

*À Guerino Capobianco (1925-2007)*

*(For Pier Giorgio Di Cicco, Poet Laureate of Toronto, 2005-09)*

By George Elliott Clarke

Self-exile of Sicily—  
Cement craftsman, concrete friend—  
Your sweat blueprinted this city:  
Subway, skyscraper, streets without end.

Unsung miracle worker—  
Disciple of metropolis—  
Italo-East York gardener,  
With stone for backbone, steel for fists—

You were the best salt-of-the-earth—  
Down-to-earth among your grape vines.  
Your hands, calloused (a worker's worth),  
Wrought glass palaces with steel spines.

From Monteleone, you shipped  
To Toronto, this "meeting place,"  
To build with buds while suds were sipped,  
Lifting a skyline toward space.

Fifty long years, you laboured hard,  
Pouring cement that never cracked,  
Then went, neighbour, to your backyard,  
To pour red wine, a cataract.

A man purely ordinary—  
Of dungaree-plain quality—  
But, citizen, exemplary,  
Confecting nectar like a bee—

You weren't deterred by raw, rich dirt—  
The gravel, grime, the weedy soil,  
The elements, the dust inert  
That comes to life only through toil—

And sculpted skyscraper and smoothed  
Sidewalks, and tiled the subway line,  
And tooled and tinkered til long-toothed,  
Then, green-thumbed, grew blue grapes, pressed red wine.

Proud immigrant, strong Sicilian,  
You tallied coins, then bought a home,  
And brought Toronto—civilian  
Haven, the heritage of Rome.

Your talk was taut, grounded, gritty,  
But your wisdom was like honey.  
You accented what was witty:  
“Everything costs expensive money,”

You complained. An average guy,  
Words minimum, but maximum  
Neighbour (to a klutz such as I):  
You strung me vines where bees did hum.

Guerino Capobianco,  
Founder—foundation—of Toronto,  
*From the ground up*, you made us look  
To stars, to make our dreams our nook,

And to see that, what is concrete,  
Is, where we dream is where we meet;  
And this city tests, as most great,  
For neighbours diverse craft our state.