

The Geographer

*On the painting
by Jan Vermeer, 1669*

Under his left hand, the unopened
volume; in his right, the twin-
legged gauge of expanding centres
hovers over a blank parchment
unfurled—translucent wave
where a map will come to be.
To his inward and distracted
gaze these objects, like a shoreline
blur; he speeds through stillness—

Dipped in a dream he leans
like a trader's prow
away from the known
into encompassing
light from the quartered window

while in the foreground, thick wool
from Turkey or Persia
folds over the table trenches of blue
surging into stunned peaks of light
above spice-coloured borders.

Put away, almost ignored,
the conscripted globe
on the back corner cupboard glows
from darkness like a moon. Near full it sails;
fixed above his forehead
as though to the spire of a plunging mast.

By Kathleen Moore