

Between “incidents of intolerance” and “massacre” british interpretations of the Early Modern Polish Religious Persecution

The close Scottish-Polish relationship provided some immediate examples of Polish persecution that attracted great attention in Britain. British writers focused on persecution also in order to control a surprising experiment of uncontrolled political and religious liberty in Poland which through the seventeenth and eighteenth century pushed the country to be more and more a trouble spot of Europe.

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British writers from the 1620s to the 1750s showed an interest in the status of religious minorities in Poland. The most evident examples could be drawn from texts written up to the so-called “Thorn affairs”, 1724. Observing changes in British writers’ opinions of incidents of Polish intolerance allows to chart the main motives they ascribed to the Poles. Polish religious affairs were variously received in early modern British popular literature, and sometimes contradictorily. These different faces of Poland reveal the particular British contexts, in which facts of religious persecution in Poland were discussed. Three of these tendencies seem to be of most importance and are to be analysed here. Firstly, the gradual replacement of the image of a tolerant, liberal country by the idea of a “Popish and Jesuit kingdom”. Among the provided material some immediate examples of Polish persecution could be observed, amongst others, as a result of the close Scottish-Polish relationship. Secondly, the desire to help Protestants in Poland in the time of their various oppressions, especially during the period of the “Deluge” (1655-60) and “The Northern War” (1700-1721). Thirdly, the projection of Britain’s own external and internal policy in the context of Poland’s religious persecutions, applied in such a time like the proscription of the Arianists in Poland (1658) or the “Gdańsk tumult” of 1678, and more strongly manifested in the British attitude towards the “Thorn affairs”, 1724.

In the seventeenth century religion in Poland was quite an interesting subject of observation and comparison for British writers, since it also was a time of great religious and political struggle in Britain itself. Religious tolerance in Poland - traditionally seen as one of the characteristics of the country - declined with the accession to the throne of the Swedish monarch, Sigismund III, and the rise of Jesuit influence at court. British people in turn became more critical of Polish religious and political actions. British writers were becoming increasingly aware at this time of the price of Polish tolerance, not only for Poland, but also for the rest of Europe, including Britain. From the 1630s the victorious Polish Counter-Reformation helped to make British authors more and more sensitive to the situation of Polish Protestants, which towards the end of that century and in the first decades of the next - especially after the scandalous withdrawal of Saxony - created the conditions for the foundation of the league of Protestants countries under its strong leadership.

With the arrival of the Counter-Reformation in Poland and the outbreak of the "Thirty Years' War", some "undeniable proofs of Poland as a state without stakes"¹, became reconsidered.² One of the sources of the re-evaluation of Poland's religious tolerance was the Scottish diaspora in Poland.

Generally, British writers praised Poland as a "mother willing to feed crowds of Scottish peddlers".³ However, a contrary view of Polish tolerance in seventeenth-century Britain is evident in an interesting satire on the Catholic Church, with its action settled in Poland and having various versions throughout the century. A poetic satire: *The Pack-man pater noster or a dialogue betwixt a chapman and a priest* was first composed by Sir James Sempill in the year 1624 and, in a deliberate deception, presented to the public as a translation from the original Dutch. It consists of a dialogue, in which a Scottish peddler or packman in Poland comes to a Catholic priest named John in order to understand the essential points of the Catholic religion:

"A Polands Pedlar went upon a day,
Unto his Parish Priest to learne to pray.
The Priest sayd: Packe-man, thou must hant the Closter,
to learn the *Ave* and the *Pater Noster*."⁴

The main topics discussed in the course of the dialogue are the use of Latin versions of the mass and prayers, praying to God through the intercession of both Christ's

¹ Tazbir, J. *Państwo bez stosów i inne szkice*, Kraków, Universitas, 2000.

² One of them, the asylum in Poland gained by the Marian martyr, the Duchess of Suffolke, living in peace with her family in Crozam (Samogitia), 1557-9, became even a subject to the great mystification in the play by Thomas Drue *The life of Duchess of Suffolke* (performed 1623-1624/ published in London 1630. Drue misrepresented the Polish king who invited the Duchess to Poland as the Rhenish Palatine. (See: Limon, J. *Danger Matters. English Drama and Politics in 1623/24*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 21-41)

³ Lightow W., *The totall discourse, of the rare adventures, and painefull peregrinations of long nineteene tears traueiles from Scotland to the most famous kingdomes in Europe, Asia, and Africa...*, London, 1640, Part. IX. (Listing the reasons of Scots to come to Poland, Anna Biegańska wrote: "Of no less importance for the Scottish Presbyterians was the knowledge that traditions of humane tolerance prevailed in Poland, even long before the days when Europe was plagued by religious wars. Therefore, they, as well as other groups of religious dissenters, were able to find shelter and accommodation in that Roman Catholic state, where they were free to adhere to their conscience." (See her article: Biegańska, "The learned Scots in Poland (from the mid-sixteenth to the close of the eighteenth century", *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 43 (2001). (Provided by ProQuest)

⁴ *A Pick-tooth for the Pope: or, The pack-mans pater noster. Set downe in a dialogue, betwixt a pack-man, and a priest. Translated out of Dutch by S. I.S. and newly augmented and enlarged by his son, R.S.*, Glasgow, 1642. A1.

