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Negative Portrayals of Poles in Elizabethan Literature

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Abstract of the Thesis

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Poles and Poland were culturally marginalized and viewed in an increasingly negative light in Elizabethan writing. This was due mainly to differences of views of government and trade between England and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the second half of the sixteenth century. Whereas the former continued to maintain a hereditary monarchy, the latter developed and practiced a form of elective monarchy, the existence of which the Elizabethans viewed as a threat to their own society. The Poles, in turn, protested the English selling arms to Russia and seizing Spanish ships at the port of Danzig, which they viewed as a threat to their security. Although English writers and nobility openly recognized Poland as a fellow member of Western Christendom, they responded by willfully ignoring and portraying the Poles as a violent and politically and culturally immature people.

Table of Contents

Negative Portrayals of Poles in Elizabethan Literature.....	1
Works Cited.....	33

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Negative Portrayals of Poles in Elizabethan Literature

Poles and Poland were culturally marginalized and viewed in an increasingly negative light in Elizabethan writing. This was mainly due to major differences of views of government and trade between England and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the second half of the sixteenth century. Whereas the former continued to maintain a hereditary monarchy, the latter developed and practiced a form of elective monarchy, the existence of which the Elizabethans viewed as a threat to their own society. The Poles, in turn, protested the English selling arms to Russia and seizing Spanish ships at the port of Danzig, which they viewed as a threat to their security. Although English writers and nobility openly recognized Poland as a fellow member of Western Christendom, they responded by willfully ignoring and portraying the Poles as a violent and politically and culturally immature people.

Before examining depictions of Poles in English literature during the reign of Elizabeth I, a brief summary of Anglo-Polish relations up to that time is necessary. The relationship between the two nations fluctuated for religious and political reasons throughout history. Knowledge of Poland in medieval England was scant and merely geographical; the instability of names for the country, the people and the adjective reflect this lack of contact and information. The earliest mention of Poland is as “Polayne” in

Mandeville's Travels (c. 1375); John Trevisa refers to "Polonia" around 1398, and the alliterative *Morte Arthure* (c. 1400) names "Pulle" alongside "Pruyslande" (Prussia) and "Lettow" (Lithuania) (McCarthy 201). The first knowledge of any depth about Poland was mainly obtained by English knights of the Teutonic Order, a religious order of knights, mostly confined to German nobles. Although first invited by a Polish prince to combat neighboring pagan Prussians, the Order quickly eradicated the tribes and formed an independent state in their former lands. Both John Gower and Geoffrey Chaucer assumed that fighting in Prussia was "an essential part of a knight's career" and even Henry Bolingbroke, the future Henry IV, took part in the Order's attack on Wilno in 1390-1 (Davies 93). The Teutonic Knights eventually became a threat to Poland's territorial security and began to absorb Polish cities like Gdansk (which became Danzig). As the Teutonic Order began a series of wars with the Polish kingdom, English opinions of the Poles inevitably became negative. Poles were described as Saracens and "enemies of the Prussian crusaders" (93). This distrust was shared on both sides. It is known that Henry of Derby was sent to the Polish king by Bolingbroke to intercede for two of his knights who had been taken prisoner during the siege at Wilno; Derby was ultimately unsuccessful (Bevan 26).

Anglo-Polish relations improved during the first half of the sixteenth century. The newly established power of the kingdom of Poland-Lithuania probably raised English hopes that English merchants would gain greater access into the Baltic Sea. High-level diplomatic contacts between the two nations became more frequent. Henry VII and Henry VIII repeatedly angled for an Anglo-Polish alliance against Turkey, but ultimately to no avail; Poland eventually signed an Eternal Peace with Turkey in 1533 (Zamoyski

73). The first major improvement in Anglo-Polish relations came with the successful diplomatic mission of Jan Dantyszek (Dantiscus). Hostilities between Poland and the Teutonic Order were renewed in 1519 and fighting proceeded in Prussia, where several strategic ports such as Danzig were located. A renowned poet and humanist, Danasticus was sent to London in 1522 to give the English court a strong presentation of the Polish case against the Teutonic Knights (Segel 176). The Polish envoy made a very favorable impression. A meeting with “an apparently sympathetic Cardinal Wolsey led to an audience with Henry VIII, during which Thomas More... translated Dantiscus’s Latin” (176). “During a private meeting with Henry VIII, who apologized for his awkward Latin, Dantiscus” was able to convince the English king of “the rightness of the Polish case” against the Order (177). Henry agreed to view the matter “in a different light, and in a gesture of goodwill...he denied further audiences to the Teutonic Grand Master, Dietrich von Schonberg (177). The Teutonic Order later became the secular Duchy of Prussia and a fiefdom of Poland in 1525. Anglo-Polish relations improved during the rest of Henry VIII’s reign; he later tried to arrange a royal marriage for his daughter Mary in Poland and “as late as 1553 the ruling house of Poland, the Jagiellonians, was still showing interest” (McCarthy 205).

British connections with Poland became very close during the middle of the sixteenth century due in large part to the Reformation. Large numbers of Catholic and Protestant Scots settled in the Poland-Lithuanian cities of Chelmno, Danzig, Thorn, Sluck and Kejdany. Some Poles chose to study at Oxford for religious reasons (Davies 189). The Polish philosopher and Protestant evangelical reformer Jan Laski (John O’ Lasco) was received at the court of Edward VI and from 1550 served as superintendent of the

Strangers' Church at Austin Friars in London. Laski influenced ecclesiastical affairs in England. He corresponded with John Hooper, whom he supported in the vestments controversy, and "even exerted a definite influence on the formulation of the Book of Common Prayer" because of his close work with Thomas Cramner (189). The accession of Queen Mary caused a rift in Anglo-Polish relations. Although Poland-Lithuania was predominantly Roman Catholic and also deeply divided by religion, it exercised and promoted a large degree of religious toleration and largely opposed violence. During Bloody Mary's persecutions, Laski took many refugees from the Strangers' Church and resettled them in Brandenburg. He later fled to the continent (Davies 189). As late as 1571, the Polish Cardinal Stanislaw Hosius, referring to Bloody Mary, warned his countrymen: "Let Poland never become like England" (Zamoyski 89).

