

Room for a view

The shoeless of hand

In the land of Afasia the people speak a language that resembles English. For most of its history, this language had a word that could nearly always be translated as *shoe*. It had another word that corresponded quite well to *glove*.

Recently, the people of Afasia have begun to speak of “shoes” when formerly they would have spoken of “gloves.” They no longer say, “This man has no gloves,” but “This man has no shoes on his hands.” The word “glove” is still heard, but exclusively in theoretical discourse, as in “There are no such things as gloves, there are only shoes for hands.” Afasians often exchange pronouncements of this sort with one another, sometimes for hours at a time.

Accordingly the gloveless in Afasia are no longer called gloveless, but “shoeless of hand.” Public advertisements exhort Afasians to the awareness of such people, who are said to comprise a sizeable segment of the population. Popular entertainment often sympathetically portrays minor characters as being shoeless of hand (but otherwise just like you and me), and legislative bodies dedicate specific weeks, or months, to the promotion of shoefulness of hand.

The Afasian people believe that shoes are a necessary component of a minimally bearable life; Afasian shoemakers have long been among the most valued members of society. Traditionally, those Afasians who could not provide themselves with shoes were helped by their neighbours. The Afasian people held this as an important mark of compassion. Some time back, however, the rulers of Afasia convinced the people that providing shoes for the shoeless is more properly a function of the government, and taxes are now levied for that purpose.

Afasian glovemakers (or shoemakers for hands, as they are now

called) always insist that their products are shoes, even when they bear no resemblance to shoes, but they often do. Many modern Afasian gloves have laces, for instance, and many have a rubbery excrescence resembling a heel. In the past it was possible to say, “This object does not require laces, because it is a glove, and gloves do not require laces.” The language no longer permits such statements, and anyone who attempts to advance an argument along these lines is quickly confused. Here is an example:

“This object [referring to a glove] does not require laces.”

“Is this object not a shoe?”

“Yes, it is.”

“Do not shoes require laces?”

“Yes, they do.”

“Then this object, being a shoe, requires laces, does it not?”

“I suppose it does.”

There is great variety in the techniques and products of Afasian glovemakers, which has increased with the growing linguistic confusion between “glove” and “shoe.”

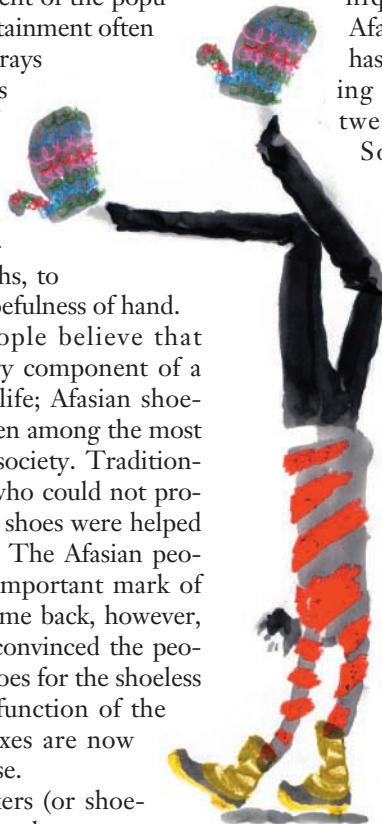
Some make gloves that strongly resemble shoes, some make gloves that are practically indistinguishable from the gloves of former times, and some make hybrids that resemble both gloves and shoes to a greater or lesser extent. A large number of glovemakers work to some completely new design, producing an object that looks like neither a glove nor a shoe nor like anything else ever made before. Whatever glove is made, however, the glovemakers insist on calling it a shoe for the

hand, and whatever the glovemaking technique, the glovemakers always insist on being called a shoemaker for hands, thus partaking of the prestige that shoemakers have always enjoyed in Afasia, along with a portion of the government funds that are appropriated for the purchase of shoes from shoemakers, and which are not available for the purchase of gloves from glovemakers, unless the gloves are called shoes, and the glovemakers are called shoemakers.