mother and the saints, and the Pope's authority. Packman is stylised here as a naive and uneducated person, who had never studied Latin at school and who therefore felt excluded from real praying. He first allows the priest to assert his superiority (which John, of course, does eagerly). Sometimes shaped as a Socratic dialogue, the "chat" was designed to stress Packman's real eloquence, which leads to his undeniable oral victory. As a result, John suspects a pack on his back to be only a disguise:

"Well Packe-man, thou beare about that Trunke,
I feare thou bee but some forlopen Monke,
Of *Luthers* love, or crooked *Calvines* Crew,
And sent abroad, such businesse to brew:
Transformed in the person of some Pedler."⁵

Packman consistently denies the charge and then again proves his eloquence, showing knowledge of the Church Fathers, the Bible in its Catholic and Protestant versions and a great capacity to make an impromptu critical analysis of any topic that comes up in discussion. Finally, the quite helpless priest asks him to return the following day to discuss that matter with his superior, a prior, and Packman returns. After a long wakeful night, filled with contradicting emotions, he arrives festively dressed to the cloister to take up the topic with John's prior. This attempt, however, proves to be a disaster. From the very beginning of their meeting the prior treated both Packman and Father John as heretics and has no objection to educating the peddler by force:

"Hee call'd them heretiques, both, and vow'd to hang them.
With that Pack-Man hurled through the Closter,
And there he met with an ill-favoured Foster.
Who quicly twined him, and all on his Back;
And then he learn'd to pray, shame fall the Pack;
Therefore the pedlar's conclusion was clearcut:
For if they have not freed mee of my sinne,
They sende mee out lighter out than I came in."
And his reaction quite fierce:
"And still hee cryde, Shame fall both Monks and Fryers,
For I have lost my Pack, and learn'd no Prayers.
So farewell Ave, Creed, and Pater noster;
I'll pray n my Mother- tongue, and quyte the Closter."⁶

This satiric dialogue was later plagiarised by the famous "water poet", John Taylor, as *A Pedlar and a Romish priest in a very hot Discourse, full of Mirth, Truth, Wit, Folly, and plain-dealing*, in 1641. He reoriented Sempill's Calvinistic arguments in order to make them fit better the Anglican church's views,⁷ partly eliminating the Scottish context of the poem. Although Taylor repeats emphatically both the topics and the relationship between conversational partners of Sempill's dialogue, he underlines the idea of Poland as the only place in the catholic world to make that kind of free discussion possible:

⁵ Idem *ibidem*, (B3). (I would like to thank Arthur H. Williamson for showing me the cultural context of that fragment, which is also shown by his paper in this volume).

⁶ The number of that page is missing but the reconstruction suggests it to be B5.

⁷ Kendal, L H. Jr., "John Taylor's Piracy of The Pack-Mans Paternoster", *Papers of the bibliographical Society of America* (College Park, MD) 57 (1963), pp. 201-210.

"Wert thou at Rome, & half these words didst speak,
 Pedlar it were enough thy neck to break;
 But here you live, and talk and prate secure,
 and undervalue that blest Virgin pure,
 Yeelding no honour, or no adoration.
 To her, or to her dayes of celebration.
 (Goe but to Spaine, and shew thy vild condition,
 Thou shalt be tortur'd in the Inquisition."⁸

Therefore, Poland existed at the opposite extreme to Rome and Spain of the Inquisition. In Taylor's version, however, Pedlar rejects as useless the suggestion that he return the next day to meet the prior. Greatly disappointed by the Roman Catholic priest's ignorance, he quits the cloister ultimately convinced that there was no way to unite with Catholics. But it remains clear that both Packman and the priest left as they had come, in peace, keeping to their own positions. The incident of intolerance with the prior was omitted. Although the dialogue shows as strong a focus on the faithfulness of Packman's cause as Sempill's work, Taylor stresses that Poland was a special place that offered the possibility to discuss religious matters without any threat of persecution.⁹

Why the image of Poland differs so much from Sempill's diagnosis is not easy to explain. Could it be the general religious moderation shown by Taylor and the lesser hatred of Catholicism as compared with the Scottish versions? ¹⁰ Could it be the result of good experiences of Poland or the Poles during his travels to Bohemia and East Central Europe?¹¹ Or maybe the contrast with Sempill was caused by his withdrawal from Scottish affairs and his unwillingness to identify himself with the Scots? These are all plausible explanations, but there is no certain answer.

In any case, the more negative depiction of Poland provided by Sempill proved to have more impact on the consciousness of the British. The moderate Taylor's dialogue was not reprinted, whereas Sempill's dialogue on Poland as a place for religious discussion was to be repeated in the British editions up to the first decades of the eighteenth century. This happened thanks to his son, Robert, who enlarged and filled the text with even more aggressive arguments in the third version of his father's poem, which appeared in 1642. This version was reprinted a few more times.¹² One might conclude that this version better matched British, or at least Scottish, people's opinions, based on later accounts by real Scottish peddlers from Poland, their "foster homeland", as well as other British reports on Polish Counter-Reformation actions.¹³

⁸ *English Poetry Database* (Chadwyck collections), p. 7.

