Dreams and Dreaming

in Fred Chappell's *Midquest*

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INTRODUCTION

Dreams emerge as prominent motifs throughout Fred Chappell's many poems, novels, short stories, and essays. Poems like "A Transcendental Idealist Dreams in Springtime," "The Animal Dream," and "Caligari by Dreamlight" each bespeak their primary focus on dreaming in their titles, and Chappell regularly portrays the dreams of his characters in other works. Peter Leland becomes tortured by dreams which he cannot remember in *Dagon*. In *I Am One of You Forever*, Jess Kirkman dreams of death, Hitler, and underwear models from the Sears catalog. Figures seem obsessed with their dreams in the interior and dramatic monologues of the operatic *Castle Tzingal*. In these and other cases, Chappell uses the imagery of dreams to illustrate a character's deepest concerns. Dreams and dreaming often serve as central events in the structure of these works, as in *It Is Time, Lord* and *Brighten the Corner Where You Are*, where dreams described at the end of each novel hint at the resolution of earlier struggles. Chappell also suggests the importance of dreams through his characters' voices. In the short story "Broken Blossoms" from *Moments of Light*, the protagonist states that he "must plunge more deeply and thoroughly into the waters of my dreaming reverie" to locate "the key to it all" (129). James Christopher describes something which was "probably a dream" in *It Is Time, Lord*, but he is certain that the dream is "more tangible than many things encountered in the flesh" (9). These statements suggest that, in Chappell's work, dreams reveal great meaning and that, although they are imagined visions, dreams are as real as "flesh."

These statements hold equally true for Chappell's *Midquest*. A "verse novel," as the

poet calls his carefully structured book in its preface, *Midquest* is divided into four volumes, each containing eleven poems and each deriving its imagery from one of the four classical elements, as the titles *River*, *Bloodfire*, *Wind Mountain*, and *Earthsleep* suggest (ix). These four volumes repeat four times the thirty-fifth birthday of the book's protagonist, Ole Fred, from whom Chappell deliberately distances himself by saying that he "is no more myself than any character in any novel I might chose to write" (x). Modeled in part after Dante's *Divine Comedy*, *Midquest* presents Fred as he examines his past, present, and future. The many poetic forms which compose the book correspond to Fred's various memories and experiences, also introducing Fred's wife, family, and acquaintances. Dreams emerge repeatedly in these poems, in the sleeping thoughts or memories of Fred and others. The eight poems which frame each of the four volumes detail Fred's dreams, and two other poems are dedicated in their entirety to the presentation of dreams experienced by Fred's wife and grandmother. These and other poems allow Chappell to explore the nature of dreaming and the relationship between dreaming and waking. In terms of imagery and theme, Chappell challenges the notion that dreaming can be separated from or subordinated to waking. Fred resolves issues which are very important to his life during his dreams, and other dreamers find that images from their sleep change their lives when they awaken. Just as with Chappell's other works, *Midquest* suggests that dreams provide insightful meaning and that dreams are just as real as waking life.

CHAPTER ONE:
Perched Unsteady on the Margin of Dream

Similar poems open and close each of the four volumes of Fred Chappell's *Midquest*--*River*, *Bloodfire*, *Wind Mountain*, and *Earthsleep*. In his preface to the verse novel, Chappell borrows the musical term "overture" in referring to these opening poems because each introduces the specific themes of the volume it represents and echoes the broader, central themes of *Midquest* as a whole (x). The final poem of each volume provides a similar thematic overview while serving both as closure and as transition from volume to volume. To continue Chappell's use of musical terminology, these closing poems can be viewed as "postludes" which balance the opening "preludes." Each of these eight poems is an interior monologue: the preludes follow Fred's thought processes before he wakes on the morning of his thirty-fifth birthday; the postludes trace his drift toward sleep later that evening. Because Fred speaks his thoughts while sleeping in these poems, they become transcripts to his dreams. These dreams dissolve when he nears waking in each prelude and become more and more opaque as he falls asleep in the postludes. Whether these dreams take the form of linear thought patterns or surreal fantasies, they reveal ideas which are central to the entire book.

Sleeping next to his wife Susan, Fred voices his dreaming thoughts in each of the preludes and postludes. Fred's dreams combine a consciousness of his surroundings (e.g., light filling the bedroom, birds singing outside) with flowing, associative visions. Speaking to Susan in the poem "Earth Emergent Drifts the Fire River," Fred describes their status as

sleepers whose thoughts are bombarded by images of both the external and the fantastical:

> Here are we perched unsteady on the margin of dream,
> Receiving from two worlds their gaudy intelligence.
> World of half-sleep,
> World of waking. . . .
>
> (58-61)

The metaphorical position Fred describes is a precarious one. The word "perched" implies that he and Susan are seated high in the air, their balance "unsteady." Because they are situated on the border or "margin of dream," Fred and Susan perceive sensory images of their "waking" surroundings while simultaneously being vulnerable to the dream images of "half-sleep." These images seem "gaudy," wild and strange and colorful. As evidenced by Fred's dreams in the preludes and postludes, making rational sense of these images becomes increasingly difficult when the images of these two worlds intermingle. Although Fred describes the worlds of "half-sleep" and "waking" as separate, his dreams prove that the "margin" or boundary between these two worlds becomes difficult to discern when external images and fantastic images entangle. Often, Fred's dreams evolve from perceptions of his physical surroundings, which then transform into fantastic visions. The dreams may take the form of fanciful images which are parallel or analogous to events occurring simultaneously in the waking world. Fred's body and rational mind sometimes react to images in his dreams, and vice versa. In all of these instances, the difference between dream images and sensory images becomes obscured, and the margin between the worlds of "half-sleep" and "waking" dissolves.

Though sleeping, Fred perceives changes inside and outside of his bedroom. Fred's awareness of his surroundings surfaces in his dreams as sensory images, which in turn

transform into new, fantastical images. These changes most often develop as a result of association: the shape, color, or movement of an external image suggests a similar, imagined vision. Continuing to flow and change, these imagined visions depart from their source to follow that associative and sometimes random course of dreaming. In "Earth Emergent Drifts the Fire River," Fred perceives the morning light beginning to shine on the trees outside. His dream transforms both the light and the trees into a new image:

> the light in the trees
> At daybreak, filigree of sugar icing, it is
> A wedding cake, no, it is a highly fanciful birthday cake,
> Hullo ole Fred Welcome to Life and Death,
> 1st day my 35th year the world.
> (97-101)

The white light shining on the trees suggests white "sugar icing" to Fred's mind; and the tall, tiered shape of the trees reminds him of a "wedding cake" spread with such icing. Abandoning the image for one more appropriate for his thirty-fifth birthday, Fred imagines the lighted trees as "a highly fanciful birthday cake." Fred's dream then assumes the voice of a birthday salute which greets him with the joy of another day of "Life," one day closer to the certainty of "Death." Dreaming in a garbled syntax, Fred acknowledges the arrival of "[the] 1st day [of] my 35th year [in] the world." With these confused words, Fred's dream departs totally from his original perception of the trees outside his bedroom.

Other external images are similarly transformed in Fred's dreams. Fred senses light streaming through his bedroom window much as he had sensed light shining in the trees outside. In "Earth Emergent Drifts the Fire River," the image of the window, slightly open, transforms into a confused vision of light, birdsong, and wind entering the room:

> The window is raucous with sunlight,

Water-warble, daybreeze, the window
Opens into the furnace of spirit, the cranky
Obbligato of bluejay, stinksparrow, opens the flames of morning.
The cool contralto mourning dove
Is the one clear note of soothe in the world
Going up in flame.

(28-34)

In the first sentence of this passage, Chappell suggests the course of Fred's dream by parataxis, where independent clauses, words, and phrases are strung together--in this case, by commas--to form one sentence. The fluid series of images represents the direction of Fred's thoughts, which drift uninhibited between sights and sounds and imagined visions. Chappell breaks the lines of this passage so that "the window" recurs directly below the first phrase "The window," thus establishing the window as a touchstone to which Fred's thoughts return. Fred first describes the light coming through the window as "raucous," an adjective which usually modifies words associated with sound. This equation of light with sound is a pattern which recurs throughout the passage. The next phrase in the series, "Water-warble" evokes the sound of air whistling through liquid. Unrecognizable at first, this noise later reveals itself as the sound of birds chirping. Fred's thoughts turn to the gusts of wind coming through the open window before returning to a vision of morning light filling the window. Fred's imagines "the window/Opens into the furnace of spirit," thus transforming the window into a furnace-door, where dreamed spirits burn. As Fred's dreaming thoughts return to the singing birds, he associates their sounds with flame as well. The "Obbligato of bluejay" feeds "the flames of morning"--in contrast to the mourning dove's "cool contralto" which is the only "note of soothe" in the fire's heat. Chappell's play on the words "morning" and "mourning" and his repeated use of musical terms in this passage accurately

portray the associative course Fred's dream takes in transforming morning light into a burning, song-filled world.

In two of the preludes, Fred perceives a curtain before this window which rises and falls with the morning breeze. The curtain also changes into various shapes--even into music--during his dream. In "Fire Now Wakening on the River," Fred sees the billowing curtain, though his eyes are closed:

> Behind tensed lids begins the salvo
> Of silent orange curtain, little by little rising, changing
> In rising to the sky-wide hem of the northern *Borealis.*
> In alert half-sleep I follow upward the supernal sheer
> Of burning drapery.
>
> (3-7)

Fred's commentary begins to explain how he perceives movement and changes around him even though his "lids" are closed. Fred describes himself "In alert half-sleep," which immediately seems comparable to his definition of sleeping "on the margin of dream" between the two worlds of "half-sleep" and "waking." He is both "alert" to his external surroundings and dreaming in "half-sleep." Thus, the curtain, filled by morning light, changes as Fred's dreams again substitute sight with sound, describing its movement and color in the contradictory terms of gunfire ("salvo") and quiet ("silent"). The curtain then becomes the northern lights glowing on an imaginary horizon, cleverly described as a "hem." Perceiving both outside images and dreamed images, Fred somehow manages to recognize the process by which the curtain becomes "the supernal sheer/Of burning drapery." In "Dawn Wind Unlocks the River Sky," Fred's dreams reshape the image of the curtain to even greater extremes. Fred imagines the billowing curtain as his "galleon-sail" which will enable him to "voyage where I whither" during sleep (5). The curtain changes later in

Fred's dream, as sunlight brightens its fibers: "First sun in the glass curtain dyes it with fire,/It is fire in air,/It is a fanfare of pure spirit, prelude, aubade" (14-6). The fire-like sunlight turns the curtain itself into fire. Then, as Fred's dreams again associate sight with sound, the burning light becomes music, denoted by "fanfare," "prelude," and "aubade"--which, appropriately, is also a poetic form. Transformed into fire and sound, this dreamed image is totally divorced from the external image of the curtain which sparked it.

Another recurrent motif in the preludes and postludes centers on Fred's physical contact with his wife as they sleep. Like the perceived images of the trees, the window, or the curtain, the feeling of Susan's touch affects Fred's dreams. In "The River Awakening in the Sea," for example, the sensation of touch leads to rich dreams of sounds and images:

> My forehead suckles your shoulder, straining to hear
> In you the headlong ocean, your blood, island-saying sea now.
> Wild stretches, bound to every water, of seas in you,
> Uttering foam islands like broad flotillas of cabbage butterflies.
> (2-5)

Fred imagines that his head, against his wife's shoulder, "suckles" or draws sustenance from her as a child draws milk from his mother's breast. His dream then transforms the physical sensation of touch into the act of listening. Fred imagines hearing Susan's blood pump through her veins, likening the sound to waves falling in "the headlong ocean." Her heartbeat is "island-saying," causing brief pauses in the flow of rushing blood. As Fred envisions the endless network of blood flowing tide-like inside Susan's veins ("Wild stretches, bound to every water, of seas in you"), the image of her heartbeats as "foam islands" becomes "broad flotillas of cabbage butterflies." Thus, his dream transforms the sensation of touch into the wave-like sound of surging blood and, in turn, changes that sound

into the image of flying butterflies.

Especially in the postludes, when Fred drifts closer and closer to sleep, his increasing susceptibility to dreams manifests itself in images of the dissolution of his surroundings, or of himself. These images signal an ebbing awareness of the waking world as deep sleep and dreams engulf Fred; the conscious, rational mind slowly gives way to the wildly imaginative subconscious. Most often, Fred's consciousness of his surroundings and his self (represented by his body or his hands, for example) dissolves into the controlling element of the volume at hand--water in *River*, fire in *Bloodfire*, air in *Wind Mountain*, and earth in *Earthsleep*. A prime example can be found in "The River Seeks Again the Sea," the closing poem of *River*, where Fred's awareness dissolves into water, which in turn seeps into the ground: "Mind coming apart to water, searching salt springs/Of earth, or is it the sea reaching/To first fresh fingertips of water in stone in the high mountains?" (21-3). Fred's "mind coming apart" represents his decreasing rational consciousness. His associative, subconscious thoughts then take the appropriately fluid form of water. Fred's question about the true shape of this water in fact mirrors the unpredictable, wandering nature of dreams--as do the gerunds "searching" and "reaching." These verb forms evoke images of water seeping and spreading through the earth, just as the dreaming mind plumbs the subconscious during sleep.

