

[Catbird](#) [1]

December 14, 2020 [Featured Poetry](#) [2]

[TW at Ten](#) [3]

[Nature](#) [4]

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?

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.

- [5]



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

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.

- [5]

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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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Links:

- [1] <https://talkingwriting.com/catbird>
- [2] <https://talkingwriting.com/talkingwriting-categories/featured-poetry>
- [3] <https://talkingwriting.com/taxonomy/term/2055>
- [4] <https://talkingwriting.com/tw-channels-and-categories/nature>
- [5] https://soundcloud.com/talking_writing
- [6] <https://www.flickr.com/photos/biggreymare/3862380342/>
- [7] <https://www.flickr.com/photos/starwillowstudio/3579452699/>