⁹ As for the real attacks on Scots in Poland, referred to by Anna Biegańska in her article "In Search of Tolerance, she resumes: „Altogether there were about twenty cases of assaults on the dissenters in all Poland and a dozen or so on the Catholics in Toruń, Gdańsk, Elbląg, Ryga and Królewiec. Minor incidents arising from interdenominational friction did occur, but bloody persecutions organized by the authorities, as happen in virtually all other European countries, were unknown." (Biegańska A., "In Search of Tolerance: Scottish Catholics and Presbyterians in Poland," *Scottish Slavonic Review* 17 (1991), p. 47)

¹⁰ See Capp, B., *The World of John Taylor the Water-Poet, 1578-1653*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994, pp. 132-40; Kendall, however, underlines his deep involvement in the religious controversy rather than his moderateness. (See his *John Taylor's Piracy*, p. 204)

¹¹ Capp, *The World of John Taylor*, p. 127.

¹² Probably the first edition of Robert Sempill was prepared in 1634 (Kendall, *John Taylor's Piracy*, p. 204) but what surely survived is *A Pick-tooth for the Pope*.

¹³ Kendal listed subsequent editions of Robert's version in 1669 (Edinburgh and Glasgow editions), and 1696. (See *John Taylor's Piracy*, p. 202)

More obviously anti-Protestant attitudes in Poland were to be found in an eye-witness account by the Lutheran minister, Gilbert Eleazar, who served the English and Scottish congregation in Vilnius for three years. He witnessed the persecution of Calvinists there in the year 1639 and the destruction of their church in 1640. Eleazar published his report in the year 1641, after his return to England. His *News from Poland: wherein is declared the cruell practice of the popish clergie against protestants*¹⁴, announces on its title page: "Read it over and you shall find it a most unparelled story for barbarous Treacherie". While a strong accusation, the account is a quite faithful description of the events, albeit with the goal of promoting the Protestant cause and somewhat of a panegyric on Princes Janusz and Krzysztof Radziwiłł, Eleazar's Polish supporters.

His perspective can be observed in his examination of the manifestation of God's Providence in "Vilnian affairs". He recognised it through a sudden death of one of the nuns, who had earlier falsely testified against Protestants to justify their persecution. He provided a very detailed account of the tragic persecution, sparked accidentally by Calvinists but later eagerly pursued by Catholics, of Vilnian Protestants, including his own community, and its consequences. On the basis of his own experience, he blamed only the Jesuits for causing trouble for Protestants. In his opinion, Polish Catholics were naturally passive, and thus both susceptible to specific catholic illusions and likely to embark on persecutions, especially when under Jesuit influence.

The author of *News from Poland* appeared to be a religious as well as profound thinker. His statements against Catholics were void of hatred and quite reasonable. What surprises a contemporary reader most is Eleazar's conclusion, a lesson drawn from Poland for Britain. Knowing the consequences of intolerance so well from Poland, at the very beginning of the English "Civil War", he recommended that all non-Anglican sects, together with Catholics, be rooted out and banished from the Kingdom. So he emphatically encouraged his King:

"That he may be pleased so to affect and dispose the hearts of the Peers and Princes, Magistrates of this Land, that they may speedely bethinke themselves of some opportune way and means, whereby all fractions, and factions, schismes, separations, sidings, and backsidings, contentions, combustions, confusions, prevarications finally all Antichristian, polypragmaticall, tyrannicall, and treacherous heresies, schismes, practices, professions, and enterprises may be quite, or at least as much as is possible, abolished and removed from the body and bounds of this Monarchie [...]"¹⁵

He does not vow to kill extremists but to reject and banish them, which would cause God to grant the Kingdom final unity in the formula of "one God and one King". His analysis is based on both partly justified suspicions of a negative influence of Catholics in his country and on true love for unity. But in an argument that seems to be significant and characteristic of the epoch, he could not even imagine a peaceful coexistence of different denominations within the one country. And he also failed to realise that he had advised the British to undertake exactly what the

¹⁴ Gilbert, Eleazar, *News from Poland: wherein is declared the cruell practice of the popish clergie against the Protetstants, and in particular against the ministers of the city of Vilna, in the great Dukedome of Lithuania, under the government of the most illustrious prince, Duke Radziwell, faithfull*, London 1641.

¹⁵ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 30.

Polish Catholics had attempted in Vilnius. It seems peaceful coexistence was simply beyond his comprehension. This interpretation is confirmed by the statements of positive surprise he made at the beginning of his mission - he was greatly amused by the fact that a large number of denominations lived in peace together.¹⁶ It appears that the incident he experienced pushed him to the extreme.

In Gilbert Eleazar's case, at the risk of overstatement, it could be said that Polish persecution provided simple justification of English persecution, and not only towards Catholics, but also every non-Anglican denomination, justification of persecution of anyone who was different on behalf of religious unity. His work was a harsh statement against Catholics and had some effect at home. Its second edition, published in 1652, was especially welcomed as an impressive example of Catholic treachery in Poland.

