

Rope-A-Pope et al

By

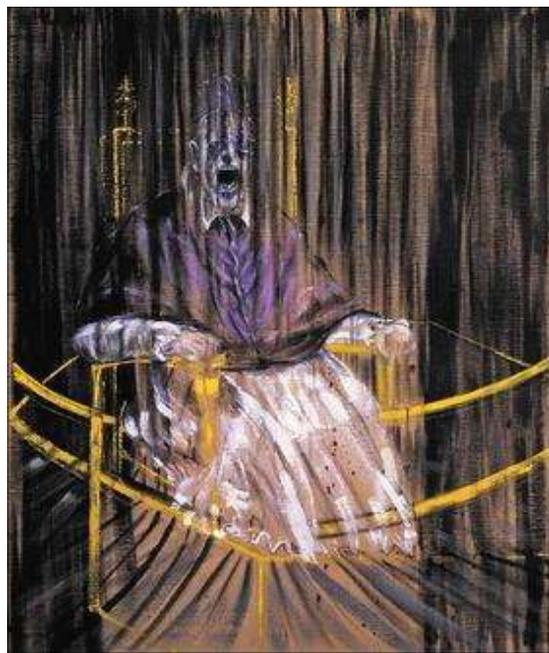
Walter Shulits

WHY I LIKE IT; Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes:

BEFORE: Velazquez



AFTER: Bacon



If the broadest of skeptics must be forever cautiously vigilant not to narrow and shrink into skulking cynics, Walter Shulits' skepticism ascends, soaring, to most scintillating heights of cynicism. Lets scale up, 'ROPE-A-POPE: FRANCIS BACON'S "INNOCENT X" (After Bacon's "Study after Velazquez' Portrait of Pope Innocent X"),' Don't you just love Bacon, as well? 'Innocent X,' to start, is that some euphemistic nickname for a miscreant malcontent like Baby Face Nelson, Pretty Boy Floyd or The Kissing Bandit? Walt hilariously lampoons the shrewd old political Pontiff. Fortunately, there are no Papal Bulls on the number of smiles in a day. If you want to up yours, no sense me quoting it all, just read it. I do have one question, though: Is "(!)" the international symbol for a diaphragm or IUD? In 'THE BALLAD OF BOOMER-X,' Shulits cracks-wise on those bastards who raised and kept Millennials as livestock. "Nikeing every trial and tribulation, / Tweeting his way to immortality..." "and / bulimically rebuffing blame for any heaven-forbid failure," "his parents were the ones who sweated, sacrificed and even died to /

defend his Leave It To Beaver life" "his throbbing jet ski like a mega dose of Viagra," "while Tiffani was awarded a water / polo scholarship at USC even though she couldn't swim" "his abacus mind no match for almighty algorithms, his checkbook effete / flaccid in the face of crypto currencies" "while his bald crown, / its bulging translucent veins recalling his penis in its better days and not / the overcooked cannelloni that now hung limply between his legs..." Okay, okay, you get the idea. Both 'HIDING IN MY HOODIE' and 'ARIA FOR POPEYE' are each as uproariously funny, chockablock with bruised and abused truths, except maybe this one: "It's high tide and I can no longer hide nor cast the truth aside: I'm a / dud dude, imposter poet and despite my hoodie deep inside I know it." Nothing could be further from... If you like a good raging rant with a heaping helping of stark rave, so long as you're not in the line-of-fire, Read Walter, he's the Fleas new Lewis Black--but bitter-better, let's get at her . . . (Spacing is poet's own.) HS

ROPE-A-POPE: FRANCIS BACON'S "INNOCENT X"

(After Bacon's "Study after Velazquez' Portrait of Pope Innocent X")

No, I'm not a malcontent monk or a condescending cultural critic who snickers at the Vicar, presumes, impugns that there's nothing papal about this pontiff... but what if his raging religious rectitude is really just dastardly deceit, what if this pope IS morally bent,

of Satanic descent, sent to earth young boys to torment or maybe this bloke's a practical joke, a woke masterstroke to evoke might in the fight against the Christian right, smite its acolytes, which makes him a buffoon, an opportune cartoon, a metaphoric goon to lampoon.

