readers in order for them to continue reading. The readers get hints of what directions the story will take. The dream offers a symbolic version of the conflict between Haman and Mordecai. Moore (1973:288) says that the symbolism in the dream can be traced to Egypt, Persia, Babylonia and Israel itself. By means of the "mysterious" dream, the author hooks his audience. Wills (1995:117) compare the function of the dream with the oracle in the beginning of Xenophon's story *An Ephesian tale*.

FRAMING DEVICE/INCLUSIO

The dream in Addition A, and the interpretation of the dream in Addition F forms a frame around the whole narrative. Within this frame, the author introduced all the characters, the basic plot, and the ultimate purpose of the narrative – the reversal of the position of the Diaspora Jew.

DELIBERATE HISTORICAL DISCREPANCIES

According to Berlin (2001:7) it is a literary device to say that your story is true and to offer proof. She further states that the author of Esther was imitating the writing style of historical writings such as 1 and 2 Kings. Berlin (2001:7) further states that the annals in Esther have the same functionality as the pea at the end of Hans Christian Andersen's story *The princess and the pea.*[12] We thus find an air of historicity in the text, but in 2:6 the text gives itself away when it says that Mordecai was exiled by Nebuchadnezzar with the Judean king Jeconiah, which implies the date 598 BCE, which is more than a century before Xerxes I began to rule.

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[12] That story closes with the words: "So the Prince took her for his wife, for now he knew that he had a true princess; and the peas was put in the museum, and it is there now, unless someone has carried it off. Look you, this is a true story." Hans Christian Andersen, *Stones and tales* (Cambridge: Hurd & Houghton, 1871:179).

COMEDIC HYPERBOLE

It has been shown that the lavish descriptions of the Persian Empire that we find in the Book Esther are no different from what contemporary authors said about Persia (Berlin 2001:10). It is however obvious exaggeration when the 20 satrapies of Xerxes (footnote 1) are increased to 127 (1:3). Other examples are the banquet the king held for 184 days (1:4); the twelve month preparation of the beauty contestants13 (2:12); Haman offers the king 10 000 talents of silver to exterminate the Jews (3:9); Haman erects a pole of 50 cubits14 tall to impale Mordecai (5:14).15

DUALITY

According to Polish (1999:86) the most striking feature of the book of Esther is its constant doubleness. Almost all the key events of the plot are repeated at least once. Firstly we find two banquets in the beginning of the story – one by Ahasueros (1:3-4), and one by Vashti (1:9-10). The relationship between Mordecai and Esther are given twice, once in 2:7 and again in 2:15. The plot to kill the king is heard by Mordecai in A13, 2:22 and mentioned again in 6:2. The refusal of Mordecai to bow before Haman is related in 3:2 and 3:5. The lots cast by Haman to choose the date for the execution of the Jews are given in 3:7-8 and 9:24. In 5:14 and 7:9 Haman builds the pole on which to impale Mordecai, and Esther intervenes in 7:1-6 and 8:3. Haman is then killed on the pole erected for Mordecai in 7:10 and 9:25. Mordecai and Esther both sent out letters to observe Purim (9:20 and 9:29), and the festival is to be held on two days (9:21).[16] Typically these doubled scenes have been explained by scholars as the

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[13] The Peshitta reads “days” instead of “months”.

[14] The equivalent in the metrical system would be 22.25m.

[15] This ridiculous exaggeration can also be labeled as “caricature” which refers to the technique of exaggerating for comic and satiric effect one particular feature of the target, to achieve a grotesque or ridiculous effect. (Johnston 1998)

[16] There are other lesser motifs and narrative elements that occur in repetitions or pairs, i.e. Esther finds favour in the eyes of others in 2:9, by all who saw her in 2:15 and with Ahasueros in 2:17; upon hearing the decree of Haman the Jews fast twice in 4:4

