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THE EVOLUTION OF A MYTH: ROMULUS & REMUS

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I. Abstract

Myths offer an explanation of something unknown, as is the case with Rome's founding myth of Romulus and Remus. The first known record was written four hundred years afterward and survives only as a reference in later material. In each subsequent account from the first, authors contribute the influence of their time to grasp the imaginations of their audience and renew interest in days long past. In 2019, director Matteo Rovere molded the Romulus and Remus myth to suit a modern audience in his film *Il Primo Re*, using reconstructed Proto-Latin to create an immersive 8th-century experience. Comparing early accounts such as those written by Livius' and Plutarch, and methods of storytelling through film, we will examine how the myth of Romulus and Remus evolved and adapted to audiences of the past and present.

II. Introduction to the Myth and its Evolution

Every culture possesses a unique origin story from which its people can draw pride and understand the society to which they belong. These stories can sometimes be mundane or a logical explanation of beginnings, often full of unrealistic elements to pique the listener's interest. For the Romans, the commonly accepted origin story of their once vast empire is no exception. The tale of the twins, Romulus and Remus, contains mythological claims in their infancy and tragic fratricide in their adulthood. Like many origin stories, the legend of Romulus and Remus and the founding of Rome has been told and retold for thousands of years. Over time, the shift in collective morality and external influences adapt the story to better relate to a changing audience. Deviations are seen even between the ancient accounts of Ovid, Plutarch, and Livy. By analyzing the 2019 film adaptation of Romulus and Remus in *Il Primo Re*, we will see the various ways in which the modern world can influence an ancient myth and renew its

relevance. This research project aims to better understand the evolution of a story and how that is a story within itself.

To understand how the story of Romulus and Remus compares to Matteo Rovere's *Il Primo Re*, we must first know the accepted narrative as it stands today, taken primarily from the account of Livy. In 794 BCE, the kingdom of Alba Longa was to be passed to Numitor, the eldest son of Proca. Numitor's brother, Amulius, seized the opportunity to bypass the line of succession by killing his nephews and committing his niece, Rhea Silvia, "to perpetual virginity" as a Vestal Priestess.[84] Numitor was sure his place on the throne was secure and had done away with any chance of an heir to challenge him, as his brother would not, but fate turned against the power-hungry tyrant. Rhea Silvia, the daughter of the rightful king, Amulius, was found to be with child by the god Mars.[85] Upon the birth of the twins, Amulius imprisoned Rhea Silvia and ordered the boys to be drowned in the Tiber to rid himself of the potential rivals to his throne.[86] However, the swell of the river worried the men sent to execute Amulius' orders, and instead, they disposed of the two boys at the riverbank. The basket was picked up by the rising waters and gently floated downstream until coming to a stop under the shade of a Rumina fig tree.[87] A she-wolf, looking for a drink, found the twins and cared for them as if they were her own.[88] Soon after, a shepherd found the unlikely group and brought the boys home to his wife Larentia, who recently suffered the loss of their child.[89] In the house of Faustulus and Larentia, Romulus and

[1] Livius, Titus, "The History of Rome from Its Foundation," *Ancient Rome: An Anthology of Sources*, ed. Christopher Francese and R. Scott Smith (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2014), pp. 146, 3.2.

[2] Livius, pp. 146, 4.1.

[3] Livius, pp. 146, 4.1

[4] Naso, Publius Ovidius, *Fasti*, translated by James G. Frazer, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), https://www.theoi.com/Text/OvidFasti3.html.

[5] Livius, *The History of Rome*, pp. 146-147, 4.1-2

[6] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities Book 1*, trans. by Earnest Cary (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937), pp. 269,

Remus grew to be men before embarking on the adventure that would lead to their founding of Rome.