He looks so suave bedecked in mauve but that pansy purple is pulverized, buried by the bordering black, is it the bile of his barbarity or bitterness from some baneful betrayal...and now behold that he's trussed in gold, oh how he cajoled, but despite his bulging billfold

he'll never be paroled, perhaps it was something flimflam, financial scam in the Vatican, gifting a nun a diaphragm(!), the public pissed that he refused to desist so he was dismissed, is he an alchemist or the Vicar of tryst, maybe that's the gist but other theories exist,

some critics insist that you need go no farther than Francis and his father, the dad was bad to the young lad and the painter stayed mad but despite harbored hatred he found it harder to go furdur

than metaphoric murder, papal patricide preferred.

One theory highfalutin but difficult to be disputin', and not meaning to impeach Nietzsche, to throw his ideas into the breach, but forget about wanting to deprecate any unholy apostate reprobate, Bacon simply got it into his head that God herself was surely dead.

An explanation far less banal— and perhaps some might even term it anal— is that he wanted people to hear him “say” that he had an inherent right to be gay even in a sadomasochistic way despite cultural norms in the UK, anyway... he was the shock cock of the walk.

I've never understood the dismissive mystique, the intolerable twaddle of artistic geeks, pedantic poseurs oh so highbrow expecting us peons to be wowed and kowtow, pretentious pundits trying to be what they ain't— not a one of them knows how to paint— so I'm not even certain

why I wasted my time in uneven meter but not-too-bad rhyme trying to understand what's the big deal, the nature of this painting's morbid appeal, when I knew at first sight if I recall, despite the crap from the critics' cabal, I'd never want the damn thing on my wall.

THE BALLAD OF BOOMER-X

Call him the Chosen, the man with the Right Stuff, master of the universe, founder of the 1%, CEO of Pax Americana, God's right hand, the Closing Bell to human evolution...

Glory Hallelujah, Hosannas to the highest, prostrate yourself because you are not worthy...introducing Boomer-X, his existence a never-ending quest for truth and perfection,

singlehandedly steering man's destiny, Nikeing every trial and tribulation, Tweeting his way to immortality, luck has nothing to do with it, luck is for losers, it's all about focus and commitment...

and sheer genius...but beware—the bane of the Boomers, those malingering malcontent MillenialsCentennials, denounce dismiss his bullshit bombast, indignant at the gluttony, how he sucks the marrow

out of every not so bone-a-fide bone-doggle business he builds, leaving nothing but industrial sludge for the rest of mankind and bulimically rebuffing blame for any heaven-forbid failure,

hoping the culprit label will suction onto someone else, praying the president will pardon him for the dirty dancing he denies that could demean or diminish his already disgustingly doctored image.

The biodegradable truth is that he has always had it all, the fates never fickle, forever favourable, a life of Facebook "likes," his egregiously exaggerated exploits mere figments of his imagination because

his parents were the ones who sweated, sacrificed and even died to defend his Leave It To Beaver life, from Little League legend to the long-haired hedonistic heaven of the 60's—sex, drugs and rock and roll—

those search and destroy missions in Southeast Asia a convenient side-show to let him vent his holier-than-thou moral outrage all the while frugging and fucking at Fordham or doing mushrooms at Middlebury,

cocaine at Cal unless you lost the lottery and then it became "We Gotta Get Out of This Place" and "O Canada," the marijuana in Montreal soooo mellow...