The main reason for the souring of Anglo-Polish relations during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, however, was very probably political. The increasing power and influence of the Polish-Lithuanian nobility eventually led to enormous changes in their political system. The "Nihil Novi" Act in 1505 transferred all legislative power from the King to the Polish Parliament, and it eventually became customary to elect kings even though the Jagiellonians continued to be the hereditary ruling house. It became known as the "the noble democracy." The Union of Lublin in 1569 combined the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to create the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, a political entity in which the Parliament gained even greater executive powers. After the last Jagiellonian King died without leaving any male heirs, the Commonwealth decided to include the lower nobility and even foreign rulers as possible candidates for their king, creating the widest franchise of any European nation. It was also reasoned that a foreign

ruler would wed his country's interests to that of his adopted kingdom rather than subordinate Polish interests to that of his homeland. As a result, there was no single, certain center of power in the Commonwealth's government. This undoubtedly disturbed England which, after a contentious interval with much fear of foreign interference and invasion, had retained a delicate hereditary monarchy headed by the daughter of a king whose lone male heir had died. In contrast to the lack of a locus of power in Poland, everything in England appeared to be centered on and subordinate to the rule of the Crown.

The first monarch the Poles selected was Henry Valois, Duke of Anjou, brother and heir to Charles IX of France and at one time brother-in-law to Mary, Queen of Scots. He was proclaimed king in May 1573 after an exemplary election which had proceeded without any disturbance (Davies 123). This first political experiment, however, turned out to be a disaster. Henry's reign only lasted 118 days throughout which he became frequently frustrated by the constant quarrelling of the Polish Parliament and his own failure to turn the Commonwealth into an eastern pillar of a grand anti-Habsburg coalition for France (124). Upon hearing of his brother's death in August, Henry decided to secure the French throne and, in one of the more comical moments in European history, fled the Polish capital of Cracow in the middle of the night through a secret passageway, much to the dismay of his new subjects (124). An interregnum of chaos followed, which Sir Philip Sidney experienced first-hand when he visited the country sometime between October 21st and November 12th.

Sidney, one of the major English writers of the sixteenth century and an exemplary Renaissance courtier, famous throughout the courts of Europe, traveled from Vienna to Cracow in the autumn of 1574 with the intent to witness the coronation of the French prince. By the time he arrived, however, an atmosphere of disappointment and frustration prevailed, and rival contenders were already campaigning for the vacant Polish throne. Whatever Sidney saw in Cracow must have left him unimpressed with Poland. In a letter to the Earl of Leicester, written in Vienna and dated November 27, Sidney merely offers an unusually brief, stale, and rather sarcastic account of the confused state of Polish affairs: “The Polacks heartily repent their so far-fetched election, being now in such case [that] neither have they the king, nor anything the king with so many oaths had promised” (Sidney 103). He also mentions that “there is lately stirred up a very dangerous sedition, for the same cause that hath bred such lamentable ruins in France and Flanders” (103). The “dangerous sedition” refers to riots and persecutions of Polish Protestants instigated by Polish Jesuits. In a letter to Lord Burghley written in Vienna and dated December 17, it is clear that his negative feelings about his Polish trip had obviously not abated and perhaps even deepened. Although he admits that he initially could not “command his desire of seeing Poland,” he writes that he could have spent time in “more profitable or at least more pleasant voyages” (107). Further information from Sidney about Poland is still pessimistic, even when writing about victories. Although Sidney writes that the “Polacks hath appeased a great sedition in Cracow for the religion, [having] since defeated 12,000 Tartars, among which were 3,000 Turks,” he still seems to predict dire trouble for the Poles, mentioning that the Tartars’ “return with far greater force they do daily look for” (107). Sidney also writes forebodingly of Poland-

Lithuania's next election: "It is thought they will choose another king in May, although the Lithuanians be wholly against it" (107). The only non-violent and positive action of the Poles and Lithuanians mentioned by Sidney is at the end of the letter when he informs Burghley that both "have made truce with the Muscovite" (107).

It can be argued that the letters of Philip Sidney concerning Poland are the first conscious attempts at the marginalization and of Poland in Elizabethan writing. It is, after all, somewhat surprising that Sidney, being so well traveled and intensely curious, chose to de-emphasize a momentous event in European history. By the time of Sidney's writing, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had become the largest state on the European Continent and accordingly an influential and sophisticated player in European politics. In Sidney's letters, however, the Poles are portrayed fleetingly as naïve and almost child-like in their confusion. There is a certain bite to phrases like "so far-fetched" and "so many oaths" The repeated use of negation ("neither" and "nor...anything") and the word "so" creates a feeling of condescending pity for the Polish nobles who were gullible enough to believe both the wisdom of electing an alien as their monarch and the "promises" of an ambitious Catholic French noble who was in large part responsible for the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. It was argued in the 1560s that hereditary monarchy was legitimized by the English common law. England's common-law rule against aliens' inheriting English property had its origins after the loss of Normandy. In his *Commentaries*, Elizabeth's lawyer, Edmund Plowden wrote that the crown of a king went by a succession determined by descent (Levine 111). This hereditary succession was necessary because it was "by the law of the realm descendible in [the monarch's] blood," working out in the same way as the common-law rule of representative

primogeniture (112). It was, most importantly, a way of maintaining the body politic. The Poles, moreover, “heartily repent” of their wild political ideas. The words “heartily” and “repent” add to Sidney’s picture of the Poles as a people of extremes, both in their “so far-fetched” ideas and actions and their regret at having done them. There could also be a religious connotation to the Poles’ regret. By using the verb “repent,” Sidney might be insinuating that the Poles have committed the sin of forsaking their true representative of God on earth, namely the Polish noble most closely related to the Jagiellonian bloodline. Yet this is not to say that Sidney is entirely dismissive of the Poles. He appears to accept them as fellow Christians and states this belief that the Poles know that they have made a mistake, in writing that they do “repent.” In other words, Poland is but a newly civilized country whose people are still trying to master their passions and the proper laws of government. The Poles are civilized enough, after all, to have “appeased” the sedition and to make a “truce” with the Muscovites, a highly important action for the English, who relished their early trade with Russia.

