

“Upholding the Good Justice”:
An Examination of *Speculum Principum* in Indo-European Society

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At first glance, an Old Irish wisdom text, the *Audacht Morainn*, and the famous Homeric epic, the *Odyssey*, do not appear to have much in common. Emerging in written form a millennium apart in places thousands of kilometers from one another, the two texts are among the oldest examples of literature in their respective languages. Striking similarities in both diction and theme, however, are unmistakable signs of a common Indo-European ancestry. In this exploration of these two seminal works, two passages that show such interconnectedness, *Odyssey* 19:107-114 and *Audacht Morainn* 14-21, are compared in order to illuminate their history. Beginning with a close reading of several words and phrases in each passage and using the comparative method, many of the Greek and the Old Irish words can be traced back to their origin, Proto Indo-European.

In order to comprehend fully the connections between the words and phrases of the texts, this examination then considers how these words and phrases reflect on the larger theme known as *speculum principum*, translated as ‘mirror of princes’ or ‘instruction of princes.’ This genre, present in works from many Indo-European cultures but especially evident in Irish and Greek society, focuses on “the abundance resulting from the power of a good king.”¹ The concept of justice, which formed a crucial link between the king and his subjects, emerges as a central theme within the narratives of both the *Audacht Morainn* and the *Odyssey*, evidence of a cultural pillar stretching far back into the end of Neolithic times. Therefore, the close observation of individual words and phrases reveals patterns and similarities between the Old Irish and Greek texts, shedding light on the language and culture of their shared ancestors, the Proto Indo-Europeans.

¹ Richard P. Martin, “Hesiod, Odysseus, and the Instruction of Princes,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 114(1984): 35.

PART ONE: PROTO INDO-EUROPEANS AND THEIR LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL LEGACY

Information about the group or groups of people known as Proto Indo-Europeans is scarce, partially due to the lack of an archaeological record that can be securely linked to any single linguistic group. Scholars do not agree on the size of the Proto Indo-European culture, nor on how widespread the beliefs and practices of its members may have been.² For the purposes of the exploration in this paper, the Proto Indo-Europeans are treated as a single group, both culturally and linguistically, with the full realization that reality is never quite so simple. Furthermore, while scrutinizing the words it is possible to reconstruct using the comparative method, “it is fair to assume that the things which the reconstructed words represent actually existed,”³ since presumably the linguistic reconstruction of a word and its associated meaning is as accurate a guess as possible.

The Proto Indo-European language (PIE) most likely arose in the region north of the Black Sea.⁴ One strong candidate for a group that spoke PIE is the Sredny Stog culture, which lived north of the Black Sea from 4500 – 3500 BCE.⁵ From this group came the Yamna culture, which occupied a larger area north and east of the Black Sea in the mid-fourth millennium BCE. The archaeological record of the Yamna exhibits several traits associated with late Proto Indo-Europeans, including “rapid expansion from an original area that comprised a temperate forest; the recent adoption (or invention) of wheel technologies; widespread stockbreeding; and use of

² Benjamin W. Fortson, IV, *Indo-European Language and Culture: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 19.

³ Robert S.P. Beekes, *Comparative Indo-European Linguistics: An Introduction* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1995), 34.

⁴ Lyle Campbell, *Historical Linguistics: An Introduction*, 3rd ed., (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013), 406.

⁵ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 48.

the domesticated horse, including in ritual.”⁶ Several words for leaders, with militaristic undertones,⁷ add evidence that the Proto Indo-Europeans lived in a socially stratified and roughly patrilineal exogamous society, with complex gift exchange and legal processes.⁸ Poets were highly valued members of the group, and the oral-formulaic poetry they composed served as a powerful transmission vehicle for myths and other shared cultural themes,⁹ such as the concept of fame. Fame must have been quite important to the Proto Indo-Europeans, since even though no PIE poems are extant, a few instances of poetic diction and meter can be reconstructed. Two of these are **kléwos meǵh_a-* ‘great fame,’ which has lexical cognates in Greek (*mégas kléos*) and Old Irish (*clū mōr*),¹⁰ and **kléuos nǵ^hg^{wh}itom* ‘immortal fame,’ which is lexically and metrically cognate with formulae in Greek (*kléos áphthiton*) and Sanskrit (*śrávas ákṣitam*).¹¹ Oral poetry and its formulaic quality, which provide some of the most compelling clues for the PIE origin of works in Greek, Old Irish, and other languages, will be explored more deeply in later sections.

Although the precise date is the cause of much speculation, most experts agree that around the year 3500 BCE, amid a period of monumental change in the greater Mediterranean area, PIE began to break up into many smaller languages that would soon become unintelligible to one another.¹² The Yamna can be considered some of the last Proto Indo-Europeans. Their descendent group, the Indo-Iranian-speaking Andronovo culture of the second century BCE¹³ is classified as early Indo-European.¹⁴ The advances in technology during Neolithic times now

⁶ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 47.

⁷ J.P. Mallory and D. Q. Adams, *Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-Europeans and the Proto-Indo-European World*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 284.

⁸ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 19-24.

⁹ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 33.

¹⁰ Mallory and Adams, *Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-Europeans and the Proto-Indo-European World*, 118.

¹¹ Gregory Nagy, *Comparative Studies in Greek and Indic Meter* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 1.

¹² Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 43.

¹³ Beekes, *Comparative Indo-European Linguistics*, 45.