When Fred nears waking in the preludes, the dissolution process of the postludes is, as one would expect, reversed. This waking process is a gradual one, however. Initial tremors or shifts in the dreamed elemental fabric often cause Fred to stir in his bed. This cause-and-effect relationship suggests that Fred's physical faculties are awakening and that the world of waking is slowly overtaking the world of dream. In "The River Awakening in

the Sea," a disturbance in Fred's dreams provokes a parallel disturbance in his body:

> wind diving out of the sky and raising
> In the waters falling towers of lace and spittle,
> Oaring underneath with strong legs so tides pile and gasp.
> So corded surf comes forward half-circle,
> Spreading and cataracting.
> We are fitful in the sheets,
> We clutch. My forearm digging your breast. . . .
> (21-7)

Fred imagines that strong winds "oaring underneath" the water of his dream create huge waves ("falling towers of lace and spittle"). Disturbing the otherwise calm metaphorical seas, these waves represent the first forces which interrupt Fred's dreaming. The image of the pummeling waves which push the sea water "forward half-circle/Spreading and cataracting" foreshadows the eventual dissolution of Fred's dreamed water and his emergence into consciousness. This disturbance in Fred's dream causes him to stir in his bed. Alerting his physical sensations, the disturbance rekindles Fred's awareness of himself and his wife, "fitful in the sheets."

After having his dreams disturbed, Fred nears waking, and the controlling elements of his dreams begin to dissolve, representing both the end of Fred's dreams and the reciprocal emergence of his rational thoughts. Reversing the process of the postludes, where Fred's consciousness dissolves as he drifts to sleep, the dissolution of his dreamed images in the preludes suggests his growing attention to the waking world. Fred begins to drift from the world of dream into the world of waking. In "The River Awakening in the Sea," Fred dreams that his dreamed sea is breaking apart:

> Sea coming apart now, green fingers
> Shaking and shredding like cobweb. The sky
> Punishes the waves, in-thrusts glassy caves,

> Caves growing mouthlike round spindles of wind.
>
> (34-7)

Fred imagines the sea fraying into thread-like "green fingers" which become increasingly thin and fragile, "shredding like cobweb." Just as a dreamed wind had caused waves and disturbed Fred's sleep earlier, so a new wind totally dismantles the sea here. This wind blows holes ("glassy caves") into the sea. By repeating this image twice, "caves/Caves," Chappell suggests the rapidly increasing number of these holes. His description of these holes "growing mouthlike round spindles of wind" suggests by the word "round" that they are both circular in shape and widening *around* the wind. Because the sea is so closely associated with Fred's dreams in this prelude (and in its accompanying postlude), its dissolution represents the destruction of the very fabric of Fred's dreams. The image indicates that Fred is waking, or returning to rational, dreamless thoughts. In "Dawn Wind Unlocks the River Sky," the prelude to *Wind Mountain*, a similar dissolution of elements also symbolizes the process of waking and the waning of dream:

> Fire coming apart now to wind, earth
> Divides to rivers, the world of waking shoves me bodyward.
> How may I retrieve my spirit where it twirls
> In the glasswalled caves of wind?
>
> (47-50)

Chappell connects the two images of dissolution to the third image of "the world of waking shoves me bodyward" and thereby suggests that the three events are parallel and simultaneous; the images of elemental dissolution represent the process of waking. The verb "shoves" connotes that Fred is forced unwillingly into his body, the physical manifestation of dreamlessness. This sudden shove causes Fred to worry that his body will rise intact from dream but leave his spirit behind. When he asks "How may I retrieve my spirit where it

twirls/In the glasswalled caves of wind?," Fred voices this fear, and his description of "the glasswalled caves of wind" connects this passage to its predecessor in "The River Awakening in the Sea."

When Fred awakens at the close of each prelude, the dreamed images of symbolic elements vanish--to be replaced by images of his surroundings, the images of an alert consciousness. As these elemental images disappear, the external world fully usurps the world of dream. The last strophes of "The River Awakening in the Sea" detail the deterioration of Fred's dreaming:

> While I am wishing never to wake, the oily bull-muscle
> Of sea water shoves us landward, straining and warping like kites.
> Yellow ring of earth rises above burned eyes.
> My senses touch daylight and recoil, the furious net
> Of daylight plumbs the bed.
>
> Continent or momentary island,
> Mid-life, this island too known, too much unknown, 28 May 1971,
> First day of my thirty-fifth year.
> Sleeping sleeping I cannot halt the faithless instinct to be born.
>
> The trees glow with raucous birds.
> I rise and yawn,
> Begin to scratch for clothing.
>
> My naked foot upon this alien floor.
>
> (50-62)

Fred's dreaming mind realizes that it is about to be replaced by the conscious mind. He fights the waking process, but--just as he is "shoved" in "Dawn Wind Unlocks the River Sky"--so Fred and Susan ("us") are forced out of the watery element of dream, "landward." Because water is the element of dream and sleeping in *River*, the impinging land represents waking by contrast. The gerunds "straining" and "warping" connote discomfort and

contortion, while the image of the kite appropriately represents an object which is helpless against the element which acts upon it. These dreamed images are interrupted by external perceptions, and, thus, Fred begins to wake as his conscious senses usurp his dreaming mind. Again, the process is figured as uncomfortable for him. He perceives the light-filled world with "burned eyes" as his "senses touch daylight and recoil." Accustomed to the darkness of sleep, Fred's eyes feel pain when exposed to the morning light. Helpless in his attempts to reject daylight and consciousness, Fred is pulled from the waters of sleep and dreaming as "the furious net/Of daylight plumbs the bed." Returning to images of land masses as the embodiment of waking, Fred reckons whether this new day is a "Continent or momentary island." His doubt about the course of his life and his own beliefs, which he addresses later in greater detail, manifests itself in uncertainty about this day, his birthday--"this land too known, too much unknown." Fred finally succumbs to the waking process when he realizes that he "cannot halt the faithless instinct to be born." Given the fact that it is his birthday, the act of waking is figured as a birth. Fred then awakens fully, represented by the stanza break. His perceptions are devoid of dreams, totally dominated by his awakened senses. He sees the light-filled trees outside and hears the birds singing in them. Physical sensations of his body ("yawn," "scratch") remind Fred that he has been delivered to his conscious form. The shocking sensation of his bare foot on the cold, "alien floor" serves as the greatest reminder that Fred is no longer dreaming.

Throughout the postludes and preludes of *Midquest*, Chappell addresses the ambiguous relationship between dream and waking. Although dreams and waking seem separate and distinct, they intermingle during Fred's dreams. His perceptions of his

bedroom magically transform during dreams, therefore obscuring the margin between dream and waking. Only when Fred dreams deeply does he seem totally removed from the external world, though his dreaming mind transforms images and memories of reality in often startling ways. Chappell portrays Fred's drift toward waking, out of the dreaming world, by images of the dissolution of the controlling elements in the book. As Fred's dreamed images of these elements dissolve, he becomes increasingly aware of his surroundings, his senses, and himself. Totally awake, Fred becomes conscious at the end of each prelude. Only then do the worlds of dreaming and waking seem truly distinct.

Chappell explores the distinction of other such margins and boundaries throughout the preludes and postludes. Just as the margin between dreaming and waking often becomes obscured as sensory images are transformed by Fred's dreams, so the true margin or shape of other forms is often unclear in these poems. Fred's dreaming mind cannot discern the outline and form of his surroundings until his conscious senses are awakened and light reveals the shapes of things. Similarly, Fred imagines himself without margins or outlines as he dreams; he pictures himself as a formless wisp, lacking the ability to touch or be touched. Initially, as Fred's dreamed formlessness enables him to drift inside Susan's sleeping body, he enjoys the sensation. Through the course of the four volumes, however, he yearns for his own margins--his shape, his body, his skin--so that he might touch his wife. Fred then ceases to fight the process of waking detailed in the four preludes because it delivers him from his dreamed formlessness, into his flesh. With Fred's decision in *Earthsleep* to welcome waking and the ability to touch comes an acceptance of his own flesh, which had

before unsettled him. Fred's acceptance of his waking and his flesh is a metonymy for his acceptance of life and reality. As evidenced by Fred's desire to regain his own form, the recurrent images of obscured or developing margins in *Midquest* introduce important metaphors and themes for the book as a whole.

The first line of *Midquest*, in "The River Awakening in the Sea," provides evidence of this image pattern: "Deep morning. Before the trees take silhouettes" (1). The morning is "deep" as Fred is "deep," or submerged, in sleep. The utter darkness makes the trees indiscernible from the horizon; the trees have no "silhouettes," shape, or outline. In "Fire Now Wakening on the River," the second line reads "First light shapes the trees" (2). Although this prelude details the same morning as its predecessor, it opens at a later hour of the morning, when sunlight and Fred's slowly awakening consciousness enable him to perceive the sharpening outline of the trees. Fred begins to perceive the margin and details of objects in his bedroom as well. In "The River Awakening in the Sea," the rising sun shines inside Fred's room and reveals margins previously hidden by darkness:

> Early light, stringent, has opened the bedroom, searches
> Crease between wall and ceiling and molds itself on the dresser
> In domestic shapes: brush and comb, deodorant can, cologne bottles,
> Black clots of hairpins like barbwire.
>
> (29-33)

The morning light seems "stringent" or severe to Fred's unaccustomed, still sleeping senses. Shining brightly, it "opens the bedroom"--as if it had been so dark that it seemed closed. Fred describes the sunlight actively "searching" the margin between the walls and ceiling. The light is so powerful that it seems to take solid form, although it is, in fact, revealing the "domestic shapes" on the dresser. Fred perceives these objects beginning to take shape; the

increasingly sharp margins and outlines indicate that his conscious senses are sharpening as well.

As the end of each prelude describes, Fred perceives himself regaining shape as he awakens, along with everything around him. Before he wakes, however, Fred dreams of himself as a formless being dissolved in the controlling element of the volume at hand. He imagines that his own margins and outlines--his skin--is imperceptible; without form, he cannot feel himself or anything else. Fred first describes this sensation in "The River Awakening in the Sea," imagining that everyone who is sleeping feels the same way: "everyone begins slowly to reach toward another,/Entering each other with hands and arms impalpable, shadowless" (10-1). Figured as a communal mass, the sleepers which Fred imagines "reach toward another" in their dreams, but they cannot touch or feel anything because their bodies are "impalpable." Their forms are so ghostly that they do not even cast shadows. Fred dreams that, without a body, he drifts inside Susan when he tries to touch her. Appropriate to the images of water in *River*, he describes this dreamed sensation as "swimming your salt skin" (28). Thus inside his wife, Fred dreams of their two bodies as one entity. In "The River Seeks Again the Sea," Fred imagines that, just as their formless bodies occupy the same space, so they dream the same dream:

> now touchless my hand on your breast is swimming
> Unfeeling wilderness of time present and past.
> And now you mutter in dream and now you say
> My dream.
> Our life is gratefully asleep.
>
> (36-40)

Fred again dreams that his formlessness enables him to swim his wife's body. His shapeless hand drifts within her, and the sensation becomes confused with his mind's drift from images

of "time present and past." Because he and Susan share the same intermingled form, they even share the same thoughts--as evidenced by Susan's voicing Fred's dream. Finally, Fred's statement that "Our life is gratefully asleep" celebrates the fact that even their lives are the same in this state, and Fred delights in the sleep that enables them to be one. Recurring images describe Fred and Susan in this manner; they are one, commingling but never touching. In "Fire Now Wakening on the River," Fred imagines this formless commingling in terms of fire:

> My forehead enters your shoulder
> As air and flame enjoin, nothing separate,
> All selfless in all as we burn together,
> Ascend the air we make, wavering, visible.
> We waver within one another.
>
> (13-8)

Dreaming he is formless, Fred imagines that his "forehead enters [Susan's] shoulder" until they occupy the same space ("nothing separate"). Fred is "selfless," no specific part of himself evident in this communion. He and Susan "burn together" like one "wavering, visible" flame; they shift and flicker like colors in a fire that pass through one another but never touch. Fred dreams of similar images later in the same prelude: "[we] twine as above a candle the yellow and red entwine./Our bloods ascend this stalk of air like the snakes of a caduceus" (23-4). Again figured as parts of the same flame, Fred describes himself wrapping around Susan "like the snakes of a caduceus," the staff of the messenger-god Hermes. Burning together, Fred and Susan achieve the perfect marriage of selves.

Initially, Fred celebrates this dreamed commingling. "At last," he dreams, "in fire we are one and none" ("Fire Now Wakening on the River" 25). The phrase "At last" implies that this state is one for which he had longed. "One and none" in this dreamed fire,

their formless bodies are the same, and they are simultaneously obliterated, burned away. Enjoying this new sensation, Fred does not object to the fact that his individuality and sense of touch seem lost in this state. In "The River Seeks Again the Sea," Fred voices similar feelings:

> Ever ever
> In unanimous voice we drift,
> Selfless of energies bright and blind.
> We are each us. There is no me.
> (I do not mind.)
>
> (25-9)

Fred dreams that he shares the same "unanimous" voice with his wife and that their formless bodies are in fact a kind of energy field or light. Still, Fred states that he does not mind if his individual self and body are not discernible from Susan's ("There is no me"). Content in this union of formless bodies, Fred does not object to the course of his dream.

There remains evidence in some passages, however, that even though Fred seems content in this formless dream state, he detects an instinct to search for margins or outlines which would define his own body. In "The River Awakening in the Sea," Fred's formless body drifts inside Susan. Although his body does not have any margins or outlines, Fred instinctively searches for margins within his wife:

> Perhaps now in you my body
> Seeks limits, now contoured horizons
> Deliver to self accustomed bitter edges.
> Deliver to the man, plunging narrow in the sea, curb and margin.
>
> (17-20)

Without a physical body, Fred "seeks limits" inside the "contoured horizons" of his wife. The urge is a natural one; he grapples for an outline like his own, one to which he has been "accustomed." Referring to these usual margins as "bitter edges," Fred voices the negative

feelings he associates with his body and, by association, with his life. Still, Fred seeks for a replacement for his own form, "plunging narrow in the sea" of dream to find "curb and margin." This instinctive search for a physical shape resurfaces in "Dawn Wind Unlocks the River Sky." Fred believes that he feels an awakening sexual desire for Susan, but he corrects himself: "No, it is the false desire of fresh morning, my body seeks limit/Merely, curb and margin, wind-plunged./It is a half-bitter floating in the sea of spirit" (19-21). Fred recognizes that his sexual desire is truly a yearning to locate margins for his formless, dreaming body. Describing this search for "curb and margin" as "a half-bitter floating," Fred reverses his use of the adjective "bitter" to apply to his formless search, not his usual outlines. Importantly, the fact that Fred confuses this search with sexual desire aligns his instinctive quest for the outlines of his form with a need for human contact.

