


Patronage Networks in Gaelic Ireland ca. 1541–ca. 1660

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Bardic poetry in early modern Ireland was the product of highly sophisticated, transactional, and mutually beneficial relationships between poets and their aristocratic patrons. This paper combines innovative methods of network analysis with traditional textual scholarship to visualize and examine these social relationships, which played a role, at both a national and regional level, in maintaining and upholding the values of Gaelic Ireland's elite. Focusing on the period from the declaration of Henry VIII as king of Ireland, in 1541, to the beginning of the Restoration period, in 1660, it highlights and explores an under-studied aspect of Renaissance Ireland.

INTRODUCTION

THE LITERARY LANDSCAPE of early modern Ireland was dominated by bardic poetry, the work of a professional caste of poets (or *filidh*) who were trained in the bardic schools in Ireland and Scotland during the period ca. 1200–1650. Bardic poetry is characterized by highly polished syllabic verse, the highest register of which is called *dán díreach*, and was composed largely for members of a lay nobility including both Gaelic lords and Old English lords, who were descendants of the Anglo-Normans who had colonized parts of the island in the twelfth century. Poets composed poems to legitimize their patrons' claims to leadership and to bolster their public image, and they, in return, were paid handsomely in goods, protection, and hospitality.

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They were entitled to certain privileges and held their lands tax-free. The poet-patron relationship was, then, reciprocal, sophisticated, and central to the workings of aristocratic society.¹ While the relationship between a lord and his *ollamb*, or chief poet, was one of particular intimacy, exclusive attachment to a single patron (or poet) was not customary.² Poets traveled on poetic circuits to the houses of other lords, where they could expect to be received as guests. They sometimes repaid their hosts by composing and disseminating poems describing the hospitality they had received. They could also employ the threat of satire when hospitality was refused or deemed inadequate.³ Despite the cultural and social importance of these highly transactional patronage connections, they have not been the focus of much recent analysis, and the world of the bardic poet remains on the periphery of literary-historical scholarship on Renaissance Ireland.

This paper combines new and more traditional methods of research to examine the complex nexuses of patronage that played a role, at both a national and regional level, in maintaining and upholding Gaelic aristocratic society from the declaration of Henry VIII as king of Ireland, in 1541, to the Restoration, in 1660, which brought to an end the tumultuous Cromwellian period in Ireland. Taking a dataset of 618 poems from the Bardic Poetry Database (<https://bardic.celt.dias.ie/>), we employ network analysis to link professional poets to their patrons.⁴ The potential of network analysis to revolutionize the way we think about the early modern period has been demonstrated before, and networked approaches have already been successfully applied to the study of Gaelic Ireland.⁵ This analysis, which is the first to combine network analysis with early modern Irish language material, has been conducted as part of a larger Irish Research Council funded project, MACMORRIS (Mapping Actors and Communities: A Model of Research in Renaissance Ireland in the Sixteenth/Seventeenth Century). MACMORRIS's aim is to map the full range and richness of cultural activity across languages and ethnic groups in Ireland from 1541 to 1660.⁶ The present study furthers this aim by combining network analysis with a close reading of bardic poems in order to

¹ The nature of this relationship has been characterized as one of intimacy and, crucially, of interdependence, with lords and poets seen as “mutually supporting powerbrokers of intimate connection”; Kane, 2018b, 485. For the portrayal of the relationship between patron and poet in bardic poetry see, for example, Carney, 1985.

² Knott, xli.

³ Simms, 1978.

⁴ This dataset was collated by Katharine Simms and is being maintained and updated by Mícheál Hoyne at Trinity College Dublin.

⁵ Ahnert and Ahnert, 2015; Townend; Bourke; Basu et al.; McShane; Van Vugt; Bauer; Yose et al.

⁶ On the MACMORRIS project, see Baker et al., 2018 and 2019.

map, explore, and draw attention to an under-researched archive for the study of early modern Ireland.

There has been increasing awareness of the importance of Gaelic sources, including bardic poetry, in recent scholarship on early modern Ireland (both literary and historical).⁷ Despite this gradual move toward a more inclusive framework, sources in the vernacular are still peripheral, rather than central, to most studies of the period. When bardic poetry is drawn on, it is most often from translation, and, given the number of poems that have still to be fully edited and translated, we are left with a somewhat incomplete picture of the literary landscape. Furthermore, there is still much work to be done on the poet-patron relationship that sustained the production of this body of work. This article uses network visualization and analysis to present a broad, panoramic view of the network of patrons and poets in Ireland in the early modern period. The first part of this article analyzes the broad patterns of literary patronage networks across the island of Ireland, identifying the key players, examining their connections, and measuring their influence. It also showcases how patrons utilized poetry written about them as a means of cementing their image as powerful lords. The second part of the article filters the network to focus on the province of Munster, combining network analysis with more traditional qualitative textual scholarship to bring to light those people and connections not immediately apparent in the larger network, and perhaps not the subject of previous scholarship. While the regional network exposes the fragmentary nature of extant bardic material, it is argued here that the gaps in the network can lead to a deeper understanding of the nature of the sources, and that the quantitative results of the Munster network are best understood when analyzed alongside the poems themselves.

The research has been conducted with an acute awareness of the inevitably fragmentary nature of extant bardic material. This loss and destruction of source material is particularly pertinent to medieval Gaelic sources, and although some two thousand bardic poems from the medieval and early modern period survive, this number is likely to be a mere fraction of the original corpus.⁸ However, recent work on historical networks has shown that missing data or incomplete archives are likely to be the norm for most historical network data, and that analysis of these networks is surprisingly robust and unlikely to change

⁷ For an overview of Gaelic sources and their usefulness, see Simms, 2009; for the incorporation of Gaelic material into wider scholarship, see Palmer, 2001; McCabe, 2002; Coolahan; Kane, 2010; Herron and Potterton; *Early Modern Ireland*; McKibben; Kane, 2018a; McQuillan. A digital project that promotes the use of these sources by providing learning resources is Léamh.org (<https://xn--lamh-bpa.org/>).

⁸ For a discussion of the destruction of Ireland's manuscript traditions, see Ó Corráin.

drastically if more sources were to come to light.⁹ Another challenge is that many of the extant poems have not been fully edited, and in some cases the patrons and poets to whom they are attributed have yet to be verified. This paper will address these considerable challenges.

THE DATASET

The Bardic Poetry Database (BPD), compiled originally by Katharine Simms in Trinity College, Dublin, is a catalogue of the extant corpus of Irish bardic poetry. Along with providing a diplomatic edition of the texts, it records each poem's poet and patron (when known), along with further information such as the meter and register of the poem.¹⁰ The certainty of the patronage attribution is ranked from 1 to 5. The BPD notes the period of each poem's composition (by thirds of a century), as well as the area associated with its patron (by Irish province, including Meath / the Midlands as a separate area, Scotland, and a general category of "Elsewhere" for poems composed outside Ireland and Scotland).

The first step in the network analysis was to clean the data through a process of reconciliation. The backend of the BPD separates the given names and surnames of the poets and patrons, assigning each name component a separate ID, rather than assigning an ID to each person. To rectify this, the poems dated between the mid-sixteenth century and mid-seventeenth century were read through manually, and records and IDs were created for each poet and patron, and for the poems that they were connected to. This involved the challenge of disambiguating people of the same name and people whose surnames only were recorded (e.g., Ó Dálaigh Fionn).¹¹ The next step was to extract the network data. In their most basic form, networks are composed of two types of data, "nodes" and "edges," where "nodes" are entities and the connection between those entities are the "edges." This study treats the poets and their patrons as the nodes and the poems that connected them as the edges, creating a base .csv file from which to extract different types of networks.¹²

⁹ While the networks in this article are clearly built around certain poets and patrons for whom the sources survive, this is not to say that the results are not robust, nor to say that these poets and patrons would not still rank highly if more poems were to come to light. For more on this issue of missing data and robustness in historical networks, see Ryan and Ahnert, 57–88.

¹⁰ There were three distinct registers of bardic verse: *dán díreach*, *brúilingeacht*, and *ógúchas*.

¹¹ This is particularly challenging in a context of hereditary bardic families, with generations of poets having the same name.

¹² We used a Python code to draw in the poet and patron of each poem, alongside the rest of its metadata as recorded in the Bardic Poetry Database (poem ID, location, time period, certainty of attribution, and class of poem). We have updated the metadata where it has been superseded by recent scholarship.

The dataset was then filtered to include only those poems for which both the patron and poet were known.¹³ A disadvantage of this approach is that it masks, to some extent, the influence of certain poets. It excludes, for example, a huge body of religious poetry composed in our period: because we do not know who patronized these poems, they could not be used to discern patronage connections. While some of the poets in the network composed religious poetry as part of a wider portfolio of writing, others composed mostly religious verse. Aonghus Fionn Ó Dálaigh, or Aonghus “na Diaghachta” [the pious] (fl. 1585–1601), who wrote for patrons in our network, is better known for his extensive corpus of religious work.¹⁴ His influence and prominence as a poet are therefore not reflected in our network.

PATRONAGE NETWORKS

The overarching aim of this section is to examine broad patterns of literary patronage in Ireland, based on the extant evidence. Who emerged as the most important poets? For whom did they compose poetry? Whose influence was, by extension, most far reaching? To answer these questions, we abstracted two networks that we have classed as poet-to-patron networks. Both are directed bimodal networks. A bimodal network consists of two distinct node types (in this case poets and patrons); in our study the edges are the poems that connect them. While the poets and patrons are all people, these networks are bimodal because there is no instance of a poet being a patron or vice versa.¹⁵ This means that poets cannot be directly connected to other poets and patrons cannot be directly connected to other patrons; they must be connected via the other node type. The networks are also “directed,” meaning that all the connections (edges) flow from A to B, with A being the poet, or writer, and B being the patron, or subject (fig. 1).

The data for these networks was then organized into two .csv files: a nodes file (the patrons and poets) and an edges file (the poems that connect them). The edges file also drew in the metadata on each poem from the Bardic Poetry Database (poem ID, location, time period, certainty of attribution, class of poem) captured in the overall .csv. These files were then imported to

¹³ Those patrons whose surnames only are known have been included in the network. Poems classed as satire or bardicon (referring to the Contention of the Bards, a literary controversy in which poets from the southern half of Ireland pitted themselves against their northern counterparts) were excluded, as they represent a different type of patronage connection.

¹⁴ McKenna, 1919.

¹⁵ This is not to say that we have no extant examples of aristocratic patrons writing verse, or of poems composed on poets. These poems fall outside the usual poet-patron category, however, and have therefore not been included in this analysis.

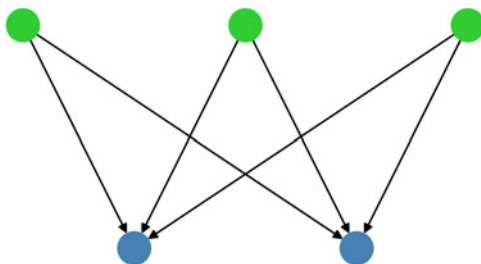


Figure 1. Sample patronage network, where the poets and their patrons are the nodes, and all edges flow from poet to patron.

Gephi—an open-source network analysis and visualization software tool—to analyze the network.

