



**MEDICINE**  
**SHOW**

Tom

Yui!





TOM YUILL

*Medicine Show*

the university of chicago press



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Every Wolf’s and Lion’s howl  
Raises from Hell a Human Soul.

William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*

## COYOTE

---

My friend, I could wander  
Around out here for years,  
Shaking my head for letting him out,  
Swearing not to forgive myself  
If anything should happen.  
He slipped out in the rain  
While I slept. I followed,  
Desperate, with a picture, asking people,  
*Have you seen this coyote?*  
He went across the ocean  
On a freight ship, sat in the corners  
Of doorways on Rue Montmartre,  
On Aston Quay, and in London,  
Slumped, head between his knees,  
Longing for the familiar woods,  
Longing for the last red glimpse of sun  
On the lake. He says he is a coyote  
Who does what he likes. He likes  
To stay outside. Tonight under the evening  
Clouds in their cold, silver raiment  
He sits there, alone,  
And I must go out to find him.



## **BIT: AN ODE WITH THE ROLLING STONES PLAYING IN THE BACKGROUND**

The King squirms, on the spot.  
Each remark makes a wound, like a mouth.  
Each hot thought grins like a raccoon.  
Each moment heats itself against another moment.

Each thing fucks. Each thing wants.  
Waste and pain again and again.  
They got me with a fine they didn't tell me was a fine.  
They got people like teeth, whose job is being sharp.

“They got people dressed in plastic bags directing traffic.”  
Wake up, King! Wake up the Son of Man.  
The sex between the sexes hasn't stopped.  
The drinking of the drunkards hasn't stopped.

The King inspects his mud flaps, then anoints his beets.  
Each mouth slobbers. Each mouth eats.

## UNSOLICITED ELEGY

---

My brothers, the Wag and the Artful Dodger  
(Really my cousins) awoke me at 3:44. We poured big  
Bourbon and cokes and took a walk.

Traylor asked how my broken leg was healing,  
I asked how his broken collar bone was healing.  
Charles told us his plan: "I'll take biology,

And really study. Then, if I receive a B, I leave  
The frat house, study all the time. It's med school.  
I'm a doctor. If it's below a B, stay in the house,

It's business, I'm a millionaire from business."  
What about B minus? "Still a B. I'm still  
A doctor." And same goes for C plus? "It's not

A B. So I'm in business, Cousin." They wanted big  
Aquariums. No matter what we talked about,  
Charles had an answer, Traylor had philosophy

Like this: "If you're ever in a group  
Of people longer than 15 minutes and can't figure  
Out who the dumbass is, you're it." We listened

Once as a neighbor said he'd been to a big concert  
Where most who showed up after him got in  
For free. "But we were not ripped off," he said,

"Because we paid, the concert happened, everyone  
Enjoyed it." Sure they said, and Gentleman Traylor  
Glanced at me and grinned like a raccoon, just

For a second, as if to say, "we've found the dumbass,  
Haven't we, Tom?" Ten years after the accident  
Which I only survived by having missed, I said,

Voice shaking as I spoke to the 200 gathered  
For the reunion what I'd written that morning  
To Traylor and Charles. "*Because I was not there*

*At Chamonix to save you, I will save you with poetry  
For the rest of my life.*" So I swore ten years ago,  
And for ten years now, they have helped save me.

## LOVERS

---

The air is hot, it whispers, it has lips.  
It whispers like good news . . . *the beer is cold.*  
She lumbers for one more. “Eywhere’d she go?”  
He thinks, but turns and thinks, “oh there she is.”

He’s sitting by her on the floor with lime-  
Peels, open tubes of paint; some Jonathan  
Richman’s playing. One of them’s been painting.  
*Dos Equis* are being knocked back. He finds

He knows where she is. She sees him. It’s summer,  
They’re on the floor. The music’s like good news.  
“I get a facial tic when I drink too  
Much Coke,” he says. “Each time I brush

My teeth I think about Wisconsin,” she nods.  
They whisper, purse their lips, it’s all good news.

## ODE TO THE WIND

---

I'm older now and live without regard  
For consequences less than in my youth.  
And I don't like you stuffing my nose

Full of sewery rain, whipping swill  
Around corners and overfed pillars.  
I do like the way you make the trees rattle,

A soundtrack around me, or lover-  
Like presence, for which I am grateful, if I am  
Lonely. But I have to say, it annoys

Me that you blow, or that you're blown,  
That you don't emerge from some *regard*.  
What? Don't say I'm out of line.

I still know about influences, flux  
Of "swirl and vortex." "Weather." Hey, I *choose*  
To walk this way, I *choose*

To stand here being blown by you.  
And though you bring me  
New ideas for lunch—tacos *al carbon*

Or crispy sesame beef—you also piss  
Careeningly all over me  
Without regard. This isn't envy here.

I know you, Dog. I've seen you  
Knock the stuffing from the sea, and  
I've been blown before. Bring it.

