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Why Write Fantasy? A Mythopoeic Conference XIV Panel

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Abstract

The purpose of this panel is to examine some of the underlying reasons why Fantasy literature is written and why it is worth writing. Many of us, probably most of us, as readers of Fantasy, have been tempted to try our own hand at writing Fantasy at one time or another. The panelists here today will hopefully be able to give us some direction for those story ideas we feel we must try to get down on paper. Our honored guests are Marion Zimmer Bradley, author of the Darkover series and the *Mists of Avalon*; Diana Paxson, author of *Lady of Light* and *Lady of Darkness*; Stephen Donaldson, author of the "Chronicles of Thomas Covenant"; and Evangeline Walton author of *The Song of Rhiannon*, *The Children of Llyr*, *The Island of the Mighty*, *Prince of Annwn*, and is now completing a new series of books based on the Greek Myths.

Authors

Robert Cowan, Marion Z. Bradley, Diana Paxson, Stephen Donaldson, Evangeline Walton, and Paul Zimmer

Why Write Fantasy?

A Mythopoeic Conference XIV Panel

Introduction — Robert Cowan.

The purpose of this panel is to examine some of the underlying reasons why Fantasy literature is written and why it is worth writing. Many of us, probably most of us, as readers of Fantasy, have been tempted to try our own hand at writing Fantasy at one time or another. The panelists here today will hopefully be able to give us some direction for those story ideas we feel we must try to get down on paper. Our honored guests are Marion Zimmer Bradley, author of the Darkover series and the Mists of Avalon; Diana Paxon, author of Lady of Light and Lady of Darkness; Stephen Donaldson, author of the "Chronicles of Thomas Covenant"; and Evangeline Walton author of The Song of Rhiannon, The Children of Llyr, The Island of the Mighty, Prince of Annwn, and is now completing a new series of books based on the Greek Myths.

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY

It is a temptation, when I am asked why I write Fantasy, to say "Because it is there!" However, that reminds me too much of the the time Randall Garrett introduced me on a panel. He said, "Marion Zimmer Bradley needs no introduction, therefore I am not going to introduce her." Well, that kind of left me there staring into space, wondering what to do next.

Another answer for why I write Fantasy is literally, what else is there?

Seriously, the great literature of the world has always been Fantasy. The realistic novel, Pamela for example, was invented to divert the unwashed servant girls, people who were too stupid to be interested in the serious things, Matter of Britain and the Matter of Troy and serious themes for Fantasy. The so-called realistic novel was invented for idiots.

There is a very famous button around that says, "Reality is a crutch for people who are unable to handle Science Fiction." There are a few Science Fiction writers who absolutely froth at the mouth when you quote that to them. They can't stand the idea. They want to be firmly anchored. You see, they can't quite write about beer and automobiles and all those manly things, so in the Science Fiction Writers of America, they sit around and discuss how to get beer and cigarettes, as somebody called them, the real necessities of life, into their writings. They've got to prove they are real manly, tough guys.

When I was a kid there was this image of real kids, the ones who played football and went out for the pep squad and talked about hairdos. The 97-pound weaklings who sat around reading Science Fiction, were supposed to be the ones who were escaping from reality.

So Science Fiction writers who had this image felt they had to get tied down very hard to their mechanistic view of the universe, the speed of light, spaceships, and rocketships. They will always tell you that we, the Science Fiction fans, were the first people to decide on going to the moon.

This is, to a certain limited degree, true. We Fans, would-be writers, were the only people who had enough imagination to look past the day after tomorrow, or next Saturday night's date, if we had one. (We usually didn't, because most of us, liking good company, would rather stay home with a good book. In those days if you wanted intellectual company, Rider Haggard was about the only guy you could date on a Saturday night and have any intelligent conversation. It was a little one-sided, but better than going to a football game.)

OK, I have amended this even further. I say Science Fiction is a crutch for people unable to handle Fantasy. This is because in writing Fantasy what you get down to is the real nitty gritty of your own feelings. You don't disguise them behind rocket ships, you disguise them behind the great images, gods, goddess, kings, and princesses.

Someone once said I was an intellectual elitist, because I never wrote about the common people in the Darkover books. I am always writing about the aristocrats. There is a very good reason for that. The common person is the one who is just too damn common to be interesting. Nobody is really interested in whether or not the wife of a plumber gets curtains for her kitchen. (That's not necessarily true: I gather that somebody is interested in those stories because the story of the poor little girl that does not have a date for Saturday night fills up the racks of teenage books.) But I don't consider that great writing.