From the beginning, we can see divorce from reality in the telling of Romulus and Remus. Having been suckled by a wolf seems more plausible when considering Romulus and Remus are demigods, which is clear evidence of initial fabrication. Regardless, these building blocks would appear as nonsense when attempting a more realistic and relatable tale for a modern audience, as Rovere aims in *Il Primo Re*. In the film, we meet Romulus and Remus as young men tending to their flocks in the river valley. There is no reason to believe the brothers got to this moment in their lives through any extraordinary or otherworldly means. Romulus and Remus appear precisely how a modern audience would imagine two ancient shepherds spending their days; dressed in sheepskin, praying to an unknown god, and waiting for the sun to set. Their journey begins with an overflowing of the Tiber -- a flash flood sweeping Romulus and Remus off to meet their destiny and "stake their claim for the foundations of Rome."[90] A raging river is dangerous enough for two babes floating along in a basket, and Rovere increases the excitement by sending Romulus and Remus tumbling down the flooded river like ragdolls, sustaining injuries, and losing consciousness. Instead of being found by a suckling wolf and taken in by a shepherd, the two men are found by soldiers from Alba Longa and taken as slaves.[91] The violence of the brothers' introduction in the film *Il Primo Re* panders to a modern audience expecting an unusual opening incident.

https://archive.org/details/romanantiquities01dionuoft/page/268/mode/2up?view=theater&q=faustulus.

[7] Travis, Ed, "The First King (Il Primo Re): A Savage Tale of the Founding of Rome," (Cinapse, 2019), https://cinapse.co/the-first-king-il-primo-re-a-savage-tale-of-the-founding-of-rome-2c949d4765aa.

[8] *Il Primo Re*, directed by Matteo Rovere (Rome, Italy: Groenlandia, 2019), DVD.

Matteo Rovere's *Il Primo Re* may differ significantly from what we know as Rome's founding myth. However, as previously mentioned, early sources of the legend of Romulus and Remus differ, presumably from the original as well, as we have no record from the time of Romulus himself. In fact, there are so many early records that we are often confronted with completely incompatible versions of the Romulus and Remus tale. [92] Rovere contributed to the various renditions of this immortal story through his creation of the film *Il Primo Re*, shedding new light on this ancient and mysterious time in Western history. By embarking on this research project, we too can make our own contribution by understanding how a story thousands of years old still captivates the imagination today. In an interview, Rovere says to Giacomo Savani, "I hope that *Il Primo Re* might stimulate curiosity and interest in the classical world and ancient history," and that is certainly true here.[93]

Rovere's choice of writing Rome's origin story as someone of our modern age could realistically imagine it does not dishonor history. Quite the contrary, by offering a new interpretation, Rovere continues the Romulus and Remus myth tradition by keeping it alive. The actual events surrounding the formation of the city of Rome are lost to time, and the surviving rhetoric may be more of a reflection of a much later Rome than any factual early ancient cultural influence. Rovere writes *Il Primo Re* as a historical drama, rather than historical fantasy as early Roman writers Livy or Ovid paint the story of Romulus and Remus to be. A she-wolf caring for the two infant boys is not so outlandish when considering how often children adopted by animals are depicted in fiction. Even real life occurrences of wild children periodically crop up, such as the story of Marina Chapman, abandoned in the Colombian jungle and raised by capuchin

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[9] Beard, Mary, *SPQR*, (New York: Liveright, 2015) pp57.
[10] Savani, Giacomo, "Omnia vincit amor? An interview with Matteo Rovere, director of Il Primo Re," (Classical Reception Studies Network*,* 2019), https://classicalreception.org/omnia-vincit-amor-an-interview-with-matteo-rovere-director-of-il-primo-re/.

monkeys.[94] So why then would Rovere choose to omit the twins' canine surrogate? One reason could be that being suckled by a wolf removes a particular aspect of normalcy in the lives of the two sheepherders. Rovere wished to immerse himself and his audience in the world of 753 BCE, which meant leaving behind some of the more unrealistic elements.[95]

To make *Il Primo Re* a more immersive ancient experience, Rovere scripted the dialogue in reconstructed Proto-Latin. Rovere hired a team from The Sapienza University of Rome to create the long-dead language using a previously reconstructed Proto-Indo-European language to accomplish this ambitious linguistic task.[96] Without a doubt, the moment a viewer hears Romulus reciting prayers in the opening scene, the feeling of that exact moment in history is overwhelming. Mel Gibson attempted using a mix of ancient languages in his 2004 *The Passion of the Christ* and Yucatec Mayan in his 2006 *Apocalypto*, achieving a similar level of immersion as Rovere. It is difficult to argue against the use of reconstructed dead language in historical films. Even language pieced together incorrectly acts as a steppingstone in future endeavors and provides valuable insight. The most significant contribution of Proto-Latin to the film, as mentioned earlier, is the sense of total immersion in the ancient world of Romulus and Remus. The ancient cadence of speech paired with a wild and dangerous landscape full of unknowns is well executed by Rovere, earning *Il Primo Re* a respected spot in a storytelling lineup going back thousands of years.