Perhaps it is this instinct which leads Fred to question his formless dream state and to yearn for his body, which would enable the sensation of touch. Fred first voices his frustration with his formless body in "Fire Now Wakening on the River": "How, love, in this frenzy of illuminant particles, each atom a spark,/May I you touch?" (11-2). Because their bodies are absent in the dreamed flames, Fred recognizes that he cannot touch his wife. Here, touch represents a concrete manifestation of the love shared by husband and wife, and the loss of Fred and Susan's touch-enabling margins, or skin, robs them of the ability to express affection. Fred asks another question about his formlessness in "Wind Subsides on the Earth River." With "no bodies," he asks, "what can we love with?" (33-4). Worded differently from the first question, this one implies that Fred and Susan have nothing to "love with." Without bodies they cannot make love or touch. Later in the same postlude, Fred's

yearning for a physical body provokes him to cry out for the sensation of touch:

> Susan, have I not loved you?
> This world is wind, and homeless.
> Here now I lay my stone of fire, crying,
> *Touch me, touch, I cannot come apart from the wind.*
> (18-21)

Fred's questioning his wife about the past underscores his present inability to love her physically. Formless in the dreamed element of wind, Fred finds his state "homeless"--uncomfortable, alien, providing no shelter. He imagines himself placing a "stone of fire" on the ground. Considering his entreaty to be touched, the stone seems like an offering. The repetition of the word "touch" in Fred's imploring cry reenforces his desire for contact. His inability to "come apart from the wind" recalls similar images in the preludes where Fred's dreamed elements dissolve and he emerges, retaking his real body. Fred yearns to wake and remove himself from the wind, the metaphor in *Wind Mountain* for dreaming. He knows that if he can force himself to wake, he will again occupy his body, thereby regaining his margins and the ability to touch the wife he loves. Fred then dreams that the wind mocks his formlessness and his inability to touch Susan:

> The wind in the meat night says,
> *You have no hands, no bodies, you cannot speak.*
> Our figures
> Collide touchless as reflections of Buicks in supermarket windows.
> Ghost and no ghost,
> I lift you toward that profound atom,
> Earth,
> I know you dream of.
> (37-44)

The voice of the wind taunts Fred, bringing his attention to his formlessness. An image of frustration comes to Fred's dreaming mind as he pictures himself drifting toward his wife,

expecting contact--only to float through his wife as reflections of cars do "in supermarket windows." Although Fred is a "ghost," he still manages to try to "lift" Susan toward "Earth," a landmass which again represents waking. On the metaphorical land of consciousness, Fred knows he will regain his margins and form, therefore regaining his ability to touch.

Fred's desire to retake his body and again touch his wife leads him to reject the celebration of his dreamed, formless state. In turn, Fred celebrates form, not formlessness; he celebrates the flesh which enables touch. A few poems in *Midquest* foreshadow Fred's extolling flesh over formlessness. In "Susan Bathing," for example, Fred rejoices in his wife's bare beauty. In "The Autumn Bleat of the Weathervane Trombone" and "The Peaceable Kingdom of Emerald Windows," Fred has one-sided conversations with the fictional Uncle Body. In these humorous passages, Fred jokes about physical pleasures and the joys of sex, both made possible by the margins of flesh. The postlude "Bloodfire Garden," set in Fred's drift toward sleep after sexual intercourse, reintroduces sexual desire as a reason for his wanting to regain his physical body:

> It is
> desire.
> It is the skin
> sniffing the skin of the other,
> and convulsion of the heart's-blood
> when the woman turns from watching
> through the window, unloosens
> the halter-strings,
> steps forward gravely, and on
> the bedside table
> sows a handful of bobby pins.
>
> (16-26)

Fred describes the primitive, animal-like "skin/sniffing the skin of the other" as "desire."

This desire is a carnal one, prompted by the sight of flesh. This image becomes more sensual and private, less primitive, as Fred links this desire to the excitement of watching a woman undress. He equates the abstract physical desire with the concrete feeling of the heartbeat quickening. The woman's disrobing, dramatized and slowed by Chappell's heavy use of commas, happens gradually; she "unloosens/the halter-strings" of her nightgown and walks nude toward the bed. The image of the "bobby pins" laid on "the bedside table" recalls similar images of bobby bins and "domestic shapes" in the preludes--thereby tying this image to Fred's bedroom and equating the imagined woman with Susan. The sensual images which follow describe sex in terms of fire, and Fred luxuriates in the union. In "Earth Emergent Drifts the Fire River," Fred seems to have taken his desire for flesh, margins, and touch into account when he stresses the importance of flesh and rejects formlessness. Dreaming in terms of water, Fred recapitulates many of the poems in *River*. He rejects his watery memories in which his formless body "drown[s]" (109), and he seizes the notion of the margined form, represented by the concrete image of his wife showering in "Susan Bathing":

> I am content,
> Susan, to see you step forward from the drizzle,
> Ideal taking form in history, touchpoint
> of vision and blood, your pinkened foot on cool tile,
> Here is your towel. . . .
>
> (117-121)

The words "step forward" connect this image of Susan walking from the shower to the image of her walking toward the bed in "Bloodfire Garden." Here, too, Fred becomes excited by her "form," which is "ideal" in its beauty. It is Susan's body, her margined "form," that intrigues Fred. The word "touchpoint" brings the issue of contact into the image, and the

images of Susan's "blood" and "pinkened foot" serve to underscore her state as a fleshy form. Fred's effort to hand Susan her "towel" indicates his desire to interact with this image of his wife. No longer formless or impalpable, these dreamed images of Susan's flesh remind Fred of his physical desires for love and contact.

Fred's desire for touch and contact leads him to cease fighting the waking process which returns him to his bodily form. In the first three preludes, Fred struggles to remain in dreamed formlessness. Upon waking, he immediately attempts to clothe his naked, palpable form. Fred's first conscious reaction in "The River Awakening in the Sea" is "to scratch for clothing" (61). In "Fire Now Wakening on the River," he begins to "reach for clothing" (66). In "Dawn Wind Unlocks the River Sky," Fred tells himself, "Put your pants on, Birthday Boy" (63). Fred's instinct seems akin to Adam's after the fall. He appears ashamed of his nakedness, uncomfortable in his own flesh. This reaction is a symptom of Fred's ambivalent outlook on himself and reality throughout *Midquest*. Only when he resolves the issues plaguing him does he seem comfortable in the world of waking. This resolution coincides with Fred's rejection of his dreamed formlessness. In the final prelude, "Earth Emergent on the Fire River," Fred does not struggle against the imminent world of waking. Likewise, he does not try to hide his naked form: "Okay,/I gird myself./I'll wear my clothes, my naked clothes" (183-5). Although Fred does "gird" himself to prepare for his emergence into waking, he does not fight the process. He seems resolved to accept his nakedness, as he is, in a sense, reborn on his thirty-fifth birthday. Fred's acceptance of his own flesh as he wakes confirms his wish to regain his margined, touchable form.

In "Earthsleep," the last poem of *Midquest*, Fred makes a final resolve to celebrate

flesh over formlessness and touch over impalpability. He rejects the dreamed state of formlessness because it robs him of the ability to touch and feel. Recognizing the urge to wake, Fred perceives himself emerging from the elements of dreaming and sleep:

> What shapes may we take now
> Where destiny uncurls its roots of fire?
> Let it then be flesh that we take on
> That I may see you
> Cool in time and blonde as this fresh daybreak.
>
> (26-30)

Again, Fred does not fight against the waking process here. He looks forward to waking so that his dreaming, formless body will again have a shape. When Fred tells his wife, "Let it be flesh we take on," his pronouncement carryies the weight of God's command to bring forth light in Genesis. Within his margined "flesh," Fred knows he and his wife may touch and caress one another. His awakened senses will enable him to "see" his wife, delivered to her beautiful form and "blonde" hair. The close of the poem figures Fred's wakened form caressing Susan in a harmonious, universal accord of touch:

> The way the light rubs upon this planet
> So do I press to you
>
> Susan Susan
>
> The love that moves the sun and other stars
> The love that moves itself in light to loving
> Flames up like dew
>
> Here in the earliest morning of the world.
>
> (35-41)

Fred imagines himself touching Susan the way the heavenly bodies are touched by light. Fred's repetition of his wife's name focuses this universal picture on their private love, which nonetheless radiates the same universal light of touch which "Flames up like dew/Here

in the earliest morning of the world." This final image ties the last postlude to the other preludes, which also close with images of morning light. *Midquest* therefore achieves a cyclical form, where one morning is repeated four times and then resolved in the image of a bright, new morning lit by the light made possible by touch.

Images of margins and outlines appear throughout these poems. The shape of objects becomes increasingly discernable in each prelude as Fred's conscious senses awaken and light fills his bedroom. The images of margins also evoke central themes in the preludes and postludes. Fred's formless, dreaming body leads him to yearn for a margined shape which will enable him to touch his wife. He therefore ceases to struggle against the waking process and comes to welcome his conscious, naked form. Partially because he has resolved many central questions of his life, Fred appears more comfortable with the waking world. Fred's acceptance of waking and his own flesh therefore becomes a metonymy for his acceptance of his own life and reality.

The central question which Fred resolves in these dreamed poems--thereby making him comfortable with his margined form and his life--is that of death and mortality. Images of death haunt Fred's dreams. Of course, sleeping becomes a metaphor for death in *Midquest* as it does throughout literature; the loss of consciousness and senses which comes with sleep approximates death as closely as man can imagine. Death evolves as a prominent issue in the book by the sheer number of poems in which it plays a dominant role: "Cleaning the Well," "Bloodfire," "Second Wind," "In Parte Ove Non E Che Luca," "My Father Washes His Hands," "At the Grave of Virgil Campbell," "My Grandfather Dishes the Dirt,"

and most of the preludes and postludes. The fact that Fred faces his thirty-fifth birthday in each of the preludes and postludes forces him to reckon with his age and the proximity of his death. Naturally, these thoughts lead to questions about the nature of death and existence--serious questions which demand serious consideration. Through the course of the four volumes, focused in the preludes and postludes, Fred resolves his uncertainty about death and his relationship to it. He rejects the notion of death, embraces life, and--appropriate to these dream poems--seizes dreams and dreaming as talismans to ward off the unimaginable Nothing that is dreamlessness.

Images of death emerge during Fred's sleep in the preludes and postludes. In "Earth Emergent Drifts the Fire River," Fred's dreams are bombarded by the bodies and lamentations of the dead: "The birdsong tiers of my dream are the screams/Of the immolated and the self-immolated./And the drowned men swim unbearably toward us" (25-7). Both of these images echo poems which appear earlier in *Midquest*. First, Fred connects the sound of birds chirping in the trees ("birdsong tiers") with "the screams/Of the immolated and the self-immolated," burned victims and protestors of the Vietnam conflict who Fred eulogizes in "Bloodfire." Second, the unbearable sight of "drowned men" who "swim" life-like toward Fred and Susan recalls a similar image in "On Stillpoint Hill at Midnight." In that poem, Fred imagines that all dead forms sink to the bottom of a body of water. He states that these dead bodies will emerge from those depths to threaten the living while they dream:

> on the sterling upper plane
> of water
> we the living dance thoughtless,
> steady in one place,
> while in the living muscle
> dead men toil

and compose their strengths.
In satin inlets of our sleep
they will surface
and like pistons swim
absolutely toward us.
They depart no painted paradise
with harps and lutes
but a dread salt Sargasso
thirsting for our green blood.

(123-137)

Fred figures himself and Susan dancing on the water's "upper plane." Below, the dead men prepare to rise. Fred predicts that the dead will emerge when he and Susan dream "in satin inlets of our sleep." He imagines the dead forms swimming just as they do in "Earth Emergent on the Fire River." The dead do not appear angelic; rather, they are menacing. They desire Fred and Susan's "blood," which is described as "green"--the symbolic color of vitality. Thus, these dead forms plan to rob Fred and Susan of their lives. Chappell clearly intends Fred's dream in "Earth Emergent on the Fire River" to mirror this passage. After all, Fred is dreaming, and the approach of "the drowned men" is implicitly threatening. These dreamed images therefore begin to betray Fred's fear of and uncertainty about death.

Other recurrent images of death in Fred's dream provide evidence of his fixation. Similar passages appear in three of the four preludes, in which Fred dreams that dead bodies form the core of the earth. Usually introduced by the phrase, "the way the world was formed," these passages are developed fully in the long poem "How to Build the Earthly Paradise: Letter to George Garrett." In the three preludes, however, the images of our planet forming show Fred's preoccupation with death. In "The River Awakening in the Sea," Fred dreams as follows:

How the world was formed,

> The dead dropped down brick by brick to sea bottom,
> The dead and the sleeping, layer upon
> Layer, they hug each other forever, their bones
> Grin in the fathomless dark, wary as eyes.
> Here is the bedrock: the dead, fold upon fold.
> Lamprotoxu, Chiasmodon,
> Dragonfish, Sea Viper, Black Gulper,
> Burning like comets over choked bones.
>
> (41-9)

Fred dreams that the dead sink into the dream waters of *River*. Chappell's use of the rhythmic phrase "brick by brick" implies by its stresses and repetition the image of these bodies piling upon one another. Importantly, Fred's dreaming mind equates "the dead and the sleeping" as one inert group which submerges to form the "bedrock" of earth. Both the dead forms and the sleeping forms are likewise referred to as "they," and both are figured as skeleton-like "bones." By this association, sleeping becomes a metaphor for death. Because Fred sleeps and dreams here, he experiences a metaphorical death. Chappell carefully delineates this passage so that the line break between "layer upon" and "Layer" suggests actual stacking as the reader's eye turns the corner of the first line to a new line underneath it. The haunting image of glowing fish "burning like comets over [the] choked bones" of the dead and sleeping closes the passage. The corresponding passage in *Bloodfire* is similar, but it appropriately figures the dead as fire:

> This way the world was formed,
> The purer spirits surged ever upward,
> Shucking the gross pig-matter their bodies;
> Lie glittering round the zenith like strewn glass.
> Mountain and riverbed are the stacked dead husks.
> The pure spirits stand among the monsters and heroes,
> Orion, Hercules, Cassiopeia,
> And Draco and the Big and Little Bear.
> And we this hour, 28 May 1971,
> Are Gemini. . . .