When I began writing, it was quite impossible for me to write contemporary fiction. I was told when I was a kid, "write about what you know." But what I knew was not very interesting, at least not to me. I was trying, though not articulately, to transcend, you might say, a commonplace reality.

When I write about aristocrats, I am writing of the enlightened person, the person who has imagination, the person who does not just walk obediently into the cannon's mouth. I am writing about the aristocrat who has chosen to confront the implications of his own soul, the person who follows the Apollonian concept, that the unexamined life is not worth living.

Over one of the great temples of the past is written the command, "know thyself." There is a much underrated writer called Kathleen Windsor. She sort of blew her credibility in her first book. The book Forever Amber, was thought of, when I was a teenager, as a dirty book. Nowadays if you read something by Jacqueline Susanne and then go back and read Forever Amber you might decide this could be read in the novels for recreation at Saint Claires' Convent. But at the time, it was considered a dirty book. Right after that, she wrote a very good book about a writer called Star Money. In it, the heroine said that writing was a very slow process of self-discovery. Well, when I read that, I was about 22 and I said, "Hell no, I am not writing about myself. I am writing about everybody else. I am writing about other things. I don't want to write about myself." On the other hand, after 30 years of writing, I have finally come around to realize that in a very real sense I am writing about myself.

About the great Victorian Fantasy writers; Charles Dodgson on the surface was a mathematician, a very obsessed artist and a photographer of naked little girls. But on the other hand, when he took the brakes off and stopped thinking about himself, becoming unselfconscious because he was writing Fantasy, he wrote one of the greatest classics of whimsy and Fantasy the world has ever known or ever will know. I don't think there is a person in this room who has not read Alice in Wonderland, and I suppose that most of you do I like do, and reread it every few years. It may be the great classic of modern literature. All these buttoned up Victorians, when they stopped being self-conscious, they revealed a great deal of themselves. If they had written ordinary books they might have revealed little about themselves. In writing Fantasy, they did not fully realize what they were writing, because the science of psychology was very much in its infancy.

The more fantastic your writing, the more you reveal of yourself, because you are less guarded. When you get right down into Fantasy you are confronting the great archetypes of the human mind.

Back in the forties, Fantasy was a real no-no, even in the magazine Unknown, which was founded by that great mechanistic thinker John W. Campbell. He kept saying, "let's not confront Fantasy, let's make jokes about it." All the stories in Unknown are not true Fantasy, they are parodies of Fantasy, they are making jokes about Fantasy because these people are too afraid to go down deep into their own subconsciousness and confront the images they see there.

I think the revival of Fantasy in this century is probably the healthiest thing that has ever happened to the human race. Things are much better today than back in the days of Frederick Wertham. He was the psychologist who said comic books were so terrible for children. He also had a lot of sage words to say about everything else, and everything he has said just proves that he is a greater - let me think of a polite epitaph . . . let's call him a turkey and be done with it. That is about as polite as I can get about that gentleman.

Now God knows I have no love for comic books, not even on the Donald Duck level, and when it gets up to the underground comics my tolerance reaches zero, but it is also true that I consider comic books probably harmless and possibly beneficial. At one time Wertham said that the great rise of juvenile delinquency was not because of poverty or parental misguidance, but because of comic books. It had no other reason; all juvenile delinquency could be traced back to comic books. I think I could pick at random any person in this audience who would have better things to say about child rearing than Mr. Wertham. I mean the youngest person in this audience, including some of the children.

I don't think Bruno Bettelheim is the greatest psychologist in the world, but I think he is a hell of a lot better than Mr. Wertham, which isn't saying much. But anyway, Bettelheim went on to say that Fantasy and fairy tales were probably good for children. Now thank you Mr. Bettelheim - we knew it all along.

Let me get back to the very first thing I said. At first I could not write contemporary fiction. I was living in Texas - if I had written about the conditions I saw around me I would have been lynched. This was back when they were still lynching people for going into the wrong restroom at a railroad station. But I wrote about Martians, or alien intelligences, and pointed out that they could take over the world if they hid themselves among the Mexican Bracero workers because none of the so called "important" people would even know they were there. I was saying something very real.