Another instance of Polish religious intolerance that provoked comment in Britain came in the time of the political and religious struggle accompanying the wars ruining Poland in the second part of the 17th and the first part of the 18th century.

British writers found powerful examples of Polish persecution activity after the "Deluge", 1655-60, when a series of anti-Protestant incidents, apparently attempts at revenge for Protestant support for the Swedish army, took place in Poland-Lithuania. The most effective evidence for Polish intolerance appeared to be *The book of Martyrs*, completed in 1701 in the part entitled *The persecution continued in Hungary, Poland and Lithuania*, as well as Robert Burton's: *Martyrs in flames, or, The history of poppery displaying the horrid persecutions and cruelties...*¹⁷ Horrible scenes of unhuman cruelty, such as roasting people alive or cutting off parts of their bodies in Lesno, Karmin, Schochy, Karłecin and other places, were illustrated with pictures of Protestants hunted by Poles, especially ministers.

The more historically based account of Lesna's fate appeared in British writings quite late, in the eighteenth-century supplement to Fox's *Books of Martyrs*.¹⁸ This detailed account finished with the well-known moving verses which read, in the English version:

"When first Lesna stood of old
Now nought but Ashes we behold."¹⁹

While the famous "Tragedy of Lesno" also involved the Arianists, a religious minority, in Poland often called the "Polish Brothers" or the Socinians. None of the later British writers identified them, eagerly forgetting own persecutions of the

¹⁶ Biegańska, In *Search of Tolerance*, p. 50.

¹⁷ *The book of Martyrs, with an Account of the Acts and Monuments of Church and State, from the time of our blessed saviour Wherein is given a Faithful Relation of the Sufferings and Martydoms of the Apostles, Evangelists, and Primitive Christians, under the Ten Heathen Persecutions, and of the anti-Christian Popish Persecutions that have been in England, Ireland, Italy, Germany, Bohemia, Spain, Flanders, France, Hungary, Poland, Lithuania, Savoy, Piemont, and in other Countries. Abstracted from the Best Authors and Original Papers. Illustrated with Cutts engraved on Copper-Plates*, London, 1702, vol. II and Burton R.: *Martyrs in flames, or, The history of poppery displaying the horrid persecutions and cruelties exercised upon protestants by the papists, for many hundred years past...* The 3rd edition, London, 1729.

¹⁸ Welsley, J., *A Supplement to Mr. Fox's in A Christian Library. Consisting of Extracts from and Abridgment of the old choicest pieces of practical Divinity, which have been published in English*, Bristol, 1751, vol. VI, pp. 250-265.

¹⁹ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 265.

Arianists in Britain. They described all victims simply as "Protestants", without any doctrinal distinctions.

British authors' attitudes towards the Socinians proved to be complex. Some considered them a "blasphemous" sect, an undeniable sin and the evil fruit of Polish tolerance. The *Dracon Ordinance*, passed by the English Parliament in 1648, stated that everyone advocating Arianism should be punished with death. This law followed both the Polish and general European norms of the time.²⁰

Polish intolerance of Socinians sometimes provoked contradictory opinions. There was also a view in Britain that the creation and spread of the Socinian sect formed part of an anti-Protestant plot, begun in Poland, either by Jews or Jesuits. A poem entitled: *Upon a prohibited Festivall of Nativity of our Saviour* by Edmund Gayton, a poet and "Phisician", demonstrates an effort to connect Polish tolerance of "new Arianists" with English anti-Semitism. According to Gayton, the Jews had invented Socinianism in Poland with a view to taking over London Saint Paul's cathedral. Therefore, under the cover of persecution, Jews sent Arianists to England to cause religious ferment. Gayton claimed that the prohibition of Christmas celebrations during the Civil War and the Commonwealth period resulted from a combined "Jewish-Polish plot". That "calendar revolution", the poet said, should be overcome with recalling the spirit of Athanasius, the main opposer of the Arianists doctrine's founder, Arius (III/IV Century). He also appealed to the Swedish army invading Poland during the Deluge, as the "Swedish swords", predestined to find the proper means to root Socinians out.

Gayton saw both Jews and Socinians as the children of the same poisonous change within the unchangeable Scripture, explaining that Jews had purposely sent Socinians to England to kill the only truly Christian doctrine which stressed Christ's Divinity and thus undermine the state:

"But Jews have shipt them over in Danz' boats,
And we (like Brutes) have swallowed Polish Oats."²¹

Published in the year 1663, this text does not, however, allow us to identify the year of writing, although a case might be made for both the time of the passing of the bill against Christmas (1645) and the period after the passing of the final Polish bill against the Arianists (1658). Gayton's poetic vision of ships loaded with Socinians and sent from Gdańsk to England better fits the latter. And, from that perspective, their banishment from Poland would be seen rather as a pretence at persecuting them which was said to be a deliberate Jewish plot against England.²²

The fate of Polish Protestants oppressed in the beginning of the 18th century, during the "Northern War", inspired another sort of reaction. Following the King's appeal, a collection of money was begun on their behalf. However, as a result of

²⁰ Ogonowski, Z., *Myśl ariańska w Polsce 17 wieku*, Kraków, Ossolineum, 1991, pp. 16-17.

