

FRED COGSWELL

THE BOY I WAS

Fred Cogswell (1917-2004) was born in East Centreville, New Brunswick, and graduated from the Normal School in 1936. He served in the army during WWII, and after the war he received a bachelor's degree and a master's degree from the University of New Brunswick and a doctorate from Edinburgh University. In 1952 he became a professor at the University of New Brunswick, where he remained for the rest of his career. He published numerous collections of poems, which were described by *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* as "characterized by compression, wit, the use of a wide variety of both traditional and modern forms, and a gentle, ironic view of the world." The following poem was published in the spring 1997 issue and included in the collection *Double Question* (1999).

The boy I was had heart-strings wrung
By words like "Whore" and "Fuck" and "Damn."
When others spoke, I held my tongue.
This silence made the man I am,

For words can be a part of all
That use them and the things they quote
Grow up as free and natural
As are the horns on any goat.

My silence grew a rift in me
Between the badness and the good.
What others were I could not be
But never ceased to wish I could,

Which makes a simple thing like sex
Become incredibly complex.