



Midquest: A Poem

Fred Chappell

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Winner of the Bollingen Prize in Poetry Together now, the four poems River, Bloodfire, Wind Mountain, and Earthsleep counterpoint one another in a grand symphony, Midquest. In what he has referred to as "something like a verse novel," Fred Chappell has summoned up the rich veins of memory and brings this to bear on the contemporary sensibility. Through the remarkable range of his poetic talent-in turns lyrical, dramatic, elegiac, mythic, and humorous-Chappell brings us to the elemental: this encounter with earth, air, fire, and water. The dynamic of their interrelation contains multitudes but also holds a pattern. In his preface to the completed work, Chappell explains that "though he is called 'Fred,' the 'I' of the poem is no more myself than any character in any novel I might choose to write. . . . He was constructed, as was Dante's persona, Dante, in order to be widely representative." Chappell's Fred has moved away from the land and the work of the hands to the city and the work of the intellect. In the memories he reviews at mid-life, he regains the values that he had thought were lost. In its mental reclamation, Midquest belongs in a long and vital southern tradition. In design, he tells us, its model was "that elder American art form, the sampler, each form standing for a different fancy stitch." Fred Chappell, author of four novels, is professor of English at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Besides the four volumes of Midquest, he has published another collection of poems, *The World Between the Eyes*. Four times he has won the Roanoke-Chowan Award for Poetry, and he has also received the Prix de Meilleur, Académie Française, the Sir Walter Raleigh Prize, and the North Carolina Award in Literature.

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