

Otter & Seal

in Schull Harbor

JOHN KINSELLA

for Tim and for John Kerrigan

1.

Pier's end betokens
cored discs of fireworks,
distracted wrappers

of celebration, of spent
rapture through drizzle
which holds Clear Island;

a harbor seal bottles,
snorts air with traces of salt solution,
and, yes, *studies* us—off starboard

an otter lifts and rises
higher than any spring metal,
falls back to twist into drift

with compulsion; otter & seal
enact within recall of dazzle—
fireworks suppressed to memory,

filtered out into harbor,
glimmer off gray-green surface
without sun, a daytime

resuscitation of fishways,
small trawlers stilled to death
at their moorings, and landdogs

running to the pier
to pursue otter & seal
against medium, against restraint,
land to air to water.

2.

The story of seeing
should not be forgotten
by the teller—called out

to engage otter, called out
to engage seal, adding circles of witness,
gathering vision of seal *and* otter—

fraternal, paternal, fluid
as soup of harbor with dross
and essential ingredients,

the heavy hunting zone
no one's leisure, but all between
is essential also, matters more,
submariners.

3.

I have been obsessed with otters
since reading *Ring of Bright Water*
as a seven-year-old near the otterless

river of my Australian childhood, where water
rats came up through torrefied gardens
and dropped dead on back lawns,

and where water rat vs. otter
matched creature with reading
rather than creature to speech.

Obsessed. Then I let go and let
water rat be water rat, and Scotland
be Scotland. And now

in this Ireland we construct
return on return that is nothing
and everything to do with a presence,

in zone of otter speech and seal reading,
of thought and utterance—*listen and hear*
to the slip of water, the oil of fur

and breath overload with snort of seal.
Exhalation. Vapor. Together and not, they
work the waterishness, looking to blackened
red rock edge, where to emerge, consider.

4.

Water and fire: breakdown
of spectrum. So much of “home” burns
and here it drizzles on and on in emergence,

the inflamed ambience of “celebratory” afterthought:
residues, pollutants, discards, ingredients
of fireworks and bait, the schools of fish

a diver (compact bird?) goes for, too, small
and abrupt and glossed, rising from under.
Submergences and emergences, from slip to glide

to smoke, to drift, to drizzle, to slide to storm—
fireworks—oxidation counterpoint
as all air is sucked out from where
we come from—evacuating, now, GMT?