Villon

Here beside the fountain I die of thirst.  
In my own state I'm in a foreign land.  
I'm comforted and grin when in despair.  
When dolled up like a judge, bare as a wurst.  
I talk about my pleasures but they're bland.  
I'm always welcomed, always shown the door.

At daybreak I tell all good night, good luck.  
All my learning's earned by pure, blind chance.  
While lying down I know I'll fall. I'm sure.  
I'm so well set I don't have one sawbuck.  
Am not an heir, expect inheritance,  
Am always welcomed, always shown the door.

I work, but still don't give a happy damn.  
I'll spend my coins before I stop to think.  
I know it all and my mind is a blur,  
Lies, the truth—to me they're both the same.  
It's soothing knowing the sturdiest boat sinks.  
I'm always welcomed, always shown the door.

Forbearing Princes, learn: I know the score.  
I'm quite unique, like everyone you've known.  
What's my gift? Retrieving things I pawn,  
Being always welcomed, always shown the door.

## TWO EASY ODES

---

### 1. ODE TO THE MOON

I sit up and see the moon at night.  
It is right there past my nose. The bright

Half-tortilla, she brings scrambled eggs to mind.  
I'm chirped at by thoughts when I sit up and see

The moon. I'm not here waiting for the smacking  
Sun. I roll up in a world that licks its chops

And thumps around me, sometimes stubs my toes.  
(But I wouldn't turn around and hate you,

World, I learn to love you by the hoist and drop.)  
I do my sit-ups, curling and uncurling, I am half

A somersault, just like the moon this night.  
Back and forth go the tides. I curl in,

I go out. I close my eyes almost  
And there's my nose. Back and forth, there's my nose,

There's my knees, there they go. Let's have eggs  
On flour tortillas. You and me, Moon: you and me.

### 2. ODE FROM MY HEART

Broken, fixed, and drunk with love, I go,  
I gasp, I peak, I spin. I'm lodged but loose  
And chuckling. Glottal thumping—that's me.

I gape, I eat the filaments from distant  
Vistas coming in a rhythmic rush  
And poop them out. I am the throbbing

World. I shiver for you, but I am a purring  
World as well. I bloom, I push the papery  
Clouds around me. I live in my vault and love

And punch the ribbed claw that fixes me. I don't stop.  
I hoist, I drop, soothe, I shower, rush, peruse. I breathe,  
I weep, I plop, I try. I ring, chime, coo, sing, do.

# THE BLUE-EYED GIANT, THE MINIATURE WOMAN, AND THE HONEYSUCKLE

freely after Hikmet

He was a blue-eyed giant.  
He loved a miniature woman.  
The woman's dream was a miniature house  
With a miniature mortgage, dork  
For a husband, but honeysuckle  
Growing, a riot of colors, very fine house.

The giant loved like a giant,  
Loved the giant world, its giant feet of clay.  
His head was accustomed to such giant ideas  
That the giant kept seeing the faces of fathers,  
Of Washington and Crazy Horse, in damned  
Near every cloud. If she yelled at him he nearly  
Snapped. Damn couch legs were prison bars.

He loved like a giant. His desires were few, but those  
He had he had lots of. He could not knock  
On the door before something of himself was already  
Through it. Could not fit in a miniature house,  
Could not be a dork with a miniature mortgage  
In a house where honeysuckle grows  
In a riot of colors.

He stayed a blue-eyed giant. He loved the miniature  
Woman. She was a porcelain miniature of a miniature  
Woman. The woman was hungry for miniature prose.  
She needed a comfortable sectional couch,  
She got tired of the giant's long strides, his almost  
Snapping when he stubbed his toe, and, bye, bye, off  
She went to a dwarf with a mortgaged, miniature

Future, no questions and, sure, a garden  
With some honeysuckle growing in a riot of color.  
Now the blue-eyed giant knows there is no grave  
For a giant's loves. No memory permitted for the love  
Of one who sees faces in clouds, of one who loves  
Like a giant, no recollection of him in the miniature  
Houses whose gardens grow honeysuckle  
In the standard riot of colors.

## HER CHOIR

---

pomegranate  
adored one

the sky filled with snow  
swirling

her hips as she turns in bed  
to face me

a swirling and a whiteness

that fill the sky—

for Heaven to be

all of it must be  
all at once—

pomegranate

white hips she  
turning adored one

toward me

## DALLAS SKINHEADS

---

Heads shaved to give advantage during fist-  
Fights at soccer games in Manchester or

Berlin became shaved heads in Addison or  
Farmer's Branch, decorticated smooth to piss

On both "Thou Shalt" and "Thou Shalt Not."  
Oh, skinheads of the early eighties, yes, you had

A weird joie de vivre. Stomping and  
Swinging with torpid disinterest. Bloodshot

Eyes crossing from indifferent headbutting  
Of windshields and indifferent gobbling of

Acid and Ecstasy. Not even drunken, wobbling love,  
Just wanting whatever the next sting

Was. Oh, raspberries blown at ennui in the form  
Of noses burst to bloom by redneck fists,

Were you mostly piss? Ah, Dionysus  
In the eighties, hairspray paisleyed on bangs, storms

At dinner tables in St. Louis, in Ann Arbor.  
Long sleeve paisley shirts covering tracks

In Plano. No to the bond salesman father, yes to smack  
After dinner. The death rattle should be adored,

She'd think, if she had the words. Another Self  
Recorded in London, in New York, gives her

Her words. Dreams yielding, death seekers voting for  
Reagan again, her own words not shelved,

Just not there. Grandmother dies suddenly, and dying  
Floats in beneath Mom's shoulder blades.

