

LESLEY WHEELER

Heathen

My son fits his ear to my ear
so the god in your head can talk
to the god in mine. I hear a forest
creak like the binding of a book.

It is full of red wings, bogs,
and ravenous beasts, yet he treads
safely in his own wildness.
Me, I'm afraid. The god in my head

is a bear and not the talking kind.
He rears up, slavering, unsheathes
his nails, famished for sacrifice.
His prison is a vast cold heath.

I hope the bear is asleep. At the edge
of his cave, flowers breathe. Scent blows
from me and the she-wolf in my son
catches it, pushes her snout to the rose

canal and snuffles. He likes to leash
her in vines. She likes to snap them. Gods
abhor quiet, the skull-bone closing.
Walls that mount clod by clod.