

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

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.

