

McFadden's met with them all

## Metro library's first writer-in-residence a new creative resource for aspiring writers

By LAURA LUSH

For most of us, the thought of showing someone a piece of creative writing is frightening, if for no other reason than it makes us aware of our own vulnerability. Just ask anyone who has sat through the first few weeks of a creative writing class to tell you about the anxiety associated with reading work aloud for the first time.

But from the overwhelming response to Metro Library's first writer-in-residence, it seems that there are just as many of those who have shirked that fear for the sake of an opportunity, and a big opportunity at that. If you should take the chance to walk through the doors of the Arthur Conan Doyle Room on the fifth floor of the Metro Library in the next few months, chances are you won't regret it. Sitting behind his desk in the dimly lit room, appropriately encased with wall to wall books, Canadian poet and novelist David McFadden is ready to talk about your writing. If the thought of submitting your work to a well-respected author is still paralyzing—rest assured—McFadden has already perused over some 138 manuscripts since May 1, and he's still smiling. Tired, but smiling just the same.

Exactly at the half-point of his six month tenure, McFadden is both pleased and exhausted. Having grappled with submissions of novels, several short stories, poems, and a film script, it is no wonder he feels like he has been "out in a field working for 12 hours a day." Despite the heavy demand on his energies, McFadden said he was honored to be Metro Library's first writer-in-residence. He credited the head of the Literature Department, Katherine McCook, as one of the main forces behind the writer-in-residence program. Although the administration looked favorably towards the concept, she said, the program actually didn't receive full funding until this year, when it was co-sponsored by the Toronto Library Board and the Canada Council.

The success of similar, shorter-term residencies at smaller lending libraries in Toronto was a major factor in convincing the board that a large reference library could also start its own program. But the biggest reason for its beginning, McCook said, was because there was a definite need for a writer-in-residence. From the Literature Department's observations, the many existing writing resources and tools were

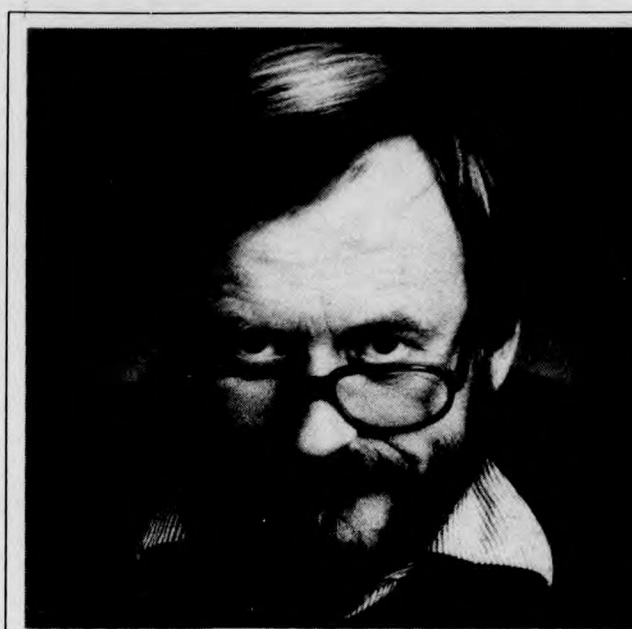
already being well utilized. Having a writer-in-residence would provide that ultimate service for the writing, McCook said.

Under the Canada Council stipulations, the Metro Library had to provide half of McFadden's stipend and demand only a 15-hour work week to ensure that he would have sufficient time to work on his own material. This way, McCook explained, McFadden would be given funds to do his own writing, while at the same time provide a service to the community by sharing his expertise with aspiring writers. McCook said that although other candidates were in mind, McFadden's previous experience as a writer-in-residence, once at Simon Fraser from 1979 to 1980 and most recently at the University of Western Ontario during the 1984-85 academic year, and his reputation as a Canadian writer made him an excellent choice.