¹⁴ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 46.

allowed small groups of people to trade and wage war, increasing the contact between people of different cultures and linguistic backgrounds.¹⁵ Indo-European languages quickly spread throughout much of the Mediterranean and the rest of Europe due to their “adoption and emulation as prestige, gender-specific or trade languages, along with modest migratory expansions from time to time.”¹⁶ Eventually, Indo-European grew and divided into ten branches or subgroups, which in modern times have hundreds of languages between them. The Celtic and Greek subgroups will be of most interest to this examination of *speculum principum*.¹⁷

Greek and the *Odyssey*

The events that transpired between the divergence of the Greek branch from PIE and the appearance of the first texts in Greek, clay tablets from Knossos dated circa 1400 BCE, are as compelling as they are mysterious. It is unclear when the first Greek language, Mycenaean, arose; furthermore, it is also unknown to which language family or families the languages it replaced (such as the Minoan language), belonged to.¹⁸ The most likely scenario, supported by the archaeological record, is that Mycenaean speakers migrated into Greece around 2000 BCE.¹⁹ Major changes from PIE to Greek included a merge of the palatals with the velars, the devoicing of voiced aspirates, aspiration dissimilation (Grassman’s Law), the loss of word-final non-nasal stops and the triple reflex vocalization of laryngeals. Vowels and diphthongs were better maintained in Greek than in any other language, and Greek verbal morphology also greatly

¹⁵ Cyprian Broodbank, “The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea,” in *The Making of the Middle Sea: A History of the Mediterranean from the Beginning to the Emergence of the Classical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 325-326.

¹⁶ Broodbank, “The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea,” 326.

¹⁷ Campbell, *Historical Linguistics: An Introduction*, 174-177.

¹⁸ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 248.

¹⁹ Beekes, *Comparative Indo-European Linguistics*, 46.

resembled its PIE ancestor.²⁰ Written in a script called Linear B, which was adopted from the Minoan Linear A script, Mycenaean eventually gave way to alphabetic Greek in the eighth century BCE after a period known as the “Dark Ages,” a time of societal turbulence to which only one inscription can be securely assigned. After the “Dark Ages” came the Archaic period, which lasted until 480 BCE when it was replaced by the Classical period.²¹ Attic Greek was the dominant dialect of the Classical period,²² and the influence of the Greek language, especially the Koine, spread during the following Hellenistic period, which lasted from 323 BCE to around the 6th century CE.²³ Modern Greek, still spoken today across the Greek islands, is a direct result of the Koine.²⁴

The form of the *Odyssey* read across the globe in contemporary times dates from the beginning of the Archaic period (800-500 BCE) and was potentially first written down towards the end of this time period, at the earliest. It existed as an oral epic for a lengthy time span before then, however, since it recounts legendary events and people from the Mycenaean age (1600-1200 BCE),²⁵ and it most likely continued to be performed as an epic until the second century CE.²⁶ Two dialects, primarily Ionic with some Aeolic added, were used to form the language of the epic genre.²⁷ This type of “artificial” language is known as a *Kunstsprache*, and the combination of Ionic, Aeolic, older forms, and novel innovations within the *Kunstsprache* served to create “the maximum metrical diversity from the least infusion of ‘foreign’ material.”²⁸ As a

²⁰ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 252-258.

²¹ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 249.

²² Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 250.

²³ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 263.

²⁴ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 264.

²⁵ Richard P. Martin, introduction to *The Odyssey*, by Homer, translated by Edward McCrorie, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), xxix.

²⁶ Martin, introduction to *The Odyssey*, xxvii-xxviii

²⁷ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 249.

²⁸ J.B. Hainsworth, “The Epic Dialect,” in *A Commentary on Homer’s Odyssey*, by Alfred Heubeck, Stephanie West, and J.B. Hainsworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 24.

result, the poet gained more freedom within the constraints of the metric poetry formulae. Since the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were primarily oral epics, the “poem [was] not a text, but a sequence of themes and incidents. These [the poet] endeavoure[d] to recreate as well as his talents permit[ted] and his audience deserve[d] on the occasion of each performance.”²⁹ Furthermore, “the epic hexameter consists of formulas which have fixed inner rhythms and which are joined together in such a way as to produce a fixed overall rhythm.”³⁰ In this way, each poet throughout the years had his own version of the epics that could change slightly during each performance. Eventually, when the texts of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were first written down, they then became a highly valuable example of the language changes of that time period. Not only do these epics provide insight into the poetic practices of the Greeks, but they also preserve a much older tradition. Several thematic and philological parallels between the *Iliad* and the poetic tradition of the greater Indo-European family have already been drawn,³¹ pointing at a common PIE root. The *Odyssey* proves to be no different.

Close Reading of the *Odyssey*

Several words in *Odyssey* 19:107-114 can be traced back to Proto Indo-European. Lines 107-108 provide three examples of such words:

Lady, no one of mortals upon the boundless earth could find fault with thee, for thy fame goes up to the broad heaven³²

- 1) γυνή ‘lady’ or ‘woman’ (in the text the word is in the vocative form, γύναι) Comes from *g^wéh₂³³ and became g^weneh₂ through vowel insertion.³⁴ The initial labiovelar lost its labial quality, the first vowel was raised and backed, and the final laryngeal was lost, causing compensatory lengthening of the preceding vowel.³⁵

²⁹ Hainsworth, “The Epic Dialect,” 29.

³⁰ Nagy, *Comparative Studies in Greek and Indic Meter*, 9.

³¹ C. Scott Littleton, “Some Possible Indo-European Themes in the ‘Iliad,’” in *Myth and Law Among the Indo-Europeans*, ed. Jaan Puhvel, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 229-246.

³² Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans A.T. Murray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), 19:107-108.

- 2) βροτός ‘mortal’ (in the text the word is in the plural genitive form, βροτῶν)
Comes from *mr̥tós.³⁶ An epenthetic vowel was added³⁷ and it then became *mbrotos through the insertion of voiced stop.³⁸ The initial nasal was lost at some point.
- 3) κλέος ‘fame’
Comes from *kléwes.³⁹ The loss of the glide⁴⁰ caused it to become kle-es, and the second vowel was backed.

