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## Poems

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## Roberto Picciotto

### *Epistola desde el frente*

Yo sueño que estoy aquí...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 lenqua 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

### *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,

### *Letters from the Front*

[Translated by the author with  
Charles Molesworth]

Yo sueño que estoy aquí...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.

### *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*

ligeramente fruncida, lúbrica,  
la trompa. Es así que la lengua  
tartamudea el color de su corola  
desviándose hacia el centro

y la garganta se atraganta  
en silabas. Que quede claro,  
dice autoreferencial Arlequin,

he aqui las letras que me indican,  
creo y me creo, soy este torrente  
de silabas. Sólo la abeja penetra.

*with its lightly puckered lascivious  
shout. It's this that the tongue  
stammers the petals' tint  
sliding toward the center*

*and the throat is choked  
with syllables. Let it be clear,  
says self-referential Harlequin,*

*here are the letters that spell me,  
I found and I am founded, I'm this torrent  
of syllables. Only the bee enters.*

### **Tertulia entre aristocratas**

Charm, smiling at the good mouth,  
Quick eyes gone under earth's lid...

E.P.

Al ver adolescentes los pechos,  
la cintura apenas marcada, púdico  
Arlequín casi vuelve el rostro:  
la muerte, dice, no llega de sopetón;

sin ser sentida se instala en mucosas  
y piel. El pintor se lame los labios.  
En el cuadro hay un espejo. Y es  
así que en el desacato trivial

de ion y membrana en algunas  
nueronas

transeúntes se compone la imagen:  
cetrino el canario se mece en su jaula  
y la niña juega con sus muñecas –

*habemus linguam* se reprende el juglar

tenemos carne sin hueso, tenemos  
complice del ojo—con óleo y pigmento  
color de velador y tapiz de oriente

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.

### **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*

*gets composed: yellow the bird  
swings in its cage and the girl  
plays with her dolls –*

*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  
Arlequin, 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 anémoma la sutil  
oscilación de la anémoma  
se repite en su sangre

con un vaivén de olas;  
e olor a hembra,  
la sal de sus emanaciones

conjuga todos los ritmos  
y sin ser señor de sí  
en su concupiscencia

sustancial Arlequin  
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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*to some weeds  
starting to fade  
among the roots*

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

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

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

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

Meditativo, Arlequin se calla.

*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.*