The first is a patronage network made up of all the poetic and patronage families in the dataset covering ca. 1541–1660. Bardic poetry was a hereditary profession: Bergin has highlighted that these poets belonged “to a hereditary caste in an aristocratic society” and were “both born and made.”¹⁶ Much like the professions of law and medicine, poetic training was confined to certain families, and many of these families ran schools to train subsequent generations.¹⁷ In order to represent the importance of heredity connections as a network, we treated all the poets and patrons who share a surname as one node, connecting the poetic family to the patronage family if any poet of a certain name wrote a poem for any patron of a particular surname. The poet Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird (ca. 1540–1618), for example, wrote a poem for Cú Chonnacht Óg Mág Uidhir (ca. 1520–89), connecting the “Mac an Bhaird” node to the “Mág Uidhir” node. In the visualization of this network (fig. 2), each poetic family and each family of the lay nobility that employed poets are represented by nodes, while the poems that connect them are the edges. This is a network visualized from 618 poems that includes 118 nodes (of which there are fifty-one different poetic families and sixty-seven different families that offered patronage) and 218 edges (or poems).¹⁸

Among the hereditary poetic families are the Meic Bhruaidealha of County Clare (who are also associated with the historical profession), the Meic an

¹⁶ Bergin, 4–5.

¹⁷ McManus, 97.

¹⁸ The layout is a Yifan Hu multilevel layout, which combines a force-directed model with graph coarsening technique, meaning that the most connected nodes (those with the highest degree) appear close to the center, with their affiliations being placed beside them.

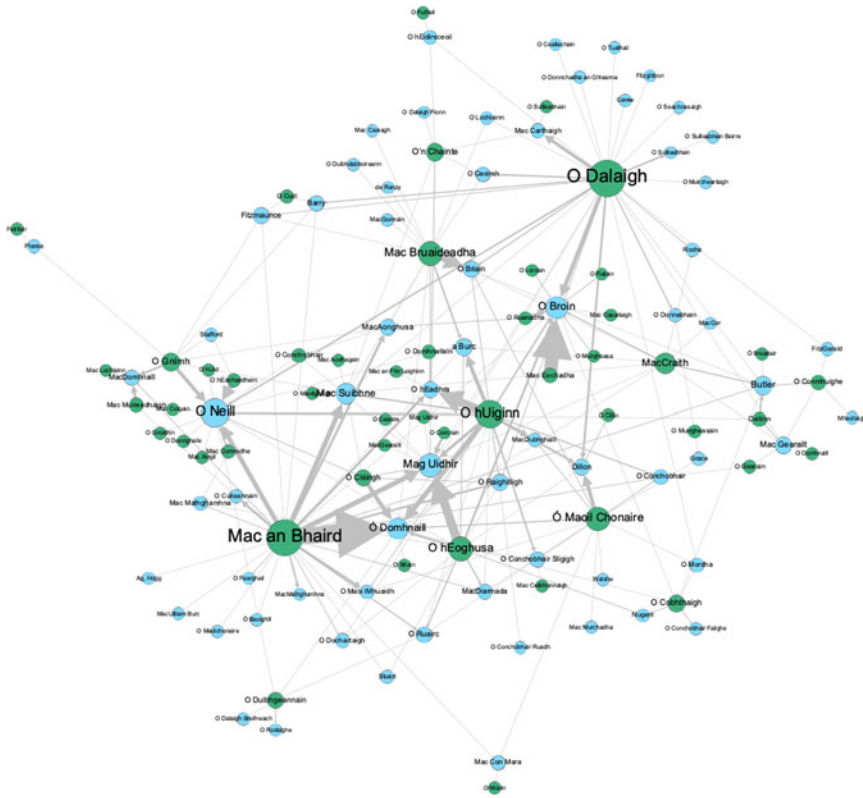


Figure 2. Bardic poetry family patronage network (ranked by degree).

Bhaird of Donegal, the Uí Eódhusa of Fermanagh, the Meic Eochadha of County Wicklow, and the Uí Uiginn of County Sligo. Visually, these are the families that stand out in figure 2, alongside the Uí Dhálaigh of Westmeath and Kerry and the Uí Mhaoil Chonaire of Roscommon. Noble families that were significant patrons include the Uí Dhomhnaill of Donegal, the Méig Uidhir of Fermanagh, the Uí Néill of Tyrone, the Meic Shuibhne of Donegal, the Uí Bhroin of Wicklow, and the Uí Eadhra of Sligo. All of these families are also represented in the network.

When we examine the weight of the connections between the nodes (the edge weights), we can see the different noble families that the poetic families wrote for (fig. 3). The Meic an Bhaird stand out for developing and sustaining a large network of patronage. From the network it appears their main patrons were the Uí Dhomhnaill of Donegal, for whom they wrote forty-two extant poems, but they also frequently wrote for the neighboring Meic Shuibhne,

alongside the Méig Uidhir of Fermanagh and the Uí Néill of Tyrone. Based in Sligo, the Uí Uiginn had a strong bond with their local lords, the Uí Eadhra (for whom they wrote twenty poems), but they also had a connection with the more powerful Uí Dhomhnaill, which is unsurprising, perhaps, given Sligo's proximity to Donegal. The results suggest that other poetic families were more tightly bound to one particular patronage family, as is the case with the Ó hEódhusa connection to the Méig Uidhir and the Meic Eochadha connection to the Uí Bhroin.

While this network gives us a broad overview of the traditional literary connections between families, it does not give us any insight into individual patronage connections between poets and patrons. The Ó Dálaigh node, for example, is made up of several branches of the family, including the Ó Dálaigh Fionn and the Ó Dálaigh Cairbreach branches, who wrote for different patrons. To illustrate these individual connections, we added more complexity to the network by breaking each family node down into its individual poet and patron components. This allowed us to see which patrons had their own *ollamb*, and which connections were due to a collective production of poetry by various members of a poetic family. This insight adds to our understanding of how patrons managed the interplay of poetics and politics, showing whether high-ranking patrons drew on their hereditary poets, visiting poets, or a mix of the two when using poetry as a vessel to manage and express their political, social, and cultural images as powerful and generous lords.

When we break the network of families down into a network comprised of the individual poets and patrons, the result is a network visualized from the 618 poems that includes 518 nodes (229 different poets and 289 different patrons) and has 557 unique patronage relationships (fig. 4). One way to look closer and analyze this network is to look at what we call degree centrality, which is a measure of the total number of edges connected to a particular node—or, in other words, the total number of connections a person has. As the edges always flow from poet to patron, we can use the two different degree-centrality types (in-degree and out-degree) to ask different questions. In our case, out-degree measures how many patrons a particular poet wrote for, and in-degree measures how many poets wrote poems for a particular patron.

First, if we rank all nodes by their out-degree from highest to lowest we can see the distribution of connections. In a foundational piece of scholarship, Albert-László Barabási and Réka Albert showed how a range of real-world networks like social networks and the World Wide Web all exhibit nearly identical patterns of distribution.¹⁹ In these networks, a small number of nodes will have many connections, and a slightly larger number of nodes will

¹⁹ Barabási and Albert, 509–12.

Rank	Poetic Family	Patronage Family	Edge weight
1	Mac an Bhaird	Ó Domhnaill	42
2	Mac Eochadha	Ó Broin	33
3	Ó hEódhusa	Mág Uidhir	23
4	Ó hUiginn	Ó hEadhra	20
5	Mac Bruaideadha	Ó Briain	16
6	Mac an Bhaird	Mac Suibhne	12
7	Mac an Bhaird	Mág Uidhir	12
8	Ó hUiginn	Ó Domhnaill	12
9	Ó hEachaidhéin	Ó Néill	12
10	Mac an Bhaird	Ó Néill	12

Figure 3. Top ten edge weights in the family patronage network, where edge weight equals number of poems penned for a particular family.

be reasonably well connected, while the vast majority of nodes will have very few connections.²⁰ While this is not a surprising result in our network, it does quickly bring attention to the overwhelming role played by a select few poets. Only three poets (1.3 percent) have twenty or more patrons, and only eight (3.5 percent) have more than ten. By comparison, 211 poets (92 percent) have five or fewer patrons, while 135 (59 percent) have only one. The identities of the top-ranked poets can be seen in [figure 5](#), highlighting the top ten out-degree nodes.

Seven of the top ten in terms of out-degree are all members of the poetic families that ranked highly in the first network. Of these, Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn (ca. 1550–91), Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird, and Eochaidh Ó hEódhusa (ca. 1568–1612) are exceptionally prolific poets within their families, and, indeed, all three have long been identified as key masters of their craft ([fig. 5](#)). They wrote at least twice the number of poems as any other members of their families, which, unsurprisingly, results in them emerging as the largest hubs within the network. This is similar to what occurs in correspondence networks when an archive is arranged around a select number of individuals: the person whose archive is being visualized will often end up being one of the main hubs of the network.²¹

²⁰ This is known as a scale-free network, which means that as the network grows, the underlying structure remains the same. Ahnert and Ahnert, 2019, 5.

²¹ Ryan and Ahnert.



Figure 4. Bardic poetry individual patronage network (ranked by degree). Nodes indicating poets are green.

This is certainly the case with Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn, who has the overall largest out-degree in that he is connected to thirty-five different patrons. He is the large node at the center of [figure 6](#), with multiple edges radiating from his node. Tadhg Dall was most likely born in the barony of Leyney (in modern Co. Sligo). His father, Mathghamhain (d. 1585), and grandfather, Maol Muire, were also poets. It is thought that Tadhg Dall received his bardic training within his family, or at a bardic school in Ceall Cluaine (in modern Co. Galway), which has been associated with the Ó hUiginn bardic family.²² The height of Tadhg Dall's career corresponded with a period of intense conflict and societal change, which brought upheaval, destruction of property, and even

²² Knott, xiv–xxxii. See also Caball, 2009a.

Rank	Name	No. of Patrons
1	Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn	35
2	Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird	27
3	Eochaidh Ó hEódhusa	22
4	Tadhg (mac Dáire) Mac Bruaideadha	19
5	Aonghus Ó Dálaigh Fionn	15
6	Gofraidh (mac Briain) Mac an Bhaird	12
7	Domhnall (mac Dáire) Mac Bruaideadha	11
8	Fear Flatha Ó Gnímh	11
9	Seathrún Céitinn	8
10	Cathal Mac Muireadhaigh	8

Figure 5. Top ten out-degree nodes in the patronage network.

violent death to both poets and patrons. The Elizabethan conquest of Ireland was in full swing, and in 1585 the reduction of Connacht to the jurisdiction English law was completed by the Composition of the Province between Sir John Perrott (1528–92) and the local Irish lords, whereby the lords surrendered their lands to the Crown and agreed to pay rents in order to be regranted enough land to maintain their own state.²³ Among Tadhg Dall's extant poetry are compositions for three patrons who signed up to this policy of surrender and regrant: Riocard (mac Oilbhéarus) a Búrc (d. 1585), Brian na Múrtha Ó Ruairc (d. 1591), and Cormac (mac Céin) Ó hEadhra (d. 1612). Of these, Eleanor Knott argues that Ó hEadhra was Tadhg Dall's most important patron, as he was the chief of Leyney and Tadhg Dall selected him to be his guarantor—a role that protected Tadhg Dall as the Elizabethan conquest bit deeper and poets were more open to persecution.²⁴ However, when we look at Tadhg Dall's ego network (a network that places Tadhg Dall at the center and incorporates his neighboring nodes and edge weights) (fig. 6), we can refine our understanding of the parameters and texture of bardic exchange. From this network, it is clear that Tadhg Dall's prominence comes from the fact that he wrote one or two poems for a wide range of patrons, rather than relying on his primary patron.