Lines 111-113 also show three words that can be reconstructed in PIE:

and the black earth bears wheat and barley, and the trees are laden with fruit, the flocks bring forth young unceasingly, and the sea yields fish⁴¹

- 4) μέλας ‘black’ (in the text the word is in the feminine form, μέλαινα)
Comes from *mel-n⁴² and underwent very little sound change.
- 5) κριθή ‘barley’
Comes from *ǵhrédh(i).⁴³ The cluster ǵh was devoiced, as was the cluster dh. The first vowel was raised while the second was lowered.
- 6) ἰχθύς ‘fish’
Comes from *pik̥sk̥os.⁴⁴ The initial stop was lost, the first velar stop became a fricative, the alveolar fricative became a dental fricative, and the second velar stop was lost. The second vowel was raised.

A more detailed exploration of the meaning of these words within the larger framework of *speculum principum* will occur in a later section.

³³ Mallory and Adams, *Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-Europeans and the Proto-Indo-European World*, 564.

³⁴ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 133.

³⁵ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 63.

³⁶ Mallory and Adams, *Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-Europeans and the Proto-Indo-European World*, 545.

³⁷ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 254.

³⁸ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 255.

³⁹ Mallory and Adams, *Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-Europeans and the Proto-Indo-European World*, 534.

⁴⁰ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 255.

⁴¹ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans A. T. Murray, lines 111-113.

⁴² Mallory and Adams, *Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-Europeans and the Proto-Indo-European World*, 527.

⁴³ Mallory and Adams, *Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-Europeans and the Proto-Indo-European World*, 525.

⁴⁴ Mallory and Adams, *Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-Europeans and the Proto-Indo-European World*, 536.

Old Irish and the *Audacht Morainn*

The people who first brought Indo-European languages to what are now the British Isles were most likely members of the Hallstatt culture (1200 - 500 BCE), the origin of the numerous Celtic tribes which later spread into many parts of Europe. The Celtic language thrived in places like Ireland for hundreds of years before the Roman conquest in the first century BCE, and one branch, Insular Celtic, continued to survive despite the prevalence of Latin in other parts of Britain.⁴⁵ Insular Celtic languages underwent a series of sound changes that affected both consonants and vowels and definitively differentiated them from their Proto Indo-European past. These changes included lenition and nasalization of word-initial and word-internal consonants as well as umlaut (vowel harmony), syncope (internal vowel loss), and apocope (final syllable loss). Insular Celtic languages did, however, retain a large amount of the Indo-European verbal morphology.⁴⁶ One branch of Insular Celtic is known as Goidelic, and the Proto-Goidelic language was spoken around the year 0 CE. Primitive Irish arose from Proto-Goidelic in the fourth through seventh centuries, and the earliest written evidence of this language are inscriptions written in an alphabet known as Ogam.⁴⁷ The term Archaic Old Irish generally refers to the language spoken in the fifth through early seventh century, whereas Classical Old Irish was spoken for the next two hundred years or so until the mid-tenth century.⁴⁸ From Old Irish came the Irish languages known in modern times: Irish Gaelic, Scottish Gaelic, and Manx.⁴⁹

Written around the year 700 CE in Archaic Old Irish but most likely told in oral form for years before that date, the *Audacht Morainn* is a mythical account of the wisdom imparted to

⁴⁵ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 309.

⁴⁶ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 316-317.

⁴⁷ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 319.

⁴⁸ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 319.

⁴⁹ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 316.

King Feradach Find Fechnach by a judge named Morann through Morann's foster son, Neire.⁵⁰ Morann tries to make clear to Feradach Find Fechnach that "the welfare of the king and his tribe depends on his justice or *fir flathemon*."⁵¹ Although Christianity existed in Ireland during this time, no evidence of Christian influence on the text can be detected, thereby making the text a valuable tool for the study of Indo-European society.⁵² The *Audacht Morainn* was probably used to instruct or inform generation after generation of princes or young kings. These kings must have been important, since the king is referred to in the text as having several tribes, meaning he was either a *rí tuath* 'king of tribes' or *rí cóicid* 'king of a province' but certainly not a low-ranking *rí túaithe*, the king of only a single tribe.⁵³ The consistent repetition of the phrase "May it be a truth which is fulfilled, may it be a power which is enforced" by the king after every section provides evidence that this text was recited in a public setting and was part of an inauguration or swearing-in ceremony.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the poet reciting the poem engaged in the ceremonial passing of a rod to the king, representing the fact that "the Irish king is certified by the poet; reciprocally, the poet is maintained by the king and tribe."⁵⁵ This ritual also has direct parallels in ancient Greek tradition.⁵⁶

Close reading of the *Audacht Morainn*

Several parts of the *Audacht Morainn* merit a close inspection, beginning with the title itself.

One theory about the origins of the word *audacht* 'will or testament, solemn presentation, pledge' posits that it comes from the word **ad-uk^w-to* 'that which has been said,' which is in turn

⁵⁰ Fergus Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1976), xiii-xiv.

⁵¹ Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*, xvii.

⁵² Martin, "Hesiod, Odysseus, and the Instruction of Princes," 33-34.

⁵³ Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*, xvi.

⁵⁴ Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*, xiv.

⁵⁵ Martin, "Hesiod, Odysseus, and the Instruction of Princes," 35.

⁵⁶ Martin, "Hesiod, Odysseus, and the Instruction of Princes," 35.

a *t*-participle of the root **wek^w*-, from which the Greek word ἔπος ‘word’ is derived.⁵⁷ The PIE root **wek^w* ‘speak’⁵⁸ therefore morphed into two slightly different but intrinsically related nouns in the two different languages – in Old Irish, ‘testament’ or something that is spoken, with official connotations, and in Greek, ‘word,’ a unit of spoken language. Thus the *Audacht Morainn*’s connection to PIE and Greek material is evident from its very start.

