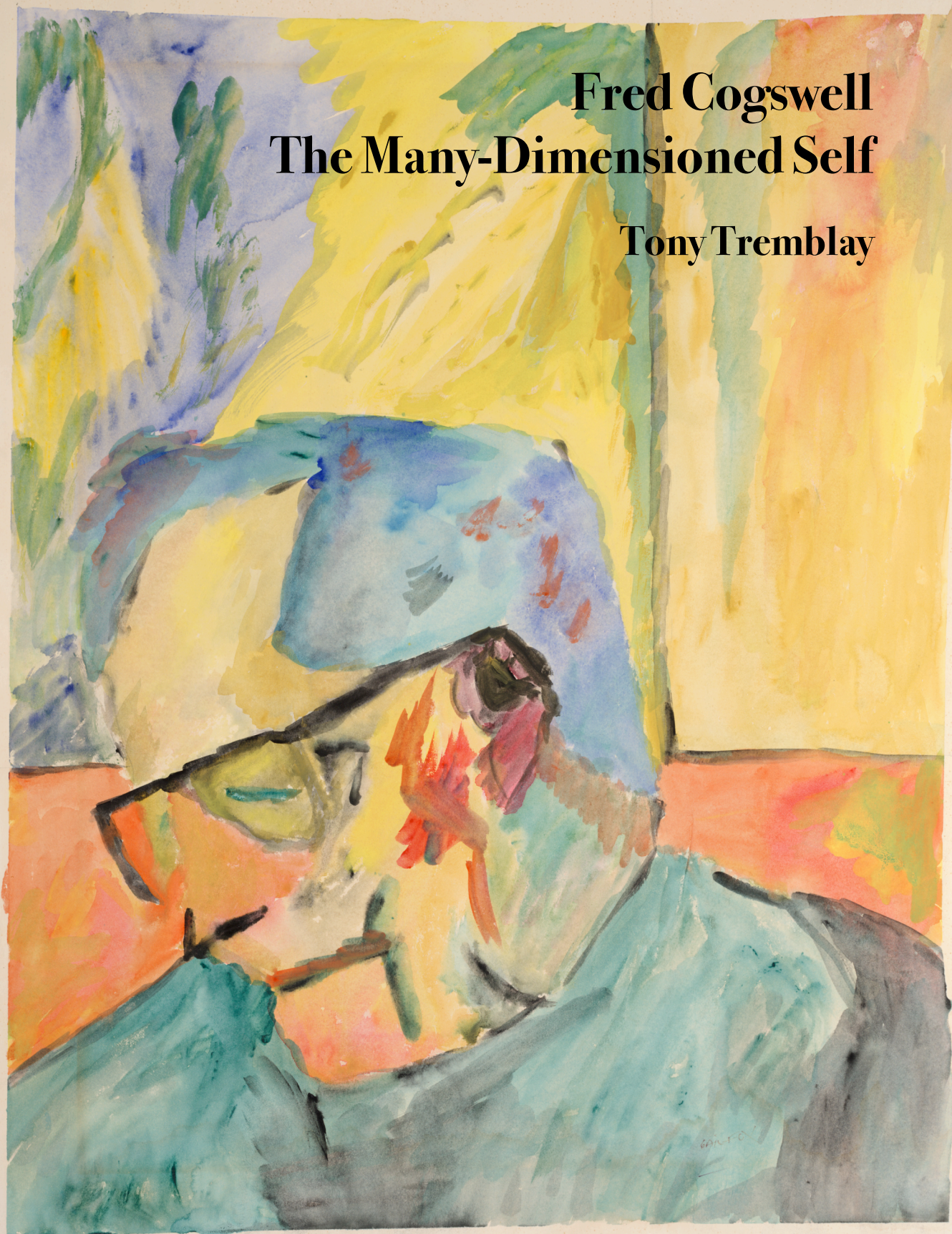


Fred Cogswell
The Many-Dimensioned Self

Tony Tremblay



*Fred Cogswell:
The Many-Dimensioned Self*

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for Ellen

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Preface & Acknowledgements

and so the books
have opened, and although
I am as much
a child as any child
who cannot read
as to why the things
should be that are,
the debt I owe
the books is this:
the books have taught me
not to be afraid.

(Cogswell, "The Debt I Owe the Books" 93)

Fred Cogswell was one of a small number of cultural workers in Canada who came to Canadian literature at the moment of its greatest potential. With the end of the Second World War in 1945, thousands of young servicemen, Cogswell among them, returned to Canada with a greater sense of the larger world, a sense that demanded more of their country than their fundamentalist and provincial origins could deliver. This need was soon to find expression in a host of public policy initiatives that shaped national identity for Canadians, thus delivering on the promise that our soldiers had indeed fought for something more tangible than commonwealth and Queen. A beefed up National Film Act was passed in 1950. A year later, the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences recommended the development of the Canada Council and comprehensive spending in public broadcasting, the extension of which was the Fowler Commission on Broadcasting in 1955. Driving these initiatives was not solely the appetite for cultural nationalism but also the same worry that had attended Confederation: that with the rise of America as a world super power, Canada, a sparsely populated nation perched precariously on its border, should assert its own sovereignty, if only that sovereignty could be found. Surely we were more than a disparate federation of immigrants who looked to our countries of origin for meaning.

It was into this milieu of post-war fervour that Cogswell arrived in A.G. Bailey's freshman Arts class in 1945. Already a precocious reader and gifted student, and eager to acquire the credentials that would provide entry into the world of intellectual work, Cogswell immediately set out to pursue a course of cultural stewardship. Only a year after the Massey-Lévesque Commission had tabled its report (1951), Cogswell was a

published poet, a university professor, and the editor of what would become one of the most important literary magazines in the country. Moreover, given his drive and his proximity to many of the country's literary pioneers, his was a name that came to mind when projects of pan-Canadian importance such as the *Literary History of Canada* were proposed. A young Cogswell therefore soon took his place beside Louis Dudek, Dorothy Livesay, Roy Daniells, Desmond Pacey, George Woodcock, Phyllis Webb, and Malcolm Ross as one of the pre-eminent cultural workers in twentieth-century Canada. This volume is intended to illuminate the many dimensions of his work. That those dimensions have not yet been examined with the critical rigour they deserve is a consequence of the unevenness of our nation's distributed federalism. Suffice it to say that my hope is that this volume will correct the oversight, at least as it concerns Cogswell.

Because he was another "portmanteau-man," a term devised by Wyndham Lewis to describe his own many-dimensional self (3), I organized this volume to reflect Cogswell's most important facets. *Chapter One* is a biography of Cogswell that covers his family background, his Acadian ancestry, his intellectual development and influences, and the many roles he played as editor, publisher, poet, scholar, and mentor. The chapter extends to his death in June 2004.

Chapter Two is dedicated to the discussion and presentation of Cogswell's poetry. Because he thought of himself primarily as a poet – "[T]hough deeds may cause biography / Words I write are the best of me" ("An Epigram" 73) – this chapter constitutes the largest portion of the volume. It begins with a discussion of editorial decisions that influenced my selection of his poems, proceeds to my own interpretation of his aesthetic, and ends with a representative selection of his poetry. Though extensively interviewed and reviewed, Cogswell has never before received the kind of careful critical treatment that I have given his work here, so this chapter should make clear some of his formal and aesthetic intentions.

Chapter Three foregrounds Cogswell's editorial work, showcasing examples of the correspondence for which he was so universally admired. That admiration came not because his penmanship was elegant or his prose mellifluous, but because his advice was so earnest. It was in his letters to other writers that he earned the nickname "friend of poets," and there is no better example of his cultural stewardship than in those letters.

The *final chapter* presents as comprehensive a Cogswell bibliography as could reasonably be compiled. Because Cogswell sent his poems to obscure and often short-lived international literary magazines, and because he cared almost nothing about a legacy (which meant that he spent little time keeping records for posterity), the work of constructing a Cogswell bibliography is both challenging and inevitably incomplete. Nevertheless, the bibliography in the final chapter is the most comprehensive one to date.

The sum of the combined parts will, I hope, provide a picture of a man with indefatigable energy for work, creation, compassion, and leadership. The evidence in this

volume clearly reveals that Fred Cogswell was one of the pillars of Canadian modernism in the twentieth century.

The Digital Interface

The decision to build a digital interface that accommodates the work of one of Canada's most Gutenberg-bound writers might seem odd. *Wouldn't it be more fitting to present Cogswell in the paper and ink format he was accustomed to, and in which we are accustomed to seeing him?* The quick answer is "Yes"; the more nuanced one is that publishers today have little of the generosity that Cogswell had in getting writers into print. So rather than dwell negatively on what couldn't be done for reasons of sales and marketability (the usual reasons publishers give when they don't see a place for a book in their catalogues) I decided to take the means of production into my own hands – as Cogswell, Dudek, and other modernists did. The result is a project aimed primarily at presenting Cogswell and secondarily at experimenting with the potentials of digital creation and dissemination.

Dean Irvine's Editing Modernism in Canada SSHRC project, on which I am a co-applicant, provided the impetus to begin. Since that SSHRC project aims to create innovative digital interfaces to re-present key Canadian modernists, and Cogswell was one of those modernists, the fit was ideal. And UNB's Electronic Text Centre, one of the leading centres of digital humanities in the country, was eager to partner with me.

My hope from the outset was that the work we did to create the Cogswell interface would serve as a template for other books on other figures. In New Brunswick, a province poorly served by a small cottage-industry publishing house and a corporately owned press, the benefits of digital knowledge dissemination – an alternative to the dismal situation we now have – are immediate and pressing.

In pioneering alternative ways to present and disseminate information, the students and scholars working in the still-early days of digital publishing are, in effect, paralleling the efforts of the mid-century modernists who used earlier technologies of typewriter and mimeograph machine to bypass the intractability of a media and publishing industry no longer serving the knowledge needs of citizens. It was thus in seeking to be as revolutionary (and relevant) as Cogswell that this project found its form.

The digital interface enables multiple points of access and use. Most readers will want to use this ISSUU book. ISSUU software simulates the Gutenberg book, and so is the most familiar format for a collection like this. For readers desiring more functionality, the proximate website enables quick access in searchable form. Students and scholars will find that function especially useful. The website also provides access for the visually impaired. I invite readers to try both options.

Acknowledgements

This volume was created with the assistance of many students and colleagues at St. Thomas University and the University of New Brunswick. To begin, I gratefully acknowledge the support of the late Fred Cogswell, who not only gave his blessing to the project in its earliest stages but who also happily assented to interviews during his final months in New Brunswick. More recently I received the same gracious welcome and support from Fred's daughter Kathleen Forsythe in Vancouver. As Fred's literary executor, Kathleen gave me permission to reprint her father's work in this volume.

For administrative support, Margie Reed and Lehanne Knowlton were, as always, invaluable, as were Peter Mersereau and Chandell Gosse, two talented undergraduate research assistants. Two doctoral students were also essential to the project. New Brunswick poet Tammy Armstrong, now a Fulbright Scholar in the U.S., provided cheerful and comprehensive research assistance, and Eugene Kondusky, a doctoral student at UNB, lent his computer expertise to the digital design of this innovative interface.

Assisting Tammy and Gene were Pat Belier, Francesca Holyoke, Patsy Hale, and Patti Johnson at the Harriet Irving Library (Archives and Special Collections), and Geoffrey Allen, Erik Moore, Mike Meade, and Jennifer Whitney at UNB's Electronic Text Centre.

For financial support I gratefully acknowledge the funding of the Canada Research Chairs Secretariat (SSHRC), the Editing Modernism in Canada Strategic Knowledge Clusters grant (SSHRC, Dean Irvine, PI), and the in-kind assistance of the always-encouraging Gayle MacDonald, Dean of Research at St. Thomas University. I also wish to thank Barry Craig, VP Academic at St. Thomas University, who supported this project in tangible ways, and my close friend and colleague Demetres Tryphonopoulos (UNB), whose scholarly productivity is exceeded only by the care he extends to his graduate students.

Finally, I wish to thank Cynthia Sugars, Robert Gibbs, and the peer reviewers of this manuscript for their incisive and fair-minded suggestions for its improvement. To my wife Ellen, always muse and counsel, this and all that I do is dedicated.

Tony Tremblay
Fredericton, NB
May 2012

"The soil of settlement fed roots in me": A Cogswell Biography

Despite a few hard stones that rocked content
The soil of settlement fed roots in me.

(Cogswell, "Biography" 52)

Ancestry

Fred Cogswell's maternal grandfather was Frederick Walter Leblanc, originally from Moncton. Little is known about his early life, except that he went to the United States as a boy, anglicized his surname to White, and was educated by the family that adopted him. He came back to New Brunswick as a veterinarian, quickly earning the reputation as a clever and fun-loving bachelor. Especially adept at the horse track, he had a dark side, drugs and other stimulants being rather easy for animal doctors to procure. As well known to the ladies as to the local constabulary, he was Kent County's most notorious bachelor.

His soon-to-be wife (Cogswell's maternal grandmother) was Marie Elizabeth Girouard from Bouctouche, the first Acadian woman in the province to receive a university degree (Music). Marie was the daughter of Gilbert Anselme Girouard, whose ancestors had come to New Brunswick from Poitou in the late 1640s. Gilbert "le Petite" Girouard was elected MP in 1878 and 1882 in the riding of Kent. Only the second Acadian to sit in the federal house, he became a favourite of John A. MacDonald. A great champion of French-language education and the preservation of Acadian heritage, Gilbert was one of the original organizers of the First National Convention in July 1881 in Memramcook, an event that attracted 5000 Acadians from around the world and set the foundation for the political emergence of the Acadian people.

