

Fossils

Martin Robertson

Here in this rock lie stony semblances
of shells—here was the sea;
and in this coal a leaf—this was a tree.
Leaf and shell
are with us still
but delicately other than these;
a world of life perished and vanished
taps us these messages.

Hearts flower in words, or works of hand and mind,
song and colour and stone,
or in the whispering of two alone;
melting mist
or tough to outlast
their time, their race—perhaps mankind,
featureless in a swarming desolation
as light falls on the blind.

Paris loves Helen in all tongues of the world,
Gorgias Tamynis on a sherd
in a scratched verse, and A.G. on a wall
in chalk R.H. On the Roman vault
Adam is made man in one image, Eve
in another woman, for love.

Love is the heart's flower
not only in these lovers'
cries—in all that sprang
from Michelangelo's hand or Homer's tongue,
all craft or thought
achieves with heart;
a little known,
world on world gone.

Spare a small grief
for lovely shell or leaf
that loosed or crushed before its hour
left unfulfilled its being, nor
vanishing stamped its image on
the less ephemeral stone.