Furthermore, within the section of the *Audacht Morainn* chosen for this exploration (lines 14-21), line 15 shows a striking parallel with Homeric Greek and other Indo-European languages through the use of tmesis. Tmesis occurs when “the preverb comes at the beginning of the clause with the rest of the verb at the end,”⁵⁹ instead of appearing directly before the verb as part of the verb, which is a later form. Having the particle at the beginning of the clause while the verb is in the final position of the clause is an inherited trait from PIE.⁶⁰ There may be as many as eight examples of tmesis in the *Audacht Morainn*, and the one in line 14 contains a well-attested form of the verb *ad-cuirethar*:⁶¹

<i>ath-</i>	<i>(mór)cathu</i>	<i>fri</i>	<i>crícha</i>	<i>comnámat</i>	<i>–cuirethar</i>
PART	ACC.PL	PREP	ACC.PL	GEN.PL	3SG.PRES.INDIC.PASS
	battalions	to	borders	hostile neighbors	dispatches

‘he dispatches (great) battalions to the borders of hostile neighbors’

This clear example of tmesis has comparable examples in Homeric Greek, where “tmesis was sought after and deliberately used by epic poets”⁶² because it was a reminder of previous times.

For instance, in *Odyssey* 3.40-41, the poet chose to split up the verb ἐνέχευε even though the hexameter still would have been metrically correct if it had been kept as one word.⁶³

⁵⁷ Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*, 22.

⁵⁸ Mallory and Adams, *Oxford Introduction to Proto-Indo-Europeans and the Proto-Indo-European World*, 519.

⁵⁹ Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*, xxxiv.

⁶⁰ Dag T. T. Haug, “Tmesis in the Epic Tradition,” in *Relative Chronology in Early Greek Epic Poetry*, ed. Øivind Andersen and Dag T. T. Haug (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 98.

⁶¹ Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*, xxxiv-xxxv, 28.

⁶² Haug, “Tmesis in the Epic Tradition,” 97.

⁶³ Haug, “Tmesis in the Epic Tradition,” 97.

3:40	δῶκε 3.SG.AOR.INDIC.ACT give	δ’ PART	ἄρα PART	σπλάγχων GEN.PL.NEUT inward parts	μοίρας, ACC.PL.FEM portion
	ἐν- PART	δ’ PART	οἶνον ACC.PL.MASC wine	-ἔχευεν 3SG.IMPERF.INDIC.ACT pour	

3:41 χρυσεῖῳ
ADJ.DAT.SG.NEUT
golden
‘thereupon he gave them portions of the inner meat and poured wine in a golden cup’⁶⁴

Since tmesis was probably not used in the vernacular during the time period when the *Odyssey* was written down, it could have been used by individual poets as a stylistic tool,⁶⁵ which was valued for inherently preserving an older form of the verb. Given that the *Audacht Morainn* is a much later text, it is possible that tmesis was used in Old Irish as well because it maintained an older, more prestigious form.

Another fascinating example comes from line 15 of the *Audacht Morainn*, ‘... there is abundance of every high, tall corn.’ The Old Irish word for ‘high and tall’ is *ardósil*. The first part, *ard* ‘high’, is cognate to the Greek word *orthós* ‘upright.’ The second part, *ósal* ‘tall’ is also related to the Greek *hupsēlós* ‘lofty.’⁶⁶ Clearly these words all come from PIE and were preserved in different forms.

Finally, the words in the phrase ‘is tre fir flathemon’ can be traced back to an earlier origin and thereby reveal several important details.⁶⁷ Each word will be examined individually.

is ‘is’	Comes from *h ₁ esti. It lost the initial laryngeal, ⁶⁸ underwent i-infection, ⁶⁹ dropped the final vowel, ⁷⁰ and then lost the final consonant. ⁷¹
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⁶⁴ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans A.T. Murray, 3:40-41.

⁶⁵ Haug, “Tmesis in the Epic Tradition,” 100-101.

⁶⁶ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 327.

⁶⁷ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 326.

⁶⁸ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 311.

⁶⁹ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 321.

⁷⁰ Julius Porkorny, *A Concise Old Irish Grammar and Reader*, Vol. 1 (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis and Co., 1914), 15.

tre ‘through’ ⁷²	Cognate with Latin <i>trāns</i> , comes from *terh ₂ , and became treh ₂ through metathesis. The vowel was lowered and backed. It then lost the laryngeal and underwent compensatory lengthening before gaining the final vowel quality.
fír ‘justice; truth’	Cognate with Latin <i>vērus</i> , ⁷³ comes from * μ eh ₁ -ro. It lost the laryngeal ⁷⁴ and dropped the final vowel. ⁷⁵ At some point, the glide μ became f.
flathemon (genitive singular of fla(i)them) ‘ruler’	Comes from the Celtic *wlati-amon ⁷⁶ which became wlati-mon through umlaut, ⁷⁷ then wlathi-mon through lenition, ⁷⁸ and finally became wlathe-mon through <i>a</i> -infection. ⁷⁹ Here too, the glide μ (w) became f. The –mon suffix can not only be traced back from Old Irish to Celtic, but it also existed in PIE as *-mon- and can be seen in other Indo-European words such as the Greek hēge-mōn ‘leader.’

Together, these four words form a phrase that is repeated fifteen times, first in a set of ten lines and then in a set of five lines. The importance of this repetition will be considered further in a later section.