but not for the blacks, browns, yellows, uneducated and impoverished, the discards who were punji-sticked or accidentally napalmed never embalmed, because they had no other place to go

and returned home to a nation that wanted to forget they ever existed, the American dream forever beyond their reach...while Boomer-X jettisoned his Jesus sandals and joints and pledged allegiance,

not to the flag, but to the Greed is Good God, imploring him to “show me the money,” the bundle, the big bucks, the Benjamins, all systems go as he giggled his way down the interest rate slip n slide,

gorged himself at the all-you-can eat tax cut buffet, trampoline onto the real estate escalator, flipping mortgages while Vietnam vets flipped burgers at McDonald’s, borrowed against the skyrocketing value

of his megalomaniac mansion to launch a Tet Offensive on tech stocks, and leased those glitzy gas guzzlers from Gomorrah that left everything green gasping, his throbbing jet ski like a mega dose of viagra,

at least until the engine got gummed up with the plastic bottles and bags he launched into the lake and his children asked why their beach was littered with dead trout, which he never answered

because his “quality time” with the kids was limited and he had to get them to violin lessons or soccer practice while conducting a conference call with some corporate cocksucker, never taking notice of

the obvious connection to Jared’s ADD, but whatever, he just topped off the Ritalin and continued to charge until Jared didn’t get accepted at Harvard, clearly a victim of discriminatory affirmative action programs

but no worries, a donation to the university and that boy was on his way to becoming a world-class slumlord, while Tiffani was awarded a water polo scholarship at USC even though she couldn’t swim...unfortunately

the whole inhumane college admissions saga finally euthanized his marriage and, oh horror, there were no pre-nups back then and he would have been KIA in the financial firefight

if not for his lawyers’ mastery of legal mazes, otherwise known as shell games and money laundering— how cool that those shells were in tropical paradises like the Bahamas and the Virgin Islands—

he chuckled as he flipped the bird to the feminist divorce courts in the kumbaya commune of California and continued to bring the bling to his 25-year old mistress until she traded up

for a newer, more expensive model that didn't ejaculate prematurely, but this only spurred BOOMER-X to take his game to the next level, mastering and gaming online dating websites,

immersing himself in the legal lexicon of consent, when a "no" was really an "OMG yes, yes, yes," becoming a master mixologist in blending alcohol with date rape grapes, and finally,

just like with his real estate, stocks, and politics, applying leverage when necessary to ensure a favourable outcome— life was just one big market and markets separated the men from the boys.....and girls.

The problem was that next year he would be 70 and despite his insistence that "70 is the new 40," the mirror didn't lie—his hump-backed posture resembled a constipated ape straining to relieve itself,

scraggly tufts of grey pubic-like hair pockmarked his back, hands, elbows and toes, and even festered in his nostrils and ears, the latter actually long enough to braid, while his bald crown,

its bulging translucent veins recalling his penis in its better days and not the overcooked cannelloni that now hung limply between his legs.....well, his dome could actually have benefited from a few of those hairs....

and then there was his mouth, cankered blue-grey rectal lips, jagged week-old coffee grind-coloured incisors peaking like a Tour de France mountain stage and spewing a palpable stench seemingly bellowsed

from a belly firebombed by the previous night's feast of nachos, sauerkraut and pink champagne, a masochistic masticatory triathlon more debilitating than the run/bike/swim events from his self-flagellating 40's,

and maybe, a clue to the origin of a belly as prodigious as it was disgusting, four overinflated inner tubes oozing or jello-ing over his knees, stretch marks like the tracks of a Land Rover

careening and fishtailing down dunes of cellulite, this anatomic apocalypse making a mockery of his incessant incantation "I am the Master of the Universe OAT" even as

his world was shattered by tattooed teetotaling vaping and vengeful Centennials willing to forgo plastic cups and straws, preferred a hybrid Honda to a Hummer, hummus to hot dogs and hamburgers,

his abacus mind no match for almighty algorithms, his checkbook effete flaccid in the face of crypto currencies and how exactly were these young radicals reaping rewards from those ridiculous Reddit ribbits?

He was universally rejected because he wasn't connected, baffled that slackers turned hackers were so damn respected, couldn't conceal his rage at the call for a living wage from a generation that

couldn't string words together in a simple sentence, his beloved grammar and syntax drawn and quartered, slaughtered by internet slang—LOL—bookstores gone, now Subway franchises and bikram yoga centers,

gay men were running for president, girlies demanding equal pay, transsexuals squatting in public restrooms, and his illegal immigrant housekeeper had left a goodbye love note spray-painted on his garage—

#MeToo says SCREW YOU!!