Despite their high standing in Acadian New Brunswick, however, Fred Cogswell's maternal grandparents lived in exile from the eastern part of the province because of the circumstances of their union. On her wedding night, with the guests arrived and the turkeys slaughtered, Cogswell's grandmother snubbed her intended betrothed and ran off with the aforementioned Fred White, whose superior Harvard education and questionable morals, it was said, had duped her. The couple fled to Rivière-du-Loup, where Fred Cogswell's mother Florence Ann was born in 1900. Despite two visits from the Bouctouche priest (Marie's uncle) to bring the couple back, they eventually moved to Bath, New Brunswick to continue their family. Six of their seven children were born in Carleton County, Marie forever after known to her Kent

County relatives as the Girouard girl who ran off with the man she loved rather than the man she was supposed to marry.

Providence smiled then frowned on the couple. Shortly after their youngest child was born, Fred White drowned while crossing thin ice with a team of horses. ("Drowned" was the official story, believed for many years. What in fact happened was that he staged the accident to cover an affair he was having with another woman. He set up home with that other woman in Bathurst, where he practiced as a veterinarian until he died.) To feed her abandoned family of seven, Marie taught music in the schools, but times were tough, a factor in her eventually agreeing to the marriage of her teenaged daughter Florence Ann to a Baptist bachelor of thirty-four named Walter Scott Cogswell. The marriage of Fred Cogswell's parents took place in Centreville, New Brunswick on 01 November 1916, a year before Fred Cogswell was born (08 November 1917). Christened Frederick William Cogswell, he would be the eldest of three children.

Fred Cogswell's paternal line was equally colourful. Descended from the Saxons of Essex in the 12th century, the Cogswells (named after Sir John de Coggeshall, 1302-1361, knighted by King Edward III in 1337) were wool merchants with vast flocks and acreages. After succeeding in business, John Cogswell, his wife, and their eight children emigrated to America in 1635, as much for its business opportunities as for the religious freedoms it promised (the Cogswells were Puritans). On 23 May 1635, they set sail from Bristol for the New World on the *Angel Gabriel*, the ship made famous by Sir Francis Drake. Shipwrecked off the coast of Maine on 15 August, they made it to safety near Pemaquid, Maine, eventually settling east of Boston in Ipswich, Massachusetts, a town of Saxons that welcomed them with generous land grants. Over the next two centuries the Cogswells grew to become a prominent New England family, some of their descendants directly involved in the Salem witch trials, others more politically inclined (the Cogswells were involved in founding the Library of Congress, for example). One line of the family moved to New Brunswick in the 1760s to occupy lands of the recently expelled Acadians. They settled in an area of Carleton County known as Cogswell Settlement. The Cogswell farm that Fred knew was registered in 1810 and is still worked today (2012) by Fred's youngest brother, John, twenty-two years his junior, and John's two daughters.

In New Brunswick, the Cogswells of Cogswell Settlement were Baptist farmers. Fred's father, Walter Scott, was the youngest son of William and Elizabeth Cogswell. William had been married and widowed three times, so when Walter arrived his father had not only slowed considerably but was also set firmly in his ways. Walter was an equally conservative, sometimes quarrelsome, man with flaming red hair and freckles who had been a military-school runaway, the regimentation of training too stifling for his farm-boy personality. Like his father, he was steadfastly opposed to new technologies, so when J.B. McNair's Liberal programme of rural electrification came to New Brunswick in the 1940s he adamantly refused to consider it, arguing with Florence that it was an occultish, rather-Catholic indulgence that would bring ill repute to the community. In similar fashion, he also refused to own a tractor, preferring to work his farm with his beloved horses long after his potato-exporting neighbour, the now-famous

A.D. McCain, had made the switch. His decline began with just that kind of stubbornness: another recalcitrant refusal to put up an electric fence to separate his livestock from the sprawling potato fields of the McCain brothers. One day his prized herd of Holstein cattle broke through his flimsy wire barrier and wandered into the nearby McCain field, where potato shoots had just been sprayed with insecticide. After gorging on the new potato leaves, the entire herd died, a loss that Walter would never make up. His son Fred would have lifetime memories of his father and local farmers trying to revive the slowly dying cows. The wages of such a life repelled a young Fred Cogswell just as powerfully as its struggles impressed the older poet. And it had the same impact on his siblings, who forever after refused to grow anything for the McCains.

An older Fred Cogswell also remembered the bookishness and music of his father, which were the only indulgences in a life of hard labour. But the bookishness was often an excuse for retreating into glumness, as Walter, unlike Florence, had little use for conversation or the rituals of rural socializing. Rather, when company came over, or when his grown children would arrive with their own offspring, Walter would escape to the parlour with his Bible or *Farmer's Almanac* while others shared the news in the kitchen. As adults, Fred and his siblings would sit next to Walter in the parlour reading silently, their reticence an accepted part of the personality of what Fred would describe as "the stunted strong" ("New Brunswick" 16).¹ Indeed, much of the rustic personality recorded in Cogswell's first collection came directly from home, even if its character traits were attributed to others.

Fred was aware of his mother's Acadian ancestry when growing up; however, in deference to his father, who, like other Carleton County Conservatives politicized (to denigrate) the French language, he never investigated that part of his background until after his father's death. Nevertheless, French was a powerful undercurrent in his life: Florence's mother was a frequent visitor, and in all likelihood mother and daughter spoke French in the home, making Acadian French Cogswell's maternal language. As well, French-speaking cousins (Allains and Cormiers) often stopped in Centreville from Massachusetts on their summer trips to Bouctouche for family gatherings. But they did so quietly, for the little New Brunswick town of Centreville was also (incredibly) the base of the Ku Klux Klan in Canada in the 1920s and 30s. The Klan publicly denounced the French and Roman Catholics in the province, and burned crosses to prove the seriousness of their opposition to anything that threatened their nativist Anglo Saxon Protestantism (the hooded Klansmen sang "Onward Christian Soldiers" during these cross burnings). During the 1935 provincial election, the KKK circulated anonymous

¹ The practice of reading the life and motives of a writer through his creations should always be carefully considered. Cogswell's case is no exception. He followed in a tradition of confessional poetry, but he also used poetry for imaginative transport. So, in good New England fashion, he both told the truth and told it slant. As he aged, however, he became much more candid about his literary subterfuge, actually inviting critics to examine his verse for turns of mind. The poem "Since Any Life" is instructive in this regard: "Since any life is lived in sections, / Look not upon his deeds to find / True mirrors of a poet's mind, / His poems, though, give good reflections" (109). In using his work to understand his thought, I have followed his invitation.

flyers urging New Brunswickers not to vote for Allison Dysart, a Catholic, for “If Dysart is elected,” they said, “Rome will rule” (Provincial Archives). Perhaps because of this campaign of terror in her own community, Florence rarely admitted to being French or Catholic, accepting instead the Anglo Saxon evangelism that she had married into (her granddaughters, Fred’s daughters, didn’t know she was Catholic, or that they had a large Acadian family in Bouctouche, until after her death). The ironies of those sorts of silences and denials, and the limitations they placed on provincial autonomy and identity formation, are still typical of the peculiar sociology of New Brunswick.

Cogswell’s later commitment to literary translation is therefore found in both his lineage and the tensions within it. Writ larger, his commitments to New Brunswick are rooted in competing antagonisms: a love of place tempered by an exasperation with its parochialisms, both of which emerge fully in his first collection of poems, *The Stunted Strong* (1954).

Childhood, Schooling, and Military Service

As a child, Cogswell became the ground over which his parents quarrelled. His mother wanted him to leave the farm and become a Baptist minister, not from allegiance to spiritual servitude, but simply from a desire that he expand his horizons. He was strong, having survived pneumonia and a dog attack before his first birthday, yet also unusually cerebral, the perfect candidate, she thought, for the ministry. At seven he was reading at an adult level and asking questions that annoyed his practically minded father. He also had an amazing memory and mathematical aptitudes – akin, in fact, to the talents of one “Hugh Wiley Peppers Lewis” that an older Cogswell would write about (85). Young Cogswell could add multiple columns of numbers in his head and easily calculate the seconds in a year or the near-exact potato yield from sixteen acres. When he realized the extent of the ridicule that intelligence attracted in rural environs, he started acting the fool to win the favour of his peers. The older poet recalls this compromise with wry sadness: “A teen-aged oaf, I sang off-key / And they would clap in ridicule. / The fool they needed then was me, / Paying back for my marks at school” (“The Singing Fool” 92). Seeing this compromise, his father Walter became protective of his oldest son, concerned especially about the malocclusion and speech impediment that he thought would limit the boy in the ruthless wider world. (He was not far wrong: when Cogswell was hired at UNB, the appointment was conditional on students being able to understand him.)

Cogswell would always be torn between the world of the mind that his mother demanded and the world of the earth that his father inhabited. Like Hardy’s Jude Fawley, he would come to accept both realms as his inheritance, even if the “strong roots that held and fed [him were] bread that was more like glue than honey” (“In My Young Days” 52). Perhaps not surprisingly, the denigration of that rural world among the urban sophisticates of his later professional life moved him closer to his father, as the short poem “Antaeus” reveals: “Of ancient warriors strong Antaeus / To me had

special worth. / When other heroes leaned on heaven / He drew his strength from earth" (59). What the poem states by inference, and the sum of Cogswell's work supports, is that he was much more sympathetic to his father's tactile meeting of the world than his mother's longings for escape, for as he wrote elsewhere "[d]eeper than reason run the tides of life" ("Apollo and Dionysus" 57). Later poems such as "My Father's Counsel" (*Folds* 56), "To My Father" (*In Praise of Old Music* 1), and "Husbandman" (*The Trouble With Light* 45) make this affection clear. His mother was estranged from him in ways that his father never was, a clue, perhaps, to his later embrace of Acadia's literary project. In that project he rediscovered his mother's heritage and reconciled with her.

Until grade nine, Cogswell attended a one-room schoolhouse across the street from the family farm, which was approximately three kilometers from the town of Centreville. To his peers he was odd, always eager to join but preoccupied with strange interests like chasing butterflies, collecting flowers, and reading the dictionary, one of the few books available in his rural school. He was also awkward, not only big-boned and strong, but shy, gentle, and self-conscious, very much like the poet Alden Nowlan, who would build his own poetic career on the vulnerabilities that came from the combination of strength and gentleness.

One of Cogswell's formative experiences was being mocked by three girls when he was eleven. Their ridicule of his speech impediment seemed especially calculated to harm, causing him to withdraw into his imaginative world and become an early champion of the hurt and underdog. With no close friends, he tended to the periphery of crowds and events, always present but in the background. What distinguished him were his unusual allegiances. He became notorious in Sunday School for his defence of the devil, who he thought got a raw deal in the Abrahamic tradition. Likewise, if the Toronto Maple Leafs were atop the NHL standings, he'd cheer for the Montreal Canadiens, a sometimes-dangerous allegiance in Baptist (and KKK-occupied) New Brunswick. When he was eight one of his uncles gave him a set of crystals with which to fashion a crude radio. He built the radio to listen to baseball games, the first time he could hear live games from Boston and New York. Northrop Frye would later write humorously about a similar practice in Moncton, New Brunswick, declaring that "[w]e never had a radio in our house, just a heavy supply of static" (qtd. in Bogdan 250). Cogswell continued listening to live MLB games until he died, declaring with pride that the only World Series he ever missed was during the war. When he attended high school in Centreville, about two miles from the family farm, he earned renown for his encyclopedic knowledge of baseball statistics – though why anyone would bother with baseball statistics was a mystery to his peer group. He would run home after school to do his farm chores, then run back to play ball, his frequently broken fingers proving no deterrent to his obsession with the catcher's position. With no gloves available for left-handed boys, he had to make do with pieces of burlap sewn together as a catcher's mitt, a poor substitute at best for the protections of proper equipment.

As he grew, his preoccupations with reading and writing became pronounced, giving him a way to move from the periphery of events into the centre of a mostly imagined culture from away. By age ten he had discovered *Palgrave's Golden Treasury*,

an anthology of poetry that was standard in British and North American schools – and, as standard, the common ground shared by many of the Canadian modernists of Cogswell's generation. In fact, some of the first discussions between Cogswell, Louis Dudek, Raymond Souster, Irving Layton, and Earle Birney centered on the pivotal role the *Treasury* occupied in their literary apprenticeship. Cogswell began writing by copying the forms and sentiments of the Victorians, whose body of work was the focus of the second volume of *Palgrave's* anthology in his school. He was especially interested in poetic forms, making a game of using the strict rules of the forms to generate his own verse. As he has said repeatedly since, the forms supplied an avenue for thought, determining the direction an idea went. Coupled with his reading of the dictionary, his writing career saw its beginnings as this kind of controlled word play.

There were also the early books that came at Christmas and from neighbours who wished to encourage him. He read Charles G.D. Roberts's animal stories, Walter Scott's historical fictions, and Gilbert Parker's works, those a New Brunswick obsession since George Parkin introduced them to students at the Fredericton Collegiate many years earlier (Parker and Parkin were two of Canada's strongest advocates for Imperial Federation, thus a fixture in colonial New Brunswick). James Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo (aka Hawkeye) and the chivalrous heroes in *The Boy's Own Paper* were also Cogswell favourites, as were the occultish radio stories of Bulwer-Lytton, which came in on the family radio. Reading was "an escape," he told David Galloway many years later, "because the books that I read when I was in my teens were in many ways more real and more satisfactory to me than the social and other experiences which I was having in the settlement where I lived" (209).

Given his school's student/teacher ratio of approximately 60:1, he had time during the day to indulge his interests – his preoccupied teacher allowed her dutiful students to do what they wanted. By age twelve, Cogswell had completed grade eight, and by the time he graduated in 1934 from Centreville Superior School, he had read as extensively as his teacher.