Following the earlier example of shoemakers, glovemakers have formed various associations, which rent billboard space, arrange press conferences, and engage in numerous other efforts to educate the public in matters deemed to be important to them, mainly involving the nature of the relationship between gloves and shoes. They place particular emphasis on the handshoelessness of the poor, which is absolutely no different from any other kind of shoelessness, except that it occurs on hands. It is claimed that the government provides too few shoes for hands and that more are needed. In the history of Afasia, no one who could afford privately made shoes has ever used those provided by the government.

Afasian glovemakers associations also engage in extensive public debate over the proper training of glovemakers. The prevailing belief favours a complete shoemaker’s education, for glovemakers are shoemakers, no less than any other kind of shoemaker, only for hands. To become competent shoemakers for hands, they must receive a thorough grounding in all the things shoemakers must know, such as formulae for adding chemicals and various kinds of bark to tanning fluid, principles for cutting shoes and inner soles, snub-toed and pointed shoes, high heels and low, and methods for fitting customers with flat feet, bunions, hammer toes and calluses.

Other glovemakers have formed societies to promote the notion that shoe-



makers intending to work solely with the calceolan needs of hands need not receive a classical shoemaker's education and should instead receive an education better suited to the practical day-to-day demands they will actually face. They propose a curriculum genuinely relevant to the needs of shoemakers for hands, yet every bit as rigorous as the traditional shoemaker's course of instruction. They would still be shoemakers, to be sure, and shoemakers every bit as good as their pedical colleagues. To this the traditionalists reply that shoemakers for hands still need a classical shoemaker's education, if only to discern when a customer is mistakenly requesting shoes for the wrong appendage, since to the untrained eye many feet appear to be hands, and many hands look like feet. A shoemaker for hands who lacked a standard education would not know what to do when presented with a hand that turned out, on professional inspection, to be a foot.

Still another faction of glovemakers — the Eucheripapoutsiological Institute — asserts that their profession is dedicated to the promotion of shoefulness of hand rather than to the reduction of shoelessness of hand, and that this focus should be reflected in their training. A shoeful hand is not at all the same thing as a hand that is merely not shoeless. There are many other factions of glovemakers, and great disagreement among them regarding practically every matter of concern to the profession, including the nature of the finished prod-

uct, its proper care and maintenance, the choice of glovemaking technique, the establishment of professional standards and a policing mechanism for enforcing them, the extent to which routine glovemaking matters can be entrusted to nonglovmakers, how much government control is acceptable in return for government funding, and how best to convince people that they

need gloves when they do not realize that they do.

All of these questions provoke vigorous controversy and debate. But the one thing on which all glovemakers agree is that they are not glovemakers.

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What price, peace?

On Mar. 3, 2003, amateur and professional actors around the world presented roughly 1000 readings of Aristophanes' play *Lysistrata* to protest the imminent war in Iraq. In this exchange, the protagonist reaches an attitudinal stumbling-block.

Lysistrata: ... Now tell me, if I have discovered a means of ending the war, will you all second me?

Cleonice: Yes verily, by all the goddesses, I swear I will, though I have to put my gown in pawn, and drink the money the same day.

Myrrhine: And so will I, though I must be split in two like a flat-fish, and have half myself removed.

Lampito: And I too; why to secure peace, I would climb to the top of Mount Taygetus.

Lysistrata: Then I will out with it at last, my mighty secret! Oh! sister women, if we would compel our husbands to make peace, we must refrain —

Cleonice: Refrain from what? tell us, tell us!

Lysistrata: But will you do it?

Myrrhine: We will, we will, though we should die of it.

Lysistrata: We must refrain from the male altogether — Nay, why do you turn your backs on me? Where are you going? So, you bite your lips, and shake your heads, eh? Why these pale, sad looks? why these tears? Come, will you do it — yes or no? Do you hesitate?

Cleonice: I will not do it, let the war go on.

Myrrhine: Nor will I; let the war go on.

Translator anonymous. Text available at: <http://eserver.org/drama/aristophanes/lysistrata.txt>

Pharmacia

Arthrotec

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New material