



## Caribou: Poems

*Charles Wright*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

# Caribou: Poems

Charles Wright

**Caribou: Poems** Charles Wright

**A powerfully moving meditation on life, nature, and the beyond, from one of our finest American poets**

This is an old man's poetry,  
written by someone who's spent his life  
Looking for one truth.  
Sorry, pal, there isn't one.  
—from "Ancient of Days"

Charles Wright's truth—the truth of nature, of man's yearning for the divine, of aging—is at the heart of the renowned poet's latest collection, *Caribou*. At once an elegy to simple beauty (a sunset the same color as the maple tree in his neighbor's yard, "Nature and nature head-butt") and an expression of Wright's restless questing for a reality beyond the one before our eyes ("Between the divine and the divine / lives a lavish shadow. / Do we avoid it or stand in it? / Do we gather the darkness around us, / or do we let it slide by?"), *Caribou's* strength is in its quiet, subtle profundity.

"It's good to be here," Wright tells us. "It's good to be where the world's quiescent, and reminiscent." And to be here—in the pages of this stirring collection—is more than good; it's another remarkable gift from the poet around whose influence "the whole world seems to orbit in a kind of meditative, slow circle" (*Poetry*).

## Caribou: Poems Details

Date : Published March 18th 2014 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux

ISBN : 9780374119027

Author : Charles Wright

Format : Hardcover 96 pages

Genre : Poetry

 [Download Caribou: Poems ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Caribou: Poems ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online Caribou: Poems Charles Wright**

---

## From Reader Review Caribou: Poems for online ebook

### Richard says

I have long been an admirer of Wright's poetry, and this volume only supports that feeling.

"...  
This is an old man's poetry,  
written by somebody who's spent his life  
Looking for one truth.  
Sorry, pal, there isn't one.  
Unless, of course, the trees and their blown-down relatives  
Are part of it.  
..."  
--"Ancient of Days"

The book is divided into three parts: "Echoes," "End Papers," "Apocrypha."

Firmly grounded in the natural world, these poems reflect one being between an evanescent past and an unknown future. The poetry is certainly superior, and I have some clear favorites: "Homage to Samuel Beckett," "Heaven's Eel," "'I've Been Sitting Here Thinking Back Over My Life . . .,'" "Lost Highways."

I shall to return to this volume often and to the rest of his work as well. It strikes me like seeing a wet tree in the twilight, beautiful yet familiar.

---

### mwpm says

This is an old man's poetry,  
written by someone who's spent his life  
Looking for one truth.  
Sorry, pal, there isn't one.  
— *from* **Ancient of Days**

The lines quoted above betray the fatigue that is present throughout the collection. Indeed, the poet is an old man (79 y/o when *Caribou* was published in 2014). Perhaps he is acknowledging what I have identified, having identified it himself and having anticipated that others will identify it. Though it seems unlikely. The lines are less self-deprecating than I'm painting them. On the contrary, the lines have been repeatedly held up as an example of what's good about this collection. Adhering to a romanticism worthy of the outdated poet archetype: the old man coming down from the mountain to share his wisdom. There's a lot that's good about this collection, but this isn't it.

The canonized lines of "Ancient of Days" aren't the first symptoms of fatigue, and they aren't the last. There seems to be a disharmony in the arrangement of the poems. Although the collection is divided into three parts (Echoes, End Papers, and Apocrypha), the three parts fail to dictate a thematic arrangement. Indeed, the poems are unruly. They say what they want, where they want, when they want. A poem entitled "Things

Have End and Beginnings" stresses that "Grace is the instinct for knowing when to stop. And where." at the risk of betraying his lack of grace...

Cloud mountains rise over mountain range.  
Silence and quietness,  
sky bright as water, sky bright as lake water.  
Grace is the instinct for knowing when to stop. And where.  
- **"Things Have Ends and Beginnings"** (pg. 26)

Not a bad poem. It's eloquence, however, is lost on me. His use of repetition is awkward. What's more, it is placed not at the beginning, not at the end, but second to last in the first part (Echoes). It is followed by a blank page. A false ending! The blank page is followed by another poem. And then on to the second part (End Papers). An uncommonly short poem, one could argue that the message ("knowing when to stop. And where.") is limited to the lines in the poem, rather than the poem in the collection. But this is reductive. Shouldn't the meaning be universal? The lines in the poem, the poem in the collection, the collection in the body of work, the body of work in the canon of literature, etc...

