

TOWARDS FRED COGSWELL'S PARADOXICAL POETICS OF SUGGESTIVE SILENCE, ELABORATION, AND THE DAO'S NATURE AND RHYTHMS¹

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Unfortunately our Western mind, lacking all culture in this respect, has never devised a concept, nor even a name, for the *union of opposites through the middle path*, that most fundamental item of inward experience, which could respectfully be set against the Chinese concept of Tao.

—C.G. Jung, qtd in Chang, *Creativity and Taoism* (6)

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Recent years have witnessed deservedly increasing and increased publications on Daoism and its western parallels. To name but a select few, *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* alone has featured Shaobo Xie's and John (Zhong) Ming Chen's "Jacques Derrida and Zhuang Zi: Some Analogies in their Deconstructionist Discourse on Language and Truth" (19.3 [1992]: 363-376), and Chen John (Zhong) Ming's and Shaobo Xie's "Malcolm Lowry and the Tao," a long co-authored essay (20.3 [1993]: 355-380). Most recent and notable is Rujie Wang's "The Mosaic of Chinese Modernism in Fiction and Film: The Aesthetics of Primitivism, Taoism, and Buddhism" (35.1-2 [2008]: 14-39). This essay joins the company of those mentioned above and examines a Canadian poet, Fred Cogswell's carefully and sensitively developed poetics of suggestive silence, of elaboration, and of the nature and rhythms of the Dao. Given the cross-cultural nature of this study, it is not irrelevant to preface the discussion with an intriguing conversation between two English Canadian writers and critics, Margaret Atwood and Jeffrey Hancock. In fact, what follows is partially occasioned and informed by the two major concerns they raise: a Haiku sensitivity and tradition and, relatedly, a yin-yang Daoist aesthetics, that both bear directly on Fred Cogswell's poetics:

Atwood: How did it [*One Hundred Years of Solitude*] do among the Innuit? Or the Chinese? It's true you can translate things, sort-of, so that they can be read.

But efforts to translate haiku have always frustrated me...It [the translation] lacks a rich

cultural compost...

Hancock: We don't even know how to "read" a Chinese restaurant in Toronto. The dragons on the wall, the Fo dogs which represent Yin and Yang, the tree figures that represent health, wealth, and longevity. There's something tricky about language.

Atwood: There's something tricky about "reality," let alone language. Insofar as language relates to a cultural experience of reality, to what extent is that transmissible?

(Ingersoll 210-211)

6 What Atwood tries to unfold in terms of the Haiku sensitivity and its rich tradition can be viewed as arising, at least in part, from Chan (Zen in Japanese) Buddhist poetics (among Shinto and Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism),² which is, historically, a mixture and offshoot of Chinese Buddhism and Daoism, according to recognized experts such as Conrad Schirokauer (1991, 115-16) Georg Moeller (2004, 149-50), A.C. Graham (1992), Earl Jackson (1989, 1990), and to a monograph fresh off the press: *The Influence of Daoism on Asian-Canadian Writers* (2008, 19-20). Moeller, in particular, has put the complex and intricate interconnection this way: "The modern Chinese philosopher Feng Youlan (1895-1990) accurately summed up the Buddhist 'reinforcement' of Daoism by saying: 'The combination of Daoism and Buddhism resulted in Chanism, which I should like to call a philosophy of silence'" (149). A similar point has been brought up by Roland Barthes earlier (Jackson 1989); in fact, one may indulge in alliteration and suggest that, like Atwood, Barthes is badly baffled by the haiku's lack of metaphors and symbolism and its imperviousness to Western interpretation (Jackson 1989). Hancock, we venture to say, seems to understand sufficiently well the Daoist signifying system on another occasion (*Chinada* 157-59). Nevertheless, an explication of the Daoist aesthetics at greater length is necessary in the Canadian context.

We will focus on a number of key features in Fred Cogswell's poetry that are distinctively Daoist. Besides being an inspiring teacher and warmly encouraging critic/editor (Keith 1985; Gibbs 1983; New 1989), the poet has published over thirty collections of verse. However, he has received unduly little critical attention to date.³ Of immediate relevance to this project is the poet's honest and graceful admission that Daoism informed nearly fifty of his poems, and that he had studied Tom McInnes's *The Sayings of the Old Boy* and Thomas Merton's *The Ways of Chuang Tzu*. From this new perspective, one wonders whether his poetics might not have puzzled quite a few Canadian critics.⁴ Though we have yet to prove this point to our own complete satisfaction—given the dire and disproportionate scarcity of scholarship accorded him⁵—we hope that the ensuing discussion will shed some light on three main aspects.

First of all, much of Cogswell's poetry is inspired by Daoist poetics of suggestive silence, predicated upon the bitter realization of the inadequacy of language and the urge to articulate human thoughts, ideas, and feelings. The same realization partially explains his penchant for the haiku, and for similar short poetic forms, which are mostly shortened and subdued "lyrics"⁶ that have managed to survive the Imagist

Movement championed by Ezra Pound. Secondly and no less ironically, the same realization propels him to articulate by all means the meanings and manifestations of the Dao as he sees them: by paradoxes and by repetition of words and phrases; by tautological and hence emphatic poetic structures and forms such as the villanelle and sestina;⁷ and by intuition or instinct. Finally, the poet's search for balance, rhythm, form, and symmetry in the postmodern world leads to the Daoist yin/yang correlative paradigm and sensitivity that underlies his poetic visions, where companions, complementary qualities, co-ordinated pairs, harmonized self/other, in life as much as in poetry, reign supreme. We submit that, against the steam and stream of postmodern and post-structural ideologies and deconstructionist theories that question or negate meaning and thrive on the challenge to or dismantlement of language's stability and signifying potentials, Cogswell's poetry self-consciously reclaims, asserts, and celebrates order, meaning, and purpose in writing as much as in reality, both human and natural.

