Otter & Seal
in Schull Harbor

JOHN KINSELLA

for Tim and for John Kerrigan

1.

Pier's end betokens
cored discs of fireworks,
distraught 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?