Although a “very dangerous sedition” occurred in Cracow, it is interesting that Sidney decides to connect it with the “lamentable ruins in France and Flanders.” Sidney’s “ruins in Flanders” refers to Calvinist rebellions in the Netherlands, which were ferociously put down by their Spanish overlords and temporarily shut down Anglo-Spanish trade. The “ruins in France” refers to the even more terrifying St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre in 1572, which Sidney witnessed while staying with the English embassy in Paris. Both events refer to religious conflicts in which Catholic powers attacked and massacred Protestant minorities, and it is true that the “sedition” in Cracow involved Catholic attack on Protestants. But it should be further noted that the Catholic attackers in

both France and Flanders were the Catholic governments of the countries. Thousands of Dutch rebels were executed by the Spanish regent, who was sent to the Netherlands by Philip II. The slaughter of French Huguenots was engineered by the Catholic ruling family of France. The Polish religious tumult in Cracow, however, was neither encouraged nor orchestrated by the Polish government. Feeding off the chaos of the sudden interregnum, groups led by Polish Jesuits attacked and stole from properties belonging to the Reformed Church in Poland. Some even went so far as to exhume and violate corpses of famous Polish Protestants, but there were few instances of substantial physical violence and far fewer deaths. Sidney, however, seemed to connect the failure of the Polish election with religious conflict, especially when compared to Sidney's own rather extreme examples. Refusing to proceed with royal succession by blood leads to the disruption of the body politic, the "perfect corporation" of the king and "his subjects, who be of divers degrees and sorts" (Levine 111). It should also not be forgotten that Poland-Lithuania was a Catholic nation. The violent actions of Polish Catholics would have added to the climate of fear that pervaded at the court of Elizabeth I at the time of Sidney's writing. The Queen and her councilors were deeply suspicious of Catholic powers on the Continent (namely France and Spain) forming a crusade against Protestant England. They viewed international relations as a fight between the true religion and the Antichrist and expressed a strong sense of solidarity with England's fellow Protestants abroad (Doran 47). By all accounts, Sidney shared these views, especially after having witnessed the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre.

What is perhaps most mysterious about Sidney's letters concerning Poland is their brevity. But this lack of information may serve as an early attempt to marginalize Poland

as a cultural entity among European nations. In the letter to Lord Burghley mentioned above, for example, only a quarter of the content concerns Poland; the rest deals with relations between the Turks and the Holy Roman Emperor. Sidney writes nothing about Polish culture or individuals at the Polish court in Cracow. This is even more puzzling when one considers that he had clearly gone out of his way to visit a distant and still largely unknown nation, having traveled some 550 miles on horseback for fourteen days. Furthermore, more information about nation and its rulers would have been especially helpful seeing as how the northern territories of Poland would have been of major strategic importance to England. The English had begun to trade with Muscovite Russia in the 1550s, and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth controlled important ports along the Baltic Sea such as Danzig. For all the chaos and violence following Henry's departure, Cracow still maintained a Renaissance court where "royal servants were themselves poets, scientists, and philosophers" (Davies 148). Many Poles and Lithuanians in government had "formal education of very high quality" and were "fully conversant with the classics" (148). Fluent in Latin and Ancient Greek, notable Polish courtiers and nobles would have had no difficulty communicating with Sidney. The Grand Chancellor and Grand Hetman Jan Zamoyski, the leading Polish politician of his day, was educated and served as Rector at the University of Padua. Although Jan Kochanowski, the father of Polish vernacular poetry and a highly esteemed Latin poet in his own right, had left the Polish court by 1574, one may wonder why Sidney was not exposed to, or ignored, either his Latin work or those of other Poles, such as the above mentioned Dantiscus. Sidney's interest in literature during his European travels was constant and well documented. He often bought books in various cities and maintained an open interest in foreign history and

poetry. In contrast to Poland, Hungary, another Eastern European country in turmoil, made a deep and positive impression on Sidney when he visited it in 1573. During the time of Sidney's arrival, a revitalized Hungary was battling the Ottoman Empire to regain territory the Islamic power had seized after the battle of Mohacs in 1526. After leaving, he maintained an interest in Turco-Hungarian wars and wrote not only about the country's defenses and recruitment of soldiers but also about its poetry. "In Hungary," he wrote, "I have seen it in the matter at all feasts, and other such meetings, to have songs of their ancestors' valour, which that right soldierlike nation should think one of the chiefest kindlers of brave courage" (Stewart 114). Hearing Hungary's martial songs may very well have influenced one of Sidney's key ideas about the uses of poetry, specifically as a source of patriotic nationalism. In England, he later defended poetry as inspiration for nobler virtues, such as patriotism, in *An Apology for Poetry*. While he might have considered the Hungarian poets to have been "barbarous" much like a Welsh "crowder" (fiddler) he had heard in 1566, he was genuinely moved by both. Indeed, he evidently respected them as powerful vernacular voices (114). The martial songs of Hungary undoubtedly impressed Sidney because he saw them as a weapon in the heroic struggle of the Christian West against the pagan Ottoman Turks and as a tool in creating national unity. He saw no such struggle in Poland. Instead he saw a nation in conflict with itself and the natural laws of monarchy. It could even be reasoned that Sidney judged any cultural product from Poland to be tainted with the conflict and confusion of their political ideas and practices.

Another possible reason for Sidney's silence and selective information is self-preservation. The young courtier was, above all, a naturally cautious person, especially in

his politics. The same climate of fear and suspicion that existed at the English court could easily have been directed at Sidney himself. By 1574, Sidney's passport had run out and the ambitious inquiries of a young courtier in a distant Catholic nation was enough to make Elizabeth nervous. Sidney had even consorted with English Catholic exiles in Venice. The Sidney family, moreover, had Catholic ties. Philip's godfather and namesake was Philip II of Spain, and at one time he had been considered by the Spanish monarch to be a Catholic (46). Sidney's negative and brief account of Poland also makes sense when one considers the views of the men to whom he wrote. Both Burghley and, to a lesser extent, Leicester were obsessed with the danger of a Catholic invasion from France. Sidney could have decided to write of a people who had willingly elected a Catholic French noble in a very negative light to convince Burghley and Leicester of his loyalty to England and Protestantism.

The marginalization and negative portrayal of Poland and its inhabitants continued and became more nuanced in both private and published Elizabethan writing. Trade relations between Tudor England and Muscovite Russia became established in 1553. Since England was relatively cut off from possibilities for trade from the New World because the Iberian monopolies which existed there and experiencing difficulties trading on the Continent because of conflicts with Spain, Russia became an increasing source of prosperity and resources. This situation became highly problematic for the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. England's selling of arms to Russia was protested and perceived as a security threat by the Polish king because of numerous previous Russian attempts to invade and annex northern territories of the Commonwealth. The Polish government repeatedly pleaded with Elizabeth I to desist from selling arms to its

perennial enemy, but to no avail. The English instead saw Polish wars with Russia, especially along the Baltic coastline as an even more serious threat. As a result, Anglo-Polish relations, already tainted with English disregard for Poland's elective monarchy, began to seriously sour.