I. THE PARADOX OF DAO(ING): TO SPEAK OR NOT TO SPEAK, THAT IS THE QUESTION

The Way [Dao] that can be spoken of is not the constant Way,
The name that can be named is not the constant name.
(Lao Tzu, the *Daodejing*, chap. 1)

Be silent. Who keeps silent inside
Touches the roots of speech.
(Rilke, quoted in Zhang Longxi, *The Tao and the Logos* 129)

Speech is silver; silence is gold.
(English proverb)

The opening lines from the *Daodejing* already articulate the dilemma that has haunted and even plagued humanity for nearly two thousand and five hundred years. The moment we speak (*Dao* in *pinyin* or *Tao* in the Wade-Giles system), we split the phenomenal world from its total, heterogeneous whole and establish a linguistic world. Fully aware of the simultaneous inadequacy and expressiveness of language, Cogswell resorts to imagery to suggest. The most concise of the poetic forms he employs remains the haiku;⁸ it comes across also as the most expressive of his Daoist aesthetic of suggestive silence.

In much of his haiku, economy of words is intended not to draw attention to linguistic or self-reflective acts—the writing itself so typical of postmodern fiction in particular, and to certain degree, poststructuralist criticism—but to the objects and events being described or represented; the nows and heres are foregrounded and highlighted. Second, Cogswell refuses to indulge in verbosity, still less the free

play of endless signifiers or “traces” (in deconstructionist parlance). In many of his poems, language is so transparent that one feels that things are “thinging”, to vary Anan Smol’s expression (1994, 249). To put in another way, one senses the thingness of things in all its immediacy and concreteness. If we may cite Morley Callaghan, we have indeed “Cezanne’s apples, the appleness of apples” (*That Summer in Paris*). Objects speak for themselves. Similarly, physical acts and even slight gestures convey meaning in its entirety; words, by contrast, are presented as either inadequate or unnecessary, or both:

Haiku

When your eyes speak love
and my eyes answer in kind
why should we need words?

(*Black and White Tapestry* 15; hereafter *BAWT*)

- 8 Reading this haiku, one is tempted to repeat that platitude that action speaks louder than words, for in this short piece, the stress is laid on the visual rather than the verbal. The most celebrated Chinese fiction writer, poet, and critic, Lu Hsun, once counselled that to capture the eyes’ meanings is a most powerful means (*Lu Xun on Literature and Arts*). Cogswell’s poem embodies a similar message. Elsewhere, three of Cogswell’s poems in the haiku series embrace the rhythms, changes, and vicissitudes of the day with few words:

Morning

...the egg-shell sky breaks:
my eyes feast on the rich warmth
of a gold-yolked sun...

Again, the visual aspect is emphasized. It is here that the proverbial “seeing is believing” becomes concretized and fleshed out. Indeed, synaesthesia facilitates the creation of a well-inlaid collage of with images of roundness: the egg, the egg-shell, the eyes, the yolk, the sun—all in round shape suggestive of the Dao symbol. In the sequel to the above poem, we have:

Noon

...the world’s so heavy
with the weight of sky colour that
we need not look up...

Here, the eyes’ functions are ostensibly marginalized or negated: one feels directly the oppressiveness of the sky and the heat; evident also is the attempt to foreground feeling, as does “the rich warmth” in the previous poem. In yet another piece, eyes, not the mouth, become the focal point again:

Night

...close your eyes and all
the shapes and hues of the day will

live on in the dark...

(WTRLS 67)

The poet asks us to arrest the images in “that inward eye”, to use Wordsworth’s expression from “The Daffodils”. Cogswell does away with many words and uses the eyes like a mirror. The gap between language and things is effectively bridged, since the images are re-inscribed, as it were, on the “paper” of the mind already. What is most intriguing seems the simultaneity of two actions--the ceasing of the eyes and the capturing of the images; this, and the contrast of day (a Yang image) and night (a Yin element) in the entire poem, are highly suggestive of the Yin/Yang continuum in complementary relation.

One would miss a good deal if one fails to note the connection between the simplicity of language and that of imagery in Cogswell’s poems, since simplicity—of language (cf. the *Daodejing*, Chapters 1 and 81) as much as of life (cf. the *Daodejing*, Chapters 20, 28 and 80)—constitutes yet another conspicuous dimension of Daoist poetics. All of his haiku exhibit a high sensitivity to extra-textual realities and ability to (re) create deceptively simple but unique versions of reality. Additionally, chiefly mono-syllabic and Anglo-Saxon words predominate, while transparent, cleanly descriptive details and images impose no human order: ostensibly, of course. These two features of language and imagery constitute a sure sign of Cogswell’s artistry of leaving no traces of forcing a point or constructing something. And yet, one knows that this is an “objective” style difficult to achieve, a style that reminds us of Hemingway’s pared down prose.⁹ We might safely conclude that Cogswell’s haiku (and we hasten to add, the bulk of his non-haiku poems inspired by Daoism) are permeated with this sense of simplicity and tranquillity with the natural world in particular. Consequently, the absence of the “humanizing” tendency, to cite Linda Hutcheon in criticism of Western Enlightenment and modernism (1993), leads to a further implication: One feels little sense of self here, *pace* many Western “self”-centered poets and critics. What we have, instead, is poetic and subtle assertion of the Daoist tenet of non-self, one that renders itself readily useful in contemporary ecological concerns, as Ellen M. Chen (1989, xi 18, and 34-36), Daniel Overmyer (1986, 112-113), and N.J. Girardot (2001) have perceptively pointed out. In short, many in the West strive for simplicity; Cogswell is at one with it.