PART TWO: SPECULUM PRINCIPUM AND PROTO INDO-EUROPEAN POETRY

The previous investigation of words and phrases in *Odyssey* 19:107-114 and *Audacht Morainn* 14-21 has clearly demonstrated that both Old Irish and Greek descend from Proto Indo-European. These two passages share more than just a common linguistic ancestor, however. They also embody the important cultural theme of *speculum principum*, which can be thought of

⁷¹ Porkorny, *A Concise Old Irish Grammar and Reader*, 15.

⁷² *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*, 3rd ed., s.v. “terə-².”

⁷³ *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*, 3rd ed., s.v. “wēr-o-.”

⁷⁴ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 311.

⁷⁵ Porkorny, *A Concise Old Irish Grammar and Reader*, 15.

⁷⁶ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 326.

⁷⁷ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 317.

⁷⁸ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 320.

⁷⁹ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 321.

as a “genre of discourse,” containing “unspoken assumptions regarding the context and manner of communication proper to a given location, occasion, and interlocutors.”⁸⁰ The people who heard texts containing *speculum principum* recognized that it was a special speech style meant to convey important ideas about the proper governance by a king. *Speculum principum* is a genre found in many ancient Indo-European societies located in places such as Greece, Iran, India, and Ireland. The concept of a ruler’s truth or justice forms the core of the genre,⁸¹ which is broadly focused on passing down the guidelines of socially acceptable behavior in the political, religious, and legal spheres.⁸² Furthermore, “the verbal expression of this concept is believed to ensure prosperity and protect from harm.”⁸³ The ruler’s truth was of paramount importance; his just decrees were the source of all good things. Conversely, if he gave false judgments, all sorts of calamities such as famine and disease would befall his people.⁸⁴ *Speculum principum* has its roots in earlier Proto Indo-European tradition, yet proved to be such an important theme that it remained a facet of multiple cultures for many thousands of years. For example, the genre is present in Irish literature until at least the 1600s, indicated by its inclusion in several parts of *Contention of the Bards*.⁸⁵

Speculum Principum in the Odyssey

The passage of the *Odyssey* considered in this exploration is taken from Book 19. Odysseus has finally returned after the Trojan War and his subsequent wanderings, but he has disguised himself from all of the members of his household in order to discern who has remained loyal to

⁸⁰ Martin, “Hesiod, Odysseus, and the Instruction of Princes,” 30-31.

⁸¹ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 326

⁸² Martin, “Hesiod, Odysseus, and the Instruction of Princes,” 32-33.

⁸³ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 326.

⁸⁴ Roland Mitchell Smith, “The Speculum Principum in Early Irish Literature,” *Speculum* 2(4): 439-440.

⁸⁵ Smith “The Speculum Principum in Early Irish Literature,” 440.

him in his absence. When he addresses his wife, Penelope, he is still dressed as a beggar, though he speaks of the rule of a great king:

‘ὦ γύναι, οὐκ ἄν τις σε βροτῶν ἐπ’ ἀπείρονα
 γαῖαν νεικέοι: ἦ γάρ σευ κλέος οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ικάνει,
 ὥς τέ τευ ἦ βασιλῆος ἀμύμονος, ὅς τε θεουδῆς
 ἀνδράσιν ἐν πολλοῖσι καὶ ἰφθίμοισιν ἀνάσσω
 εὐδικίας ἀνέχησι, φέρησι δὲ γαῖα μέλαινα
 πυροὺς καὶ κριθάς, βρίθησι δὲ δένδρεα καρπῶ,
 τίκτη δ’ ἔμπεδα μῆλα, θάλασσα δὲ παρέχη ἰχθῦς
 ἐξ εὐηγεσίης, ἀρετῶσι δὲ λαοὶ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ.⁸⁶

No one alive on the endless earth could dispraise you,
 lady: truly your name has arrived in the broad sky
 like that of a faultless king’s, a man who has dreaded
 the Gods and mastered many powerful humans
 while holding justice high. Black soil on his farmland
 yields barley and wheat, his groves are heavy with ripe fruit,
 livestock breeding always, the waters are fish-filled
 thanks to his rule, and under him the people are thriving.⁸⁷

Several aspects of this passage point to an Indo-European theme. Most immediately apparent are the direct parallels to a section of the *Mahabharata*, a Sanskrit epic first written down around the year 400 BCE. In this work, King Nala disguises himself after coming out of exile just at the point where his wife prepares to take a new husband.⁸⁸ This narrative closely echoes the situation Odysseus finds Penelope in regarding the suitors and the decisions she must make about her future as she waits for her long-lost husband to come home. Additionally, the theme of *speculum principum* is quite clear in this passage. First, Odysseus describes characteristics of an excellent king – not only has he revered the gods and conquered peoples, but he has done so with justice paramount above all else. Because of the king’s righteous actions, he and his people are

⁸⁶ 19:107-114, Perseus Digital Library, “Homer, *Odyssey*,” accessed October 18, 2015.
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0135%3Abook%3D19%3Acard%3D89>

⁸⁷ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Edward McCrorie (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), lines 107-114.

⁸⁸ Julian Baldick, *Homer and the Indo-Europeans: Comparing Mythologies* (London: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 1994), 135.

rewarded with an abundance of food and prosperity. The text makes explicit that it is directly through the king's just rule that the people benefit. A good king is a necessity for the success of a society.

