

science fiction in perspective

JOHN J PIERCE

John Pierce's Science Fiction column alternates monthly in REASON with Davis Keeler's Money column.

THE WONDROUS WORK OF CORDWAINER SMITH

In a field where innovations quickly become influences, Cordwainer Smith remains almost unique. To the general public, he remains almost unknown.

Authors aren't always treated justly in their lifetimes—Smith died in 1966. Recognition, let alone popularity, sometimes eludes those who seem to deserve it most.

This isn't often the case in science fiction. From Verne and Wells through E. E. Smith and Weirbaum, Heinlein and Asimov, Pohl and Kornbluth, Zelazny and LeGuin, success has usually come quickly—even overnight.

Cordwainer Smith was an exception only in the relative sense. He was known to readers of SF magazines, and several of his books were published by lesser-known paperback houses. He was a cult figure to his fans—but he never won a Hugo or a Nebula, and never achieved widespread popularity.

Smith wrote of a future that stretched 15,000 years and as many light years beyond our own time—a future that was a strange blend of Occidental and Oriental cultural influences, entire cycles of history from atomic wars and dark ages through the adventurous conquest of the stars to decadent utopia—and beyond.

Across the stage of this immense pageant pass such bizarre figures as the manshonyagger war machines, the half-mechanified scanner pilots, the pinlighters who do bat-

tle in space through telepathic symbiosis with their cats, the Go-Captains who steer interstellar liners by mind alone and the animal-derived underpeople who perform most of mankind's labors in a distant age.

Guiding human destiny through the millennia is the mysterious Instrumentality of Mankind, which is something like a political elite, but not exactly; something like a priesthood, but not exactly. Much of Smith's writing takes the form of an invented mythology, rather than straight history—and it is often hard to separate the "real" from the "legendary."

Perhaps this will be the year Smith begins to receive wider recognition. Ballantine Books has already published the first complete edition of his only SF novel, *Norstrilia*, which has been arbitrarily chopped in two by a previous publisher; and *The Best of Cordwainer Smith* is scheduled for release soon (July for the Science Fiction Book Club edition, September for the paperback).

THE REAL SMITH

If Smith's influence has been slight until now, it may be because it takes a unique sort of experience to create the sort of universe he imagined. Smith's real identity—which remained a secret until shortly before his death—was Dr. Paul Myron Anthony Linebarger, a world traveller who was an authority on Far East affairs, Oriental art, psychological warfare, religion and world literature.

His life will make a fascinating biography if anyone ever gets around to writing it. He was born in 1913, son of a retired judge who helped finance the Chinese

Revolution and godson of Sun Yat Sen. His childhood was spent in China and, when civil war made life too dangerous there, in Japan, Germany, France and, occasionally, even the United States.

Besides learning six languages by his teens, Linebarger acquired a taste for literature—including SF—in all those languages. But to the world at large, he was a diplomat, college professor, Army intelligence officer and foreign policy advisor—his career as a science fiction writer was one known but to a few.

That career began as early as 1928, when a 15-year-old boy in China sold a story called "War No. 81-Q"—no one can seem to remember where. But Cordwainer Smith first appeared in 1950 when an obscure and short-lived magazine called *Fantasy Book* published "Scanners Live in Vain"—which had been making the rounds of editors for five years.

Readers weren't quite sure what to make of this story, in which the scanners, whose brains have been disconnected from their bodies save for sight, must read instruments to find out if their vital processes are functioning—and adjust them if need be. And if readers could grasp the scanners, what were they to make of allusions to the Instrumentality, and to the Wild that is inhabited only by the Beasts and the manshonyaggers and the Unforgiven?

Only gradually did Smith reveal the full scope of the universe in which "Scanners" and other stories take place. Most of the historical "facts" were set down in notebooks—one since lost. But his stories are not history, but *experience*—experience as

seen by inhabitants of that universe who take for granted that which seems strangest to us.

It was five years—thanks to an interruption called the Korean War—before Smith began appearing in the magazines again, with "The Game of Rat and Dragon," wherein the pinlighters and their Partners protect the planoform ships that somehow travel *under* space, and live in such intimacy that "normal" human relationships have lost their meaning.

Strange and wondrous emotional situations became a hallmark of Smith's stories—the dancer driven to superhuman efforts at an interworld dance festival and briefly glimpsed by a Russian scientist of our own time in "No, No, Not Rogov"; the pilot who must remain awake for 40 years to steer her sailship in "The Lady Who Sailed the Soul"; the Go-Captain who must sacrifice his memory to save a lost starship in "The Burning of the Brain."

But paralleling these wonders was the growing revelation of the universe of space and time around them—a universe evolving in a strange way. The Instrumentality of Mankind, which has arisen out of the Ancient Wars of our immediate future to safeguard humanity, sees to the expansion of mankind among the stars, but also gradually establishes a suffocating utopia of the sort made familiar by Zamyatin and Huxley.