(46-55)

As in the previous passage, dead bodies ("gross pig-matter," "husks") pile atop one another to shape the earth ("Mountain and riverbed"). The spirits of the dead fly from their bodies to become flaming stars in the constellations. Fred dreams that he and Susan are paired as "Gemini" among these stars, and their position implies that--sleeping--they join the dead, having abandoned their bodies. The equivalent passage in "Dawn Wind Unlocks the River Sky" completes this pattern, emphasizing Fred's preoccupation with death:

> How the world was formed:
> Wind huddled together from every quarter the dead men in it,
> Wistful spirits in a gang chained lamenting to the elements,
> Elements carried from the Four Quarters by the East Wind,
> By Auster, and Zephyr,
> And by rapacious snaketailed Boreas.
> Suffering of spirit, suffering elements,
> In one mass.
>
> (31-8)

Here, the harsh winds blow the elements and the bodies of the dead together into "one mass" which forms the core of the earth. Like the other two passages, this one figures dead bodies as the center of our planet, thereby implying that our earth is built upon death. Although Fred dreams in these passages, his subconscious mind clearly yields images of his conscious preoccupations about death and mortality. The images of his dreams align sleep and death and, by implication, suggest that Fred experiences a metaphorical death as he dreams.

In other portions of the preludes and postludes, Fred seems to recognize more clearly his proximity to death. In the postlude "The River Seeks Again the Sea," Fred dreams that his dreaming form floats toward death. He looks to his wife for reassurance: "Where go we now? I guess we wash toward death./May I hold your hand?" (6-7). Dreaming in the

element of water, Fred thinks he and Susan "wash toward death" as they sleep. When he asks "May I hold your hand?," Fred not only asks if he may join his wife in this journey but he also seeks for reassurance by physical contact. He does not seem to be able to fight or swim against the tide which carries his sleeping form toward death. In "Wind Subsides on the Earth River," Fred seems similarly resigned to the fact that he and Susan cannot avoid death:

> We have lived to die.
> We have lived at last to kiss
> Our forefathers
> With our green earthlips.
>
> (45-8)

Fred's statement that he and Susan "have lived to die" sounds bitter--angry at the realization that life leads only to death. Fred anticipates kissing his dead ancestors with "green earthlips." The color of youth and vitality, green suggests that Fred and Susan's delivery to death would be too early.

Fred addresses his fears and questions about death fully in "Earth Emergent Drifts the Fire River." The longest and last of the preludes, this poem reveals Fred's resolution on the issue which has so haunted his dreams and memories, as represented by the other poems in the book. In lines clearly modeled after T.S. Eliot's "Ash Wednesday," Chappell has Fred voice his seeming decision that he is unwilling to die:

> I do not wish to be
> Consumed by spirit merely, I do not wish
> To be consumed. I do not
> Wish to be. I do
> Not wish.
>
> (42-46)

Fred's repeated, deteriorating lament expresses his desire to live, his desire to keep his body

from being "consumed by spirit." Chappell complicates this resolution by the phrases "I do not/Wish to be. I do/Not wish"--which introduce a suggestion of ambivalence toward death. Fred wants to live but also does not want "to be." Appearing at the end of consecutive lines, the phrases "I do not" and "I do" further illustrate Fred's ambivalence about death.

Fred resolves this ambivalence toward death in the single long passage which follows his Eliotic lament. In it, Fred tells Susan that death does not exist. He maintains that there is a "Nothing," however, which can be avoided by clinging to dreams:

> What there is in emptiness,
> What limits, what foreknowledge, what improbable coldness, what
> Hatred for the spirit-tree, the tree of flesh,
> What there is, let it consume itself,
> Let it mass and flounder yonder from the skin
> Of things, let it not come nigh this hearth, this hold,
> This house, let the cloud of unbeing never touch
> Our garish boxes of fervor.
>
> (48-55)

Rather than being "consumed" himself, Fred condemns "emptiness" and all of its properties to "consume itself." Later described as "the cloud of unbeing," this "emptiness" clearly represents death. Its "improbable coldness" mark it as death-like, lacking the warmth of life. The fact that this "cloud of unbeing" harbors a "Hatred for the spirit-tree, the tree of flesh" again proves that it is death which Fred condemns; because it despises these organic images of flesh and spirit, of life, this "emptiness" embodies the opposite of vitality. Fred wants to ensure that this "cloud" of death will not come near "the skin/Of things"--as if the cloud would infect and destroy everything which lives. Likewise, Fred wants to bar death from encroaching on "This house," where he and Susan would be threatened. Fred resolves not to allow death to "touch/Our garish boxes of fervor." Active ("fervor") and colorful ("garish"),

these "boxes" represent Susan and Fred's bodies, which contain their life-force.

To avoid death's "touch," Fred suggests a defense to protect their lives:

> Susan, we must dream
> The sinewy dream, the dream militant,
> We must thrust at bay all that is dreamless.
> Here are we perched unsteady on the margin of dream,
> Receiving from two worlds their gaudy intelligence.
> World of half-sleep,
> World of waking,
> where the four-square crucis of elements
> Cuts clean across.
> (55-63)

In order to ward off death, Fred implores Susan to "dream/The sinewy dream, the dream militant." The adjective "sinewy," which denotes human tissue, equates these dreams with life. The adjective "militant" suggests the aggressive stance Fred and Susan must take to protect themselves from death. Fred's demand that he and Susan "thrust at bay all that is dreamless" immediately recalls his desire to avoid the "cloud of unbeing" that is death. Clearly, death seems a "dreamless" state, so clinging to dreams and rejecting dreamless things is the greatest defense in avoiding death. Fred describes the sleeping position of himself and his wife, where they are vulnerable to the dreams of the "World of half-sleep" and still perceive external images from the "World of waking." Sitting on or straddling the "margin" between these two worlds, Fred and Susan inhabit a state where "the four-square crucis of elements/Cuts clean across." They are positioned where two metaphorical lines intersect, forming a cross which marks four separate quadrants for each of the four elements of dream (water, fire, air, and earth).

In this dream state, riding the "margin" between sleeping and waking while simultaneously perceiving these four elements, Fred states that he and Susan become privy to

a separate realm:

> Yet are we
> Given to know beyond these Another,
> where no water sings with
> Its breath of fire, where sunlight the cloud never
> Ripens to peach, where the single atoms stray
> Lost and touchless, where even the longdrawn shriek
> Of history sounds a thin sigh merely, it is
> That world we send our fireships to destroy.
> Not death, no, there is no
> Death, only a deeper dreaming. But there is
> Nothing
> The black egg seedless hatching its harsh wings.
> Yet is Whitman not delivered to it, nor Thoreau.
> Nor the human deaths of lovers,
> It cannot gorge them.
>
> (63-77)

Fred and Susan can see "Another" world beyond the worlds of "half-dream" and "waking." There, the four elements are not present ("no water sings/Its breath of fire"). The image of the ripening peach, also barred from this world, suggests that life holds no place in this world either. "Lost and touchless," the atoms of this world drift. Other than the negative connotations of "Lost," the feeling of being "touchless" is one which Fred heartily condemns in his rejection of formlessness for flesh. Fred claims that this lifeless realm is the one he and Susan "send [their] fireships to destroy." The introduction of the dreamed element of fire into this previously element-less world suggests that it is the warships of dream with which Susan and Fred attack this death realm. In a sudden turn, Fred declares that this other realm is "Not death, no, there is no/Death, only a deeper dreaming." This statement mirrors one uttered by Fred's grandfather, who speaks from the grave in "My Grandfather Dishes the Dirt." He says to his surviving family, "Please understand, I *like* it here,/Dreaming in cold earth my freshened dream" (8-9). Fred's dead grandfather provides evidence that death

is not to be feared, that it is indeed a "deeper dreaming." Fred acknowledges his grandfather when he states that, although there is no death, "there is/Nothing"--a vacuous existence which is to be feared. Fred dreams this "Nothing" as an "egg" which seems paradoxically lifeless ("seedless") but nonetheless hatches a menacing bird with "harsh wings." Aligning himself and his wife ("human lovers") with Thoreau and Whitman, Fred declares that this bird shall never swallow ("gorge") them and exile them to "Nothing." Whitman, Thoreau, and human lovers have a love and fondness for life in common. These qualities seem to protect them from the bird-like "Nothing."

In other passages, having resolved that death does not exist and that seizing dreams will protect him from the vacuous "Nothing," Fred celebrates life. Like his celebration of flesh over formlessness, Fred's new love of life stems from an acceptance of waking and of reality. Because he has rejected formlessness and resolved his questions about death, Fred no longer fights the waking process in the final prelude. He accepts life and reality, represented best by his new-found comfort with his flesh. Fred's dreams again return to the living, organic image of the tree in a final celebration of life over death. A recurrent image in *Midquest*, the flesh-tree or tree of spirit gains its full symbolic significance in "Earth Emergent Drifts the Fire River." Fred implores the Earth not to molest him or his wife:

> Leave us, mud jumble of mirk
> And humus, tucked in the rock heart
> Of the mountain, in these stones are seeds of fire,
> Dream-seeds which taking root shall renew the world,
> Tree of Spirit lifting from the mountain of earth
> As the curtains of fire rise behind our eyelids,
> Spirit Tree of Fire overglowing all the world,
> Seeking with its flower-light
> Each crinkle in the rock, each crease
> in the dark heart hid from the head.

(170-9)

Dreaming that he and Susan are "tucked" inside the earth, Fred perceives life-giving "seeds of fire" in the buried stones. Fred knows that these seeds will grow and thereby "renew the world," delivering everything from death into new lives. He dreams of a burning "Tree of Spirit," the embodiment of this renewing force, growing from the ground. Connecting the light of this burning tree with the light-filled and billowing curtain of his bedroom ("curtains of fire rise behind our eyelids"), Fred imagines that the life-giving light of the Tree of Spirit sharpens the margins and outlines of everything. The fact that this light can even expose "each crease/in the dark heart hid from the head" makes the Tree of Spirit an enlightener of emotion as well. Revealing subconscious emotions (contained in the "heart") which are hidden from the conscious mind ("the head"), the burning tree sheds metaphorical light on the deepest secrets of every self. In fact, the Tree of Spirit does this for Fred, revealing his doubts about life and death. Through the dreams in each prelude and postlude, Fred resolves these questions and rejects death for life--seizing dreams as an indicator of the vital imagination that holds Nothing at bay.

During the course of the eight poems in *Midquest* which frame each volume, Fred dreams fantastical thoughts and also comes to some serious revelations. These dreams obscure the margin between dreaming and waking, transforming sensory images into strange, flowing visions. As Fred's dreaming mind explores his deepest thoughts and fears, he comes to a number of resolutions: he rejects his imagined, impalpable form for his own flesh; he rejects the notion of death for a dream-filled existence which wards off the vacuous Nothing.

These realizations have similar side effects in that they enable Fred to end his fight against the waking process, to welcome a reality where his questions no longer plague his thoughts. Fred's comfort with his own flesh, his love for Susan, and his rejection of death all combine in a celebration of life. Fred's waking in the final prelude therefore symbolizes a rebirth, physically and spiritually. The fact that Fred comes to all of these realizations during his dreams reenforces the idea that dreams can reveal the deepest secrets of the heart. Though he imagines subconscious images, Fred makes decisions which are important to his conscious mind during these dreams.

Additionally, the fact that Fred seizes dreaming as a talisman to defeat the threat of Nothing proves that dreams are an important force in life. Although dreams can be frightening or disturbing, they often provide insight and shelter from cruel reality. As Fred himself says in a dream, "Mind rises from the ravages of sense/And clothes in dream" ("Earth Emergent Drifts the Fire River" 154-5). Dreams therefore serve as clothing or protection against the maddening world of our senses or of reason. The freely associative images of dreams therefore remain a positive force in *Midquest*, well after Fred awakens.

CHAPTER TWO:
Snugging Deeper in the Larder of Dream

"Susan's Morning Dream of Her Garden" is one of the two poems in *Midquest* which announces its focus on dreaming in its title. Like the preludes and postludes, this poem takes the form of an interior monologue, where Chappell presents Susan's sleeping thoughts in a manner very similar to that which he uses in presenting Fred's. During her dream, Susan imagines the growth of increasingly fantastic plants and flowers in her garden. She then dreams that she becomes a young girl in a garden scene which is painted on an antique plate. Susan regains the carefree innocence of childhood as she occupies this fantastic, Eden-like garden while simultaneously negating her own sexuality, which subconsciously repulses her. Elements of nursery rhymes and children's stories in the poem also indicate this reversion to childhood and sexual innocence. The lush garden of Susan's dream represents the antithesis of the waking world, where innocence and fantasy give way to the "dirty" sensations of sexual guilt (57). Susan therefore resists the waking process at the approach of morning as Fred does in the preludes, favoring the idyllic world of her dream garden.

