



Rome

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Rome — All ruminations flow back to Rome, home to the latency of Latinity, that robust *urbs*, whose seven hills east of the Tiber (Etruscan: *Rumon*) readily metamorphose into a vast spectrum of critical forms, from the seven heads of the apocalyptic Beast (a perennial favorite of anti-papists) to the seven purported types of ambiguity (*caveat Empson!*), from the seven grades of Mithraic initiation to the heptatonic scale that paves the *Gradus ad Parnassum*. Yet, ruminations of latency tend to unfold upon the plain of Latium, past the Alban mount, the fertile “field” (*Kamp*), which hosts either grazing “he-goats” (Old English: *hæfer*) or the cultivation of “oats” (Middle Low German: *haver*). Thus, between the capricious and the cereal, the *haverkamp* known as Latium nourishes Rome to the same extent that it is nourished by her. The “strength” (ῥώμη) of Rome lurks on the plain, on this breeding ground of cryptic figures, the site that Saturn, the exiled god of sowing, selected for hiding:

Primus ab aetherio venit Saturnus Olympo,
arma Iovis fugiens et regnis exsul adeptis.
Is genus indocile ac dispersum montibus altis
composuit legesque dedit Latiumque vocari
maluit, his quoniam latuisset tutis in oris.

(Vergil, *Aen.* 8.319–23)

First from the Olympian heavens came Saturn,
fleeing Jove’s arms and exiled from lost realms.
This race, untaught and scattered across the mountain slopes,
he gathered and gave laws, and chose that it be called
Latium, since he had hidden on these safe shores.

While it is clear that Latium names the land where the god “had hidden” (*latuisset*), the view from the plain homes in on what lies latent—*heimlich*—in the hideout, resting upon the *maluit*, which is a perfect anagram of *Latium*: “Die verborgene Angewesenheit des Gottes in Latium wird in der Verborgenheit der anagrammatischen Inschrift *Latium* gewahrt, gebannt und überwunden zugleich” (*Figura cryptica*, 7). The “truth” or *Wahrheit* that is here “preserved” and “protected” (*gewahrt*) is also that which has been simultaneously “expelled” and “overcome”—*gebannt und überwunden*—by means of those grammatical and rhetorical arts that hide themselves by their own art. Whereas Aeneas once strolled across the region with Evander at his side, surveying the *pagus* that was not yet Rome, the latter-day reader roams through this field of goats and oats, aware, like Petrarch, of the caesura that turns the place into an uncanny *pagina*, still the crypt of deposed gods and fallen sovereigns, who murmur to those who listen, to those who have ears to hear what is here no longer.