

4. FOOTPRINTS IN CHAOS

You know old footprints in lava, yes? they endeavour to make their way
over the
weathered lava on the back seat of a bouncing taxi, their bodies
intertwining,
a woman's voice on the crackling taxi radio begins
out of the blue
to quote from Osip Mandelstam's poems in Italian,
Eurydice says
that the irrational lies at the heart of the
rational universe
and smiles
but how much farther can it be, a uorescent
plastic Madonna
swings back and forth along with the taxi's twists and turns, but then
they're there
and proceed to descend time's
gently sloping path,
they go barefoot and feel the grass cool, then suddenly burning
hot, an incandescent mud, a living siliceous mass of
creamy cement,
it is 385,000 years ago, and the prints they leave in the hot
ash
will remain
though they keep walking on down the slope
everything is
sloping
they walk and walk then start to run, they're scared that the volcano
is
going
to erupt again and the mountain
to burn and
the animals run before them, all running, zig-zagging, the air is on fire
no one knows
what will happen, what has happened, no one knows whether the throat
and the organs of speech
were fully developed, but there on the slope
it has nothing
to do with words. Much farther on, where the porous layer of tophus has
been eroded,
spoor are
become speech, and chaos comes into view, all
lines
criss-cross to form a wall of colour and sound that go together in one
last gesture: a perfect foot.

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