Then she starts to smoke again, in secret. No charades  
From Dionysus last. In the eighties people heard no crying.

"Get six jolly cowboys to carry my coffin,  
Get six dancehall maidens to bear up my pall.

Throw bunches of roses all over my coffin,

Roses to deaden the clods as they fall.”

---

Heads without hair in the cancer ward. Under knit  
Caps, under silk scarves. Under the wig she wore

As she said, “I love you, too,” and, unsure,  
Tried not to cry as she walked in quick polite

Steps toward the hospital door, and he saw this, he  
Saw this, he saw this, then got in the car

To go on to the concert. Are teenagers’  
Arguments a good idea or not? Hast thou

Made the ulcers your idea? The Dallas skinhead  
I knew swapped an Escort radar detector he stole

At five pm for seven hits of acid, which, poor mole,  
He dropped, rubbing his head.

“It’s always something with you, John,” said his Mom  
To her husband of twenty-two years, and he,

Tuning his car, heard nothing. O Mimesis, flue  
For thistly mote, pearly cell or bomb,

Or migrating idea. Was he just infected, a Hell of Thought  
In which no thoughts were his? What sign of Christ

Within his poor scalped hand as he gazes at the light  
Which shivers in the hollow, vacant lot?



## MEDICINE SHOW

---

They just do what they have to do in Texas.  
Researchy and formulaic, husks of laughing hatred rolling up  
In swarms of blood behind your eye. You were a magician, seeing  
ABU undergrad cross-eyed with drink dancing alone, many moons  
Tattooed on her left shoulder blade. See the future: sitting jobless  
On her mothy couch, then in a Cadillac,  
Vintage but with an antique peanut butter cup  
Blossoming mold on her dash board. The words are in my mouth,  
She says, they're in the air before I think. The last of four  
Silkworms you dreamed would eat into your thigh. Such thoughts appear  
Tonight only: another family death, blown like a new war, from Texas to you.

### After Lowell's Saba

The one time I felt pretty good today  
(Forgive me, Lord, for that excess),  
You wouldn't believe what showed up and ruined it.  
Not someone I'd loved and hadn't  
Married looking white hot at Za Za's  
With upsized boobies and a phallic  
Zirconian rock on her finger—nope.  
It was a little blue balloon, blue  
Like the sky over Waxahachie  
When Mom dropped us off with Grandmother  
To visit. Heaven above Texas  
Has never been more blue.  
Houses so beset upon by light they seem to burn,  
And strings of smoke slip from a charcoal  
Grill. The blue balloon took flight  
And flew beyond all things divine,  
Escaped the thoughtless hand of the small boy  
(Who cried under the crush of this new loss),  
And flew between the Water Tower  
And Big Boy Kip's Coffee and Pancake House,  
Where I was killing time and gaping at the blue  
Balloon, grieving as I watched it lift and dip . . .

## THE TOAD

---

Corbiere

A lone, throat-grime song, a barfed sestina  
In the vapid night, a filmy moon, gray  
Like dying teeth, its sheen green splotchwork . . .

An echoed loogey hawk, leaping  
From behind the glandy lily pads . . .  
It's gone! It's not! there, in the breasty mud . . .

A toad! O Crappo, why so scared? We're Army,  
I am all fidelity, your lieutenant. See the bald, foam-  
Rubber headed poet, nightingale of muck. Ooog . . .

Brrraapp! He sings! It's horror—sure, but why?  
Do you not see his gloamy eye meet yours? See  
Now he slurps away. Quiet and cold, under his rock . . .

Goodnight . . . that toad down there . . . that's me.

Villon

Old. Your tutor's drooping. Liver  
Spots, my eyes which were like slate  
Are sausage-grey. Grinded, I still quiver  
At the thought of it, but I'm no bait.  
Guillemette, your tapestries won't answer  
Bill collectors. Lying is their trade.  
Devalued coins will get you better.

Pay attention, new glovestitcher,  
Time for you to get it straight.  
You too, Blanche, you hobbled cobbler.  
Get what's there. It soon gets late.  
Factory girl—tripping dancer,  
Don't stay shy. You'll never rate.  
Devalued coins would fare no better.

Help me and yourselves. He baits her—  
Jean, not you. Not you. Life is just hate,  
Just men between our legs. He hates her  
Later. Kate, those memories of maid-  
Hood really cost you so much more. He'll offer  
What you'll never get. Life is a blade.  
Devalued coins will fare no better.

“Girls, when you see me I ache.  
Listen, but don't look. I'm just a specter.  
Can't go back and circulate.  
Devalued coins would fare no better.”

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