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[11] Fitzner, Zach, "Real cases of children raised by wild animals," (Earth.com, 2018), https://www.earth.com/news/children-raised-wild-animals/.
[12] Savani
[13] The Philological Crocodile, "Il Primo Re (Review)," (WordPress, 2020), https://philologicalcrocodile.wordpress.com/2020/03/27/il-primo-re-review/.

III.   A Story Evolves

Matteo Rovere's 2019 *Il Primo Re* is the most recent installment of an ancient story shared for hundreds of years before finding its way to written text. Rovere's modern narrative arguably has little to do with the original Roman origin story, aside from finding inspiration to captivate the modern viewer. What one sees in *Il Primo Re* feels more of a retelling of history rather than myth, as the story of Romulus and Remus is regarded. Rovere's tale begins with Romulus and Remus passing the time while watching their flock in the Tiber river valley. The adventure begins when a flash flood sweeps through the valley and, as Ed Travis put it, literally hurls the two brothers towards their future.[97] The opening scene of *Il Primo Re* reflects Plutarch's *The Life of Romulus,* in which the two brothers are likewise offering a sacrifice and walking about while tending their flock. In Plutarch's telling of Rome's founding myth, these actions occur moments before the twins' lives are forever altered, though differently, and they set off to fulfill their destiny.[98]

As mentioned before, *Il Primo Re* begins with Romulus and Remus being taken as slaves by soldiers from neighboring Alba Longa. It is not long before the brothers trick their captors and escape their bonds, freeing their fellow slaves and taking a vestal priestess captive. The group of men make their way across the rugged Italian terrain, hoping to secure their newly regained freedom. Within the dark, almost ethereal tree cover of the forest, Remus undergoes a transformation of character and declares himself king, defeating those in disagreement. The group soon comes upon a village where Remus demands hospitality and again asserts his role as king. Remus kills the village leader and demands the Vestal priestess perform haruspex, the

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[14] Travis, "The First King."

[15] Plutarch, "Plutarch's Lives; The Life of Romulus," (Cambride: Harvard University Press, 1914), vol. 1, 7.1, https://forms.gle/bVVCToHjZTJ4oxBi9.

interpretation of a sacrificed animal's liver. The Vestal reluctantly speaks the prophecy to Remus; the city of the king will become an empire so long as he kills his brother.[99] Remus rejects the Vestal's prophecy and orders his followers to burn the village and slaughter at will. Remus' band of brutes clears out sometime in the night, leaving Romulus in a great state of unease over his brother's wanton cruelty and disregard for piety. The remaining villagers choose to follow Romulus, and after relighting the sacred fire extinguished by Remus, the group sets off to found a new city.

Rovere's *Il Primo Re* concludes at the banks of the Tiber, where the Alban soldiers sent to re-capture the escaped prisoners attack Remus and his men. When all seems lost, Romulus and the villagers emerge from the forest to aid the doomed men by defeating the Albans. Despite the turn of events, the villagers continue to reject Remus as their king, which forces Romulus to step up and defend his followers, fulfilling the Vestal's prophecy. In the final scene, Romulus stands before his brother's funeral pyre and declares that Rome will become the greatest empire in history.[100]

The differences between Matteo Rovere's *Il Primo Re* and the generally accepted narrative of Romulus and Remus are at times enormous, and at other times closely respected. Expanding on a comparison mentioned earlier regarding the film's opening scene and Plutarch's 75 CE account where Romulus worships the gods with fondness while Remus focuses on the world around him, Rovere is clearly attempting to include ancient opinions of the men's' character to tell his version.[101] To a Roman in Plutarch's time, Romulus upholds the virtue of

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[16] Petrizzo, Francesca, "Closer Than Blood - "Il Primo Re" and Rome's Origin Myth," (Medium, 2020), https://medium.com/@francescapetrizzo/closer-than-blood-il-primo-re-and-romes-origin-myth-998ef5d571ce.

