



Absalom and Achitopel

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Introduction

Absalom and Achitopel is a heroic satire written by a great English poet and playwright John Dryden. It was written in heroic couplets and first published in 1681. This poem is direct response to a political crisis faced by King Charles II. From 1679 to 1681. It is also known as “ Exclusion crisis”. The King’s opponents in Parliament tried to exclude Charle’s brother James from the succession on the grounds that acknowledged as the finest political satire in English language “. It is also described as an allegory regarding contemporary political events’.

About John Dryden

John Dryden was an English poet. Literary critic, translator and playwright who was appointed England’s first poet laureate in 1668. He wrote a large number of works. After John Donne and John Milton, John Dryden was the greatest English poet of the 17th century. After William Shakespeare and Ben Johnson he was the greatest playwright. Among his major works inclu’d “All for love” ‘Don Sebastian’. ‘The Conquest of Granada’ ‘Mac Elecknoc’. The Medal’ and ‘ Absalom and Achitopel ‘.

Historical Background and Political Background

The restoration of England Monarchy began in 1660. Before restoration, Oliver Cromwell was ruling over England. During these several years, there was no monarchy in England. In 1610 English, Scotch and Irish monarchies were all restored under Charles II

In 1681 in England. Charles II was in his advanced years and had no legitimate heirs. It was not liked by people because of his intense meline towards Roman Catholics. On the other hand. James Scott; the illegitimate son of King Charles and the Duke of Monmouth was very popular for his personal charisma and his favour for the Protestants. Moreover, there was also a prevailing tussel among the wighs and Tories.

When Charles health suffers, there was a panic in the House of common over the chances of the nation being ruled by a Roman Catholic king. People were eager to see Duke of Monmouth as their future. King but according to the low of Succession, he could not rule the nation wigha ignited the fire of rebellion against King Charles. The James Scott was manipulated by Carl of Shaftesbury to rebel against his father. The James scoff was caught preparing to rebel and this lead to his execution in 1685.

Political and Allegorical Satire

Satire is a form of literature, the purpose of which is to form of literature, the purpose of which is to reform human weakness, vices or fully in order to bring about social change “ Absalom and Achitopel “ is a landmark political satire written by a great satirist of his age. John Dryden it is generally acknowledged as the finest political satire in English language. It is also described as an allegory regarding contemporary political events.

Satire on English people:

In "Absalom and Achitophel". Dryden satirizes the English people for their whims and fickleness. They were not satisfied with the King. They always complained about the King. After the death of Oliver Cromwell, his son Richard became the king but people were dissatisfied with him and dethroned him. They called Charles who was living in exile and made him the king of England. But soon they were motivated to build the Republic destroying monarchy. This, the English people are whimsical and fickle minded.

"The Jews (English people) a headstrong, moody, murmuring race". Here he satires on English people.

Satire on Parliament:

Dryden also satirizes Parliament's exclusion recommended the exclusion of James II from the line of succession and wanted the Duke of Monmouth as the succession of King Charles. The king opposed and dissolved the Parliament

Satire on Politicians

Dryden in the poem satirizes politicians. Achitophel stands for the first earl of Shaftesbury. He was the leader of anti-royalist group. He had decided either to rule a state or to ruin the country. He planned to defy the authority of the king. He needed a leader of the revolt against the king. He felt that the Duke of Monmouth, would be a suitable leader of the revolt. This is a bit of sharp satire on Politicians.

Dryden represented Shaftesbury as hypocrite. We found Shaftesbury a smooth talker and with his capability, he convinced Duke of Monmouth to go against his father.

Satire on Religion

In 17th century England, religion played a big role in ruling the country and politics and religion were closely related to each other. Both Protestant Christians and their rival Roman Catholic were in a cock fight to grab the power of the country.

Dryden also attacked Protestant group. The Protestant group was in fear that if James, the brother of King Charles II, came to the throne then Roman Catholics would be beneficial and would be in power.

Thus Absalom and Achitophel remains the greatest political satire in English literature, partly because of its judicious and moderate satire partly because of its depiction of the follies and vices that prevails in contemporary society.

Absalom and Achitophel is a retelling of a story from the Bible 'David' the king of Israel has many sons from many wives and concubines' There sons, however are not of royal birth and thus cannot legally legitimated sons. Absalom is the most loved and admired by both the Jews and his father. David is filled with "secret joy" as he watches Absalom grow into a respected man and in his son. David sees his own "youthful image". David's reign is peaceful and quiet but the Jews "a headstrong, moody, murmuring race". Begin to desire moral liberty.

The Jebusites, who are native to Israel, begin to lose their rights. Their taxes are increased. Their land is seized and their gods and religion are discredited. The Jebusites in a clandestine plan infiltrate all areas of Israel including the courts and brothers. Looking for converts. The Jebusite plot makes major waves within the government and the people begin to rise up and rebel against David some even oppose David from within the government and the people begin to rise up and rebel against David some even oppose David from within the government and the most influential of these men is "Achitophel". Achitophel wants to either completely take over the government or destroy it. And he pretends to be friend. David to accomplish just that.

Absalom stokes Israel's discontent and tells everyone that David is a Jebusite The Jews have a history of announcing a new king every 20 years. Achitophel knows that he can never be king, but he wants it to be Absalom

Achitophel begins by publicly hailing Absalom's birth as royal. He claims Absalom will be the Jews "Savior" Absalom's popularity soars. Achitophel flatters Absalom with compliment of his superior's virtue. Absalom is flattered by Achitophel's words. David is a good king, Absalom says he is kind and merciful. David gives Absalom everything except his crown and

has already told Absalom everything, except his crown and has already told Absalom that he would give it to him if he could. The Crown is however, “Justly destined for a worthier head”.

After, David The crown moves to David’s brother still Absalom does wish he had been born into royalty, so he could rightfully assert his own claim to crown. But to desire, power that rightfully belongs to another, Absalom says, is a “god like din”, The people have a right to choose their own king, Achitophel says, and they do not want David’ s brother.’

To realize, his plan, Achitophel joins the various “malcontents” of Israel to one final end to strip David of his power and give it to Absalom. Everywhere Achitophel and Absalom go. Absalom is received with love and admiration. Despite this public opposition, however there are still loyal men who stand by David. These loyal men inform David of Absalom’s ambition and Achitophel’s deceit and finally having grown impatient David addresses the people of Israel.

David tells the people that he has allowed his role as a father to cloud his judgement and as a king, but he will now show them, that he is not good. David is not afraid to draw his sword if he must and he reminds the Jews. If the Jews want a fight. David is ready, he will strike them down As David speaks thunder rocks the sky and every Jews knows their rightful King.

Conclusion

Thus Absalom and Achitophel depicts the political struggle in England at that time. The only intention of Dryden to write this poem are to support King Charles II. The King himself asked Dryden to write a poem satirising the party and particularly it’s leader Shaftesbury. This poem perfectly depicts the existing crisis and political issues of the contemporary England