Of Tadhg Dall's thirty-five patrons, nineteen do not have any extant poems written for them by any other poet; these patrons include Somhairle Buidhe Mac Domhnaill (ca. 1505–90) and Brian (mac Céin) Ó hEadhra (d. 1586). The analysis also highlights that twenty-two (51 percent) of Tadhg Dall's

²³ Knott, xxix–xxx.

²⁴ Knott, xxix–xxx.

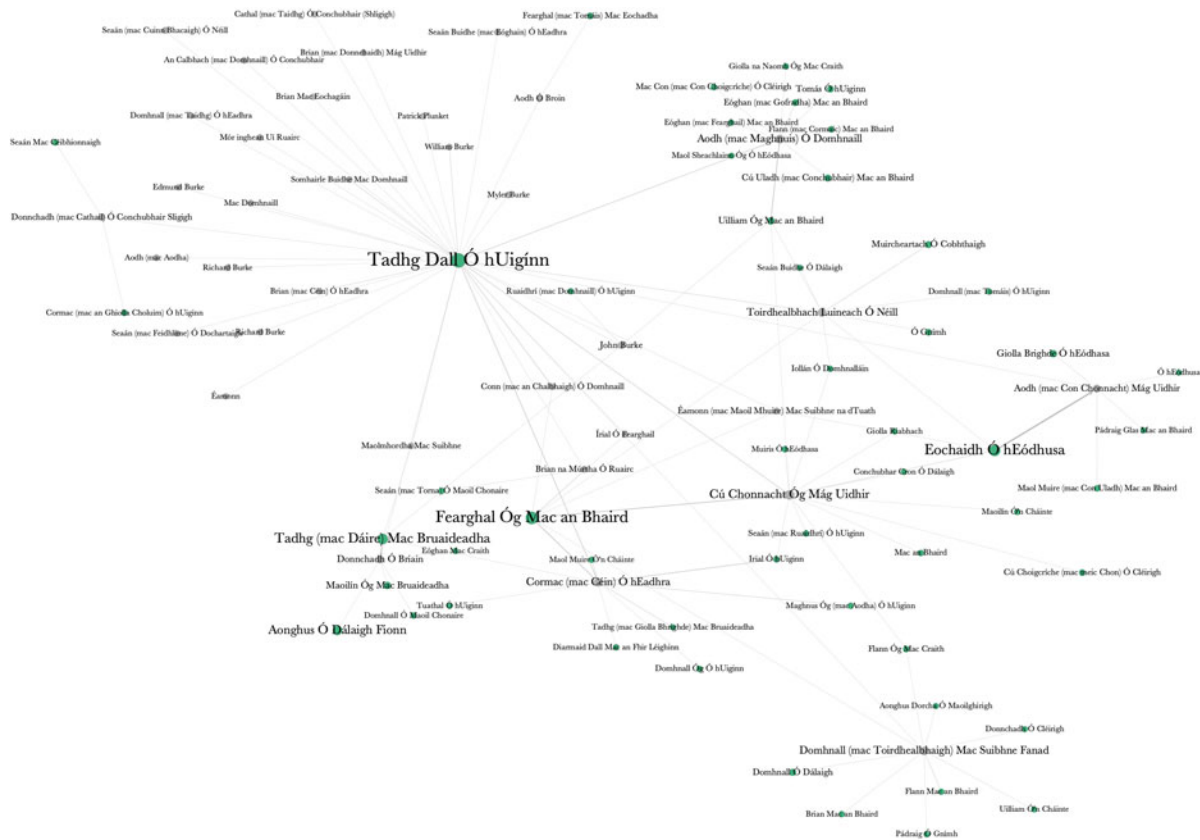


Figure 6. Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn’s ego network with neighbors and edge weights (number of poems).

Rank	Poet	Patron	Edge weight
1	Eochaidh Ó hEódhusa	Aodh (mac Con Connacht) Mág Uidhir	12
2	Tadhg (mac Dáire) Mac Bruaideadha	Donnchadh Ó Briain	7
3	Eochaidh Ó hEódhusa	Cú Chonnacht Óg Mág Uidhir (d. 1608)	6
4	Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird	Cú Chonnacht Óg Mág Uidhir (d. 1589)	5
5	Uilliam Óg Mac an Bhaird	Aodh (mac Maghnuis) Ó Domhnaill	5
6	Brian Ó Corcráin	Cú Chonnacht Óg Mág Uidhir (d. 1608)	5
7	Giolla na Naomh Mac Eochadha	Aodh Ó Broin	5
8	Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird	Cormac (mac Céin) Ó hEadhra	5
9	Muiris (mac Briain Óig) Ó Maoil Chonaire	Lucas Dillon	4
10	Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn	Cormac (mac Céin) Ó hEadhra	4

Figure 7. Top ten edge weights in Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn's ego network.

poems were penned for Connacht patrons and nineteen (44 percent) for Ulster patrons, showcasing the importance of his native Sligo on his production of poetry and corresponding to the traditional Ó hUiginn connection to the Connacht-based Uí Eadhra and nearby Uí Dhomhnaill in Donegal. Because most of his poetry connections are single instances, he is less likely to be the most prominent poet for patrons who have a wider range of poets writing for them. For example, while Tadhg Dall wrote a poem for Donnchadh Ó Briain, fourth Earl of Thomond (d. 1624) (“Aoibhinn an lá-sa i Lunnainn” [Delightful is this day in London]), and for the Ulster patron Aodh (mac Con Connacht) Mág Uidhir (d. 1600) (“Leigfead Aodh d’fhearaibh Éireann” [I shall leave Hugh to the men of Ireland]), he was neither Mág Uidhir nor Ó Briain’s chief poet—figure 7 shows that role going to Eochaidh Ó hEódhusa and Tadhg (mac Dáire) Mac Bruaideadha (ca. 1550–1625), respectively.²⁵ Instead, his ability to build a diverse network came, perhaps, from the proximity of Sligo to southwest Ulster and south Connacht, which would have enabled him to easily engage with the poetic circuit of both regions, while maintaining his close alliance to Cormac (mac Céin) Ó hEadhra, for whom he wrote four extant poems.

A similar pattern emerges for the other highly ranking poets in terms of out-degree, as Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird, Eochaidh Ó hEódhusa and Tadhg (mac Dáire) Mac Bruaideadha all have at least one patron emerge as their key connection. However, they also built up additional influence in the network by penning poems for those patrons who offered them hospitality while they were on poetic circuits of their native provinces and beyond. For example, it is apparent from Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird’s ego-network (fig. 8) that he

²⁵ Knott, poems 36 and 12. The first lines of the poems are given as titles.

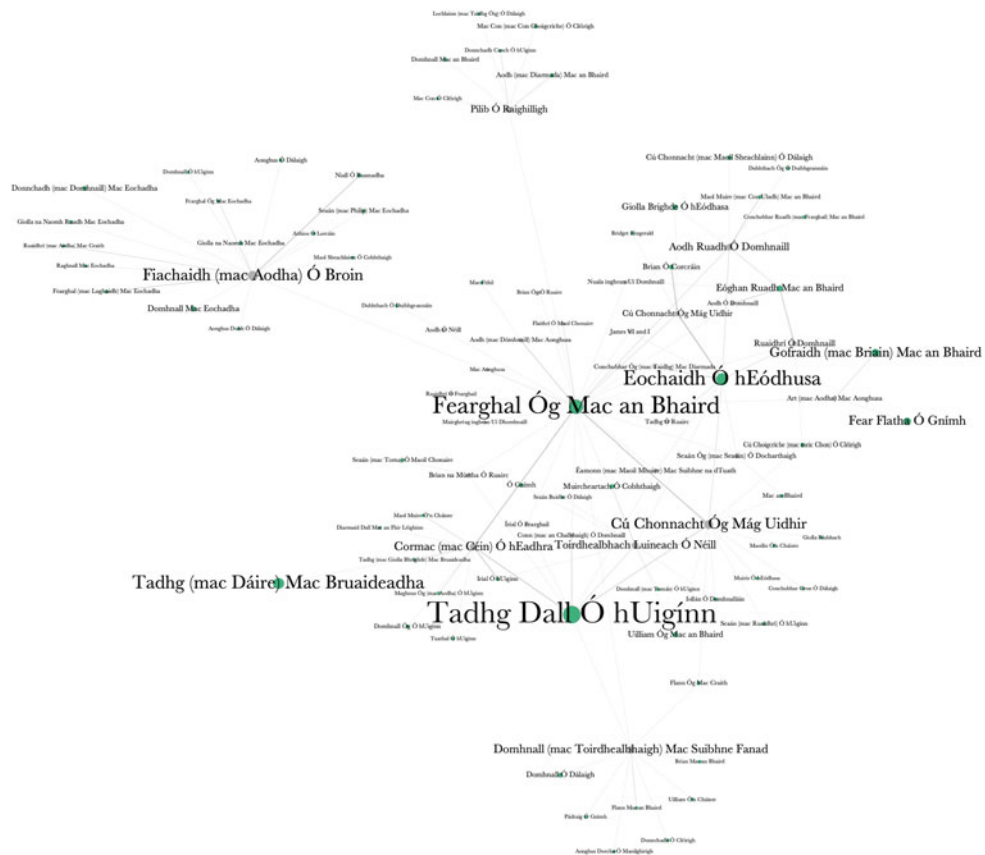


Figure 8. Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird's ego network with neighbors and edge weights (number of poems—weighted by degree).



Figure 9. Bardic poetry individual patronage network (ranked by degree).

has two key patrons in Cú Chonnacht Óg Mág Uidhir (ca. 1520–89) and Cormac (mac Céin) Ó hEadhra, composing the highest number of his extant poems for these two individuals. He also, however, builds up his wider influence in the network; he is the only poet to write for six of his patrons and is one of only two poets to write for a further eight of his patrons. Like Tadhg Dall, Fearghal Óg was raised in the bardic tradition. His father, Fearghal (d. 1550), was described as a master of a bardic school, and it is likely that both Fearghal Óg and his brother Eóghan Ruadh (d. 1572)—also a bardic poet—were trained under their father’s supervision in their native Donegal.²⁶ He was also highly active in the late sixteenth century but wrote sixteen (42 percent) of his extant poems after the turn of the seventeenth century. Just over half (52 percent) were written in his

²⁶ Caball, 2009b.