[17] Gravino, *Il Primo Re*, 1:58.

[18] Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives,* 7.1.

pietas, which is every Roman's duty to his family, friends, himself, and the divine.[102] Throughout Rovere's film, numerous examples reinforce this contrast between Romulus' and Remus' priorities. The most blatant example in the film is when Remus prioritizes extinguishing the sacred flame during his brutal attack on the villagers. This act of unforgivable disrespect causes the villagers to mark him as their enemy. Romulus neither excuses his brother's heartless deed nor tries to apologize for him. Instead, Romulus reignites the sacred flame and appoints a new Vestal priestess to watch over it.[103]

Further contrast to early accounts of the tale, Matteo Rovere chose to begin his telling of Romulus and Remus when the brothers are grown men. Consequently, Rovere eliminates the most far-fetched aspects of Rome's founding myth; immaculate conception and being suckled by a wolf. However, when it comes to Rhea Silvia, a Vestal virgin, it is likely a myth from the start that she is with child by the god Mars. Perhaps the way the story is sometimes told makes Rhea Silvia's claim a falsehood. In Livy's first century BCE account, Mars takes Rhea Silvia against her will, and perhaps her claiming the assailant was the god of war was to preserve her honor.[104] Ovid, writing around the same time as Livy, puts the encounter between Silvia and Mars under a softer light. Ovid implies rape but does not use the word; instead, he paints a sensuous picture of a beautiful Silvia resting under a tree when "Mars saw her, the sight inspired him with desire, and his desire was followed by possession."[105] Strangest of all, Plutarch recounts a very different tale of Rhea Silvia's pregnancy being caused by a phantom phallus appearing in the hearth of the Alban king, Tarchetius.[106] Today, Mary Beard points out that it would be easy to agree with Livy

[19] Philo, L. Curtius, et al., "Restoring the Ancient Roman Virtues," (Res Publica Romana, 2020), http://romanrepublic.org/roma/bibliotheca/roman-virtues/.
[20] Gravino, *Il Primo Re*, 1:36.
[21] Livius, "The History of Rome," pp. 146 - 147.
[22] Ovid, *Fasti,* III.
[23] Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives*, 2.3-5.

in that Rhea Silvia was likely not raped by Mars but had broken her vow of chastity through "an entirely human affair."[107]

When consulting early texts regarding Romulus and Remus, it quickly becomes clear that the original tale is lost. The earliest known written record of Rome's founding myth, completed by Diocles of Peparethus in the 4th century BCE, is Greek in origin, not Roman. However, Diocles' account did not survive, and the only evidence known to us today comes from references to his work by Quintus Fabius Pictor a century later. Further still, as Plutarch informs us, Pictor's work is likewise lost.[108] So who are we to believe when it comes down to accuracy? Matteo Rovere's *Il Primo Re* could be more or less accurate to the truth as Ovid's *Fasti* or Dionysius' *Roman Antiquities*, assuming Romulus and Remus ever existed at all. As mentioned in the introduction, it seems likely that all the known early accounts of the twins may be more of a reflection of the times they were written in, just as Rovere's work is. There is no doubt that Diocles gathered his knowledge of Rome's first king through an earlier, unknown document or an oral history heard during his travels. Therefore, every mark set down by Diocles would have been influenced by his modern understanding of the world, even if he did not intend it.