In 1591, the English writer and diplomat Giles Fletcher the Elder published *The Russe Common Wealth*, a work about Russia which included information about Poland as well. Whereas information about the neighboring Tartars of Russia is given an entire chapter, references to the massive Polish state are scattered, few and, for the most part, negative. This is an especially complicated view of Poland because the English, including Fletcher, saw the Russians as "barbarians." Barbarians though they might have been to English diplomats, Muscovite Russians were indispensable to England as trading partners, especially during on-going conflicts with Spain which halted commercial relations with Spanish-controlled lands on the European Continent. The English would have seen hostilities between Poland and Russia as disruptions to a valuable source of trade. Fletcher gives only two pieces of information about Poland-Lithuania that has nothing to do with violence. The first is its geographical location: "On the west and southwest border [of Russia] lieth Lituania (Lithuania), Liuonia (Livonia) and Polonia" (Fletcher 173). The second is a surprisingly lengthy passage on the etymology of the "Polonians," the Latin word for Poles. In the nineteenth chapter, Fletcher explains that this name arose from the "first author or founder of the Nation, who was called *Laches* or *Leches*, whereunto is added *Po*, which signifieth *People*, and so is made *Polaches*, that is, the *People* or *posteritie* of *Laches*: which the *Latines* after their maner of writing call *Polanos*" (246). The "Laches or Leches" Fletcher refers to is Lech, a mythical figure in

Slavic history. His English parallel is Brutus of Troy. According to ancient folklore, Lech, Czech, and Rus were the three Slav brothers who founded respectively the Polish, Czech, and Ruthenian peoples (Davies 61). A first glance, this might seem to be a sign of respect from the author. This would certainly have been a sensible approach. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was Russia's largest and most formidable European neighbor at the time. In addition, it was the largest state in Europe. None of the other European nations that border Russia receives as much attention. A closer analysis of the small passage, however, reveals a more nuanced handling of the Poles. Fletcher gives the *Russian* origin of the word for Poles rather than the Latin origin. Although it can be argued that he is right in giving the origin of the Russian word for Poles in a book specifically about Russia, the relatively long linguistic explanation makes the reader associate Poland as closer to Russia than it really was. This closer association and the fact that Fletcher made no other references to Polish culture also makes Poland more distant from Western Europe. It is true that Poland and Russia both have Slavic cultures and that the Polish language is linguistically more similar to Russian. But there were and are major differences. Polish language and culture was shaped largely by the Church of Rome. Poland's first fully documented ruler, Mieszko I, converted to Catholic Christianity in 966 and the first Polish bishopric was established in 1000. The rest of the population converted to the religion over the next few centuries. The earliest writing by Poles was in Latin. When the Polish language began to be written down, it was given a Latin alphabet. Much of the top Polish clergy and nobility pursued their studies in Italy. Russia, however, was greatly influenced by Byzantine culture and the Eastern Orthodox Church. A major source of the Russian language is Byzantine Greek and the Russian

alphabet is Cyrillic, a script that was formalized by the Byzantine Greek missionaries Saints Cyril and Methodius. When English explorers first made contact with Russia in 1553, the Greek connections to Russian culture were observed and not always in a favorable light. Richard Chancellor wrote that Russians “observe the law of the Greeks with such excess of superstition, as the like have not been heard of” (Hakluyt 264). One of Fletcher’s qualifications for his ambassadorship to Russia had been his work as a lecturer in Greek at King’s College, Cambridge.

Very nearly every other sentence about Poland in *The Russe Common Wealth* portrays the nation as a shadowy, but powerful and aggressive enemy always warring with its eastern neighbor for territories. Indeed, such information almost immediately follows the introduction of the location of Poland. When describing the western borders of Russia, Fletcher relates that all the Russian Tsar’s possessions in Lithuania and Livonia “are...(to the number of 30 great towns and more) quite gone, being surprised of late years by the kings of Poland and Sweden” (174). In fact, the vast majority of Fletcher’s writings about Poland are about Polish-Russian hostilities, especially the latter stages of the Livonian War. The Livonian War (1558-82) was a lengthy conflict fought between a coalition of Scandinavian nations and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Russia for control of Livonia, the territory of present-day Latvia and Estonia. Although small, Livonia was desired by all Baltic nations because of its strategic location on the Baltic coastline (Davies 146). In 1561, much of the prized land became a vassal state of the Commonwealth. Seeking a “window on the west,” the Russian Tsar Ivan IV invaded Livonia in 1576, foreshadowing a Russian push towards Lithuania and East Prussia. The newly elected King of Poland and successor to Henry Valois, Stephen

Batory, responded immediately. After convincing the Polish Parliament of the Russian threat, Batory led two highly successful military campaigns in which he conquered Polotsk advanced deep into Russian territory, seizing numerous fortresses. In 1581-82, he laid siege to Pskov, but Polish assaults were constantly repelled by the capable defense of Prince Ivan Shuisky. Diplomatic negotiations mediated by the Vatican ended the hostilities. Despite his military fame, Shuisky was later found guilty of conspiring against Boris Godunov and exiled to Belozersk, where he died in 1558. In the sixth chapter of *The Russe Common Wealth*, Fletcher uses the example of Prince Ivan Shuisky for two reasons. One is to criticize what he saw as a despotic system of Russian government that led to the loss of valuable Russian nobles. He is especially critical of Boris Godonov, whose policies were designed “to keepe down all of the best and auncientest Nobilitie” (202). The other is to give a negative portrayal of the Polish army and government. Fletcher identifies “*Knez (Prince) Iuan Petrowich Suskoy*” as “a man of great valure, and service in that Countrey: who about five or six years since, bare out the siege of the Citie *Vobsko* made by *Stepan Batore* King of *Polonia*, with a 100000 men, and repulsed him very valiantly, with great honour to himselfe, and his countrey, and disgrace to the *Polonian*” (202). It is important to note that Fletcher emphasizes one of the few positive aspects of Russia in his book (talented, ambitious and efficient nobles) at the expense of Poland. Furthermore, the passage includes a disdainful comment on King Batory.