HIDING IN MY HOODIE

My hoodie gives me a woody— pocket, pouch or zipper,
fleece or sweatshirt, understated salt-sated sun-faded,
black blue apricot Quicksilver Billabong Nike—maybe

because it helps hide the real me, the insecure wannabe
I hope you can't see, a bum so bogus my bile bubbles
and I barf knowing I'm confusing, using,

abusing my “closest” friend, the warm hugs he gives, coaxing
him to live a hoax, be the Melania Trump of hoodies, the Bernie
Madoff, Lance Armstrong, to cover up the dirt, the stains,

the frayed seams of my self-esteem. Still you'll never catch me in
a new hoodie; that would be disclosing that I'm posing like the tubby
twelve-year-old tuba player who carries condoms in his lunch box,

the billionaire yachtsman in a speedo who can't swim and gets
seasick on his son's swing or the tank-topped, bicycle-shortened
“body builder” with chest implants—but nevertheless

as you might guess, it's not my first rodeo on a pony named Phoney,
this circumspection for self-protection through image projection to
avoid rejection leaves little time for introspection; it's true that

in my army days I could trim nostril hairs while gazing down at the
mirrored spit-shined toes of my boots, I wore tinted Ray-Ban aviator
lenses with starched jungle fatigues so tightly tapered

they showed the veins of my bulbous biceps, Captain Narcissus doing
nude curls in the mirror every night, a rippling Stars and Stripes tattoo
on my left shoulder, my flagpole boner at full mast even though

the closest I ever got to actual combat was watching “Gallipoli” as I
blowfished Cuban cigars and threw down tequila shots after my
troops annihilated the nurse battalion— in badminton,

but make no mistake, the warrior code was zorro'd into my DNA: I was
weaned to wallop those wolves of Wall Street, clad to conquer in my
silk Brioni suits, fitted Saville Row shirts, Charvet ties,

custom Prada wingtips and Ferragamo lenses, the requisite Rolex
choking my wrist like a constipated turd, thank God for trifectas at

the track and my take from Texas Shootout, and bless my mom

for letting me live rent-free in her basement in Newark and buying me that 1986 Acura with 160,000 miles on it, plastic trash bags where the rear windows should have been because otherwise

I would have been outed: Not a gazillionaire, only Gordon Gecko's gutless go-fer, no Master of the Universe just an imitator Mastur-bater, a big-breasted blonde blow-up doll for my trophy wife,

no rose she, just a plastic peony, for the king of bling in spring, but endless summer also became a bummer as my propensity for pretense never petered out—and my pecker pouted in doubt—

precluding any possibility of prosperity or posterity, perma-tanned Peter Pan “hood”winked by hubris, haunted by the fiction in my conviction that caulking my cavities could seduce the tooth fairy

...and now there's nothing august in autumn, any grey-haired gravitas gone to ground. I'm impervious to maturity, live in complete obscurity, survive on social security, puking one more insipid poem

while alone in my mobile home, a glutton's girth despite how much I surf, reveries of youth no longer deflect the truth—my fear of failure floods any flow, I bail whenever east winds blow,

sulk despondent on my board, never risking being crushed, crucified by coral or entombed in Neptune's green room of doom, just a Halloween Super Surfer, a boob who panics in the tube,

but you'd never guess it seeing me in faded kneecapped jeans, treadless flip flops branding an almond 'v' on coral-cratered feet, koa-framed sunglasses and my favorite fuschia hoodie,

caressing a collection(hardbound) of Ezra Pound and a dog-eared book of Gwendolyn Brooks, the portrait of a pedestrian poet nursing his Corona, nacho crumbs and salsa clinging to two-day stubble,

bone on bone knees limping lopsided laps to the lavatory, returning to gaze wistfully at the waves I've never had the courage to challenge, to bemoan that canto in couplets I'll never compose.

It's high tide and I can no longer hide nor cast the truth aside: I'm a dud dude, imposter poet and despite my hoodie deep inside I know it.