By looking at the events in early accounts that lead up to Rhea Silvia's pregnancy, it quickly becomes clear that several different narratives were passed down. In *The Life of Romulus,* written in 75 CE by Plutarch, he mentions there was disagreement on the twins' parentage and that Rhea Silvia may not have carried the boys at all. Two alternative options given as parents are Latinus, the son of Telemachus, and his wife, Roma, as well as the daughter of Aeneas, who was met by Mars similarly to Rhea Silvia.[109] Plutarch also briefly mentions

[24] Beard, *SPQR,* pp. 58.
[25] Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives,* 3.1.
[26] Plutarch, 2.3.

rumors of Amulius forcing himself on his niece Silvia.[110] According to Ovid, in Fasti Book IV, Romulus himself claimed his parents to be Venus and Mars.[111] Regardless of who was responsible for bringing the twins into the world, it is agreed that the boys were seen as a threat to Amulius and, by his request, brought to the banks of the Tiber so that the current might swallow them up.

Another varying aspect in the original accounts of Romulus and Remus is in their survival of the swollen river and rescue by the she-wolf. In Livy's account, the babes are tucked into a basket intended as a coffin and were left by the riverbank under the shade of a Ruminalis fig tree.[112] In contrast, Ovid explains how the little ark which contained the twins floated down the Tiber river and came to rest under a Ruminalis fig tree.[113] Regardless, it is under this tree where a she-wolf finds Romulus and Remus and takes pity on them. Romulus and Remus showed no fear of the wolf, proving they were the sons of the god Mars.[114] To further prove divine issue, a woodpecker, the bird of Mars, is sometimes joined in caring for the twins by bringing food.[115]

Here enters a herdsman named Faustulus, who happens upon the infant twins, Romulus and Remus. However, as Plutarch mentions, in some accounts, Faustulus is the name of the servant sent to dispose of the boys in the river, adding yet another discrepancy.[116] The herdsman and his wife Larentia, a prostitute, a profession that shares the Latin word "lupa" for she-wolf, happily adopts the boys and raises them up in their community.[117] It is here, within the role

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[27] Plutarch, 4.2.
[28] Ovid, *Fasti,* IV, 19.
[29] Livius, "The History of Rome," pp. 147, 4.
[30] Ovid, *Fasti,* II, 381.
[31] Ovid,II, 381.
[32] Ovid, III, 11.
[33] Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives,* 3.4.
[34] Livius, "The History of Rome," pp 147, 4.

Romulus and Remus take up as part of the farming community, that Rovere has chosen to begin his version of their adventure. Plutarch claims that the story written by Diocles has the "widest credence and the greatest number of vouchers," which also happens to be the most likely inspiration for Rovere's *Il Primo Re*.[118]

Continuing the narrative put forth by Plutarch, Remus is taken as a prisoner of Amulius, during which time he learns that he and his brother are not the sons of Faustulus and Larentia. Concurrently, Faustulus reveals to Romulus the truth of the brothers' origins before they set forth to rescue Remus from his fate. After speaking with Remus, Numitor is moved to seek justice for his grandson. Upon finding Amulius, Romulus at once took his life, and the brothers, not wishing to be kings of Alba Longa so long as Numitor lived, reinstated their grandfather to his rightful place. Romulus and Remus then set out to found a new city, bringing the slaves and fugitives that had joined them in their fight for justice.[119] There are similarities here between Plutarch's tale and Rovere's film. In *Il Primo Re*, both brothers are taken prisoner by men of Alba Longa, but there is no mention of discovering their divine birth. Romulus and Remus are joined in their quest to found a new city so that they might live free by slaves, fugitives, and refugees, just as Plutarch suggests.[120]

In Rovere's *Il Primo Re*, Romulus kills his brother Remus after Remus attempts to extinguish the sacred fire of Vesta once again.[121] Livy, Ovid, and Plutarch tell us that Remus was slain by Romulus after jumping over his wall while building the city of Rome. Both Livy and Plutarch claim this sudden act of fratricide was brought on by Remus mocking the state of

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[35] Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives,* 3.1.
[36] Plutarch, 7.2-7, 8.1-7, 9.1-2.
[37] Plutarch, 4.
[38] Johnson, Anthony M., "#2 - Remus is Rome's first King. If we consider a legend to be a myth…," (Medium, 2019), https://medium.com/@anthonyspqr/2-remus-is-romes-first-king-e839066b80e9.