In this instance, *speculum principum* exists as a genre of stylized discourse within the larger framework of epic poetry.⁸⁹ When Odysseus begins elaborating on the ways in which a king should act, both Penelope and the audience listening to the poet reciting the epic are expected to realize that the genre has switched from narrative to *speculum principum*, and that Odysseus is communicating that he *himself* is king.⁹⁰ Furthermore, his speech foreshadows his coming reunion with Penelope and the resumption of their roles as king and queen, a symbol of the restoration of cosmic order and the return of prosperity.⁹¹ Odysseus' address can be considered a *sêma* or 'sign,' defined by Nagy specifically in Homeric usage as "the conventional word for the signs that lead to the recognition of Odysseus by his *philoï*, those who are 'near and dear' to him."⁹² Furthermore, "a true recognition of the sign, a true *nóēsis* of the *sêma*, can be achieved only by recognizing the internally coherent system of signals."⁹³ Thus, although Odysseus' words are not an overt sign like his scar or clothing, his exchange with Penelope is still a signal that can be recognized by the appropriate people, both within the epic and outside of it.

⁸⁹ Martin, "Hesiod, Odysseus, and the Instruction of Princes," 31.

⁹⁰ Martin, "Hesiod, Odysseus, and the Instruction of Princes," 46.

⁹¹ Charles Segal, *Singers, Heroes, and Gods in the Odyssey* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 83.

⁹² Gregory Nagy, "Sêma and Nóēsis: The Hero's Tomb and the 'Reading' of Symbols in Homer and Hesiod," in *Greek Mythology and Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 203.

⁹³ Gregory Nagy, "Sêma and Nóēsis," 206.

Speculum Principum in the Audacht Morainn

The *Audacht Morainn* or *Testament of Morann* is the earliest of five Old Irish texts known as *tecosoc* or ‘instruction’ that contain the theme of *speculum principum*.⁹⁴ The passage that is discussed here (lines 14-21) focuses on all of the good things that will come to a ruler and his people if he maintains justice:

Is tre fíir flathemon fo- síd sámi sube soad sádili –sláini.
 Is tre fíir flathemon ath- (mór)cathu fri crícha comnámát –cuirethar.
 Is tre fíir flathemon cech comarbe con a chlí ina chainorbu clanda.
 Is tre fíir flathemon ad- manna mármeso márfedo –mlasetar.
 Is tre fíir flathemon ad- mlechti márbóis –moínigter.
 Is tre fíir flathemon ro-bbí(?) cech etho ardósil imbeth.
 Is tre fíir flathemon to-aidble (uisce) éisc i sruthaib –snáither.
 Is tre fíir flathemon clanda caini cain-tussimter. (deraib dethe)⁹⁵

It is through the justice of the ruler that he secures peace, tranquility, joy, ease, [and] comfort. It is through the justice of the ruler that he dispatches (great) battalions to the borders of hostile neighbors. It is through the justice of the ruler that every heir plants his house post in his fair inheritance. It is through the justice of the ruler that abundances of great tree-fruit of the great wood are tasted. It is through the justice of the ruler that milk yields of great cattle are maintained. It is through the justice of the ruler that there is abundance of every high, tall corn. It is through the justice of the ruler that abundance of fish swim in streams. It is through the justice of the ruler that fair children are well begotten.⁹⁶

Immediately evident in this text is the anaphoric repetition of the phrase “it is through the justice of the ruler” (*is tre fíir flathemon*, which was previously examined in the close reading of *Audacht Morainn*). *fíir flathemon* can also be translated as ‘Ruler’s Truth,’ with the emphasis that it is an “ethical and religious notion... [and] an active intellectual force.”⁹⁷ This paramount Truth is the root of all good things for the people, but only when it comes from the ruler through his actions. The ruler and his people are inextricably bound by Truth, which will ensure prosperity

⁹⁴ Martin, “Hesiod, Odysseus, and the Instruction of Princes,” 33.

⁹⁵ Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*, 6.

⁹⁶ Kelly, *Audacht Morainn*, 7.

⁹⁷ Calvert Watkins, *How To Kill A Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 85.

for all. Clearly the justice or truth of the ruler is the central concept of the passage, important enough to be mentioned at the beginning of each line. Similar to recurring phrases in Homeric Greek, the “reading [of this poetry] must take into account the resonance of repeated phrases, since we can be certain that most such phrases were already in poetic tradition, and thus known to an audience,”⁹⁸ perhaps since PIE times. Other poetic tools in this passage include alliteration of the phrase after *is tre fír flathemon*, as can be seen in line 14

Is tre fír flathemon fo- síd Sámi Sube Soad Sádili –sláini

and in line 16

Is tre fír flathemon Cech Comarbe Con a Chlí ina Chainorbu Clanda.

Thus the theme of *speculum principum* is incorporated into the text of the *Audacht Morainn* in a formulaic way, making it memorable and understandable to both those reciting it and those in the audience.

Comparison of the *Odyssey* and *Audacht Morainn*

In both the *Odyssey* and the *Audacht Morainn*, the *speculum principum* genre is contained within the narrative rather than standing on its own,⁹⁹ although in two very different contexts. In the *Odyssey*, the genre is part of a lengthy, cohesive epic whereas in the *Audacht Morainn* it is part of a short speech. Nevertheless, there are several thematic similarities between the two passages especially in regards to the rewards for upholding justice, which are summarized in the following table:

⁹⁸ Martin, introduction to *The Odyssey*, xxxii.

⁹⁹ Martin, “Hesiod, Odysseus, and the Instruction of Princes,” 37.

