

Paul Zimmer

IN APPLE COUNTRY

A year begins with marriage in apple country,
Immaculate drift of lace in light crosswinds,
Consummation of dusts, caverns of blossoms,
Endless circles forming and expanding.

As a child I drew circles for hours,
Arcing the compass around its point
To feel the pleasure of circumference,
Roundness conjoined, swallowing, embracing,
Shoe box full of buckeyes in their husks,
Baseballs, acorns, bags of marbles,
Tulip bulbs, yo-yo's, dandelions—
But ripe apples sliced across always
Made the most perfect circles of all.

Late in harvest good pickers wear gloves
To keep their fingertips from frostbite,
The delicate twist and pluck—
A hundred and fifty bushels a day.

Do apples die when they are picked?
When they tumble from baskets and bags,
Bruised, crushed, slithering under bootsoles?
When the first bite is taken,
Sweet death dribbling onto the chin?

In truth they triumph and abide.
Now if all the apples ripening in apple country
On one autumn day and all the circles
Ever grown in these old orchards
Draped across the ridges of driftless hills,
Were counted by some great master,

The sum would equal the number of stars
In western skies on an autumn night.

I lean back in my garden chair and watch
The great harvests turn slowly in vast distances—
Red, yellow, green, their blemishes and tiny wormholes
Revolving in the October sky all the way
Out to the round ends of the universe.

THE END BEFORE THE END

My friend is driving me from Denver
To Colorado Springs the long way
On the scenic route, when his car
Vapor-locks and lurches to the berm.

Two rickety, old pals—there we are,
Many decades past our undaunted youths,
One diabetic, the other asthmatic,
Fifty miles from insulin or ventolin,
In a dead car, with shadows lengthening
And strong wind rising with our stress.

As we walk we contemplate
The vast, chilled foothills of age,
Envision snow descending with the light
To bury the road and blind us,
So that we waver off into aspens
To die, our bones found in spring,
Unglued like ancient furniture,
Scattered and whittled by animals—
Pitiful, old fools, stunned by years,
Paying at last for early excesses
And now for final misjudgments.