

By Ricardo Pau-Llosa

As a boy he had trouble speaking,
past three before a real word preened
from his lips. And for the longest time,
malaprops haunted him. His older sister
did what she could to train the bitten seal
of his brain to twirl the red ball
on the nose of eloquence, and his grandmother
tired of insisting he utter the names
of toys or foods — for every desire
was coded — and gave him whatever
he grunted and pointed to.
O, the man then a boy
thought, when I tower among them
I should invent my own speech
and leave others empty and afraid
that they did not know it, could not ask
or plead their case in the one tongue
that mattered. I shall have them
look upon the simplest things,
the man then a boy thought,
and fill up with stolen awe,
and point with their faces,
their pupils wide as blackened coins,
and hope with all the revenue
shattered heart-glass can muster
that someone had grasped
their need as need and not
as the monstrous coupling
of sounds in a trance of whims.
Then, the grind of his teeth
vowed, then the plazas of my city
will fill with my name,
and their blood will matter
as little to them as to me.

Source: *Poetry* (February 2013)