In 1935 he enrolled in Normal School in Fredericton, distinguishing himself in that simple action as a rare intelligence. When he left his village in early September of that year, a small parade accompanied him to the train station. One occasion at Normal School proved especially momentous, a visit by Dr. V.K. Wellington Koo (Ku Wei-chün), China's representative at the League of Nations. "What I heard him say," wrote Cogswell many years later in the aptly named poem "It Began In 1935," "expelled / From me what I thought was education" (41). Koo, in effect, dispelled the dominant myths of "the yellow peril" that had been circulating freely in Canada since Sax Rohmer's popular *Dr. Fu-Manchu* series of detective stories in the 1920s. Koo's humble eloquence opened Cogswell's mind to Chinese thought, prompting him to buy Lin Yutang's *The Importance of Living* when it was released in 1937. That book was his introduction to Taoism and the deep ecology of interconnectedness, the philosophy that taught individuals to find meaning in simplicity, undirected conversation, and other avenues of release from the anxieties and desires of encroaching modernity. The "greater league" (41) to which Cogswell refers in the poem is the alternate realm of

eastern beliefs that provide formulae for living differently than his democratic capitalism and evangelical Christianity allowed. He would move from Lin Yutang to Tom MacInnes's *The Teachings of the Old Boy* (1927) – delighting particularly in MacInnes's haikus, his first exposure to the form – and later to Arthur Waley's *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the TAO TÊ CHING and Its Place in Chinese Thought* (1936). Each would equip him with "a more rational education," which he described in "It Began In 1935": "Out of opposites came complements when / Yin and Yang together created league" (42). With that 1935 visit, then, the Biblical world within which he had been formed and trapped was completely undone. At age eighteen, he was free from its narrowness for the first time.² Taoist tenets would inform his ethics for the rest of his life. (Despite this, it was only as an older man that he would write of his emancipation, particularly of the narrowness and false hope that "the forefathers gave" ["I Found The Hope" 34]).

After graduating from Normal School with a first class Superior license in 1936 Cogswell worked in small rural New Brunswick schools for a couple of years, one in Gordonsville, the other in Hartley Settlement, both close to Centreville. But the experience of maintaining school discipline defeated him, and he lost both jobs, as much out of sympathy for the inattentive boys as out of duty to his wider calling. When he asked Mr. Waugh, his old principal at Centreville Superior School, for advice, he was told to hit the larger boys over the head with the book while saying "let that sink in." But he never had the heart to try, telling an interviewer years later that his "emphasis on the individual worth of students was an *avant-garde* style for that time [that] came hard up against . . . 'institutional warfare'" (Hatt 39).

With the trials of high school teaching over, he attended the Carleton County Vocational School in Woodstock to study clerkship and accounting, hoping to put those skills to a career in the Canadian diplomatic service. That, at least, would get him off the farm (Northrop Frye used the same logic when taking his vocational courses). Cogswell completed his vocational training in 1939, leaving with a Commercial diploma. But when his application to write the Foreign Service exams went unanswered – because, he later learned, an Ottawa bureaucrat erroneously forwarded his application to the Treasury Department of the federal civil service – he set off to Fredericton on a cold day in February 1940 to enlist. The walk took him two long days with an overnight at a cousin's house, but when he arrived in the capital he was heartened to discover that his poem "Poland" had just appeared in the *Telegraph-Journal*, the widest-circulating New Brunswick daily. It was his first published work, though he had been writing poetry for many years. (The poem was a critical commentary on war preparations.)

² The parallel of Cogswell's experience to Northrop Frye's, and at almost the same age, is uncanny. Frye recalls: "'suddenly that whole shitty and smelly garment [of fundamentalist teaching I had all my life] just dropped off into the sewers and stayed there. It was like the Bunyan feeling, about the burden of sin falling off his back only with me it was a burden of anxiety. . . . I just remember that suddenly that that was no longer a part of me and would never be again'" (qtd. in Ayre 44). The parallel of this experience in two leading New Brunswick authors warrants further study of the saturation of evangelical Christianity in New Brunswick, particularly among its precocious youth. G.A. Rawlyk's *Champions of Truth: Fundamentalism, Modernism, and the Maritime Baptists* (1990) is a useful place to begin that study.

His desire to join the military was influenced by events close to home. With the Battle of the Atlantic heating up and the Battle of Britain only six months away, a number of young men who Cogswell knew had joined the Carleton and York Regiment, sending home stories of their adventures. Also, the *Victoria Gazette*, his rural paper, was running ads for RCAF youth training programmes that paid \$7.50 per week, which, to a farm boy, was substantial money. With no interest in being a flyer, and even less a tail gunner, Cogswell opted for the infantry; however, his hopes were quashed by crooked fingers and poor sight. He signed up for the forestry corps instead, shipping first to Quebec for training, then overseas to Scotland, where he worked on a telephone switchboard to maintain inventory of the 100,000 board feet of timber cut each day by his unit. The timber was used for mineshafts and railway ties. He rose to the rank of staff sergeant and was able to avoid combat, but at the expense of the rich inner life he formerly enjoyed. "Instead of poems," he said, "I wrote / Part II Orders, skeleton's [sic] of War's truth. . . . Inside myself the world I made was dead" ("Three Legs" 30).

Despite that monotony, his war years were some of the best of his life. He was part of a large group of New Brunswick men who were used to hard labour and the camaraderie it instilled. Stationed in the Highlands east of what is now Cairngorms National Park, they worked hard, ate well, and were safely out of harm's way. When he got leave, Cogswell would travel south to hear lectures at one of the British universities that had opened its doors to enlisted men. He read voraciously, the army libraries superior to the ones he'd known in New Brunswick, and he also wrote and published a few poems, one in the prestigious *Chambers Journal*. He became especially fond of the work of Stephen Crane, altering his own verse to match what he later called Crane's "shorter epiphanies of the incongruous" (Interview with author), those treatments of incongruity particularly appropriate to the environment he was in. On one of his furloughs (this time to Exeter), he met his future wife, Margaret "Pat" Hynes, an Irish nurse from Scariff, County Clare. Margaret was the only one of ten siblings who had been educated, that education the result of compensation received after her father, a truck driver, had been shot by the British in 1922 during the troubles in Ireland.

Margaret was stationed at an Exeter infirmary to care for children who had been evacuated from London hospitals. She was nine years older than Cogswell, and much more worldly, having sampled the life of English cities for the last four years. She had also worked as a private nurse for the English gentry, spending considerable time in country estates looking after the sick and elderly relatives of rich landowners. When they met, she had been on her own for fifteen years.

On his next leave they were engaged and on the leave after that (July 1944) married. They were called back from their honeymoon because of post-D-Day troop movements. Until the day she died, Margaret never told her family she had married a Protestant, for Protestants had been responsible for the death of her father. She transferred to Aberdeen, Scotland to be near her husband, staying until he was shipped back to Canada in August 1945. They were reunited in Canada only when the war brides and children were released a year later. Margaret and daughter Carmen Patricia arrived in Halifax on the *Queen Mary*, boarded one of the many trains carrying women west, and

got off at Juniper Station, as close to the middle of the woods in New Brunswick as one could likely get. Fred saw his oldest daughter for the first time when she was a year old.

Universities of New Brunswick and Edinburgh

Less than a month after he returned, Cogswell enrolled at UNB. He was one of approximately 350 students to enroll that fall, most of whom were veterans. UNB President Milton F. Gregg, V.C., a decorated military man who was a strong advocate for veterans' education, accepted Cogswell's Normal School credentials and placed him on a fast track to a BA. With his peers, he took classes in designated overflow spaces such as the university chapel and a converted army H-hut temporarily erected between the Old Arts Building and the Lady Beaverbrook Residence. He also *roomed* in overflow space: an old military barracks on the Fredericton Exhibition grounds known as Alexander College, a former Basic Training Centre. Fellow classmate Vernon Mullen, also a veteran (RCAF and prisoner of war), recalls how unusual the 1945 freshman class was: "we *were* different, older and more serious about education than students just out of high school, unafraid to express our opinions and determined to win the peace, in addition to the war we had just helped to finish successfully" (27).³ Like other veterans, Cogswell became caught up in the "determined and healthy optimism" of the time (Galloway 210), eager to move beyond the stagnation of his previous life in evangelical New Brunswick. He took full advantage of the programmes available to defray his education costs. He received a monthly veteran's allowance, which was increased substantially when his wife and daughter arrived, and a tuition subsidy calculated on the basis of time served. In his case, roughly one month of tuition for every month in service, which completely covered a four-year degree. (With scholarships, Cogswell was able to study full time for almost eight years, moving from a BA [1949, UNB] to a PhD [1952, Edinburgh]. His progress was rapid because of his aptitudes and eagerness for study, but also because he was fully funded, thus unburdened of having to work to pay tuition costs.)

In his years at UNB, he benefitted considerably from Desmond Pacey's attempt to unseat some of the authority of A.S.P. Woodhouse, one of Canada's leading literary scholars in the 1940s and 50s. The University of Toronto, where Woodhouse taught, was the only institution in the country to issue doctoral degrees – and Woodhouse was the English Department czar, which made him, *de facto*, the czar of English Studies in Canada. Woodhouse had attended University College, Toronto and done graduate work at Harvard, bringing back the ivy-league ideals and some of the graft of the American system. Pacey and his contemporary Roy Daniells disliked Woodhouse's attempts to centralize advanced studies in Toronto, and they especially disapproved of the professional favours he dispensed. The more Woodhouse liked you, the closer your appointment would be to Toronto. If you ran afoul of him, as Pacey and Daniells had

³ I am indebted to UNB Professor David Frank for bringing Mr. Mullen's book to my attention.

when all three taught at the University of Manitoba (Brandon College), the farther from Toronto you'd have to settle to pursue your career. By starting doctoral programmes in English and Canadian Literature at the universities of New Brunswick and British Columbia, Pacey and Daniells directly challenged Woodhouse's authority and his colonial conception of English Studies (he was a Milton scholar, convinced that 16th-, 17th-, and 18th-century British literature was exactly what Canadian students needed). When Cogswell arrived at UNB in 1945, Pacey had been there a year and was eager to recruit students to his rather *avant-garde* republican vision. Cogswell was one of the first, completing an MA under Pacey in 1950 on the Canadian novel from Confederation to WWI. The thesis anticipated – and, according to Cogswell, contributed a good deal to – Pacey's own historical survey of Canadian literature in *Creative Writing in Canada* (1952).

Cogswell also took classes at UNB from Alfred G. Bailey,⁴ the brilliant poet-historian who had co-founded the Bliss Carman Society in 1940 and *The Fiddlehead* in 1945, both writers' workshops in their early years. Cogswell took as many of his courses as allowed, also joining the small group of approximately ten poets who met regularly at Bailey's home to read their work. It was at those meetings that Cogswell met Elizabeth Brewster, Margaret Cunningham, Donald Gammon, Frances Firth, and Lyndon Peebles. As a poetry workshop, *The Fiddlehead* distributed the mimeographed work of its members in a closed setting. Attendance at the meetings was contingent on having something to read, which meant that Cogswell had to start writing in earnest and developing his own sense of a literary criticism; that is, of what worked in poetry and didn't. His experience at UNB from 1945-50 therefore intersected with the post-war ferment that had gripped Canada and New Brunswick. UNB was rapidly expanding (Cogswell's freshman class outnumbered students in the upper three years combined), curricula were changing to reflect increasingly nationalist concerns, and the large student body of activist veterans was instigating for broad social change.

It was under these conditions that Cogswell emerged as a committed socialist, though he had been reading Harold Laski since he arrived in the UK, and his Taoist leanings certainly readied him for alternatives to the social Darwinism of militant North American capitalism. Moreover, as historian Ian McKay reminds us, "the soldiers who fought in the Second World War formed the most solidly left-wing cohort in Canadian history" (*Rebels* 45). Cogswell qualified that slightly by adding that "exposure to European ideas had to a great degree ended, among the veterans, the kind of political naïveté which had previously characterized Canadian student life" (qtd. in Galloway 210). The CCF, then, fitted both Cogswell's sympathies and his intellectual trajectory – not to mention his sense of the growing inevitability of the people's rise (he keenly followed and championed the post-war election of Britain's Labour Party). He helped with the bi-monthly provincial CCF paper, *True Democracy*, which was assembled and

⁴ The Cogswell/Bailey connection is an interesting one. As Bailey's star student, Cogswell was invited to office meetings as a prelude to being invited to join the Bliss Carman Society. At one of those office meetings, student and teacher were fascinated to discover that their first New World ancestors had been on the same ship (the *Angel Gabriel*) that had been shipwrecked off the coast of Maine in 1635.

printed by Wolfe Press on Brunswick Street (Fredericton). He attended meetings regularly; he wrote speeches for national secretary David Lewis, who visited New Brunswick; and he even served as Provincial Secretary. In addition, he ghost-wrote information segments that were broadcast free of charge on CBC's "Provincial Affairs." Cogswell knew that access to print and radio were crucial to public education, especially to rebut the untruths about socialism that sitting Liberal governments in New Brunswick had so carefully and successfully seeded. Given his literary inclinations and training, Cogswell must have felt aligned with Michael Whalen, Martin Butler, and other late nineteenth-century writers who had been at the forefront of the Miramichi and Fredericton Socialist Leagues in the province. As the left-leaning son of a farmer, he would also have been well informed about Moses Coady's work through the Antigonish Movement to establish fishing and farming cooperatives in Nova Scotia. (He would learn later from soon-to-be colleague Harold Hatheway that "junior professors at the University of New Brunswick were 'in danger of persecution if they became too active' in providing education in socialism" [qtd. in Lewey 28]).