Romulus' wall.[122] However, the inciting incident to Remus' death was a conflict over the number

of vultures Romulus had seen upon receiving the augury.[123] Plutarch continues that a fight broke

out between the followers of each brother, during which Faustulus and an uncle were also

killed.[124] The differences between the early accounts of fratricide and Rovere's modern

interpretation are at first quite apparent. Though deeper analysis could say that Remus' breach of

a barrier around the sacred fire in *Il Primo Re* is a representation of the wall described by ancient

authors. Remus challenges his brother's authority and faith in a way that pays homage to the

original while appealing more to the emotions of a modern audience. In the words of Ovid,

"walls were built, which, small though they were, it had been better for Remus not to have

overleaped."[125]

IV.   The Art of Immersion

Italian director Matteo Rovere successfully brought to life the myth of Romulus and

Remus and the world as it was in their time through his 2019 film *Il Primo Re*. Rovere chose to

rewrite the ancient myth of Rome's founding with more focus on the inner strength of his

characters, giving the modern viewer a more relatable interpretation of Romulus and Remus.[126]

Rovere chooses to emphasize the journey of Remus, who is more of a side character in early

tellings of the myth. In *Il Primo Re,* we watch Remus transform as he is consumed by a lust for

power, believing himself greater than the gods. Remus' strength overshadows his brothers'

throughout Rovere's story. By the end of the film, the viewer is convinced that Remus' death is

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[39] Livius, "The History of Rome," pp. 148-149, 7.; Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives,* 10.1.
[40] Plutarch, 9.4-5.
[41] Plutarch, 10.2.
[42] Plutarch, 3.43.
[43] Savani, "Omina Vincit Amor?"

necessary and that Romulus is the rightful leader of Rome. Rovere, in a sense, justifies and forgives the murderous deed committed by the pious and wise Romulus.

Il Primo Re is set out to give the viewer a hypothesized history of the founding of Rome. Additionally, the movie is made in a way that completely immerses one in the ancient world of Romulus and Remus, leaving no doubt that the story may very well be true. Rovere ensured every detail of his film pandered to the modern image of the ancient world. The world of *Il Primo Re* has a closeness to the grit of nature, full of life-threatening danger and hardship. Settlements are crude, and the people are seen as almost insignificant compared to the daunting wild nature in which they dwell. The use of light through the progression of the set while Romulus and Remus make their way through the story adds to the emotional ties felt from the onset. Aside from the incredible visual impact of the film, Rovere employs the use of an ancient language to engross his audience further.

When traveling far from home, one finds their senses confronted by a myriad of unfamiliar sights, smells, and ways of speech -- total immersion. To transfer the same experience of immersion in film is impossible. However, some very captivating methods of putting together a screenplay come close. For example, using a language native to the time and place in which the story takes place can transform the way a viewer perceives the entire film. Rovere embarks on the task of reconstructing a long-dead early form of Latin, a method used to great effect in the aforementioned films *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) and *Apocalypto* (2006). Though there are many more examples in film of language reconstruction, Gibson's attempts are widely known and scrutinized, making them a more compelling selection for comparison. The use of language in film is a powerful way to tell a story; it pulls the viewer into the world of the characters in such a way that it becomes difficult at times to remember it is not real. As Farhad Safina, a writer

and co-producer of *Apocalypto,* which uses Yucatec Mayan dialogue, says about the use of

language in film, "[the audience] had to buy into the story from the moment they saw the first

characters."[127]

Matteo Rovere chose to use a reconstructed form of Proto-Latin because he wanted his

audience to hear a language that sounded "ancestral," which would allow them to "attune … with

the story being told."[128] Mel Gibson reflects this sentiment in his film *The Passion of the Christ*,

where the primary goal of using ancient Aramaic and Latin was to create a sense of going back

in time.[129] A more accurate addition of Classical Greek and Hebrew is omitted from Gibson's

film to prevent auditory overload, causing some viewers to see the partial use of archaic

language as sloppy, and still overwhelming.[130] It is easy to agree with Francesca Petrizzo that

Rovere did a much better job incorporating ancient language than Gibson had done, despite the

unavoidable mistakes.[131] For instance, accent and grammar are not consistent throughout *Il

Primo Re*, which is of little consequence compared to Gibson's linguistic chaos.[132]

The use of reconstructed or invented language can hugely enrich a story, of which we

have myriad examples. For instance, in Anthony Burgess' 1971 novel, *A Clockwork Orange*,

Burgess creates an entirely fictitious slang called Nadsat using a mixture of Cockney (a modern

English dialect), Romany, Early Modern English, and Russian to immerse his reader.[133] Burgess'

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[44] Aghotte, Karen, "Becoming Mayan: Creating Apocalypto," (Santa Monica: Icon Productions, 2007) https://youtu.be/qZnaM6Yadfk.