The poem opens as Susan dreams a series of beautifully rich images. Each introduced by the phrase "the way," these parallel images unfold one after the other before revealing the act to which they are being compared. The first of these one-sided metaphors establishes the central motifs of Susan's dream, earth and plants: "The way a tree climbs down into the earth,/and earth to keep it from drifting like a bed/seizes the cloudmass roots" (1-3). The chain of metaphors and similes which begins to take shape here reveals the course of Susan's dreaming thoughts, which move from association to association. The

occasional illogic of her comparisons also portrays her thoughts as a dream. Accurate in its similarity to the appearance of outstretched roots, the word "cloudmass" nonetheless connotes an impalpable shape which cannot be "seized." The word "bed" also allows evocative interpretations. It denotes both the piece of furniture on which Susan sleeps and, especially applicable in this case, an area where flowers are planted. Neither "bed" is capable of "drifting," however. Taking the associative nature of Susan's dreaming thoughts into account, a possible link between "bed" and "drifting" may be found in that Susan thoughts are, in fact, drifting as she sleeps in bed. The image of roots serving as an anchor for a weightless tree reenforces the fact that this is possible only in dreams.

Susan's dreamed series of comparisons continues to unfold, assuming even stranger forms. She elaborates upon the image of roots reaching into the earth:

> and into ground lean the lonely
> and elaborate dead as soft as sleet,
> burbling one to another always,
>
> a full Four Hundred of juicy talkers. . . .
>
> (4-7)

This passage exemplifies the musical qualities of Susan's dream. Heavy alliteration pervades this passage and the entire poem; repeated *l*- and *s*-sounds create a sibilance that represents the fall of "sleet" and the sound of "talkers." The equation of dead, talking bodies with sleet further exemplifies the startling juxtapositions which Susan's dreaming mind formulates, as do the phrases "elaborate dead" and "juicy talkers."

The course of Susan's dream changes somewhat when she aligns the previous images of submersion with one of emersion. Again introduced by the phrase "the way," Susan dreams that the images of forms descending into the earth are equivalent to flowers growing

from the earth:

> the way
> the headstrong sunflower, and boxwood, Harpwoof
> Spragglewort, moondime, Dusty Miller, the pansies
>
> with their Pekinese faces, and grimbleweed lift
> out and up in light their informal forms,
> pistil and petal half-shadow. . . .
>
> (7-12)

The list of shrubs, flowers, and plants suggests an eruption of different shapes and colors which "lift/out and up" from the ground. Chappell has clearly chosen plants whose names evoke the most interesting images regardless of their actual characteristics. Again, the juxtaposition of words and images which Susan dreams is striking. The word "headstrong" personifies the sunflower as stubborn and resolute as well as evoking the oversized appearance of the sunflower's yellow petals--a heavy head on a long, thin neck. Further, the phrase "informal forms" implies a contradiction in terms but truly denotes "casual shapes." The final image turns from an expansive view of multiple flowers to a more microscopic view of light and shadow on the "pistil and petal" of a single bloom. By gradually focusing on the pistil, the female reproductive organ of a flower (which is the sexual organ of a plant), Susan's dream reveals sexuality as its subconscious thematic center.

Susan ends this long stream of incomplete, subjectless metaphors by revealing the act to which all of the preceding actions have been compared. Susan completes her dreamed thought by stating that "the way" roots reach into the ground, the dead sink into earth, and flowers grow "is the way my hand goes into the dirt" (13). Susan then questions and revises her thoughts, revealing the true cause of her dreamed images: "Or is it flesh I enter?/My own, or lubberhubby's lying this plot with me?" (14-5). This multilayered revelation

accurately suggests the complexity of dreams in that the cause of Susan's thoughts is obscured and delayed. Susan's uncertainty about what she, in fact, touches further demonstrates the confusion of dreaming. She mistakes her own body for Fred's ("lubberhubby's") and pictures her own hand reaching into flesh, as she had imagined her hand digging dirt. Susan's confusing her own form with that of her husband--and imagining that she can "enter" his body--both recall the reciprocal sensations which Fred expresses in the preludes. The metaphor of entering flesh also evokes images of sexual penetration. Because this sensation of entering flesh inspires the preceding images, sensuality emerges as the obscured cause of Susan's dream, as it does in the image of the pistil. Furthermore, Susan subconsciously aligns "flesh" with "dirt," thereby suggesting that the human body and sexual contact are somehow unclean or repulsive. The fact that Susan dreams that she and Fred sleep in a "plot" of ground and not in a bed (although the word denotes a storyline as well) also demonstrates the manner in which Susan's consciousness of her physical location becomes entangled in dreamed images.

Susan's attention then focuses on Fred. Although she is aware of his actual presence, Susan imagines Fred in fanciful images. The tone of her dream is light and humorous:

> Haho. He. He is loose in sleep
> and musical as a horse, goeth as a zinnia
> brave to daybreak and casts a watershaped snore.
>
> Why are men so toady, tell me, touching
> the moss and root? I'll tend well my contrary garden.
> (16-20)

The actual sound and touch of Fred almost becomes lost in these rich, dreamed images. The four syllables "Haho. He. He" evoke the sound of laughter, accurately conveying that

Susan is amused by Fred's snoring. Susan's amusement is also evident when she describes Fred as "musical as a horse"--that he makes a sound like a horse neighing. A more complex image, Susan's portrayal of Fred's snore as "watershaped" conveys the fluid and shuddering sound of its rasping. Images of plant life also appear in this passage, continuing the pattern established in the first line of the poem. Susan dreams of Fred as a "zinnia" and compares the feel of his pubic hair and penis to a "moss and root." Because roots grow into the dirt, they too seem defiled, further revealing Susan's subconscious aversion to sexuality and the penis. In reaction, she resolves to "tend" her "contrary garden" which suggests a true garden and her own genitalia--the "contrary" or opposite of the penis, because the vagina is a recess and not a protrusion. A garden proves to be an accurate metaphor for the fecundity of the female sexual organs, which are fertile for the growth of children, but the garden metaphor is also associated with dirt. These sexual implications further suggest Susan's concerns about her own sexuality. The word "contrary" also evokes the nursery rhyme "Mary, Mary, quite contrary/How does your garden grow?" The unlikely things which grow in Mary's garden, according to the song, are a precedent for the fantastic images which appear in Susan's dream. The nursery rhyme also indicates Susan's fixation with childhood, which culminates when she assumes the form of a girl later in her dream.

The image of the "contrary garden" marks the departure of Susan's thoughts from the actual to more dream-like images, removed from her consciousness of her surroundings. These images again manifest themselves as flowers and plants. She imagines a proliferation of plant life:

> Now my rows of queenly corn erupt to cadenza;

> and the cabbages unfurl
> outward and inward like sentences of Proust,
> the sweet rose invites her oriental suitors all
>
> iridescent in green and oil, and yonder my neat row
> of bones blooms out mouths of marrow. . . .
>
> (21-6)

Susan equates the appearance of growing "corn" with the sound of a "cadenza," an improvised piece of music. She also imagines the visual image of "cabbages" in terms of sound; her thoughts suggest that the delicate appearance of cabbages is like the nuances of sound in the Proust's prose. Susan's dream takes on more fanciful characteristics when she imagines that a "sweet rose" bloom is being wooed by the leaves of the bush. The word "suitors" suggests the archaic customs of formal courtship, which in its standards of decorum disallowed sexual contact. By imagining this courtship, Susan reveals a subconscious fascination with standards which make sexuality taboo. Susan's dream becomes increasingly fantastic as it progresses from images of actual plants to the personified rose, culminating in the disturbing image of "bones" sprouting "mouths of marrow"--which suggests haunting white flowers.

These marvelous, dreamed images do not satisfy Susan, however. She states that she is "not replete or reconciled," that she wishes for more fantastic images which would transform her memories of her garden into a dream world (27). Susan's attempts to revert to childhood innocence and her increasing desire to distance herself from her own sexuality coincide as she dreams of a more fantastic world where she might attain sexual innocence. She apostrophizes her garden in a song-like incantation, asking that more whimsical dream plants might grow:

> Garden, garden, will you not grow for me
> a salon full of billets-doux and turtledoves?
> Garden, garden, green tureen,
>
> will you not put me forth the olden ladies upsidedown
> in their hooped skirts like the bells of lilies,
> their clapper legs chiming sentimental songs?
>
> (28-33)

Complementing the pervading alliteration of the poem, the repetition of "Garden, garden" again recalls the sound and subject matter of the nursery rhyme "Mary, Mary, quite contrary." The repeated emergence of this rhyme in Susan's dream indicates her longing for the innocence and simplicity of childhood, when the prevalence of rhymes like "Mary, Mary, quite contrary" allowed for the possibility of the beautiful and fantastic. The fantastic things Susan asks her garden to produce are analogous to the "silver bells/And cockle shells" which grow in the nursery rhyme; when Susan asks her garden to produce a room that will grow love letters and "turtledoves," associated with love and lovers, she reduces the issues of love and sexuality to totemic items. Susan also wishes for a garden, not of lilies, but of upturned women in "hooped skirts like the bells of lilies"--an image which recalls the "pretty maids all in a row" from the nursery rhyme. Although Susan equates the legs of these upturned women with "clappers" of bells, they truly correspond to the pistils and stamens of actual lilies. Because the open skirts of the women Susan imagines uncover the lower halves of their bodies, they become sexually vulnerable--analogs to the sexual organs of flowers. This sexual image escapes Susan's growing efforts to isolate and desensualize sexuality in her dream.

Perhaps it is the image of hooped skirts which then makes Susan reflect on the society of olden times. She wishes that she had lived in the times when women wore those clothes:

"I long to belong to/the chipper elegance, those centuries where/the hand of man has never said an ugly word" (36). Although Susan dreams illogically that a "hand" could speak, the image implies an age of chivalry. Because Susan believes that "the hand of man" would not say or--by implication--do anything "ugly" during those "centuries," she wants to enter that age and thereby deny herself and "the hand of man" any sexual contact. For Susan, an antique plate which she owns represents this time. Remembering her plate, Susan dreams that she is within the fanciful garden pictured on its surface:

> I own an antique plate in which I see
> a little garden with a swing, a young girl in
> the swing, tra-la, and flush with birds of every hue,
>
> troo-loo.
> The swing-girl's face is a mint of pale pink roses.
> In the garden I grow I'm the girl in the swing, ting-a-ling.
> (37-42)

The nonsense sounds in this passage ("tra-la," "troo-loo," "ting-a-ling") and its internal rhyme all reenforce the elements of song in Susan's dream. The garden painted on the plate ties this image to the preceding ones of earth and plants. New elements of colorful birds and the "swing-girl" differentiate this tableau from the others, however. It is the "swing-girl" which arrests Susan's dreaming attention. Susan describes the girl's face as "a mint of pale pink roses," a fantastic image which transforms the color of the girl's cheeks into a bed of roses. The word "mint" not only suggests the number of flowers but also hints at its alternate meaning as an herb--a verbal pun which is quite appropriate to the imagery of the poem. Susan dreams that she is this "girl in the swing" and thereby enters the world decorated on her antique plate. By assuming the form of a girl, Susan regains the carefree innocence of childhood while simultaneously regaining her sexual innocence by returning to

her youth, before her sexual maturity.

As Susan's dream evolves, she transforms the static image on the plate into a moving scene. She so transforms the picture on the plate, in fact, that her dream wanders independently from the constraints of the painted scene, changing it utterly:

> And I rise and rise in my swing through the globe
> of green leaves giddy till I become
> a rose-pink butterfly with arms of eyes.
>
> We whirl, my garden and I, until
> the minuet boils, the sun
> and moon and ground and tree become a waltzing sea,
>
> a jiggy river of green green
> green. Hurl-whorl green in which we roll
> as down a well of hay.
>
> I sing as high and clear-O as a finch
> in a yellow-green willow tree,
> transparent and vivid as dragonflies.
>
> (43-54)

Susan imagines swinging up to the "green leaves" of the trees in the garden. High in the air, she becomes a "butterfly" whose color ("rose-pink") is the only remaining characteristic of her previous human form. The single spots on her flapping wings lead Susan to believe she has "arms of eyes." As her dream drifts farther still from the image of the antique plate, Susan imagines that she and the garden are dancing partners. The words "minuet," "waltzing," and "jiggy" convey the music which she imagines hearing. Introduced by the verb "boils," the next transformation occurs as Susan dreams that she whirls so fast that everything around her blurs into a green liquid. This spinning motion continues as Susan imagines that she and the garden "roll as down a well of hay." The image suggests a tube of green, freshly mown hay, not hay browned by the sun.

The final transformation of this passage delivers Susan from this spinning, green world. Continuing the musical theme, she imagines singing "as high and clear-O as a finch/in a yellow-green willow tree." The image of the tree ties this segment to the others which all involve plants or trees. The image "transparent and vivid as dragonflies" describes the iridescent appearance of dragonflies' wings. It closes a series of images which begins with the decorated antique plate and slowly changes, until there is no element left which indicates the original source of the dream. These images transform Susan from a girl in her dream garden into an integral part of that garden; the images become purely fantastical and remarkably devoid of the sexual implications which appear in previous portions of her dream. The dancing and singing she imagines establish her carefree fantasy as an innocent haven, a garden of Eden before Adam and Eve's fall from grace into sexual self-consciousness and guilt.

The course of Susan's dream changes as she becomes conscious of the fact that she is asleep--and that she will be ejected from her Eden-like dream when she awakens. She senses the onslaught of morning, which would force her from the fantastic images of her dreams, into the world of waking and sexual guilt. Susan therefore resists the waking process as Fred does in the preludes:

> I'd be a fool, a woman's a fool, to be drawn back
> into the waking world,
> all dinky clutter and dirty bathtub.
>
> You don't catch me yet, New Day, I'm snugging
> deeper in the larder of dream,
> I'm burrowing like a lovely whistlepig
>
> into the green earthflesh of sleep, keep
> your tarnished-silver fingers, Sun, off my bright hair,

off my pillow, my mellow wallow.