A drug called stroon, produced only on Norstrilia—a planet settled by refugees from Australia after the original Australia became a Chinesian city state—assures virtually unlimited lifespans, and the Instrumentality assures security and idleness. But for a few fighters and technicians, most worlds depend on robots and underpeople for essential labor.

Against this background takes place the drama of the Rediscovery of Man, a movement inspired by the underpeople and the more enlightened Lords of the Instrumentality—and aimed at restoring suffering, death, uncertainty and, most of all, freedom and hope.

LEGENDS FORESEEN

This process, seen through stories written in the form of "explanations" of legends supposedly prevalent in a later age, takes place over 2,000 or more years—from the martyrdom of the dog-girl D'joan to prove that "whatever *seems* human *is* human" in "The Dead Lady of Clown Town" through the Casher O'Neill series set in the second century of the Rediscovery itself.

We see the final days of utopia, and the spiritual birth of one of the architects of

the Rediscovery, Lady Alice More, in "Under Old Earth." Two lovers, freed from the utopian matrix to become "French," meet a tragic fate in "Alpha Ralph Boulevard." And Lord Jestocost and the cat-woman C'mell conspire together to free the underpeople in "The Ballad of Lost C'mell."

Norstrilia, the novel intended to tie all these threads together, tells the story of Rod McBan, the richest boy on the richest world in the galaxy who, faced with a threat to his life at home, manages to buy Earth—lock, stock and barrel. Unexpectedly involved there with both the Instrumentality and the Holy Insurgency of the underpeople, he changes history without ever having intended it.

Smith's fiction is full of allusions which time never permitted him to resolve—the Bright Empire, the superhuman Daimoni, and others—and also full of an invented nomenclature derived from a dozen or more human languages.

Frequently reappearing are members of the Vomact family, derived from the ancient German *VomAcht*—which has a double meaning implying both benevolence and malevolence. Lord Sto Odin is "101" and Lord Jestocost "cruelty," both in Russian. *Aojou Nanbien* is an old Chinese name for Australia, *spieltier* German for "play animal," *Tigabelas* Malay for "13," etc.

For all these allusions, and some plots inspired by the classics—Dante's *Inferno* went into "A Planet Named Shayol," for example—the strength of Smith's work is that it convinces the reader it is *really* happening in his future, and that it is we, not his heroes, who are the "aliens."

Alpha Ralph Boulevard, and the Earthport Tower to which it leads are taken for granted by Paul and Virginia, who are only vaguely aware of the ancient past that is our present. The contemporary age, and the ancient wars, ruin and reconstruction, and other ages that follow, are but myth and legend to them. The whole effect of Smith's presentation is weird—but intoxicating.

Smith's widow, Genevieve Linebarger, who collaborated with her husband on "The Lady Who Sailed the Soul" and other stories, has produced one posthumous collaboration, "Himself in Anachron," and more may be forthcoming. Occasionally—as with Robert Silverberg in *Nightwings*—someone has managed to duplicate his effects. But no one has replaced Cordwainer Smith. Perhaps no one ever will. ☐

LETTER FROM LONDON

*Politics bores me
(The wrong way to lead)*

*Schools don't absorb me
What they have, I don't need.*

*Books lack excitement,
Especially fiction.*

*They all seem to worship
Their God, Contradiction.*

*But I must admit
(Though it reduces my stature)*

*That I'm becoming a fan of
Margaret Thatcher.*

Dennis J. Chase

COURTSHIP

*Coquettish in her frills and paint,
the sun parades;
a crinoline
(open to the wind)
lingers a cloud, clinging
and faint
as age upon a girlish face.*

W. G.

TO PENN WARREN

*Saw,
lurking upon the autumn spruce, the moon,
pale as illness, glow;
and freckle snow,
clutching a branch as women a man, coldly . . .
sifting patterns grim and flimsy across
the grass
and ashlike evening.*

*Saw
an owl, its hunting shadow flit
the chilly mice.*

*Upward she rubs the tingling lotion,
thinking: I am 41.*

*Heard
scratching crickets, the scattering mouse;
a startle shrill as talons pierce
. . . . freeing the heart of blood;
the nightmare shadow of passing wings
that seem to slow as they near you.*

W. G.

CALIFORNIA LP CONVENTION

On the weekend of February 14-17 in Santa Monica the **Libertarian Party of California** held its Third Annual Convention with about 150 people attending. In addition to the general sessions which dealt with the Platform and the Constitution and Bylaws, a number of panels and special events were held.

