

# Origin of Beads

It begins with the nipple –  
its hard  
ridges and granulations  
the brush  
of newborn fingers across  
a milk-taut breast,  
measure of earth's curvature,  
feeding the primal thirst  
for touch.

It begins with the eye  
before language strings  
syllables into speech  
the word in a glance  
in a look that fondles  
the contours of a milk-soft  
head, vulnerable cheek  
feasts on the sweetness  
of new skin and traps  
in a kaleidoscopic net  
the infant's gaze, hooked  
by light.

This fierce joy  
this hunger for flesh  
a God  
born of her flesh  
is the first bead.

# Primal Sense

I soap his newborn skin  
with sandalwood, massage  
his elastic limbs with oil  
pressed from the stones  
of apricots, outline each  
sculpted finger and toe  
and stroke the smooth planes  
of his soles. Vertebrae ripple  
beneath my hands like birdsong.

If smell is primal sense  
I want his memories to be  
milk and honey and spice.  
I want to rub away the cold  
odour of a glass crib, the bland  
steel instruments, the meaty  
pungency of blood. I want to plant  
his morning with fruit trees  
and forests of fragrant wood.

# Earth Children

*Cro-Magnon burials at Sungir, ca 25,000 BC – excavated 1969*

In a grave scraped in the permafrost  
a girl of eight and an adolescent boy  
lie together, head to head.

Beads bracelet their wrists  
and ring their fingers, strings of beads  
are basted to their clothes:

ten thousand ornate discs  
sliced from mammoth tusk,  
softened by fire and pierced.

Were they high born, buried with tears  
and ceremony, sent to an afterlife  
equipped with weapons and treasure?

Or sacrificed, invoking light to swallow  
the long darkness when the hunter  
is blind to his prey,

a prayer for the herds' return  
to wind-scoured steppe as the ice  
retreats beneath a milder sky,

or a plea for gods long absent to walk  
the earth again and feast to the music  
of bird bone flutes?

The beads of polished ivory gleam  
on their small skeletons – sparks of light  
strike the glacier's face.

## Irezumi Lover

*a tanka sequence after the Man'yōshū*

Under your plain robe  
you're clothed with the brocade  
of your skin –  
hidden designs, secret  
as our passion.

So cool to touch  
this living canvas stitched  
with needle fire.  
Lie beneath me while I trace  
my desires upon you.

All the seasons bloom  
together in the garden  
of your body.  
Even cherry blossoms mock  
our too-brief nights of love.

Red chrysanthemums  
and sacred lotus lilies  
unfurl on your arms.  
Let me wrap you around me  
like an embroidered sash.

In your bamboo grove  
branches straight and slender  
spear the soft sky.  
As canes bend to the wind's kiss  
so I tremble at your vigour.

A golden carp  
glistening on your groin  
climbs a waterfall.  
Tonight, climb this ravine,  
swim my deep river.

Entwined in flight –  
feathered shadings of the crane's  
long trailing wings  
embrace me. How I wish  
we might be paired for life!

Above your belly  
the whiskered catfish holds me  
on waves of pleasure.  
When he flips his tail I drown  
beneath tsunami waters.

Nine fierce dragons  
ripple their sinuous tails  
across your smooth limbs.  
Rain from a thousand clouds  
cannot quench my thirst for you.

A swirl of clouds –  
the dragon over your heart  
clutches a pearl.  
Storms and sun, earth and stars,  
are in your power, like me.

The goddess Benten  
drapes flowing robes of colour  
all down your back.  
Would that I could ride you  
so close and constantly.

Shadowed arbour –  
a closed peony at rest  
between two strong trees.  
It opens in my fingers  
and spills its seed.

How I love to play  
in the wild meadow  
of your thighs.  
Should you impregnate me  
I would give birth to flowers.

As this maple leaf  
etched in crimson ink  
defies the winter,  
may the imprint of my skin  
on yours refuse to fade.

This willow leaning  
over the rushing stream  
must remember me –  
so often have my lips  
brushed against its leaves.

When you don't come  
to share the night with me  
I lie awake  
envying the coloured ink  
carved into your skin.

Fudo Myo-o  
blue face and gleaming sword  
haloed in flames –  
sever the iron gates that keep  
my love and me apart.

Only four days  
before the harvest moon  
is fully swollen.  
I count the endless hours  
until you fill me again.

## Seeds

I am sixteen and the cantaloupes are gold  
beneath their basketweave. I ripen  
with each mouthful of succulence  
wanting this sweetness to fill me  
as sap fills the frangipani tree  
as tides fill the pitted sandstone shelves  
above the beach, as seed fills the starry  
centre of the cantaloupe. I scoop and rinse  
a hundred grains, rub away the membrane  
and spread them in the sun to dry.  
I string them onto cotton thread and paint  
the spiky necklace hot pink with nail polish.  
I am hot and spiky and ripe, my breasts  
are rock hard melon sweet.