The Ghosts of History

by Gita M. Smith

In this lab, where I work 40 hours a week,
live the ghosts of questions asked.

They hover over the outdated map of Asia on which the USSR
is still plump with member countries, even the coldly-named
Estonia.

The ghosty questions cluster urgently around the globes
on which the peeling edge of Africa curls upward
like a thicket where birds cry, "slavery, slaver-eee."
I answer new questions every day, like "What is a despot?" and
"How does geography determine history?"
I vow to answer every question generously.
I am afraid that if I don't, a student will later fail a test,
and that will send another hungry ghost to haunt this lab.

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