

# POETRY

by Howard Halpern

couched in symbols that appear on the page. The poet's job is to interpret these symbols.

In Tom's view, the meaning behind the symbol often lies in the poet's subconscious.

Often the poet is not even aware of his real reason for writing the poem. Much of today's poetry is unclear, says Tom, simply because poets do not take the trouble to understand what they are writing.

And how can a poet who does not understand his own poem expect anyone else to?

Tom encourages his students to probe the subconscious. If he is confused by a poem, he may pick out certain key words or phrases that are not properly explained. He chooses words that he feels might contain some deeper meaning the poet is not aware of.

Then Tom uses an old Freudian technique, word association. He asks the poet to concentrate on a specific word or phrase (that is, a symbol) and to say anything that comes into his head.

The interesting thing about this technique is that it works. One student wrote a poem about an old man. When asked what emotion he was trying to convey he said "loneliness".

Later, under association, he revealed to us (and to himself) his fear of old age. And death.

This is only the first step. Knowledge of what you are writing about is great. But knowledge is not writing.

Tom feels it is important for the writer to become familiar with the tools of his trade. In poetry, the two main ones are rhyme and rhythm.

It is not necessary for the poet to use rhyme or to stick to a regular meter. But he should know they exist. And how to use them effectively.

Another tool is the sense datum. The image. This is what the poet uses to communicate a specific idea or thought to his audience.

It is also helpful for poets to be able to communicate with each other. Part of the Basic Poetry course is devoted to learning poetry's basic concepts.

Can you define them? Do you know what it means?

The purpose of the course is not just to provide definitions, but to show how they fit into an overall theory of poetry. This makes it easier for the poet to give feedback and constructive criticism to his fellow students.

Last term, thirteen students were enrolled at the beginning of the course. One housewife stopped coming about halfway through, ostensibly because poetry for her was something she did alone, in the privacy of her own home. She did not want to share her poetry with others. She did not want to communicate. This, of course, is her privilege.

Other students joined the group after it had begun. The average number of students coming to a session was ten.

Tom was assisted by Lorraine Hay. For the workshop the group was often divided, with each instructor helping one section.

Aside from workshop, a certain amount of time was

devoted to lectures by Tom. Generally he read his lectures, but he frequently would look up and expand upon his notes without referring to them.

This term the course is being taught by Lorraine Hay. The first class was held January 13, but it is not too late to join.

No student will be turned away. If the group becomes too large, another instructor will be employed.

This course has one distinct advantage over courses at York. There is no exam. No mark. You don't need one. The results show in your poetry. Last fall, I noticed that students whose poetry I could not at first appreciate began to write some very touching stuff, after only a few weeks.

This is perhaps the best reason I can give for recommending the course.

There are no prerequisites. Basic Poetry is open to anyone who has written a poem.

Let no poet be scared away by the word "basic". If anyone thinks he is too good for this course, he should bear in mind that Ted Plantos (one of Canada's most successful young poets) took the course last year.

**N**ow, if anyone still thinks he is too good for Basic Poetry, he should consider "Writing for Money". This second course offered at the New Writers' Workshop is designed to give poets and other writers of non-fiction a professional view of their work.

Writing for Money is also taught by Tom Arnett.

A third course, The Language Trap, is led by b.p. nichol. It deals with the ways in which people have been conditioned to use language and it attempts to overcome some of these limitations.

Mr. nichol is regarded by many as Canada's number one sound poet. He is also noted for his contributions to the new area of "concrete" poetry.

A fourth course, Revue Workshop, is taught by Don Cullen. Cullen, noted for his role in **Beyond the Fringe**, has written and acted in more successful revues than any other Canadian.

Also offered at the Workshop are courses in the Novel and in Radio, TV, and Film Scripting.

The New Writers' Workshop is located at 602-A Markham Street, south of Bloor and west of Bathurst.

Any York student interested in any of these courses should call Tom Arnett, program director, at 531-5764. He wants you to.