It could be said that by focusing on the Polish king, Fletcher hints the failure of the Polish elective monarchy to produce effective leaders. Although Batory is mentioned again later in the book and that time in conjunction with his military victories, Fletcher seems intent on focusing the reader on his failure at a single siege even more, especially

by mentioning the “100000 men” he led. In fact, when he mentions the failed siege again in the seventeenth chapter, he again emphasizes how Batory failed, this time with the phrase “with his whole armie of 100000 men” (242). The failure of the king is further emphasized in contrast to that of the Polish soldiers when he writes of how the siege ended “with the losse of many of [Batory’s] best Captaines and souldires” (242). Other passages in the book make reference to the results of the Polish king’s success in his wars with Russia, but they are written almost grudgingly and without any outward praise for the military skill of the Polish king. The first chapter mentions the loss of Ivan IV’s “possession in Lituania (to the number of 30 great towns and more,) with Narue and Dorp in Liuonia” (174). Fletcher writes that they “are quite gone, beyng surprised of late yeares by the kinges of Poland and Sweden” (174). The word “surprised” suggests luck on the part of the Poles and Swedes. This is not to say that Fletcher views Polish soldiers as inferior or even equal to their Russian counterparts. He is quite clear that the former are superior to the latter. However, Fletcher seems to reason that the sorry state of the Russian army is the result of internal divisions within the Russian government. If the Russian soldiers had been fully prepared and left in the hands of able generals such as Prince Shusky, much of the Russian territory would not have been lost and Russian trade would not have been affected. Instead, such valuable men are hindered or destroyed by greedy and ruthless Russian emperors. In the eighteenth chapter, Fletcher states just this when he recalls the conquests of the territories regained by Poland by the great-grandfather of the current tsar. He makes it even clearer when he attributes the loss of those territories “by reason of...the disquiteness of [the tsar’s] owne state at home” (243). The third chapter of the book is about Russian commercial products and Baltic trade,

which would have been of enormous importance to the Elizabethan merchants and nobles that read the book. In it, Fletcher explains the reason for the “abating and decrease of...commodities” (182). He identifies one of the major sources of the problem as “the stopping of the passage overland by *Smolenko*, and *Plotsko*, by reason of their warres with the *Polonian*, which causeth the people to be lesse provident in maintaining and gathering these and other like commodities, for that they lack sales” (182). This not only hurts Russians, but also the “*French* and *Netherlandish* marchants for *Italy* and *Spaine*” and “*English* marchants” (182). This seems to present the Poles as an oppressor in the Baltic, an aggressive power whose actions halt valuable international trade.

For all of Fletcher’s criticisms and marginalization of Poland, however, his clear declaration of the superior might of the Polish soldiers serves as an acknowledgment of Poland as a European power. In the seventeenth chapter of *The Russe Common Wealth*, he writes that although they do not carry a great deal of military equipment and armor when “they warre against the *Tartar*...when they deale with the *Polonian* (of whose forces they make more account) they goe better furnished with al kind of munitition, and other necessarie provisions” (242). He adds that despite the Russian success in repelling the siege at Pskov, “in a set field the *Russe* is noted to have ever the worse of the *Polonian*” (242).

The lowest point in Anglo-Polish relations in the sixteenth century is encapsulated in Elizabeth I’s Latin rebuke to the Polish Ambassador in 1597. In it, the Queen framed the attitude of the English government towards Poland through a string of witty impromptu comments on the Ambassador’s behavior and his country’s political system,

creating, much like Sidney and Fletcher, an image of an aggressive and confused nation out of touch with the rest of Western Christendom. She also criticized Polish elective monarchy by focusing her attacks on the Polish king rather than Poles in general.

The diplomatic incident was mainly a result of two more problems relating to Baltic trade: the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's increasing opposition to trade between Tudor England and Muscovite Russia and the English and Dutch seizing of Spanish ships at the Polish port of Danzig. Hampered by Spanish monopolies in the New World and the Continent, Elizabeth fostered trading contacts around the North Cape and the selling of arms to the Russian Tsar. The latter action deeply troubled the security concerns of both the Polish-Lithuanian nobility and their newly elected king, Zygmunt Wasa III. Whereas to the English, Muscovite Russians were merely "savage exotics living outside the pale of Western Christendom," the Poles and Lithuanians had suffered numerous attacks by the "barbarians" (Davies 387). Before the formation of the Commonwealth, the Lithuanians had lived almost in a state of constant alert. The Polish government knew that it was only a matter of time before another Muscovite invasion and it appeared to them that the English were only strengthening their perennial enemies. Elizabeth and her councilors, moreover, certainly had no intention of stopping the highly advantageous trade of English weapons because of the protest of a distant Catholic nation. They probably reasoned that it was the continuing aggression of Catholic Spain that had forced their merchants to go as far as the Baltic Sea. Anglo-Spanish hostilities had not ended with the English defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 and commercial relations with Habsburg-controlled nations became damaged.

The foolish conduct of Polish diplomat Pawel Dzialynski, Castelan of Dobrzyn did much to worsen the already tense relations. During a mission to England, he stopped at the Hague and Greenwich where he provoked a couple of incidents which reverberated throughout the courts of Europe to his [and to his country's] discredit" (392). At the time, both England and the Netherlands were at war with Spain; the ambassador was instructed by both King Zygmunt and the Danzig city council to persuade the Protestant nations from seizing Spanish ships at the Polish port of Danzig (392). These attacks were a terrible economic blow to the Poles. Enormous amounts of Polish cargo were lost with the Spanish ships and merchants were never reimbursed. Moreover, Danzig, which had become incorporated into the economic life of the Commonwealth in 1570, was becoming an increasingly vital source of money for Poland, especially when financing wars against Russia and the Tartars. Dzialynski, however, exceeded his terms of reference. At the Hague, he "threatened to close Danzig completely and to 'starve' the Dutch into submission (392). When he arrived at Greenwich on July 25, he repeated the threats to the English monarch in a "pompous oration, whose contents were 'prolix, thin, and promiscuous' (392). He also mentioned Zygmunt's recent marriage to the Habsburg princess, Anna, daughter of Archduke Charles of Styria, no doubt as a warning to Elizabeth and the English court that the King of Poland, related by marriage to Philip II, might become Spain's military ally. While the erroneous individual conduct of Dzialynski should be stressed, it should be stressed that his behavior and "oration" also had its roots in the culture of Polish diplomacy during this period. During the sixteenth century, Polish embassies "practiced a grand style" which they befitted their country's

“honor and integrity” (394). Their fellow Europeans, however, often “interpreted [it] as empty show or oriental opulence” (394).