I have stated that the poems say "what they want, where they want, when they want". That covers the arrangement (or lack thereof). But what about the content? The poems that say "what they want, where they want, when they want"... what are they saying? Here the fatigue is most evident. Wright's subject matter includes toadstools. That's right, toadstools. I don't know what's worse, the fact that he's writing a poem about toadstools, or the fact that he stresses the importance of "nothing will touch them" by telling us not once, but twice. I cannot think of a more conclusive symptom of fatigue than this: Wright tells us twice something he didn't need to tell us once...

The toadstools are starting to come up,  
circular and dry.  
**Nothing will touch them,**  
Gophers or chipmunks, wasps or swallows.  
They glow in the twilight like rooted will-o'-the-wisps.  
**Nothing will touch them.**  
As though orphans rode herd in the short grass,  
as though they had heard the call.  
- **Toadstools** (pg. 38)

What redeems this poem about toadstools is what redeems the overall collection, and that is Wright's transcendental inclinations. Rather than focusing on "nothing will touch them", the poet should have focused on "they will always be with us", a line that carries more weight, in which there seems to be a deeper underlying message. The profundity of Wright's poems rests entirely in these moments of transcendentalism. Whether its the toadstool that "will always be with us" or the poet himself

They will always be with us,  
transcenders of the world.  
Someone will try to stick his beak into their otherworldly  
styrofoam.  
Someone may try to taste a taste of forever.

For some it's a refuge, for some a shady place to fall down.  
Grief is a floating barge-boat,  
who knows where it's going to moor?  
- **Toadstools** (pg. 38)

A second time, and who can blame him?  
If he disappears again, your mind's back on transubstantiation.

We live beyond the metaphysician's fingertips.  
It's sad, dude, so sad.  
There is no metaphor, there is no simile,  
and there is no rhetoric  
To nudge us to their caress.  
The trees remain the trees, God hlp us.  
And memory, for all its worth,  
is merely the things we forget to forget.  
- **Dude** (pg. 40)

Like the eloquence of "Things Have End and Beginnings", the profundity of the poet's transcendental inclinations is lost on me. All of it seems to be undermined by Wright's use of informal language. Words like "pal" (in "Ancient of Days") and "dude" (in "Dude") instantly erase any profundity the poet was building, reducing him to a form of self-parody. Again, the Wright seems to anticipate my reaction with his line, his confession, that "there is no metaphor, there is no simile, / and there is no rhetoric". But even if the poet is admitting to some shortcoming in his work, that doesn't redeem the work itself. On the contrary, if he knows what he's doing and he does it anyway, then it's worse than if he were oblivious.

As a result, the poems are neither profound nor humorous. They amount to back-peddling and name dropping. Not literal names, but words like "transcend" or "metaphysical" that the reader reads and immediately attributes an assumed depth. My conclusion is that the water is not deep, but mirky. You may not want to dive in for fear of bumping your head on the deceptively shallow bottom.

What I like best is the poet's form. His line breaks may be simple to the point of tedium, but I like the way he fills spreads out sentences and fills a page. It may not be Ferlinghetti, but it's something worth praising...

There is a heaviness inside the body  
that leans down, but does not touch us.  
There is a lassitude that licks itself, but brings no relief.  
There is a self-destructiveness no memory can repeal.  
Such breath in the unstopped ear,  
such sweet breath, O, along the tongue.

Cloud swatches brilliance the sky  
Over the Alleghenies,  
unpatterned as Heaven.  
Across the street, Amoret's family picnic has ended.  
Memorial Day,  
the dead like plastic bags in the blown trees.

In Paradise, springtime never arrives.

The seasons  
Are silent, and dumb, and ghost-walk outside our windows.  
And so it is down here -  
we grovel on our extremities  
An rise, rise up, halfway to where the new leaves begin.  
- **Homage to Samuel Beckett** (pg. 10-11)

---

## Leah says

Ancient of Days

There is a kind of sunlight, in early autumn, at sundown,  
That raises cloud reflections  
Inches above the pond water,  
that sends us packing into the chill evening  
To stand like Turner's blobbed figurines  
In a landscape we do not understand,  
whatever and everything

We know about it.  
Unworldly and all ours,  
it glides like the nineteenth century  
Over us, up the near hill  
And into the glistening mittens of the same clouds  
Now long gone from the world's pond.  
So long.