In his moments of dispensing with words because of the gap between sound and meaning, Cogswell lays stress on the tactile—the only simultaneous, two-way approach of the senses in the physical dimension (e.g., not the psychic). This poetic proclivity is certainly reminiscent of the Daoist notion of unity (joining the two or more, in fact) and correlative relation as most powerfully bodied forth in the Yin/Yang couplet (e.g., the female/male, the cool/warm). For illustration of reciprocal nature, it might serve my point to cite Rilke’s poem made well known by Hugh MacLennan:

Love consists in this,
 That two solitudes protect,
 And touch, and greet each other.
 (qtd. on the dedication page of Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes*)

Through the linguistic indexes such as “each other” and “touch” and the image conjured up by “solitudes” (voluntary, we believe), Rilke underscores mutual protection, touching, and greeting in a two-way relation. And yet, Rilke falls short of envisaging a poetic union. In Cogswell’s poem, also on human relationship, speech is initially less emphasised than silence and touch:

10 I am glad of this, for it is well that
 Both you and I can keep a separate sense
 Of selves, although, no matter what we say,
 It jars us both that unity we took
 Such a joy in does not encompass sound
 Till silence sends us back again to touch.

I think that Blake was right to claim that touch
 For human beings flung wide the doors that
 Led to eternity. There is in sound
 Always a gap between sense given and sense
 Received, but when we touch, who gave or took
 Or which of us was which no one can say.

One of Rilke’s means of communication—greeting—can be renamed in terms of sound, and sound is excluded here by Cogswell—indeed negated—as an ineffective means; silence and touch are what bridges the gap and joins the two in “unity”. At the end, however, the poet arrives at a realization, through reconciliation or even resignation, that without words, one simply cannot sufficiently express one’s feelings and thoughts. A Daoist-Blakean realization of the paradox inherently in language is conveyed, and rounds off the twists and turns of human relationships.¹⁰ For language is the best possible medium of expression at our disposal even when we are fully aware of its limits:

And yet it took these words to say that touch,
 Taste, and smell mean more to me than thoughts that
 Sense our difference even while they sound.
 (BAWT 54)

The three-line envoy encapsulates the functions of five senses in relation to thought, and thus, human relations in a most succinct manner; but present, or even pervasive, is a sense of intuition and instinct, accompanied by the by now subdued attempt to relegate language and thought to the margins.

Two points can be proffered here. First, whereas the haiku succinctly encapsulates his poetics of suggestive silence, it is by no means true that Cogswell excels only in brief verse forms.¹¹ In other words, what seems to be the hallmarks of his brief poems

lies in the paradox of speaking or not speaking—the Dao-ing or not in the original Daoist canon—the *Daodejing*. And at those poetic moments he elects to employ short forms. At other times, he cannot resist exploring the Dao in more extended poetic discourse, much like the articulate, even verbose and grandiose Chuang Tzu, in contrast with the terse to laconic Lao Tzu. Indeed, the last poem we analyse above already adumbrates Cogswell's more elaborate and meditative mode of writing and thinking, rather than the sudden enlightenment and brief observations typical of haiku and short poems.

Second, one should not suggest that Cogswell exploits (he might not harbour the intention) the rich Japanese allusiveness within that particular literary tradition, in which, Kawamoto (1989) and Stewart (1969) suggest, haiku written in the Japanese language partake necessarily. Nor has Cogswell tapped the potentials of Chinese short poetic forms intimated in the *Daodejing*,¹² those that inspired the Imagist movement and are perfected by the Chinese, according to Robert Kroetsch and Adele Wiseman (Hancock 1982, 157).¹³ To claim either would be to overstate the case. And yet, through decades of practice, Cogswell has established his own system of imagery within his private and unique poetic world, and the flashes of insight are often Daoist in origin. This leads us, in a somewhat circular fashion characteristic of the Dao's movement and trajectory, to the Dao as imbibed and played out in Cogswell's longer, well sustained and balanced poetry.

II. DAO-ING (IN/AND,) CIRCLES/CYCLES/RETURN

Let us give up the failed enterprise of seeking to “understand” any single poem as an entity in itself. Let us pursue instead the quest of learning to read any poem as its poet's deliberate misinterpretation, *as a poet*, of a precursor poem or of poetry in general.

—Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (43)

[P]roductivity...is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another.

—Julia Kristeva, “The Bounded Text” (36)

Cogswell has written a number of poems directly expounding the concepts of Dao (and *Chan/Zen* less frequently) in its multifarious manifestations, but most remarkable about his poetics remains the perfect matching or collapsing of content and form.¹⁴ True to Daoist tenets of circularity and cyclicity, he wisely selects demanding poetic forms—in particular, the villanelle and the sestina—that require repetition of words or phrases, recurrent images and symbols, and regurgitation, and hence, re-circulation or recycling of ideas, images, and symbols; that emphasize, in its totality, circularity of temporal relationships or spatial movements. Most notable and pertinent to our project is his outright poetic “play” with defining the Dao and exploring its connotations. This, one should note, constitutes an altogether impossible yet very tantalizing task that has tempted numerous aspiring and ambitious

thinkers and poets alike.¹⁵ However, by doing this, he joins the company of all those who consciously or not, “misinterpret” (in Bloom’s paradigm) and intertextualize (in Kristeva’s parlance) the very first (the *Daodejing*) and a host of subsequent Daoist works.¹⁶

Since Cogswell’s “Tao” was written some thirty years ago and bears a seminal significance to his subsequent absorption of the Dao and his contribution to our understanding of it, we would cite the poem in full:

Tao

Five players in an endless game
That move together to one end –
Charm, Zest, Rhythm, Grace, and Glame –

They wind inside and out a frame
Of matter which our senses tend,
Five players in an endless game.

12

Charm is a pool of waters tame
Where reeds of Grace may smoothly bend
To winds whose morning breath is Glame

On Rhythm of the sunlight’s flame,
With Zest the magic of the blend.
Five players in an endless game

That move as one: Life, Way, and Name
of God, the Source alike and End:
Charm, Zest, Rhythm, Grace, and Glame.

–So sang Lao Tze, who saw the same
And in one brush-stroked sign did blend
Charm, Zest, Rhythm, Grace, and Glame,
Five players in an endless game.

