

How does Achitophel persuade Absalom to stand against his father?

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Absalom and Achitophel (1681) is a political satirical poem by John Dryden (1631-1700). In this poem, Dryden uses a Biblical story to show real political events of his time. King David represents King Charles II, Absalom represents the Duke of Monmouth, and Achitophel represents the Earl of Shaftesbury. Achitophel is a clever but dangerous man. He uses words like weapons. He slowly and cleverly persuades Absalom to rebel against his own father, King David. Dryden shows how ambition and flattery can destroy loyalty and peace.

Achitophel's Clever and Corrupt Mind: Achitophel is shown as a very intelligent man, but his intelligence is used for evil purposes. He understands human weakness very well. He knows that Absalom is brave, handsome, and popular, but also proud and ambitious. So, Achitophel plans to use these weaknesses. Dryden says Achitophel has a sharp brain but a crooked heart:

"A daring pilot in extremity."

This means Achitophel is bold and fearless, even in dangerous situations. He is ready to risk everything to gain power. His clever mind helps him plan the rebellion very carefully.

Flattering Absalom's Pride: First, Achitophel flatters Absalom again and again. He tells him that people love him more than King David. He reminds Absalom of his beauty, youth, and charm. He says the people already see him as a future king. He makes Absalom feel special and proud. Dryden warns us against pride and says it is a great sin.

"Desire of greatness is a god-like sin."

Achitophel fills Absalom's heart with pride. Slowly, Absalom starts to believe that he deserves the throne.

Questioning David's Rule: After flattering Absalom, Achitophel targets King David's rule. He does not openly insult the king. Instead, he speaks gently and wisely. He says David is old and weak. He says the nation needs a young and energetic ruler. Achitophel suggests that the country is in danger under David's rule. He says that people are unhappy and want change. In this way, he creates doubt in Absalom's mind about his own father. In reality, Achitophel wants the power himself. Dryden writes that Achitophel is:

"Resolv'd to ruin or to rule the state."

This shows how some men use others to get power.

Using the Issue of Illegitimacy: One of Achitophel's strongest tricks is the issue of Absalom's birth. Absalom is not a lawful son. Achitophel tells him that this should not stop him from becoming king. He argues that merit is more important than birth. He says nature itself has marked Absalom as a ruler. Achitophel makes Absalom forget the law and think only about his strength and popularity.

Creating Fear and Urgency: Achitophel then creates fear in Absalom's heart. He says that if Absalom does not act now, his enemies will destroy him. He warns that once David dies, others may seize power. He presents rebellion as self-defense. This makes Absalom feel that rebellion is not a crime, but a necessity.

Absalom's Weak Resistance: At first, Absalom is gentle and loyal. He loves his father and does not want rebellion. But Achitophel's words slowly poison his mind. His ambition grows stronger than his loyalty. Dryden shows Absalom as a good man led astray by bad advice.

To sum up, Achitophel persuades Absalom through flattery, fear, false logic, and clever speech. He uses Absalom's pride, popularity, and ambition to turn him against his own father. Dryden clearly shows that rebellion does not begin with swords, but with words.