This is an old man's poetry,  
written by someone who's spent his life  
Looking for one truth.  
Sorry, pal, there isn't one.  
Unless, of course, the trees and their blow-down relatives  
Are part of it.  
Unless the late-evening armada of clouds  
Spanished along the horizon are part of it.  
Unless the diminishing pinprick of light  
stunned in the dark forest

Is part of it.  
Unless, O my, whatever the eye makes out,  
And sends us, on its rough-road trace,  
To the heart, is part of it,  
then maybe that bright vanishing might be.

---

## metaphor says

Nothing's as far away as love is,  
not even the new stars,  
Though something is moving them  
We hope in our direction, albeit their skin's not on fire.

---

## Susan says

Charles Wright is, well, Charles Wright. He seldom makes any missteps, but he also doesn't ever veer away from what he does. Unlike poets who experiment with different forms, styles, and language, Wright stays on course. Yes, because of this he can be a bit repetitive, but he always speaks to the deep mystery of life, the questions we have about now and after now, and he does it with self-deprecation and wit. There's always a bit of irony in his work. This book is darker than the others--he's 78 years old, will be 79 in August, and he's acutely conscious of the passage of time. In fact, some of the poems in this book seem to indicate that he's almost done with what he has to say. But I'm betting he's not. If you love his work, as I do, you will be pleased to enter into his particular sensibility once again.

---

## Julie Christine says

This is an old man's poetry  
written by someone who's spent his life  
Looking for one truth.

### Ancient of Days

*Caribou* is an uncertain prayer to the life beyond this life. Charles Wright is in his late seventies, and many of these poems caress the years and hopes behind the poet in wistful elegy. Wright hopes that whatever awaits him, it will be gentle, and he asks to be forgiven for being uncertain what truth he believes in.

### October, *Mon Amour*

Our history is the history of the City of God.  
What's-to-come is anybody's guess.  
Whatever has given you comfort,  
Whatever has rested you,  
Whatever untwisted your heart  
is what you will leave behind.

He also passes on the wisdom of his years, a quiet admonishment not to expect more, not to do more, than what is within reach, to be at peace with the *now* of your life:

### Cake Walk

To do what you have to do—unrecognized—and for no one.  
The language in that is small,  
sewn just under your skin.

and

Grace II

It's true, aspirations of youth burn down to char strips with the years.  
Tonight, only memories are my company and my grace.  
How nice if they could outlive us.  
But they can't. Or won't.

Elements of Christian faith, its dutiful redemption, mystical transubstantiation, and the wonder of heaven mingle with cyclical process of Buddhism. But the natural world is most precious to Charles Wright:

L'Amor Che Move Il Sol E L'Altre Stelle

I love walking into the setting sun  
where nothing is visible but light,  
And that nor really visible, just a sweet blinding.  
Then coming back to the world  
Unharmd, but altered slightly,  
as though it were not the same setup anymore.

So much beautiful language here: cloud gobbets and creeks that sniddle along and armadas of clouds Spanished along the horizon, the stepchild hour that belongs to neither the light nor the dark--passages that make me glad this is one of my rare book purchases, for I have scribbled notes in the margin, starred favorite poems, underlined words and verses to refer to again and again.

*Caribou* is a meditation on the human condition, the end of which is inevitable. And ultimately, it is silent.

Time and the Centipedes of Night

The condition of everything tends toward the condition of  
silence.  
When the wind stops, there's silence.  
When the waters go down on their knees and touch their heads  
To the bottom, there's silence, when the stars appear  
face down, O Lord, then what a hush.

---

**missy jean says**

Is Transcendental Grandparentish Appalachianism a genre?

Should be.

### **Kara Jackson says**

Loved the poems just wish it was a little longer or there was a second book

---

### **Corbin says**

Quite pessimistic in tone, Wright revisits questions about the meaningfulness of life, the reality of death, and the doubts associated with religious faith time and time again throughout this collection. I appreciated the tone and consistent focus of these poems, but rarely was I absorbed into the language or imagery used to convey these thoughts and emotions.