[45] Cowan, Rich, "The Making of 'The Passion of the Christ,'" (Spokane: North by Northwest Entertainment, 2004), https://youtu.be/859EpXpRebw.

[46] Cowan, "The Making of the 'Passion of the Christ,'" 4/5 0:23.

[47] Petrizzo, "Closer Than Blood," 8.

[48] Petrizzo, 2.

[49] Philological, "Il Primo Re (Review)."

[50] "A Clockwork Orange and Nadsat," (The International Anthony Burgess Foundation, accessed 13 November 2021), https://www.anthonyburgess.org/a-clockwork-orange/a-clockwork-orange-and-nadsat/.

skill in language creation caught the eye of Jean-Jacques Annaud, who directed the 1981 film

Quest for Fire, which is based on a 1911 novel by J.H. Rosny of the same title. Burgess

constructed a language to befit Annaud's prehistoric characters based on the languages of native

Inuit and Cree peoples of Canada.[134] While *Quest for Fire* contains no subtitles for the unfamiliar

dialogue, Annaud successfully created a profoundly moving and triumphant film about

prehistoric humans. In a third example, Philip Glass wrote *Akhnaten*, a 1984 opera, using

language derived from ancient Egyptian texts, Akkadian, and Hebrew to add depth to the

performance.[135] Stepping into the realm of science-fiction, Ridley Scott makes a contribution to

the language construction pool in his 2012 film, *Prometheus*. *Prometheus*, a story set in Scott's

Alien universe, follows a team seeking the creators of man, known as the Engineers, who speak a

form of Proto-Indo-European.[136]

    Il Primo Re may be different from the examples given for language construction in

storytelling, as each example hails from its own unique time and place, but they all share the

same quality. The use of language is a vital component of the viewer or reader's understanding

of the story being told. For example, *Il Primo Re* was also released in an English dubbed version,

which changes the entire experience of watching the film. Hearing the actors speak in a language

their characters would have never come in contact with separates them from the world in which

they are meant to be immersed. The viewer is unable to find the same connection with the

characters, making the film less meaningful. Father William J. Fulco, the translator for Gibson's

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[51] Hollywood Suite, "How Quest for Fire Developed a Language and Became a Hit," (Toronto: Holywood Suite, 2019), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pv2XxPu-m_E&ab_channel=HollywoodSuite.

[52] Finesilver, Carla, "Glass : Akhnaten / ENO, 4th February 2016," (WordPress: Opera Britannia 2016), https://operabritanniauk.wordpress.com/2016/03/05/glass-akhnaten-eno-4th-february-2016/#more-2735.

[53] *Prometheus,* directed by Ridley Scott (Los Angeles, CA: Scott Free Productions, 2012), DVD.

The Passion of the Christ, tells us how a person's language can reflect different personalities and ways of life, which becomes very important when these things are different from our own.[137] Language can deepen our understanding of an unfamiliar world and impact us in ways more profoundly than if the words were familiar to those living in a very different time and place.

