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The Rediscovery of Cordwainer Smith

[T]he art of storytelling is coming to an end.... Was it not noticeable at the end of the [First World] war that men returned silent—not richer, but poorer in communicable experience? ... A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile, human body.—Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller”

Thunder, and a wash like water. There went his world, his wife, his time, himself ... He floated free in anachron.—Cordwainer Smith, “Himself in Anachron”

Walter Benjamin suggests that the straightforward telling of tales was discouraged by twentieth-century experience itself: modern warfare fractured personal experience and consequently narrative. I will argue here that one context for the mysterious silences of Cordwainer Smith’s science fiction is the social disruption he lived through but barely survived—his era’s global wars and political upheavals, with their untold and in fact incalculable cost in human suffering:

Never again gunfire, filth, blood, sun-streaked water-gleaming acres.... Never again cities burning, and people burning in them.... Never again Asia, thought Carola.... Some day America too will burn; wounded people, hungry, will crawl through the ruins looking for food. But that will be beyond my time. There’s one more life’s-worth of goodness before the Third World War. (*Carola* 3-4)

Directly addressed in *Ria* (1947) and *Carola* (1948), psychological novels published under the name Felix C. Forrest, the experiences of Paul Linebarger in Germany and Asia from the 1920s through World War II only indirectly enter the science fiction of his alter-ego, “Cordwainer Smith.”¹ But no hero of his, any more than the saddened survivors in Benjamin’s essay, lives through cataclysm to bring back a simple story.

In Smith’s sf, Benjamin’s fragile human being, tethered to a planet grown ungovernably violent, is shown breaking free of gravity, distance, time, embodiment. Spaceships become superfluous after the discovery of a miraculous new dimension (“Space³”); “anachron” allows his hero to live backward in time; near immortality is possible with “stroon.” But breakthrough in Smith is always accompanied by the possibility of breakdown. This is not escapism in the triumphant mode of space opera, for Smith’s heroes, free-falling through time and space, repeatedly encounter a terrifying isolation and danger.²

Smith’s plots force characters to rethink the very conditions of their existence. The shifting paradigms (ways of knowing) that test his heroes may be political or social in nature, such as the Rediscovery of Man in “Alpha Ralpa Boulevard” (1961). But often the catalyst for change is a scientific

discovery (“anachron,” “Space³,” “stroom”), and in “The Dead Lady of Clown Town” (1964) it is a mass religious conversion. Smith assesses the impact of new ideas on humanity, by which term he means “humane behavior” more than “human beings”: cyborgs and “underpeople” (genetically-enhanced animals) are just as likely to be his heroes. And the cost of change is usually high: a state-mandated initiative in “When the People Fell” (1959) results in the death of millions of colonists parachuted onto the surface of Venus. Even an innovation that will eventually bring about great good, such as the acts of civil disobedience among the underpeople that follow their conversion in “The Dead Lady of Clown Town,” may claim the lives of numerous early martyrs.

Smith’s sf dramatizes the power, for good or ill, of innovation, a focus that links his stories to the traditions of popular sf. He is unusual only in his emphasis on psychology, the impact of change on the human subject—again, a category that Smith does not restrict to members of *homo sapiens*. This focus on character not only places him ahead of his own time but has much to teach the genre today. Often misread by critics as erratic, Smith in fact conducts an intense critique of postwar US culture, including the culture of science fiction. He represents unreason as a test of heroes, a condition to be overcome, thereby challenging enthusiasm and indoctrination, forces he saw as aligned with Nazism, fascism, and Soviet and Chinese communism. Smith’s characters become heroes precisely at the moment that they shed their conditioning and begin to think for themselves, despite being adrift in space and time, caught (like Tasco in “Himself in Anachron” [1993] or Benjamin’s embattled soldier) in a vortex of all-but-incomprehensible forces.

One implied criticism of his own day may be seen in his virtual exclusion of war as an agent of change. With two exceptions, his sf never dramatizes war in progress, though he does emphasize its long aftermath: the rigid social divisions that characterize his far future are said to date from the “Ancient Wars” of the mid-twentieth century.³ Rejecting his own era’s recurrent eruptions of organized conflict and popular sf’s often unthinking recapitulations of that pattern, Smith focuses not on war but on conspiracy—covert political and financial machinations and religious dissent—as the main conduit for aggression in his far future.⁴ Violence in Smith’s sf is not visceral but epistemic: received ideas are shattered, and conspirators maneuver by outwitting, not assaulting, their adversaries. Smith also dramatizes violence against the psyche, identity crises generated as characters encounter new “realities.” One example is the perplexed hero of “Alpha Ralpa Boulevard,” discharged from a hospital re-programmed to be “French.” And if Smith minimizes the conduct of war as an activity of heroes, he all but eliminates the most common preoccupation of Cold War sf: the conquest of aliens, imagined Others. Smith not only refuses to consider aliens a menace but also refuses to concede that Others exist: his far-future cosmos has been entirely colonized by the descendants of Earth settlers and underpeople (the worker or peasant-class of intelligent but oppressed earth-derived animals).

In his refusal to privilege xenophobia or violence—in keeping things personal, character-based—Smith is somewhat reminiscent of Theodore Sturgeon. But his macrocosm (his selectively disclosed backdrop of vast, ever-shifting paradigms) was unique in the 1950s and continues to be impressive today. Unlike some of his postwar peers, he never settled down to one extrapolative specialty, dramatizing instead the many possible catalysts for change. Curiously, despite a command of many languages (both Western and Asian allusions and vocabulary greatly enhance his style), Smith never drew on linguistics for his wider extrapolative premises. But he ranges over almost every other field of knowledge that inspired postwar American sf: the sciences (especially psychology and physics), the social sciences (especially political science, his own academic specialty), philosophy (especially mid-twentieth century existentialism), and theology (which allows him to consider indoctrination and dogmatism as well as the mysteries of faith).

Still, choosing from diverse fields to generate his plots, he is unlike his contemporaries in never betraying the slightest anxiety to prove that he has done his homework. Unlike Frank Herbert in *Dune*, for instance (whose complexity of imagination is comparable to Smith's), he only hints at the broader premises from which his stories draw. While he took pains to work out background details privately,⁵ he evidently felt no obligation to share those details with readers. Smith's reticence contrasts sharply with Herbert's elaborately nested counterplots and laborious apparatus (four appendices, a glossary of terms, and a map follow the story in *Dune* [1965]). In Herbert's cosmos (notwithstanding the existence of a culture calling itself the "Fremen"), there is no such thing as a free man. Everyone is a pawn in a larger game. Herbert's broad canvas actually works to diminish his youthful protagonist, Paul Atreides, who is shown to be ignorant of the complex forces gathering to destroy his family. Readers of *Dune* are given much more information than the characters, and this produces irony: Herbert's universe is as fatalistic as the plays of Aeschylus, from which he draws his hero's surname (Atreus is the name of Agamemnon's father).

Smith's readers are kept too off-balance to assume an ironic stance: they drift in anachron right alongside Tasco. Smith may withhold background details because he does not want the background to take over, overwhelming characterization as plot exposition does in so much sf of his era, including that of Robert A. Heinlein and Arthur C. Clarke—figures as important to sf (and as problematic to Smith) as Theodore Sturgeon and Frank Herbert. The efforts of Smith's characters to understand and respond heroically to the forces that threaten to engulf them generate sympathy, pulling readers into these stories. At the same time, the mysteries of his master-plot have a centrifugal action, pushing readers outside into the darkness of cognitive estrangement (Suvin, *Metamorphoses* 4). It is no accident that he often uses the image of a vortex.

I will refer in this essay more often to Smith's heroes than to his plots, precisely because while Smith's portrayal of large-scale social and scientific

innovation is a hallmark of his fiction, it is subordinated to a focus on the heroic human subject—the singularity of individual experience. Puzzling out the details of the back-story is simply not the point, for Smith is encouraging readers to focus on the inner space of characters' consciousness. And to repeat an earlier caution, the unsatisfactory but in this case indispensable term "human" involves no sentimental inflation of *homo sapiens* per se. The heroic individual in Smith—the vindicated subject or person who matters—might be a human being (alive or dead)⁶ but also might be a laminated mouse-brain ("Think Blue, Count Two" [1962]), a botched genetics experiment ("E'telekeli," leader of the underpeople in several stories), or even a pair of robots disguised as ancient Roman legionnaires ("Under Old Earth" [1966]).

