

nature of the soul. I remembered particularly, apropos of my own astonishing moment in the street, a famous poem in which the poet wandered on the byways of London several hundred years ago,

*"and mark in every face I meet  
marks of weakness, marks of woe."*

I read this poem again, but found that it did not shed any further light on what I was after, and turned idly over the pages till my eye was caught by the lines

*"seeking after that sweet golden clime  
where the travelers journey is done."*

I felt at that moment a wave of such great sadness pass over me that I knew that my vision of the early afternoon had returned, and this time in such intensity that I stared stupefied with knowledge of the words written on the page, as if there had been a magical formulation of my own awakening comprehension of joy. I looked out the window at the sky above Harlem, beyond the bare, stained, brick wall of the next building, through the massive distances of the cloudless and immobile atmosphere toward the unseen stars, and felt the gigantic weight of Time.

I then found the poem "The Sick Rose" and when I came to

*"the invisible worm  
that flies in the night  
in the howling storm"*

and read on to

*"his dark secret love  
does thy life destroy"*

I realized once more that the last and most terrible veil had been torn from my eyes, a final shuddering glimpse through death. Then I moved across the room with the gnawing pulse of animality engulfing my body with slow carnal undulations of my frame, and shrieked and collapsed in silent agony, moaning on the floor, my hands grasping and hollowed in my thighs.

## SONG OF SKINS

from **ANXIETY OF WORDS: CONTEMPORARY POETRY BY  
KOREAN WOMEN** (2006)

by Kim Hyesoon

trans. Don Mee Choi

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*The open lips find my breasts  
though they weren't told where mine were,  
draining sweet water from my body.  
They want to suckle again right after they've eaten.  
First the saliva evaporates inside my mouth,  
tears vanish from my eyes,  
veins shrivel,  
blood fades,  
trees and plants collapse,  
the Nakdong River dries up,  
and its floor shrieks as it explodes.  
My whole body is pumped out.  
Even though you vomit what you've just eaten,  
your open lips still hang onto my nipples  
till my body is emptied  
of everything but dry bones and skin,  
till the heaven's castle splits  
and the Milky Way shatters,  
till I can think of nothing  
and my soul withers and dies.*