

Lithium

*third element of the Periodic Table; adjectival derivative of Greek lithos (rock);
“made of rock”*

Sisyphus with his rock knows
about same. Same rock. Same
journey forcing him into
same self. And now I too
have my daily rock
pushing me up against
a samer self.

What did you lose, Sisyphus?

Myself, I first lost the sense
of myself as lit fuse
stepping on detonators;
my old nickname, “Volcano.”

You lost far more than the yen
to rustle cattle. I’m sure of it.

Next went whisperlight sleep.
I used to waken
if a moth snored;
I missed nothing.
Tied to this stone, I sink
immediately; the world,
despite my inattention, turns.

What about your wheedling tongue?
Do you miss being able to talk your way into
and out of *anything*?

Strangest for me, the confetti-forming
over my words. Now when I see
“Follow my directions exactly” I read
“Follow my actions directly.” *Omniscience*
now suggests *omissions*; in *pertinent*
I hear a lurking *penitent* and *aspiration* surely
needs an *aspirin*.

Horrified, in some measure
at least, my laughter
used to be at those who said *biblical cord*

for umbilical, or *ornithologist*
for oncologist; who spoke of *Tenerife*
when they meant Tel Aviv.

Such aural malappropriation seemed to me
so wrong, and yet no word exists alone.
Each has tackle to grapple it
to other words, to make
meaning and sentence; but each, also,
an aura—spokes of aural trceries,
so that the cuckoo of ornithologist
sits as spokily in its cancer-care nest
as does *plum* with *plump* . . .

Sisyphus, my tongue that spoke straight,
correct, now bends to the roof of my mouth
to send the stone down my throat.