With only 15 hours a week spent as a writer-in-residence, one would think McFadden would have lots of time to work on his two upcoming novels. Not so. Although he is not required to take any manuscripts home, the diligence and thoroughness that he tries to give to each manuscript is draining. "The first 10 people to submit manuscripts really got their money's worth," he said. "I poured over their work." But to maintain that level of intensity in light of the number of manuscripts coming in was impossible, he added. "It's a meat market in the sense that because there are so many manuscripts and not enough time, the manuscripts become like a number," he said.

Yet the job is not without its rewards. One of its most pleasing aspects, McFadden said, was the ability to break through barriers with a virtual stranger in a very short time. While you are nervously waiting outside for your appointment with McFadden, trying to second-guess his comments, he is inside trying to match the author with his work. "Someone walks in and within five minutes all of your preconceptions are shattered . . . you end up discussing the most intimate things about his work." What McFadden finds the most trying is the attempt to impress upon a young writer all the expertise and experience that he has gained along the way. "You end up trying to tell someone in half an hour what it has taken you 20 years to know about writing."

When asked how his experience as a writer-in-residence at a university differs from that in a major city library, McFadden said it was basically a matter of being utilized or not being utilized. At Simon Fraser, McFadden said he "had a lot of time to write—I would shut my door and write . . . now I don't have time to do anything but read manuscripts." It is not unusual for McFadden to spend four hours looking



SOURCE OF TERROR?

Canadian poet and novelist David McFadden offers would-be writers criticism in his current position as Writer-in-Residence for Metro Library.

LESLEY LEE HAPPER

over manuscripts, and then spend an hour or more talking with each writer. Typical submissions are material that has been previously rejected by publishers, McFadden said. The writer comes in hope that McFadden can pinpoint the flaws in his style, structure, or other technical areas. An optimist, McFadden said there hasn't been one piece of writing yet in which he hasn't found a "kernel of something good." All too familiar for McFadden is discovering a great story imbedded in the larger frame of a weaker story. It is all a matter of being able to look objectively at your own work, he said.

The greatest lesson that McFadden has learned as a writer-in-residence is not to make assumptions about anyone's work; mainly their reason for coming to see him in the first place. So far, he has met with them all: good writers, not-so-good writers, writers that refuse to read anyone else's poetry but their own, writers who have come chiefly for praise, writers who do not want to hear criticism, and a surprisingly high proportion of writers who are unaware of his own work. As a candidate for this year's Governor General's Awards for his collection of poems, *Art of Darkness*, and an author of 20 books of poetry, two novels and several short stories, it would only be to a writer's advantage to know the quality of work of the one who will be passing on advice.

Although there have been far more fiction writers than poetry writers, McFadden finds the poets the most challenging. "I tend to lock horns with the poets . . . it is sometimes difficult to find a way to talk about their work," he said.

He claimed these impasses are a result of having too many laymen or "macrame poets," charging that "anyone can write poetry today." His major disappointment with Canadian poetry is that there are not enough people taking risks and that those who do go largely unnoticed.

McFadden praised the small presses for producing some of the best writing in Canada today. While not disregarding the merits of the larger, commercial presses, McFadden, who also sits on the editorial board of Coach House Press, said, "Small presses are the only presses." He cited his own experience of discovering a young poet at Meet The Presses, a monthly gathering and forum of the small presses.

As also a teacher of creative writing, McFadden had much to say about the merits of workshops, which enable him to focus in on a particular aspect of the craft every class. Reiterating a much belabored point, McFadden stressed the importance of revising. Calling himself a "serious teacher," there is no doubt that McFadden takes his job as a writer-in-residence with the same level of conscientiousness. And this can only be done, McFadden said, by applying a kind of professional toughness that offers a writer the kind of constructive criticism that he needs. It is the kind of straightforward, yet unthreatening advice that has made McFadden such a popular commodity at the Metro Library. McFadden, whose stretch at Metro ends October 16, says his intentions are to make writers feel "a bit better when they leave."

## SCIENCE

### Bio-manipulation the key to cleaning our waters, says York biology prof

by GISELLE WINTON

York Biology Professor Dr. Don McQueen recently attempted to shed some light on the water pollution controversy that has northern and southern metro municipalities at odds with each other over who is responsible for the pollution.

