

SANDRA KOHLER

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Heraclitus Returns

This morning, looking at a photograph  
of Bellini's Saint Francis in Ecstasy,  
I find you in the background, unexpected  
discovery: great blue heron, bird I watched  
for decades on the Susquehanna's shores,  
christening you Heraclitus. Here you are,  
in a landscape meant to signify Moses'  
Egypt, but clearly Tuscan countryside,  
nearly garden, rich in flora and fauna,  
rocks and water, the towers of its  
distant hill town signifiers  
like all the other details  
of this landscape,  
including  
you.

You are poised next to a small red bird,  
still and stiffened as the pointed ears  
of the donkey behind you, attentive  
to this moment as is everything in this  
painting, above all Francis himself,  
head thrown back, arms opened to  
receive rays of light from some  
mysterious source inflicting  
the invisible stigmata,  
illuminating him,  
making him  
saint.

Centuries later, you are here again,  
on the ocean shore I walk as exile,  
your return a series of incarnations:  
first the black-crowned night heron,  
smaller than a great blue, hunched,  
ominous, at the waterline, then

a few mornings later, white  
egret at the edge of the bay  
waters, ghost heron glimpsed  
at the periphery of my vision,  
white form I'm tempted  
to name  
regret.

Then one morning it's you, Heraclitus,  
great blue heron, and for the first time in  
this exile I'm struck by the possibility  
of walking with pleasure again, of exile's  
landscape becoming revelation,  
vision returned to me as you have,  
materializing on a stretch of sand  
between two beaches, rare and  
singular among the urban gulls'  
raucous rancor. You are  
there and gone, vanishing  
quickly but there,  
here, now,  
heron.



## ABOUT SANDRA KOHLER

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Sandra Kohler is the author of *The Country of Women* (Calyx Books 1995), *The Ceremonies of Longing* (University of Pittsburgh Press 2003), and *Improbable Music* (Word Press 2011). Her poetry has appeared in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Prairie Schooner*, *New Republic*, *Tar River Poetry*, and *Notre Dame Review*. She received a PhD in English literature from Bryn Mawr College, and has taught literature and writing in venues ranging from elementary school to university. A resident of Pennsylvania for most of her adult life, she now lives in Boston, Massachusetts.

