

*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