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ADULT POETRY

by Ron Norman

I had an enjoyable hour last Wednesday evening - I was fortunate enough to hear Dennis Lee read some of his poetry and childrens' verse. Yes that's right childrens' verse! It seems, for what Dennis told us, that he has been divorced from 'adult' poetry for about eighteen months now and instead has been completing a couple of books on childrens' verse, books with such titles as Nicholas Knock and Other People, and the companion volume Alligator Pie. An examination of Lee's numerous accomplishments would reveal no hint of a guy who is the author of childrens' verse. He's a co-founder, with Dave Godfrey, of the House of Anansi, a Canadian publishing company (now, by the way, selling its shares to the Canadian public - it seems to have fallen on some hard times due to some sort of fire). Lee is also the co-founder of Rochdale College in Toronto. In the field of literature his attempts at poetry have won him the Governor General's Award. The Governor General's Award is a tricky award in

that a great many times it is simply a showpiece - for Lee it wasn't.

Anyway, Dennis began his reading, to a sparse crowd of about twenty or twenty-five people, with The Cat and the Wizard, a childrens' tale from his colorful new book of verse Nicholas Knock and Other People. I don't get any sort of kick out of childrens' stories. They are usually mindless garbal which some wind wrote while locked in a can. Even though Lee's verse was fun, funny, and rhythmical I couldn't say that I enjoyed it. I can see where light verse might be fun to write, but it is not exactly fun to hear.

Talking afterwards to Dennis, it seems that his kids had something to do with his entrance into the realm of childrens' tales. He thought he could improve on the present body of work of childrens' verse. He did change some of his intentions, however. He began writing verse which was just fun, instead of trying to infuse it with his own morals; and that folks is exactly what he has done. Such awful but somehow smaltzy lines like:

"Hare today goon tomorrow" are indicative of this approach; and the tone changes wildly from page to page.

Getting back to the reading on Wednesday night, Dennis did not keep up his childrens' verse for long, he proceeded to read three new poems - love poems, one of which had the beautiful phrase "I've counted bruises every time your loving has touched me". Another line which seemed to grasp the essence of the personality of Lee, as well as the entire poetry reading was: "abstract ideas are a drag, they keep us from living". From this point Dennis closed out the evening with a couple of excerpts from Civil Elegies, a very powerful poem. Actually the poem is nine meditations. There are two voices in the poem, the first relates what it is like to live in Canada, in civil emptiness. The second voice is the private side of the poet, the individual Dennis Lee. It is a powerful poem, with many powerful images which reflect the type of cynical humour which Lee exerts in person.

The Play's the Thing

The Clifford E. Lee Award is a National Playwriting competition and Playwright-in-residence program, designed to encourage Canadian writing of importance to the Stage, while at the same time affording the playwright in-depth experience of the process of stage production. The program is sponsored by the Clifford E. Lee Foundation and in its first year of operation received support from the Canada Council and the Alumni Fund of the University of Alberta as well. The program is administered by the Department of Drama at the University of Alberta. The Department will arrange for production of the winning script or will produce the play itself; in either case, every effort will be made to ensure that it receives professional treatment.

A prize of \$1,500, plus travel and in-residence expenses, will be awarded to the playwright whose script makes, in the opinion of the judges, the most significant contribution to the Canadian Theatre, and which satisfies the selection criteria. The winning playwright is expected to be in residence for rehearsals and performance of his play.

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DEADLINE FOR SCRIPT ENTRY: FEBRUARY 1st, 1975

RESULTS OF THE COMPETITION WILL BE ANNOUNCED: MARCH 31st, 1975

For further information, write:

Ben Tarver, Administrator
 The Clifford E. Lee Award
 Department of Drama
 The University of Alberta
 Edmonton, Alberta

REGULATIONS

1. The author must be a Canadian citizen or Landed Immigrant.
2. All scripts must be sponsored and submitted by a third party. The administrator will not consider any scripts that are submitted directly by the playwright.
3. Suitable sponsors would include the following:
 TV Drama producers and/or directors
 Script editors
 Artistic directors of established theatre companies
 Play publishers
 Play agents
 Teachers of theatre of literature
 Dramaturges
 Or any established person in the professions of theatre, media or literature.

Individuals may sponsor one or two plays per year. Organizations may sponsor up to five plays per year. Any theatrical organization may qualify as a sponsor, with a special invitation to organizations primarily devoted to the playwright such as The New Play Centre, Centre D'Essai Des Auteurs Dramatiques, The Play-

3. Sponsors will delete the author's name from the ms. before submitting it. The administrator of the Lee Award will delete the sponsor's name and the region from which the play comes before forwarding the script to the referees and final judges.
4. A play must be full-length or its equivalent. A series of related one acts is acceptable.
5. Plays must be written for the medium of the stage, i.e. film or TV scripts are not acceptable. Original adaptations are acceptable if it is deemed that sufficient alteration has gone into the adaptation.
6. Scripts must be in English. Other language plays are acceptable in English translation.
7. A play will be considered original if it has never been produced OR if it has been produced on a limited run basis but remains in a state of process.
8. The playwright must agree to be "in residence" to meet the requirements of the program. Duration of residence is negotiable.
9. Contestants may enter any number of scripts, provided that they can find sponsors.
10. All scripts must be typewritten in standard play script format.
11. A return, addressed envelope with sufficient postage must accompany each script.
12. Although care will be taken in the handling of all submissions, the Lee administrators can take no responsibility for loss or damage to individual scripts.

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