result of the author's composing the text from two or more sources, one about Mordecai and one about Esther (cf. Dommerhausen 1968:26 and Humphreys 1973:214). Only recently have scholars begun to interpret these doubled scenes as a literary device. Polish (1999:90) sees the enormous amount of doubleness in the book as a suggestion that Mordecai and Haman are *Doppelgängers*, in other words two sides of the same character or person. Greenstein (1987:237), on the other hand, sees the doubleness as a reference to the main theme of the book namely the problem of dual loyalty all Jews in a Diaspora situation have to face. This paper argues for the suggestion by Greenstein, since in the opinion of the author, Mordecai and Haman are portrayed as true adversaries especially in the light of the two dragons in Mordecai's dream, and not as mere two facets of a single persona. Furthermore, the argument by Polish (1999:90-103) that the events in Esther can be related to the phenomenon of the "substitute king" is not convincing. Neither one of his two personae – Mordecai and Haman – ever really plans to take over the kingship from Ahasueros. In one place (6:6-9) the suggestion of Haman to honour the man with the king's horse, his attire and his crown are interpreted as such an attempt by Polish. However, in the festival of the substitute king the man who is paraded in this fashion is the one who was killed. Moreover, the substitute king never asked for the "honour". In the festival the substitute king was usually a criminal or slave (Van der Leeuw 1963:124).

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and 4:16; Esther dispatches Hatach to carry messages to her uncle twice in 4:5 and 4:10, and Mordecai's response is conveyed twice in 4:9 and 4:13-14; King Ahasueros extends his scepter to Esther in 5:6-7 and 7:1-2; Esther has two names – Esther and Hadassah (2:7); The prospective consorts of the king gathered on two occasions (2:19) and are housed in two harems (2:14); The royal chronicles are referred to in 2:23 and in 6:1-2; The king asks Esther what she desires on four occasions (5:3, 6; 7:12 and 9:12) and the identical phrase '*even to half the kingdom and it shall be done*' are used in the last two; The king tells Haman to hurry in 5:5 and 6:10; The phrase '*but on booty, they laid not their hands*' is repeated in 9:10 and 9:15 when the Jews wreak their vengeance.

IRONY

The irony in the book of Esther seems usually to be at the expense of Haman. Haman seeks to harm (3:6) the man who has saved the king from those who wished to harm him (2:21). He cast lots to fix the date for killing the Jews on the eve of the Jewish holiday of redemption – *Pesah* (3:7). When the king asks to see Haman to consult on the best way to honour Mordecai, he is already in the court to ask permission to hang the same man (6:6-10). When the queen invites Haman to her banquet (5:4) he believes he is to be renowned, but then he falls on the queen after being exposed (7:6) and the king thinks that he is advancing on his wife (7:8). Lastly, the 50 cubit-high pole Haman erected to impale Mordecai (5:14), is to be his own death in 7:10.

ANTITHESIS

The king in Esther, Ahasueros, seems to be an antithesis to the character of Israel's former wise king, Solomon. Both of these kings reign over many countries – Ahasueros from India to Nubia (Esther 1:1), and Solomon from the River Euphrates to Gaza (1 Kings 5:1, 4). Solomon, however, sought wisdom rather than glory and wealth (1 Kings 3:13), while Ahasueros boasts of his glorious wealth in Esther 1:4 and seems to lack wisdom.

EPITHETS

Mordecai and Haman are repeatedly referred to as "the Jew" and "the evil" respectively. Furthermore, Ahasueros, Vashti, Esther and even Shushan are represented as "king", "queen", and "city" or "citadel" respectively. These characters can stand for virtually universal types (Greenstein 1987:230). Ahasueros is portrayed as the stupid king that needs advice for several problems (Esther 1:13), and whom is merely a puppet in the war between Mordecai and Haman; Esther is portrayed as a lovely and modest queen, and heroine in the eyes of her people.

MYTHICAL NAMES

Even though the reasons are not clear, one cannot deny the obvious similarity

between the names of the main characters of this story and Babylonian deities. Mordecai is easily related to Marduk, Esther with Ishtar and Haman with Humban. It is noteworthy that Humban is associated with the Mesopotamian deity Enlil. Marduk absorbed the powers and prerogatives of Enlil at the expense of Enlil's prestige (Van Reeth 1994:73-74, 110, 120, 156).

BIBLICAL MOTIFS/THEMES

We have several parallels between Esther and the Joseph story in Genesis, another story of a Jew rising to a high position in a foreign court (Greenstein 1987:229). Greenstein (1987:229) do find several other parallels in the book of Esther.[17] The author of this paper, however, is of the meaning that these were used to give further credibility to this book (in other words to make it sound more authentic). These occurrences are thus deliberate usage by the author of Esther rather than mere parallels.

