

# Speaking bluntly

Sarah Rice

If words had a weave we would feel when our lover spoke  
to us in hessian when we needed satin taffeta, and more subtle  
vocal fibres, the inflection of cashmere over merino or mohair.  
Or perhaps better, if words spoken could be felt like Braille,

a sensitive perception of the digits, under the fingertips, six  
dots raised, pin-pricks really but the pattern is all. If the sound  
of the letter felt inside the cheek could have its sharpness tested  
by tongue and teeth, before the utterance leaked out, before lips parted

company, we could test the word for bitterness, the way we test a grape,  
sucking on the sour fruit in the dark fist of the mouth, holding it  
against the light to examine its translucence. Clarity and obscurity  
are measurements of density, the length of a word's shadow, its resistance

to light, how sure-footed it is in the dark. Sometimes it seems impossible  
that speech is spoken by the likes of tongue and lips, those bodily blood-  
filled servants to flesh and heart, hatred and dreams. If words were guests  
only in the mouth, surely we would send them forth full and warm,

and perhaps they would carry our message with more care. Words stick  
in our teeth like peppercorns. We are so very aware of the rough  
edges of the apple core against our mouth's sore corner, of the tough  
leather bay leaf left in by mistake, or the softness of silken tofu.

Our lips know for certain the thick ceramic mug and the thin porcelain rim.  
We are so good at discerning too stale, too salty, too dry, or too hard.  
If we could ink up our words like a thumb-print, analyse the friction  
ridges, pick up the underlying interface of the epidermis, the better to transmit

signals, the evidence would present not the word itself but its pressure,  
and through impression – intention, weight. Words put their hands on us  
and press. Speech leaves its imprint, a smoky graphite smudge  
with its map of thin white lines where the fine print lies.

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