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Poems

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Roberto Picciotto

**Epistola desde el frente**

Yo sueno que estoy aqui...etc.

*Calderon de la Barca*

Desde la primera oscilación

del alba, labio del mundo,
hasta esta emanación
danza de materia con materia,
cabalista, todo es texto

y aun la noche

ha de caer como un aletazo.

Introito y responso

en lengua de luz y pluma,

un cielo puntuado de pájaros

y estas neuronas-

el cuervo que devora

a la paloma, la carne,

la podredumbre de la carne

carece de mensaje,
es ilusión, dice ilusorio,

*Arlequin*

**Letters from the Front**

[Translated by the author with Charles Molesworth]

Yo sueno que estoy aqui...etc.

*Calderon de la Barca*

From the first quivering

of dawn, lip of the world,

and on to this emanation

of matter dancing with matter,

Cabalist: all is a text,

and yet the shade of night

shall fall like a wing beat.

Beginning and response

in the tongue of light and feather

sky dotted by birds

and these neurons -

the crow that devours

the dove, the flesh,

the rotting of the flesh,
bears no message, it's

only shadow, says shadily,

*Harlequin.*

**Exemplum del poeta**

**y la enredadera con campanillas**

"yields falsehood when appended to its quotation,"
yields falsehood when appended to its quotation.

*W. V. Quine*

Que quede claro, insiste

Arlequin en amores, anterior

a cualquier sentimiento la flor

se presenta entre flores,

**Example of the poet**

**and the trellis with bellflowers**

"yields falsehood when appended to its quotation,"
yields falsehood when appended to its quotation.

*W. V. Quine*

Let it be clear,

insists Harlequin in love

prior to any feeling, the flower

appears among the flowers

**DIFFERENTIA 8-9 Spring/Autumn 1999**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIFFERENTIA</th>
<th>Tertulia entre aristocratas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ligeramente fruncida, lúbrica, la trompa. Es así que la lengua tartamudea el color de su corola desviándose hacia el centro</td>
<td>Charm, smiling at the good mouth, Quick eyes gone under earth’s lid... E.P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y la garganta se atraganta en silabas. Que quede claro, dice autoreferencial Arlequin,</td>
<td>On seeing the girlish breasts and the waist barely pinched, modest Harlequin almost turns his head: death, he says, comes not of a sudden;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he acquí las letras que me indican, creo y me creo, soy este torrente de silabas. Sólo la abeja penetra.</td>
<td>unheard it settles on membrane and skin. The painter licks his lips. In the painting there is a mirror. And it is like this that in the wayward trope of ion and synapse the image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>habemus linguam se reprende el juglar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tenemos carne sin hueso, tenemos complice del ojo—con óleo y pigmento color de velador y tapiz de oriente</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lúbrico el pincel gusanea su luz por la tela y dentro del marco dorado, dentro de interiores, desnuda la niña se repliega en gestos de madre.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Table talk among aristocrats                                                                 |
| Charm, smiling at the good mouth, Quick eyes gone under earth’s lid... E.P.                     |
| On seeing the girlish breasts and the waist barely pinched, modest Harlequin almost turns his head: death, he says, comes not of a sudden; |
| unheard it settles on membrane and skin. The painter licks his lips. In the painting there is a mirror. And it is like this that in the wayward trope of ion and synapse the image |
| habemus linguam, the clown catches his thought, we have boneless flesh, we have an accomplice to the eye— with oil and pigment the tint of bedlamp and rugs |
| the brush worms its light within the gilded frame where naked the girl enfolds herself in her arms as if she were her mother. |
**Hacia el país donde se desconoce el remo**

Habiendo llegado

a buen puerto

Arlequín, la niebla y el mar son deleite de lengua.

Este es el argumento,

cuento de un cuento en todo su tumulto:

ahumado el héroe y más que metafísico

se enmaraña en la carne –

la anémona la sutil oscilación de la anémona

se repite en su sangre

con un vaivén de olas;

e olor a hembra, la sal de sus emanaciones

conjugando todos los ritmos

y sin ser señor de sí en su concupiscencia

sustancial Arlequín supone que el sabio siempre ha de partir

con la marea.

**Towards the country where the oar is unknown**

Having come,

Harlequin to safe harbor fog and the sea are delight of his tongue.

This is the plot of the tale of a tale in all its convolutions:

smoke-dried the hero and more than metaphysical he snares himself in the flesh –

the anemone the subtle to and fro of the anemone swaying in the waves

repeats itself in his blood; the salty smell of woman subsumes every rhythm and having lost his mastery of self concupiscence

substantial Harlequin supposes the sage should always leave with the tide.

**Paseo dominical por el Parque Central**

Severo desde un principio desordena su voluntad a fuerza de bofetadas

hasta otorgarse, abúlico, a todos los vicios de la percepción:

**A Sunday walk in Central park**

Severe from the start he disorders his will by dint of slaps to his face

until he can yield to all the temptations of perception:
hacia el frente,
asimétricos, sus ojos,
él, de espaldas

a lo que pudiera estar
a sus espaldas,
entrega su cerebro

a un destello intempestivo
entre las hojas,
a una porción rugosa de tronco,

a unos yerbajos
que empiezan a desteñir
en torno a las raíces,

y en esta compleción
de todo lo oculto,
en esta suprema ilusión,

el arce en su papel
de arce el sol
en su papel de sol.

Meditativo, Arlequin se calla.

he faces forward
asymmetrically, his eyes,
& there, behind his back

is hidden
all he’s turned his back on,
his mind yielding

with a flash out of synch
among the leaves
to a gnarled chunk of tree-trunk,

to some weeds
starting to fade
among the roots

and in this completion
of all that’s hidden,
in this supreme illusion,

the maple in its role
as maple the sun
in its role as sun.

Thoughtfully, Harlequin is silent.

TRANSLATOR’S NOTES
These five poems come from the middle of a sixteen-poem sequence: Registros (Pequeña Venecia, Caracas, 1995). Their main figure - poet, dreamer, wise clown - is known as Harlequin, and he has many literary cousins. The mediaeval jongleur, Monsieur Teste, J. Alfred Prufrock, and the Crispin of Wallace Stevens’ “Comedian as the Letter C” would all nod in recognition. But here Harlequin, pressured by perception, finds himself consumed with that which he is nourished by: language. Words fall from his tongue, to his tongue, his organ of many chords. His tongue and the cordage it weaves tie him down, choke him, and lash the sails that carry him on his voyage; it helps him whistle while he passes the graveyard. And the tongue reminds us that while language takes us beneath or above the world, our need to taste brings us back into it. The sensuous philosopher: a comic figure only poetry could invent and only language could confound.