It’s a linkage I’m talking about, and harmonies and structures, and all the various things that lock our wrists to the past.

Wright’s most critically successful work came in 1998, when his fourteenth collection, *Black Zodiac*, earned the American Book Award, as well as the Pulitzer Prize in poetry.

“[The name *Black Zodiac*] has to do with the overall trajectory of a large group of poems that I’ve been doing over the last 27 years. Basically, it means that the end result of all one’s strivings in my case is going to be as far only as one can see, that one cannot go past the Zodiac, cannot go past the stars, that one is forever here, and that’s okay,” he extrapolated to PBS after the book’s success, adding, “But one sometimes wonders that perhaps it might be nice to be elsewhere sometimes.”

Wright’s work has been closely examined by his contemporaries, such as Edward Hirsch, who considers him to be a “poet of lyric impulses.” Other critics differ from that opinion, and *The Richmond Times-Dispatch* once labeled him as a “steadfastly Southern poet,” mostly due to his constant rendering of the past and present. Wright disagrees about that classification, stating that he’s a Southern poet “by geography and definition,” but that he doesn’t follow the Southern tradition of narration.

Instead, Wright sees his narratives as “populated with people who are whispering stories in my ear which I then launder in my own way and present, and by the time the poem gets presented, all the people are gone and nothing’s left but the whispers.”

Wright’s only experiment with narrative poetry was 1984’s *The Other Side of the River*, which stemmed from his life’s stories. After its publication, Wright never delved back into his childhood. “After I had written that book, I said, ‘Well, I’ve done that. To hell with that. Let’s go back to what I like to do, which is the impressionistic stuff,” he explained.

Wright also lost the need to explore his childhood when he returned to the South with a teaching job at the University of Virginia. The director of the poetry program, Lisa Russ Spaar, saw him as a “beloved teacher whose students hoard his aphorisms,” such as “God only cares if you write well.”

The landscape of Charlottesville also serves Wright well, as he calls his backyard his “largest canvas” that has inspired more works, most recently his 2007 collection, *Littlefoot: A Poem*, which stayed true to the poet’s ideas on imagery.

“I guess I’m a closet painter, but I can’t paint, so I’m stuck with what I have, which is language.”

Despite his continued success and popularity, Wright remains philosophical about the frequently lonely plight of poets.

“Nothing helps loneliness. I mean—you either feed off of it, or it feeds off of you. And no one tries to feed off of it... You write poetry because you either have to, or it’s been given to you to do so. Every time I sell a book, I’m always happy and surprised.”