The changes that imperil "humanity" in Smith's fiction—the sudden plot events (Bloch's and Suvín's novums [*Metamorphoses* 63-64]) that emerge out of an only partly explicated backdrop to test his heroes—are designed to remain enigmatic, outside the story that they have set in motion. Indeed, Smith's overriding focus on subjective experience gives his imagined universe (however strange the dilemmas encountered by his heroes) a certain verisimilitude; it resembles in some ways a reader's cognitive sphere (Alan C. Elms concurs, praising Smith's "intense psychological realism" ["Thing" 112]). For Smith's readers are exactly like his protagonists in not knowing all the facts that might bear on their survival.

Smith's sf immerses both characters and readers in an irruptive, unstable macrocosm actively engaged in incubating challenges. Some stylistic features that follow from his refusal to tell everything he knows about that macrocosm include ruminative (not "climactic") pacing and a riddling use of words. His reluctance to proceed to absolute clarity has exasperated sf critics who privilege the plot-driven extrapolation of other postwar writers. For notwithstanding the wide range of his intellect, he utterly abjures the tidy logic of Campbellian hard sf, by which a story's initial premise is finally used to shut the story down (one example is the closed logical circuit of Godwin's "The Cold Equations" [1954], a classic postwar story parodied in later drafts of "Himself in Anachron"—on which, more below). One never has a sense, reading Smith, that his cosmos could be closed out in this way, settled and summarized once and for all.

He so dislikes closure and foreclosure that in later stories he toys with the idea of "stroon," a drug that (like Frank Herbert's "melange") can almost indefinitely prolong life. Like Scheherazade in the tales of the Arabian nights, Smith plays a teasing game with death, deferring his ending, intertwining his stories, and opening the door to future installments even as he spins his present tale. His refusal to wrap up extrapolation in a tidy cognitive package is no doubt an idiosyncrasy. But I see it also as a strength. At a time when the best sf (including his own) was written at short lengths, he was able by this means to evoke a deep ambiguity. Unlike most sf writers of his day, Smith imagined a future with real staying power when he imagined a future with significant silences and gaps.

His imagination is inherently science fictional in its emphasis on surprise, on narrative elements that present intellectual challenges. He departs from sf tradition only in offering plot-resolutions, when he offers them, that could apply only to the (often fanciful) circumstances of that one single story.⁷ And in this way, again contrary to critical consensus, Smith is not a didactic writer. Readers are plainly advised *not* to try this at home when difficulties are removed by such means as lining the walls of spaceships with live oysters (“Scanners Live in Vain” [1950]) or broadcasting the primal rage of psychotic minks as a planetary defense system (“Mother Hitton’s Littul Kittons” [1961]). In his delight in the singular, Smith is indeed poetic, a term that has been used both to praise and to dismiss his work. He is poetic, too, in his allusions, which draw from many eras and nations in an attempt, I think, to imagine scenarios more noble than his own century’s sorry master-plot of global holocaust.

Smith’s effort to think around the imperative of contemporary violence is visible even in his first published sf story, “Scanners Live in Vain,” in which the space-faring league of Scanners plot vengeance against Adam Stone, whose scientific breakthrough has threatened their monopoly of deep space. The story’s protagonist, Martel, separates from his comrades, questioning their reasoning and then disobeying direct orders. By his resistance, this outlandish character—Martel is a machine-man, a surgically-created cyborg—transforms himself into an authentic hero, changing the world for the better. The story’s plot first explains why and how the fraternity of Scanners reach a decision to murder Adam Stone; but its main action dramatizes Martel’s desperate effort to prevent an injustice, avert an act of violence. Smith typically dramatizes heroes who resist not only violence but indoctrination (in this case, Martel’s deeply conditioned loyalty to his fellow Scanners).

Smith, whose first novels *Ria* and *Carola* were marketed specifically as “psychological,” showcased the individual human subject from the beginning of his career. The “first person singular” was for him always the crucible of consciousness, and the emphasis is anything but sentimental: in *Ria* the “I” is called “the blank abyss from which each of us comes forth” (10). In his later sf, too, heroes from Helen America to Casher O’Neill struggle with the always open question of how to know and be themselves. Quite often—Martel is an example—characters become heroes by resisting authority. And I think that Smith discovered his own voice as an author in a parallel series of demurrals, employing literary allusions that are not echoes so much as *sotto voce* rebuttals.

Other critics have noted Smith’s references to the classics of many cultures, from eighteenth-century France (Jacques Henri Bernardin de St. Pierre’s Rousseau-inflected *Paul et Virginie* [1788]) to sixteenth-century China (Wu Ch’êng-ên’s flamboyantly folkish *Journey to the West* or *Monkey* [c. 1580]). But less has been done than this author invites:

There are five stories here.... The first is a re-telling of Ali Baba and the forty thieves; it is the story of Mother Hitton and her indescribable “littul kittons.” The second story is a rendition of the true narrative of ... Jeanne d’Arc.... I

believe I am the first to put it into science fiction with “The Dead Lady of Clown Town.” Some of the other famous renditions of this tale are to be found in the works of Voltaire, Schiller, Mark Twain, Percy MacKaye, Anatole France, and Bernard Shaw. The third [“Drunkboat”] is an English rendition of some of the life and experience of Arthur Rimbaud, 1854-1891, whose chief work was *Le bateau ivre*. This is one of my boldest attempts at Englishing some of the great poetry of France.... The fourth story, “The Ballad of Lost C’mell”—pronounced as though it were k-mel—was rather loosely inspired by some of the magical and conspiratorial scenes in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, published by Lo Kuan-chung in the early 1300s.... The last story [“A Planet named Shayol”] is a direct steal of Dante Alighieri. “Shayol” is the same word for hell in Arabic and Hebrew, *sheol*. (Preface, *Space Lords* 9-10)

Smith’s allusive style bears out M.M. Bakhtin’s paradoxical idea that appropriation of another speaker’s words is often a means both of resistance and self-discovery (“Discourse” 379). He draws not only on classics of the literary mainstream (Asian and European) but also on popular sf, from Arthur C. Clarke’s *Childhood’s End* (1953) and Theodore Sturgeon’s short stories to the early installments of Herbert’s “Dune World” and the work of Robert A. Heinlein. Always, Smith speaks in opposition: even his early spy-thriller *Atomsk* (1949) goes against the grain of its genre when his affable superspy Michael Dugan declares that “liking people is the only way to win wars” (37).⁸ But his spirit of contradiction is most ebullient in his sf, where his heroes, trapped in a maelstrom of inexplicable events (and often reconstructed—like Artyr Rambo in “Drunkboat” [1963] or Mercer/Dante in “A Planet Named Shayol” [1961]—from a source-character in classic or popular literature) rise to heroism as they refuse every invitation to unreason.

Smith’s repudiation of the visceral and the violent (deriving partly from his focus on the irrational potential of the individual psyche, partly from a rejection of his postwar cultural climate) underlies the expressive power of his best stories, including “Scanners Live in Vain,” “The Game of Rat and Dragon” (1956), “Alpha Ralpa Boulevard,” “Think Blue, Count Two,” “On the Storm Planet” (1965), and “Under Old Earth.” I view these as the very strongest of about a dozen unquestionable classics. (The percentage of success is high, for Smith’s entire published output of sf consists—according to the NESFA Press editions—of just thirty-three short sf stories and an extraordinary but not entirely successful novel, *Norstrilia*, begun in 1957.)

The element in sf critical tradition most hostile to the rediscovery of Cordwainer Smith is probably its expectation of logical extrapolation—full exposition of plot premises and a consequent tidy closure or suture of the various narrative threads. The traditions of sf discourage the sustained—i.e., not necessarily resolved—emphasis on cognitive dissonance that enriches Smith’s sf. In my own view, the essence of appreciating Smith lies not in solving but in recognizing (as mysterious) his carefully constructed mysteries. His imagery is typical of popular sf of his day in displacing current issues and debates to distant galaxies and eras. He is atypical mainly in the far degree of that displacement

(very little serious sf is set thousands of centuries ahead in time, millions of light years away in space) and in the elusive curve of his imagination, which makes paraphrase of his stories always a kind of cheating. Plot summary (the logical tracking of extrapolative premises) always involves overlooking some contrary nuance, some implied element in that only partly legible bigger picture.