Most famously, Cogswell became involved in a late-1947 incident in Fredericton that was reported by the UNB paper *The Brunswickan* and later picked up and circulated nationally by the Canadian University Press. The incident occurred when a black forestry student at UNB (another World War Two veteran) was denied service by local barbers. Vernon Mullen, then Editor-in-Chief of *The Brunswickan*, as well as a vocal CCF organizer, published a special supplement to the paper decrying the affair. Mullen's editorial accused four Fredericton barbershops of "unchristian racial discrimination." It said further: "The same fine citizens of Fredericton who contribute large sums to 'Christianize' the poor 'heathen,' who are considered to be solid pillars of our churches, but who refuse to sit in a barber's chair after a Negro has had his hair cut there, are no more Christians in the true sense of the word than the 'heathen' they want to convert" (qtd. in Mullen 34-5). The next month (January 1948),⁵ *The Brunswickan* carried Cogswell's well-known poem satirizing Fredericton's purity:

"Ode to Fredericton"

White are your housetops, white too the vaulted elms
That make your stately streets long aisles of prayer,
And white your thirteen spires that point to God
Who reigns afar in pure and whiter air,
And white the dome of your democracy –
The snow has pitied you and made you fair,
O snow-washed city of cold, white Christians,
So white you will not cut a black man's hair. (35)

⁵ "Ode to Fredericton" was reprinted ten years later in the Canadian edition of *Time*.

Cogswell's "public" involvement in the CCF affected his future, as it did the futures of other young idealists in a political environment that was decidedly and timidly centrist in New Brunswick – and, it must be remembered, sympathetic to the radical message of the KKK. At the request of A.G. Bailey, and on the strength of his undergraduate record (he won the Bliss Carman Medal in 1946 and '47, and the prestigious Douglas Gold Medal in 1949), he applied and was short-listed for a Rhodes scholarship. At the start of the mandatory interview in Saint John in 1950, he was asked when he was going to change his politics. When he stumbled and then became defensive about his answer, the interview abruptly ended, one of the shortest (he was later told) ever conducted. When it was announced that fellow UNB student Gérard La Forest won the award, Cogswell called to congratulate him. Both knew each other as upper Saint John River Valley boys, La Forest from Grand Falls. La Forest explained on the phone that his Liberalism had been the focus of genial discussion during the interview, which to Cogswell made perfect sense, for Liberalism had become dynastic in New Brunswick. That bit of political gerrymandering, however, meant that Cogswell had to settle for an IODE scholarship, going to Edinburgh for a doctorate instead of Oxford. Cogswell concluded that Liberal Premier J.B. McNair, himself an Oxford man and Rhodes scholar, would not tolerate a CCFer at his beloved university. (Cogswell later irritated McNair in editorials that denounced the Liberal claim that the CCF party was communist and, as such, would confiscate private property and family farms. As the son of a farmer, Cogswell's denunciation of this scaremongering carried some weight in the province.)

The prospect of spending two years in Edinburgh was not unpleasant, for Cogswell had developed great affection for Scotland during the war years. The stay also enabled Margaret to renew contact with her Irish family, with whom she wanted to share her two daughters (Kathleen Mary, younger sister to Carmen, was born in Fredericton in 1949). The project he began was a biographical study of the Scottish sociological novelist John Galt (1779-1839), who had written the first complete biography of Byron, and who had lived briefly in Ontario as Secretary of the Canada Company, a British land development agency founded to bring settlement to Upper Canada.⁶ But when Cogswell found sources unreliable and primary materials scarce, he switched to an examination of the idea of America in Romantic poetry, conducting the kind of broader survey of literary ideas that would come to characterize his critical method.

By the start of the 1952 academic year, he had accepted a job at UNB with an annual salary of \$3100, conditional on students being able to understand his speech. He was one of four members of the English Department in an Arts faculty that had less than fifty students. Cogswell and David Galloway split the freshman and sophomore class, also teaching service courses to larger numbers of engineering and forestry students. Desmond Pacey and Alec Lucas, who later went to McGill, were the other members of the department.

⁶ The study of Galt would form the basis of a later research grant Cogswell received in 1959 from the Nuffield Foundation.

Despite the excitements of an expanding university, a young family, and a new career in a growing city, Cogswell stayed rooted in his rural milieu. He worked on the family farm every summer, and on the lucrative Carleton County highway projects during election years. He got most of the produce and meat his Fredericton family ate from the East Centreville farm. In exchange, he assisted with the haying in August, the planting in spring, and the harvest in fall, leading what his colleagues around him considered a double life. (One of those colleagues observed that he walked like a farmer between his furrows, eyes always cast down and pace always slow and methodical.) His students never knew what those colleagues did: that Cogswell saw himself essentially as a farm boy with an academic appointment, one who, at times, used words to free himself "from the logic of [his] father's farm" ("A Mental Journey" 60), and, at other times, wished that "if I could I would be / Farmer, pull weeds, use hoe for tongue instead" ("Memory" 23). Such was Cogswell's life, expressed by the poet as "two lives [lived] ambidextrously" ("Memory" 22).

That farm boy stayed at UNB for his entire career, retiring as Professor in 1983. In those thirty-one years he won the respect of students, colleagues, and writers from across the country. But to locals, he was known as the preoccupied professor who walked home for lunch every day to Reid Street, about ten minutes west of the university. With his pipe in his pocket, he would often be seen with smoldering pants, his attention to the poem in his head overriding the more pressing concerns around him. At other times, he'd wander as far west as Odell Park, oblivious to where he should be. Then he'd be seen running back to meet the class that had started without him. This was the father his daughters saw: a man driven by heavy demands who was always composing, always working on something in his head. Margaret, as his daughters came to understand, was the figure who grounded and shielded him: grounded him from his penchant for overwork and shielded him from the academic quarrels that put "cause above adversity" ("How Can I Say" 43).

The Fiddlehead and Fiddlehead Poetry Books

Shortly after he began his work at UNB, Cogswell took over editorial control of *The Fiddlehead* (his editorship was announced formally in 1953). The magazine had been sputtering for a few years because the original group of approximately ten private members had either moved away or wearied of their association. At the suggestion of Robert Rogers and A.G. Bailey, Cogswell contacted Alan Crawley, whose magazine *Contemporary Verse* had ceased publication in February 1953 after thirty-nine issues. After consulting with Dorothy Livesay (and, it appears, moving to check the increasing power of Louis Dudek and the second-generation Montreal modernists, whose male bravado was a source of growing agitation among Livesay's female peers), Crawley agreed to furnish Cogswell with CV's mailing list of subscribers, which got *The Fiddlehead* off to a new start. As UNB President A.W. Trueman wrote in Cogswell's inaugural issue, "It is now the intention of *The Fiddlehead* to open its pages to poets anywhere in

the English-speaking world. In sponsoring this development, the Bliss Carman Society hopes to extend the audience to which it speaks, and to enrich the contribution which it has been making, on a modest scale, for the past eight years. There is not only room in Canada for a magazine of this type; there is a need of it" (2). And so Cogswell responded by opening the magazine to a large audience, enacting an editorial praxis of eclecticism to accommodate as wide a readership and authorship as possible. As he later explained, his desire was "'to create a potpourri of types, attitudes, ideas and sensibilities within which people could be interested in something other than what they were doing'" (qtd. in Hatt 39). When challenged by Dorothy Livesay to make the magazine more responsive to Canadian talent, he responded that "I think it wiser to stay international. . . . The best chance for Canadian writers is to produce work that can compete with English and American" (Letter to Dorothy Livesay).

With the demise of *Contemporary Verse* and *Northern Review*, Cogswell's magazine and *The Canadian Forum* became the incubators of creative writing in the country. To fulfill that rather daunting responsibility, observed Andrew Moore, Cogswell "literally reshaped the magazine, shrinking its pages to a more conventional size [the earlier format was 8 ½ x 11-inch mimeographed sheets], setting aside space for advertising, and adding literary reviews to the content of each issue" (n.p.). By 1959, he also started accepting fiction, which was a condition of the Canada Council grant that he began receiving. Cogswell retyped each entry, assigned them numbers for blind review, and then circulated copy to five editors for ranking. On top of that, he took sole responsibility for correspondence, proofreading, financial management, printing, and distribution. As first reader, he read upwards of 5000 poems every year once the magazine got going, endeavouring to provide constructive feedback to each poet. For Cogswell, who had been with the magazine as an undergraduate student since its early poetry workshop days, *The Fiddlehead's* mission was as much to cultivate talent as to showcase it. The duties were daunting and the work exhausting, but Cogswell had even greater ambitions.

A year after he began remaking the magazine, he and Al Tunis, a like-minded colleague in UNB's Sociology Department, founded Fiddlehead Poetry Books, the logical extension of the periodical. Tunis had been an editor of the *McGill Daily* (1947-48) and was frequently heard reading poetry on CBC radio. Both approached UNB for start-up money and office space, which was provided. The first books published (500 copies of each) were Cogswell's *The Stunted Strong* (1954) and G.V. Downes's *Lost Diver* (1955). With Pacey's help, Tunis and Cogswell ran the imprint until Cogswell won a Nuffield Travelling Fellowship in 1959 and went on leave. In his absence, the university collapsed the press and reallocated its resources, a decision related to the growth of professional-school faculties at the university. Faced with the prospect of losing the publishing venue, Cogswell convinced UNB to turn over ownership to him, and he ran the press out of his own office until he sold it to his English Department colleague Peter Thomas for one dollar in 1981. (He was able to sell it for that price because he had completely wiped out its debt and because he felt literary publishing was a civilizing rather than corporate mission.) During Cogswell's tenure as owner/publisher, he published the work of Al Purdy, Alden Nowlan, Dorothy Livesay, Norman Levine, Joy Kogawa,

and many others who would go on to become the best-known poets of the 1960s and 70s. "[F]ew other Canadian publishers," wrote Gwendolyn Davies, "have produced the number of poetry books or attracted the same caliber of writer as Fiddlehead" (38). Canadian literary critic Emeritus George Woodcock agreed, writing that Cogswell's efforts created "a literary ambiance . . . of a kind that had never existed in this country before" (293). In total, Cogswell published 307 books of poetry, forty-four of those in 1973,⁷ and many funded by his own resources. As editor of *The Fiddlehead* (1953-66) and publisher of Fiddlehead Poetry Books (1954-81), he established himself as both the friend and mentor of an entire generation of Canadian poets.

One poet that Cogswell mentored very closely in his early days of editing *The Fiddlehead* was Alden Nowlan. "Fred Cogswell was more than the first poet I'd ever met," remembered Nowlan; "he was the first person I'd ever met who read poetry. He gave me magazines, and books by people like Louis Dudek, Irving Layton and Raymond Souster. . . . I was twenty-four years old and, in one sense, I had never before had anyone to talk with" ("Something" 9-10). So integral was Cogswell's counsel and friendship that Nowlan credited both with inspiring the start of his mature work, writing that "the best poems I wrote that fall are the oldest that I still take seriously" (10). Though the two poets had previously met in the pages of small magazines, and then in correspondence, it was only when Cogswell took a bus to visit Nowlan in 1958 that their association started.⁸ Drinking in Nowlan's car in an abandoned schoolyard in Lower Brighton (just south of Hartland) cemented a friendship that lasted until Nowlan's death in 1983. Cogswell would publish Nowlan's first collection of verse as a Fiddlehead Poetry imprint, *The Rose and the Puritan* (1958), and, with University of Maine folklorist Sandy Ives, propose Nowlan for a Guggenheim Fellowship, which Nowlan used to write *The Wanton Troopers*, his first substantial work of fiction. Cogswell even became a surrogate father, lending Nowlan the money to get married – and the advice that enabled him to stay married.

As mentor, editor, publisher, professor, literary critic, and poet, Cogswell's workload was colossal. And the burden of that load has been one of the facets of the man that many commentators have noted, even if they remain confused by his incessant drive and capacities. As a farm labourer's son, however, Cogswell had theorized an ethic of work in advance of his intellectual labours, writing that the "Use of strength which makes muscles sound / Applies as well to thought" ("The Work Ethic" 64). He

⁷ This perhaps-apocryphal fact originated in an interview that David Galloway did with Cogswell in 1985. See Galloway interview in *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en littérature canadienne* (208).

⁸ The question of Cogswell's first face-to-face meeting with Nowlan occupies the middle part of Patrick Toner's biography of the latter. And it is a question that Toner rightly invests with importance, for their association "did indeed change Nowlan's life as a writer" (Toner 98). While Toner is unsure of the facts of their first meeting, he disputes both Nowlan's and Cogswell's memory of it. In fact, Cogswell wrote to Alan Reidpath on 09 January 1958 that "I would like to meet [Nowlan] but so far haven't had the chance" (Letter to Alan Reidpath). It was not until the late spring of 1958 that they did meet in the abandoned schoolyard.

expounded on that ethic in numerous poems that speak of work in a larger context of cosmic vitalism. "What won't move, decays," he said in "Ballade of Light and Heat," "What would there be when movement dies / But nothingness, life's truest hell?" (107). Though the symbolism suggests a Calvinist view aligned with his Baptist upbringing – the view that work is the process by which covenants of natural law and personal salvation are realized – Cogswell thought of work as an *escape* from dogma. For him, work was neither duty nor the consequence of depravity (a Calvinist's punishment for sin), but rather a conduit to creation, thus beyond the darkness of blind duty and enslavement. He expresses this idea in the poem "This Poem Aching to be Born": "write for the poem's sake, already / Waiting, fledgling work after fledgling work, / To be born of memory and the will / In mute brain-cells that join and mate together" (45). Work, in other words, is a generative force, a literal mating of potencies for creation; it is not done to atone or appease, but for the thing made. This ethic of "labour" (a metaphor/pun for giving birth to creation) is expressed again in the early poem "Joy":

Of all pleasures, the artist's is most rare,
Whether he carve a stone, write a sonnet,
Compose, paint, play an instrument, his joy
Is most remarkable of all in that
It is akin to God's as it draws from
Chaotic things to form a new creation. (26)

Tying work to creation is vital to understanding Cogswell's higher aims, for he also believed that the energy dispensed through work was an immortal force in the universe – and "that energy will never end" ("More Than Anything" 33). To work as an artist or enabler was therefore to enter into harmony with a natural process and to rise above man's normal action, as the poem "The Masters" further elaborates:

When patient artists find and fix
Clear patterns out of time and space
They sense their works are only tricks
That score the surface, not the base.