Rank	Name	No. of Poets
1	Fiachaidh (mac Aodha) Ó Broin	16
2	Cú Chonnacht Óg Mág Uidhir	14
3	Aodh Ó Broin	11
4	Aodh (mac Maghnuis) Ó Domhnaill	10
5	Feidhlim (mac Fiachaidh) Ó Broin	10
6	Domhnall (mac Toirdhealbhagh) Mac Suibhne Fanad	10
7	Cormac (mac Céin) Ó hEadhra	10
8	Toirdhealbhadh Luineach Ó Néill	9
9	Aodh Ruadh Ó Domhnaill	8
10	Pilib Ó Raighilligh	7

Figure 10. Top ten in-degree nodes in the patronage network.

native Ulster, showing how he built connections with Cú Chonnacht Óg Mág Uidhir and also wrote poems for several of the Uí Dhomhnaill, including Aodh Ruadh Ó Domhnaill (ca. 1572–1602) and Nuala inghean Uí Dhomhnaill (ca. 1575–1630). However, Donegal's proximity to Connacht also allowed him to build up connections there—namely, with Cormac (mac Céin) Ó hEadhra. He is also the only poet to have at least one extant poem tied to every Irish province; moreover, he has extant poetry from periods he spent in Scotland, in the 1580s, and in Louvain, after 1608.²⁷ While Fearghal Óg (like Tadhg Dall) had the skill to build and sustain connections with influential patrons, it was perhaps his wider reach that enabled him to become such an influential poet.²⁸

While ranking the network by out-degree allows us to measure how many patrons a particular poet wrote for, ranking by in-degree (fig. 9) brings attention to the role played by the patrons in this exchange. Like the out-degree distribution, the in-degree distribution quickly highlights a select few patrons in the network. Only one patron (0.3 percent) is linked to fifteen or more poets, and only seven (2.4 percent) employed more than ten. By comparison, 270 patrons (94 percent) were the subjects of poems by five or fewer poets, while 185 (64 percent) were only written for by one poet. The identities of these patrons can be seen in figure 10, highlighting the top ten in-degree nodes. What stands out from this figure is the dominance of the Uí Bhroin, with three generations of Ó Broin chiefs appearing in the top five.

²⁷ Ó Macháin.

²⁸ Caball suggests that Mac an Bhaird withdrew to Munster due to deteriorating relations between himself and Ruaidhrí O'Donnell. See Caball, 2009b.

The Uí Bhroin were a Wicklow-based family, and all the Uí Bhroin mentioned here belonged to a junior branch known as the Gabhal Raghnuill, which rose to prominence by the mid-sixteenth century. Their territory extended from Rathdrum to the Carlow border, with their chief residence at Ballincor in Glenmalure.²⁹ The rise of this branch of the Uí Bhroin was intrinsically linked to the violent imposition of the Leix-Offaly Plantation caused by an eastward shift of the provincial powerbase to the Wicklow Mountains.³⁰ Aodh Ó Broin (ca. 1520–79), who took over the lordship in 1551, used this shift in power to consolidate his family's status. He solidified kinship bonds with the influential Uí Thuathail of Kildare through marriage; he offered military support to the Uí Chonchubhair Failghe and the Uí Mhórdha in Laois and Offaly; and he acted as patron for the Wicklow-based poetic families—the Meic Eochadha and the Uí Dhálaigh. In total, Aodh had eleven different poets write for him, of whom six (55 percent) were members of the Meic Eochadha. The most prominent was Giolla na Naomh Mac Eochadha (fl. 1579–1604), who wrote five of the eighteen extant poems to Aodh in the family poem-book, *Duanaire Aodha mbeic Sheaáin* (The poem-book of Aodh, son of Seaán). This includes “Craobh eolais an oinigh Aodh” (Hugh is the guiding branch of honor), which contains a supplementary quatrain praising Aodh's second wife, Sadhbh Ní Thuathail (fl. 1550).³¹

From the 1550s Aodh raised his son Fiachaidh (ca. 1544–97) to succeed him, which he did by the early 1570s.³² By the mid-1570s, Fiachaidh was the leader of Gaelic Leinster, and also fostered alliances with another prominent Leinster family, the Uí Thuathail, through his marriage to the redoubtable Róis Ní Thuathail (d. ca. 1629).³³ Fiachaidh is known for his military prowess, including his defeat of Arthur Grey (1536–93) at the battle of Glenmalure—a battle at which Edmund Spenser was likely present, as the river that he refers to as the “balefull Oure, late stained with English blood” in book 4 of *The Faerie Queene* is the river that goes through Glenmalure valley.³⁴ On top of this, Fiachaidh is remembered

²⁹ Mac Airt, viii–x.

³⁰ O'Byrne, 2009. See also Maginn.

³¹ Mac Airt, poem 4 (translation by Nic Chárthaigh). Aodh's first wife was Sadhbh, who was the daughter of Feilim Buidhe Ó Broin. Sadhbh Ní Bhroin was the mother of Aodh's two children, Fiachaidh and Elizabeth.

³² In Gaelic tradition, succession was not decided through primogeniture; instead, the strongest surviving member of the family claimed leadership. However, the appointment of one's favored successor as tanist, or second-in-command, represented an attempt to lend certainty to an uncertain process.

³³ McCarthy.

³⁴ Hadfield, 157.

for his role in the Second Desmond Rebellion (1579–83), the Baltinglass Rebellion, and the early stages of the Nine Years' War—a run of exploits that ended when he was betrayed and beheaded in 1597.³⁵ Like his father, Fiachaidh patronized poets as a means of cementing his family's status, and, again, he regularly employed members of the Meic Eochadha: eight of the sixteen poets (50 percent) in *Duanaire Fhiachaidh mheic Aodha* (The poem-book of Fiachaidh, son of Hugh) were from this family, the most recognizable being Fearghal (mac Lughaidh) Mac Eochadha. However, Fearghal (mac Lughaidh) is not the author of the most extant poems for Fiachaidh. This ranking goes to Niall Ó Ruanadha (ca. 1597), who penned four poems for his patron. Mac Airt and Pádraig A. Breatnach have suggested that Ó Ruanadha may have been Fiachaidh's "one-time ollamh," evidenced by "Uirim Fhódlá ag énduine" (One man has the respect of Ireland), which is an inaugural ode that highlights the role Ó Ruanadha played in the ritual that announced Fiachaidh as the new head of the Gabhal Raghnuill.³⁶ However, Ó Ruanadha quickly fell out of favor and does not seem to have been replaced as *ollamh*. Instead, Fiachaidh continued his father's tradition of offering his patronage to the Meic Eochadha, while maintaining "special affection . . . for 'the passing guest,'" or visiting poet. Mac Airt and Breatnach both link this decision to Fiachaidh's desire to manage the interplay of poetics and politics, using poetry as a means to fashion his political image and express his power over his region. Mac Airt argues that Fiachaidh's success and that of the wider Uí Bhroin in maintaining control of their mountainous territory meant that they were one of the only families "in a position to attract poets of repute from distant parts of Ireland."³⁷ Breatnach nuances this by suggesting that it was more in Fiachaidh's "interest to establish a reputation for bounty, such as would draw the services of a steady stream of guest poets to his territory, rather than squander his resources in maintaining a resident praise-poet."³⁸ Either way, it is this decision to host, and perhaps privilege, the visiting poet while maintaining connections to their hereditary poets (the Meic Eochadha) that led to Aodh and Fiachaidh's dominant position within the patronage network.

In terms of members of noble families known to have drawn on the services of poets for multiple generations, Cú Chonnacht Óg Mág Uidhir (ca. 1520–89) stands out as the most important Mág Uidhir patron, despite the precarious political position in which he found himself (fig. 11). Cú Chonnacht Óg was

³⁵ For more on the violence of beheadings and how this atrocity gets translated into art, see Palmer, 2013. For an overview of the Nine Years' War, see O'Neill.

³⁶ Mac Airt, xiii; Breatnach, 1983, 73. For more on the inauguration ritual, see FitzPatrick.

³⁷ Mac Airt, xiii.

³⁸ Breatnach, 1983, 77–78.

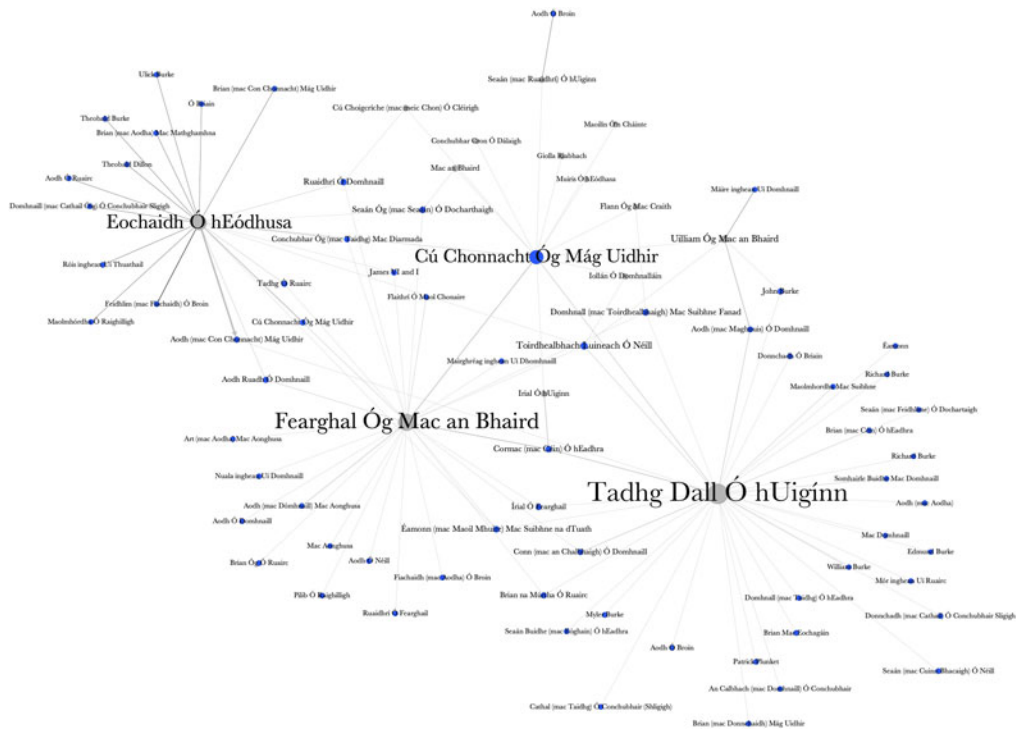


Figure 11. Cú Chonnacht Óg Mág Uidhir's (ca. 1520–89) ego network with neighbors and edge weights (number of poems).

the son of Cú Chonnacht Óg (“an Comharba”) Mág Uidhir (ca. 1480–1537), Lord of Fermanagh. Upon the murder of his father, in 1537, the head of the lordship briefly reverted to a more senior branch of the Méig Uidhir. However, in 1540, Giolla Pádraig Bán Mág Uidhir (d. 1540) was deposed by Con Bacach Ó Néill (ca. 1484–1559), who appointed Seaán Mág Uidhir (d. 1566), son of Cú Chonnacht Óg (ca. 1480–1537) and elder brother of Cú Chonnacht Óg (ca. 1520–89), as lord. Then, in 1566, Seaán Ó Néill (ca. 1530–67), the son of Con Bacach Ó Néill, deposed Seaán Mág Uidhir in favor of Cú Chonnacht Óg (ca. 1520–89).³⁹ As Cú Chonnacht Óg replaced his brother as leader of the Méig Uidhir due to the influence of the Uí Néill, Cú Chonnacht Óg’s claim on the lordship was clearly contentious. However, throughout his lordship of Fermanagh, Cú Chonnacht Óg naturalized his power and influence through his generosity to the Catholic Church and by using the poetry produced by the poets to present an image of himself as a powerful Ulster lord. In terms of his generosity, he maintained his family’s connection with the monastery at Lios Gabhail (Lisgoole), and between 1583 and 1586 he was responsible for reviving the abbey and granting it to the Franciscans.⁴⁰ As for his use of poetry, Cú Chonnacht Óg was also the patron of twenty-four poems from sixteen different poets, which were written down and collected in the family’s poem book known as *Duanaire Mhéig Uidhir* (The Maguire poem book).⁴¹

Of these sixteen poets, only three wrote more than one extant poem to Cú Chonnacht Óg: Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird (five poems), Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn (three poems), and Eochaidh Ó hEódhusa (two poems). Four poets, including Giolla Riabhach Ó Dálaigh (fl. 1589) and Conchubhar Cron Ó Dálaigh (d. 1583), were known only by their poems to Cú Chonnacht Óg. Of the poets who wrote more than one poem to Cú Chonnacht Óg, Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird drew on the patronage of Cú Chonnacht Óg most frequently, while Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn penned the same number of poems for Cú Chonnacht Óg as he did for Cormac (mac Céin) Ó hEadhra. Eochaidh Ó hEódhusa, who is arguably one of the most important of all the late sixteenth-century poets, mostly drew on the patronage of two members of the Méig Uidhir—Aodh and Cú Chonnacht Óg—both sons of Cú

³⁹ Greene, vii. See also Morley.