<i>Odyssey</i>	<i>Audacht Morainn</i>
groves are heavy with ripe fruit	abundances of great tree-fruit of the great wood are tasted
black soil on his farmland yields barley and wheat	there is abundance of every high, tall corn
livestock breeding always	milk yields of great cattle are maintained
the waters are fish-filled	fish swim in streams
the people are thriving	fair children are well begotten

Such a close correlation is clearly no coincidence, and in fact has its roots in earlier Proto Indo-European modes of thought. The Proto Indo-Europeans lived just after the Neolithic Revolution began in the eighth and seventh millennia BCE in the Near East and subsequently spread throughout Europe and Western Asia. They therefore understood the importance of a successful harvest and the consequences of food shortage. Interestingly, wheat and barley were the main cereals to be domesticated, and they are mentioned by name in the *Odyssey*. Similarly, cattle were among the first animals to be domesticated, after sheep and goats, and are also mentioned by name in the *Audacht Morainn*.¹⁰⁰ In addition, both the *Odyssey* and the *Audacht Morainn* discuss fruit that grows on trees. Domesticated trees would have been a more recent innovation among the Proto Indo-Europeans, with the first signs of it appearing in the 4th millennium BCE.¹⁰¹ Finally, it must be noted that vegetable crops were likely not cultivated until the second millennium BCE, after the breakup of PIE,¹⁰² and there is no mention of vegetables in either of the sections of the *Odyssey* and the *Audacht Morainn* discussed here.

¹⁰⁰ Daniel Zohary, "Domestication of Plants in the Old World: The Emerging Synthesis," in *When Worlds Collide: Indo-Europeans and Pre-Indo-Europeans* (Ann Arbor, MI: Karoma Publishers, Inc., 1990), 36.

¹⁰¹ Zohary, "Domestication of Plants in the Old World," 38-39.

¹⁰² Zohary, "Domestication of Plants in the Old World," 39-40.

Another aspect of Proto-Indo-European life evident in *speculum principum* is kingship. The king is a figure of great authority in both texts who wields a significant amount of power. While rulers on a small scale must have existed for some time, the processes of the Neolithic revolution allowed “leaders to exploit their followers on a relatively stable, long-term basis.”¹⁰³ In other words, it created a society based on classes with one ruler above them all. Thus, the Proto Indo-Europeans were very much wrapped up in defining and exploring this new type of leadership, which continued to be present in various cultures, including in Greek and Old Irish society.

***Speculum Principum* in Other Works**

Although the *Odyssey* and the *Audacht Morainn* are two excellent examples of *speculum principum*, many more texts exist in which this theme occurs. For instance, the composition *Works and Days* by Hesiod, whose poems were composed around the time that the *Odyssey* was first written down, may be “the best surviving reflection of the genre [of *speculum principum*] in Greek.”¹⁰⁴ One passage in particular shows several parallels to both the *Odyssey* and the *Audacht Morainn*:

Οἱ δὲ δίκας ξείνοισι καὶ ἐνδήμοισι διδοῦσιν
 ἰθείας καὶ μὴ τι παρεκβαίνουσι δικαίου,
 τοῖσι τέθηλε πόλις, λαοὶ δ' ἀνθεῦσιν ἐν αὐτῇ...
 τοῖσι φέρει μὲν γαῖα πολὺν βίον, οὔρεσι δὲ δρυῶς
 ἄκρη μὲν τε φέρει βαλάνους, μέσση δὲ μελίσσας:
 εἰροπόκοι δ' ὄιες μαλλοῖς καταβεβρίθασιν:
 τίκτουσιν δὲ γυναῖκες ἐοικότα τέκνα γονεῦσιν:
 θάλλουσιν δ' ἀγαθοῖσι διαμπερές¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Antonio Gilman, “The Mafia Hypothesis,” in *When Worlds Collide: Indo-Europeans and Pre-Indo-European* (Ann Arbor, MI: Karoma Publishers, Inc., 1990), 152.

¹⁰⁴ Martin, “Hesiod, Odysseus, and the Instruction of Princes,” 32.

¹⁰⁵ 225-236, Perseus Digital Library, “Hesiod, *Works and Days*,” accessed December 12, 2015.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0131%3Acard%3D202>

As for those who give straight judgments to visitors and to their own people and do not deviate from what is just, their community flourishes, and the people blooms in it... For them Earth bears plentiful food, and on the mountains the oak carries acorns at its surface and bees at its center. The fleecy sheep are laden down with wool; the womenfolk bear children that resemble their parents; they enjoy a continual sufficiency of good things.¹⁰⁶

Here, the main concept held in common with both the *Odyssey* and the *Audacht Morainn* is that the justice of the ruler ensures an abundance of food from the soil as well as from the trees, plentiful livestock, and the growth of the community. In this text, the specific mention of sheep, the first animal to be domesticated,¹⁰⁷ points back to the Proto-Indo-European origin.

Elements of *speculum principum* are also present in other branches of Indo-European languages, including Indo-Iranian, the second oldest branch of Indo-European.¹⁰⁸ The following passage is from the collection of *Yasna*, or hymns, that are part of a Zoroastrian religious text called the *Avesta*. It is written in Old Avestan, the oldest known Iranian language, which is closely related to Vedic Sanskrit and was spoken around the year 1000 BCE.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, the *Avesta* and the Sanskrit *Rig Veda* have several similarities, especially in terms of poetic formulas.¹¹⁰ The following lines of text are taken from *Yasna* 31:6, which is a prayer for enlightenment. Zarathustra, a priest who calls himself “appointed arbiter and judge,” asks the higher powers to tell him the secret of health and immortality¹¹¹ in order that he and others “may live in accordance with Asha (justice)”:

ahmāi anhat vahistem yē mōi vīdvāe vaocāt haithīm
mathrem yim haurvatātō ashahyā ameretātasca
mazdāi avat xshathrem hyat hōi vohū vaxshat mananhā¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ Hesiod, *Works and Days*, trans. M.L. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), lines 225-236.

¹⁰⁷ Zohary, “Domestication of Plants in the Old World,” 36.

¹⁰⁸ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 202.

¹⁰⁹ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 202.

¹¹⁰ Watkins, “The Poet’s Truth,” 89.

¹¹¹ Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie, *The Hymns of Zoroaster, Usually Called the Gathas* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1914), lxi-lxiii.

¹¹² Guthrie, *The Hymns of Zoroaster*, lxii.