(*A Long Apprenticeship* 172)

One can examine the villanelle on several levels. First, key Daoist concepts abound: circularity, oneness or monism, natural rhythms, and fusion of opposites or more appropriately, complementaries; in a Bloomian fashion, they necessarily echo and interplay with the Daoist texts Cogswell read. Second, the language, while repetitive (not repetitious) and fairly simple, is at once poetic and philosophical, much like that in the *Daodejing*. Third, the skilful unity of form and content invites an allegorical or metaphysical reading, and may serve as an eloquent rebuttal or reply to those who challenge the employment of traditional forms and old wisdom.¹⁷

On the first level, Cogswell’s dexterity lies in poetizing abstract philosophical concepts, which are in turn adroitly couched in sharp and rich imagery and purposefully re-used vocabulary. Thus, he continues and, of course, reinvigorates the time-honoured Daoist tradition in another language—English. In the spirit of Bloom’s passage cited above, we may intertextualize a selective few of the pertinent lines from the *Daodejing* and unfold the discussion of Oneness (the One in/and the Dao) and har-

monizing or blending of all:

Chapter 39

Of old, these came to be in possession of the One:
 Heaven in virtue of the One is limpid;
 Earth in virtue of the One is settled;
 Gods in virtue of the One have their potencies;
 The valley in virtue of the One is full;
 The myriad creatures in virtue of the One are alive...
 (Lau xvi, 59)¹⁸

Chapter 42

Tao gives birth to one,
 One gives birth to two,
 Two gives birth to three,
 Three gives birth to ten thousand beings.
 Ten thousand things carry *yin* on their backs and embrace *yang* in their front,
 Blending these two vital breaths (*ch'i*) to attain harmony (*ho*).
 (Chen 157)

13

In the *Daodejing*, the One is sometimes equated with the Dao, and vice versa, and scholars have discussed the meaning of the multiplication from one to many elsewhere. What is creative in Cogswell's poem, then? Not only do the linguistic registers in his "Tao"—"to one end", "one brush-stroked"—resonate well with the many "One's" in Lao Tzu's text; the initial issuing of One to the many and the many's eventual going back to the One are also recreated in Cogswell's "endless game" with five players: the one Tao now transforms into five key qualities personified by the capitalization. Furthermore, Cogswell's terms, "blend" and "blending", hark back to the last few lines of Chapter 42 cited above and reinforce the notion of ultimate unity of myriads of things, and hence, the inevitability of harmony. It is no surprise that one finds a wealth of pleasant and positive diction—"Glame", "Zest", "Charm", and so on—in a harmonized but endless game.

The image and topos of the game lead naturally to another dimension of Cogswell's "Tao": the concept of circularity and cyclicity. How can the "game" be endless? Or by extension, how can the Dao play this game forever? The solution is at once simple and viable: by circularity and cyclicity. Cogswell boldly concretizes and embodies the answer in poetic and philosophical language and images. Again, some lines from the *Daodejing* would facilitate our appreciation of Cogswell's intertextual mind and creative use of Daoism:

Circularity is the movement of Tao (Chapter 11, Ch'en 13)
 It [Tao] revolves without pause.

...

And "distance" means "returning." (Chapter 25, Ch'en 142)

Now, of the myriad things in all of their profusion each
 again returns to its root.
 Returning to the root is called "tranquillity,"

And “tranquillity” is called “restoring the original nature.”
(Chapter 16, Ch’ên 110)

14 According to the *Daodejing*, the Dao’s movement is circular and constant; it returns to the place of origins of peace and starts anew and with renewed energy. Likewise, Cogswell’s “Tao” is sufficiently circular that it returns and “gathers up”, as it were, all the five players into its orbit, and the oneness guarantees “tranquillity”. At this juncture, one may mention in passing Dylan Thomas’s memorable and exemplary use of the villanelle in “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” with Cogswell’s. Thomas literally exhorts the reader to yell before the metaphorical “night” approaches, and the refrain accumulates its resonance along the way, increasing the heaviness of death. The underlying mode of thought can be described as linear: death is just death; it constitutes a point of no return that Christian culture dreads. Hence the necessity of “rage, rage against the dying of the light”. In contrast, Cogswell’s poem places a genuine and great store by circularity (e.g., “the endless game”), and no wonder it is suffused with a quiet, peaceful, and graceful mood. Indeed, Daoism as a quietist philosophy not only attempts to rid humanity of activist desires, but also underscores the route to what Northrop Frye has called the “peaceable kingdom” (Chen and Xie 1993): the way, or Dao—here a symbol of life (cf. “Life” in Cogswell’s poems)—to move in an unhurried but sure way back to eternal peace.¹⁹ Barry Wood, in commenting upon the impact of Daoism on Malcolm Lowry’s work, has not only characterized the Tao/Dao as a unifying force, but also emphasizes its importance in Lowry’s voyage circle (1980, 190-93). We believe that this brilliant and perhaps unsurpassable summation holds equally true for Cogswell’s appropriation of the Dao.

To understand further Cogswell’s poetization of the Dao and its laws of circularity/cyclicality and of return to the origins of simplicity, we could do no better than cite the poet’s manifestation—like “The Sestina / for Alison McAhpine /”, composed in yet another challenging and circular form—sestina:

You ask me why I write sestinas now
The form is out of fashion and it makes
Another barrier to the flow of thought.

Why not write free verse? Surely images
And the natural rhythms of our speech
Are enough to suit the needs of poesy.

...
This sestina its own exemplar makes
Now with respect to thought and images.
The speech is mine; the rest is poesy.

(*Meditations: 50 Sestinas 7*)

Unequivocally, the poem exerts and bodies forth the paramount importance of circular poetic forms and thought, against analytical and linear, though seemingly “modern” or contemporary mode of thinking and of writing poetry. One hears the

whole poem as a humming and humming of a prolonged and variegated refrain, not loud, but persistent and echoing: like a recurring theme in a piece of music, or a haunting theme song in a movie; it eventually hypnotizes the reader into agreeing with Cogswell. Since the circularity and the flow of words or argument in his reply exist in a self-contained and self-sufficient system, the poetic form makes sense by itself. Consequently, the reader is left sweetly and gently touched and convinced.