²¹ Gayton, *Upon a prohibited Festivall*, p. 63.

²² Apart from the "Jewish plot" promoting Socinianism in the British Isles in the context of their wider movements as a result of Polish persecution, also accusations against Jesuits may be found in the British writings in the middle of the 17th century. (See; Bartlet, J., *Jesuites plots and counsels plainly discovered to the most unlearned which hath satisfied many about these distractions: wherein is laid open the Jesuites endeavours to bring all states to monarchies and all the commons in monarchies to slavery, and how they have been put on foot here in England: also how their counsels brought Germany into these long and bloody wars endeavoured to bring Poland into slavery*, London, 1642, p. 6)

dogmatic discussions which arose on that occasion, both “Popish” persecutions and troubles brought on by the war for Polish Protestants were scarcely noticed in writings referring to the topic in the years 1716-1717. Printed texts, mostly sermons or brief statments added to sermons, focused on the sources and status of Polish churches, whether or not they could be called Episcopal or Reformed. The anonymous author of *A Letter to the Bishop of Ely*²³ took a negative view of Polish Protestants. He argued that the Calvinist nobility in Poland was in fact not even Christian because the custom of electing their king violated God’s will. That perspective suggested they were not worthy of any aid. Thomas Bennet addressed this argument in order to justify charity for Polish Protestants in *The case of the Reforme’d Episcopal Churches in Great Poland and Polish Prussia consider’d in a Sermon...*²⁴ He made a huge effort to counter dogmatic criticisms that distracted from the fund-raising efforts, but it seems that at that time ideological differences shaped reactions to the plight of these Protestants among the British.

While Gilbert Eleazar attempted to derive a general formula for Britain on the basis of his own Polish experience and observations, the anonymous author of the satire: *St. Crispins triumph over Pope Innocent, or, The monks and fryers routed a Tragi-comedy, as it was lately acted with the great noise at Dantzick in Poland* published in 1678, was sure he had found a connection linking Poland to the very beginning of the “Popish plot”. This accusation against Poland was based on the events of the 3 May, 1678, when craftsmen attacked the Catholic procession in Gdańsk, and the Carmelite church was plundered and the saints’ pictures within were destroyed. It was the guilds’ way of displaying their bitterness towards King John Sobieski, who, despite his promises, had not helped them during the visit he had paid to Gdańsk a few months earlier, and instead had shown only interest in supporting Catholics and receiving gifts.²⁵ Licensed in the beginning of November, the satire satirical print was purposely dated on 17th October. Added to the place of its publication was the following note:

“Printed at Primrose Hill and for the special edification of those new Miracle-Mongers, who would persuade us, that after a man has been Strangled and Murdered, he can yet walk a Mile, and run himself through with his own Sword.”

What was the reason for drawing a connection between the starting point of the “Popish plot” and the events in Gdańsk on the 3rd of May? *St. Crispins triumph over Pope Innocent* was written amid the hysteria of the beginning of the “Popish plot crisis”, sparked by alleged revelations by Titus Oates that Jesuits had planned to kill Charles II and the Protestants who supported him in order to introduce his Catholic heir. The Whigs tried to use this so-called “Popish plot” as a pretext to exclude the

²³ *A letter to the Bishop of Ely, upon the Ocasion of his suppos’d LATE CHARGE (said to be Deliver’d at Cambridge, August &th, 1716) as far as Relates to what is therein urg’d against Frequent COMMUNION ; and for the (pretended) Episcopal Reform’d Chrches of Transylvania, Great Poland and Prussia, by Philalethes (M. Earbury),* London, 1717, 2nd edition.

²⁴ Bennet, T., *The case of the Reforme’d Episcopal Churches in Great Poland and Polish Prussia consider’d ina Sermo preached on Sunday, Nov. 18 1716 At St. Laurence Jewry, London in the morning, and St Olave’s Southwark in the Afternoon,* London, 1716.

²⁵ Cieślak, *Historia Gdańska*, 1655-1793, d. Edmund Cieślak, Gdańsk, Instytut Historii Polskiej Akademii Nauk. Zakład Historii Gdańska i Dziejów Morskich Polski, 1993, vol. III, pp. 170-175 e pp.214, 243, 253, and Cieślak, E., *Walki społeczno-polityczne w Gdańsku w drugiej połowie XVII wieku. Interwencja Jana III Sobieskiego*, Gdańsk, Gdańskie Towarzystwo Naukowe, 1962.

Catholic successor, the Duke of York, from the British throne. The satirical poem served to show how Protestants defended themselves against repeated Catholic plots and persecution by Jesuits, and proved that it reached its peak in those times of "Popish plot". Hysteria in London broke out with the death of Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey,²⁶ a Westminster Justice of the Peace, whose body was found in the ditch nearby Primrose Hill. He was strangled and spiked with his own sword, on the evening of the 17th October, as indicated in the satire. His death became a signal for anti-Catholic persecution. Two weeks later, by 2nd November, the situation seemed to be clear, and the connection between the events in Gdańsk and London as examples of the same Catholic persecution and Protestant martyrdom formed. It took few months for the Gdańsk events to become proof of yet another attempt by the Jesuits and papacy to persecute Protestants. The "Gdańsk anti-catholic commotion" became considered as a simple catholic provocation, founding a base for revenge and anti-Protestant persecution on the European scale, starting with the most firm Protestants, those in England.