---

### **Lee says**

Charles Wright is the ideal poet for our time: accessible, yet veiled. Spiritual yet pragmatic. Traditional yet innovative. I was first bewitched by his short lyric "spider crystal ascension" and it's spirit pervades this wonderful collection.

This collection contained the essences of so many poets I adore: Dickinson's meditation, Basho's attention to nature and man's place within, Whitman's cadence and embrace, I could go on.

There is a reason he is the next Poet Laureate, even with the embarrassment of that office. His southern voice is uniquely american, common and insightful. Caribou is a contemporary classic.

---

### **Christian Harder says**

Staggeringly bad. A monument to outdated, quixotic pastoralism. Deaf. Institutional poetry in its blandest form.

---

### **S.D. Johnson says**

Some real gems here, such as "Heaven's Eel" and "My Old Clinch Mountain Home". Subdued in tone, but then throwing audacious lines at us here and there such as "Sunlight is black magic,/and transubstantiation even, if/It touches the right thing at the suddenly right time." The familiar territory of the Appalachian landscape, the poems drawing us into a perspective at once religious and nihilistic. Too tired and busy to write a full review, but like most of Wright's work, well worth reading.

---

### **Trish says**

This collection of poems by Charles Wright reminded me so much of Chinese poetry, and in his *Acknowledgements* he does credit the poetry of Du Fu and the poetry of ancient China. Consider this:

The deer walk out the last ledge of sunlight, one by one. --*fm* "Cake Walk"

Or this:

Moon soft-full just over the tips of the white pine trees. --*fm* "Life Lines"

In this collection Wright speaks much of death, the transitory nature of things, of seeing things for perhaps the last time. He will be 80 years old this year, so he is deservedly feeling his years.

When is it we come to the realization  
That things are wandering away? -- "Waterfalls"

There is so much here that captured me, though he and I are divided by years. Would that we learned his lessons earlier, but

Contentment comes in little steps, like old age --*fm* "Chinoiserie VI"

So many of his phrases I yearn to post but he warns us

Musician says, beauty is the enemy of expression.  
I say, expression is the enemy of beauty.  
God says, who gives a damn anyway,  
Bon mots, you see, are not art or sublimity. --*fm* "Chinoiserie VI"

But much of what he writes in this book is distilled to its essence. So few words, so much meaning. He gets right to the heart of things.

There's an old Buddhist saying I think I read one time:  
Before Enlightenment, chop wood and carry water.  
After Enlightenment, chop wood and carry water.--*fm* "Ducks"

Wright, immersed as he is in the end of things, shares his wisdom:

Beware of prosperity, friend, and seek affection.--*fm* "Heaven's Eel"

---

## Trip Starkey says

An excerpt from my review on The Literary Man Blog. Go buy this book!

"Caribou reads, in many ways, like a great poet's last gasp. In many of the poems, Wright seems to

acknowledge that everything is headed to a world of dark, but he continuously affirms his acceptance of that fact. The poems, relying heavily on the natural world, appeal to the great mysteries of life and death in a way that questions our insistent dependence on things that fail us – religion, language, nature, humanity, etc. The looming essence of death has had a profound impact on Wright, who can't seem to shake the idea that his eternity is behind some locked door, and he can never seem to find the proper key. His poems orbit the culture of the world, and use it to prepare himself for the long walk to the end of his life.

In many ways, this book was very difficult to read because it seemed like a great mentor accepting his home in the grave – the end of his life's work. In other ways, this book is another testament to the power and wisdom that seethe from the surface of Wright's poems. Charles Wright is the great minister of the dead, and remains a great teacher in the world of poetry. Caribou is another must-read book, maybe the final one, in an illustrious career filled with some of the most enlightening poems in the American canon."

Link to full review: <http://literaryman.com/2014/03/17/a-g...>

---

### **Kim says**

To me, these poems read like salt water. Some are nightswimming in the briny, dark, endless Atlantic, fathoms unknown beneath my treading feet. Others the taste of tears on my lips, breeze a delicate finger against the glaze of water on my cheeks. And a handful are the salty-sweet strangeness of salt water taffy. All lovely, all words worth savoring a spell.

---