

Eric McCormack

Eric McCormack is a renowned writer of fiction who spins gruesome tales of grisly murders. But it is good to remember that he is mostly a dreamer, who unlike most of us pays close attention to the surreal stories that come to him in the dark.



“Dreams are ingenious, often quite strong and you’re absolutely not in control of them. You’re given them, and they’re astounding,” he said once. McCormack, who uses material from his dreams to inspire his writing, has been short-listed for a Governor General’s Award.

He began teaching English literature at St. Jerome’s University in Waterloo back in 1970, however, it wasn’t until he was 49-years-old that he had his first book, a collection of short stories, published. One reviewer called *Inspecting the Vaults* (1987) “an extraordinary book, full of invention and black humour, in which the terrible deeds of seemingly ordinary characters are narrated with elegant detachment.”

McCormack is a study in contrasts – an academic who balks at deep interpretation of his own work and a writer with a sunny disposition whose fiction is often dark. “I love it when people just enjoy the blasted book and don’t ask me what it meant,” he said. “It didn’t mean anything.”

When fans probe him for the origin and meaning of his work, McCormack says, “I always take great pleasure in pointing out to them that ‘no, on the contrary, what it really means is what it is’. It’s like asking a tree what it means.”

McCormack made his way to Waterloo after completing his PhD at the University of Manitoba. A native of Scotland, he received his Master of Arts degree at the University of Glasgow.

He grew up poor in an industrial Scottish town; the son of an ironworker with little education. However, his parents encouraged the young McCormack, who was a voracious reader at a young age and a dreamer who used imaginary worlds to escape the poverty of his childhood. Tragedy struck when at the age of 7, McCormack witnessed one of his brothers being hit and killed by a train while walking home from school.

McCormack has won several awards for his fiction. His 1997 novel called *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* was short-listed for the Governor General’s Award for fiction. *Inspecting the Vaults* (1987) was short-listed for the Commonwealth Writer’s Prize and *The Paradise Motel* (1989) won the Scottish Council Book Prize.

In 2000, McCormack donated his personal papers to the University of Waterloo. His gift to the Doris Lewis Rare Book Room will be used as a research tool for students. McCormack, who has said he writes for the pure joy of writing, never jots down his dreams until he's ready to put them in his fiction. He also never speaks about his stories before writing them down. "I'm superstitious, and I always feel like if you talk about it, you won't write it."

Photo courtesy of Eric McCormack