



Negative Blue: Selected Later Poems

Charles Wright

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The culmination of the cycle that won Wright the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Critics Circle Award

*Time will append us like suit coats left out overnight
On a deck chair, loose change dead weight in the right pocket,
Silk handkerchief limp with dew,
sleeves in a slow dance with the wind.
And love will kill us--
Love, and the winds from under the earth
that grind us to grain-out.
--from "Still Life with Spring and Time to Burn"*

When Charles Wright published *Appalachia* in 1998, it marked the completion of a nine-volume project, of which James Longenbach wrote in the *Boston Review*, "Charles Wright's trilogy of trilogies--call it 'The Appalachian Book of the Dead'--is sure to be counted among the great long poems of the century."

The first two of those trilogies were collected in *Country Music* (1982) and *The World of the Ten Thousand Things* (1990). Here Wright adds to his third trilogy (*Chickamauga* [1995], *Black Zodiac* [1997], and *Appalachia* [1998]) a section of new poems that suggest new directions in the work of this sensuous, spirit-haunted poet.

Negative Blue: Selected Later Poems Details

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Melissa says

I like the wordiness and the layers of adjectives just falling all over each other.

Mike says

Wright's best single collection of poems. His verse is a mystic reading of landscapes physical and spiritual.

It's kind of like tossing Walt Whitman and Lao Tzu in the large hadron collider.

Greg Converse says

What a great poet, I thought. What a way to write a poem.

S. says

Not a book to whizz through. Much of this is sublime, as Charles Wright is sublime. I love his poetry. At times, though, some of it started to seem like itself, all fine and true to one's art, but occasionally a slog for the reader.

Jessica says

One of my favorite poets of all time. This book was gorgeous and brilliant in many places, but a surprising number of clunkers so that I wish I could give it a 4.5. A tree undergoing chemotherapy, for instance, was an image that caused me to cringe. Most of the clunkers had to do with ascribing human illnesses and/or prescriptions to natural phenomena.

ON the other hand, Charles Wright is a master almost all of the time.

Keith says

Wonderful. I could live in these poems.

Keli Wright says

This is the first Charles Wright collection I've read. I appreciated the natural imagery, the interesting mix of backyard and international vantage points, the reaction pieces to his reading material. There were many "moments" as I read, and a few full poems that really spoke to me. There were also times when I thought "there's that arborvitae, again...."

What appeals to me most is the recurrent theme of internal spiritual/religious struggle and Wright's facility in connecting the natural with the supernatural in a realistic, non-fantastical way--from the recurrent references to the titular "Blue" that ties the Heavens with the Earth (e.g., Blue Ridge Mountains) to the constant use of images of winter-barren plant life. The Man (Adam?) I see throughout this collection is one who, after a youth of religious devotion and fervid expectation, has experienced a life that challenges that Springtime passion. At the end, he sees rather an absent God, one who has lost interest in His creation. But even then, the Man cannot deny God's existence, though at times it appears that this is his desire. It seems that the essence of God remains, but the Edenic rupture has yet to heal. Throughout the poems, there is a thread of anger, frustration, abandonment, and doubt as to whether that rupture can heal. But always there remains a sense of reality, even if that reality is difficult to put into words; the spiritual/religious elements are rooted in solid ground, not flitting about in ether.

A bit of the poem "Ostinato and Drone" speaks to this:

"It's reasonable to represent anything that really exists
by that thing which doesn't exist,
Daniel Defoe said.
and that's what we're talking about, the difference between the
voice and the word,
The voice continuing to come back in splendor,
the word still not forthcoming.
We're talking about the bush on fire.
We're talking about this quince bush, its noonday brilliance of light."

This book is not a skimmer. It deserves consideration. My observations are limited by my knowledge of Mr. Wright and my single reading of this collection.

S.D. Johnson says

Already have 2 of 3 of the works from which these poems are culled. Yup, I just got it for its amazing cover, featuring The Creation and the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise by Giovanni di Paolo, even more beautiful in hardcover.

Patrick Mcgee says

Charles Wright great as always.

Ross says

*Desire discriminates and language discriminates:
They form no part of the essence of things:
each word
Is a failure, each object
We name and place
leads us another step away from the light.*

*Loss is its own gain.
Its secret is emptiness.
Our images lie in the flat pools of their dark selves
Like bodies of water the tide moves.
They move as the tide moves.
Its secret is emptiness.*

A great collection of work by an underrated poet. In Wright's poetry, Paul Celan, Du Fu, and Dante meet and discuss the Appalachians. This kaleidoscopic conversation is nowhere more evident than the selections from *Chickamauga*—which, for me, are the strongest.

Maegan Wendt says

One of my favorite poets