Encountering the test of Smith's by turns playful and melancholy enigmas, many strategies favored by sf critics show their limitations. The relative failure of Tony Lewis's *Concordance to Cordwainer Smith*, for instance, is linked to Lewis's promise of "exegesis" (6) of stories that invite contrary and multiple interpretations. Smith uses words, as poets do, to double-think, luxuriating in metaphor, oxymoron, contradiction, and equivocation. His late portrayal of the Lord Sto Odin in "Under Old Earth" even considers with some wistfulness the narrative special-effects that might be possible if writers and their heroes could "triple-think" (319).

My own approach emphasizes Smith's efforts to construct ethical and psycho-dramatic (as opposed to escapist) scenarios in which heroism—thoughtful individual action—is possible despite prior social programming (e.g., Martel's training as a Scanner) and also despite ambiguous larger contexts that place certainty well beyond the reach of either characters or readers. And since these stories resist or defer extrapolative logic, I have also reached outside texts to suggest social, biographical, and literary contexts. I believe that Cordwainer Smith will come back from the "nothing-at-all" of critical oblivion—and be re-written into the histories of the genre—only when sf scholars are persuaded of the subtle way he, however indirectly, addresses his own life and times, of how artfully he infuses his tales with references to other writers and texts (canonical and popular), and finally of how boldly he projects into the future—and then dissents from—the various fanaticisms of the postwar era. In his military intelligence textbook of 1948, Paul Linebarger predicted that "an adequate description of the present historical period will only be written after the forces now operating have ceased to be significant; at that future time, it may be possible ... to determine what happened in the middle of the twentieth century" (244). In his sf, "serious and reflective" narrators do look back (244), hinting at experiences of world war, Cold War, and the psychological wars that they exacerbated.

In order to dispel some myths that have persisted despite the painstaking and insightful research of Alan Elms, I have placed in a postscript a brief biography (synthesized from the work of Elms and some less well-known material) of Paul M.A. Linebarger, the "true man" behind the manifestly fictive pseudonym. Any survey of this author's life suggests that science fiction was instrumental in his recovery from his experiences as a soldier and propagandist during World War II and the Korean conflict, and also as a "psychological warrior" (Linebarger, *Psy War* 101) and frequent psychiatric and surgical patient during the postwar years. Let me say here, however, that the correlations between Smith's life and certain elements in his fiction do not simplify the task of critical interpretation.

One of a very few postwar giants in the genre (I have already mentioned the names of most of the authors I think of as his peers), Smith constructs for the pleasure and enlightenment of readers a vision of future “humanity.” This vision, like that of other writers (whether in or out of the sf genre), is rooted in a partial reconstruction or transposition of personal experience. Nonetheless, unlike his first two psychological novels, his sf cannot be read simply as private and personal—as thinly-veiled case history or therapeutic self-analysis. He was successful in no other fictional genre he attempted, but in his sf (like his friendly architects the Daimoni, who never visit humanity without leaving behind a marvelous building as a parting gift) he makes something of his sorrows, constructing a temple to wonder on the ashes of an estranged consciousness. The ashes can be sifted; his life can be told. But the fiction, the temple itself, is a thing apart, as mysterious as the Palace of the Governor of Night, a miraculous Daimoni construction that can be viewed only outside the visible spectrum. “Nobody could take a Daimoni building apart, once it had been built” (*Norstrilia* 51), and Cordwainer Smith’s stories (despite autobiographical echoes that are as frequent and flagrant as his historical and literary allusions) likewise resist critical dissection.

A Temporary Place Like Earth

I need a temporary dog,
 For a temporary job,
 On a temporary place
 Like Earth! —Song from *The Merchant of Menace*, “Under Old Earth”

Smith’s stories are often framed as fragmentary tales of long-ago events. “The Dead Lady of Clown Town” is set, according to Pierce’s chronology, around 13,000 AD; yet the viewpoint of its narrator is firmly retrospective: “You already know the end—the immense drama of the Lord Jestocost.... But you do not know the beginning, how the first Lord Jestocost got his name” (223). Smith’s readers look far forward, his narrators far back. His heroes, however, experience their story’s crisis as urgently present, forcing choices and events that may (like Martel’s rescue of Adam Stone or the cruel burning of D’joan) change the world. Smith abandons popular sf’s futuristic narrative tone and unilaterally forward-facing plots, achieving full freedom (looking backward, forward, and inward) to express his horrified fascination with time, “which tricks man while it shapes him” (143). His preoccupation with human time goes along with a preoccupation with death that may seem extravagant to critics because it goes against the grain of sf’s utopian heritage, its emphasis on progress and change: in mortality, Smith selects a human problem that can be palliated but hardly solved by technological or social innovations. It is at any rate unsurprising that religion is so often touched upon in these stories, with their emphasis on time and mortality and their frequent representation of painful or ecstatic separations of spirit and body (“Scanners Live in Vain,” “Drunkboat,” “No! No! Not Rogov!” [1959]). Allusion does not in itself,

however, constitute either a testament of faith or a pledge of allegiance: these stories are not allegories but ambiguous existential parables.

For Smith invokes faith in tandem with doubt. Even the providential interventions that do occur—as in “The Lady Who Sailed *The Soul*” (1960) or “Think Blue, Count Two”—are likelier to disconcert his heroes than to point the way.⁹ To take for contrast a text that does engage in religious allegory, in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) John Bunyan imagines a narrow but straight path for his hero Christian (if he obeys instructions) through a universe of trouble: the path is marked, the goal defined, and the message to the reader crystal clear. In Smith, by contrast, heroes are likelier to end up adrift in anachron or, like Mercer in “A Planet Named Shayol,” drug-addicted in Hell than treading the golden streets of any Celestial City. Smith’s heroes share only the painful part of Christian’s human plight: an anxious consciousness that they abide, as mortals, in the City of Destruction.

They engage not in credos but in uneasy ontological musings. In *Norstrilia*, Rod McBan imagines distant old Earth, which he has never visited, as “a whole planet inhabited by Hamlets” (41), and Smith’s heroes are indeed Hamlet-like in their eloquent doubting. In “Under Old Earth,” the almost thousand-year-old hero, Sto Odin, soliloquizes, lamenting the brevity even of his own long life:

How can I be alive when the people who knew me are dead? They have whipped through the corridors like wraiths of smoke, like traces of cloud; they were here, and they loved me, and they knew me, and now they are dead.... How can passing ghosts like me and my kind, each with just a few dozen or a few hundred years to go before the great blind winds of time whip us away—how can phantoms like me have built this solid city, these wonderful engines, these brilliant lights that never grow dim? How did we do it, when we pass so swiftly, each of us, all of us? (298)

And in another tale of death and immortality that may have influenced a key scene in Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969),¹⁰ recently deceased Tice Angerhelm sends his brother Nelson a message from the afterlife (picked up by the Russian satellite Sputnik) that is orthodox in the terms of no known faith, but closer to Buddhism than Christianity:

I knew I was dead when I felt so different. It was more comfortable being dead, more relaxed. There wasn’t anything tight. That’s the trouble, Nels. There isn’t anything tight.... [I]t’s your brother talking and I’m somewhere and it isn’t Heaven and it isn’t Hell and it isn’t really even out in space. I am in something different from space, Nels. It is just a somewhere with me in it and there isn’t anything but me. In with me there’s everything.... All the opposites are the same. Everything I hated and everything I loved, it’s all the same. (“Angerhelm” [1959] 664-65; italics in original)

In many stories, Smith wonders aloud, as Hamlet did, whether consciousness is a human blessing or a human curse. The operative word is “wonders”: this is not an author of affirmations and certainties. In a memoir posted on her website, Rosana Linebarger Hart recalls her father’s fundamental sadness:

I was intensely steeped in the huge questions of cruelty and suffering from very early in my childhood.... So my relation with the stories is complex. I can be reading along when suddenly a phrase, particularly a description of some bit of cruelty, will hit me and I'm a kid again, crying, "Stop it, Daddy! It's too much! I don't want to be here if the world is as horrible as you say!"

