

2008

## The Language of Touch

Jayme Hughes  
*Denison University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/exile>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Hughes, Jayme (2008) "The Language of Touch," *Exile*: Vol. 55 : No. 1 , Article 6.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/exile/vol55/iss1/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English at Denison Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Exile by an authorized editor of Denison Digital Commons.

JAYME HUGHES

## THE LANGUAGE OF TOUCH

Shopping at the open-air market two blocks  
from my grandmother's house, it's all about touch  
she says, running her swollen hands over the boxes  
of avocados like a concert pianist across the keys.

I am too confined in my own mind,

prone to standing there and looking instead of plunging  
my hands into the crates of peaches, the baskets  
of blueberries, the beds of ice on which fresh fish lay -  
red snappers, yellowtails, Atlantic blue fin tuna.

A physical process: her hands flutter like a bamboo fan.

She squeezes a peach, gazing into it like a crystal ball,  
searching its skin for her fingerprints, evidence of its ripeness.

Before my grandfather died, they browsed  
the outdoor bazaars every week after temple,  
my grandfather the master at sniffing a fish

to tell its freshness, especially after the cataracts  
clouded over both his eyes. The only places he went –  
temple, then the market, standing firmly  
at my grandmother's side, fingers threaded  
through hers. Everywhere else my grandmother

walked on her own, my grandfather left  
at home under his orange afghan, his fingers  
grazing the pages of the books my mother brought him  
the way hers would skim across tomato skins.

The configuration of bumps that mean nothing to me

shrink the world to fit under the pad of his finger,  
and he reads it the way he read the history  
of a mango on its rind. After he lost his sight,  
he always found the sweetest ones, full of juice  
that ran down your chin like a waterfall.