

THE BAR POEM

Jaswinder Bolina

And if it turns out Lahore is at the proximate center of a cloud-shaped multiverse, every universe a droplet, every moth in Punjab the mortal flicker of an otherlife; if there's an otherlife, this trig and nova show just a third or a thirty-ninth expansion in a boundless quantum mud, and there aren't any mountain spirits, no papacy or patron saints logging our masturbations, you mulling boneheaded sermons in erroneous temples, me resting on the wrong day, pleading at an incoherent altar, and if the space gurus arrive curing unemployment and angst, if they confirm the definitive merits of deregulation but also the indispensable covenant of a social safety net, if they affirm Otis Redding is better than the Beatles or the Stones, Bach pedantic, Lata Mangeshkar more intricate than Ovid, and of course *Anne of Green Gables* over *Harry Potter*, of course Michael over LeBron, of course Serena, and yes, the milk past its sell-by date is fine, and no, you don't look fat in those pants, but the gecko tat and tongue stud in '98 were a bad idea, but there's no such thing as '98, and you were wrong about Tupac, right about kumquats, wrong about Nietzsche, and if the unearthly Übermenschen arrive in their Jesus-shaped starship to say they've been watching us a long time, that we are critical as paperclips, redeemable but nearer to the apes than the angels, will you finally put your beer down, Bernie, settle your tab, and walk the long, hushed blocks home?

PREPPING THE EXILE

Jaswinder Bolina

Concede now your darling
gripes, your ordinary evasions:
the idiots texting while snarling
your rush hour, your escapes
via the back roads you best know
for a happy hour at the Gold Star
or Black Rock, dinner, then nightcaps
at the Green Mill till predawn
raises its gray sail in a window
of the house where you keep
your things. You'll need new
things you can't even begin
to Costco, to crate or to barrel.
Forget now your Anthropologies,
your Free Peoples, your kitsch
and granite kitchen, staycations,
the soft power of owning
a Roomba, and the sumptuous
green of oak leaves crowning
the streetlights of your town.
This is not your town. No suitors
here woo you, no needy here
need you. The local boys beef,
their mouths a bazaar of adenoid,
slur, and molar, though you learn
their fan dances, dress yourself
in their oils and attire, articulate
a grammar doesn't pronounce
you, their lexicon has no word
for you, but you mustn't despair.
The night is young, the snake
houses still open. Come, raise up
your rickshaw, doctor, straighten
your collar, and give us a ride!