It all comes down in the end to say, I write Fantasy because it is the only way I can tell absolute, exact, unvarnished truth. If I wrote about contemporary things, I'd have to disguise it so I wouldn't tread on the toes of my friends and my acquaintances. Someone otherwise might say, "Oh, yes, there is a person who is a Fantasy writer, that is probably her, and that other Fantasy writer is her brother," that sort of thing.

I just go ahead and write Fantasy, and it comes out to be about me anyway.

DIANA PAXSON

How many of you have manuscripts in bureau drawers?

[about 80% of the audience raised their hands]

I went through that. How many of you have had a creative writing course? How many of you were almost terminally discouraged by that creative writing course?

I had a course like that at Mills College from a man who was very nice, knew a lot about English literature, and had had one story published in a little magazine, though I don't know if he got paid for it. This man once said to a student who had more courage than I did (she had been writing a Fantasy about three princesses growing up, and

she handed it in) "This is very nice, dear, but couldn't you set it in New York?" That epitomizes what my problem with this man was, but of course at the time I assumed since he was teaching writing, he must be a great professor.

And being a great professor, if he said, "you should write what you know," then obviously he must be right.

So I concluded nothing I knew, or could conceivably want to write about, would ever be of interest to anybody else. Therefore why bother? And for ten years I didn't.

Then I was struck by whatever you call it, fate, destiny, bad luck or whatever: I married into a Science Fiction family. My husband is the foster brother of Marion [Zimmer Bradley]. After a while it began to dawn on me that real people write books.

We were all sitting around the tea table at Greyhaven one day. Included were Marion's daughter and one of Marion's daughter's little friends. Suddenly it dawned on this friend that the author of all those books that she had been reading was her friend's mother. She looked at Marion and said, "But you look just like a real person!"

The desire to write is just about inherent in anyone who likes to read. But the realization that real people, flesh and blood people, not only wrote books (and finished them, which is another crucial point) but sent them off to publishers and got published and paid was a real revelation to me. I didn't know that that sort of thing happened.

Eventually I found myself in a job where I could get through the day's work in two-thirds of a day. Well, I was not going to tell anybody, because my husband was a published writer, and my sister-in-law's a published writer, but I was going to try to finish something. That's all. I didn't want it to be good. I didn't want it to be published, I just wanted it to be done. And I thought, OK, write what you know.

What do I know? I know California. If a certain plant is growing there I want to know what its name is and what it looks like. I want to know just what color the sun is on the sea when it goes down.

The other thing I really knew by 1971 was medieval culture, because I had been involved in starting the Society of Creative Anachronism (SCA) a few years earlier. The SCA was not created as a research tool for all us Fantasy writers, but it did turn out that way. So I either knew, or knew who I could ask about, how do you hunt a wild boar? How do you forge a sword? How do you fight? (I could hardly escape how you fight; we had it around the dinner table for years!) So I decided, OK, I will combine medieval culture with California, and see what happens. And that was the only thing I have ever done where I simply started without knowing where it was going, because I figured if I knew where the story ended I would feel I would not have to write it. I started by putting some people in a situation and seeing what happened. As this developed, interesting things began to take place. I had the experience of suddenly realizing who a character, who appeared out of nowhere, really was. I understand this has happened to greater writers than I. And eventually I had a 90,000 word book, which had everything but the kitchen sink all mixed up in it.

I finally got up the courage to show it to people like Marion who were kind enough to say that there were moments that shone, mixed in with such godawful prose as you never saw, such as half-page paragraphs and clauses. I find it kind of painful to look back on. But the thing that happens when you let your subconscious loose on Fantasy had happened, and the archetype had gone, "Ping!! ping!! Here I am! Here I am! Come look at me!" And there they all were. This is the material to which "Lady of Light and Darkness" is actually the prequel, but it all evolved.

Eventually after several dozen re-writes and many tearful interviews with Marion on what was wrong with chapter six, I actually had something that showed promise of selling. It is not always a comfortable thing to live with a family full of Fantasy writers. You have to develop a fairly thick skin, because over the breakfast table you might find

yourself in a deep discussion of whether there is a difference between male and female fiction and what's wrong with the way you handled it in chapter six. So, one thing about writing Fantasy or writing anything, you have to like pain. As soon as you start showing your work to somebody else, you are laying your self open to rejection. Once you start mailing it out to editors you are almost certainly opening yourself up to rejection. Some of us have more experience with this than others. Marion has not had the experience for quite a while.