As for satire's title, Saint Crispin was the patron of shoemakers, and functioned as a symbol of radical Protestants, being the "sole-menders", which in literary texts often gained the connotation of "soul-menders". In fact different guilds were involved, although one of their leaders, Kristian Meyer, was indeed a cobbler.²⁷

The satiric text is written from an ironic point of view, stylised on ironic monologues. The situation of conflict is described against the background of Jesuit vices and atrocities, as both an act of self-defence against their tricks and the result of fear by Protestants. One of the parts of that satire was a lampooning litany prayed by friaries first to Saint Dominic and then to the Devil, to encourage their retaliation against the Gdańsk Protestants.

The main aim was to show the coincidence and consequence of both incidents, in Gdańsk in May and in London in October, 1678. The first one appears to be a reason for the second one and thus gains the status of the true beginning of the "Popish plot crisis" in England. The English satire on the incident of 3 May was not an attack on Poland itself, but rather on the dominance of Popish and Jesuit forces there. The Polish king, John III Sobieski, however, appeared in the story as a guarantor of Catholic power in Gdańsk, which provoked the incident. The request from a delegation of monks from Gdańsk contains:

"Father Pope, and Father Devil,
And you the most Unchristian Evel
Wrong the right, we have sustain'd
Wherein we were justly maim'd;
They in spite of Sobieski,
Mar'd the tools your worships get by
Made on purpose to pick Pockets,
Thieves are Saints disguise'd in Rocket
Therefore, if you do not help us,
Ye are Puppies, and bewhelp us;"²⁸

²⁶ See for example, Marshall, A., *The strange Death of Edmund Godfrey. Plots and politics in Restoration*, London, Sutton Publishing, 1999.

²⁷ Chapman, A. A., "Whose Saint Crispins' Day Is It?; Shoemaking, Holiday Making, and the Politics of Memory in Early Modern England," *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 54, p. 200.

²⁸ *St. Crispins triumph over Pope Innocent, or, The monks and fryers routed a Tragi-comedy, as it was lately acted with the great noise at Dantzick in Poland*, London, 1678.

After deciding that Saint Dominic lacked sufficient power to wreak vengeance on “bloody” Protestants, Gdańsk friars directed themselves to the greatest powers of Catholicism – the Pope, the Devil and the French King. This “trinity” decided that the revenge on the “shoemakers” should be exceptionally cruel, and carefully prepared, so their plenipotentiary became the “Monsieur”, as they called the French King. The promise to prepare a terrible vengeance became his new mission and, the narrator concludes, he started the “Popish plot” itself, because the French cause in England was the most important and still incomplete. The satire, *St. Crispins triumph over Pope Innocent*, was designed to reveal the connection with the British and make them remember the alarming principles of „popery”, which would then in turn allow the persecution of Catholics. Poland, and especially Gdańsk, just delivered the tailor-made opportunity to underline justification for this cause.

However, it was the execution of Protestants in Toruń (Thorn) in 1724 that caused the greatest repercussions in Britain. Protestants, provoked by Catholics, destroyed the Jesuit college and the pictures of saints within. The speed with which Poland imposed its cruel, if legal, punishment of two council members and a dozen rioters being condemned to death, ten of whom were publicly beheaded in December 1724, provoked shock all over Europe, and mobilised both Prussian and British monarchs into making official protests. Reactions there showed that solidarity was a must. The “Thorn affairs” were often treated as a kind of apocalypse fulfilled, because of the Saxon connection. The need to observe the changeable forces of Protestant and Catholic countries caused British writers to examine the situation of Poland, especially after the accession to its throne of the king of Saxony, Augustus II. His conversion to Catholicism was clearly received as apostasy. In the year 1700 Richard Burridge published a long satirical poem, *An Apostate Prince or a satyr against the present King of Poland*, in which one of the methods of description was to ridicule a picture of Frederic Augustus, as led by the Jesuits:

“[...] the *Blazon*, let it be,
Set out with all marks of Infamy;
Two *Jesuits*, the Supporters; on each Hand,
The Motto, God and Justice I withstand.”²⁹

The long poem is also filled with prophecies that demonstrate the consequences of Augustus’ apostasy for his very own country. Burridge highlights both political and religious persecution as inevitable results of the exposure of the Saxon to the Catholic, Jesuit tensions of the re-catholicisation. Grave, dramatic pictures showed Saxon Protestants sacrificing their lives rather than their commitment to religious freedom:

“Nay, more than this, your Rage will Violate
Those Holy Altars, which they Consecrate
Unto a Sacred Deity, that’s true,
And not to Saints, their Fathers never knew.”³⁰

The principal image of Augustus as a Polish King is as a “popish king”, which meant being a tyrant. This aggressive satire explains why the situation in Saxony and

²⁹ Burridge, R., *An Apostate Prince or a Satyr against the Present King of Poland*, London, 1700, p. 9

³⁰ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 13.

its relationship to Poland became so topical in Britain. British observers speculated as to whether Saxony would become Catholic or not and expected Augustus to initiate persecution of Protestants at any moment. The satire also partly explains the later reactions of British writers to the "Thorn affairs".