V.   Concluding the Myth's Evolution

Every culture possesses its own myths, and some of these stories have evolved more than will ever be fully realized. Perhaps it is the sense of mystery that surrounds the stories passed down through innumerable generations that hold our interest. So desperate we are at times to dispel the unknown, that one of our numbers produces a sensational falsehood. An example of such which failed to alter the narrative is *Some Account of the Roman History of Fabius Pictor,* discovered and translated by an unnamed 'English Gentleman' in 1746. This publication of Pictor's history turned out to be 18th-century political satire, perhaps no more accurate than *Il Primo Re*'s re-imagined founding of Rome, but equally as captivating to the intended audience.[138] Nevertheless, from the undying interest of the true origins of the Western world also comes great contributions, the work of Theodor Mommsen being a 19th-century example, whose publications are still used in modern research on Roman history.[139] The world which birthed Rome, whose empire was among the greatest in history, remains firmly in the minds of those living today. It would be an arduous task indeed to find someone in our modern-day who had never heard the name Caesar or did not recognize the uniform of a Roman soldier. So naturally,

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[54] Cowan, "The Making of the 'Passion of the Christ," 4/5 0:23.

[55] Anonymous, "Some Account of the Roman History of Fabius Pictor," (M. Cooper: London, 1746), https://www.google.com/books/edition/Some_Account_of_the_Roman_History_of_Fab/8bhXAAAAcAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PP11&printsec=frontcover.

[56] Mommsen, Theodor, "The History of Rome, Book 1," translated by William Purdie Dickson, e-text by David Ceponis, (The Project Gutenberg, 16 March 2005) https://gutenberg.org/cache/epub/10701/pg10701.html.

curiosity remains regarding the mystery of Rome's founding, a time which leaves little trace compared to the hundreds of years that followed.

The original tale of Romulus and Remus is unknown, its first recording coming roughly three hundred years after, which is itself lost to time. The evidence comes from later scholars, an additional couple hundred years after Pictor's initial account.[140] The problem with this is that we do not know what influences would have made their way into the Romulus and Remus myth. We can only assume that the authors creating a record of Rome's founding would have done so in a way that reflects the time in which they lived. To confirm this thought, we must consider how one would write about the trial of Joan of Arc today, a story that took place roughly as long past as Romulus and Remus to Plutarch's time. Even if the author did not intend to include their modern understanding of the world in how they explained Joan of Arc's ordeal, it would bleed through. With this in mind, there is no way to truly know and understand the thoughts and actions that would have compelled the cast of 8th century BCE characters in Romulus and Remus' tale. We can only speculate based on the logic of 1st century BCE writers, who claimed to glean their knowledge from a man of the 4th century BCE. Even if this knowledge is had, stories will not likely appeal to the modern thinker in the way they were intended by their authors. Hence the need for a myth nearly three thousand years old, such as the founding of Rome, to change and adapt with time to remain an inspiring tale.

Matteo Rovere shares his fascination with Rome's founding myth with the world through his film *Il Primo Re*. By putting forth the effort to recreate a language long lost to match the best guess of how the people of Romulus and Remus' time would have communicated with one another, he has contributed significantly in two ways. The first contribution is scholarly, by

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[57] Beard, *SPQR,* pp. 138.

begging the question of where a language still used, albeit quite different, can trace its roots. The team from The Sapienza University of Rome not only reconstructed Proto-Latin for Rovere's film but has added to further research in the early use of Latin. Rovere's second contribution is to the culture of millions of people living in the Western world today. Rovere has created for the average person a chance to hear and be immersed in the world which saw the founding of Rome, which is "considered the event that allowed power to [become] order."[141]

Matteo Rovere's *Il Primo Re* is a worthy addition to the legacy of Romulus and Remus and the founding of Rome, despite the many artistic liberties taken in its telling. *Il Primo Re* reflects the attitudes of our time while inspiring further interest in a world long gone. Rovere successfully appeals to his viewers' sympathies, fears, and desires by offering a deeper look into the personalities and struggles of Romulus and Remus. Rovere upholds the narrative of Romulus being superior in both mind and body to his brother Remus, as implied by ancient writers such as Plutarch and Ovid.[142] In contrast to the way early writers expressed the difference between the brothers, Rovere caters to a modern audience in need of justification for Romulus' fratricidal crime by shedding light on the downfall of Remus. Remus is no longer the brother who must die, as he appears in the old texts -- he is a man whose strength becomes his undoing. Undoubtedly, *Il Primo Re* is a perfect example of how a myth evolves over time.

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[58] Savani, "Omnia vincit amor?" 3.
[59] Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives,* 6.2.; Ovid, *Fasti,* III, 11.

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