⁴⁰ Greene, viii.

⁴¹ Greene, viii. The extant *duanairí*, or family poem books, are the largest sources of bardic poetry; as a result, the poets and patrons associated with them are privileged in the network. This again returns to the issues raised in Ryan and Ahnert, but we are aware that the impact the extant materials have on the structure of the networks produced in this article is similar to that faced by others working with historical material.

Chonnacht Óg (ca. 1520–89)—highlighting the importance of the Méig Uidhir on Ó hEódhusa’s career.⁴² The strong connection between Ó hEódhusa and the Méig Uidhir is alluded to in the poem “Anois molfam Mág Uidhir” (I will praise Maguire now), in which Ó hEódhusa promises to include a quatrain about Aodh in all of his compositions:

Cú Chonnacht, son of Cú Chonnacht, is a fertile branch untouched by fault,
who shall be the lover of Ireland; many poets choose him, as I do.

I promised to Hugh, a keen mind, a verse out of every poem I should make; there
is no fear of my changing from him, a soft white hand which won my love.⁴³

While the praising of a patron’s generosity to poets is a trope of the genre, the poets writing about Cú Chonnacht Óg are consistent in praising his care both for his *ollamb* and for the poets who visit him.⁴⁴ Thus, in contrast to that of the poets themselves, Cú Chonnacht Óg’s position in the network is rooted to one location—southwest Ulster—and, in line with another trope in the genre, his position within the hierarchy of Ulster lords is consistently praised in the poetry despite the reality of the Mág Uidhir family’s precarious political position between the Uí Néill of Tyrone and the English.⁴⁵

While the networks of the top ten poets and patrons highlight the largely exceptional cases—which have been the focus of scholarship already—our analysis shows that the vast majority of poets and patrons only have one or two connections. However, as these results are expected (both in terms of highlighting those that have been the subject of scholarship and in terms of the network following traditional power-law distribution), they give us confidence in the dataset and allow us to abstract the network in different ways.

⁴² For more on Eochaidh Ó hEódhusa’s poetry and career, see Carney and de Paor.

⁴³ “Gécc thoraídh nár thadhuill locht / Cú Chonnacht mac Con Connacht, / mór ndámh dá thoga mur tám / do chlár Logha bhus lendán. // Do gheallus d’Aodh, aigneadh grind, / rann as gach dán dá ndingnind; / bos mhaothbhán do thuair mo thol / mo chlaochládh uaidh ní homhan.” Edited and translated in Greene (poem 23, quatrains 29–30).

⁴⁴ In his poem “Brath lendáin ac Leic Lughaidh” (“Leac Lughaidh has found out her lover”), Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird highlights Cú Chonnacht Óg’s position among *ollamb*s (“ní d’fhuaire fán trian tallan / trian andamh uaidhe ar ollamb” [“it is a sign of their lack of interest in any other land that it is seldom that an *ollamb* leaves him”]), while Iollán Ó Domhnalláin highlights visiting poets’ preference for Cú Chonnacht in a poem entitled “Geall ó Ulltaibh ag éanfhear” (“One man surpasses all other Ulstermen”) (“Dámh deoradh nach d’iath Oiligh / an chliar dá n-eolus anaidh; / don chuairt tuc fa Fhád Fhuinidh / Mág Uidhir rug do raghain” [“A company of poets who are not from Ulster, the poets remain from their journeying; from their current circuit around Ireland they have chosen Maguire”]). Edited and translated in Greene (poem 4, quatrain 6, and poem 24, quatrain 41).

⁴⁵ Greene, ix. See also Caball, 1998, 14–17; and Kane, 2010, 67–75.

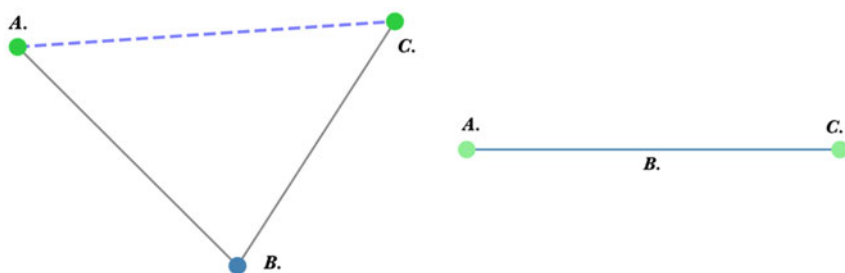


Figure 12. Sample networks showing the theory of triadic closure and unimodal projection. Left: Bimodal network showing poets A and C connected to patron B, with potential triadic closure between A and C. Right: Unimodal projection connecting poets A and C, with patron B acting as the edge between them.

To see which poets shared patrons, we condensed the network to a unimodal form (an undirected poet network). To create this network, we had to remove the patrons from the poet network and connect the remaining node types to each other in new ways. In order to do this, we drew on the theory of triadic closure, which suggests that “if vertex A is connected to vertex B and vertex B to vertex C, then there is a heightened probability that vertex A will also be connected to vertex C.”⁴⁶ However, in a bimodal network, A cannot connect to C unless the network is condensed, allowing B to act as the connection between A and C (fig. 12).⁴⁷

Following this principle, we created a poet network in which we treated the patrons to whom the poets are connected in the poet-patron network as the edges and then connected a poet to another poet if they shared a patron in common. For example, Domhnall (mac Dáire) Mac Bruaideadha (ca. 1558–70) and Tadhg (mac Dáire) Mac Bruaideadha both wrote a poem for Conchubhar Ó Briain (1535–81) and, therefore, share a connection in this network. The resulting network has 190 poets represented and 748 connections (fig. 13). Like the poet-patron network, this unimodal network follows a similar power distribution in that only a few poets are connected to a large number of other poets, while a larger number of poets are only connected to one or two other poets.

As this is a less complex network, we were also able to run other centrality measurements and compare them to the degree rankings to see if this would bring attention to lesser-studied poets. For example, by running eigenvector centrality, a measurement that examines a node’s influence on other nodes, the main hubs of the network (those with high degree ranking) become highly

⁴⁶ Newman, 178.

⁴⁷ For a discussion on condensing bimodal networks, see Ahnert et al., 49–50.

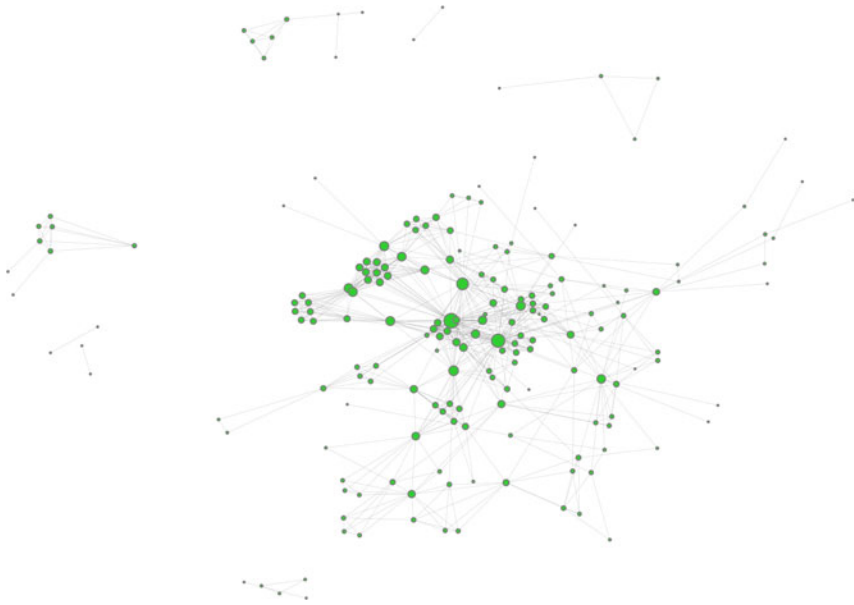


Figure 13. Poets network (unimodal—weighted by degree).

visible, but nodes with a relatively low number of connections could still have a high eigenvector score if these connections are to other important nodes.⁴⁸ When we look at the top ten in terms of eigenvector ranking (fig. 14), we see that theory playing out. Unsurprisingly, Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird, Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn, and Eochaidh Ó hEódhusa rank highly, but this measurement draws our attention to seven poets who do not feature in the bimodal out-degree rankings. These include Seaán (mac Ruaidhrí) Ó hUiginn (ca. 1579–89), a poet who ranks highly despite penning only two extant poems for two patrons, “Cia cheannchas adhmaid naoi rann” (Who buys the material for nine verses) and “Rogha an chuaine Cú Chonnacht” (Cú Chonnacht is the best of the litter) for Aodh Ó Broin and Cú Chonnacht Óg Mág Uidhir (ca. 1520–89), respectively.⁴⁹ While the Uí Uiginn were known for their connection to the Méig Uidhir, Seaán (mac Ruaidhrí) is one of only two Ó hUiginn poets to dedicate a poem to an Ó Broin (the other being Tadhg Dall), and it is this connection that raises Seaán mac Ruaidhrí’s position in the network. At only nine quatrains, Seaán mac Ruaidhrí’s poem to Aodh Ó Broin is short, but it draws on two key motifs that can also be seen in other

⁴⁸ Borgatti. Ahnert and Ahnert, 2015, 14–5.

⁴⁹ Mac Airt, poem 8; Greene, poem 17. *Cia cheannchas adhmaid naoi rann* has also been edited (with translation) in Walsh, 188–90.

Rank	Name	No. of Poems	No. of Patrons
1	Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird	38	27
2	Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn	43	35
3	Eochaidh Ó hEódhusa	45	22
4	Uilliam Óg Mac an Bhaird	9	5
5	Seaán (mac Ruaidhrí) Ó hUiginn	2	2
6	Irial Ó hUiginn	5	2
7	Flann Óg Mac Craith	2	2
8	Domhnall Mac Eochadha	6	5
9	Donnchadh (mac Domhnaill) Mac Eochadha	2	4
10	Giolla na Naomh Mac Eochadha	6	2

Figure 14. Top ten poets ranked by eigenvector, showing the number of poems they wrote and the number of different patrons they wrote for. The first three listed here ranked in the top ten for bimodal out-degree.

poems dedicated to the Ó Broin family—allusions to the Elizabethan conquest of Ireland and praise for Aodh as an exemplary Ó Broin.⁵⁰ Thus, despite its brevity, it can act as a good example of the type of poetry written to this family. The same can be said of Irial Ó hUiginn (fl. 1585), who also ranks highly, despite penning only five extant poems for two patrons: Cú Chonnacht Óg Mág Uidhir (ca. 1520–89) and Cormac (mac Céin) Ó hEadhra. Unlike Seaán (mac Ruaidhrí), Irial is connected to the two traditional Ó hUiginn patrons, and his position in the network is epitomized by his close connection to Cormac (mac Céin) Ó hEadhra, for whom he wrote four poems, the same number that his more illustrious kin (Tadhg Dall) composed for this patron. In all his poems to Cormac (mac Céin), Irial gives an envoi to a saint, and he often calls on John the Baptist:

O John Baptist, when this abode (i.e., the world) has passed away take me with thee; if, O my friend, I cling to thee my sin will be forgiven in yonder abode (of Heaven).⁵¹

This is a motif that recurs in several poems to Cormac (mac Céin), with Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird signing off with an envoi to a saint in three of

⁵⁰ Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn also alludes to the conquest in “Searc mná Ír duit, Aoidh, ná léig a bhfaill” (Despise not, O Hugh, the love of Íor’s spouse) (Knott, poem 35), while Donnchadh Ó Muirgheasa and Doighre Ó Dálaigh both praise Aodh in this way.