The main source of information about the "Thorn affairs" was a collection of documents sent by the Prussian court. The most popular among them was *A faithful and exact Narrative of the horrid Tragedy, lately acted at Thorn in Polish Prussia, by the Contrivance and Instigation of the Jesuits*, published in the year 1725 and reprinted later a few times.³¹ The speech of the "Reverend Father Advocate to the Jesuits in Thorn" also helped create interest in the topic.³² The most interesting of these writings is the *Remarks on the speech of the reverend Father the Advocate for the Jesuits of Thorn made by Philopatris*.³³ It is an excellent piece of polemic literature. It consists of a methodical analysis of the advocate's speech, showing step by step, how successive arguments were very carefully contrived. Jesuit idolatry was especially mocked. The most interesting for Philopatris was the part connected directly with England. As for the argument of the Jesuit that "Thorn is another England"; Philopatris shows his mischievous appreciation in the words:

"We in England are particularly oblig'd to the Reverent Father. What he said was all compliments because he had found out the worse of colours. And yet what catholic of common Sense, whose bigotry has not taken away his Feeling, would not rather choose to groan under English Laws, than to live within the Reach of Lawless Zeal or Unreleting Biggotttry, which upon the Slightest Difference, scatters destruction or Mischief upon All around it?"³⁴

When he started to summarise his commentary, speaking on the punishment already inflicted, great emotions, of both sorrow and indignation, caused him to cut off his speech.

It seems that a more moderate reaction to the "Thorn affairs" came only from one author, a Scot, Robert Howarden,³⁵ with his *Some remarks on the decree of King Augustus II. And of the assessorial tribunal....* There he tried to observe the Thorn case in its wider historical context, arguing for the similarities between the two religious camps:

"Tis true, this paper everywhere supposes that Protestants are not impeccable, and that Papists are not always in the wrong."³⁶

³¹ *A faithful and exact Narrative of the horrid Tragedy, lately acted at Thorn in Polish Prussia, by the Contrivance and Instigation of the Jesuits. With an account of the Generous, Just and Seasonable Interposition of their Britanic and Prussien majesties and other Protestant Powers, in the affair. And a serious Exhortation to Protestants Powers of all Denominations to unite and exert themselves against their common Enemy. To which is added A prospect of the said Horrid Tragedy, on a large Copper-Plate.* London 1725 *Remarks on the speech of the reverend Father the Advocate for the Jesuit of Thorn made by Philopatris: delivered before the Assessorial tribunal of the Great Chancellor of Poland.... In a letter to Britannicus*, [Dublin], London printed and reprinted in Dublin, by R. Dickson, 1725.

³² It was published three times with the comments showing his idolatry and hidden cruelty, from Latin and French versions.

³³ *Remarks on the speech.*

³⁴ *Idem, ibidem*, p. 3*.

³⁵ H. E. [Edward Howarden] *Some remarks on the decree of King Augustus II. And of the assessorial tribunal, with other select judges of Poland, October the 30th, anno 1724: ... Together with an answer to a pamphlet intitled, A faithful and exact narrative of the horrid tragedy lately acted at Thorn ...*

³⁶ *Idem, ibidem*, Preface.

Some British writers, following Augustus' propaganda, justified him as one willing to help Protestants in Toruń, but thwarted by the cruel intentions of magnates and Jesuits. *A poem upon a tragedy of Thorn*, by an anonymous Scottish author, written in September, 1725³⁷, provides an extreme example of this perspective.

With asking "Shall it become a nation's sin..."³⁸ it reveals great sensibility on the part of its author, who was also obliged to interrupt his work on the description of the "Thorn affairs" because he was overcome with emotion.³⁹ In the resumé of the affair, the poet confessed:

"Yet Justice does require, that we
unto the World shou'd show,
that these Severities do not
from King Augustus flow;
But from Grandees and Jesuites,
whose malice is so keen,
They torture Laws, to make them speak
what they did never mean"⁴⁰

The longest lines are devoted to a description of those magnates who were enemies of his (sic!) king and plotted against him for their own material benefit. The following rhetorical question serves to indicate the final difference between the good king and his noble subjects:

"Is't possible, that they can be
To King Augustus Friends,
Whose Conduct does alienate
From him the Peoples Minds?"⁴¹

What is very noticeable is his strong identification with Poland, especially at that point. In his vision, Poland is ruined above all by 'grandees'. He blames them even more than the Jesuits and finally makes an accusation, linking the "Thorn affairs" and Stanisław Leszczyński's claim to the Polish throne:

"Should we not be afraid, that thus,
some dark and hellish Plot
by Stanislaus is contriv'd,
his Intrest to promote?"⁴²

His whole poem is filled with emotion and he even calls Poland his (sic!) native land.⁴³ He was so overcome that he suddenly broke off his poem after a vision of terrible destruction awaiting Poland under its unfaithful aristocratic inhabitants and the corruption of the will of innocent Augustus by the Jesuits.