Elizabeth’s immediate rebuke to the ambassador was also a highly conscious show of her strength and a defense of both the English monarchy and nation. During the 1590s, England faced enormous problems. Despite the glory of the defeat of the Spanish Armada mentioned above, it continued to have problems not only with Spain, but with Ireland as well. This constant warfare and poor harvests led to a heavier tax burden and financially drained the English government. As a result, it had a scarcity of resources to distill disobedience from an increasingly better educated and politically conscious upper class. It was also no secret that Elizabeth was suffering from smallpox at this time in the last decade of her life. She therefore used Dzialynski’s *faux pas* of directly confronting a monarch in a time of peace to her advantage and by vocally interpreting it as a sign of Poland’s weaknesses, showcased England’s strengths to both her English subjects and the (Catholic) courts of Europe. It certainly worked at home; the Earl of Essex wrote back to Cecil that he rejoiced at the Queen’s “princely triumph” over the “braving Polack” (335).

Elizabeth began her rebuke with a witty criticism of the Polish ambassador’s actions. Dzialynski loudly and directly accused the Queen and her nation of “violating both the law of nature and nations” by allowing the Polish merchants “to be spoiled without restitution” and “not caring to minister remedy notwithstanding many particular petitions and letters received” (Elizabeth 334). The first action refers to the English failure to reimburse lost Polish cargo on seized Spanish ships. The second refers to England’s avoidances of Zygmunt’s pleas to stop English privateering at Danzig. While

Dzialynski's complaints were justifiable, it was totally inappropriate of him to accuse the Queen directly and loudly in the presence of her subjects. The Queen said just this but in such a way as to make the ambassador look like a confused child rather than a formidable and dangerous opponent. This pugnacity, however, was noticed by and impressed others. Robert Cecil was taken aback by "a countenance as in [his] life [he] had ever beheld" (334). She complains of having been "deceived" and expecting an "embassage" and "ambassador," but instead being brought a "complaint" by "an herald" (333-34). A herald was one lower in status than an ambassador and also more potentially menacing; the herald's duty was to announce an action (such as a declaration of war) rather than to negotiate. By declaring that Dzialynski's "bold insolence" more befitted a herald than an ambassador, she uses his same argument on his own person and king. Rather than coming to negotiate with England as befitted his function as ambassador, the Pole had tacitly declared war through his aggressive behavior and the warning/threat of the Polish king's closer relationship to Philip II of Spain. This is especially sarcastic when one takes into consideration the fact that the Latin word for "herald" can be translated as "page-boy," making the Polish diplomat and the nation of which he is representative child-like in its understanding of civilization (Davies 393). In other words, although the Polish king accuses the English court of not properly following the law of nations, it is plain that he does not know how to follow it himself. Elizabeth's ridicule of the Pole's aggression was also evident in her order for the ambassador to "repose" himself, that is, to quiet down.

Elizabeth also took the opportunity to ridicule both the Polish practice of elective monarchy and the threat of an alliance with the Habsburgs. She does not believe that the Polish king himself would use the same kind of speeches as Dzialynski, but he was

commanded to do so, she attributes it to the fact that Zygmunt “is a young man and newly chosen, not so fully by right of blood as by right of election” (Elizabeth 335). Therefore, “he doth not so perfectly know the course of managing affairs of this nature with other princes as his other elders have observed with us, or perhaps others will observe which shall succeed him in his place hereafter” (335). In two sentences, the Queen identifies Polish elective monarchy as the possible source of its child-like confusion of “what is convenient between kings” (333). Elizabeth had a strong belief in the divine right of monarchs and thought that opposition to that idea, such as the elective monarchy of Poland, set a dangerous precedent. This was clear in her relations with other monarchs. She was furious when she heard of Mary Queen of Scots’s deposition in 1567 because she hated to be a party to a fellow monarch’s deposition and exile (Doran 20). During that same year, she also accepted the reprisals of Philip II against his disobedient subjects in the Netherlands were legitimate even though those subjects were fellow Protestants (20). She then justifies England’s actions at Danzig by explaining that when war occurs between two monarchs, “it is lawful for either party to cease on each other’s provision for war, from whence soever derived, and to forsee that they be not converted to their own hurts” (Elizabeth 333).

Elizabeth’s response to Zygmunt’s “new affinity with the House of Austria” was the particularly skillful and informed observation that the ambassador is “not ignorant that some one of that House would have had the kingdom of Polonia from” his king (333). The “one of that House” she refers to is the Habsburg Archduke Maximilian, younger son of the late Emperor Maximilian II, who was a candidate for the Polish throne. When Zygmunt was elected, however, the archduke crossed the Silesian frontier of intention of

forcibly securing the throne for himself. His army was eventually defeated by Polish forces in 1588. Thus, the Polish king is shown as not even cognizant of relatively recent events in his own region.

Elizabeth's criticisms, however, were a highly nuanced criticism of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and not at all a direct disparagement of the entire nation and its culture. It is evident that Elizabeth and her court accept Poland as a fellow member of the Latin West by their initial welcome and impressions of Dzialynski. Sir Robert Cecil describes the ambassador in a letter to Robert Derevuex, Earl of Essex, as "a gentleman of excellent fashion, wit, discourse, language, and person" "attired [impressively] in a long robe of black velvet, well jeweled and bordered" (334). Elizabeth, he adds, both approved of "this gentleman's comeliness and qualities" which were "brought to her by report" and King Zygmunt, whose "father [John III] the duke of Finland had so much honored her" to the extent that she decides to receive the Polish ambassador "publicly in the Chamber of Presence" (334). The honor mentioned was a marriage proposal from Eric XIV of Sweden which John III had presented to Elizabeth. Cecil also writes that the honor was such that the "earls and noblemen" resolved to make the reception "a great day" (334).