ARIA FOR POPEYE

Her voice floated like Chinese flying lanterns
each note lilting lingering twinkling, their
confluence a constellation of chords slowly
dispersing then hovering, lulling the twilight
traffic as beleaguered bankers boatbuilders
beauticians brokers were freed to exhale smile
chuckle, dart like waterbugs heading home.

The aria—he had no idea what that was—conjured
a kaleidoscope of dreams unlike those he had ever
dreamt, his 19 year-old dreamscape as dark and
devoid as his lineage...he saw a flaxon-haired
female flutist flanked by fairies offering flowers,
a naked henna-haired Amazonian nymph frolicking
under a waterfall to the shrieks of horny howler
monkeys, a bare-chested Polynesian boy skin
blowtorched by the sun shimmying up a swaying
palm, his lavalava luminous, a lighthouse guiding
his father's fishing ketch home...

but life had never gone right, nor any fantasies
taken flight for the young sailor, a nobody from
nowhere who knew nothing, had nothing; there
were no fairy tale finishes, no trails of breadcrumbs
leading him from the gingerbread house of false
promises, no ruby red slippers to deliver him from
the scalding cauldron of debilitating drudgery, just
big bad wolves huffing puffing, fucking up his life

because he was naive, too willing to believe, easy
to deceive, his whole life humdrum its outlook glum
which had led him to succumb, ensnared by the flair
of naval fanfare, enthralled by all those exotic ports
of call(imagine his despair once he became aware
he suffered mal de mer)

so while puritanically white two-masted schooners
cast off their collars to rock and bob drowsily dreamily,
their sails pinging like soprano popcorn, whistling like
wind chimes in summer on the New Hampshire coast or
the soft soothing swoosh of a drum brush interrupted
by an impetuous pediatric piccolo player, and captains
and their crews mesmerized by a merely pedestrian
Mediterranean nocturne prepared to go ashore palpita-
ting at the prospect of platefuls of pappardelle pasta

portobello—or maybe paella—

the young seaman, his reveries rapidly receding,
reverted to the realm of disbelief: had he really
dreamed of that female flutist, the henna-haired
nymph, a lava-lava'd lad, or had the reality he reviled
rendered him delirious: that suffocating blast furnace
of gun metal gray rusted by salty seas sizzling in the
sun, the sickening sticky stench of motor oil as the
ship's engines throbbled and sledgehammered his skull,
the barrage of bovine body odor from unwashed beer-
bellied sailors a generation older, cigarette butts like
inflamed warts protruding from scabby lips, piss-like
perspiration discoloring tattered tank-top tee shirts,
tattoos of long-forgotten tarts and trollops in distant
ports peeking out of rainforests of matted grey hair
sweat monsooning between tufts...

and as if all this stuff wasn't rough enough, no one
would dispute that even as a recruit his sea sickness
was so acute even in port he'd continually puke—
so it wasn't a stretch for the poor wretch to retch all
night, his bowels also clenched- oh what a stench,

but the next day as darkness descended, indisputable
divine deliverance—She was back except this time her
lanterns came to life as a regiment of the Righteous
Knights of the Round Fable: Prince Charming dashed
to the aid of distraught damsel Cinderella, Rapunzel
let down her golden hair for the scrawny Scarecrow,
Aladdin swooped to scoop Snow White and Superman
soared to save Hansel and Gretel... and at that very
moment young Popeye became a true believe in the
diva, knew he must follow her music, the flow of her
lanterns, and climb, no—scramble up— the beanstalk
to escape the blight of naval kryptonite and follow her
into the night, the end of a life diminished— she would
lead him to...his spinach.

AUTHOR BIO: Walter Shulits is an endurance athlete who graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point. After a lucrative career in creating and marketing bond investments for international pension funds, banks, and insurance companies in North America, Europe, Asia and Australia, he's retired to Provence, France, with wife Catherine but spends up to six months a year in beloved Hawaii. His poems are forthcoming in *Wingless Dreamer*, *Griffel*, and *Dumpster Fire*.