(55-63)

Susan asserts that "a woman's a fool" to return to "the waking world," where her domestic responsibilities (suggested by the "dinky clutter and dirty bathtub," which must be cleaned) represent the antithesis of the carefree imagery and innocence of her dream. The "dirty bathtub" also associates dirt washed from Susan and Fred's nude bodies with the waking world. By implication, Susan attempts to remain in her dream so that she will not return to a world where sexuality and her own body seem "dirty." Figured as a kind of undertow, "the waking world" pulls Susan "back" toward itself. Thus, Susan feels that she must avoid the active force of waking in order to maintain her dreaming. She dreams of waking as a pursuer which she dodges. As if to hide from this pursuer, Susan imagines "snugging/deeper in the larder of dream" where she cannot be molested by daylight or waking. Usually a room or closet where food (especially meat) is stored, the "larder" in Susan's dream seems to be a storeroom for dreams. By retreating "deeper" into this metaphorical realm of dream, Susan further removes herself from the waking world. Susan's retreat into dream is also described as the "burrowing" of a "whistlepig" into the ground, an image which immediately recalls the images of roots digging into the ground at the poem's opening. The word "earthflesh" also recalls the sensual image of forms entering flesh earlier in the poem, betraying the concerns about flesh and sexuality which Susan wants to avoid. Susan then warns the sun, the embodiment of morning, not to wake her. Figured as "fingers," the sun's rays would awaken Susan if they shined upon her "bright hair" and "pillow"--the symbolic center of sleep. Susan also wants to escape the touch of any "fingers" which might initiate sexual contact. By defending herself against the forces of waking, embodied by the morning

light, Susan also defends her regained state of fantastic innocence in the garden of her dream.

As if to escape this light, Susan again imagines burrowing deeper into dream, where she cannot be forced into a world barren of the fantastic images in her dream garden. Ironically, this passage downward is also described as light-filled, and it leads to a world where she can awaken without losing her dreams:

> I'm diving to a door I sense below,
> a door as yellow with catlight as an owl's eye,
> that opens truly into the garden
>
> on my antique plate and can draw
> my waking body in and there no one
> can draw me out again. No use, you-all,
>
> I'm gone beyond your smirch, you can't
> get in, I'm the slattern in the pattern,
> admire, admire!
>
> (64-72)

Susan dreams that she descends to a lit doorway. Both "catlight" and "owl's eye" suggest the glow of these animals' retinae when light shines on them. Susan perceives that this bright, yellow doorway "truly" leads to the garden of her antique plate in her dream. She believes that once she enters the doorway, she can regain her "waking body" while remaining in the realm of dream. The notion of a door opening into another, magical world echoes similar instances in C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, and--most appropriately--Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, where a door reveals a beautiful garden to a group of children. The elements of these children's stories reemphasize the sexual innocence and childhood fantasy of Susan's dream, which she desperately desires to maintain. Once inside the door of her dream, Susan

knows she can have the benefits of consciousness without losing the imagery and innocence of her dream. Susan imagines herself in this ideal state, where she cannot be removed by the forces which would awaken her to the "dinky clutter and dirty bathtub." She taunts, "I'm gone beyond your smirch"--as if waking or sunlight would defile the waking dream and sexual cleanliness she imagines. As "slattern in the pattern," Susan commands all to watch her lounge in the beautiful garden of her dream, where she can be seen but not touched. Susan thus imagines that she is actually awake in the world painted on her antique plate; she thinks she has escaped the waking world for a permanent, waking dream.

Susan only dreams that she has escaped waking to the new day, however. As she senses light invading her bedroom, Susan knows that she must abandon the dream in which she believes she is awake:

> . . . But sunlight now comes licking at my dream-door,
> boohoo. *Day day go away*,
> come again some other sleep.
>
> Yet there's no help for it, and up I go
> to breast the unendearing morning,
> eject, usurpt, and half-awake.
>
> (73-8)

The image of light "licking" at the door of Susan's dream implies that morning is an animal or predator; it is also a sexual image which threatens the dreamed abstinence Susan maintains. Still trying to avoid waking, Susan imagines another song-like chant. Similar to the children's song "Rain, rain, go away/Come again some other day," Susan's chant asks for respite from morning. Her song is a last effort to defend the fantastic innocence of her dream garden. Susan cannot avoid waking, consciousness, and delivery from her dream-world, however. When Susan realizes this fact, she states "there's no help for it."

Reversing the process of submerging into dream, Susan imagines that she rises upward, toward consciousness. The words "eject" and "usurpt" accurately convey that Susan is unwilling to awaken. Susan's feelings of dread manifest themselves in the final stanza, where her disgust is made perfectly clear in two similes: "I lie like cool meat on the bed like a/dimestore plate which has no picture on it,/no pattern at all" (79-81). Conscious and forced from her dreamed garden, Susan becomes aware of her physical form which seems grotesque, reminding her of her sexuality. The image of meat recalls the "larder of dream," from which Susan has been expelled. Her bed also seems unwelcoming now that she is awake. No longer the setting of dream, Susan describes her bed as "a/dimestore plate that has no picture on it." Perhaps an evocation of white sheets, the image of a plain, white, and cheap "dimestore plate" represents the antithesis of the colorful and vibrant "pattern" of the antique plate which she occupied while sleeping and dreaming. Susan appears totally dejected that she has been expelled from the flower-filled garden of her dreams. As Eve was cast out of the garden of Eden, so Susan loses the child-like innocence she regained in her fantastic dream. She also regains the sexual guilt which Adam and Eve felt upon leaving paradise.

Like Fred's dreams in the preludes, "Susan's Morning Dream of Her Garden" details the way in which Susan transforms her perceptions of her actual surroundings into dreamed images. Often figured as beautifully colorful gardens, Susan's dream removes her from waking and sexuality, which often seems "dirty" in her dream. Susan seizes upon the image painted on her antique plate as an ideal dream realm, where she becomes a girl swinging in a swing, a butterfly, and finally her own self, awake in the garden of her dream. Throughout

the poem, children's stories and nursery rhymes highlight Susan's fixation on childhood innocence and fantasy, which she regains in her dream. The ideal state of being conscious without losing the sexual innocence and beautiful images of dreams introduces the possibility that dreams and reality might somehow coexist, an idea which is ultimately obliterated when Susan awakens in disgust. Susan continues to long for the dreamed realm of her antique plate--a carefree, asexual existence in a flower-filled garden.

CHAPTER THREE:
A Gold Made Out of Dream

"My Grandmother's Dream of Plowing" is the second of two poems in *Midquest* which reveals its focus on dreaming in its title. Unlike "Susan's Morning Dream of Her Garden" or the preludes and postludes, this poem does not take the form of an interior monologue. Rather, "My Grandmother's Dream of Plowing" is a dramatic monologue in which Fred's grandmother Anne describes a dream she once had. Her recollections benefit from rumination over the images she has dreamed, whereas "Susan's Morning Dream of Her Garden" and the preludes and postludes detail the dreamer's thoughts as they occur, without the aid of hindsight. Because Anne retells a past dream in this poem, her recollection introduces issues which do not apply to "Susan's Morning Dream of Her Garden" or the preludes and postludes: the way in which one remembers dreams, the way in which one assigns meaning to dreams, and the way in which one's dreams affect life after waking. In the dream Anne describes, she unearthed a huge lump of gold, which she hoped would enable her and her husband to live without enduring the toils of farming. The lump of gold changed shape, however, eventually becoming a simple stone. The ensuing repercussions which the unearthed stone caused in Anne's dream represent still greater burdens which the earth can impose, also suggesting the fruitlessness of wishing for deliverance from these burdens. Anne assumed responsibility for what transpired in her dream, and her feelings of guilt permeate her life even when she awakens. Because Anne's dream has such a lasting impression on her, the poem further indicates that dreams can have profound effects on human lives.

As Anne describes her dream, she endeavors to translate the miraculous properties of her past vision into words. Unlike "Susan's Morning Dream of Her Garden" or the preludes and postludes, where a dreamer's wandering thoughts are recorded, "My Grandmother's Dream of Plowing" presents Anne trying to convey a dream's magic to another person, Fred. Anne often employs similes and metaphors to suggest the association or emotional impact a particular image had on her as she dreamed it. At the outset of her description, Anne expresses the illogic of her dream, which seemed perfectly natural and logical as it evolved; although she never saw her husband at the plow, Anne maintains that she could, in fact, perceive his actions in her dream:

> I never saw him plowing, but Frank was well
> And whole and plowing in the field behind
> Jackson and Maude whose heads went up and down
> Like they agreed on what they were talking over.
> (1-4)

This description recalls Fred and Susan's ability to perceive changes and movement in their bedroom as they dreamed, without opening their eyes. The conjunction "but" lends a matter-of-fact tone to Anne's expression of this paradox--that she did not *see* Frank but still watched his actions as if they took place inside her head. The word implies that this paradox seemed natural to Anne at the time, though it was magical.

Anne indicates another marvel. Other poems in *Midquest* (including "Second Wind" and "My Grandfather Dishes the Dirt") reveal that Frank died before Anne. Anne's noting that Frank was "well/And whole" in her dream suggests that he had, in a sense, risen from the dead. Anne remembers seeing Frank magically surrounded by a light which reenforced the miracle of his appearing in her dream: "There was a light around him, light he was

blind/To, light tolling steady like a bell" (5-6). This seems to indicate that Frank did not perceive his appearing in Anne's dream as a resurrection, though the revelation of the light to Anne is certainly a manifestation of her amazement. The light builds in brightness and abundance as the word "light" is repeated three times. To Anne, this light seemed to pulse. Perhaps unwittingly, she employs the technique of synesthesia in describing the way the light appeared in her dream; she equates the visual image of pulsation with the sound of a bell tolling. Given the fact that Anne introduces all of these details by the fact that she "never saw" her husband, her mystical perception of Frank's actions and the light streaming from him reveals the paradoxical magic of her dream.

Anne describes another magical element of her dream when she remembers having foreknowledge of what Frank would unearth in the field. Anne therefore anticipated the course her dream would take, and, by the tone of her reminiscence, this assumption seemed perfectly viable and sensible at the time:

> The dirt peeled back from the share like meal, brown
> Loam all water-smelling. What he'd uncover
> With his plowing I felt I already knew:
> He'd turn up that bell from the church the Klan
> Burned down because of the Negro organist.
> The bell they couldn't find had washed in the tide
> Of earth and finally had come to rest
> In our own bottom land that used to grow
> Tobacco . . .
>
> (7-15)

The image of dirt "like meal" or seed suggests that the earth did not resist the force of the plow but spilled aside with ease. Anne's dream was so vivid that she even remembers the smell of the earth, "all water-smelling," a description which suggests a musty and rich fecundity. Anne believed that she "already knew" what the plow would reveal under this

fecund dirt. Her statement carries a tone of absolute certainty. Anne recalls being so certain that she suddenly realized how the bell had come from the site of the burned church to her field. She believed that the bell had moved through the earth in an ocean-like ebb and flow. Anne's assumption that the bell had drifted under ground into her field and her certainty that it would, in minutes, be unearthed both reveal the way in which the most magical and nonsensical things (i.e., tidal flow of the earth, foreknowledge) seem completely logical in dreams.

Continuing her narration, Anne tells Fred that her assumption "was wrong" (16). Although she mistook what would emerge from the dirt, her dreamed foreknowledge correctly predicted that the plow would unearth "something":

> for when the sun
> Gleamed on something in the furrow-side
> I went to look, and it wasn't a bell at all.
> It was a big and shining lump of gold.
> It was a Mystery gold, and just the tip
> Of it stuck out.
>
> (16-21)

Anne expected that the "something" which "gleamed" in the dirt would be the metallic edge of the church bell. The "big and shining lump of gold" which she found instead seems more surprising than the church bell because Anne had prepared herself and the reader for its arrival by her confident, though impossible, assumption of its flowing under ground. A by-product of her own surprise, the gold appeared a "Mystery" to Anne. The lump's mystery can be partially attributed to the fact that most of it remained hidden from Anne's sight. By calling the lump of gold a mystery, Anne reveals that, in her dream, she knew that the gold held secrets or meanings which she might discover.

Anne then describes digging the lump of gold out of the earth. Her digging is a metaphor for trying to understand the mystery of the gold, apart from her desire to possess it for its value:

> With my bare hands I brushed
> Away the crumbs and dug it out of the soil.
> I got on my knees and tried to wrestle it up,
> And after a while I did, aching, and rolled
> It out and stood looking at it all hushed.
>
> (21-25)

The word "crumbs" evokes the image of small particles of dirt on the lump's tip. The image of "crumbs" as the smallest bits of food also suggests the hunger Anne felt in her dream and in her experience as a poor farmer. Anne's description of her efforts to unearth the lump of gold suggests toil and struggle. In fact, the verb "wrestle" implies that the gold actively resisted being removed from the ground. Anne's digging up the gold also suggests the efforts associated with farming. First, the gold appeared while Anne and Frank prepared for planting. Second, Anne unearthed the gold as if it had grown there like a crop. Third, the struggle Anne describes echoes other images in *Midquest* which associate exhausting physical labor with farming (e.g., "My Father Burns Washington," "Remembering Wind Mountain at Sunset," "My Mother's Hard Row to Hoe," "My Father Washes His Hands"). Anne then remembers that, after pulling the gold from the ground, she "stood and looked at it all hushed." Because of its syntactic position in the sentence, the phrase "all hushed" applies equally to both Anne and the lump of gold. Anne was "hushed" or silenced in amazement. The gold, too, was "hushed"--making no noise so that its miraculous appearance seemed quiet and sublime, thus inspiring Anne's silence.