(Marion: "the hell you say.")

How many places was Thomas Covenant sent?

(Donaldson: "forty-seven.")

And now he is on the New York Times best seller list.

So, that is not exactly why I write Fantasy, that is how I ended up writing Fantasy. Why, is because it was the only type of literature in which I could say what I really cared about saying. The "Why" boils down essentially to what Marion covered so well. If you want to talk about archetypes, if you want to be writing in a setting, or with characters with whom you are able to maneuver the situation so you can display these archetypes in a clear and presentable way, you almost have to invent your world. If you want to talk about religion without turning off about three-fourths of the reading public you have to disguise it. If you want to talk about ethics, morals, spirituality, magic, psychic power, things like that, Fantasy is the way to do it. It is the reason Lewis wrote the Narnia books, and it works. You can have the greatest fun dealing with the fundamental issues of human life under the guise of sheer entertainment.

It is even becoming possible to do this in a contemporary setting. Both Marion and I have just finished books which are contemporary Fantasy, occult Fantasy, in which the heroine must learn to exercise magical power. And mine in the first chapter looks like it's going to be a romance.

STEPHEN DONALDSON

Someone once asked Stephen King, "Why do you write all those horrible, gross, obnoxious and scary books?" And his response was one the best ones I can remember hearing. He said, "What makes you think I have a choice?"

There is a certain sense, which I think is really true, that writers do not choose ideas, ideas choose writers. And one of the things I think is important for anyone who wants to be a writer is that you should not necessarily limit yourself to the kinds of ideas you're going to be receptive to. Because you don't know the kinds of ideas that are going to fit you. You may have learned to want to be a writer by reading Fantasy all your life, but that does not mean you will be a Fantasy writer if you keep the door open for the kind of ideas that are going to suit you. And the process by which I came to be where I am now, was very much a process of trying to discover what were the right ideas for me to be dealing with, rather than one of making the choice to be a Fantasy writer.

I made the choice back in 1964, Sept. 22, that I wanted to be a writer of fiction, because the act of discipline of putting stories into words made the stories so exciting to me that I simply could not bear to spend my time doing anything else. From the moment I discovered that was true - and I did not know it was true up until that particular day. I knew exactly what I wanted to do with my life: I wanted to write stories. Now, I was young and vigorous, and I wanted to write all the stories in the whole world. I also wanted to write all the plays in the whole world and all poetry in the whole world and a bunch of other things. I quickly learned I wasn't going to be a poet and it did not take me much longer to learn I was never going to be a playwright. So I focused on my fiction. I was in college and graduate school and I was studying what is considered in academic circles the main stream of recent English fiction. Which means in

the past two hundred years Hawthorne, Melville, and Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser in the U.S., and all kinds of interesting people on the British scene. I discovered as I kept trying to write, very naturally, that I was trying to write what I was reading.

And that's the danger, I think. Maybe you want to write because you love Fantasy, that does not mean you should be writing Fantasy. I loved Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and William Faulkner. I loved George Meredith. I loved with an intense passion the things that some of these people did. But I could not write that stuff. Now I mean literally I put it on paper. I used the words, and the stories are there sitting in my file gathering mold. But the thing was that nobody could read them. Over the course of nearly ten years of full time dedication to being a writer and writing all that I could in my spare time, the entire critical reaction to my work from friends, family, professors, and anybody else could be summed up in one word, "Yuck!"

Well, what was happening, and it is very clear in retrospect, was that inside me was a Fantasy writer struggling to get out. I was using techniques, talents, types of vision which suited me, but I was using them in a form which they did not fit. And the fact was, that what I wrote was bad. Now I learned an enormous amount by writing it, and I wouldn't undo that process for anything. But it wasn't until I stumbled onto a Fantasy idea, that is to say on to the idea for the "Chronicles of Thomas Covenant," that I was in a position where I was using my talents for the right thing.

Fortunately the minute I started to write Fantasy, it became clear to me what had been happening, because there was a powerful recognition experience. I could just feel it coming to life on the page in a way it had never come to life before. That's what you have to strive for, is that coming to life on the page. And you have to write the kinds of ideas that you can bring to life on the page. Some people say write from your own experience. Well that works for some writers, and does not work for others. I always have to make things up to bring them to life on the page.