PLOT TWIST/REVERSAL

The miraculous transformation of the king's anger to solicitousness in Addition D:8 is without a doubt the dramatic climax in this story. Until this point, the plan of Haman to annihilate the Jews was going according to plan. Now in Chapter 6, soon after he erected the silly 50 cubit pole, the king calls him to honour not him – but the man he planned to hang! Mysteriously, the king struggles with insomnia on this specific night; for some reason he reads the royal annals when he cannot sleep, and above all his eyes will fall on the name of Mordecai. Esther's role changes from passive to active. Mordecai moves into the centre of the court as prime minister while Haman is not only moved out but executed. The Edict sent out in Addition B is now reversed or amended in

[17] The report in Esther 2:6 seems lifted from Jeremeiah 29:1, the prophet's letter to the Babylonian Diaspora; Ahasueros's edict to all husbands in Esther 1:22 appears to adapt Nehemiah 13:23-24; Sending food parcels to neighbours in Esther 9:22 probably derives from Nehemiah 8:10-12; while the words of well-being and faithfulness embodied in Esther's letter in Esther 9:30 recall Zechariah 8:19.

Addition E. The device of reversal is indeed central to the Esther narrative. It forms the climax of the plot, but it also signifies one of the key features of the festival associated with this satire, Purim.

OMNISCIENCE

The author of the book of Esther somehow knew things that only the person involved could have known. For example, in Esther 6:6 we read that "Haman said to himself"; Esther 2:15 relates how "Esther bore grace in the eyes of all who saw her"; in Esther 2:22 "the matter becomes known to Mordecai" in some miraculous way.

CONCLUSION

The Jewish tradition of observing Purim in a carnival atmosphere, with people wearing masks, playing out satirical plays and drinking to excess[18] certainly fits with the understanding of Esther as a satirical drama well. The book of Esther appears to be a satire on the real anxieties of Jews living as a minority in a largely non-Jewish society. The Jews in the time of the book of Esther, and consequently every year during Purim, are fantasising about a circumstance where the majority or adversaries would want to act Jewish.

By means of a text where everything is turned upside down (the minority is appointed in important positions; the king even favours a Jewish wife; a certain disaster is turned around), the Diaspora Jews created a festival where they could forget all their troubles and their difficult situation. The endless search for the accurate Pagan festival that constitutes the origin of Purim seems almost unnecessary. Most of the New Year celebrations of the ancient Near East

[18] The Babylonian Talmud (*Megilla* 7b) reads "A man is obligated to drink on Purim until he does not know 'Cursed is Haman' from 'Blessed is Mordecai'". The Palestinian Talmud (*Tosafot* to *b. Megilla* 7b) adds "Cursed is Zeresh, Blessed is Esther, Cursed are all the Wicked, Blessed are all the Jews".

entailed activities much like these described in Esther (Paton 1908:77-94).

The oldest extant satiric text dates to the beginning of the second millennium BCE (*The satire of the trades*), from Egypt, while the next dates to the late second millennium BCE (*Papyrus Anastasi I*). Moreover, Roman satire dates to the sixth century BCE, and while the Greeks did not have a word for them, cynicism and parody were used. It is therefore not in the least impossible that these types of literature could have been known by the author of Esther.

LXX Esther is a translation of a Hebrew original (De Troyer 2000:396). We, therefore, cannot try to prove that the LXX version is a satirical drama without admitting that the Masoretic Esther also has a satirical undertone. The translator and re-worker of LXX Esther, however, made many additions and changed the nuances of the text. We base the dating of the text (103-76 BCE) on the study by Bickerman (1944:339-362), where he argues that LXX Esther came into existence in Jerusalem during the time of Alexander Janneus (based on the colophon of LXX Esther). Ptolemeus XII Auletos was the king during that time and sought alliance with the Jews primarily because he lacked support from Rome. The Romans are placed under the pseudonym "the Macedonian". De Troyer (2000:399) concludes that the LXX of Esther was written for a Jewish public.

The author of LXX Esther used various literary devices, characters and sub-genres to attack the position of the Diaspora Jew within his or her community by using the weapon of wit.

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