On the last, but not the least level, Cogswell's expert utilization of a poetic form that thrives on circularity and cyclicity is not only consonant with but also illustrative of Daoist credos of movements in/and circles. If one may paraphrase (Frank Davey's bugbear) Marshall McLuhan, or challenge the orthodox Marxist dichotomy of form and content, the form in Cogswell's "Tao" is the message, "always already", or right from the moment of its conception. It is as if Cogswell intended to reveal to us by the form itself that the very nature and movement of the Dao—circularity—that the poem could not have been written otherwise or in other forms. The germs are sowed here of circularity, of speaking of or discoursing on the Dao in circles. It may also be true that no other English Canadian poets have such an adroit command of conventional poetic forms, according to W.J. Keith (1985, 103).

15

If "Tao" and "Sestina" capitalize on the villanelle and sestina to good effect, "Full Circle" poetically plays not only on word order and syntax, but also imagery and symbolism to produce yet another superb and subtle poem on the Dao. New Daoist elements—pristine simplicity and innocence, the triad of heaven, earth, and humanity and the interconnectedness of things, non-action (*wu wei* in *pinyin*), the stress on softness and femininity—are introduced, again with consummate skills.

Full Circle

A little boy holds one end of a string.
 The other end is tied to his pulltoy.
 The pulltoy's wheels rest on the grass.
 The grass is rooted to the earth.
 The earth touches the water of the sea.
 The sunlight strikes the water and draws it up.
 The water vaporized becomes a cloud.
 The cloud bursts and falls as rain.
 The rain falls on the little boy holding a string.

(*A Long Apprenticeship* 203)

The poem shows Cogswell at his most liberal in adopting poetic forms. For, unlike "Tao" and many others written in traditional and fixed forms (e.g., the haiku, the sonnet, and the villanelle),²⁰ "Full Circle" runs freely and ends where it begins. Nonetheless, the poem is pregnant with multi-layered meanings, however deceptively simple on the surface. Indeed, simplicity of language and simplicity of imagery enhance one another; and the haunting echoing of repeated, significant Daoist phrases multiplies and harmonizes with the whole Daoist polyphony joined by other Daoist poets.

Now we will concentrate on salient and highly concentrated Daoist aspects not yet discussed previously in this study: the archetypal images of the child, of the cosmic circle, and of water; the triad of heaven, earth, and humanity and the concept of inter-connectedness; and poetic devices—simple syntax and the employment of anaphora (certainly) and quasi-chiasma.

From a Daoist perspective, the image of the child (or infant) is and represents the supreme and ideal state of innocence, the lost but hopefully, retainable quality; Cogswell's creativity lies precisely in rendering this image memorable and continuous with previous Daoist images of the infant. The very first book Cogswell read about Daoism, we need only to point out, is *The Sayings of the Old Boy* by Tom McInnes.²¹ "Old Boy", an altogether oxymoronic or contradictory term, has fired the imagination of many a creative writer and the hermeneutic and inquisitive attention of scholars, though North American literature may have its approximate counterparts.²²

16 Of course, Western civilization has, in the past century at least, produced two giants who were both fond of and famous for the images of infants or infancy: Hegel and Karl Marx, respectively founders of philosophical idealism and dialectical/historical materialism, the latter standing the former on its head. What interests us is not Hegel's infamous and euro-centric view of the Chinese language as undeveloped or forever staying still and young (like a stunted child),²³ nor Marx's higher but certainly idealized communism (as a re-vamped infancy, so to speak, of a supposedly anterior and once existent human society—primitive communism) as an over-used concept in China and the former Soviet Union. Rather, our concern bears directly on aesthetics and poetics. Hegel, who expounded on Daoism as a philosophy (Chang 1970, 4 and Chen 1993 *passim*), also relied on images of a young child in terms of expressing simplicity and innocence, the forever lost qualities. Similarly, Marx romanticized Greek mythology as the infancy of Western culture and literature, and lamented the loss of humanity's harmony with nature, believed to have existed in ancient time, in his reworking of Hegel's concept of alienation. It seems that Cogswell has not been impressed by these western versions of "child play" and that he so far finds no use for them before his departure.

What is it in the child that captures Lao Tzu's, and subsequently, Cogswell's philosophic-poetic attention? Besides the innocence and outspokenness remindful of the child (or even the infant in the *Daodejing*, Chapter 20) in the western story, "The Emperor's Clothes," Lao Tzu perceives, first of all, the suppleness and softness in her/him as a sign of life (the *Daodejing*, Chapter 10), rigidity being an indication of death, as observable in dead bodies of humans or animals (the *Daodejing*, Chapter 76). Next come the youthfulness and the pristine simplicity couched in the metaphor of the uncarved block (*pu* in *pinyin*). It would seem that Cogswell condenses and compresses these images and ideas in his "Full Circles". True to his particular ways of expression—suggestion and allusion, not direct references—Cogswell never makes a single explicit reference in his poems to the *Daodejing*. But the image of a little boy, together with the cosmic and human circles—as we will demonstrate—certainly pos-

sesses identifiable Daoist character traits.

A related concept is non-action (*wu wei* in *pinyin*), which is incarnated in the child's non-interference (whether conscious or not) with nature's law, seen here as the Dao, working thorough him/her. Indeed, it takes Cogswell's Dao-inspired sensitivity to perceive and re-inscribe the boy's non-action in action, if we may indulge in word play. The child is ostensibly doing nothing, and paradoxically, doing everything possible: he lets nature take its course, and the result proves to be a perfect balance of yin/yang forces, of the natural and human worlds unified as one.

