

Paul Anderson

WATCHING OTTERS IN TIME

“Lie down like children in this holiness . . .”

—Wallace Stevens, “The Auroras of Autumn”

They pour their bodies down in surface dives,
Hunting their food, coming up with blunt
Muzzles dripping and fur frazzled, sending
Their musical cries toward the strange one who watches
From shore. With lazy tails and primly folded
Paws, they relax and idle backward across
The icy April lake, plunging to pursue
The spawning rainbows. One comes up gripping
An egg-swelled belly with needle teeth, the trout
Squirming to escape, the otter firm and impassive.

The easy violence calls me home somehow:
I shed the skin of innocence. But watching
One otter swim to shore and shake the spray
From his pelt like a dog, hearing the trout being
Devoured, I feel the final leathery shudder
Of the last mammoth shiver across my skin,
The shoreline hemlocks toppled by tides, children
Embedded in new Mindanao Deeps where Seattle
Sank and, on some deep interior pool,
An otter swimming and singing his unheard song.