Around them Masters (Sun, Moon, Earth,
Worm, Wind, Wave, Tide, and Chlorophyll)
Have toiled since energy had birth
To paint what even we can kill. (16)⁹

Speaking of himself in the third person, Cogswell writes of what he, as an artist/editor, does to counter the end – that is, the violent end – to which work is normally put: "I think the most important thing he gave / Was love disguised as work, a sesame

⁹ See also "Mind: Con and Pro." *A Double Question*. Nepean: Borealis, 1999. 86-7.

/ That seemed to open doors to ample life" ("Earth and Sky: A Marriage" 48). Life, creation, service, and harmony with a vitalism more powerful than himself were cognate in Cogswell's ethic of work. His end was thus not an end, that view "too simple for my faith" ("More Than Anything" 34). In old age, he slowed but never tired because work was a cornerstone of his ethical system. "What matters is what I have done," he concludes, "Not whether folks praise me or weep. / I want to die with my boots on / And not slip away in my sleep" ("Earth, I Have Always Made My Prayer" 7). It was completely in character, then, that on his deathbed Cogswell told his daughter Kathleen that he was ready to go, having *done* all that he could *do*. Action informed his view of mortality.

Translation and Cultural Advocacy

In the late 1960s, Cogswell would put that ethic of action into force yet again, when, with the support of a Canada Council fellowship, he went to Montreal in 1967 to study and translate French. He had already done a few Latin and Middle English translations, but those, he felt, supported a classical world with little relevance to his own bilingual space, which current events seemed to be hailing. The first six volumes of the Laurendeau-Dunton Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism were released in 1967 and Quebec's Quiet Revolution was threatening to explode into the streets. More than political activism in Quebec was at play, however, in influencing Cogswell's decision to explore his submerged French heritage. Events were happening in New Brunswick that spurred him to action. Acadian Premier Louis J. Robichaud's Equal Opportunity reforms were taking shape and, as importantly, beginning to elicit a response that Cogswell considered downright racist.¹⁰ When editorial cartoons depicting Robichaud as a decadent King Louis XVI of France started appearing in the Irving-owned *Daily Gleaner*, and then an anonymous letter appeared in the Irving-owned *Telegraph-Journal* accusing Robichaud of "robbing Peter to pay Pierre," Cogswell became convinced that English intellectuals had to come forward to defend the interests of the French in New Brunswick. Why was a country that claimed to be so cosmopolitan at its World Fair (Expo '67) being so retrograde with its own citizens? Why, wrote Cogswell, did "the English-speaking writer in New Brunswick [make] little attempt to understand his French neighbour and still less of an effort to use him as a subject for serious literature" ("The Development" 21)? Try as he might, he couldn't consider these questions but through the lens of the KKK's earlier activities in Carleton County.

¹⁰ Cogswell's concern with anti-French racism in New Brunswick was a frequent point of discussion with Alden Nowlan. When Cogswell became incensed with the English reaction to a proposed community centre in Fredericton (Le Centre Communautaire Sainte-Anne), Nowlan, in sympathy, wrote an op ed piece for the *Telegraph-Journal*. Entitled "Stop Crying, You Anglophone Babies!," the piece scolded English agitators for their hypocrisy in the face of overwhelming English infrastructures in the province. Nowlan and Cogswell knew equally what the underdog faced.

He sought to explore these questions, and to understand intolerance, by learning the literary language of the French, Canada's vanquished citizens. *Star-People*, his best collection after *The Stunted Strong*, appeared in 1967 – its preoccupations the freedoms and confusions of the decade of political turmoil – and *One Hundred Poems of Modern Quebec* was published in 1970, the year after New Brunswick became officially bilingual. When Antonine Maillet's ground-breaking *La Sagouine* came out in 1971, Cogswell started to read Acadian literature in earnest, convinced that opening the French sensibility to English readers would buttress tolerance through understanding. In the essay "Modern Acadian Poetry," which came out a few years later, he celebrates the cultural archaeology undertaken by Acadian poets, distancing it from the dominant "alexandrine" (64) tendencies at work in English Canadian poetry. Those latter tendencies, he argues elsewhere, dehistoricize place and people for New Critical fetishes for text that deny political and other social influences on artistic production (Galloway 222-23). Far healthier, he maintains, is the Acadian commitment "to an essentially personal and honest response by the individual to the circumstances of his immediate surroundings" ("Modern Acadian Poetry" 65). It was largely through his exposure to those personal responses in Acadian poetry that Cogswell's exploration of his own French heritage began.

And so also began his work to counter those "alexandrine" forces that, through McLuhanesque play and masque, deflected attention from what silenced and marginalized Canada's peoples. His counterstrike began, as it had before, with publishing, much as it had with his hero Joseph Howe, except this time Cogswell's efforts were pan-Canadian.

In 1971, less than a year before his tenure ended as editor of the *Canadian Humanities Association Bulletin* (1967-72), Cogswell became a founding member of the Independent Publishers' Association (IPA), which, after 1976, became known as the Association of Canadian Publishers. A year earlier the Ryerson Press had been taken over by the New York firm McGraw-Hill, a move that, in Cogswell's view, threatened to stop the momentum that had been building toward a vibrant, Canadian-owned publishing industry. Cogswell joined a small group of like-minded cultural nationalists to lobby government for more attention to the material conditions by which art is disseminated. In 1972, the Canada Council announced the first substantial programmes of financial support for Canadian publishers, and, two years after that, legislation was adopted that restricted foreign investment in Canada's publishing industry. As an executive member of the IPA, Cogswell was instrumental in these advances, and for his efforts he was named an honorary life member, the only person to have ever held that distinction.

When the Literary Press Group formed in 1975, Cogswell was also involved, as he had been a strong advocate on the IPA executive for a separate body that would speak primarily for literary publishers in Canada. With the assistance, again, from the Canada Council, the Literary Press Group became instrumental in raising awareness about Canadian literature across the country. Efforts were made to link the interests of publishers and booksellers, and to bring writers into this partnership, the result being a renewed sense of national purpose in the literary arts.

Cogswell would yet again be instrumental, and for the same reasons, in the later formation of the Atlantic Publishers' Association. His motives in taking on this pan-Canadian cultural work were not directly related to his own interests or to a politics of cultural nationalism, though both were served by his work at the policy level of cultural governance. Rather, he desired primarily to support individuals, especially those silenced and marginalized, at the most fundamental level of their artistic practice. His work at building capacity for artistic expression was rooted in a memory that he harboured, and which he and Alden Nowlan had discussed in their early meetings: simply put, he considered himself privileged to be in the position he was and wished to use that position to make it easier for others than it had been for him to find publishing venues in a still-rural and colonial country – a country, moreover, curiously susceptible to self-aggrandizing and manifesto-inducing "clubs" that reminded him of "bardolatry" ("Modern Acadian Poetry" 65). He was referring specifically to Warren Tallman's TISH group, whose inward-looking histrionic poetics Cogswell considered very non-inclusive, thus the opposite of his own editorial practice of eclecticism. Cogswell told David Galloway in 1985:

Perhaps it's conscience money [that motivates my generosity to other artists]. . . . I have compromised. I have taught, and enjoyed a reasonably good living. Many other people with whom I have come into contact have chosen to take [the] other road. That is why they have been poor and needed help, and they have been more out-and-out poets than I have ever pretended to be, and because they are such, I have valued and respected very much the kind of thing they were doing, very often even though it was not terribly fashionable, nor terribly appreciated and sometimes not even terribly good. What I respected most of all, I think, is somebody who is capable of giving in a big sense, rather than a small sense, to that which he or she believes is worth giving to. (219)

This statement reveals much about the place of ego in Cogswell's ambitions. What appeared to some as shyness and a stubborn reluctance to promote his own verse was rather a sophisticated ecology, perhaps an offshoot of his Taoism. Though he did indeed publish his own work in his magazine and imprint series, he did much more on behalf of others, considering their worth equal to his own – and their need often greater. His haiku "Snob" seems illustrative of this view: "The humming-bird / flies by here and flies by there / without seeing me" (46). In the detente achieved between "here" and "there," the poet is negated, his subjectivity existing somewhere along the plane of the balance created between opposing energies. The transfer of that ethic to his cultural work occurred early. In 1957 he wrote the following in a letter to Richard Ashman:

I have always been remarkably patient with contributors, . . . Several writers whom I have secretly dismissed as hopeless have come up with quite respectable poems and won acceptance. I have come to the conclusion that

any one who had it in him to try can miraculously enough produce a poem if he tries hard enough and long enough. In this world of conformity, I have great respect for even the rudest attempts at poetry. Wretched as they often are they are signs of the resurgence of the human spirit. (30 September 1957)

Though that teaching came early, the learning was hard won, for the early 1980s were especially difficult years. On the one hand, the accolades started coming in regularly. In 1980, the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia and the Atlantic Publishers' Association commissioned a *Scroll* in his honour, a collection of poems signed by forty-nine Canadian poets. The ceremony at Dalhousie University recognized Cogswell-the-publisher as a man who "listened / heard them all / and knew their need to sing." He received the Order of Canada a year later, and a rare Professor Emeritus status was conferred by UNB in 1983. Honorary degrees for outstanding achievement in the arts followed: 1983, LLD, St. FX; 1985, DCL, King's College, Halifax; 1988, LLD, Mount Allison. As if in response to these "local" attentions, he immersed himself in Maritime literary criticism, undertaking major restorative projects on Charles G.D. Roberts and Atlantic writing. His focus now was decidedly regional, a narrowing influenced by the political activism in the language of the Acadian literature he was reading. In the fall of 1981, however, the equal measures of pain worked to rebalance the joys that he had been harvesting. His oldest daughter Carmen, just thirty-six, was diagnosed with an insidious form of bone cancer. She had been working as a librarian in Vancouver. Cogswell missed a number of classes that semester to be with her, then made the difficult decision to sell Fiddlehead Poetry Books, its demands no longer at the forefront of his mind.¹¹ Over the next two years he made many trips to the west coast, struggling in his personal life to deal with Carmen's suffering. His collection *Pearls* (1983) addresses her prolonged struggle with sickness, and his struggle with her death. In that collection, observed one critic, Cogswell "achieves a moving exploration of memory and death in some of the most intimate and finely controlled poems of his career" (Davies 36). He lost himself for a time in his daughter's death, devoting himself compulsively to the weighty metaphysical questions that were occupying him. His retirement from UNB in 1983 prolonged that process, as did his preoccupation with Émile Nelligan's work, which he had been translating during the worst part of Carmen's illness. Nelligan's darkness seemed to speak to his own. Both were in a sense trapped in a mental anguish

¹¹ Though Cogswell sold Fiddlehead Poetry Books to Peter Thomas, his Welsh colleague was not his first choice. His first choice had been Montreal poet Sharon Nelson. He had earlier published her collections *Seawreck* (1973) and *Blood Poems* (1978), and had worked closely with her on the Feminist Caucus of the League of Canadian Poets. She was the founding coordinator of the Caucus; he was the first, and for a time only, male member to serve on that Caucus. His desire that she take over ownership of the press was born of his loyalty to Dorothy Livesay and his hope that Fiddlehead would become a feminist instrument. When Nelson was unprepared to accept the press in 1981, however, Cogswell sold it to Peter Thomas for \$1.

neither could entirely escape. Though he was never suicidal, Cogswell's letters of that period reveal the hope that he too would be taken.

Antonio D'Alfonso, who compiled Cogswell's *Selected Poems* (1983) at this time, should be forgiven for writing the following about Cogswell in 1983: "Too busy perhaps, publishing the works of fellow poets, Fred Cogswell was not to become what we normally call a prolific writer" (7). While the first part of the comment is certainly true, the second part is not, for Cogswell would go on to publish seventeen volumes of his own work after 1983, making him among the most prolific of Canadian poets. What appears to be an oversight now, however, provides a clue to an important intersection in Cogswell's career: after 1983, the year of his retirement, he was freer than ever before to write his own verse. Free, that is, from the teaching, administration, editing, publishing, and other cultural work that had inundated him for nearly thirty years.

As he had done before, Cogswell went to the University of Edinburgh to think through the next stage of his life. There on a 1983-84 Canada/Scotland Writers-in-Residence fellowship, he could do little else but read, an activity he put to productive use by compiling two major anthologies of Atlantic Canadian writing, which appeared in 1984 (prose; *Ragweed*) and 1985 (poetry; *Ragweed*). In May 1985, however, just when his equilibrium was returning, Margaret, his wife of forty years, died unexpectedly, leaving him alone for the first time in his life. He spent many days on the beach in Prince Edward Island that summer seeking answers in the island's elemental spaces to questions that were again asserting themselves. Much of the content of *Meditations: 50 Sestinas* (1986) was composed there, as was the poem "The Beach at Noon," which expresses the helplessness he felt. One stanza reads:

Although the core of consciousness is me,
The power is elsewhere. Outside are wings
Of mind and gull, are sun, cliff, sky, and waves
That, despite my hope and memory, bear
Their kaleidoscopic patterns in the air,
Intent upon an ever-moving *now*. (9)

"[I] feel my lack of wings," he wrote in the same poem; "Outside me now / The discord lays my limitations bare" (9). Unable to go on alone, he remarried only months after his wife died, a decision he would soon regret. But at the time, marriage and poetry were the stable forms that carried him forward.

When *The Best Notes Merge* appeared in 1988, his mood was one of conciliation. "What I have learned," he wrote, "is that wills cannot merge" ("Inside the Chapel" 56). Rather, the "discord" of which he previously wrote forms a "Great orchestra whose instruments perform / God's master-work . . . and from each place / The best notes merge to find one unison" (56). In another poem of similar focus he would later write, "what turns / My inner wheel of consciousness / And the vastness beyond my view / Is something I can only guess" ("A Speculation" 44). Clearly reconciled to his new understanding (that every process around him confirms destruction), atonement becomes

his will, and he has opened himself again to love: "You wake in my heart, love, a darting jay, / A blur of joy to glint beneath my skin / Where all seemed dead and grey before you came" ("Poem for Gail" 12). Only in the late 1980s was he assured that his life would go on – and reminded of "[w]hat a gypsy said at the country fair": "'Don't quit on love, boy. Though it hurts like hell, / How much you live depends on how you care'" ("Loneliness" 2).

