

We need you, Yul Brynner!

"Now that I'm gone, I tell you: Don't smoke, whatever you do, just don't smoke."

– Statement by Yul Brynner on *Good Morning America* in 1985,
months before his death.

Yul Brynner haunts the tree-lined alleys of Davis,
howling like a distant baritone,
blowing out cigarettes.
Like the trees, like the rest of us,
he yearns for rain.

Yul Brynner, iron man of Broadway,
flies over the campus flatlands,
looking for the UC Davis 8%,
the coughing scallywags.
He is our spectral smoke alarm.

Yul Brynner, The Cal Ripken of Siam,
who performed his 4,625th *King and I*
while weak from chemotherapy,
while weak from radiation,
still looks into your eyes and says no.

Yul Brynner, the King of Davis,
the self-proclaimed clean-cut Mongolian boy,
hovers over the bushes behind Wellman Hall,
spooking the remaining hiding smokers,
hoping to part the choking haze.

Behold the King as he whistles and points,
waving down the hesitant campus cops,
seeking to draw their attention,
our attention, to the smokers' subterfuge,
to their slow and sad self-sabotage.

Yul Brynner, as King Mongkut,
willfully unmovable and strong,
was used to obedience:
"When I sit, you sit. When I kneel, you kneel."
Now none of them sat, nobody kneeled.

They ignore you, your highness.
There they stand in the dark vapor,
not an ashtray in sight, wishing to breathe free,
puzzlements lonely and coughing in the shrubbery,
their passions seeping out like a million etceteras.