

DENNIS LEE

*Poems*

Introduced by Rosella Mamoli Zorzi

It is a pleasure to present to our readers six unpublished poems by Canadian poet Dennis Lee, well known and widely honored for his collections of poems, from *Civil Elegies* (1968) to *The Death of Harold Ladoo* (1976), *The Difficulty of Living on other Planets* (1987), *Riffi* (1993), *Night-watch: New and Selected Poems* (1996); for his children's books of poems, from his best-selling *Alligator Pie* (1974) to *Bubblegum Delicious* (2000), with *Jelly Belly* (1994), *The Icecream Store* (1991), *Garbage Delight* (1977) in between; for his essays, from *Savage Fields* (1977) to *BodyMusic* (1998).

Dennis Lee started "Writing in Colonial Space", as the subtitle of one of his essays indicates, but although he has actively participated in the birth of Canadian poetry — in particular, but not only, writing *Canadian* nursery rhymes and children's poems set in Canada — and has written on important Canadian poets, in his poetry and essays Lee has explored the great themes of human life, those our civilization tends to shirk away from, to use his own words, the themes of "good", "evil", "the sacred". Lee's great themes are expressed in a most lively language and diction that takes advantage of rhymes, assonances, neologisms, polyrhythm, in a "free prosody", where "vocal improvisation", as in jazz, is important, and where "cadence", as he himself calls it, is essential. "Cadence" is best explained by Lee: "Cadence is my name for the flux, the felt and living flux that poems rise out of". "If I withdraw from immediate contact with things around me, I can sense it churning, flickering, thrumming, locating things in more shapely relation to one another".

Lee's poems partake deeply of this "flickering and thrumming", in meaning and in language. Not only do they enchant the reader with their verbal brilliance, but they make him look at things in new ways, they make

the reader ask himself questions, about himself and the world, as poetry should.

Dennis Lee, I would like to add, is a wonderful performer: cadence and rhythm, — not that of the metronome, as Pound would say — animate his poetry readings. Voice and performance make his poems even more lively. His lecture-poetry reading-performance was one of the highlights of the third Canadian May in Venice.

Dennis Lee lives in Toronto, where he has often read at the International Festival of Authors at Harbourfront.