Anglo-Polish relations, however, did not suffer totally as a result of the Queen's rebuke of the Polish ambassador. During the final decade of the sixteenth century, English scholars became increasingly aware and appreciative of religious toleration in Poland. In 1599 the Oxford theologian George Abbot published *A Briefe Description of the Whole Worlde*, which summarized widespread negative and positive notions views

about Poland. Abbot portrays the Poles as a turbulent and unique people among the Europeans, “because there the king is chosen by election of some of their Princes neare adionyning, as was lately Henry the third, King of France” (10). Poland, according to Abbot, is often the site of “civill warre” because the “elections oftentimes doe make great factions there” (10). The king of Poland is not surprisingly described as “continually at warre” either with Russians or the Turks. Poles are inveterate soldiers who “commonly desire to chuse warriors to their King” (10). Abbot, however, adds a surprising positive aspect to Poland by noting that, obviously despite all the civil wars that rock the land, “liberty of all religions is permitted, insomuch that there be Papists, Colleges of Jesuits, both of Lutherans and Calvinists opinions: Anabaptists, Arrians, and diverse others” (10).

Many negative portrayals of Poles mentioned above can be seen and are even encapsulated in *Hamlet*. One must at first wonder why Shakespeare wrote at all about Poland, still a distant and largely unknown nation to his audience. Although he arguably had more access to information about Russia in books printed before 1600, three of his plays mention Poland, and his longest, most ambitious and well-known dramatic work does so repeatedly. Why is Poland defeated by the armies of Norway and perhaps Denmark? Why does the highly vain Lord Chamberlain and chief courtier at Elsinore have the linguistically obvious name of Polonius?

Shakespeare’s first reference to Poland actually comes in one of his earliest works, the *Comedy of Errors* (McCarthy 204). In a comic passage, Shakespeare refers to Poland to characterize a long, hard winter – “a Poland winter” (3.2.97). It is difficult to ascertain whether this was a proverbial expression and even harder to find a possible source of

information about “Poland winters” or icy conditions of the Baltic prior to the writing of the play (1589-94). Another reference comes in *Measure for Measure*, which Shakespeare wrote after *Hamlet*. The play is set in Vienna and when “the Duke goes into hiding, he lets it be known that he has traveled to Poland” (McCarthy 206). There are various possibilities for the reference to Poland. It could be just to give the play some authentic local color, but this rather difficult to believe upon closer examination of the play. Not a single name of the characters, for example, suggests Vienna (206). Another possibility is that the reference adds security to the Duke’s alibi, not only is he nowhere in the region, but he is far up in the icy unknown north of Europe (206).

In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare promotes Poland and Poles from a passing reference to a surprisingly important part. Based on the texts to which Shakespeare would have had access prior to the writing of *Hamlet*, the simplest explanation is that the Poles are used as formidable and aggressive, but essentially negative characters, victims and foils to important characters in the play. The extraordinary and unexpected name of Polonius is, despite the general unfamiliarity of the country, obviously Polish, but why? The character is a devious man whose mind is always full of intrigue and spying. Perhaps Shakespeare had been inspired by the incident involving Elizabeth I and the Polish ambassador mentioned above, but that poses obvious problems. How would he have known about it? He was not a member of the court and he certainly would not have been able to get his hands on a copy of the rebuke or Cecil’s account. He, along with many others, could have heard the barest outline of what happened, but only that. It has been suggested that this choice of name was meant to reflect and perhaps criticize Poland’s own elaborate system of government, but it is doubtful whether Shakespeare would have had access to sources

about how elaborate the system really was (McCarthy 209). One could even argue that Hamlet's accidental murder of Polonius while he hides behind an arras represents Shakespeare's view of Poland destroying itself with its over-elaborate political intrigues. However, virtually nothing is known of Shakespeare's knowledge of Baltic politics and the possibility of his having deep knowledge of Polish affairs is doubtful. One strong argument that can be made for this is if one believes that Shakespeare read the Polish bishop and statesman Goslicki's (Gosilicus) *De Optimo Senatore*, a manual that was translated into English and published as *The Counsellor* in England in 1598. Although Harold Jenkins thinks the book should not be considered as a source for the play, it should be added that "the ideal counselor as portrayed by Goslicki is a man full of his own importance and aware of his merit, a man convinced of his own capacities and the wisdom of his insights" (210). Polonius is certainly similar to this figure in that he never hesitates to put forth ideas he regards as profound (210). In the end, it is enough to say that the name is most closely related to the background wars of the play, that of Norway and Poland and perhaps Denmark and Poland. It is also safe to say that by associating Poland with an overanxious, presumptuous, long-winded and self-deluding character, Shakespeare simply continues the negative view of Poland shared by his fellow Elizabethans.

The first possible reference to Poland in Hamlet has been the subject of editorial debate for literally centuries. Speaking of the old king, Horatio (according to the Folger edition) notes that Old Hamlet wore the same armor "When he the ambitious Noyway combated" (1.1.73). He goes on to add, however, that he made a similar "frown" when "in an angry parle" he "smote the sledded Polacks on the ice" (1.1.74-75). Many modern

scholars have argued what these four lines mean. Some say that all four lines concern a fight between the King of Denmark and the King of Norway at the end of which the former dashes a weapon to the ice. Others say that the last two lines refer to a separate battle where Hamlet's father fought Polish soldiers in sleds. According to the second Quarto, "which is generally thought to have been printed from Shakespeare's foul" papers, "sledded Polacks" is spelt as "sleaded pollax" (McCarthy 199). This reading changes the meaning of the lines considerably. Most proper names in the second Quarto are in italics, making "pollax" seem to be the regular sixteenth-century spelling of the modern 'pole-axe.' Although many disagree about what "sleaded" means, the Earl of Rochester regarded the word as a description of an axe "loaded with lead, or other great weight like a sledge-hammer" and this interpretation was followed (199). In the 1623 Folio, the word "sleaded" was changed to "sledded" and the noun "Pollax" was given a capital letter but still left unitalicized, which still led many seventeenth-century readers to interpret the noun as a weapon. In 1685, the case for the word as a weapon was strengthened when the fourth Folio was published in which the word was printed with a final "e" (199). Rowe tried to further clarify matters in 1709 by adding a hyphen and thus presenting the word as "Pole-axe." By the late seventeenth century, however, a new reading of the word was introduced by renewed doubts over the meaning of "sleaded" (200). In 1723 Alexander Pope edited the text to read "sledded Polack," becoming the first to italicize the word into a proper noun. At the end of the century, Malone, probably conscious of the phonetics of the original "pollax," decided to turn "*Polack*" into "*Polacks*" (200). Editions have unanimously followed Malone's spelling ever since, despite the fact that a plural form in -ax "does not occur anywhere in English spelling"

(200). The lone major exception is T.J.B. Spencer's Penguin edition of *Hamlet*, which returned to the spelling of "sleaded poleaxe" (200).