To him shall belong the best (power),
 the Knowing One who shall pronounce for me the true
 formula concerning the integrity and immortality of Truth;
 to the Wise One (shall belong) that (best) power which he
 shall make grow with his Good Thought.¹¹³

This passage demonstrates one aspect of the theme of *speculum principum* by describing a “true formula” which is pronounced by a knowledgeable being and contains the “integrity and immortality of Truth,” which sounds remarkably similar to the events of the *Audacht Morainn* where a judge recites a series of formulae regarding the Ruler’s Truth (*fír flathemon*). Although the two narratives and circumstances are quite different, they both contain an underlying concern with Truth that stems from a mighty power.

Understanding the Proto Indo-Europeans

The preceding examination of *speculum principum* has shown that Greek, Old Irish, and several other cultures valued instructions to young rulers on how they should conduct themselves.

Although these observations are intriguing on their own, one of their greatest contributions is to inform the current understanding of the Proto Indo-Europeans and their poetic tradition. Just as archaeology is an invaluable tool in revealing the material culture of a prehistoric people, so too are linguistic reconstructions and comparisons a window into the lives of those who could not leave a written record. For example, an intriguing phenomenon comes to light when further investigating the Old Irish word *ardósil*, which was examined in an earlier section. The comparison of several Indo-European literatures shows that it was common to describe grain as tall,¹¹⁴ just as it is depicted in the *Audacht Morainn*. For the Proto Indo-Europeans, tall grain, which was discussed earlier as a fairly new development of the Neolithic revolution, was a sign

¹¹³ Watkins, “The Poet’s Truth,” 89.

¹¹⁴ Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture*, 327.

of enough water and rich soil that could grow food to sustain a population. Tall grain would therefore have been of great importance, and it is no wonder that it was included in their poetic tradition. Such a similarity is not enough to prove on its own that Old Irish poetry is descended from the Indo-European tradition, but it is one of many clues that point in that direction.

To more concretely address the origins of languages such as Old Irish, comparisons must also go beyond the word level to closely scrutinize the structure of the poetry itself. The lyric meter of the poetic traditions of several languages, including Greek and Celtic, has been shown to derive from an Indo-European origin, and “there are by now enough examples of poetic expressions attested in common by the Indo-European languages to validate the existence of an Indo-European poetic language.¹¹⁵ In fact, “our best chance for reconstructing Indo-European poetry would be by carefully examining formulae... which have survived”¹¹⁶ in languages such as Greek. Formulae that appear to be derived from a PIE root not only give a unique insight into what PIE poetry might have been like stylistically, but also what concepts were important enough to be repeated often.¹¹⁷ Parallels in Greek and Sanskrit, though rare, are more easily found, as they belong to some of the oldest branches of the Indo-European family and thus share formulae that are both etymologically related and describe similar things.

One example of such a parallel is the previously discussed Greek *kléos áphthiton* and the Sanskrit *ákṣitam śrávas*, which both mean ‘immortal fame’ and derive from the PIE formula *kléuos n̥d^hg^{wh}itom*.¹¹⁸ It is no stretch of the imagination to posit that for the Proto Indo-Europeans, this type of fame was “not merely a human creation but something akin to the eternal

¹¹⁵ Leonard Charles Muellner, *The Meaning of Homeric EYXOMAI Through its Formulas* (Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachwissenschaft der Universität Innsbruck, 1976), 14.

¹¹⁶ Beekes, *Comparative Indo-European Linguistics*, 41.

¹¹⁷ See Nagy 1974 and Muellner 1976 for the seminal explorations of the Greek formulae κλέος ἄφθιτον and εὔχομαι, from which Beekes and Segal derive their theories and interpretations.

¹¹⁸ Beekes, *Comparative Indo-European Linguistics*, 41.

elements of the world, possessed of an objective existence in the lives of societies and their traditions.¹¹⁹ Reconciling formulae in Old Irish and Greek is more of a challenge given the geographic and temporal distance between the languages, and no words or phrases in the passages examined here show such direct parallels. However, the formulaic instances of phrases like *fír flathemon* (ruler's truth) in the *Audacht Morainn* and ἀρετῶσι δὲ λαοὶ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ('and the people prosper under him')/ λαοὶ δ' ἀνθεῦσιν ἐν αὐτῇ ('and the people prosper in it') in the *Odyssey* and *Works and Days* do certainly seem to point back to an earlier tradition, where ruler's truth and the following prosperity were of great significance.

Conclusions

By the time the *Audacht Morainn* was written down, it had been over 4000 years since the breakup of PIE. Nevertheless, both linguistic and thematic markers tie this text to the *Odyssey*, which came a thousand years before, and to other texts with long histories that precede the written word. This use of "the comparative method in linguistics and poetics can illuminate not only ancient ways of speech but ancient modes of thought."¹²⁰ Through this exploration of individual words, phrases, and lines it has become clear that the selected passages in the *Odyssey* and the *Audacht Morainn* are variations on a basic theme – a just king is the source of prosperity for his people. The theme of *speculum principum* transcends space and time, connecting the *Odyssey* and the *Audacht Morainn* to their distant linguistic and cultural cousins and providing a window into the lives of the Proto Indo-Europeans by showing glimpses of their political structure and value system. This ancient society that so heavily relied on the justice of their ruler hoped for an abundance of food and peace among its people, just like modern societies.

¹¹⁹ Segal, *Singers, Heroes, and Gods in the Odyssey*, 87.

¹²⁰ Watkins, *How to Kill A Dragon*, 27.

Comparisons like these bring the Proto Indo-Europeans to life after more than 5,500 years, and show that perhaps humans today have some of the same feelings, aspirations, and concerns as their long-lost ancestors.

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