We have addressed the concept of circularity/cyclicity above in terms of "the endless game" in "Tao", but entirely new is the idea of return in Cogswell's "Full Circle": a return to the state of the child, that ideal state untainted as yet by societal and necessarily, adult influence; it constitutes a symbol of a natural being, rather than a social being, and there is no more appropriate image than that of a little child. The simplicity of the child is thus re-covered at the end of the whole poem, just as the repetitive and echoing words and phrases circle meaningfully back to the "little boy holding a string." Everything starts anew. What needs to be emphasized is this: the poet, like the little boy in all his simplicity and innocence and non-action, does not use subjective and logical language to infer and converse on the laws of nature.

Also key to the appreciation of Cogswell's Daoism are the images of water and the triad of heaven, earth, and humanity. On one level, his consistent representation of the movement of the Dao through the image of water in constant motion carries over to his poetic vision of human beings (in the figure of the child) as part and parcel of the universal or cosmic scheme subject to the Daoist law of movement-in-stillness, or vice versa. The boy is stationary, yet the Dao works on and through him. On a higher level, though, yet another archetypal image lies in the triad of heaven, earth, and humanity. One hears Lao Zi announcing remotely, in his typically tautological and hence circular way, a way that Cogswell's repetition and stringing of words and phrases recreate in English so admirably, and yet so simply:

[Humans] models [themselves] on earth,
 Earth on heaven,
 Heaven on the way [Tao]
 And the way [Tao] on that which is naturally so.
 (the *Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 25, D.C. Lau 39)

A scrutinizing comparison would disclose, of course, Cogswell's intertextual mind, and more importantly, his poetic creativity: the original tripartite structure is re-structured through a replacement of what was originally "humans" or "man" (*ren* in Chinese) in general²⁴ with the child in particular. The substitution then, constructs more attributes of innocence and simplicity in the figure of the child than in an adult man; consequently, the reversal or return to a child-like, not childish, simplicity and non-interfering attitude in regard to natural laws grace Cogswell's entire poem right from the start. Taken as a whole, the poem emphasizes the organic wholeness of the Daoist universe and the interconnectedness of all things therein: the world is

perceived as a veritable “living system” (Overmyer 1986). The Dao personified in the figure of water further links up and runs through everything, in the sky and on earth. One might cite W.J. Keith in conclusion: “Cogswell almost invariably manages to redeem the quotidian, the convert the trivial and ephemeral into the valid and universal” (1985, 103).

This earthly dimension constitutes the immanent and monistic aspect of Daoism, and brings us naturally to a point of distinction about the circularity of things. Perhaps it would be useful to contrast Cogswell’s “Full Circle” with Earle Birney’s “A Walk in Kyoto,” since a demonstrably Eastern influence is present. Textual references to “Zen” and “Lord Buddha” on Boy’s Day and Man’s Day in Birney’s poem would of course join Cogswell and Birney in terms of subject matter (boys) and Eastern philosophy (*Chan* or Zen Buddhism and Taoism), but the ending images in their poems underscore different aesthetics, significant to both, at work.

18 a carp is rising golden and fighting
 thrusting its paper body up from the fist
 of a small boy on an empty roof higher
 and higher into the endless winds of the world

(15 *Canadian Poets X 2*, 59)

In Birney’s relatively long poem, days of wandering and wondering in Kyoto have their finale in the epiphanies of “closed lotus” opening and a small boy flying (read: symbolically), two images of both genders seen through a Western eye. Birney’s self-consciously and culturally ambivalent feelings notwithstanding, a sort of feminisation of the East and fetishization of Eastern girls and ladies, like Patrick Lane’s “Lotus” after a China trip, certainly creep in.²⁵ Moreover, from a Daoist perspective, Birney never quite completes the circle; the carp flies up and up, vertically, symbolically transcending this life and ascending to the sky or heaven in the Western sense of the word. And the upward movement of the kite, never to return to earth, eventually betrays a linear and vertical vision, a transcendence of earthly life: this perspective, according to Jackson (1989, 1990), bears the trademark of Western poetics. Birney is still Birney the Western traveller/poet.

Compared with “A Walk in Kyoto,” Cogswell’s poem seems to have imbibed the true essence of Daoism. As we have discussed above, some of Cogswell’s briefer pieces are also shot through with Zen simplicity and spirit, much as Birney’s poem on this score. No doubt, Birney’s kite in the shape of a carp is linked to the earth by something like a string, but there is no more re-connection and/or return after its flight is achieved. “Higher higher” are indexes of an “Endless” ascension. Only in Cogswell’s “Full Circle” is the connecting point re-made and, re-made earthwards. Obviously, the ending point is on earth, back to where the poets starts, and this trajectory constitutes yet another hallmark of Dao’s rhythm—a celebration of life on earth and “making this life significant”, to cite Roger Ames and David Hall (2003). Thus, a related feature of Daoist poetics is reasserted: its earth-boundness and immanent nature; the Dao is ubiquitous in all things; here (earth) is as good as there (heaven).

The extent of Cogswell's absorption and innovative play with the Dao can also be gauged by (re-)examining circularity from (an)other angle: the function of the yin and yang in the circularity/cyclicity of the Dao. After all, one cannot resist posing questions like these: what causes the circularity? What sustains the endless movement, or the new endless game on a cosmic scale? Integral to the Daoist notion of movement is the yin/yang cardinal principle, poetized in Cogswell's subtle and creative images of the earth/heaven, rain/sun, stillness/movement complementaries. As is well known, the *Daodejing* has these poetic-philosophical lines:

Chapter 42

Ten thousand things carry *yin* on their backs and embrace *yang* in their front,
Blending these two vital breaths (*ch'i*) to attain harmony (*ho*).

(*The Tao Te Ching*, Ellen Maria Chen, 157)

In the Daoist paradigm then, the yin and the yang reside in everything, and in its changes and movements; and the interfusion and interpenetration of one another guarantees an equilibrium that has to be renewed in an ever-lasting dynamic interplay. In Cogswell's newly constructed Daoist scheme, the two notions—circularity and returning to the origins as well as the yin/yang balancing and blending—are so naturally (in two senses: skilfully and in the manner as nature devises it) interwoven as to warrant analysing another Cogswell poem, “Haiku”, in conjunction with “Full Circle”.

