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Treasure Map with No Spot Marked "X"

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Ranjit Hoskote

TREASURE MAP WITH NO SPOT MARKED “X”

Master of first drafts,
mason of untroweled walls,
frugal householder,
he hoards the coinage of poems.
Circling the ruins, he hunts for the lost
clearinghouse of fonts;
he chases the smell of clay horses
with patents.

Most original of minotaurs, he bellows,
savage in a labyrinth of versions.
A magneto coiled in his own rage,
he haunts the hall of mirrors you devise
to seize him, retreats chafing from your locksmith gaze.
You'll never tell concave from convex in this hell
of inversions. I tell you, wherever you look
is the wrong place.

The camera lucida moves to screen him.
Slashing through its jammed celluloid,
you hope to grab the missing guru, the stable truth
metallic behind the moving frame:
the projector, agape, spews reams
of looped film at you—a *mujahid* machine gun
clipping out magazines
of staccato laughter.

He has married an audience of images, proxies
for epileptic watchers (the reels were mixed up
when the projectionist was napping).
You match and docket the specimens for proof
of polygamy: Garbo, nautilus, carbon, woodrose.

But when it's time to pin the blame,
turn your satchel inside out
and you'll shake out only shadows.

His trademark. Next, with vetch and kale, blue-green
travelers' tales, he sows a garden on the beach;
caretaker of crumbling manuscripts, he needs
neither cartridges nor identity cards:
he is the turnings of the maze,
the flickering instants on the screen:
you are the catatonic, he the genius;
he masks himself as you, you face yourself

as him. Kabir weaves a shawl
with no edge:
the horizon
is his garden's boundary.

HELICAL HISTORIES

Osmotic as an agora
open to storm and tide and tread,
to voyagers, merchants, sorcerers, our bed
contrives, though seamless as a skin, to simulate
our every nuance in its creases, until it folds
in one calyx our separate fires, and we forge
a ring of elbow room and breathing space
for our wants to wrestle
(my foot in your slipper, your hands
in my hair) till there is no sense
in which our speaking tongues and wet ears
are any different