Smith's future history contrasts despairing humanity—"Under Old Earth" speaks of the "gentleman-suicides" of the Bezirk (289)—with faithful underpeople and robots. While the oppressed "homunculi" find consolation in thoughts of God, such comfort is elusive for Smith's "true men." In "The Dead Lady of Clown Town," a goat-man tells Elaine (who has asked about the new faith that has galvanized the underpeople) that "You'll find out about God somewhere else, if you do. Not from us" (246). "True men" in Smith's stories are on their own, and the references in his stories to "the Old Strong religion," "the sign of the Fish" (538), and the crucifix ("the image of a man in pain" [562]) position hopeful belief, the province of the suffering underpeople, against the melancholy uncertainty of true men, who suffer greatly from knowing that they are in "a temporary place." The mystery that lies beyond life—which may be the originary mystery that generates Smith's enigmatic cosmos—remains a mystery to them. In "On the Storm Planet," Casher O'Neill *knows* about the subversive underground faith that venerates the First, Second, and Third "Forbidden Ones," yet (though recognizing references to it) he shows none of the fervency of *belief* that characterizes the turtle-girl "T'ruth," an underperson. In Smith's sf, especially in his later stories, "true men" may well hope. But they always also doubt.¹¹

Hesitation suffuses even Smith's style, which builds ambiguity into the very thread and fabric of words and names. "Jestocost," for example, resembles the Russian word for cruelty (*zhestochos*); yet the seventh Lord Jestocost (hero of "The Ballad of Lost C'mell" [1962] and an early advocate of human rights for underpeople) is the kindest of all Lords of the Instrumentality (412). The name of the protagonist of *Atomsk*, Michael Dugan, at first glance suggests no such paradox; but Smith soon reveals that Dugan's divided ethnic heritage—half Irish and half Aleut—makes him an incarnation of cultural dissonance (from which he profits as a spy, since Dugan looks Japanese enough to have served as a Japanese officer during World War II, yet also enough like an Asian Soviet to infiltrate Siberia during the Cold War). In "Scanners Live in Vain" (written before but published a year after *Atomsk*), the probably autobiographical hero Martel—ill-suited to normal life on earth after the horrors of deep space, he communicates best by writing—is drawn to two identities. His mind, will, and prior conditioning draw him to the male fellowship of space-faring "Scanners," but feelings he scarcely understands draw him into a marriage with Luçi made possible only by his abuse of the dangerous "cranching wire" that temporarily restores him to the use of his senses. Martel, like a returning soldier haunted by battle flashbacks, undergoes a painful transition from a wartime ethos of honor and duty to a peacetime ethos of domestic partnership. Divided in loyalties,

Martel is also divided in consciousness, a machine-man with a control box implanted in his chest that mechanically regulates his feelings. (This fantasy of control over bodily functions appears in Smith's first published story and also in his last, "Under Old Earth," wherein dying Sto Odin can temporarily strengthen his vital signs.) The first uses of the word "cyborg" date from 1960 (Clynes 29); even the parent-term "cybernetics," coined by Norbert Wiener in 1948, entered the language after the writing of "Scanners." Smith sees something of the future in his emphasis on Martel's conjoining of mechanical and biological identity. In any event, though probably the strangest of Smith's heroes, Scanner Martel is typical, too, in being torn between two worlds.

In *Carola*, the protagonist is also divided, for self-preservation requires betrayal of her country: she collaborates with the Japanese to get out of China after she assists the suicide of her drug-addicted Chinese husband. Not so much a split in consciousness or loyalties as a parodic doubling may be seen in the name of the hero of "Nancy" (1959): introduced as Gordon Greene in the first sentence, he is reintroduced seven paragraphs later as "Giordano Verdi"—probably Smith's critique of the interchangeable Anglo-Saxon names of so much American sf during the 1950s. ("Why did you change?" asks Verdi's commanding officer. "Verdi is a great name too" [629]). Something between dissonance and doubling also characterizes Smith's sing-song rhymes and double names ("Alpha Ralpa"; "Veeseey-koosey") and his pairings that conjoin opposites, such as matter's counterpart, "antimatter," in "Under Old Earth" (324).

Smith's contradictions and equivocations are often joking ("The Bell, of course, was not a bell" [413]), but sometimes poetic and evocative: "The solid rock had become an open door" (328). Oxymorons create microbursts of incongruity: a man is "young-old" (153), architecture is "ridiculous-beautiful" (320), an entranced audience is "tortured-blissful" (316). Smith also disorients his readers when his heroes fail to recognize mundane references: Martel in "Scanners Live in Vain" does not know what a lamb chop is, and Paul in "Alpha Ralpa Boulevard" does not at first recognize as bones and skulls the detritus surrounding the forbidden weather-computer called the Abba Dingo: he sees only "a walkway littered with white objects—knobs and rods and imperfectly formed balls about the size of my head" (393).¹² Smith's style, then, like his plotting and character portrayal, works to instill doubt, deferring the clarification of his extrapolative premises. In "The Colonel Came Back From the Nothing-At-All" (an early draft of "Drunkboat" [1963] separately published in 1979), the hero's ambiguous ontological status—his body has been transported across space to New York's Central Park, but his consciousness has remained in space—is conveyed by a syllogism that (typically but impossibly) is also a non-sequitur: "He is there, major premise. He can't be there, minor premise. We don't exist. Q.E.D." (157).

I see no cause for assuming that Smith's refusal of deductive (extrapolative) logic follows from a wholesale rejection of reason itself. Like many mid-century writers influenced by existentialism and the theories of Freud, he seeks a deeper

order of knowing (especially self-knowing) than that afforded by the elementary cognitive transactions of deduction and induction. In his effort to imagine ways around mundane logic, he employs not only a vast chronological scale (at a distance of some 13,000 years, people may well “know” in different ways) but also a powerful symbolic imagery. One evocative icon that recurs in his stories is Earthport, a landing platform extending high into Earth’s atmosphere that is both a city and a single building. With its slender stem traversing the distance between sea-level and the upper atmosphere, Earthport is situated both on the earth and far above the earth. A similarly grounded-but-elevated recurrent image in Smith’s stories is Alpha Ralpa Boulevard, which begins as a regular highway but whose “northern side” soars miles into the sky. Both these structures are in mundane terms impossible: Smith explains that Earthport was built by visionary architects, the legendary far-travelers already mentioned whom (perhaps recalling Freud) he calls the *Daimoni*.¹³

Both Earthport and Alpha Ralpa Boulevard invite what Gaston Bachelard, following Rousseau, calls “reverie” or philosophic daydream:

For one who knows written reverie, who knows how to live, to live fully, as the pen flows, reality is so far away! What one meant to say is so quickly supplanted by what one finds oneself writing, that we realize written language creates its own universe. A universe of sentences arranges itself on the blank page, in an organization of images which follow different laws, but which always observe the great laws of the imaginary.... A literary image sometimes suffices to transport us from one universe to another.... Language evolves through its images much more than its semantic effort. (26-27)

Bachelard suggests that “image” (more than “semantic effort” or a literal pursuit of meaning) is the crucial element in fostering reverie, a term for which a reader versed in sf might wish to substitute the word “speculation.” For Smith’s images do invite speculation, holding out a promise of a higher order of consciousness. Travelers seek out Alpha Ralpa Boulevard for where it can take them; fallen into disrepair and broken through at its higher reaches, it is in itself no ideal or goal. But rightly traveled, it offers a possible route to insight.

I see this sublime image of a remote skyway as indispensable to appreciating Smith’s work, for in my reading Alpha Ralpa Boulevard is his most memorable symbolic representation of science fiction itself. In Smith’s imagining, sf’s cognitive negotiations cannot provide adequate models for mortal knowing—cannot help people better to understand either their “temporary” status or their obligations (as people) to each other. Speculation builds an avenue that may lead somewhere meaningful; as the misadventures of Paul and Virginia show, much depends on the human sympathy of the traveler. As in Bachelard’s and Rousseau’s ideas of reverie, Smith shows the human spirit liberated by (and into) speculation. The point is not to arrive at a destination or conclusion, but to begin a process of coming into knowledge: of one’s true identity for Jean-Jacques Rousseau (“*Reveries of a Solitary Walker*” [1777]), but of one’s true humanity—self-aware connection to others—for Smith.