⁵¹ “A Eoin Baisde, beir mheisi / libh fa thásg an tigheissi; / badh réigh mh’fhala san tigh thall / ribh, a chara, dhá gceanglam”: McKenna, 2003, poem 12, quatrain 21.

Rank	Poet A	Poet B	Edge weight
1	Eochaidh Ó hEódhusa	Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird	9
2	Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird	Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn	8
3	Domhnall (mac Dáire) Mac Bruaideadha	Tadhg (mac Dáire) Mac Bruaideadha	5
4	Eóghan Ruadh Mac an Bhaird	Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird	4
5	Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn	Tadhg (mac Dáire) Mac Bruaideadha	4
6	Uilliam Óg Mac an Bhaird	Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn	3
7	Eochaidh Ó hEódhusa	Giolla Brighde Ó hEódhasa	3
8	Eochaidh Ó hEódhusa	Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn	3
9	Domhnall Mac Eochadha	Donnchadh (mac Domhnaill) Mac Eochadha	3
10	Giolla na Naomh Ruadh Mac Eochadha	Giolla na Naomh Mac Eochadha	2

Figure 15. Top ten edge weights in unimodal poet network.

his five poems for Cormac (mac Céin) and Tadhg (mac Giolla Bhrighde) Mac Bruaideadha ending on an envoi to a saint in “Anam ga chéile a Chormuic” (Let us keep together, O Cormac).⁵² These two Ó hUiginn poets show how a poet who only has two patrons can be positioned at the heart of the network if he writes for highly respected patrons, making us rethink his poetry and compare it to that of his more illustrious counterparts.

Another way to explore this network is to examine how many patrons particular poets shared (fig. 15). Unsurprisingly, the three poets who dominate all the other measurements again come to the fore, as, in the act of building up large networks, they wrote poems for several of the leading patrons. Looking beyond the poets of exceptional artistic quality, the importance of poetic families comes to the fore. In fact, 18.7 percent of the connections in this network are between poets from the same family. As previously mentioned, poetic training was the preserve of certain families, and each of these families that “followed the calling” ran a school to train the next generation.⁵³ Thus, it is no surprise to see family connections emerging, and when the network is viewed in terms of eigenvector (fig. 14) and edge-weight combinations (fig. 15), five of these families once again stand out: the Meic Bhruaideadha, the Meic an Bhaird, the Uí Eódhusa, the Meic Eochadha, and the Uí Uiginn. As we have shown, three of these families each produced one of the exceptional poets of the period, but the Meic Eochadha are worth looking at in more detail. While this family does not have a Fearghal Óg or a Tadhg Dall to act as a hub for its influence, many of its members have a high eigenvector and write for the same patrons as their kin. This is the case for Domhnall Mac Eochadha (ca. 1544–1630) and Donnchadh (mac Domhnaill) Mac Eochadha

⁵² McKenna, 2003, poem 7, quatrain 26.

⁵³ McManus, 97.

(fl. 1601), who Mac Airt suggests might have been Domhnall's son.⁵⁴ As already discussed, the Meic Eochadha were closely bound to the Uí Bhroin, and Domhnall and Donnchadh are no exception, connected only to them in our network. Mac Airt has shown that the Meic Eochadha, alongside the Uí Dhálaigh, were based near Pallis, in the north of County Wexford, and that the Meic Eochadha were “attached to the Uí Bhroin as hereditary bards.”⁵⁵ Both Domhnall and Donnchadh wrote between four and six poems for five different members of the Uí Bhroin, three of whom overlapped and include two successive leaders of the family: Fiachaidh (mac Aodha) Ó Broin and Feidhlim (mac Fiachaidh) Ó Broin. Similarly, their relatives Fearghal (mac Lughaidh) and Giolla na Naomh also wrote between four and six poems each for two different members of the Uí Bhroin, with both also writing for Fiachaidh (mac Aodha) Ó Broin. None of the Meic Eochadha who wrote for Fiachaidh (mac Aodha) have enough extant poetry to be accurately identified as Fiachaidh's *ollamb*. However, the combined output of the family creates a poetic cluster, emphasizing the hereditary link and enabling the family as a collective to be considered beside the likes of Fearghal Óg and Tadhg Dall.

With both network types we must be mindful of the fragmentary nature of the evidence, given the large percentage of bardic poems that have not survived. These results could suggest, however, that only a select few poets and patrons managed to build up a broad patronage network, with the majority of the network being single-poem connections—representing, perhaps, poets with lesser influence, who remained with one primary patron. It is the exceptional poets and patrons who are highlighted in the networks: poets for whom a relatively important segment of their oeuvre (in terms of the diversity of patrons and topics) survives, and patrons who wielded extensive influence through their patronage of bardic poetry.

So far, this paper has highlighted poets who have already received scholarly attention, and the results discussed above confirm their place in the bardic canon. The following analysis moves beyond that broad picture to highlight the role of lesser-studied poets and patrons in this network of poetic exchange. It will focus on the province of Munster, which, though not prominent in the overall results discussed above, was, in fact, a scene of vibrant literary exchange.

FILTERING FOR PLACE

One way of conducting a more in-depth and focused analysis of patronage circles and connections is by filtering the database according to province, and by examining the network alongside both the poems represented in the network

⁵⁴ Mac Airt, 433.

⁵⁵ Mac Airt, xii.

	Poems	Poets	Patrons
Overall	618	229	289
Munster	112	57	92
Connacht	135	53	65
Ulster	248	99	83
Leinster	89	50	37
Elsewhere	26	12	31

Figure 16. Overall network size.

and the larger corpus of extant bardic poems. This section of the paper isolates and examines the results for the Munster region (including Co. Clare).⁵⁶ In addition to unearthing lesser-known figures and connections, focusing on a localized area network allows us to consider what—or who—is missing from the network, and these observations can be equally revealing. Our focus on Munster is part of a broader MACMORRIS case study on that particular region. However, this kind of in-depth analysis could be repeated for other geographical areas on the island.

From the results discussed above, Munster would appear to be the least productive province when it comes to bardic poetry. None of the three poets who consistently ranked highly in the analyses—Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird, Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn, and Eochaidh Ó hEódhasa—were based in Munster. Nor did they have strong links to Munster patrons.⁵⁷ Furthermore, not one of the ten top-ranking patrons (see [fig. 10](#)) is from Munster. However, if we compare networks in terms of size, it is striking that Munster has the highest number of patrons in the database ([fig. 16](#)). These patrons do not rank highly in the overall

⁵⁶ Historically Clare was considered part of Munster, but during this period it was at times considered part of Connaught. In 1569, Henry Sidney, upon creating the presidency of Connaught, transferred Clare from Munster to Connaught. Then, around 1600, Clare was made a presidency under the earl of Thomond. After the death of the fifth earl of Thomond, in 1639, Thomas Wentworth returned Clare to the presidency of Munster, and this was ratified upon the Restoration in 1660. To avoid confusion relating to these political decisions, we have included Clare in Munster for the entire period.

⁵⁷ This is not, of course, to say these poets did not visit Munster or compose poems on Munster patrons. Fearghal Óg Mac an Bhaird, for example, wrote a poem, “Slán agaibh, a fhiora Mumhan” (“Farewell to you, men of Munster”), bidding farewell to Munster after a stay there: Bergin, 44–8; 229–30.

Rank	Name	No. of Poets
1	Donnchadh Ó Briain	5
2	Conchubhar Ó Briain	4
3	Mac Muiris / Fitzmaurice	4
4	Ó Briain	4
5	Barry	3
6	Theobald Butler	3
7	Muiris (mac Uilliam) Mac Gearailt	2
8	Éamonn (mac Piarais) Butler	2
9	Tadhg Mac Cárthaigh	2
10	David Roche	2

Figure 17. Top ten Munster patrons ranked by number of poets. (Fitzmaurice and Barry have two potential poets for poem 450—both have been included so as not to efface the potential authorship of either poet. Donnchadh Ó Briain has two potential poets for poem 242.)

results because of the small number of surviving poems dedicated to them.⁵⁸ This serves as a reminder that the poems in our network are representative of a much vaster, lost corpus. Survival of material in our period may be particularly scant and fragmentary due to the violence of the colonization of Ireland. In Munster, for example, there was the devastation caused by the Desmond Rebellions and the subsequent Munster Plantation, while the Nine Years' War and Ulster Plantation would have caused similar damage to material culture in Ulster.⁵⁹ The chance survival of certain *duanairí*, or poem books, has helped to preserve the poetry of certain families, giving prominence to certain geographical areas in the network. Despite the dearth of extant material from Munster, often a single poem, or a single link on our network from poet to patron, can be enough to represent a much richer and more sustained literary connection. Filtering the network to focus on Munster, along with a close reading of the texts that survive from that region, can help to demonstrate the vibrancy of literary patronage circles that have not hitherto been recognized.

Figure 17, which represents the top Munster patrons from the BPD (in-degree), shows the Uí Bhriain of Thomond emerging as the most well-connected patrons in Munster, and, given the extent of their political influence, this is perhaps unsurprising. Early adherents to Crown policy, the Uí Bhriain embraced English customs, laws, language, and culture, but also continued provide patronage to Gaelic poets. Donnchadh Ó Briain, the Protestant fourth Earl

⁵⁸ Anonymous poems to these patrons are not represented in the network.

⁵⁹ On the Desmond Rebellions, see McCormack. On the Nine Years' War, see O'Neill.

of Thomond, was particularly well known for his patronage of bardic poetry, and this is represented by fourteen poems in our network. Eight of the fourteen poems to the fourth earl have been attributed to Tadhg (mac Dáire) Mac Bruaideadha, who probably served as *ollamb* to the earl. In “Eascar Gaoidheal éag aoinfhir” (The death of one man entails the overthrow of the Gaeil), an elegy on O’Brien, Mac Bruaideadha celebrates his patron’s loyalty to the Crown:

For forty-four years he has been aiding the Crown without being willing to do anything dishonorable—such is the excellent service of our good Earl.⁶⁰

He also, however, emphasizes O’Brien’s Munster connections, and alludes throughout the poem to his influence in the province. In the following two quatrains the poet addresses Munster directly:

I regret your cause of sorrow, O Munster; your lament will last for a long time; you have reached a misfortunate circumstance now: the death of your fine native ruler.

O Munster of the green plains, I am the first one to be pitied because of your sorrow; and also every crowd to whom he was a friend; you are the second object of pity.⁶¹

This poem demonstrates Mac Bruaideadha’s role in smoothing over the incongruities of Donnchadh’s reign, and in making a bridge between the anglophile Protestant earl and his Catholic Irish-speaking followers: the earl, it seems, could not rely on anglicization alone to consolidate his political power; he also required the kind of traditional legitimacy that bardic poetry propagated.