We submit that “Full Circles” and “Haiku” extends considerably the Daoist metaphoric and metaphysical intent and the Daoist discourse on the functions and nature of circles and round shapes, by unfolding the primal or primordial forces—the sun (yang), and water (yin)—together with movement and stillness. Cogswell has been fascinated by images of circles and round shapes, of course:²⁶

Thoughts Like Sun-rays
...thoughts like sun-rays flow
till through the poet's prised brain
they form a rain-bow...

(*IPOOM* 51)

Like “Full Circle”, there is much to recommend “Thoughts Like Sun-rays”. In these two poems, not only are images of round shapes and (semi-)circles abundant (the sun, the brain, the rain-bow); the organic blending of sun or sun-rays (yang element) and rain or rain-bow (yin element); of the grass and the string (soft and yin element) and the earth and the pulltoy (hard, solid, and yang) also achieves a perfect balance, resulting in a beauty of a most natural description. Finally, true to the yin-first principle implied in Daoism, both poems culminate in an authentically yin image—“a string” in one and “rain-bow” in another. Soft, flexible, and curvy, the string is not a stick or hard handle nor taut, and the “thoughts” have not hardened into something solid like a “well-formulated” idea, or intellectual products hammered into final, and thus rigid and unchangeable shapes.

An ingenuous master of blending and/or of mixing and matching, Cogswell pulls together archetypal Daoist images and ideas of the yin and the yang and commingles them throughout the poem. On a deeper level, however, it might be safe to conclude thus: the ultimate beauty and quietude of his poems come from Cogswell's deft resolving of the yin and the yang elements in chiefly yin imagery. Furthermore, since "Full Circle" not only challenges and breaks away from this Western mind set, but also flows out of the fixed conventional forms such as the villanelle and sestina to approximate the Dao's movement and rhythms, it is little wonder that Cogswell's favourite is this simple yet profound poem, of all he has ever written.²⁷

20 In conclusion, the significance of Cogswell's poems under discussion, exploring and disseminating the Dao and manifesting its movement and nature's rhythms in beautiful circles and ever-regenerating cycles set in motion by the yin/yang dynamics, can now be measured in terms of T.S. Eliot's standards in "Tradition and the Individual Talents". Western history and philosophy have been obsessed with "linearity", according to Michel Foucault (1976); similarly, as Helen Cixous and Lucy Irigaray have argued so poetically, Western sexuality, especially male, has also been characterized by the same feature.²⁸ Furthermore, the same holds true of much Western poetry. One needs only to think of the Yeatsian fear of the falcon's turning in circles in "The Second Coming", Margaret Atwood's *The Circle Game*, or the popular nursery rhyme in terms of a deadly game (remember "Ring-a-ring round the roses"?). In these poems, anything that moves in circles, spirals, or cycles scares the poet/speaker, and fills him/her with endless anxiety about "progress", "development", or simply forging ahead (linear movement).²⁹ Cogswell's Dao-inspired poems can be read as a counter-cultural act in the Western context. In doing so, he carries on the sceptical tradition of Daoism in the time of its inception.³⁰ In sum, his poetic output to date has shown amply a hankering for things of the past, such as old poetic forms and time-tested Daoist philosophy, and for traditional life of harmony and balance; correspondingly, it also enshrines his dislike or even hatred for industrialization and technology for its own sake. Furthermore, it registers a mode or line of thinking whose trajectory parallels and inscribes the circular movement of the Dao. Finally, his Dao-related poetry keeps, and would continue to keep alive, the vigorous intertextual play with other Daoist texts, ancient and contemporary.

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NOTES

1. We follow the practices of recent publications and use "Dao" or "Daoist" in this essay, leaving intact cited sources and quotations. We borrow the phrase from Arthur Waley's essay in *Madly Singing in the Mountains*; the title of Waley's book stems in turn from a line of Po Chu-i (Bai Juyi). Another part of my title comes from Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry*, obviously, which is derived from Blake's "The Tyger." We leave it to interested readers to solve the problem whether Blake is a Taoist or whether Cogswell is a Canadian Blake the Taoist; see Waley (1981) and Frye's "General Note: Blake's Mysticism" (1969).
2. Interestingly, part of the Chinese culture, especially Daoism or Daoist poetry and poets, is transmitted to the West through Japan. Li Bai's "The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter" (Li Po or Rihaku as rendered by Pound and by the Japanese) is translated by Ezra Pound and much anthologized (de Roche 367). I thank the anonymous reader for pointing this out: Li Bai is a Taoist initiated into the Shangqing-school of Daoism of the Tang Dynasty. Dorothy Livesay (1991) mistakes the famous (to the Chinese, of course) story about Zhuang Zi (Chuang Tzu)'s butterfly-human or dream-reality identity as being of Japanese origin. There is no denying the Japanese changes or transformation of Chinese traditions, literary or philosophical; see Turner (1995).
3. Granted that one entry is devoted to Cogswell as a critic and poet in *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* (1983, 133), we have yet to see any substantial analysis of Cogswell's poetry or poetics. John Metcalf's comment in *Kicking against the Prick* is more damaging than fair, and Tracy Ware's "Is Fred Cogswell beyond Criticism?" does not deal with his poetics at all. Perhaps Cogswell's poetics is beyond criticism from a traditional Anglo-centric perspective.
4. We wish to extend deep gratitude to Fred Cogswell, who had the grace to identify specific poems inspired by Daoist philosophy and poetics.
5. To the best of our knowledge, a female biographer from Ottawa was conducting research on Cogswell in 1993, and probably is now finishing a book on him.
6. The term has come under increasing controversy in recent revamping of its definitions and ideological functions. Whether Japanese or Chinese nature poetry under Daoist and *Chan* (Zen in Japanese) influence can be categorized as lyrics as defined by Abrams (1988), Palgrave (1994, ix), or Jeffreys (1995, 196-97; 204 n. 4) is very much in question; see Pauline Yu (1988); Yue Daiyun (1992), and Sun (1987).
7. The title of *Meditations: 50 Sestinas* already reveals a great deal about Cogswell's proclivity for the circular poetic form and for cyclicity/return of "eternal" themes.
8. For the philosophical (Daoist and later, *Chan* or Zen Buddhist and Shinto), literary (Haiku-renka, and historical background and the haiku and the Japanese-Chinese connections, see Jackson (1989; 1990); Stewart (1969, 150-158), Kawamoto (1989), and Moeller (2002, 149).
9. We shall deal with this aspect in terms of the Daoist poetics of negativity in another paper.
10. Since this article intends to leave behind a more detailed comparison of Blake's and Lao Tzu's philosophy and Cogswell's poetics for another project, we refer readers to the following similarities between Blake and Lao Tzu as articulated by Arthur Waley: the fond use of paradoxes (Waley 361); the union of opposites or "the identity of contraries" (Waley 358); "distrust of purely intellectual process and of those who exalted such process at the expense of Imagination" (Waley 360); against "the stones of Law" and morality (Waley 360); "getting behind and getting underneath" (362). Cogswell's allusions or references to Blake are quite frequent; see for instance, "A Commentary" in *Watching an Eagle* 22.
11. The haiku is the original opening lines of a much longer poem in the Japanese literary tradition, which is rich in its allusiveness that often or eventually harks back to classical Chinese poetry; see Kawamoto (1989).