Anne further describes her amazement during the dream, recalling the appearance of

the gold she had found. She compares the lump's size to that of "a twenty-five-pound sack/Of flour" (26-7). Not only does this image describe the way the lump looked in Anne's dream but it also aids Anne in conveying the lump's surprising size to Fred. Anne compares the gold to a domestic object so that Fred might imagine the magical lump's shape, weight, and size in terms of something he sees regularly. The image of the sack of flour also suggests Anne's hunger and poverty; flour, which she may not have been able to afford as a poor farmer, represents the potential alleviation of her hunger and poverty which the gold would provide. She also portrays the light which glittered on the gold as "burning burning like the flame/Of Moses' bush" (27-8). An allusion which she knows Fred will recognize, the image compares the shining lump to a flame that burns but does not consume. Furthermore, this image reenforces the notion that Anne anticipated discovering a revelatory meaning for the lump of gold, just as God enlightened Moses as He spoke through the burning bush.

Anne then tries to express the fantastic effect the lump of gold had on her as she dreamed. She is unable, however, to find adequate words to describe its momentous appearance and the feelings of imminent importance which it inspired in her: "It lay there in the furrow/Like, like . . . Oh, I can't say what like" (28-9). Although Anne uses evocative similes throughout the poem to suggest the magic of her dream, she cannot pinpoint an accurate comparison in this case which would convey the ultimate effect which the lump's appearance had on her. She remembers that her awe and happiness so inspired her, however, that she imagined the lump of gold would forever alter the course of her life:

> I picked it up and cradled it to my breast,
> Thinking how this was a Gold made out of dream

And now we'd never fear about tomorrow
And give our frets and cares a well-earned rest.
(30-3)

Anne's ecstatic embrace of the gold represents a physical manifestation of the meaning Anne believed she has found in it. The word "cradle" suggests the gentle way a mother holds a child. This association foreshadows the transformation which the lump later underwent. Anne's thought that the lump was "a Gold made out of dream" introduces many interpretations. Positively, the gold embodies the magical qualities of dreams, ironically represented by the dream Anne is in fact describing. The gold also embodies Anne's hopes, as the word "dream" is often synonymous with "wish" or "hope" in idiom. Negatively, "dream" also implies the unsubstantial and the impermanent. Because dreams are not concrete, anything "made out of dream" is, by definition, ephemeral. Anne's dream serves as evidence that the images of dream cannot be reliable or permanent in that they shift radically and unexpectedly. Despite these multiple suggestions, it is the positive connotations which Anne seized in her dream, asserting that the value of the gold would give her and her husband enough money so that they could escape poverty and the toils of farming. Without having to tend the earth or worry about the health of their crops in order to earn a living, Anne believed that the gold would allow her and Frank to "give [their] frets and cares a well-earned rest."

Anne continues describing her dream to Fred, remembering Frank's reaction to the lump of gold she had unearthed. She dreamed that his first efforts to speak to her were fraught with anger and accusations:

"Is that your baby that was never mine?"
Behind me Frank had stopped the plow. His voice

Came up against me like another person,
Like a stranger maybe intending harm.
His voice was dressed in black and laid a curse on
All the fancies I'd thought up for us.

(34-39)

By asking whether the lump of gold was a baby which was Anne's but not his, Frank implies that Anne had been unfaithful. This instance establishes Frank as the voice of Anne's subconscious feelings of guilt in her dream. Anne personifies Frank's angry voice; given the suggestion of sexual infidelity in the preceding lines, the image of his voice pressing against her in the form of "a stranger maybe intending harm" suggests sexual threat. Anne further personifies the way Frank's voice sounded in her dream. Whereas Anne described Frank as surrounded by light earlier, the image of his voice "dressed in black," the absence of light, suggests both malevolence and death. The anger of Frank's voice and his suggestion that the lump of gold was in fact a child, both of which arise from Anne's subconscious, destroyed her "fancies" that the gold would free them from labor.

Anne recalls more of her dream, when Frank's anger and suggestion of her guilt became concrete, transforming the lump of gold:

I turned around to tell him Hush, but then
I knew it *was* a baby in my arm,
The strangest baby. As fat and dimpled as
The Baby Jesus in the pictures on
The Upper Room. And this golden child was
Speaking to me, not just baby-talk,
But real words that I ought to understand.
Except I couldn't hear. Bent my head down
But couldn't hear, no more than you hear the dark.

(40-48)

Foreshadowed by Anne's previous use of the word "cradled" and by Frank's insinuation that the gold was Anne's child by another man, Anne discovered that the lump had become a

baby. Similar to the processes by which images shift and transform in the preludes, postludes, and Susan's dream, this change illustrates the way in which the magical is perceived as ordinary in dreams. Anne compares the child to Jesus, establishing the image of herself cradling the child as an equivalent of Mary holding the Christ child. The comparison also emphasizes that Anne hoped that the child would somehow save her and Frank from farming and poverty as Christ saves all believers from eternal damnation. Anne remembers that the Christ-like baby seemed like a "golden child," thus applying the color of the lump to the baby it had become and implying that this child could do no wrong, as "golden child" suggests in idiom. Anne also describes the child as "the strangest baby," extending the pattern begun with "Mystery" which suggest incomprehensibility. Anne's inability to understand her dream manifested itself in her inability to understand the baby's speech. Although she recognized its speech as communicative language ("not just baby-talk") she "couldn't hear" the words it spoke. Anne repeats the verb "hear" three times, highlighting her failure. She perfectly evokes her inability, again using the technique of synesthesia, telling Fred that she "couldn't hear, no more than you hear the dark." Indeed, the ear does not perceive light or the absence of light, and this image of futility enhances the idea that Anne's efforts to understand her changing dream were futile as well.

After realizing that the gold had in fact become a child, Anne felt the need to defend herself against her subconscious feelings of guilt which first surface in Frank's accusations of infidelity. She recalls speaking to Frank in her dream. As she defended herself, Anne also attempted to convey the momentous meaning she felt certain the magical child embodied:

> "It's not my baby, and just never you mind,"
> I said to Frank. "This baby I've found will bring

> Us luck," I said, "because it turned from gold
> To flesh. That means--it has to mean--something
> To us, something to help us when we're old."
>
> (49-53)

By asserting "It's not my baby," Anne also denied that she had been unfaithful to Frank. Continuing her narration of her dreamed speech, Anne recalls insisting that the child would "bring/[them] luck"--thereby transferring the luck she associated with the lump of gold to its new shape as a child. She also endeavored to express the importance she felt this change indicated. Like her assumption that the plow would unearth the church bell and that the lump of gold would deliver her from farm labor, Anne was certain that the transformation "from gold/To flesh" implied "something," that the change was an important sign. Grappling for the significance of this change, Anne maintained that, like the lump of gold, the baby would "help us when we're old." She thought that the child, too, would enable her and Frank to live comfortably without labor.

As Anne remembers Frank's response, she describes how he revealed the futility of her hopes. Frank reminded her that they were "already old," that anything the child might magically prevent or provide would come too late. Anne then recalls that Frank also revealed that the baby had again changed shape: "And, see, the baby's changed to something else./It's turned into an ugly little man" (55-6). Frank again seems the voice of Anne's subconscious. Just as the gold had first changed by Frank's suggestion, Anne remembers that the baby had transformed as well:

> I looked, and felt the beating of my pulse
> Grow harder in my throat, knowing it was true.
>
> I held to me an evil little goblin
> With an evil smile.

(57-60)

Again, Frank's words proved "true" in Anne's dream. As his suggestion of Anne's guilt seems linked to the first transformation of the gold into a child, so his dismissing Anne's hopes about the child's importance seems linked to its changing into a "little goblin." The word "goblin" and the repeated word "evil" both apply negative connotations to what was first a glittering lump of gold, then a child, then a "little man." The words suggest that what Anne had previously identified with hopes and hidden revelatory meanings had become malicious. Anne remembers grotesque details of the little man's appearance. His eyes rolled in his head, "loose" as if they were not attached to a controlling mechanism (61). His head also rolled uncontrollably, "bobbling/Up and down" (61-2). Anne recalls her response to the despicable man, that she, too, seemed to lose control of her body as "[a]ll over I went water" (63). This image suggests formlessness, as if Anne became fluid and collapsed. She also remembers that she "trembled/Like a flame of fire," another image which suggests a loss of bodily control like the little goblin's (63-4). Because Frank represents Anne's subconscious feelings of guilt, her effort to turn from him was an effort to escape or ignore the guilt she felt. Anne reveals that her response was not only one of horror but also one of guilt and shame. She "turned her face away/From Frank" so as not to see the man who revealed the folly of her hopes (64-5). She recalls feeling that she had "never felt so ashen-humbled" (65). The word "ashen" first portrays Anne's feelings as a natural consequence of her burning "like a flame of fire" and also portrays her as ash-white, pale, and afraid. She feels "humbled" for having believed many things through the course of her dream: that the gold would make her hopes real, that the gold which once seemed passive was now a malicious

"goblin," that her husband would accuse her of infidelity, and that he could reveal the folly of her wishes with such ease.

"Ashen-humbled," Anne also felt guilty. She recalls blaming herself for the appearance of the evil goblin, which in a previous form seemed the sign of fulfilled hopes. Anne describes the questions she asked of herself, as she becomes flooded with the subconscious feelings of guilt which first appeared only in the voice of Frank:

> What had I brought on us? *Oh what, what?*
> Something terrible the field had birthed,
> And now I'd gathered it up, and who could say
> It wouldn't haunt us forever from this day
> Onward?
>
> (66-70)

Just as Anne had felt certain that the lump of gold and the baby it became were good signs, she felt equally sure that the little man might "haunt" her and Frank "forever." These words prove true as Anne later indicates that the images of her dream continue to "haunt" her well after she awakens. Her question "What had I brought on us?" indicates that she blamed herself for what had transpired. Frank's first accusation of her guilt and his later revelation of the folly of her hopes seem to have made Anne believe the whole incident was her fault. Her subconscious feelings therefore began to influence the emotions she experienced in her dream. Although Anne was certain that the gold she unearthed would ease her "frets," it had become yet another worry and burden.

Anne then remembers wanting to be rid of the curse the little goblin seemed to signify. To ward off the bad luck it embodied, she wished for the little man to die. She surprised herself by the violence of her wish:

> I'd never thought such an ugly thought

> As standing there with what the plow unearthed
> And wishing it would go away. Or die.
> That's what I wished: *Please die, and let us be.*
> (70-4)

The word "ugly" ties Anne's wish for the goblin's death to the evil it embodied, as Frank had also called it "ugly" ("an ugly little man"). Once the sign of good luck, "what the plow unearthed" seemed a plague to Anne, an actively malicious force that could only be dismissed by departure or death. It is the goblin's death that Anne wished for. She knew that if the little goblin died, she and Frank would be free of the curse it symbolized.

Remarkably, the goblin obeyed Anne's wish. She tells Fred of the horror of watching it die in her dream:

> Now here's the awfullest part. What I said
> To do, it did. It rolled its eyes glass-white
> Back in its head, and kicked and shivered like
> A new-born calf, and murmured in white froth
> A tiny whisper, and opened on its mouth
> A glassy bubble and sucked it gagging back
> Into its throat, and opened and closed its throat,
> And sighed a sigh, and lay in my arms stone dead.
> (74-81)

The goblin's death seemed as gruesome to Anne as its life. It "kicked and shivered" as it had while living. Anne's characterization of the goblin's loss of bodily control, "like/A new-born calf," ironically compares something which is about to die to something which has just been born. The image also emphasizes Anne's feelings that she had killed something which was weak and innocent. Whereas Anne had never heard the goblin make a sound as it lived, it emitted both a "tiny whisper" and "a sigh" in its suffering. The image of its "glass-white" eyes rolling back echoes the reflective surface of the "glassy bubble" which hideously billowed from its mouth. The goblin's death and Anne's remembrance climax as she

describes this bubble "gagging" back into the goblin's throat. This final act of life echoes a passage in "My Grandmother Washes Her Feet," where "water circled gagging/To a bloody eye and poured in the hole like a rat" (117-8). Also described by the word "gagging," the image of water flowing down a drain is certainly similar to that of the bubble disappearing in the drain-like mouth of the goblin. The goblin's life flowed away as well, and Anne remembers that the man "lay in my arms stone dead."

The phrase "stone dead" anticipates the change which Anne remembers taking place. Once a lump of gold, then a baby, then a little man, "what the plow unearthed" finally became a stone:

> It was my fault. It turned into a stone,
> And it was my fault, wishing that way.
> Whatever harm had the little goblin done?
> And now I'd killed it. I began to cry,
> And cried so hard I felt my eyes dissolve
> To dust, to water, fire, and then to smoke.
>
> (82-7)

Anne blamed herself for the goblin's death. The repetition of the phrase "It was my fault" suggests the burden of guilt which Anne felt. This seems an accreted guilt, initiated by her subconscious feelings made manifest in Frank's implication that Anne was guilty of adultery--continued as Anne blamed herself for bringing on the goblin's curse. Although she had only wished for the goblin's death, Anne felt that she had in fact murdered it, an imagined act which implicates Anne with the "evil" the goblin embodied. Because Anne had figured herself as an equivalent of Mary holding the goblin in its previous form as a Christ-like baby, she seems to have adopted the role of Judas Iscariot and Pontius Pilate in Christ's death by murdering the goblin. Her guilt is compounded by the fact that she destroyed that

to which she had given a metaphorical birth. Finally a "stone," the lump of gold had proven to be fool's gold, and Anne's hopes to avoid the toils of farming had produced yet another burden--her guilt, manifested in the weight of the stone in her arms. Anne remembers being so overcome by her guilt that she "cried so hard [she] felt my eyes dissolve," as if her eyes had washed away in tears. She imagined her eyes dissolving "To dust, to water, fire, and then to smoke." As images of the four elements which structure *Midquest*, this transforming dissolution figures Anne's eyes tapering into the air as smoke, suggesting the dissolution of the images of her dream upon waking.

