

The Sixth Age

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First of all the deathless gods who dwell on Olympus
made a golden race of mortal men . . .

—Hesiod

Call it Capital, call it Modernity Post Hoc—
the hours have passed through the hourglass
and back into the sea.

The high-resolution satellite image
of the world's largest rare earth mine
looks from above like a cluster of plums

dried on their branches, sins
of omission. Each round of leaching
has left behind the lined

anonymity of a topographical map.
In my Californian school, we discovered
our history by learning to pan for gold.

They taught us to watch for the dense flake
that sank below the grit, to remember
that staking a claim once meant

a stake in the ground. We swirled our portion.
Far away, prices scrolled by, incantations
uttered by no man.