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## Poetry by Lesley Wheeler



### Catbird

Mimic the mimid, heavy with midges  
and a trashy mewling song. She swipes  
stalks from the bed, hops to the shortest  
post of the fence, sidles up it then glides  
with a beakful to build, somewhere  
low down, a steeply-angled nest.  
A jaded scheme; no effort wasted.  
Why work one wingbeat harder  
than this untidy world requires?

## Catbird

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The only possible reply: a screech  
from the lilac, its flower-cones  
gone brown, valentine leaves concealing  
a clutch of blue-green eggs, or  
green-blue, dubious tint but  
hot with obstinacy, late spring  
luck, and all her cupped refusals.

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### Step One

The news outside is nothing good. Catbird  
flirts her tail a while then gives it up,  
too hot to cry. A black walnut fruits hard,  
concealing fists beneath serrated leaflets.  
Creepers strangle laurels. The creek's a drip  
over dusty scree. Crabs gleam like planets

of ill omen. But at least that world's alive

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to rage and mourn. Step from the insulated  
box where vents exhale, dreamless, sedated,  
and a washing machine simulates a grief  
you do not feel, to share the evil weather.  
Let half-dead grass crackle underfoot. Sweat.  
Be observed. Trees will whisper overhead  
in another language. They're not happy, either.

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Lesley Wheeler is the author of two new books: *The State She's In* (Tinderbox Editions, 2020) and *Unbecoming* (Aqueduct Press, 2020). *Poetry's Possible Worlds*, her essay collection about twenty-first-century poetry, is forthcoming in 2021. Her poems and essays appear in *The Common*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Ecotone*, *The Massachusetts Review*, and other journals, and she is poetry editor of *Shenandoah*. Wheeler lives in Virginia and teaches at Washington and Lee University.

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