

Acknowledgements

This collection emerges from the conference ‘Tudor Ireland and Renaissance Court Society: Audience and Discourse’ held at the Royal Irish Academy, 3–4 November 2016. The initial impetus for the gathering was the organisers’ long-standing interest in bringing together a group of scholars, working in a range of disciplines and subfields, to explore a subject they deemed critical to understanding Ireland in a European context in the age of the Renaissance, and yet which had been barely touched by scholars. There were both comparative and local questions in mind. Regarding the former, Ireland in the late medieval and early modern periods participated in what we might think of as court culture, broadly construed. And yet in the vast literature on that subject, Ireland barely appears. Moreover, studies focused specifically on Ireland have rarely considered elite politics and their social embeddedness and impact in terms of court culture. A primary goal of the conference, then, was to simultaneously address those linked questions with the aim of offering new insights beneficial for those working on early modern Ireland and/or on western Europe more broadly.

A second driver of the conference was an interest in the transhistorical aspects of political polarisation. We live in a historical moment of ferocious and fateful demonisation of difference. In the United States, discussion of possible civil war is now to be heard; in Europe, the phenomenon of Brexit offers a ‘peaceful’ example of disinterest in collaborative governance among nations, whereas Russia’s invasion of Ukraine returned war to European soil. The ‘Humility and Conviction in Public Life’ project, funded by the John Templeton Foundation and managed through the University of Connecticut’s Humanities Institute, was constructed to bring together academic researchers and community partners in the interest of better understanding the history, dynamics and effects of political polarisation and to explore how humanists might lend their shoulders to efforts at counteracting them. The ‘Tudor Ireland and Renaissance Court Society’ conference was in part an exercise in setting political balkanisation in historical context, for the target era, too, was one of great – indeed

murderous – polarisation. The conference and present volume were not intended to make direct links across the centuries, but rather to draw out the early modern lineage of political polarisation and put it in conversation with modern studies of the same.

There are many people to thank for the appearance of these essays. First and foremost are those who made it happen. From the engine room of the University of Connecticut Humanities Institute, JoAnn Waide and Nasya Al-Saidy ensured that plans were made and successfully carried through and all participants kept on track. Hugh Shiels and his colleagues at the Royal Irish Academy were welcoming and attentive hosts. Funding was provided by the John Templeton Foundation through the auspices of the ‘Humility and Conviction in Public Life Project’; additional support came from the sponsoring institutions of the University of Connecticut and University College Cork. In addition to the editors, the speakers on the day included Hilary Bogert-Winkler, Gearóidín de Buitléir, Jane Fenlon, David Heffernan, Thomas Herron, Mícheál Hoyne, Valerie McGowan-Doyle, Christopher Maginn, Hiram Morgan, Emma Nic Chárthaigh, Patricia Palmer, Nicholas Popper and Malcolm Smuts. Plenary talks were given by Stephen Alford and Michael Questier. Sessions were chaired by Ciaran Brady, Marc Caball, Ruth Canning, Nicholas Canny, Colm Lennon and Michelle O Riordan. Our heartfelt thanks to them all. Gathered here are revised and expanded versions of some of the papers delivered. Simon Egan and Jason Harris came on board to fill critical gaps in the treatment of the subject. We also wish to thank the anonymous readers for their close attention to the text and helpful suggestions, and Clodagh Tait for reading and commenting on the introductory chapter. And, of course, immense gratitude goes to the staff of Manchester University Press, particularly Meredith Carroll, Siobhán Poole and Laura Swift.

This collection has been too long in the making. But in spite of pandemics and various personal crises, it has finally come together. We are immensely grateful to all involved for their patience and forbearance, and we hope that the final product will be worth the wait.

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