Though doubtful and ironic in his style and plotting, then, in imagery Smith is an idealist. The universe *that can be imagined* is for him (as for William Blake and Percy Shelley) the universe that matters; imagination is the Up-and-Out, and the sf genre is only instrumental (an important word for Smith) in marking a pathway there and back. Bachelard notes that writers and readers alike embark during reverie on a journey through a “universe of sentences.” Smith, who often emphasizes partnerships and collaborations, concurs, telling readers in his Prologue to *Space Lords* (1965) that “We two, we have this story between us.... At this minute you are yourself the prologue. All I have done is supply the makings” (10). While he has his secrets, then, there is no haughty refuge taken in authorial privilege; Smith is elusive and allusive but (unlike Philip K. Dick) not hermetic. The boulevard that he constructs is wide enough to accommodate a large party, and readers are welcome on the journey.

Stark Raving Mad—*Star Craving Mad* was the working title of *Norstrilia*

The colonel was trembling, but he was sane. He was alive. He was human again.—“The Colonel Came Back From the Nothing-At-All”

[Captain John Joy Tree]’s the only pilot who ever piloted himself back home from outside our galaxy.... They made a machine out of him. And it worked. In that one deep flight he went billions of times further than we will ever go.—“Three to a Given Star”

But to realize you *were* a body, that this thing was ruling you, that the mind could kick the flesh and send it roaring off into panic! That was bad.—“Scanners Live in Vain”

I have been emphasizing Smith’s resistance to closure and his invitation to speculative reverie. Let me turn to images of control and surveillance and possible links to Paul M.A. Linebarger’s wartime and postwar experiences.

The group who govern in Smith’s far future, the Lords and Ladies of the Instrumentality, are a self-perpetuating oligarchy (existing members recruit new ones) who through the purchase of the immortality drug “stroon” from Old North Australia (the planet later called *Norstrilia*) gradually lengthen life spans, substituting leisure for labor as the chief business of human life. Over the centuries the Instrumentality’s worst error in policy is an exclusive concern with “true men” and consequent denial of human rights to underpeople, the animal-derived worker-class. Tolerant of most cultures and practices, the Instrumentality prohibits only the publication of truth (Dr. Vomact in *Norstrilia* is exiled for inadvertently printing facts in his newspaper [99]) and the propagation of faith: “The Instrumentality ... took good care that fanaticisms did not once more flare up between the stars, once again bringing wild hope and great death to all the mankinds” (506). The word “Instrumentality” (at least twice used in *Psychological Warfare* as a synonym for “bureau” [24, 34]) itself encloses smaller words, including “true mentality” and “true men,” an important, if often sardonic, term in Smith. (For it is women who emerge as the best of “true men” in many of these stories: e.g., the Lady Alice More, the Lady Panc Ashash, and Helen America. “Is civilization always a woman’s choice first, and only later a man’s?” Smith asks in “On the Gem Planet” [471].)

The Instrumentality has utopian goals but makes many mistakes; Smith dramatizes not the evil but the blind-spots and limitations of “mentality,”

contrasting the computer-assisted and near-immortal Lords and Ladies with the short-lived, sharp-witted, persecuted underpeople, whose leaders refuse to hate the “true men” even though they have every “reason” to do so. The underpeople instead are governed by unconditional faith and love (cf. “The Dead Lady of Clown Town” and “Queen of the Afternoon” [1978]). The rulers of the Instrumentality are sometimes wise (Lord Sto Odin in “Under Old Earth,” Lord Jestocost in “The Ballad of Lost C’Mell”), but sometimes foolhardy (Lord Crudelta in “Drunkboat”; Lord Redlady in *Norstrilia*) or sadistic (Lord Femtiosex in “The Dead Lady of Clown Town”). This is not an economic system or political party but a group of people whose actions (benign in some stories, oppressive in others) depend on current membership.

One cruel instance of their policy of non-intervention (in “Under Old Earth,” the Lord Sto Odin “knew it all, and never dreamed of preventing any of it” [289]) is the permission they give an unspecified “Empire” to populate the hell-planet Shayol with political dissidents. The story’s hero, Mercer, is incarcerated on Shayol for what is called “the crime without a name” (420), later revealed to be the theft (perhaps rescue) of kittens from the wall of the imperial palace (424). Yet the clever ruse by which the Instrumentality averts war in “Golden the Ship Was—Oh! Oh! Oh!” (1959)—a single tiny ship sows plague on a hostile planet while the planet’s military forces are preoccupied with an enormous golden mystery ship—shows that their “true mentality” can be beneficial. Their fixation on the rational, however, leads them to attempt the perfection of human life through the abolition of emotional turmoil—not only postponing death by the use of “stroon,” but assuming that their primary task is to make everyone calm and happy. “We must be people first and happy later,” warns Lady Ru, one among several officers of the Instrumentality to question this policy, “lest we live and die in vain” (290).

In “Under Old Earth,” Santuna explains to Sto Odin why she has fled to an underground district of renegades called The Gebiet. She felt suicidal on earth, she says, where every true man lives out 400 perfect years of leisure. The Gebiet’s violent underground “wasn’t death, and it wasn’t life, but it was an escape from endless fun” (311). Santuna’s lover, the gyrating character “Sun-boy,” is identified as a reincarnation of the pharaoh Akhnaton (303); but he evidently is based also on American pop icons of the era: his “long face and thick lips” equally suggest ancient Egyptian art and such androgynous pop stars as Elvis Presley (whose early recordings were with Sun Records). A dangerously charismatic performer, Sun-boy has strong hypnotic abilities, bringing the “power and the music of the Sun ... far down underground” (315). In an uncharacteristically violent resolution, Sun-boy is blown up by Sto Odin, who intervenes to stop the spread of this deadly new music, said to be broadcast from hostile, sentient planets. Smith juxtaposes drums and dancing against “true mentality”—represented not only by Lord Sto Odin but his two companions, robots who maintain Smith’s contrast of new versus old (Sun-boy versus Sto Odin) in their disguise as ancient Roman soldiers.

To use a Freudian model that would not have been alien to long-analyzed Linebarger, Smith's Instrumentality works as a superego constructed to countermand the insistent beat of the id-like Gebiet, where "laws have been lifted," and the Bezirk, where "laws have never been" (304). The Instrumentality's counterparts are, like the Freudian id, underground sites of rebellion, "holy insurgency," desire. The Instrumentality's Earth headquarters are located miles above sea-level in the building/city/landing platform called Earthport, which towers over Meeya Meefla (Smith's playful future spelling of Miami, Florida). The superego rules "high," while the id resides Downdeep, as Smith calls the underground tunnels and catacombs "under old Earth," location of the Bezirk (German for "zone"), the Gebiet ("district"), and the hideouts of the proscribed H.I. (Holy Insurgency of underpeople).

With all the potential for error implicit in its exclusive focus on reason, then, the Instrumentality dramatizes the "higher" position of mentality in the working out of the human and (with the eventual enfranchisement of the animal-derived underpeople and robots) post-human future. And Smith is (like Lord Stod Odin) "triple-thinking," for there is a third element that corresponds to Freud's ego. This is the Rediscovery of Man, a joint project—suggested by E'telekele, leader of the H.I., but carried out by the Instrumentality—that negotiates between the "no" of the superego and the "yes" of the id. In "Alpha Ralpa Boulevard," Smith's only story (except the posthumously published "The Colonel Came Back") told from first-person point of view, the narrator (significantly named Paul) describes this exciting re-introduction of disease, risk, and uncertainty to the long-pampered "true men":

Formerly, I would be able to go to bed and think, "The government has given me four hundred years. Three hundred and seventy four years from now, they will stop the stroon injections and I will then die." Now I knew anything could happen. The safety devices had been turned off. The diseases ran free. With luck, and hope, and love, I might live a thousand years. Or I might die tomorrow. I was free. (375)

National cuisines and conflicts are revived in the Rediscovery of Man, along with romantic love and jealousy, the focus of this story; Paul's beloved Virginia (the names themselves, recalling the lovers in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's novel, have been assigned by the Instrumentality) does die in a typhoon the next day, an early casualty of the new freedom. The Rediscovery of Man sounds like more of a victory for the id than it is, however, for surveillance covertly continues: "We knew that when the diseases had killed the statistically correct number of people, they would be turned off; when the accident rate rose too high, it would stop without our knowing why. We knew that over it all, the Instrumentality watched" (376).