12. Such as the *jueju* (a quatrain of five or seven-word line) or *lushi* (a poem of eight lines, each line of five or seven words).
13. For an enlightening discussion of short Chinese poems, or suites of them, see Joseph Ellen (1993).
14. For instance “Zen”, “Tumbling Water” and “Mental Monism” (*Meditations: 50 Sestinas*) are composed in the sestina, and “Tao” (*A Long Apprenticeship*) in the villanelle.
15. Lao Tze has the modesty and humility to inscribe its ineffability through paradoxical statements right in the initial lines of the long philosophical poem, the *Tao Te Ching* or *Daodejing*. For an informed discussion of sinologists’ and Chinese scholars’ take on this, see A.C. Graham (1989, 1992); for creative writers’ serious play or flirtations with the Tao, the most recent, and perhaps most influential work, remains *TAO: Reception in East and West* (Peter Lang euro-sinica series, 1994) edited by Adrian Hsia, with contributions from many an illustrious comparatist and specialist; for recent major scholarship on Daoism since the new millennium, see *Daoism Handbook*, edited by Livia Kohn.
16. Kristeva’s employment of Daoism in *Des chinoises* is central and extensive, as are her uses of Chinese sources meticulous and accurate in “The Bounded Text”, from which the epigraph emerges.
- 22 17. This point can never be over-emphasized, given that Cogswell self-consciously goes against the trend of free verse, cherishes old values, dislikes machinery or “the mechanical age” (Benjamin’s shocking expression) and adopts Eastern philosophy which is ancient, not just old. Poems such as these and the title, *In Praise of Old Music*, are but the most obvious examples.
18. The classical Chinese text of *Tao Te Ching* defies translation even into modern Chinese, let alone modern English, and Atwood as cited in the epigraph to my whole article pinpoints the problem. Even though there has been a steady stream of new English renderings recently, controversy is still rife as to the interpretation of the text. Hence, a completely satisfactory one is not yet in the offing, and we have selected passages from different English versions (all considered standard).
19. We deal with this aspect in a separate paper, “In Search of ‘The Peaceable Kingdom’ (Frye) of Daoism: Cogswell’s Naturalism and Ecological Poetics.”
20. See Keith (1985) 103, 105.
21. To Cogswell we owe this useful information. Our thanks here.
22. An English Canadian equivalent would be Robertson Davies’ play with the name of Boy(d) Staunton in *Fifth Business*, incurring much moral and physical ambiguity. This fascination may start with his thesis, *Shakespeare’s Boy Actors* (1939), though no critics have made this point. Jungian criticism in terms of the animas and anima has been employed on *Fifth Business* and in particular, on *The Manticore*, but perhaps not many scholars know that Daoism has impacted Jung to an appreciable extent (cf., Chang 1963, 5-6 and Xie and Chen 1992, 363). *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain and J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* are also comparable pieces.
23. See Rey Chow (1991) 174, n. 11 and Dawson (1967) chapter 4.
24. Some English versions have it as humans (*ren* in *pinyin*, as in Ellen M. Chen’s *Tao Te Ching* 117); others, as man (as in D.C. Lau’s *Tao Te Ching* 39). For “*The Daodejing* and its tradition,” see Allan T. Chan (2000) 1-29.
25. See Thomas Hastings’ cross-cultural reading of Birney’s much anthologized “The Bear on the Delhi Road.” No one has critiqued Patrick Lane’s Westernized version of the East or China; but Keith Harrison’s Barthesian study (1994) is useful, even though Barthes himself has been accused of Orientalism (Chow 1991, 174).
26. Other poems saturated with images of round shapes and circles can be found in “Haiku” (103) and “Haiku” (195) in *A Long Apprenticeship*.
27. Cogswell declared this in his letter in 1994 to John M. Chen.

28. We thank John Lepage for alerting the first writer to the possible “stereotypical” view that *all* Western philosophies are linear; the Judeo-Christian vision of history is ultimately circular: a return to God or Christ’s second coming are ready instances; see for example, Rivers’s two chapters, “Views of History” and “Cosmology” in *Classical and Christian Ideas in English Renaissance Poetry*.
29. For an enlightening discussion of how “progress” has changed its meaning, see John Ralston Saul’s *The Doubter’s Companion*; we thank Curtis and Josie Dams for alerting the first writer to this work and for a very useful discussion. For another equally skeptical view about “development” in the West, see Malcolm Lowry’s “The Forest Path to the Spring”, and Chen and Xie (1993).
30. See Xie and Chen (1992).

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