

Eighty Left Feet: Revolutionary Footnotes

by Mary Walling Blackburn

From *thelastperformance [dot org]*, June. 2007

The Footbridge Across the Rio Grande: An illegal, simple, plank and rope form stretching across the river. Plants wrap along its entrance and exit. It's a crossing that has been used for a thousand years. It is the best place to leave and the best place to arrive.

After September of 2001, a sign in Spanish and English was erected at either end of the footbridge. Now, passage is forbidden. But in the morning, before the heat kicks in, wet animal tracks have yet to evaporate. I read them like a postcard. Postcard number one: *Hey, I made it in one piece and I'm here now.* Postcard number two: *You didn't help me and that's OK.*

At another crossing, someone has laid concrete blocks under a shallow part of the river and when night falls, others drive over, without touching the water or the earth with their feet.

Why do they cross? For money and drugs. For food and for family. Why do I cross and cross back? For leisure and leisure.

*

Footnote: See Stallybrass's work on revolution and cobblers, written in the form of footnotes. (Albeit it uses an elaborate and potentially annoying pun, but nonetheless, it is a useful constraint.) I, however, have not been able to track the book down. It was always checked out or sold out. Trafficked. Popular? Maybe with a certain set...the academics who study revolution but never make it.

In my imagination, others are reading Stallybrass, others are reading about the downtrodden (who are always on foot or on their feet or underfoot and fist) and others are learning how the cobbler fashions resistance. (Perhaps through powerful guilds? Perhaps with shoes with secret blade compartments? Who knows?! Not me. I can't find a copy.)

Or perhaps a different kind of foot constraint is useful; one that is less urban; one that provides for weightlessness and inquiry and desire? Were you thinking of the stirrup--the way it makes your foot float in the air? I am thinking of the stirrup.

With the stirrup, the ground then becomes something far away and useless-- and the foot, she's useless too.

*

In front of the El Paso Airport, the city has erected a 34-foot statue made of 18 tons of bronze. They are formally calling it "The Equestrian." However, it was commissioned as and is referred to in the airport literature as a depiction of Don Juan Onate, a 17th century Spanish Conquistador, husband of the illegitimate granddaughter of Montezuma, and first governor of New Mexico.

In October of 1598, a skirmish erupted when the occupying Spanish military demanded supplies essential to the Acoma people surviving the winter. The Acoma resisted; thirteen Spaniards were killed, and amongst them Don Juan Onate's nephew. In 1599, Onate retaliated; his soldiers killed 800 villagers. The remaining 500 women and children were enslaved, and by Don Juan's decree, the left foot of every surviving Acoma man over the age of twenty-five was amputated.

Eighty left feet were separated from the leg.

The left? Why the left?

Stacked or strewn?

In Espanola, New Mexico, at the Onate Monument and Visitor Center, the right foot of another Don Onate statue was removed with an electric saw. The thin scar of the

repairing weld is barely detectable- the foot, starfish-like, appears regenerated. The events that set the cut and weld in motion occurred over 400 years ago, but like a wake, these incidents reverberate, pulsing towards the shore of the Present.

What are the dimensions of this conquistador's bronze left foot suspended in a stirrup (16 feet off the ground)? If no one, speeding through the airport's entrance, recalls who this equestrian is modeled after, Onate becomes, in fact, weightless. Without gravity, without ownership of his deeds. He is so far away from the ground and what it might retain.

*

Pre-Christian Eve walks out of the Garden of Eden, into a desert of sin, left foot forward.

Post-Colonial Onate, balances on one left leg in contemporary Espanola.

If the orientation and trajectory of the foot determines behavior- from here on out- Onate's step would be, by Christian symbolic tradition, towards the pure and the good. But he opts out of a right step forward. He'll stand in place. He's a statue.

*

The amputation of statues.

Why remove a perfectly operable foot? It's doing its public work.

That means encapsulating an international story of adventure and empire, or say relaying a living history of conquest and use.

Bootless, footless, the Man-Statue comes to represent the saga of globalization-botched trade, disposable bodies, and decorative resistance.

And his statue heart? It just isn't in it anymore.

*

Last Note: A new type of flip-flop has been fashioned for American college students on Spring Break in Mexico. A bottle opener is fused to the sole.

Our drunken American scholars forget the shoe after the beer is uncapped and pouring down their throat and the front of their chest. For them, the bottom of the shoe becomes the tool that takes them away from the foot and towards their torso- which is filled with feeling.

But their psychological occupation of their physical center is not suffused by the heart and its heavy compass nor the heart's desire and its furious mouth. Their center is not so much inhabited as illuminated, illuminated by a curious light- fluorescent and modern, surveilled and soused. Like a Dan Flavin sculpture - a bulb in its collector's shrine- the surface is satisfied with seemingly endless luminosity of no particular origin or without apparent cost. Not one reveler knows where this surface of light comes from and that 'not-knowing' is the source of all that easy brightness; to understand its source dims the form.

Without feet, left or right (sin or ethic), they are light. Or so it seems.

These young Americans flew in and flew out of Mexico. Like archangels and engineers, these citizens of light are locating, generating, and sustaining lightness. The Lightness of Atoms. The Lightness of a Vacationing Divine Providence. The Lightness of Sea Spume and Beer. The Lightness of the Girls' Hair.

And, the sandals, they are a light material, too. And who was the flip-flop cobbler? Where is the Zapatista now? Is he traveling towards the light, swapping resistance for apocalypse?

Revolution? Revolutionary Footnotes...? I can't find them.