Like Freud's ego, the Rediscovery of Man in this story coordinates between reason (the Instrumentality's investment in control) and desire (Macht's and Virginia's spirit of adventure—but also their instinctive cruelty). And even less sympathetic versions of the id than Macht's pleasure in crushing birds' eggs or

Sun-boy's dance of death in "Under Old Earth" may be found in other stories. In "Mother Hitton's Littl Kittons," self-destruction is the fate of Benjacomin Bozart after becoming infected by telepathic contact with the planet Norstrilia's defense system—a loud broadcast into outer space of the primal emotions of specially bred psychotic minks: "Mad with lust and hunger, the body arched in the pilot's seat, the mouth bit deep in his own arm. Driven by lust, the left hand tore at his face, ripping out his left eyeball. He screeched with animal lust as he tried to devour himself ... not entirely without success" (373). "Space³," the mysterious new dimension traversed in several stories, is an irrational realm of "raw pleasure" in "The Colonel Came Back From the Nothing-at-All" (where it is described though not named), enraged grief in "Drunkboat," and consuming hunger in "Three to a Given Star"—always, it threatens the personalities of voyagers, luring them to destruction. In "The Game of Rat and Dragon" (1956), deep space likewise invites insanity by unleashing "the primordial id itself, the volcanic source of life" (167). The space dragons in that tale can be slain only by the "light bombs" with which Smith's planofforming ships are equipped: human pin-lighters and cat-partners literally hurl enlightenment into the gloom of deep space, protecting the ships from an enemy that always strikes from "below": "There was something *underneath* space itself which was alive" (164; emphasis added).¹⁴

Smith also juxtaposes mentality and desire (mind and body) in "Scanners Live in Vain." The Scanners are all mind, having agreed to the surgical disconnection of every bodily sense except vision in order to protect them from what Smith calls "the Pain-of-Space" (70), which overloads unprotected living things, flooding them (like Benjacomin Bozart) with the "First Effect," "the need for death" (75). Powerfully in control, disciplined, Scanners can even will their blood "away from anger," as in the story's famous opening sentences (65). But always, Scanners must think about feeling: strong emotion threatens to move the needles on their chest-boxes past "*Danger*" to "*Overload*." And Martel's struggling marriage can only be a "brave experiment" (84) given the Scanners' virtual castration; only through use of the "cranching wire" is "begetting" possible (77).

Paul Linebarger may have had every reason to fear the secret workings of Downdeep, to acknowledge (even though aware of their limits) "true mentality" and enlightenment as governing entities. For if he was even partly the inspiration for Robert Lindner's patient "Kirk Allen" in *The Fifty Minute Hour*, this Lieutenant-Colonel had himself come back from "the Nothing-at-all"—the Space³ of a psychotic episode. Let me emphasize that some details do not fit. In Lindner's account, Kirk Allen was born in 1918 in Hawaii; Paul Linebarger was born five years earlier in the US. Allen's father, a naval officer always called "The Commodore," was "an old man when he married"; his wife was very much younger. Linebarger's father, always called "The Judge," was not, however, that much older than his wife: this was a second marriage for both. (Further details on Linebarger's parents and his early life are given in the

Postscript.) Kirk Allen's first language is said to be a Polynesian dialect, while Paul Linebarger lived in rural Mississippi as a small child. But age six is a year of horrors both for Kirk Allen and Paul Linebarger: Allen's Polynesian nurse dies, and Paul Linebarger's left eye is lost, an accident that occurs in Honolulu. (In the place of residence at age six, the two childhoods coincide). Kirk Allen remembers as constricting the western clothing he was forced to assume after an early childhood spent in native costume (or undress): "everything became—well—tight" (233), wording echoed by Smith's Tice Angerhelm in a passage quoted above. Allen is said by Lindner to be a scientist at Los Alamos; by the later 1940s Linebarger, still a military intelligence consultant in the Army reserves, was teaching at SAIS in Washington, D.C., though during World War II, his wife Margaret Snow lived at Los Alamos, where her father was a mathematician with the Manhattan Project (Elms, e-mail communication); Los Alamos is also mentioned in the dedication to *Ria* (1947).

So far the divergences are not that substantial: Lindner would most likely have altered details in order to preserve confidentiality. Kirk Allen's sexual dilemma is said to stem from his childhood seduction by a governess; Lindner reports that he entirely avoided sexual encounters afterwards. Paul Linebarger was the father of two when he would have been consulting Lindner, though his first marriage was collapsing. Finally, Kirk Allen's delusion—a belief that he could will himself off this planet, leaving earth and materializing in a distant part of the galaxy that he ruled as a space "Lord" (Lindner 250)—is said to have been rooted in a fantasy of his mid-teens that began when he read a novel whose protagonist had exactly his name; he began to pretend that these stories were "biographies" recording his own future. Paul Linebarger's name is not "John Carter" or close to any other possibility, so that detail cannot be made to fit. Yet if E.E. ("Doc") Smith were the writer, and the Grey Lensman tales the catalyst—those stories are, in the expanses of time and space traversed and the heavily visual symbolism, similar to Smith's tales of scanners and pin-lighters—the name in common would be the adopted surname "Smith." Indeed, given the near-effacement of his own identity in that of a larger-than-life (and often absent) father, the adolescent Paul Linebarger might well have sought some surrogate "parent" and alternative identity among the popular authors of the 1930s.

But the strongest evidence of a link between Paul Linebarger and Kirk Allen lies in the parallels between Lindner's description of a crisis in his patient's therapy and a moment of crisis in Smith's story "The Burning of the Brain," whose title in itself may be taken as a broad hint of psychological content. Robert Lindner, a psychiatrist based in Baltimore, reports that Kirk Allen, on being asked by a superior officer why his work had become sketchy, had answered that he would "try to spend more time on this planet" (224), leading to his referral for psychiatric treatment. Kirk Allen experiences space travel much as Smith's heroes describe the experience of Space³. "In some way I could not comprehend, by merely desiring it to be so," Allen tells Lindner, "I

had crossed the immensities of Space, broken out of Time" (251). After a year, the delusion proving invincible, Lindner reports that he decided to enter into Allen's psychosis, immersing himself in the notes, illustrations, stories, and astronomical charts and maps that his patient has brought to him (255-56). The psychiatrist soon drives a wedge into "Kirk's" certainty that he is not insane but instead gifted with a "wild talent" for teleportation across the galaxies (251), when he points out that the mathematics of some of Kirk's "star maps" "are way off" (270). For the first time, Allen becomes distraught: "'Well,' I comforted, 'it's not very serious, after all'.... 'Not serious!' he exploded.... 'Why, man, these maps are used by my pilots. No wonder I've lost so many ships!'" (272).

Lindner's office overlooked Mount Vernon Place in Baltimore, a setting he emphasizes: "The scene was ... my office, high above the noisy streets of Baltimore.... [T]he monument at Mt. Vernon Place and, beyond, the busy harbor, had the charm of an old print. Inside, it was warm and quiet" (287). In an ensuing scene, Lindner remembers how Kirk Allen "stood by" that same window, first looking down into Mt. Vernon Place and then over at Lindner, on the day that he admits he has returned to reality:

He leaned across and picked up the note book.... "It's a lie, all of it. I've been making it up.... I realized that I've been deluding myself for years; that there never have been any 'trips,' that it was all just—just insanity."

"Then why," I asked, "why did you pretend? Why did you keep on telling me...?"

"Because I felt I had to," he said. "Because I felt *you wanted me to.*" The last words echoed and re-echoed in the silent room.... Then they faded, to be replaced by the normal sounds of the morning— ... the closing of a door down the hall, and the honking of horns from the street nine stories below. (290; italics in original)

In "The Burning of the Brain," too, Go-Captain Magno Taliano can traverse space telepathically, can "plow space with his living brain if the instruments failed" (177); his ship, the *Wu-Feinstein*, is a fanciful simulation of Mount Vernon: "[it] had no need for metal walls. It was built to resemble an ancient, prehistoric estate named Mount Vernon, and when it sailed between the stars it was encased in its own rigid and self-renewing field of force" (179). The same contrast that Lindner emphasizes—between the leisurely pace of daily life around Mount Vernon Place and the stark psychodrama of Kirk Allen's recognition scene—occurs in "The Burning of the Brain: "The passengers went through a few pleasant hours of strolling on the grass, enjoying the spacious rooms, chatting beneath a marvelous simulacrum of an atmosphere-filled sky. Only in the planoforming room did the Go-Captain know what happened" (179). The carefree passengers on the lawns of Mount Vernon form a contrast to Taliano, who is, at the moment dramatized by the story, losing his mind, attempting to save his ship by piloting it mentally. And Taliano's brain is destroyed by the same problem that shocks Kirk Allen out of psychosis: an

unprecedented failure of the “lock-sheets” (star-charts) that could guide the ship forward and an equally inexplicable failure of the Emergency Return sheet (181). The Go-Captain rescues the *Wu-Feinstein*, but burns out his brain “cell by cell.” “This was indeed his last trip” (184).