Donnchadh’s father, Conchubhar Ó Briain, the third Earl of Thomond (d. 1581), is the patron of four poems in the network, three of which are attributed to Domhnall (mac Dáire) Mac Bruaideadha in manuscript witnesses (highlighting, once again, the family’s ties to the Meic Bhruaideadha [see fig. 3]). Conchubhar Ó Briain’s relationship with the poets was not always amicable, however. In a poem to Aodh (mac Maghnuis) Ó Domhnaill, the Ulster poet Uilliam Mac an Bhaird accuses the third earl of executing three poets in 1572.⁶² Two years later, Maoilín Óg Mac Bruaideadha composed a satire in which he complains of being abandoned by his patron,

⁶⁰ “Ceathracha is ceithre bliadhna / deighsheirbhís ar ndeigh-larla / atá ag cunnamh don Choróin / gan urlamh ria n-easnóir”: Ó Cuív, 1984, 94, quatrain 18. Translations are Ó Cuív’s.

⁶¹ “Truagh leam do mhairg a Mhumha, / cian bhus buan do bhrónchumha, / tárrthais cás neamhratha a-nois / bás do dheaghfhilatha dúchais. // A Mhumha na magh n-uaine, / mise ón chás-so an chéadtruaighe, / ‘s gach cuaine dar chara so, / an dara truaighe tusa”: Ó Cuív, 1984, 98, quatrains 36–37.

⁶² Ó Cuív, 1977, 125–45.

the earl.⁶³ Other members of the Ó Briain family in the network include Murchadh “na dTóiteán,” the infamous sixth Baron of Inchiquin (d. 1673),⁶⁴ and Muircheartach Ó Briain, the bishop of Killaloe (d. 1612).⁶⁵ Despite bearing witness to the fascinating ability of the Uí Bhriain to maneuver between two cultural milieus—English and Gaelic—many of the poems in the family’s vast corpus remain unedited and have received little scholarly attention.

If it is not altogether surprising to see the Uí Bhriain rank highly among the Munster patrons, given the extent of their influence and their traditional Gaelic pedigree, it is perhaps more unexpected to see the Fitzmaurices, the Geraldine Barons of Lixnaw, emerge as prominent players. Vassals of the more powerful Earls of Desmond, the Fitzmaurices have received very little scholarly attention, despite playing a prominent role in the politics of the region throughout the sixteenth century.⁶⁶ The results shown above connect the Fitzmaurice family (as opposed to an individual member) to four poets through three poems. The first, “Soraidh leat a Leic Snámha” (Farewell, Lixnaw), is a poem on the fall of Lixnaw Castle, and can probably be dated to ca. 1600, when Lixnaw was captured by the Lord President of Munster, Sir George Carew.⁶⁷ It survives, incomplete, in a single manuscript witness (MS NLI 140), in which it is attributed to Ó Dálaigh Fionn. The Fitzmaurices’ generosity to poets is highlighted throughout this poem. The house of Lixnaw is addressed directly—“a Róimh fhileadh Chláir Chobhthaigh” (O Rome of the poets of Ireland)—and the esteem in which the poets were once held within the household is put on display:

I have often received cold wine and esteem before a host of horsemen in your court, the wine that I used to drink from gold [cups] I must [now] recompense with sorrow.⁶⁸

The second two poems are somewhat obscure and are only tentatively linked to the Fitzmaurices (with a certainty tag of 3). Both are unedited. The first of these,

⁶³ O’Rahilly. This poem, being a satire, is not included in the network.

⁶⁴ Poems 1918 and 1445 in the database.

⁶⁵ McManus and Ó Raghallaigh, poem 323.

⁶⁶ Notable exceptions include Nicholls’s investigation of the Fitzmaurice genealogy prior to the sixteenth century (1970). A recent publication, *Deeds not Words, The Survival of the Fitzmaurices, Lords of Kerry*, investigates the family’s history from 1550 to 1603; see Moore. See also Nic Chárthaigh, 2022.

⁶⁷ See Carew’s own account on the fall of Lixnaw: “The Lord Fitzmaurice, when he saw his chief house possessed by our forces took such an inward grief at the same, as the 12th of this month [August] he died, leaving behind him his son and heir, as malicious a traitor as himself”: Brewer and Bullen, 426.

⁶⁸ “Minic fuarus fion fúar / ad chuirt muirnn air marcsfluagh; / an fion do ibhinn a hór, / dlíghim a dhíol re dobhrón”: McManus and Ó Raghallaigh, poem 438, quatrain 13.

“Cia na cinn do-chiú an-iar?” (Who are the [severed] heads that I see yonder?), is attributed to both Pádraig Mac an Bhaird and Fear Flatha Ó Gnímh in late manuscript sources. The poet laments a certain Fitzmaurice who has apparently been beheaded: “And the king of Lixnaw of the streams, without his head on his body.”⁶⁹ It is unclear which Fitzmaurice this refers to. The second of these poems is attributed to Domhnall (mac Dáire) Mac Bruaideadha.⁷⁰

While the context and subject of these two poems are ambiguous, and although they cannot be connected with any certainty to individual patrons, they draw our attention to the Fitzmaurices’ role in cultural production in Munster, which, on further investigation, appears to have been significant and sustained. There are four further poems in the network on various barons of Lixnaw, spanning three consecutive generations, that bear witness to their patronage of bardic poets. The first of these, “Maith an compánach an dán” (Poetry is a good companion), is attributed to a certain “Ó Cuill.”⁷¹ The poet mourns a catalogue of Munster patrons and laments the end of patronage in that province generally. Thomas Fitzmaurice (d. 1590) and his son, Patrick (d. 1600), the sixteenth and seventeenth Barons of Lixnaw, respectively, are among those mourned, and their generosity to poets is highlighted:

Mac Muiris of high renown—owing to his death music and play and carousing too have departed; their plight is like that of poetry.

The purchase of both wine and horses like poetry has all but died here, I declare, since his death.

Although Pádraigín his [Tomás’s] son after him died at old Lough Leane, it is said of him that poetry’s share of honour has departed with him.⁷²

The second poem, “Ní dúal cairde ar creich ngeimhil” (It is unfitting to postpone a raid for captives), is a more traditional panegyric on Patrick Fitzmaurice.⁷³ It was composed by Domhnall (mac Dáire) Mac Bruaideadha (who also wrote for Conchubhar Ó Briain, the third Earl of Thomond). The poem was probably

⁶⁹ “Is rí(gh) Lice Snámha na sreabh / ‘s gan a cheann ag teacht ré ttaobh”: McManus and Ó Raghallaigh, poem 97, quatrain 6.

⁷⁰ “Do cuireadh ceathrar cloinne” (poem 757 in the BPD) is a genealogical poem to Fitzgerald, Fitzgibbon, and Fitzmaurice. The text of the poem is not available on the database.

⁷¹ Breatnach, 1999, 79–88.

⁷² “Ceól agus imirt is ól, / Mac Muiris do budh mór clú, / cosmhail ris an dán a gcor, / do chuardar d’éag dá dhol súd. // Ceannach fíona, ceannach each / leath ar leath maille ris an dán / ón taoibhsi adeirim dá ló / ní mór nach bhfuadarar bás. // Pádraigín a mhac dá éis / ag seanLoch Léin gé fuair bás, / atáthar dá aithris air / a chion do dhul leis don dán”: Breatnach, 1999, 79–88, quatrains 9–11. The translations given are Breatnach’s.

⁷³ Bergin, poem 11.

composed before the death of Patrick's father, as Patrick is not given the title "Mac Muiris." The patron's generosity is highlighted throughout the poem. In the following stanza he is likened to Guaire, a celebrated seventh-century king of Connacht, who is frequently invoked in poetry as a supreme example of generosity:

The pole-star of Mac Con's Munster is Pádraigín, offspring of earls, a piece of bright steel, a knee before a shower, a second Guaire from Dún Durlais.⁷⁴

The poet playfully depicts the hospitality he is shown as unlawful imprisonment, and he hopes, in return, to hold his patron captive. The only place to do so, however, is in Fitzmaurice's own castle at Listowel, where the poet describes scenes of revelry and abundance:

I must remain with him in Listowel of the spacious hall with golden goblets, graceful mansion of woven branches—what outland fastness is better?⁷⁵

The final two poems are to Thomas (Tomás Óg) Fitzmaurice, the eighteenth Baron of Lixnaw (d. 1630). The first, "Ná treig a Thomáis meise" (Do not abandon me, Tomás), is a petition poem by the Cork poet Fear Feasa Ó'n Cháinte.⁷⁶ The poet appears to have been shunned, having colluded with the enemies of his patron's father, and pleads for reconciliation. The second poem on Thomas, "Ní bean aonothruis Éire" (Ireland is a woman with more than a single wasting illness), is an elegy in which the poet, Diarmaid Riabhach Ó Dálaigh, depicts Ireland as a sick woman and as a widow without protection ("baintreabhthach . . . gan chogair gcomhairleach" ["a widow . . . without a whisper of advice"]). Thomas's death is compared with that of a previous Earl of Desmond (Thomas Fitz James FitzGerald [d. 1468]):

The death of the first Thomas—an intense grief—[and] the death of the other young Thomas: two guarding griffons of a smooth, luxurious castle, it happened that they fell in the same place.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ "Rédla thúaidh Mhumhan Meic Con, / Pádraigín pór na n-íarladh, / mír glanchrúaidhe, glún ré bfráis, / an t-ath-Ghúaire ó Dhún Durlais": Bergin, poem 11.20, quatrain 20. The translations are Bergin's.

⁷⁵ "Anta leis i Lios Túathail / an m[h]úir fhairsing órchuachaigh, / brugh seang na bfoighég bñithi—/ ga fearr coimhéd coigcríc[h]e?": Bergin, poem 11, quatrain 40. The translations are Bergin's.

⁷⁶ Fear Feasa Ó'n Cháinte may have been a pupil of Tadhg (mac Dáire) Mac Bruaideadha. For a recent edition of this poem, see Griffin-Wilson.

⁷⁷ "Bás an cheadTomáis teidhm te / bás an Tomáis óig eile / da ghríbh chabhra ar séanmhúir slím / ar éanúir tarla a tuitim": McManus and Ó Raghallaigh, poem 358, quatrain 15. Translation is Nic Chárthaigh's.

This comparison is interesting, given that the poem postdates the fall of the house of Desmond by some thirty years, and it bears witness to the family's pride in their Geraldine identity. This is the last surviving poem on the Fitzmaurices, and it demonstrates that they continued to provide patronage to poets after the fall of the southern Geraldines.

Although the poems on the Fitzmaurices are, in some cases, fragmentary and obscure, they represent a sustained and rich engagement with bardic poetry and highlight the role of the barons of Lixnaw as prominent cultural players in Munster. The poems in the network connect the Fitzmaurices to a host of poets, including members of the celebrated Mac Bruaideadha and Ó Dálaigh families. Further evidence of the Fitzmaurices' patronage of poetry can be found outside the network. Thomas Fitzmaurice, the sixteenth baron of Lixnaw, is celebrated as a generous patron in the annalistic records: he is described by the Four Masters as "the best purchaser of wine, horses, and literary works, of any of his wealth and patrimony, in the greater part of Leath-Mogha [the Southern half of Ireland] at that time."⁷⁸ Similarly, a reference to a now-lost Fitzmaurice *duanaire*, or family poem book,⁷⁹ along with the survival of a praise poem to an earlier (possibly fifteenth-century) Patrick Fitzmaurice,⁸⁰ suggests the family's engagement with bardic poetry was deeply rooted and sustained. It is also a reminder that the survival of certain families' poem books—those of the Méig Uidhir and Uí Bhroin, for example—has an impact on the overall network and can skew the influence of certain patrons and poets, indicating the need to complement network analysis with closer readings and bibliographic scholarship.