And indeed his life did go on, but in a much-quieter guise than previously. Retired, divested of his heavy editorial, publishing, and teaching labours, and living with a mentally ill wife, he spent the 1990s in New Brunswick as poet and seer. He continued to help aspiring poets by using his broad network of connections to find publishing venues, and he continued to translate French verse, endeavouring to bring the work of Acadian poets to English readers. His translations in *Unfinished Dreams: Contemporary Poetry of Acadie* (1990, with Jo-Anne Elder) were the first Acadian verses that many English New Brunswickers read. His greater energies, however, concentrated on his own poetry, which he finally had the long horizons to cultivate. From 1991 to the time he left New Brunswick in 2002 he published twelve collections, their preoccupations more philosophical than earlier works. In each, memory assuages loneliness, and the poem itself (as creation) is flashpoint for a temporary joy. He was not clinically depressed or despondent, but given increasingly to long periods of contemplative isolation from which he would emerge to attend services at his beloved Unitarian Fellowship. After separating from his second wife in 1996, he lived monastically for a time, then remarried again. In "A Bare Road and a Lonely" he recounts the loneliness of that uncertain time, the freer verse line he employs a metaphor for how unfixed his world was during those years of "hid[ing] in outward smiles the inner ache" ("Self-Advice" 58):

a bare road and a lonely
cold rain-clouds hid the sun
each hill he climbed led only
to another one

in him song welled up anew
spurring his weary feet
and the rhythm it moved to
was his own heart-beat (31)

In January 2002, Cogswell's third wife Adele (Anningson) died, leaving him alone once again. When his daughter Kathleen came from the west coast to console her father it was clear that he couldn't live by himself. Both packed up his books and set off by truck for Vancouver. He was eighty-four. 2002 was his last year in New Brunswick.

Final Years

Cogswell wrote to his dying days, refusing to let his "toil-established muscles die" ("Retirement" 99). Two full volumes of English translations of the Acadian poets Léonard Forest and Raymond Guy LeBlanc were half completed when he went into hospital in Vancouver for the final time. The last poems he wrote spoke of the injustices of a bureaucratized world that imposes and institutionalizes its structures, a world where power thwarts the masses as it enriches the few. The unpublished poem "Pelagius and Augustine" is particularly salient in that regard. It puts the two medieval thinkers in radical counterpoise, suggesting that in the battle for spiritual authority, the Celtic monk Pelagius lost to Augustine, a one-time disciple of Mani – and so the freedom to love, serve, and choose that Pelagius represented was lost to the stern Manichaeism of Roman fatalism. From the third century forward, Augustine's Manichean views of good and evil, righteousness and original sin, sexuality and hell dominate western Christianity. Cogswell writes of their differences as follows:

Pelagius gave human love and all
He felt would pay God's debt, prayer and thought
From all he was. They never were enough
To suit the morning star of Augustine
In a Roman religion. There was no
Saint Lucifer more powerful than he.

To the end, then, Cogswell's poems were beacons of light that expressed his profound belief in freedom of the imagination and heart. With Christianity gone off the rails, the creative impulse, he concluded, is the only truth. The translation that he was most proud of was "Art" by Theophile Gauthier. Its last two stanzas might stand as a Cogswell epithet:

The gods themselves are dead.
Great verse, stronger than brass,
In their stead
Lives on and will not pass.

Write, sculpt, paint, use the knife.
May your floating visions come
To life
In the hardest medium. (40)

Fred Cogswell died at Vancouver's Royal Columbian Hospital on 20 June 2004. The day before his death he offered to give up his bed in Palliative Care to a person who couldn't afford one, concerned that others might have greater need. He died with his poems around him.

Dreaming Against the Quotidian: Cogswell's Poetry and Poetics

One of the things that, frankly, astonishes me about you – as a poet – is that you are one of the very few people whose work sounds better, instead of worse, on re-reading. I mean that as a compliment. I've read some of your stuff – not the poems in *The Stunted Strong*, because I liked them from the first glance – but some of your other work and when I first read it, it seemed casual and even superficial. Then, when I looked at it again three weeks later, I caught the real implications . . . a chain reaction of emotions orbiting around a core of the only-seemingly simple.

(Alden Nowlan, Letter to Fred Cogswell, 23 January 1959)

Tho I maintain the same opinion of your poems as they appear on the page which I gave you with excessive frankness several years ago; since hearing you read (a grand experience) last year; I have begun to think that the spirit, the authentic spirit, a man puts into his reading, is not to be discounted. . . . At any rate, after having heard you read, I acknowledge you as an authentic poet.

(Milton Acorn, Letter to Fred Cogswell, 16 July 1970)

I. Editorial Principles

Selection of Poems

A “selected poems” represents one story among many, the larger inventory from which it comes having had the potential to combine in countless ways to become any number of narratives. To select 100 poems from twenty-nine books is thus not only to condense a poetic career but more fundamentally to misrepresent it. That is the sin of the editor, one that Cogswell knew well. But “circumstance,” one of the twin villains in this world (Cogswell, “In This World...” 50), necessitates such condensations and the false readings and emphases they inevitably impose. Still, all editors of collections such as this one have an obligation to present a writer in what the editor determines to be *characteristic* fashion, balancing the poet's best work with his most representative. If an editor doesn't know his subject thoroughly enough to do that, he has no business attempting the task.

In choosing these 100 poems, I have tended toward the lyrical and personal impulses in Cogswell more than the speculative or philosophical. As such, I have favoured the preoccupations, though not the poetry, of his earlier career. To some, that may seem

like an error, for Cogswell, like Louis Dudek, turned his poetry increasingly toward the meditative in later life. With that turn, however, came no dimming of the generative impulse that is most characteristic of Cogswell's best work. He called that impulse "energism" ("Energism" 37), referring to it metaphorically as the enlivening friction by which humans seek freedom from the quotidian. That friction is best displayed in Cogswell's personal rather than speculative poems, and is still evident in his later work, such as the poem "Sarcoma" about his oldest daughter's death:

In this way sarcoma took my daughter's life
And made into a brainless virus' food
What once was normal, healthy flesh and bone,
In time reduced her strong, athletic form
To status of a wheel-chair resident
And added pain with which no nerves could cope.

I grieve her death; grieve life and death dependent
Upon each other's form and scope for food;
But live because there's murder in my blood. (28)

The Irish poet W.B. Yeats, a Cogswell favourite, wrote similarly in "Sailing to Byzantium" that "An aged man is but a paltry thing, / A tattered coat upon a stick, unless / Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing / For every tatter in its mortal dress" (10). Cogswell sang to the end, and his singing is always a straighter path to his soul than his speculations. Hence the choice of poems in this collection.

Borealis Press

Unfortunately, this selection of Cogswell's poems *does not include* the work of the latter half of his poetic career. I learned late into the project that Borealis would not grant permission to reprint 40 poems from Cogswell's last sixteen volumes, all published by Borealis. While I will not comment on Borealis's decision, I think I can say with a fair degree of certainty that their decision would have disappointed Fred. He was an editor and publisher of unparalleled generosity, seeking always to find ways to put the creative work of others before a wide public audience. It was his example I followed in compiling this collection of his works. So while I respect the decision of Borealis to deny permission to reprint his poems – they do, after all, hold copyright – I deeply regret how their decision limits the appreciation of Cogswell's post-1983 work.

Textual/Authorial Variants

Cogswell was an inveterate scribbler. He wrote poems in longhand, often in disjointed pieces, then typed them for editors. He never composed on the typewriter, and never made the transition to a computer. His *fonds* contains myriad examples of longhand scraps of poems written on envelopes, recycled pages, napkins, and other media that were close at hand (cigarette packages, grocery bags, student exams, and even, in one case, a prayer card). He also, especially when retired, wrote poems in letters to colleagues and friends. Most of those first drafts show evidence of emendations, whether to correct or improve. Further emendations are apparent when comparing longhand drafts with final typed drafts sent to magazine and journal editors, but much less so when comparing poems published in magazines and journals to poems published in collections, and poems then republished in selected and collected works. Cogswell's method of composition was therefore open until his poems were published. After that point, he generally left his work alone. Thus, comparing versions of poems published does not provide much insight into his textual poetics. What it does reveal is the extent to which form dictated his composition. Most of the (few) changes he made to poems after publication were done to tighten metres and smooth pacing.

As a result, I have *not* identified variants in this collection because his practice does not warrant it. Rather, beyond what I have already said about choosing the lyrical over the speculative, I have made selections on the following basis:

- Poems were selected only from published volumes that bear Cogswell's name.
- Within that body of public work, the pre-1980 poems I selected were taken from *A Long Apprenticeship: The Collected Poems of Fred Cogswell* (1980). Since that was the definitive collection of its time, and Cogswell was both editor and publisher, it is reasonable to assume that the textual version of each poem in it was his final choice. The few pre-1980 poems that were published after *A Long Apprenticeship* (for example, from *Ghosts*, "T.V. Watcher," "Immortal Plowman," and "Love") bear this out. Changes are inconsequential.
- Since Borealis has denied permission to reprint Cogswell's post-1983 work, I can only list the forty titles that I would have included had they agreed to grant permission. Those titles and the Borealis volumes from which they come are listed at the end of the first selection of his poems, and they are my selection of his best and most representative work of the latter half of his career. Had Borealis granted reprint permission, those poems would have appeared.

Grouping

The order and sequencing of poems must also occupy an editor's thoughts, as it did mine. After long contemplation I decided to present Cogswell's "representative" poems in chronological order, following the sequence of their original publication. This may seem disingenuous for obscuring the criteria I employed to select the poems in the first place. *Wouldn't it be more transparent to group the poems according to the criteria that dictated their selection*, some may ask? The answer is "yes and no." Yes, that may have been more transparent, but it would have also imposed my schema more forcefully. In presenting the poems chronologically, I leave it to readers to forge their own paths and draw their own conclusions about Cogswell's work, thus freeing them to read with less constraint (and more possibility) than they otherwise would. Cogswell's own thoughts in the poem "In the Great World of Being" support this: "...never rule the dance / In our world everywhere / Life's god is circumstance" (25). In addition, presenting a poet's work chronologically enables readers to see the changes of emphases and concern that follow a life. And as a self-proclaimed confessional poet, Cogswell's work provides rich ground for that kind of discovery. So in an effort to follow his developing poetic sensibility, and to be as unobstructionist as possible in an already-coercive process, I have presented his poems chronologically.

Because digital mark-up allows for comprehensive searching by word and phrase, I encourage readers to use the tools of the site above the ISSUU book to navigate Cogswell's poems in creative and critical ways. Typing the word "love" into the website's search field, for example, shows all the Cogswell poems in which that word appear, thus opening possibilities for identification and research that are much more flexible and immediate than before.

Translations from French Poets

I have not included Cogswell's translations or partial translations, denoted by him with the italicized tag "*After the French of ...*." Cogswell was a pioneering (mostly intuitive) translator, especially of the New Brunswick and Quebec literatures; however, his own work is beacon enough of his intentions without including his translations of others. A question remains, though, about his impulse toward translation, particularly of French poets.¹² He had French blood on his mother's side and his closest professional mentor,

¹² Though his reading of French poetry was diverse and extensive, Cogswell's preferred non-English models are the poets Charles Baudelaire, Eddy Boudreau, Nicole Brossard, René Char, Alfred Desrochers, Lorraine Diotte, Léonard Forest, Théophile Gautier, Jacques Godbout, Anne Hébert, José-Maria de Heredia, Victor Hugo, Micheline de Jordy, Eva Kushner, Rina Lasnier, Leconte de Lisle, Albert Lozeau, Stéphane Mallarmé, Alfred de Musset, Emile Nelligan, Alphonse Piché, Sully Prudhomme, Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Valéry, Paul Verlaine, Jocelyne Villeneuve, and François Villon. Their metres and influence begin appearing with frequency in Cogswell's work around 1992. His favourites were the Quebec poets Emile Nelligan and Hector Saint-Denis Garneau, and the Acadian poet Léonard Forest.

A.G. Bailey, had schooled him in the vibrancy of a dual language culture, particularly in New Brunswick, where official bilingualism was edging closer to a political certainty when Cogswell began his study of Acadian poets. But these, I would suggest, are incidental factors. More central to Cogswell's interest in translation was the formal discipline it imposed on him, a discipline that paralleled his own use of tight forms. Translation therefore honed his ear and mind for his own work, a training that became increasingly important as his energies and abilities started to decline. As he explained to his daughter Kathleen Forsythe, "once [I choose] the words and the form, the poem writes itself" (qtd. in Forsythe, *Vision* 7). We see much more translation, then, in his last six collections, as well as clearer statements of his own struggles with the Muse (e.g., "My thoughts now often come by happenstance. / I grope for names to pin old faces on. / Now gravity weighs a wit that used to prance" ["Body, Mind, and Soul" 77]).

One example of his favoured mode of translation will suffice, its rhythms borrowed from the well-known poem "A Vagabond Song" by Bliss Carman. For the English reader unable to read French, this example will provide a sense of how Cogswell read and used other poets. Carman's poem begins,

There is something in the autumn which is native to my
blood...
Touch of manner, hint of mood;
And my heart is like a rhyme,
With the yellow and the purple and the crimson keeping time. (23)

Cogswell's poem "October" carries the imagery and rhythms of Carman's:

With a hood of purple berries
And a cloak of gay attire
Comes the gypsy maid October
To set the hills on fire. (39)

Cogswell's parallel poem is not a lexical translation but an incorporation of Carman's music and cadence to suit a particular mood or condition (Cogswell chose the term "equivalency" to explain this parallel [qtd. in Forsythe, *Vision* 100].) So it is with many of his translations from the French. At the level of craft, these exercises become studies in examining the metres and symbols of other artists, thereby alerting Cogswell's ear and mind to similar applications. The last two lines of the later poem "How Far is Far?" provide a final clue to what Cogswell is seeking in doing this: "Not inside itself but in what it's like / Is the deepest gold that we have expressed" (88). Cogswell would mine likeness for most of the second half of his poetic career, even if his formal articulation of the fact only becomes evident in his last six collections.