If Paul Linebarger was Kirk Allen, the Go-Captains in Smith’s sf are at least partly rooted in a self-portrait or snapshot of himself at a by-gone point of crisis; again, he is sf’s poet in this recollection of strong emotion in subsequent (comparative) tranquillity. And Lindner may have inspired not only the physician-narrator of “The Colonel Came Back” but also Smith’s “Stop-Captains,” prosaic figures who do the routine docking and unloading for the exhausted Go-Captains as they “come back” from deepest space. But as Freud wrote that dreams do, Smith’s story reverses the real-life scenario, for “Kirk Allen” is returning from madness while Magno Taliano is descending into it.¹⁵

And one further echo of Kirk Allen’s case history may be seen in Taliano’s ancient wife Dolores Oh, a fiercely possessive former beauty who is gladdened by his regression into childish imbecility—hence into her total control—at the story’s conclusion. For as Lindner defines the genesis of Kirk Allen’s illness, his desperate fantasies of escape from his body stemmed from an extended period of sexual abuse when he was eleven by “Miss Lillian,” a possessive and predatory governess in her thirties. Miss Lillian may not have been as old as Dolores Oh, but she was—as Dolores appears—three times the age of her sexual victim. Lillian, though a common name of the day, may have some significance in being also the name of Paul Linebarger’s mother. Lindner is hardly hinting at incest, but he may be leaving clues to his patient’s identity. In fact, Lillian Bearden Linebarger was like Dolores Oh in one respect, being by all accounts very manipulative and controlling. Over forty when she married Judge Linebarger, she also may have been perceived by her son as being (like Dolores Oh) unusually ancient as well as unusually powerful and beloved.¹⁶

The referring physician who first called Lindner about Kirk Allen explained the army’s dilemma to the psychiatrist: “Washington sent him out to do a key job, and until a few weeks ago he was going great guns. But lately he’s out of contact with the work so much and for so long that something’s got to be done about it” (224). There may be a parallel in Smith’s story “Nancy.” Gordon Greene, a lieutenant in the Space Service, is told that he will have two options on his coming voyage: to endure the hell of space or to choose happiness but ignominy via the “Nancy” option, which will ensure his survival but cost him his military career. Desperately lonely after several years in space, the Lieutenant does choose failure and learns that the last-resort virus with which he has injected himself (provided in case of emergency by the Space Service) creates a person, “Nancy,” who introduces herself to him as “the illusion you always wanted” (635). Although Nancy is just a mental projection of the lieutenant’s own wishes—as in Smith’s “The Good Friends” (1963), the plot is reminiscent of Theodore Sturgeon’s “Bulkhead” (1955)—their relationship is so satisfying and complex that Greene fails in his mission. No longer caring about

anything but Nancy, he is no longer fit for duty. As she explains to him, "All your imagination is going into making me. All your extra thoughts are of me.... [T]here are none left over for emergencies and there is nothing left over for the Space Service. You are doing the minimum, that's all" (637).

"Nancy" may look obliquely back at the years spent under the influence of the consuming "Space Lord" fantasy that Lindner describes. The psychiatrist writes that his initial screening of "Kirk Allen" created a strong impression of "the life-sustaining necessity of his psychosis" (253). It could be coincidence, but in "Nancy," too, Lieutenant Greene resorts to an elaborate fantasy simply in order to go on living. Whether or not he was Dr. Lindner's patient, Linebarger does, in many of his stories—"Scanners Live in Vain," "Alpha Alpha Boulevard," and "Angerhelm," as well as "Nancy"—contrast heroic distinction with a quiet domestic life, imagined or real.¹⁷

Propaganda Man

You are fighting against *men*. Your purpose ... is to make them change their minds.—*Psychological Warfare*

Critical discussion of Smith, probably because of its effort to define his central extrapolative premises, has often attempted to pull him in under an ideological umbrella of some kind. This has created competing and incompatible summaries and interpretations. John Clute's entry on Smith in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* introduces him as "right-wing in politics" (1121), for instance, while in *Age of Wonders*, David Hartwell summarizes the style and purpose of Smith's stories as "allegorical (Christian)" (129). Darko Suvin has focused on the intersection of religion and politics in these stories, defining Linebarger's values as those of

both a High Anglican cum Mason, that is, intensely religious in a very specific bourgeois way that identifies the nation-state with the supreme transcendental value, and an important member and ideologist of the US intelligence establishment during the Cold War, that is intensely political in a very specific right-wing way that equates flexible piety toward the past with imperial renewal. (*Positions* 209)

But others have argued just as confidently that Smith's stories are liberal fables, especially in their critique of violence and their support of the US civil rights movement. His portrayal of the underpeople, says Arthur Burns, is a "social allegory of the American Negro" (19).¹⁸ Karen Hellekson praises as central Smith's benevolent concern for humane behavior (126), and Gary K. Wolfe and Carol T. Williams also have emphasized his celebration of the "majesty of kindness" (the phrase is derived from C'mell's description of the seventh Lord Jestocost [412]) (52). Smith's current critical eclipse may follow from this fundamental division of opinion even among the handful of scholars who acknowledge his importance. And while it is difficult to imagine how a consensus might be constructed across this central chasm, it is at least clear that Smith cannot be, simultaneously and 100% of the time, both a right-wing Christian apologist and a liberal secular humanist.¹⁹

My own view is that it is mistaken to attempt to derive simple didactic messages from a style so pointedly equivocal. It is at any rate strange that Linebarger's propaganda textbook *Psychological Warfare* (1948; I will be citing the 1954 edition, which adds a Cold War section [vi]) has never been brought into the discussion about his perceived values and message. For as the numerous photographs of "leaflet bombs" in this book attest, Linebarger devoted much thought to the power of written messages to discourage mayhem; the leaflet bombs were substitutes for more destructive cargo. Psychological warfare is for him an alternative to violence, an effort "to win military gains without military force" (37). He emphasizes strategies that encourage hostile nations to stop fighting or (in the Cold War revision of 1954) to delay overt hostilities. Linebarger provides a history of psychological warfare that begins fancifully with a section on the Bible ("The Use of Panic by Gideon" [3]). But most of his textbook considers in detail which pamphlets and posters worked, and which did not, during World Wars I and II and Korea.

He defines three basic types of propaganda message:

White propaganda is issued from an acknowledged source, usually a government.... This type of propaganda is associated with overt psychological operations.

Grey propaganda does not clearly identify any source.

Black propaganda purports to emanate from a source other than the true one. This type of propaganda is associated with covert psychological warfare operations. (44)

Given that Smith did not sign his sf with his real name or reveal his identity to his readers during his lifetime, we see that according to his own classification, his writings are a kind of "black propaganda" or covert operation. Conceal-



Figure 76. Korean Leaflet Bomb, Early Model. An M16A1 cluster adapter being loaded at the FEC printing plant in Yokohama (1 November 1950). The bomb-type adapter will contain 22,500 (5" by 8") psychological warfare leaflets.

ment, not revelation, is his business. And Smith's ideal reader is a reader, sifting and pondering, not a mere consumer of words. Linebarger invents just such a compliant consumer in *Psychological Warfare* and calls him Propaganda Man. Target of all psy-war strategies, Propaganda Man is a composite sketch of the enemy arrived at by defining him as a single person. Not just a statistically-derived everyman, s/he is the average person likely to be influenced by written or

broadcasted (mis)information. Propaganda Man is, in short, indoctrinated.