As demonstrated by the filters applied for location, which shed light on the roles of lesser-known figures and allow us to recognize more regional cultural networks, analyzing the data under a tighter focus can offer a new perspective and prompt a different set of questions. It might be surprising, for example, that the Fitzgeralds of Desmond, who dominated politics in Munster in the fifteenth century and wielded extensive influence over the Province until the suppression of the Desmond Rebellions in the 1580s, do not rank among the top Munster patrons.⁸¹ Unlike the earls of Kildare, the Desmonds had a long tradition of engagement with Gaelic culture. Gerard Fitz Maurice (Gearóid Iarla), the third Earl of Desmond (d. 1398), for example, was known not only for his patronage of poets—he was the addressee of poems by the celebrated

⁷⁸ "Cendaighe fíona, each, 7 ealadhan rob ferr dfior a inmhe 7 a athardha féin baóí i lleith Mogha durmhór an tan sin": O'Donovan, 1892–93.

⁷⁹ De Brún, 58–60.

⁸⁰ For a recent edition of this poem see Nic Chárthaigh, 2020.

⁸¹ For more on the importance of the Desmond Rebellions in shaping the politics of the Munster region during this time, see Brady; McCormack.

Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh—but also for his own poetic compositions. Despite the dearth of extant poems to the Desmonds in the current network, there is much evidence that the handful of texts that do survive are representative of a much greater corpus, and that the Desmonds continued to be important patrons until their downfall at the end of the sixteenth century. An examination of this evidence, therefore, allows us to augment the network and to rectify some of the inevitable shortcomings of a fragmentary dataset.

There are three poems in our network connected to the Desmonds. The first, “Cia as sine as cairt ar chrích Néill” (Whose is the oldest chartered right to the land of Niall?), is a panegyric on James FitzMaurice Fitzgerald, who is best known for his central role in the Second Desmond Rebellion. It was composed by Domhnall (mac Dáire) Mac Bruaideadha, probably around the time of FitzMaurice’s de facto assumption of leadership of the southern Geraldines (1569–73).⁸² The other two poems were composed on the deaths of FitzMaurice and his half-brothers: Gerard, the fifteenth Earl of Desmond (d. 1580), and Sir John (d. 1581). The first of these is Ó Cuill’s poem on the loss of patronage (mentioned above), in which the poet casts all three brothers as prominent Munster patrons:

The trio of James’s sons from Tralee—Ireland’s poets lay such store by their death that they do not care to talk of poetry.⁸³

In the second of these poems, “Liaigh mo thuirse, tásg mo ríogh” (The graveyard of my sorrow is my king’s death), the poet, Donnchadh an tSneachta Mac Craith, laments the beheading of the same three Desmonds. Once again, their deaths are mourned in the context of personal loss to the poet:⁸⁴

Whoever has severed your three bodies, O three heads of the descendants of Gerald, has dulled my complexion, my three wise heads of counsel (?).⁸⁵

These poems hint at the importance of the Desmonds’ patronage to the poets, and indeed, if we look outside the network, there is much evidence to suggest that the small collection of extant poems is a mere remnant of a much vaster corpus. The anonymous poem “Truagh sin a chinn mo chroidhe” (It is sad,

⁸² This poem has been fully edited in O’Raghallaigh, 123–37.

⁸³ “Triúr mac Shéamais ó Thráigh Lí, / do bhrígh dá chur ina mbás, / ag éigsibh Éirionn fa seach, / nach ní leó eacht thar an dán. Breatnach”: “A Poem on the End of Patronage,” 79–88, quatrain 4. The translation is Breatnach’s.

⁸⁴ McManus and Ó Raghallaigh, poem 299. The translation is uncertain due to difficulties with the surviving texts. See Nic Chárthaigh, 2021.

⁸⁵ “Gidhbé do thesg bur ttri ccuirp / a tri cinn do chloinn Geroilt / do líathmhill lí mo dheilbhe / mo trí ciallachinn comhairle”: Nic Chárthaigh, 2021, 280. This quatrain is metrically faulty, and the translation is therefore tentative.

O beloved head) again mourns the beheading of Sir John Fitzgerald, and emphasizes the loss of patronage that his death has brought about:⁸⁶

Your head on a stake, O smooth form, O beloved son of James, O hand that was best for rewarding poems, is, alas, a great pity for me.⁸⁷

Further evidence of Sir John's patronage of bardic poetry can be found in other sources, such as the following item from the State Papers, which strongly suggests his importance as a patron:

Item tat the sayde Sir Iohn shall not vse ne keepe within his house anie irische Bard, karroghe, or Rymour but toe th uttermost of his power he hoe to remove them from those partes of Mounster.⁸⁸

Another anonymous poem, written when James, the Sógán Earl, was in exile, nostalgically recalls the deaths of Gerard, of his son, James (d. 1601), and of James FitzMaurice:

Skillful Gearóid, the beloved of the poetic-bands, the Jameses of the great plunders of Munster, the death of the band torments the heart, and the plain of Kerry is [left] without an heir.⁸⁹

These poems connect the Desmonds to a host of poets, hailing from families such as the Meic Bhruaidealha and the Meic Craith. It appears, however, that the Desmonds' official court poets may have been a branch of the Munster Uí Dhálaigh. Although no poem by an Ó Dálaigh poet survives on the Desmonds of this period, there is much evidence to suggest a strong connection between the families. Sometime shortly after the fall of the house of Desmond, one Conchubhar Ó Dálaigh wrote a poem to Cú Chonnacht Mág Uidhir, Lord of Fermanagh (d. 1589), in which he says that he is traveling to Ulster in search of patronage, following the death of his own three patrons:

The death of the three whom I loved has sent me on a long journey to you; many as well as I in the west lament the three who were best to visit.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ The poem does not appear in the network due to its anonymity.

⁸⁷ "Do cheann ar cuaille, a cruth thais, / a mh[e]ic shoghrádaigh S[h]éamuis, / a lámh dob fharr ar dhíol duan; / [ní] leam fá-ríor nac[h] rothruagh": Nic Chárthaigh, 2021, 290.

⁸⁸ *State Papers* 63/40, 129 (24 May 1573); quoted in Fletcher, 175.

⁸⁹ "Gioróid seaghan serc na sgol / na Séamuis móirchreach Mumhon / bás na foirne as cradh croidhe / 's gan oighre ar chlár Ciarroidhe": McManus and Ó Raghallaigh, poem 227, quatrain 11. Translation is Nic Chárthaigh's.

⁹⁰ "Bás an trír dá ttucus toil / do chuir misi a ccéin chugaibh; / iomdha lem thair dá ttoirimh; / triar dob fherr le a n-athoighidh": Greene, poem 19, quatrain 4. This is the only surviving poem attributed to Conchubhar.

The three patrons have been identified as the Fitzgeralds of Desmond: Gerald Fitzgerald, the fifteenth Earl of Desmond; his brother Sir John; and their half-brother James FitzMaurice Fitzgerald (d. 1580).⁹¹ Evidence from other sources connects the Uí Dhálaigh with the Fitzgeralds. A survey of the Earl of Desmond's rents, carried out in 1572, for example, refers to Kilsarkan as "the Rimer's lands." This land was leased by the Uí Dhálaigh, suggesting that a distinct Kerry family branch of Ó Dálaigh poets continued to work in the service of the Desmonds.

Little of the editorial work that has been carried out on bardic poetry to date has focused on Munster. With the exception of Aonghus Fionn Ó Dálaigh, most of whose poems are of a religious nature, no Munster poet from this period has had his work collected in an anthology, and other than the inclusion of poems to the Butlers of Cahir in *Poems on the Butlers*,⁹² there is no edited collection of poems to a Munster patron or family. While individual poems on families such as the O'Briens and the Fitzmaurices have been edited in specialist journals, they have not been examined as a body of work. Filtering the network by geographical region provides a model to unearth lesser-known figures and connections, which can be applied to the other provinces while simultaneously shedding light on what was clearly a very vibrant literary scene in Munster—one that is surely deserving of more scholarly attention.

CONCLUSION

The outset of this article noted an increasing acknowledgment of the importance of vernacular sources for the study of Renaissance Ireland. The present study complements and expands on this turn in scholarship by using network visualization and analysis to refine and augment understanding of the early modern bardic corpus and its evidential centrality to Irish cultural history at a time of conquest and colonization. More broadly, it demonstrates the importance of prioritizing minoritized languages, and provides a model for engaging with fragmentary and peripheral sources.

Due to the lack of a vernacular administrative archive, the corpus of bardic poetry examined here is a critical source of insight and knowledge for a period of tumultuous change in Ireland's cultural, social, and political history. This study presents a broad, panoramic view of the social world embedded in bardic

⁹¹ See Caball, 1991.

⁹² See Carney, 1945.

poetry, especially the network of patrons and poets in Ireland in the early modern period. It highlights the role played by exemplary poets and patrons such as Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn, Eochaidh Ó hEódhusa, and Cú Chonnacht Óg Mág Uidhir, alongside the collective role played by poetic families such as the Meic Eochadha. While the research of Breathnach, Knott, Simms, and others has examined the one-to-one relationship between a poet and his patron, this study expands our knowledge of the multiplicity of network relations and makes clear the vastly larger dynamics at play.⁹³ It maps and demonstrates the breadth and vibrancy of the bardic world while presenting the complexities of a network of influential poets and patrons, who were political as well as cultural players.

Filtering the network by geographical region offers a new perspective through which to view the data, and for Munster, it brings to light those people and connections that are not immediately apparent in the larger network, and who may not have been the subject of previous scholarship. This is demonstrated by the network's recentering of the cultural role played by the Fitzmaurices, and by its ability to highlight the likely impact that the violence and destruction of the Desmond Rebellions and the Munster Plantation had on the extant evidence of the Desmonds' cultural significance.

While this study has focused on bardic poems that have survived from the early modern period, the same methodology could be employed to explore patronage connections for the medieval period. Widening the parameters of the study in this way would allow for a temporal element to be added to the analysis, which would facilitate an examination of the rise and decline in influence of various poetic and patronage families. Another approach would be to turn to the text of the poems in more detail. Doing so would facilitate the examination of people mentioned (often in the context of envois to the patron's wife or verses about the patron's wider family), places or myths drawn upon, or religious saints cited to see how different poets captured and celebrated the social, physical, and religious world they inhabited. As was the case with the present study, such an exploration would initially have to take place using a subset of the bardic poetry corpus, as the poems would need to be marked up manually; this would help to continue to work through the challenges of refining models for using digital approaches on the extant, often fragmentary, sources of minoritized languages. However, as collaborative work on the creation of OCR and NER tools that can read minoritized languages (including Gaelic script) continues, our ability to examine the full

⁹³ Breathnach, 1983; Knott; Simms, 2009.

corpus in greater detail increases, allowing for an even richer exploration of the Gaelic world as perceived by the bardic poets.

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