

# our measured treads

*by* strannikov

## **in the neighborhood of Vesuvius**

for Herculaneum as for Pompeii  
the blast announced: "too late to flee".  
all public streets each private space  
all sites decreed—no lives survive.

—yet frantic to outrun the racing sky  
useless curses hurled 'pon falling down  
moments colliding cooking frozen steps  
paces cease as hot grey mortar swims  
few hurries left to be in—

carts horses mules without speed  
with no escapes no paths away  
shores achoke while being pushed offshore  
boats ablaze float off to sink  
as ash displaces every air  
no space for bugs nor birds to fly.

racing only out of life this day  
concealing child's from ashen air  
bricks lie beneath thick mortared rain  
grey ash the whisper of the world  
all silences are swallowed gone.

clouds had to be inhaled this day  
no place was given else to breathe:  
faithful dogs howl and howl no more  
rats perish, cats slink off to die  
each curled into enduring sleep  
in each grey corner hidden deep

relentless storms of ash fell grey  
rinsing floors caking tiles silencing all steps.

moans of final prayers subside: hearing gods  
listen as ashes wash over those towns  
hear floods of ash wash through those towns  
into submerged sealed silenced sleeps.

### **crowds commuting to**

I recall hearing hundreds sprawl  
across the terminal's paved floors  
most for the escalators bound  
(career-bound for cabs, at least some few)  
most a scurry of legs like me  
legs quick as the wheels of the trains  
that had traveled us there, that far.

some dashed to one side first to shop:  
might drop off some shoes for repair  
or browse newspaper racks for truth  
(preferred reads for coffees at desks)  
bagels doughnuts cinnamon buns  
voices asleep in coffee queues.

I saw over twelve hundred times  
morning commutes across five years  
regularly keen to see them  
more faces an hour than back home  
(where not one minute's faces lived,  
nor to be seen in just one day)—  
hundreds of faces, thousands, too,  
varieties of faces read  
for features expressions displayed

for what their histories could tell.

through twenty seasons faces march—  
not as battalions, regiments  
aligned in step, alike in garb—  
but pedestrian, none the less.

their faces moved as fast as legs  
through any weather any day  
(Mondays through Fridays, holidays off)  
with and without umbrellas in hand  
with and without overcoats and hats  
depending on the season and day,  
no scarves in summer, gloved winter hands.

—and the god presiding over all  
a four-faced, double-Janused clock  
its equal seconds clickt away  
ticking us our steps and breaths  
timing us to traffic and to trains  
chronicling moments of blurring sight  
circling over chattered talk clattered steps—  
but not naming once how late the day.