I am babbling here, but for example back in the days when I worked with Lester del Rey as an editor, he could always tell in one of my manuscripts where I had done research, because those passages were always boring. Something about information, hard tangible solid information, seizes up my mind. I don't write well about facts directly. I have absolutely no knowledge about sailing, but people who read The One Tree find it a convincing depiction of the experience of sailing. I can do that with my imagination. If I had gone out and researched sailing I would have had to write a completely different book, because I would not have been able to make that experience seem real.

Well that's me. That is something I had to learn about my own imagination and the kinds of ideas I should write about. I was very fortunate to have stumbled into this thing and it has made a complete difference in my life.

But the point is that you have to find what is right for you to do with your talent. The ideas don't come with a label on them which says, "Fantasy Writer, addressed to box 27." You have to explore them, you have to take risks, you have to try new things and try to write different kinds of ways, and find what comes to life on the page. When you have found that, then that is the kind of writer you must be, and it doesn't matter whether it was what you thought you were going to be or not. It does not matter whether it is Fantasy, Science Fiction, Romance, Westerns, Nonfiction, Poetry, Drama, or Greek epics, that you write just so long as it fits you and your talent.

EVANGELINE WALTON

I wanted to comment on what Steve said about experience. It reminded me about what Gilbert Murray, the late great Greek scholar, said: "The Genius consisted in

making a little experience go a long way." Whether I am a Genius or not, that is the way I have had to work, having lived a pretty cloistered life on account of ill health.

I have always been interested in the origins of things. I remember when I was a small child it was explained to me that God made the world and ruled everything. I must say sometimes it doesn't seem as if he did, and I wasn't satisfied. "Where did God come from?" I asked my mother, "who were God's father and mother?" And she replied that we don't know. Well I gave up; there was obviously no use carrying on from that point. But years later in my first published novel I had the hero's little boy ask that question. "Who were God's father and mother?" And my mother, always my most interested listener, said, "Do you think you really should put that in? It isn't a thing a real child would ever say." She had quite forgotten how her own small child had talked. I suppose nobody ever really understands how his own small child thought.

Why I write Fantasy? If it is your thing, it is the only thing you can do well. I have written three non-Fantasy novels and none of them have ever been published. The first, I had the good sense never to show to a publisher. When I was half-way through it, I realised that I had failed. I just finished it up for the sake of mastering my subject, learning how to construct a novel. I have always been very thankful I did.

The second was a rather unconventional mystery. I suppose nowadays it would be called a Gothic. Anyway, it was in England in the charge of the late Lawrence Pollinger when the blitz came, and Hitler accepted it as a burnt offering. I haven't got a complete carbon copy so that was that.

The third was a kind of crazy novel with the crown prince of an imaginary country fighting against a dictator. I still think some of the scenes in it were good, but it would not be worth going over it to perfect it.

In the Mabinogion I found my own forte and latched into Fantasy. And now I am shifting over into the Greek myths. I judge in the first novel *Antiope*, the heroine is really more the protagonist than Theseus who is the sword that's forged. He is being forged, shaped by the things that have happened to him as well as by his innate nature. For after all, you do require both the metal and the forge to turn out the person.

Forging has a very different effect on different kinds of people. You can't exactly say he sets out to save the world, Theseus sets out to save his people. They are his world. Antiope had to die because she had fought against her own people. The memory of it would always have been too much for her. I had her killed, but I think that her life if she had survived would have been a very shattered one.

In the remaining books it is Theseus who really dominates. Crete, which he has destroyed, eventually destroys him, through the person of Phaedra, his second wife. I don't really look on Phaedra as a villainess; I always saw Ariadne and Phaedra, the two princesses who grew up in fear of their father Minos, as the frightened women of Crete. But of course Theseus is caught with the two high-minded crazy-minded teenagers on his hands, his son Hippolytos and Phaedra. He doesn't understand them, and so in the end they destroy both him and themselves.

Reading the Mabinogion is what really got me started: At the time I was adoring all Irish novels. Somebody in a recent copy of *Mythprint* stressed I had read Iolo Morganwg when I had written the fourth one, which was published first as the *Island of the Mighty*. The matter of fact is at the time I hadn't even heard of Iolo Morganwg, but I had gotten ideas that must have been similar to the author's, in the course of reading Rudolph Steiner and Max Heindel, who were the bible of various members of my family.

