



## Ashes To Ashes

Why?

They asked us.

Why here? What about the danger?

It's our home, we said,

Our community.

These volcanic ashy soils:

so rich, so fertile, so good for cultivation.

Look at our grapes, taste the wine, do you not see now?

And as for the view...look at that vista.

Have you ever seen such lush vines, have you ever smelt such fresh air?

Have you ever felt such peace and serenity?

Of course, there is a danger, we said,  
The spoils don't come without the risk.

But we prayed,

We prayed to the goddess of Vesuvius,

We thanked her, gave her offerings

To celebrate our harvests.

She seemed appeased,

Our benevolent Mother.

Gazing down kindly, blessing us with bounty,

So that traders arrived on our shores

To offer up treasures for our sweet blessings.

Then, in an instant, she was gone.

An angry, vindictive monster stood in her place,

Fire and brimstone scattered from her formerly generous fingers,

Spreading death and destruction to all who gazed on her,

Petrified.



The air filled with poisonous gases,  
We choked, we fell where we stood,  
No warning,  
No time to escape.  
Annihilated.  
Buried with our perfect produce in our hands.  
In our ghost town.  
In Pompeii.  
Ashes to ashes,  
Dust to dust.

**Pompeii** – an ancient Roman city in Campania, Italy. Located at the base of Mount Vesuvius, which erupted in 79AD, burying the town and its inhabitants in a cloud of poisonous gases, ash and pumice. The city lay buried until it was discovered in a preserved state in the 1700s, when much of it was found to be intact, with moulded stone shapes of people’s body forms and buildings preserved from the moment they were buried. Over the centuries, the site has undergone much excavation by archaeologists, allowing detailed study of Roman life at the time of Vesuvius’ eruption.

## VIPERS QUESTIONS

- S** Summarise what this poem is about.
- R** Why did people choose to live there?
- R** Why did people travel there?
- R** How do you know they weren’t worried about the volcano?
- E** Why weren’t they worried?
- V** What is the meaning of benevolent?
- V** What does it mean for something to be “annihilated”?
- E** What is the significance of the word “Petrified”?
- E** Explain, with reference to the text, how does the contrasting imagery for the volcano helps you understand the poem?
- R** What has happened to the narrator?
- I** What is the significance of the final lines? For the narrator? For Pompeii?