The Metro Conservation Authority (MCA) meeting was held at Lake St. George, at the head of the Humber River, where McQueen and five of his graduate students are investigating various methods of pollution control.

Craig Mather, Director of Water Resources for MCA updated the gathering by outlining the progress of an ongoing three year study examining the causes of pollution in the Don, Mimico and Humber watersheds. The investigators are trying to determine whether Toronto's beach water pollution is partly due to bacteria, sediments, and trace metals from above Steeles Avenue. The study is being carried out in conjunction with the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) the Conservation Authority, and the regional municipalities involved.

Mather said the study has found that a combination of growing urbanization in the northern municipalities, cattle excrement, and eroded sediment flowing from the source rivers has contributed largely to the pollution problem in Lake Ontario.

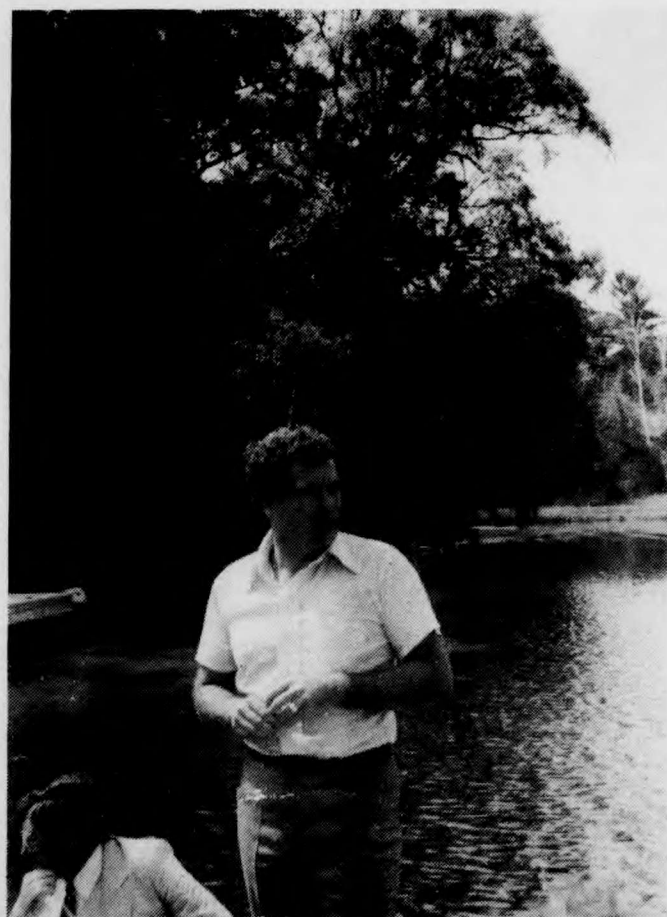
The Metro region is allocating a large amount of money

over the next few years for sewage separation processes, Mather said, which will help to alleviate Metro's dirty water problem. During storms, raw sewage overflows into storm sewage ducts which in turn flow to the lake untreated. Mather said that the sum of money for this project financed by the MOE, has increased considerably due largely to the work of O'Donohue.

"Corrective action should be taken by local municipalities," O'Donohue said, adding "you can't clean half a river."

"Toronto is blaming the north for its pollution problems," argued Richmond Hill Mayor Al Duffy. "There have always been separate sewage systems in Richmond Hill," Duffy said. Duffy said they also manage their storm sewage in detention ponds, where sediments can settle out. Currently Metro does not use this technique.

At the meeting, McQueen promoted a "passive management approach" (bio-manipulation) as opposed to the addition of further chemicals to the body of water in question. Zooplankton (tiny microscopic animals) feed on the algae, thus checking local algae population. McQueen manipulates the zooplankton population by stocking the lake with piscivorous fish which eat the fish that feed on the zooplankton. This in turn increases the biomass of zooplankton and brings the lake back into an ecologically sound state.



GISELLE WINTON

York Professor Dr. Don McQueen was one of the prime forces behind the recent investigation into Toronto's water pollution woes.