To read Cogswell's Selected Poems, click on "Poetry & Poetics" above the ISSUU book and choose "Selected Poems."

II. Cogswell's Poetics

Extracting a poet's convictions from his art is also fraught with dangers, inviting efforts that seek to separate intention (the author's and editor's) from textuality (the author's and reader's). One question that arises in attempting that separation is how to treat the confessional poet, the poet who, by admission, breathes himself into his own creations – and who, moreover, offers “the personal” as refuge from the impermanency and falsehoods of the outside world. In Cogswell's case, those questions are complicated by how compelling his confessions are, as evidenced by a frequent self-effacement in his work. The following lines will illustrate:

Though words set down kill trees, we yet will write
As, limpet-like, we clasp our egos now:
To love all life is still too great a task. (“How We Live” 38)

Cogswell was such a poet – both master of his vision and slave to his ego – but one who worked consciously in a New Brunswick tradition of like-minded “public” writers. From Bliss Carman and Francis Sherman to Elizabeth Brewster, Kay Smith, and Alden Nowlan, statements of self, purpose, and commiseration have always characterized the New Brunswick poetic voice. In fact, preoccupation with “the personal” has been the ground for anti-modernist accusations by critics from elsewhere who do not understand or share the privations of economic consequence as a *living* community narrative. This was never better illustrated than in a criticism made by one commentator from Montreal who observed that “the Maritime provinces were like a housewife who having married for money which failed to materialize ‘neglected her housework, went down to the seashore . . . watched the ships go by[,] and pouted’” (qtd. in Forbes, “In Search” 59).

In answer to this privileged dismissal we must finally take our cue from Cogswell, whose poetry and criticism provide ironic counter to the haste of limited judgement. “[I]n the land of written dreams / Where words are wealth,” he writes, “I hope they count” (“I’ve Written Poems” 60). And, indeed, isn’t that the hope we all share: that what we value most endures? Cogswell can therefore write with confidence,

I am not one of those that dies
Although a cause can unify the mind
And bring new colour to its skies;
All measurement is limited or blind. (“When I Visit” 15)

Traditional Metres and Form

I know now what it is that must be done.
Mind must delve deep to what lies below words,
Wed it to words, and let its wealth well out... ("There Is So Much..." 42)

Of fundamental importance to Cogswell was his sense of a deep order in the universe, an order that governed both biological life and imaginative creation. For most of his adult life this belief was akin to a formal religion. He believed, as Beethoven did, that creation followed the pulse of that order, which was everywhere visible as a generative force. One merely had to look at the universe to see its patterns. Correspondingly, he believed that artists had to find ways to inhabit that pulse to create both lasting and relevant work – to do otherwise, he felt, would atrophy the tongue ("In a World Ruled . . ." 70). His adoption of traditional metres and forms reflects this belief, and is manifest in a poetic *oeuvre* that can be divided into distinct formal phases. He began with the sonnet form, advanced to the sestina, the villanelle, and then the ballade, moving through periods in which he experimented with the potentials of each. Each enabled a unique entrance to a particular pulse, each summoned a different vocabulary, and each lent itself to the expression of distinct emotions and experiences. It was the job of the poet, he believed, to select and master the form best suited to carry the reader to the universal experience.

Numerous critics and reviewers have commented on Cogswell's forms, many clearly troubled by what they consider to be his unsophisticated embrace of anachronistic structures. In a review of two of Cogswell's later volumes, Christopher Levenson comments that "in the poems themselves nothing comes across as hard-won, but relapses into homely wisdom presented in a variety of traditional lyric forms" (125). Levenson concludes, as have others (see Dudek, Mandel, Lucas, and Bowering), that much of Cogswell's verse "could have been written in the late 19th century" (125), affirming Cogswell's own belief that to write outside the "peculiar rhythm or tempo" of one's age is a formula for anonymity: "in a certain sense, not to have lived" (qtd. in Forsythe, *Vision* 141).

Though Levenson's review is astute, generous, and judicious – poets are custodians of the language, after all, and are tasked with keeping it fresh – it misses what he and reviewers steeped in the "peculiar rhythms" of a discordant modernity could not have known, which is the extent to which Cogswell used traditional forms to gain access to the deep order that preoccupied him. As he grew older he sought to know this order more fully and to experience it more deeply. He explained this need as a felt somatic surrogacy in the poem "The Heart of Form":

When music comes
The dancers leap to time and tune, but here
Music's in the mind, limbs but words I write. (77)

It was thus to both entrance and obeisance that Cogswell's forms were directed. Of the sestina, for example, he writes: "The spell is simple. Light shines in order / To lead us right. We are blind in black. Six / Light words can guide us as they are set down" ("The Black Swan" 47). The deepest grammar of the poem, then, is its form. It is likewise with the poem as the thing made. Not only does form admit the poet to the *duende*, that ineffable governing order, but the poem itself (as *techne*, craft, or *matériel*) should manifest that order, for "[o]nly a strong and well-wrought glass," he explained, "should hold / creation's finest wine" ("Form" 17). Likewise, as avatar of order, the poet becomes God-like in "draw[ing] from / Chaotic things to form a new creation" ("Joy" 26). And so it is the form of the poem that carries its immortality: "[w]hat's left after time's devouring worm" is "the stark skeleton of form / [p]reserving art's symmetry" ("What Can?" 43). Rather than constricting freedom, then, Cogswell believed that "there is no freedom without form" ("Epigram" 26).

Critic Wanda Campbell believes that this preoccupation with form is integral to the Maritime writer's preoccupation with liminality, particularly a spatial liminality borne of being situated on the margins of land and sea (and, more importantly, on the periphery of power). "[O]ccupied not with authentic essence but with liminal uncertainty" (Campbell 160), poets on the periphery such as Cogswell therefore seek permanencies in speaking through the controls of form. To jettison form as disciplining order would align the artist on the margins with forces at the centre – namely "the literary dictatorship of leading poets, professors, and critics" (qtd. in Forsythe, *Vision* 142) – who are experimenting with formlessness to create that uncertainty, and thus *endorse* inequities of power while also *reproducing* those in the work of art.

While Cogswell tended to mute his theoretical inclinations he was always conscious of the centre/margin discrepancies in Canada, particularly in how those played out aesthetically. No less a critic than George Woodcock noted this awareness in Cogswell when he lauded him for "display[ing] a most admirable strain of radical Toryism which has enabled him to understand and recognize poets who find they can best express themselves in traditional ways" (qtd. in Cogswell, *Later in Chicago* ix). Cogswell did indeed express this radical Toryism in oppositional language, stating that the "true poem . . . offers its readers an alternative universe to that in which they normally dwell." Moreover, if that poem is "well done, it will offer a universe that coheres sufficiently for them to accept it imaginatively even though their own innate prejudices might have normally led them to reject it" (qtd. in Forsythe, *Vision* 150). This view fits exactly with what Campbell observes as the poet's political use of liminality to "actively oppose contemporary consumer culture" (152), that culture, in this case, being one that eschews traditional metres.

Cogswell's career-long preoccupation with form, then, must be understood in two ways: first it emerges from a belief in (and an attempt to gain entrance to) the higher order and cadence of the universe; and, second, it develops as an oppositional poetics to the practices of George Bowering (see *The Best Notes Merge* 59) and other experimental poets whose innovations in a TISH-infused Canadian context were carrying the day. Form, by contrast, was Cogswell's *différance*, the means by which, "in a world

of pressures toward conformity [to the experimental]," the poet expresses "his personal reaction to experience" (qtd. in Forsythe, *Vision* 146). By virtue of the *unpopularity* of his arcane forms and metres, Cogswell clearly thought of himself as the more engaged radical, yet another reason for his refusal to give up on old forms of poetic expression.

"Behind the veil of things"

Behind the veil of things that were
Were hints that other things might be.
I looked for patterns in the blur,
Discovered possibility. ("Behind the Veil the Dictionary" 8)

Cogswell's poetry sought to express the ineffable presence or force that he repeatedly refers to as being beyond, beneath, or outside human comprehension. The only elements of that force that *are* discernable, he claims, are patterns of energy organized around animal need: sustenance, power, sex, and ideology, the primary constituents of a self-regulating planet that was termed Gaia by chemist James Lovelock in the 1970s. To the question "What choice have we whom time and space have hurled / As shifting energy throughout this ball?," Cogswell answers, "All being's shareable in Gaea's world" ("Gaea's World" 81).

Cogswell's two-pronged reference to Gaea (spelling and inference [Gaia/Gaea]) is revealing for conflating classical and contemporary views of planet earth. The first view, from Greek mythology, holds that earth is the source of all generative energy from whose mingling dusts come mortal creatures of all types. The personification of earth as Mother Gaea stems from this still-held belief, and is observable in many early Cogswell poems that speak of earth as beneficent if unsympathetic, rather like his own mother. "After," "Diana," and "A Ballad of Orchard Evening" are such poems, their attentions not to be confused with the pantheism of Bliss Carman and the New England Transcendentalists, a definable stream in New Brunswick poetry, but with a Blakean tradition most notable in the early Blake of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Here is Cogswell's "After" in its entirety:

With the sun's kiss to warm
My body there,
And the wind's cool charm
To finger my hair,

Still shall I lie,
And covet no lass –
Sky-loved . . . when I
Am sand and grass. (48)

The more contemporary post-Sputnik view of Gaia, also intimated in Cogswell's "Gaea's World," holds that earth is a highly complex, self-regulating system (comprised of biosphere, atmosphere, and hydrosphere) in which the organic and inorganic are interdependent, their integration critical for planetary homeostasis. Though highly complex, the system and its biota are always in a delicate equipoise between optimal and menacing conditions, the latter resulting from the self-interest of organisms, usually human.¹³ This more contemporary Gaia hypothesis has largely become the metaphor through which we understand and discuss climate change and population ecologies.

In his post-1990 work, Cogswell becomes increasingly focussed on what he terms the "poetry of energy" ("The Poetry of Energy" 74), that energy a Gaea-like force that "pulses through earth's ceiling / And ranges under sea" (74). Because that energy "transcends both space and time" in a "universe [that] is adaptable," all attempts to deny or subordinate it are vanity ("Between the Science-Sun" 45). "[A]ll selfhood's a mistake," he cautions, for "the mighty world" is much more vast "than all head and heart" and "always greater than the part" ("For Any Life to Have" 19). Our reality, as a result, is myopic because we glimpse only fragments: "we refract our world / through an invisible bowl – / gold-fish do the same" ("Reality" 9).

In these poems Cogswell is not commenting on the smallness of humans in a self-organizing realm more protobiotic than Christian, but instead expressing his belief in a unifying force that is homologous with the generative force of Gaia. That unifying force, manifest in love and creative imagination, parallels the generative energy that he sees as enlivening the planet. And though "love" and "imagination" as theme and metaphor appeared frequently in his early work, it is only in his later work that he begins to ruminate on the purposefulness of both in a system that is governed by impulse to stasis and longevity. Poems such as "Lovers Beneath the Rain" should be read in this context: "Hand in hand they go – / Gold threads tying together / Both earth and heaven" (47). Love, then, *conjoins* the known and the unknown as symmetrical equivalency, as does imagination: "Of all pleasures, the artist's is most rare, . . . / It is akin to God's as it draws from / Chaotic things to form a new creation" ("Joy" 26).

Cogswell's quite-deliberate choice of the word "Chaotic" alludes to Hesiod's *Theogony*, which describes Chaos, the first of the gods, as both followed and bettered by "Gaia of the broad breast, . . . the unshakeable foundation." And following Gaia is Eros, who "overpowers the intelligence in the breast" (Lines 116-22). The point being made by Cogswell is that love and creation are the fullest expressions of Gaia, and the only means by which chaos is either negated or contested.

Cogswell came to this belief through the theology of George MacDonald, a Scottish fantasy writer he encountered during the war. Praised by C.S. Lewis as one of the great though unknown theologians of his time, MacDonald broke from the Calvinism of

¹³ See Cogswell's poem "Irony Preview: 21st Century" on this point, particularly its last stanza: "Flesh and blood cannot pay the price / As earth exacts a clumsy death / To rid itself of noxious lice / That poison us with self-made breath" (69).

his tradition to proclaim what was considered a radical view of atonement, one that replaced the idea of a wrathful God with that of a commiserate one. Cogswell explains:

MacDonald emphasized an aspect of life – its goodness – [as being] a relationship that you had with the Universe. It was good because the Universe gave you everything that you had. You gave the Universe, in turn, everything that you had. If you appreciated that the Universe was good . . . the result would be an acquaintanceship which was more than hypocrisy or mere surface friendship but a real thing that was lasting . . . as long as you and the Universe remained constant partners. (qtd. in Forsythe, *Vision* 19).

In the appropriately titled *In My Own Growing* Cogswell develops this idea of fellowship by aligning it with Northrop Frye's notion of art, specifically poetry, as revealing the Gaia-biota partnership. As the archetypal storehouse of pre-literate ritual and myth, poetry functions, says Frye, as the form/formula to discovering natural and organic cycles of life that are *supra*-linguistic. Cogswell expresses this seeming paradox in the poem "With No Fixed Truths": "With no fixed truths dimly our brain-fires glow. . . Hence from January to December / Our brains respond to how the seasons go" (2).

