

On the Occasion of the 2005 City of Toronto Book Awards
September 7th, 2005
Toronto City Hall

As the Poet Laureate of Toronto, let me welcome you all, as readers and as lovers of Toronto.

The creation of myths is one way a city has of falling in love with itself; the sagas of human effort, aspirings, failures, simple meditations on what refurbishes a city for the human heart. When literature deals with cities, it not only traces the human engagement with a city--it measures a city's generosity to the human experience. It is a gauge of a city's commitment to its own. These nominations do not claim to make the myth-making of Toronto a project, but they are an acknowledgement that a love of people is not separate from a love of place; the stage on which characters in a book play out their lives imbues that place with the romance of being human. That is how myths are made. It is how a city becomes great-- by the narrative witness of many people. And writers are the champions of that narrative.

Toronto, over the years, through many creative efforts, has become the living archive of a kind of drama we call our own. By the testimony of writers such as David Donnel, Anne Michaels, Michael Ondaatje, affection has accrued as readers have identified themselves with the sensitivities of written characters. And this empathy with a writer's world in Toronto has inspired people to see the fuller dimensions of this city, I once said that Toronto has succeeded at almost everything, except looking glamorous to itself; I was suggesting that we have to achieve a kind of rejoicing for the blood and compassion that we have shared as citizens; a kind of pride that the human spirit has for having been courageous and for having learned, through mistakes and faith, how to live in a place called Toronto.

The candidates of the Toronto Book Awards help to create that glamour. And we are grateful to them.

Pier Giorgio Di Cicco
City of Toronto Poet Laureate