

Wright, Charles  
NEGATIVE BLUE  
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This volume of Wright's work contains the three collections in the third of his three trilogies of three collections each, plus, if your eyes have not yet glazed over, some additional material referred to in the subtitle as "Selected Later Poems" which the publisher felt it necessary to bring to our attention lest our joy thrice three be incomplete. He needn't have bothered himself—or us. An ennead is more than enough. The poet himself declares, with typical grace, early on in the first of the third of these three tripartite trilogies, "Unlike a disease, whatever I've learned isn't communicable." Since Mr. Wright teaches at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, it will be hoped he was just kidding. Later on he says, "The poem is a code with no message," a principle he has clearly mastered. Wright balances all this negative attitude with some way cool faux Zen detachment, writing verse in the manner, he says, of Li Ho, and Tu Fu, and Lao Tzu, and Wang Wei, and Li Po. But only rarely does Wright write like someone who is not a depressed cynic. He is proclaimed an Appalachian poet, yet other than mentioning a couple of shrubs that won't grow in the North, Wright gives us only endlessly abstract "landscapes," a term he tosses into his poems with a frequency most writers reserve for the indefinite article. He is also depressing. Nothing is beautiful. Even a sunset is seen, with incredible triple alliteration, as "life's loss-*logo*." The verse is dry, dull, and, in true academic fashion, almost wholly detached from its subject matter, i.e., anything real.

With themes like emptiness, silence, and stasis repeated in triplicate, it grows three times harder to care.