



After The Fire: A Writer Finds His Place

Paul Zimmer

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We all dream of finding the place we can be most ourselves, the landscape that seems to have been crafted just for us. The poet Paul Zimmer has found his: a farm in the driftless hills of southwestern Wisconsin, a region of rolling land and crooked rivers, "driftless" because here the great glaciers of the Patrician age split widely, leaving behind a heart-shaped area untouched by crushing ice. After the Fire is the story of Zimmer's journey from his boyhood in the factory town of Canton, Ohio, and his days as a soldier during atomic tests in the Nevada desert, to his many years in the book business as a writer and publisher, and the rural tranquility of his present life. Zimmer juxtaposes timeless rustic subjects (tending the land, country people and their ways, the ever-changing beauty of his natural surroundings) with flashbacks to key moments: his first and only boxing match, hearing Count Basie play and discovering his lifelong love of jazz, his return to the France of his ancestors, his painful departure from the publishing world after forty years. These stories are full of humor and pathos, keen insights and poignant meditations, but the real center of the book is the abiding beauty of the driftless hills, the silence and peace that is the source of and reward for Zimmer's hard-won wisdom. Above all, it is a consideration of the ways that nature provides deep meaning and solace, and of the importance of finding the right place.

Paul Zimmer is a much honored and widely published poet and essayist, the author of eight volumes of poetry. His work has received awards from the American Institute of Arts and Letters and been selected for the National Poetry Series. He was a finalist in the essay category for the 1998 National Magazine Award, and for the past two years works by him have been selected as Notable Essays in the Best American Essays series. Zimmer lives on a farm near Soldiers Grove, Wisconsin, and spends part of each year in the south of France.

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