Question: Robert Cowan

How do we structure a novel? Do we outline it? Do we

start with chapter one and see how it builds? Does the story grow in the telling? How are we going to take our ideas and mold them into something cohesive?

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY

How do I structure a book? I listen to the book and find out what its essential structure wants to be. Sometimes it is about two-hundred pages long and sometimes it is about 2000 pages long. Somebody once asked me to justify not making outlines and I quoted, *Winnie the Pooh*; A.A. Milne. There's this thing about "What shall we do about poor little Tigger? If he never eats nothing, he'll never get bigger," and he goes on to say "whatever his weight in pounds, shillings and ounces, he always seems bigger because of the bounces." And somebody said "shillings?" "Well," he said in explanation, "they wanted to come in after the pounds so I let them."

And this is just about the way I write a book. I sort of listen to it. It's like a religion. One part of you believes it, and the other part of you says "Nonsense!" Even when you are kneeling at the communion rail, there is a part of you that says, "Suppose there isn't any God after all?"

So one part of me firmly believes that when I sit down and type the first page of a book, somewhere on the astral, that book has already been written. All I have to do is listen to it and find out how it is written. As it were, read it and listen for it and see where it wants to go. This is what players in the Indian Ragas do; they say that the music is there all the time, they just listen to it and play what they hear. That's the way I write a book.

STEPHEN DONALDSON

I think, probably, anybody who writes hard is familiar with that sense, that what you are really doing in writing is transcribing, at some level. You feel there is some sort of conduit to things you're in touch with somehow, and you're just using your hands to get it on paper. It is even as though you have ceased to exist on a certain level. On another level you are very conscious of what is going on, and you are watching all the time.

I find I can't write unless I know the whole story first. I have to know what's happening, who is doing what to whom, and why they're doing it. I need to know how it is going to turn out. I can't make rational choices when I am writing, of what to put in and what to leave out, unless I know toward what it is pending. I hate books with unsatisfying climaxes, so I find the only way I can create climaxes that satisfy me is to know what the issues are in advance, and to work out what's happened. I work out points very carefully before I write.

What I discover in process are the characters. As I am writing, I'm finding out what kinds of people would do those things. My characters change shape in front of me all the time while I'm writing, but the story I am telling remains very much the same once I have chosen it. And the process of choosing it is very pragmatic as far as what has to happen in order to tell the story. How am I going to balance this kind of development with character "X" with that kind of development with character "Y" so that these themes will be implicit in what's going on? How long has it been since we had that kind of event? Does the story need a change of pace here? I structure all that kind of stuff out on paper. Nobody but me would be able to understand the notes that I use. They don't take the form of traditional outlines, but I have to do that before I can tell a story effectively.

EVANGELINE WALTON

I am not that careful. I start out with the main situation and general idea of the climax and get acquainted with my characters in due course. If I commit myself farther than that something always happens because one character or another says, "You're mistaken about me. I wouldn't do this or that thing," and all of it undergoes a shift. If I have

planned out too much already, I have to do it all over again. Of course we each have our different ways.

DIANA PAXSON

Lest you think this is sex linked, I think my approach is closest to Steve's. Partly through natural inclination and partly through training in a mundane job where I had to outline everything in advance before I did it, my particular type of mind goes in for patterns. And when you've stuck on a story it is a wonderful way of putting off actually setting hand to the typewriter again to get at your pile of notes and do one of these little chart things with the lines going up to a climax here, and there is a low point here, and we'll balance things with another high point here, so we should have something back at the beginning, with this kind of image, to balance this. You can do this for an hour or two before you realize you are not writing.

I am still at the stage where I am not so assured of selling, so that I have to psych out my market pretty carefully. So far this seems to be working pretty well. I look and say, "What sort of thing are they buying? How long do they want it?" If it's got to be 90,000 words long, it will mean that it has to be structured about like so. What kind of point-of-view character do they like? Things like that. If I can set up a certain number of constraints, the presence of the constraints apparently gives my unconscious the freedom to work out what will happen within that. So I make a framework. Then I say to the unconscious "take over." From there it's an interactive process between the analytical part and the creative part of the unconscious. The analytical part lays out the parameters of the problem, like a problem in physics. So you drop it down the well, and you wait about two days. Then you open that door again, or lift the lid of the well, and "pop!" something comes bobbing up, and you say "Of course! The reason so and so has to be there in Chapter 3 is because . . ." One must learn how to gain access to that creative part of you. Everbody knows from their dreams, that there is an unconscious part of you that is going to be a better writer than anything your consciousness is ever going to be able to do. At least it does it a lot more easily. And you can save a lot of nerve strain instead of trying to simply hassle it out, by allowing the unconscious to do it.