In exploring his own theory of a "fearful symmetry" between the generative (natural cycles) and the imaginative, Frye, too, looked to the early Blake, discovering in his work the archetypes or Zoas (literally "living ones" who pull the chariot of God's spirit) that attempt to work through Chaos to awaken Albion, the human collective. For many poets after Frye, including the poet Adrienne Rich, the acknowledgement of such archetypes "can break open locked chambers of possibility, restore numbed zones to feeling, [and] recharge desire" (Rich xiv). In theorizing the presence of organic patterns unknown to us but manifest in imaginative creation, both Frye and Cogswell, following Blake and MacDonald, are seeking knowledge of the hidden outside the empirical (science) and the received (Gospel). Cogswell does not go as far as Frye or Yeats in entertaining the spiritual or occult dimensions of this gnosis, but locates the mystery of energy in light, tide, and gravity, the "mindless" movers of the universe. For him, "bacteria, silent worms, / Deep-rooted trees, the tides of sun and moon" move the universe ("Wasson's Bluff" 14), each unstoppable in appetite. To live fully in that world is to move and create with equal appetite and equal energy. Hence, in "Mind: Con and Pro" he can write:

My mind is open day and night.
White virgin pages wait for choice,
And still I hear love's urgent voice
Persist, "Take up your pen and write." (87)

In parallel to MacDonald, this view eliminates the menace of a wrathful God and reconstitutes atonement as fellowship with the energies of the Universe, energies that, in movement, may destroy. It is this deeper understanding of the amoral nature of appe-

tite – a force that “does not need words / To manifest itself in history” (“Mind: Con and Pro” 86) – that enables Cogswell to reconcile himself to his beloved daughter’s death:

I grieve her death; grieve life and death dependent
Upon each other’s form and scope for food;
But live because there’s murder in my blood. (“Sarcoma” 28)

Locating a prime mover in ceaseless, self-organizing energy instead of an avenging God brought Cogswell to a new acceptance of what he could not change, which allowed him to view his own thought as miniscule next to the “eons” that “time always has . . . to splurge” (“On the Stage of World Unity” 46). In acceptance he found euphony, that which was pleasing to his ear: “In birth, growth, decay, death lie euphony, / As energy moves at its required speed” (“Euphony” 48). “[R]equired,” of course, is the key word, suggestive of a self-regulating pulse that holds dominion. The contrast to the stiff orthodoxy of his formative religion is considerable, the “hope [those] forefathers gave / . . . much too narrow and too high” (“I Found the Hope” 34). St. Augustine’s “Either-or,” he concludes, “is too simple for my faith” (“More Than Anything” 33), and, in fact, Augustine becomes bugbear for institutional power, menace, and sacrilege.¹⁴

Cogswell’s submission to an ethics of energy sharpened his earlier Zen Buddhist beliefs and redoubled his commitment to living collectively and with the inevitability of pain, which he describes in the poem “Three Legs” as the irritant of change (32). The “homely wisdom” (125) that Levenson correctly identifies in Cogswell’s later work should be reconsidered in this light. That “wisdom” is not a marker of intellectual fatigue, as Levenson infers, but rather of the sage’s hard-won insight. “Truth is,” Cogswell writes, “the more we smell the rose, the more / We cannot forget to feel the bramble” (“To A Would-Be Writer” 44). And later, in sage-like address to “Good Prince,” his euphemism for “Dear Reader”:

Good Prince, the ways that all of us are on
Are mutual, where life and death convene
Gain-Loss; who views them as a battle drawn
Has but one view of a two-sided screen. (“The Life That’s Left . . .” 53)

To see the world as universalized in energies – the “one food-chain involv[ing] both bird and worm” (“Ballade of Opportunity” 75) – is to give up dominion over that world, which Cogswell increasingly signals in his later work. What was Gaea’s benevolent greeting in 1983 – “The almighty sun / says good morning to the ant / as well as to me” (“Zen” 24) – becomes Gaia’s indifference in 2002: “The humming-bird / flies by here and flies by there / without seeing me” (“Snob” 46). Being reduced to just another point of energy enables him to see new life encircling his. Life is now “a green blade growing / out of a cleft in the rock, / defying time’s cold” (“Life Is” 65) and ego, as a

¹⁴ See, especially, the poems “Augustine,” “An Atonement,” and “Inside the Chapel.”

result, is deposed: "I'm no older in my eightieth year / Than a mayfly in its twentieth hour" ("Mayfly Ballade" 21). Living in the moment becomes the poet's goal, bringing him to the conclusion that "'To be' is far more vital than 'To last'" ("Between the Science-Sun" 45). This is how we should read the final of Cogswell's fifty meditations, the culmination of his thought:

I think the best of all the tales in Zen
Is that where a man clings to a cliff-edge
Between the snake that crawls up after him
And the fierce tiger lurking at the top,
But, finding there a bunch of sweet raisins,
He eats them, crying out, "How delicious!"

I abdicate the climb to reach the top.
Let tiger prowl and snake come chasing sins.
Today I heed the lesson taught by Zen
And pay for hunger with a grateful hymn . . . ("Zen: The Epicure" 56)

"So I who fed the poets now feed / Birds," Cogswell concludes,

[r]eal birds divorced from all mind's sophistries. . . .
Once metaphor, now real as actions go:
Who feed the sparrows in a winter-snow
Bring living leaves to grace the barren trees. ("The Ex-Poetry Editor . . ." 72)

Cogswell closes, then, with a wish that metaphor be turned to action; that we must "[t]ake no thought of self or state," but take up the "raw unfathomed swarm," giving "ordered form" to "syllables afire with living heat" ("Ballade of Opportunity" 76).

Conclusion

To all who gamble effort for a goal
The odds are always astronomical. ("Wasson's Bluff" 9)

Echoing in the final lines of "Ballade of Opportunity" is the earlier poem "Art," which describes all poetry as simulacra, a pale comparison of the real thing:

Light bird of life
your death is sealed
even as we glimpse
the form revealed:

Strong though you soar,
 marble, notes, words
 kill the brave flight
 with static swords. (32)

The discrepancy between the life of words and their ultimate failure brings us to the centre of Cogswell's aesthetic. He was never certain of anything but groping in the dark, which is precisely why he speaks to us so deeply. The ending of his poem "Lines for a Last Judgement" enunciates that uncertainty: "Though never sure what was false, what was true, / He always tried to act as if he knew" (25).

Those lines seem less a confession of ego than a statement of effort, the expenditure of energy always essential in taking the measure of a man. It is the same, Cogswell reminds us, for most artists: "better," that is, "to be a well-placed / candle / than a blazing sun" ("For an Artist" 217).

Though reviewers will continue to insist on wattage, Cogswell's openness to more diminutive equivalencies pioneered new approaches to poetic attentiveness, particularly on the east coast. With no desire to lead a movement, he nevertheless plowed the soil for what would become a poetics of alterity practiced by later Maritime poets such as M. Travis Lane, Don Domanski, Harry Thurston, John Steffler, and Brian Bartlett. Arrived at through his reading of Lao Tsu and George MacDonald, and via his later meditations on the complementarity of energy and ecology, Cogswell's poetics of alterity focussed on processes that treated humans not as centres or material reserve, the usual designations of the Western ego, but as constituent pulses of much broader energies in the biosphere. Theorists of eco-poetics now express views consistent with this. Akira Mizuta Lippit, for example, contends that "even as each individual organism perishes it is immediately replaced by another from among the multiplicity that constitutes it" (133), a view closely aligned with Cogswell's vision of "cliff, waves, / Sun, sky, [and] gull wings one instant fused in me" ("The Beach at Noon" 9). Writing of the new field of critical animal studies, Tammy Armstrong observes that a poet's focus on this sort of diminution into hybridity "collapses the space between species" as surely as it elevates the larger biosphere to the status that human egos obscure (16). "As the poet moves from predator to loam," Armstrong continues, "he slips closer ... to the multiplicity of organisms that inhabit the soil and leaf fall," thus "crossing into a metaphorical ecotone" where new possibilities of life, and alternatives to logocentrism, abound (20). Acceptance of this contemporary view avows a larger and more charitable democracy, and represents the kind of radical epistemology that Cogswell brought to Maritime literature. In their insistence on high wattage and intolerance of dated forms, few critics have understood this. To Cogswell, then, must go the last word:

What matters is what I have done,
 Not whether folk praise me or weep.
 I want to die with my boots on
 And not slip away in my sleep.

Earth, I have always made my prayer
With knowledge I was only one.
What others did was their affair;
I had to trust them and be done. (“Earth, I Have Always Made My Prayer” 7)

III. Cogswell’s Selected Poems

To read Cogswell’s Selected Poems, click on “Poetry & Poetics” above the ISSUU book and choose “Selected Poems.”

IV. Cogswell Selected Poems (Borealis)

To preview the titles of Cogswell’s Selected Poems published by Borealis Press, click on “Poetry & Poetics” above the ISSUU book and choose “List of Cogswell Poems Published by Borealis.”

“[L]over of poets more than of their poems”: Cogswell as Editor and Correspondent

Here's to a gallant doffer Greatcoated
lover of poets more than of their poems.

(Robert Gibbs, “Fred’s Overcoat” 164)

The [fourteen letters](#) that follow are an infinitesimal sampling of a correspondence that is best described as voluminous. Cogswell wrote thousands of letters, many now scattered among the literary papers of Canada’s leading writers and editors of the last fifty years.

His impetus for letter writing started when he was a boy, a boy who felt especially isolated in a New Brunswick village that seemed far away from the rest of the world. He wrote letters to make contact with that wider world in the hope that he might discover a sensibility similar to his own. The practice was common among children in Canada and other countries of the commonwealth, where “pen pal” associations were advertised in comic strips, children’s books, and domestic magazines. As Cogswell grew into adulthood he continued the practice, turning what was once a personal outreach into a professional one. To these letters he affixed poems that were descriptive of the place he lived or the neighbours he lived among. The people who most often answered were editors of small magazines in the U.S. They were generous in their comments about his verse and often sent a copy of their current issue for his reading. It was in these obscure little magazines that his first poems appeared.

When Cogswell returned to New Brunswick and became editor of *The Fiddlehead* in the early 1950s, he never forgot the generosity of those distant editors – or the need of isolated writers to make contact with sympathetic listeners. When Robert Kroetsch wrote a greeting to celebrate *The Fiddlehead’s* 50th anniversary, he observed that the magazine “was always a listening kind of journal, an ear placed at a distance from the hubbub and able to hear what the centre, often, was not willing to listen in on” (qtd. in McKay, 1995 234). Kroetsch was speaking indirectly of Cogswell’s influence on the magazine, for *The Fiddlehead’s* listening sensibility was almost entirely Cogswell’s own.

His correspondence, then, is of a particular kind. It is always personal and informal, his tone and address rarely harried, officious, or doctrinal. He clearly saw himself as the ideal editor to which he, as a novice poet from a distant outpost, wrote. Whether the material he received was good or bad, and even if the query was vapid, he responded with warmth, encouragement, and tactful assistance – the kind of assistance aimed especially at improvement. Moreover, his letters are never fawning or solicitous, but surprisingly frank, detailed, and erudite, even if couched in easy conversational

style. His favourite method of criticism was to send writers to other poets and magazines, and to expound on international trends in literary practice, hoping, it is clear, that young poets might learn by reading and emulating other poets. His letters alone provide an excellent overview of small magazines in Canada, the U.S., and abroad.

As he was nearing the end of his editorial stewardship of *The Fiddlehead*, he wrote what might double as his epistolary ethic:

When I was a soldier in World War II, I once read in a British magazine called *Nature* the following lines:

Every bird
on every spray
sings its own song
in its own way.

I know that this statement is neither biologically nor artistically true, but belief can, I believe, create miracles. As a writer I have tried to obey what these lines express, and as an editor I have always respected the attempts of others to follow them. ("Choosing a Printer" 36)

As listening post, he read each poem he received and responded to every letter, the number of which soared to nearly 1000 annually when the magazine reached its international audience. Typically, he selected the best one or two poems he received for publication, preferring to showcase poets rather than poems. This practice sometimes aggravated the more seasoned of his correspondents, notably Alden Nowlan, Al Purdy, and Dorothy Roberts. As his correspondence makes evident, however, his larger intent was both to encourage and cultivate new poetic talent, a desire that required him to offer more than the usual constructive criticism in his responses. Though this work must have been exhausting, it was an integral part of the civilizing mission that he, like most modernists after Pound, was embarked on. For Cogswell, however, that mission was rooted in a place-based ethic that supported individuals rather than ambiguous notions of art. He wished for the voiceless to acquire the miracle of literary speech. That wish must be understood in the context of the geo-politics of his New Brunswick locale, the blackout of his family history, and the constraints placed upon him by an accident of birth (i.e., malocclusion-related speech impediment). That *The Fiddlehead* now enjoys the status of Canada's longest-living literary magazine is in no small part traceable to Cogswell's attentive ear and welcoming disposition.

To read Cogswell's *Selected Correspondence*, click on "Correspondence" above the ISSUU book and choose "Letters."

A Cogswell Bibliography

The items in the Bibliography of Primary Sources below are listed *chronologically* in order to show Cogswell's labour and focus at various stages of his career.

The items in the Bibliography of Secondary Sources are listed *alphabetically*.

Both bibliographies (Primary and Secondary), as well as the sections within those, should be considered *selected* rather than comprehensive. Because much of Cogswell's early work found its way into obscure journals and small magazines, many now out of print and lost to history, it is unlikely that a complete bibliography could ever be constructed. As well, Cogswell's voluminous correspondence and public profile brought him to the attention of non-literary artists who used his work in unconventional ways. In 1981, for example, the Latvian composer Jānis Kalniņš wrote the New Brunswick Song Cycle for piano and voice, setting Cogswell's poem "A Ballad of Orchard Evening" to music. In 2003, Colin Bradley Pridy, a musician studying at the University of British Columbia, did likewise, creating a composition for mezzo-soprano and pianoforte from Cogswell's poem "The Cross-Grained Tree." The work was later released as part of Pridy's master's thesis at UBC.

The Cogswell bibliography below, then, is as complete as possible, certainly the most comprehensive bibliography so far produced.

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