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*Memo: Understanding As I Do That This Little Work Would Be
Nothing In Itself, Lacking Authority, Unless It Were Favored And
Protected By A Person Whose Authority Would Protect It From
The Boldness Of Those Who, Without Reverence, Give Their
Murmuring Tongues Liberty, And Knowing As I Do How Great
Are The Obligations Under Which I Have Always Been, & Am*

—Arkansas River, 1543

The real trouble, seen in hindsight—
that Don Antonio de Mendoza,
farther than ever from his beloved sardine *tapas*,

could not keep position, nor govern well, alas,
and with Cortez out there, somewhere, and coming on . . .
the pressing question, amid the sage and chaparral,

the sun-cracked earth, and those coughing, dusty tribes
awaiting miracles, the real question, for a diarist
and observer of this empty-headed spectacle of blood,

it seems, was what to do with the assembled gentlemen-dandies
shipped off by their fathers for great *obras*—
Pedro de Guevara, son of Don Juan de Guevara,

nephew of the Count of Oñate, &c and for instance,
whose *cabeza* they found particularly *vaca*,
blinking into the tarnished squalor of another sunset—

Don Lope de Urrea, laughing at his own jokes,
Francisco Gorbalan, the Unaccommodating,
so called, Don Alonso Manrique de la Otiose,

also known as “Little Fatty,” and Paco the Offbeat,
who later shot himself in the eye—
What captaincies would you give the likes of these?

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As for Coronado? One followed him
and that was that. One did not question
certain things, even as the days amassed,

even as the land began its tricks,
—*why not drop that sea chest, anyway?*
and their methods of inquiry grew less

—how shall we say—*diplomatic?*
O, moon O, horizon of staggered
double amputees, wonder of wonders

to thread atrocity through the narrowing eye
of the historical method. Shall we lie down, instead,
& sleep all winter? For they were terrifying, yes,

and also a bit ridiculous. (The local’s early best defense:
to nod & point them farther on).

—One did not question
even as the spell of the sky fell hard upon them,
how under that sky,

the land beneath like a treading mill
or some great, scrolling script beneath them,
held them fixed in its vastness,

though if one stopped in the dust
and let the horses pass, until the glitter
of helmets and the shouts of the goatherds

vanished like bells into the processional wind,
then, it seemed, a former world,
in one sweeping view, realigned itself in the heart:

The past behind, the future ahead, in clinking armor.

And there, within that part of the past,
amid the swell
of sweet grass, chest-high, under a sky
and the sky's trance, which said, *a little farther on,*

one made his hasty note:

the land is the shape of a ball,
trying to get his mind around it,

as the grassland opened like a sea
and then, like a sea,
closed behind.