Fred then interjects himself into Anne's story. As if he had detected the end of her dream, Fred adds the traditional storybook ending--a happy one, as if Anne lived "happily ever after" her dream was over: "'And then you woke,' I said, 'to the world you love'" (88). Fred assumes that Anne's nightmarish dream was resolved when she awoke and the images faded away to those of "the world" without dream. He also assumes that Anne recalls the dream solely for its strange qualities. Anne's response contradicts Fred's assumption: "'And now I now,' she said, 'I never woke'" (89). Anne did, of course, awaken, but her answer implies that she continued to live in and be haunted by her dream once she was awake. Anne's answer also implies that she never regained the world she loved, that it was forever altered by her nightmare. Awake but still reliving her dream, Anne continues to feel the guilt which weighed upon her in her dream when she first experienced it.

Unlike "Susan's Morning Dream of Her Garden" or the preludes and postludes, "My Grandmother's Dream of Plowing" reveals the impact dreams have on life after waking. Although Susan wishes that she might awaken to live forever in her dream garden, Anne

seems to have discovered a hauntingly similar state where she lives forever in her nightmare. She feels that she cannot escape a dream that frightened and upset her. Although the dream first seemed to indicate good luck for her and her husband, it became a curse as the lump of gold changed into an evil goblin. Anne's wish for the goblin to die, in its fulfillment, filled her with such guilt that her original hopes to escape farming and poverty became still greater burdens. The deterioration of the gold into a stone represents the deterioration of Anne's hopes into the heaviest feelings of guilt, which consume her at her dream's close. Although Anne's description of her dream indicates that she does not understand the meaning of all of its images, she seems overtaken by the guilt she experienced in the dream, and that guilt is the dream's ultimate meaning. By saying "I never woke," Anne indicates that her dream never closed, that it still haunts her. Thus, the imagined pictures of Anne's sleep impinge upon her waking life, haunting her as if she had never escaped her dream. Like Susan's dreamed fall from innocence in "Susan's Morning Dream of Her Garden," the guilt which Anne continues to feel when she awakens suggests a world-wide guilt which permeates the depths of the individual subconscious.

CHAPTER FOUR:
Simply by Dreaming

Dreams and dream elements appear in several other poems in *Midquest*, and, in many of these poems, Chappell continues to explore the relationship between dreaming and waking. Like "My Grandmother's Dream of Plowing," portions of "Second Wind," "My Grandfather's Church Goes Up," "My Father Washes His Hands," and other poems portray the effect dreams have on human lives. Although these dreams are imagined, they provide insight which dreamers learn from--or react to--once awake. These poems therefore enlarge the thematic implications of the relationship between dreaming and waking for the entire book, suggesting that dreams can influence the course of waking life.

Portions of the second and fourth poems in *Midquest* figure dreams as phenomena from which a dreamer can learn truths that apply to life. These poems hint at the issues which Chappell develops in greater detail through later poems. In "Birthday 35: Diary Entry," Fred states, "I'd like to believe that anything is possible/. . . that simply by dreaming I'd find out/What subnuclear physics is all about" (89, 97-8). Although Fred implies that understanding a complex science through dreams is unlikely, he nonetheless voices the possibility of learning from dreams. This possibility becomes a metaphorical reality in "Cleaning the Well," where Fred recalls being lowered into a well as a young boy. Like the descents of Dante and Orpheus, Fred's journey underground enables him to glimpse death while alive. Throughout the poem, Fred recalls this experience as a dream. He describes himself plumbing the "soundless dreaming/O" of the well, as if he were entering the realm of dream (24-5). Once at the bottom of the well, Fred feels so cold and numb that

he believes he is dead. He remembers glimpsing death in a revelatory instant which he could not describe, and he still feels incapable of describing his encounter: "I could not say what I had found./I cannot say my dream" (89-90). Fred therefore figures his revelatory glimpse as a dream, one that forever changes his life by the knowledge and understanding of death. These two poems introduce the notion of learning from dreams and of dreams altering life. They foreshadow similar instances in "Second Wind," "My Grandfather's Church Goes Up," and "My Father Washes His Hands."

In "Second Wind," Fred's grandmother Anne speaks, recalling the day of her husband's funeral. Anne's grief over the death of her spouse, the stifling heat, and the crowd of mourners in her home combine to create an anxiety which oppresses her; as she remembers, "I feared I'd smother" (56). Anne retreats to her bedroom, where she perceives a startling image:

> I wandered through the house to my bedroom
> And sat down on the bed. And then lay back
> And closed my eyes. And then sat up. A black
> And burning thing shaped like a tomb
> Rose up in my mind and spoke in flame
> And told me I would never find the pluck
> To go on with my life, would come down weak
> And crazed and sickly, waiting for my time.
>
> I couldn't bear that . . . Would I ever close
> My eyes again?
>
> (57-66)

The fact that this image appears when Anne has lain in bed and closed her eyes--and that she fears closing her eyes again, lest another such image should appear--indicates that Anne's vision is a dream. The image emerges in Anne's "mind," not to her physical senses, also revealing it as a dream. Although the dream is a figment of Anne's imagination, it

nonetheless impinges upon her life. The tomb which talks in Anne's dream speaks "in flame" as God spoke to Moses through the burning bush. This image of death predicts that Anne will never regain energy or vitality as a widow, that she will deteriorate in mind and body as she waits for her own death. Anne's reaction ("I couldn't bear that") indicates her desire to escape the fate outlined in her dream. Unlike Moses, who obeyed the voice that spoke to him through flame, Anne seeks to disprove the prediction of the burning tomb when she awakens. She removes her mourning clothes for her "everyday's" and slips outside the house to walk to the cornfield (75). There, a cool wind blows toward her; Anne remembers "It was the breath of life to me, it was/Renewal of spirit" (113-4). This wind inspires her to continue living despite the death of her husband, to become renewed and vital, to deny the prediction of her dream. In "Second Wind," Anne's dream prompts her to escape the stagnant life of a widow awaiting death for a new sense of vitality.

In "My Grandfather's Church Goes Up," Fred recalls a dream he had when he visited the overgrown remains of a burned church, which his grandfather had built. Fred foreshadows his own dream during his initial portrayal of the day the church caught fire. He describes the burning church as an apocalyptic sign which induced bystanders to experience mystical, religious visions. Chappell formulates Fred's description in the heavily alliterative style of Anglo-Saxon verse, complete with medial caesurae:

> [T]he Spirit poured out   on souls of us sinners.
> In this din of drunkeness   the old men dreamed dreams,
> the daughters and sons   supernal sights saw.
> God's gaudy grace   grasped them up groaning.
> (39-42)

Fred's description establishes the site of the burned church as one where people had

previously beheld mystical visions. The description therefore serves as a precedent for the dream Fred experiences when he later visits the site during a picnic with Susan. Fred naps on the ground, then dreams he hears the voice of his dead grandfather:

> In happy half-sleep   I heard or half-heard
> in the bliss of breeze   breath of my grandfather,
> vaunt of his voice   advance us vaward.
> No fears fretted me   and a freedom followed
> this vision vouchsafed,   victory of spirit.
> He in the wind   wept not, but wonderfully
> spoke softly   soothing to peace.
> What matter he murmured   I never remembered,
> words melted in wisps   washed whitely away;
> but calm came in me   and cool repose.
>
> (83-94)

Fred's dream occurs in "half-sleep," so he is both attentive to his natural surroundings and susceptible to dreams. Fred's waking consciousness and his dream intermingle as the sound of the breeze combines with that of his grandfather's voice. The fact that Fred terms this dream a "vision" (though it is largely an aural experience) ties it to the previous mystical revelations in the poem. Fred's dream is revelatory, too, as his grandfather's voice speaks from the dead in a tone that is "soothing"; the dream gives Fred true "calm" and "cool repose" as it informs him that his grandfather is peaceful in death ("He in the wind wept not"). Like Anne's dream in "Second Wind," Fred's dream alters his waking life.

In "My Father Washes His Hands," Fred's father, J.T., describes a dream which changes his life because--as in "My Grandmother's Dream of Plowing"--J.T. knows the images of his dream will haunt him forever. During the course of the poem, J.T. tells young Fred of the futility of farming--"busting my behind to stay behind," as he calls it (62). He also describes burying their mule Jenny two weeks earlier. As J.T. dug a grave for the

mule, his shovel hit pipe clay, which in its resistance to movement evokes a metaphor for the difficulties of farm labor. J.T. admits breaking Jenny's legs with a mattock so that the mule would fit in its grave. When Fred comments "And now old Honey's gone" (69), J.T. contends that the mule lives on in his dreams:

> "*Gone?* Six nights in a row I'd close my eyes
> And see her pawing up on her broken legs
> Out of that blue mud, her suffering hindquarters
> Still swallowed in, and in her eyes the picture
> Of me coming toward her with my mattock;
> And talking in a woman's pitiful voice:
> *Don't do it, J.T., you're breaking promises. . . .*
> And wake up in a sweat. Honey's not gone,
> She's in my head for good and ever."
>
> (70-78)

Crawling from the grave and speaking in J.T.'s dream, Jenny is the image and voice of J.T.'s guilt. The "picture" J.T. sees of himself reflected in Jenny's eyes echoes an earlier reflection he had seen there: he had closed the mule's eyelids because he felt she was "watching" him as he broke her legs (40). The reappearance of this image in J.T.'s dream suggests that he cannot escape his feeling of guilt for the way he desecrated Jenny's form. In the plaintive voice of a woman, he mule begs J.T. not to "*do it*"; although the "*it*" to which Jenny refers is certainly the act of breaking her legs, she also asks him not to quit farming. Together, the two actions embody a metaphorical violation of the institution of farming and the land, and Jenny's feminine voice enlarges this metaphor so that the mule also asks for mercy from a metaphorical rape. By breaking Jenny's legs, J.T. is "*breaking promises*" which are implicit between the farmer, his animals, and his land; the gruesome desecration of the mule therefore signifies a greater disrespect for farming as a whole. Because J.T. will see this dreamed image of Jenny's hideous body "for good and [for] ever"-

-"even if" he quits farming (79)--the dream forever changes his life. As in "My Grandmother's Dream of Plowing," J.T. relives his dream as a constant, concrete reminder of his guilt.

In the last strophe of the poem, the guilt which J.T.'s dream embodies becomes physically apparent:

> I handed him the towel. He'd washed his hands
> For maybe seven minutes by the clock,
> But when he gave it back there was his handprint,
> Earth-colored, indelible, on the linen.
>
> (81-4)

J.T.'s washing his hands ties him to Pontius Pilate and Lady Macbeth, who by washing their hands metaphorically endeavor to remove their guilt. Although J.T.'s hands appeared "clean" to Fred at the poem's outset (2), the stain J.T.'s palm leaves on the towel represents a mark of guilt which is permanent and "indelible"--like the dreamed image of Jenny that he cannot forget. The handprint consists not of true dirt, but of the metaphorical dirt of guilt. Appropriately, the stain appears the color of the land J.T. has desecrated by association--by breaking Jenny's legs. J.T.'s handprint is the concrete, outward sign of the inward guilt Jenny symbolizes in his dream, and both are everlasting.

In "Second Wind," "My Grandfather's Church Goes Up," and "My Father Washes His Hands," three dreamers recall dreams which alter their waking lives. In each of these poems, dreams are not merely fanciful images unraveling in the subconscious, sleeping mind; they startle, haunt, or calm the dreamer when he or she awakens. These poems suggest that dreams and waking cannot be separated by a distinctive margin, nor can the images of dreams be dismissed as secondary to those of waking. Each of these poems demonstrate that

the images of dreams are as real as the images of waking because they extend beyond the realm of sleep to influence waking life.

CONCLUSION

Throughout *Midquest*, Fred Chappell emphasizes the importance of dreams and dreaming. Especially in the preludes and postludes which frame the four volumes of the book, Chappell portrays rich and powerful images in Fred's dreams which alone demonstrate the aesthetic beauty of dreams. The themes which these and other dream images evoke consistently demonstrate, however, that dreams cannot be dismissed as mere aesthetic visions of the subconscious imagination. By exploring the relationship between dreaming and waking in *Midquest*, Chappell suggests that dream images are not separate from or subordinate to the sensory images of waking. In the preludes and postludes, for instance, where the margin between dreaming and waking often becomes obscured, Fred resolves his doubts about death and existence while dreaming. He seizes dreams as the talismans to ward off the dreamless void of Nothing and celebrates dreaming as a sign and proof of life. "My Grandmother's Dream of Plowing," "Second Wind," "My Grandfather's Church Goes Up," and "My Father Washes His Hands" suggest that dreams can influence life as easily as incidents which occur while waking. By revealing the secrets "in the dark heart hid from the head," these dreams expose profound meaning for each dreamer. All of these poems in *Midquest* prove that dreaming and waking are not purely separate but inextricably joined. The dream images in the book prove as undeniably real as those of waking.

The sheer number of dreams in *Midquest* also makes their images and thematic suggestions impossible to dismiss. Other than the eight preludes and postludes, two others deal exclusively with dreams. Dreams or the word "dream" recur in nearly all of the forty-

four poems in the book. Because Fred examines his past, present, and future during the course of *Midquest*, the recurrence of dreams and dream images suggest that dreaming represents a central part of life. In the preface to the verse novel, Chappell maintains that Fred is meant to be "widely representative" (x). The concerns Fred expresses during his thirty-fifth birthday are those of every man, and the themes of life, death, and love apply to every life as well. By establishing the importance and significance of dreams in the life of Fred, his "demographic sample" (x), Chappell implies that dreams hold equal value in the lives of every man. The dreams Chappell portrays in *Midquest* and the issues which pertain to them therefore resonate to inform every life with their beauty, meaning, and importance.

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