In the Arden edition of *Hamlet*, Jenkins argues against the possibility of Hamlet's father striking a weapon on the ice. His main argument is the lack of authority to assume the word "sled" in the sense of a battle-axe with a sled, or sledge (hammer) or to take "sleaded" as a corruption of "leaded" or "studded" (Jenkins 425). He also states the pointlessness of the incident. Why would the old king throw a weapon to the ice even if in lone combat with his Norwegian rival? Indeed, "an attempt to attach an incident with a pole-axe to the combat against Fortinbras seems refuted by the adverb "once," which implies a separate occasion" (426). There is also the matter of imagination, but that is a rather subjective path to take. Some readers may find the image of a king throwing a long Scandinavian weapon into the ice far more attractive than a battle between Danes and Poles in sleds on a frozen surface. His main arguments for a reading involving Polish soldiers in sleds are the most sensible. It ties in with the later Norwegian-Polish subplot and thus creates a fuller image of the Poles in the play, foreshadowing their defeat by Fortinbras at the other end of the play (246). Such an image would also be more familiar to the Elizabethan perception of Poles that had been developed up to that time: continually aggressive and strong warriors that often lose. The words "in an angry parle" even suggest that Old Hamlet tried to negotiate with the Poles before he "smote" them (Dollerup 167). The political confusion usually associated with Poles is represented by the machinations of Polonius.

The first undeniable reference to Poland occurs in Act 2, Scene 2, when Claudius's ambassadors Valtemand and Cornelius reveal that Old Norway thought that his "nephew's levies" was merely "a preparation against the Polack" (61-62). This is a clear indication of Poland's political marginalization. The uncle of Fortinbras apparently thinks that "attacking Poland is obviously a harmless enough operation, nothing to upset the balance of power," but stops his nephew when he learns that he is preparing to attack Denmark (McCarthy 207). When Fortinbras promises to leave Denmark alone, the Norwegian ruler "gives him a substantial annuity and allows the young man to prove himself as a soldier in a military effort "against the Polack" after all (207). We are only to conclude from this reading that, to Shakespeare, Poland is probably not a major Baltic, let alone European, power.

The second reference to Poland in the play, however, is even more interesting and gives room for a more nuanced treatment of Poland. In Act 4, Scene 4, Hamlet finds out from a Norwegian captain that Fortinbras goes forth, not conquer the "main of Poland," but a worthless "patch of ground" that has no immediate worth besides its name (18). When Hamlet says that the "Polack will never defend it," the Captain answers that the territory is already "garrisoned" (ll.25). The Captain sees the campaign as "a waste of time, money, and lives" (McCarthy 207). The Poles' readiness to defend their "straw" of territory portrays Poles yet again as stubborn soldiers always ready to defend their homeland. There are two ways to approach this. Either Poland is too powerful to risk invading directly or it is hardly worth worrying about. It is probably better to assume the latter in view of the fact that it is revealed in the Norwegian soldiers' defeat of the Poles. Therefore, the Poles are continued to be shown as heroic victims. Interestingly, the sight

of an army, or rather idea of two armies going out to fight a worthless war for a point of honor, serves to stir Hamlet's shame in his dishonor for allowing revenge to be delayed. He renews his commitment to revenge even though it is almost impossible. It is perhaps worthwhile to note that the "patch of ground" could be Shakespeare's reworking of passages concerning Poland in Fletcher's *The Russe Common Wealth*. The idea of two nations wasting thousands of lives and great amounts of resources brings to mind Fletcher's brief account of the siege of Pskov. His repeated declarations of Polish defeat and loss of men and harm to trade seem to be echoed in Hamlet's declaration that "Two thousand souls and twenty thousand ducats" will not put the matter of the coming conflict to rest (11.26). Perhaps Shakespeare was influenced in this depiction of the senselessness of war by Fletcher's comments on the brutality of Russo-Polish conflicts in the sixteenth century.

The very last scene of the play seems to complete a full circle in its depiction of Poles as perennial losers. Just like Old Denmark had defeated the "sledded Polacks," Fortinbras arrives in Denmark triumphantly "with conquest from...Poland" (5.2.375). Hamlet utters approval when he hears of victory over Poland, and it seems to motivate him to give Fortinbras his "dying voice," which is assumed to mean a vote in the election for the Danish king. In other words, the conqueror of Poland, or at least a patch of it, is the true man to lead Denmark. The final indication of Poland's insignificance in international affairs is the fact that when final speeches are given by characters representing powerful nations, no one voices the opinions of Poland. Horatio represents Germany by way of Wittenberg, Fortinbras represents both Norway and Denmark and

even English ambassadors are present (McCarthy 215). The main of Poland might not have been conquered, but as the tragedy draws to a close, it hardly seems to matter at all.

Thus, *Hamlet* becomes another example of Elizabethan sentiment against the Poles. They begin to appear as a politically inept and violent people in the letters of Sidney. Although they were recognized as legitimate fellow Western Christians, they continued to be marginalized and belittled as politically confused and naïve in public and private English writing despite their substantial roles in European affairs. This marginalization was done mainly because the English thought Poland's practice of elective monarchy set a dangerous precedent. The Poles were also viewed as hindering English trade in the Baltic. In the writings of Giles Fletcher the Elder, Poland is presented as a constantly warring nation whose conflicts with Russia seriously disrupts international trade in the Baltic. Although Fletcher acknowledges the quality of Polish soldiers, he criticizes Poland's elective monarchy by emphasizing the Polish king's failure to complete the siege of a Russian fort. In her Latin rebuke of a Polish ambassador, Elizabeth I showed English disapproval of Poland's monarchial system by supporting the youth and election of the Polish king to be the source of the ambassador's improper conduct at her court. Although Shakespeare does not criticize Polish elective monarchy in *Hamlet*, he nevertheless continues the basic Elizabethan picture of Poles as a naturally aggressive people in perpetual war with their neighbors. Such examples of Elizabethan writing about Poland reveal England's own fears about the state of its monarchy and its trade. England was threatened politically by Poland's political system and threatened financially by Poland's wars with Russia, especially along the Baltic coast. Because of this double threat, Poles were portrayed negatively in Elizabethan writing.

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