³⁷ *A Poem upon a Tragedy of Thorn*, Edinburgh, 1725.

³⁸ *Idem, ibidem*, p. 9.

³⁹ Readers learn about it from the additional note of poem's publisher, signed as "LP". (*Idem, ibidem*, p. 13)

⁴⁰ *Idem, ibidem*, p. 8.

⁴¹ *Idem, ibidem*, p. 9.

⁴² *Idem, ibidem*.

⁴³ That and some other parts of that text seem to suggest strong Polish connections of the author but it still requires further research.

Other British authors treated the "Thorn affairs" as the fulfilment of the apocalypse. They argued that it was another step in Augustus' withdrawal from the Protestant cause and urged Protestant powers to reintroduce tolerance into Poland by force. Among that group the most distinguished was *An alarm to protestant princess and people, who are all struck at in the Popish cruelties at Thorne...*, by Charles Owen, printed in 1725.⁴⁴ It exploited biblical rhetoric and imagery, such as metaphors of Egypt as the Catholic Church and Israel representing Protestantism. Its main conclusion was to promote "the strong union amongst the all protestant powers under the glorious King George of Britain, the great patron of Liberty and Property".

The following extract from the end of his work best represents his rhetoric:

"Not a Dog in Aegypt would move his Tongue against Israel, if Israel were thus united, especially under King George, the titular head of the Protestant Religion."⁴⁵

The word "massacre", recalled also by Owen, was frequently applied to the Toruń execution. Attempts were made to construct an impressive parallel with the massacre of 150,000 Protestants by Catholics in Ireland in the 1641 rebellion.⁴⁶

The warning from Poland was to be repeated in some later texts of the eighteenth century that dealt with Protestants in Poland, but was never to be so strong again. The last textual evidence of such Protestant alarm was the satire reflecting Polish conflicts at the Interregnum of 1733, *Do you know what you are about? Or, a protestant alarm to Great Britain: proving our late theatric squabble, a type of the present contest for the crown of Poland*. Its anonymous author made in the *Prologue* a general comparison between Polish political and English theatrical conflicts, with Poland coming off rather negatively:

"When such a Bustle's for a King of Poland,
Those many wish there were a king of No-Land."⁴⁷

In this libel, Poland is treated as a negative example of a country from the Catholic camp, in the rather comical context of theatrical conflicts of that time. It also shows a gradual change in the consciousness of the British, who during the Enlightenment began to withdraw from religious conflict.

In troubled and increasingly weak Poland, the oppression of Protestants was routine, but their means of defence were stronger than ever. Calling for external support became habitual. Although Britain also later allied with Russia or Prussia to guarantee Protestants' rights in Poland, from this year 1733 and *Do you know what you are about?* point on, political topics dominated both political and literary texts.

⁴⁴ Owen, Charles, *An alarm to protestant princess and people, who are all struck at in the Popish cruelties at Thorne and other Barbarous executions abroad*, published first in London and then reprinted in Dublin, 1725.

⁴⁵ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 39.

⁴⁶ Wight, T., *A history of the rise and progress of the people called Quakers in Ireland, from the year 1653 to 1700. ... First compiled, ... by Thomas Wight ...* Dublin, 1751, p. 19. I would like to thank Róisín Healy for providing me with that information, also to be found in this volume.

⁴⁷ *Do you know what you are about? Or, a protestant alarm to Great Britain: proving our late theatric squabble, a type of the present contest for the crown of Poland; and that the division between Handel and Senesino, has more in it than we imagine. Also That the latter is no Eunuch, but a jesuit in Disguise; with other particulars of the greatest importance*, London, 1733, p.1.

British political commentators recalled incidents of intolerance to justify their passivity during the partitions of Poland, especially the first.⁴⁸ The change of perspective appeared in writings concerned with Poland's third partition, which were filled with compassion, and focused more on the virtues of a dying country.⁴⁹

It appears that a few motives were paramount in British comments upon religious persecutions in Poland in the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century. Treating Poland as a "Popish kingdom" caused authors to revise the former view of Poland as a "state without stakes". The close Scottish-Polish relationship provided some immediate examples of Polish persecution that attracted great attention in Britain. British writers focused on persecution also in order to control a surprising experiment of uncontrolled political and religious liberty in Poland which through the seventeenth and eighteenth century pushed the country to be more and more a trouble spot of Europe. Another motive was the desire to help Protestants in Poland, who sought British aid during the time of their various oppressions, especially after the "Deluge" and "The Northern War", although with different purposes in mind. Thirdly, but no less importantly, Britain's own external and internal policy provide a vital context for understanding attitudes to Poland's religious persecutions, especially the "Thorn affairs".

⁴⁸ Horn, D.B., *British Public Opinion and the first Partition of Poland*, Edinburgh/London "Oliver and Boyd", 1945, pp. 39-40, 60, 71-3.

⁴⁹ See, e.g. a long poem by Thomas Galloway. (Galloway, T., *Poems. The Tears of Poland. To which are added Songs on Various Subjects, Scots and English; with other pieces*, Edynburg, 1795, 2nd ed.) See also Horn, *British Public Opinion*, chapter VII).