On Friday night veteran campaigners **Dave Bergland**, **Karl Bray**, **William C. White**, **John Hospers** and **Bill Susel** held a panel discussing their experiences in the 1974 elections and the prospects and opportunities for the LP in 1976. (And following the panel was an unscheduled Valentine's Day treat—the wedding of **Dave Bergland** and **Nichole Norman** with Universal Life minister **Hank Hohenstein** officiating.)

Saturday opened with a very well attended seminar on **Libertarian Feminism** featuring **REASON** editor **Lynn Kinsky**, **Susan Love Brown**, and **Ranette Daniels** presenting the case for feminism being very much a libertarian issue. Ms. Kinsky suggested the formation of a Women's Caucus within the LP to encourage communication between libertarian women and to deal with political issues specifically affecting women (anyone wishing further information should contact Ms. Kinsky c/o **REASON**).

Following the seminar was a luncheon featuring a talk by the author of *Land Use Without Zoning*, **Bernard Siegan**, and then after a short break **Dr. John Hospers** gave the opening speech for the first general convention session.



Bernard Siegan addresses the Convention.

Sunday brought the highlight of the convention—the evening banquet, which featured a talk by **Roger Lea MacBride** on “The Future of Liberty” and a speech by **Dr. Murray Rothbard** on “The Need for Political Action” (to be published in the next issue of **REASON**). **Roger MacBride** galvanized the audience by making formal what has been talked about for a while—he announced his candidacy for the national LP Presidential nomination!



Roger MacBride announces his candidacy. l to r: Ned Hutchinson, Manuel Klausner, Murray Rothbard, Roger MacBride, Ed Crane

The convention wound up on Monday with the election of officers: **Bill Westmiller** is the new state chairman, **Susan Love Brown** is the southern vice chairman, **Ray Cunningham** is the northern vice chairman, **Ed Wolford** is the new state secretary, and **Dan Wiener** is the new treasurer.

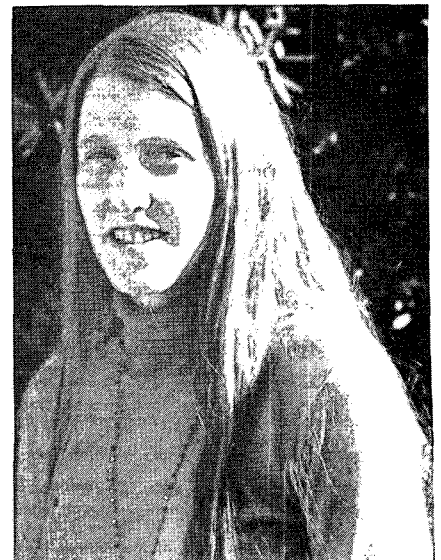
Anyone wishing further information on the Libertarian Party of California should write to the LPC at P.O. Box 71383, Los Angeles, CA 90071.

SANTA BARBARA RESULTS

The results of the libertarian campaign for School Board in Santa Barbara, California [see “Frontlines,” March 1975] were a little disappointing, but the usual excuse of lack of voter information cannot be given. **Lynn Kinsky**, editor of **REASON**, and **Ruth Hammond Sutton**, **REASON** office manager, placed 12th and 14th respectively in a field of 18. Kinsky received 3,523 votes for 9.3 percent of the vote (this was for three seats, so percentages indicate number of votes divided by total voters voting), and Sutton received 3,070 votes for 8.1 percent. The candidates having attended about 50 public forums, distributed 10,000 leaflets, and spent \$1000 on newspaper advertising, everyone in Santa Barbara was talking about “the libertarians.” When introduced to the candidates, people often

said, “Oh, you’re the ones that want to abolish public education.” Nonetheless, Kinsky and Sutton received a lot of support from community and political leaders from both the right and left. While getting endorsements from many prominent conservatives, and getting many of their votes from conservative areas, one of their highest vote-areas was Isla Vista, a small community near the University of California Santa Barbara campus which gained notoriety in 1970 for the burning of their local Bank of America, and where the political spectrum ranges from liberal to Marxist. Kinsky placed 5th with 12.5 percent and Sutton placed 8th with 8 percent, while most of the active candidates only got a few percentage points. Also, **Robert Raffealli**, Isla Vista resident and U.C.S.B. Society for Individual Liberty co-founder, running for the Community College Board, received 6,639 votes for 20.9 percent overall in a two way race, and received 46 percent in Isla Vista. His ballot occupation was “Libertarian Writer.”

The result of this campaign was that people were exposed to libertarian ideas, applied to local issues, and, while many balked, many also responded. The Santa Barbara libertarians, rapidly growing in numbers, intend to keep active in community affairs. Libertarianism has become a respected force in Santa Barbara politics. For further information please contact the Santa Barbara LP at 294 Via El Encantador, Santa Barbara, CA 93111; phone 805-964-4310, or 964-4131.



School Board candidate Ruth Sutton.