

How does Dryden ridicule the contemporary English society/people in “Absalom and Achitophel?”

Writer: John Dryden | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

How does Dryden ridicule the contemporary English society/people in “Absalom and Achitophel?”

John Dryden (1631-1700) uses satire in “Absalom and Achitophel” (1681) to make fun of the English people and politics of his time. He writes about real events using Bible characters. The poem laughs at the foolish actions of leaders and people. Through this, Dryden shows how society was full of greed, lies, and bad decisions.

Blind Public: The people of Israel are depicted as blind in this poem. Dryden calls them,

*“The Jews, a headstrong, moody, murm'ring race,...
No king could govern, nor no God could please;”*

These lines mock the English people. It shows that they were not calm or wise. They often followed anyone who gave them hope, even if it was false.

False Leaders: Dryden attacks dishonest leaders like Achitophel. He shows how these leaders pretend to care for the people but only want power. Achitophel speaks sweet words to Absalom and tricks him. Dryden is talking about real politicians, like Shaftesbury, who tried to use Monmouth to gain power. These men had no loyalty or truth. The poet writes that Achitophel is:

“Resolv'd to ruin or to rule the state.”

Corrupt Judges:

Dryden also shows how the law became a joke. The poet says that Shimei, a thief, becomes a magistrate. He frees traitors and jails good people. This is Dryden's way of mocking the legal system in England. It shows that the courts were ruled by liars who served politics, not justice.

In short, Dryden uses wit and irony to show how silly and selfish people had become. They forgot the truth and followed lies. Bad leaders and false judges made things worse. Through this poem, Dryden warns the English people not to destroy peace with foolish choices and fake hopes.

LxNotes