The Apple Tree

Galway Kinnell
The Apple Tree

I remember this tree,
its white flowers all unfallen.
It's the fall, the unfallen apples
hold their brightness
a little longer into the blue air, hold the idea
that they can be brighter.

We create without turning,
without looking back, without ever
really knowing we create.
Having tasted
the first flower of the first spring
we go on.
we don't turn again
until we touch the last flower of the last spring.

And that day, fondling
each grain one more time, like the overturned hourglass,
we die
of the return-streaming of everything we have lived.

When the fallen apple rolls
into the grass, the apple worm
stops, then goes
all the way through and looks out
at the creation unopposed, the world
made entirely of lovers.

Or else there is no such thing as memory,
or else there are only the empty branches,
only the blossoms upon them.
only the apples.
that still grow full.
that still fail into brightness.
that still invent past their own decay the dream
they can be brighter.
that still
that still

The one who holds still and looks out,
alone
of all of us,
that one may die mostly of happiness.

Galway Kinnell, Pulitzer Prize winning poet and former MacArthur Fellow, read his work as part of Poetry Night at Grand Valley State University in October 2003. He is the author of A New Selected Poems, Imperfect Thirst, and seven other books of poetry. Reprinted by permission of the author.