Audience Question #1 -- David Bratman.

Both Stephen Donaldson and Evangeline Walton have said they stumbled across Fantasy as being what they wanted to write. What I want to know, is what experience you had with Fantasy prior to that point as a reader.

Answer: WALTON

I read fairy tales originally, than I read Rider Haggard and a child's version of Wagner's Ring. I was very young when they bought me a child's version of Wagner's Ring, so I have always said I cut my teeth on it. My cousin, who was a very charming person, carefully explained to me what my book did not tell, that Siegfried's parents were brother and

sister. So I already realized at an early age that human problems were pretty deeply involved in Fantasy. I didn't, in fact, clearly know what they did mean until I was much older. I couldn't see why make all the fuss about Sieglinde and Sigmund being brother and sister. They wanted each other, so what was wrong?

Answer: DONALDSON

I grew up in India, and one of the factors of this was that we had a very erratic supply of books. I read what ever I could get. As it happened, during the course of my life through high school, I read exactly three science fiction books. I also read C.S. Lewis' Narnia books and some Oz books. Other than that I read whatever I could get my hands on, such as Bomba the Jungle Boy and Theology; Hardy Boys, and Leon Uris books - anything that came along. I did not discover Tolkien until my junior year in college. It was at that point, after I had been writing three years, it occurred to me that Fantasy was worth writing. I did not get any ideas for a Fantasy for years after that. But it was at that point that I realized that Fantasy was a good thing to do, and that I would like to do some if I ever got the chance.

Audience Question #2 -- Jeff Swycaffer.

Ray Bradbury once said the first million words you write are garbage. I wonder if I could get some comments.

Answer: BRADLEY

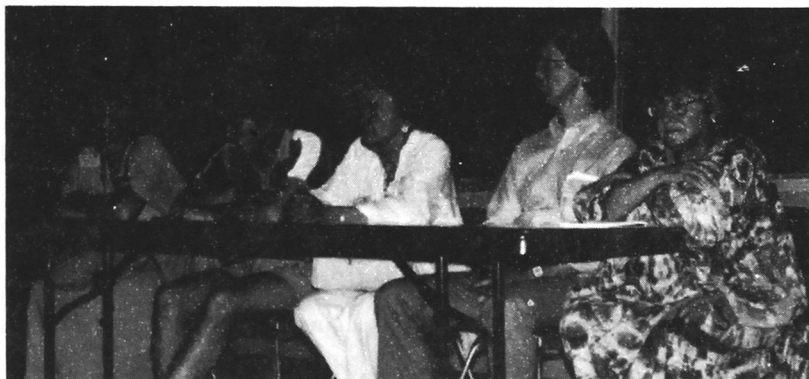
I would say the first 100,000 words I wrote, I threw away, as they were written in old school notebooks and such like. But the basic themes and ideas which became the Darkover books, I outlined between the ages of 15 and 17 years old. I think the first million words you write while you are beginning to find your voice are probably not publishable as they stand, but it is also true, I have found, that everyone, at sometime during adolescence, undergoes a great surge of sudden discovery and that all your adult work when you look back on it is based on that adolescent surge. You may write a million words, and throw them away in discovering your voice - but that essential voice is your way of finding out how you want to put over the vision that you got in your adolescence.

Answer: WALTON

I know I began on Fantasy short stories and could not publish them. So I gave them up and tried realistic stuff and got nowhere and finally swung back to Fantasy. Most of my Fantasy short stories have now appeared in anthologies. But at the time I was completely whipped; nobody would look at them.

Comment: Paul Zimmer.

One of the things that Bradbury may have meant, was that some people, and storytellers, are simply wordsmiths. A good storyteller may have terrible grammar, and vice versa, a wordsmith may not be really writing stories. It might be useful for the various members of the audience to recognize this dichotomy in trying to develop their writing skills.



The Panel (from left to right):
Diana Paxson, Robert Cowan
(Moderator) Evangeline Walton,
Stephen R. Donaldson, Marion
Zimmer Bradley