Propaganda Man is created in Paul Linebarger's textbook and, I think, dismantled in Cordwainer Smith's sf. Such heroes as Martel embody singularity

to the point of freakishness. There are limits: open the mind too wide, make the first-person too singular, and the pain-of-space (a zone of total unreason) will take over. But Linebarger's training as a propagandist led him to believe that indoctrination, with its false promise of stability, was just as destructive of identity. To come into their humanity (their "heroism"), his heroes must first shed their social programming—stop believing what they have always been told and begin to think and act for themselves. One example is Paul, narrator of "Alpha Ralpa Boulevard," who at first accepts without question the Instrumentality's re-invention of him (at age twenty-six) as both "French" and madly in love with a woman he has known all his life but has never been attracted to until his sojourn in a hospital. Paul (like Martel) enters his own story as Propaganda Man. His ethical superiority to Virginia and Macht is revealed only later, in instances of thoughtful consideration for the despised underpeople. Virginia, by contrast, is at first a hero in her determination to discover how "real" their love can be, given its origin in government control and brainwashing. But her callous indifference to the underpeople eventually disqualifies her. Holding on to what she has been taught to believe about the superiority of "true men," she stifles in herself the sparks of latent heroism.²⁰

In Smith's sf, independent thinking has everything to do with being a "true man" rather than merely a pawn of the State. In *Psychological Warfare*, Linebarger argues that the Allies won World War II precisely because their soldiers and populace were freer to think and act and therefore—this is characteristic of his thinking—freer of unreasoning hatred and "dogmatism":

Americans could use and apply any expedient psychological weapon We did not have to square it with Emperor myths, the Führer principle, or some other rigid, fanatical philosophy. The enemy enjoyed the positive advantage of having an indoctrinated army and people; we enjoyed the countervailing advantage of having skeptical people, with no inward theology.... The scientific character of our psychology puts us ahead of opponents wrapped up in dogmatism who must check their propaganda against such articles of faith as Aryan racialism or the Hegelian philosophy of history. (25)

The work of propaganda, says Linebarger, is not the dissemination of ideology: nationalist tirades are self-indulgent and always a mistake. The psy-warrior's task is the creation of a bond of sympathy with Propaganda Man in order to "bring him over," a phrase used often. Linebarger describes the failure of surrender leaflets distributed by the Allies in Asia at the end of World War II, which had to be reworded because the first version ("I Surrender: Attention, American Soldiers") was not calculated to reach its intended audience. Dryly observing that the leaflet failed "because it indicated that the Japanese soldier using it wished to surrender. This was very vulgar and depressing" (237n), Linebarger notes that the more tactful revision ("Attention American Soldiers! I Cease Resistance") was not "a humiliation" and therefore did "bring Japanese in" (239n). As defined in this textbook, psychological warfare is fundamentally rhetorical, a matter of using words to encourage more peaceful behavior:

“Propaganda may be described ... as organized persuasion by non-violent means. War itself may be considered to be, among other things, a violent form of persuasion” (25). Philosophic “truth” is not the province of propaganda, of course, which is aimed, like all forms of rhetoric, at the contingent and subjective. Truth even becomes a subject or person—the turtle-girl T’ruth—in Cordwainer Smith’s science fiction.

Paul Linebarger’s work as a propagandist made him focus on how important belief is as a foundation for behavior. But it also made him value skepticism: “the first lesson of all propaganda is *reasoned disbelief*” (38). He points out that the word propaganda originally derived from “that department of the Vatican which had the duty of propagating the faith” (38), and his textbook argues that what people take on faith is a powerful motivator. But his fiction shows how often beliefs are rooted not in “truth” but in cultural bias or indoctrination. In his novel *Carola*, published the same year as *Psychological Warfare*, “dogma” is defined not as universally human but as quintessentially western: “The Chinese had conquered the earth ... by living with it.... Their hottest passions were not the golden furies of the West—harsh justice, the bitter glory of revenge, the sweet sharp satisfaction of dogma” (207). Linebarger’s most despairing novel portrays the consolations of Western faith as delusions: “[Carola] had let the time slide, waiting for the interposition of some external force, when it was the tragedy of individual men and women that there were no external forces; under the sun, there were just people, and from what people did to themselves there was no further appeal or intervention” (246). I imagine that in his work as a propagandist, Linebarger had himself turned too many dogmatic “truths” to contingent persuasive purposes for his own writing to be anything but dubious about the things that people take on faith. His textbook, at any rate, suggests the error of critics who assume that because the author worked in military intelligence, his sf must be actively engaged in the dissemination of propaganda. On the contrary, an inclination to doubt and an independent pursuit of options are what distinguish Cordwainer Smith’s heroes (and ideal readers) from Paul Linebarger’s compliant Propaganda Man.

With Alice Sheldon, who published sf under the name James Tiptree, Jr. (and has, despite her work with the CIA, escaped being stigmatized as right wing), Paul Linebarger was one of two major postwar sf writers known to have worked occasionally as a spy. Fifty years later, some of his Cold War mind-games seem strange indeed; the memoir posted on Rosana Hart’s website describes, for instance, his mass production of party invitations to a reception at the Russian embassy in Mexico City, creating an embarrassing situation for the Soviets when far too many guests attended. But such small disruptions are in keeping with the strategies outlined in *Psychological Warfare*, which emphasize the role of propaganda in undermining enemy morale in order to make hostile nations feel less aggressive.

Linebarger’s second wife and former student at SAIS, Genevieve, often worked with him when he traveled for the CIA (and US Army Intelligence)

during the postwar years (Gutner 12; Elms, e-mail communication); in “The Ballad of Lost C’mell,” Smith praises women’s aptitude for intelligence work (404). But there is one almost exclusively male group that his sf addresses, and it is not fellow “psy-warriors” and spies but the cadre of postwar sf writers. On the evidence of his dialogue with their stories, Smith felt a strong affinity with this group, though (like Scanner Martel) he rebelled in some ways against the “Space discipline” of the “Confraternity” (82).

In the Way of Opposites

[H]e read [sf] in the way of opposites. He was very strange about Arthur C. Clarke. I mean, sometimes he would say, “That man does not understand a single thing,” by which he meant about people. On the other hand he would say that there is a certain classic kind of SF writing, and nobody does it better than Clarke.... [He] thought well of Heinlein, but thought that he often went astray.... He liked some of Van Vogt’s work, and he confessed to enjoying Fritz Leiber. —Arthur Burns, recalling his conversations with Paul Linebarger

I have mentioned two stories—“Nancy” and “The Good Friends”—that pay homage to Theodore Sturgeon’s “Bulkhead,” in which a pilot who thinks he has become best friends with a young fellow-voyager (separated only by a bulkhead, but reachable by speaker) discovers on his return that he has been communing with a projection of his own personality as a boy. In “The Crime and the Glory of Commander Suzdal” (1964), Smith bows to “Microcosmic God” (1941). Sturgeon’s central character, a super-genius, creates a tiny race of even brighter entities called Neoterics that evolve very quickly; by observing them solve the life-threatening problems he devises for them, Kidder gets ideas for technological breakthroughs. Smith’s Commander Suzdal likewise manipulates evolution: when his ship is menaced by the hostile Arachosians, he sends eight cats back two million years to Arachosia’s moon with genetically implanted instructions about how they will evolve, including “Become civilized. Learn speech. You will serve man. When man calls you will serve man” (212). Just as the Arachosians are cutting through his ship’s hull, the evolved cats do materialize in tiny ships, coming to Suzdal’s rescue from the moon now called Catland: “The cats came.... The cats who had not existed a moment before.... Their mission was to reach Suzdal, to rescue him, to obey him, and to damage Arachosia” (213). Smith’s conclusion revises Sturgeon’s, in which—little as this irresponsible scientist deserves their devotion—the distraught Neoterics disobey Kidder’s conditioning, intervening to save his life. For Smith’s Suzdal faces consequences for creating beings whose sole purpose is to save his ship: the Instrumentality, who don’t permit people to play god, sentence Suzdal to eternal punishment on Shayol, the hell-planet.

Both Smith and Sturgeon are masters of the short sf story, and both focus on character motivations. But Sturgeon is less influenced by Freud and, at least in his sf, much more optimistic. (In such fantasy stories as “Bianca’s Hands” [1947], Sturgeon can go far beyond Smith’s lyric melancholy into wrenching scenes of horror.) In *More Than Human* (1954), Sturgeon’s best-known sf novel, “homo gestalt,” the first evolutionary leap for humanity since the

emergence of *homo sapiens*, is created by telepathic contact among various (individually) defective mentalities: a tattered group of unwanted children combine their minds to form a “more than human” consciousness. This image of *homo gestalt* is, like Smith’s Alpha Ralpa Boulevard, a symbolic icon that suggests Sturgeon’s vision of science fiction itself; it conveys a strong affirmation of humanity, but in the aggregate. Sturgeon, for instance, gently hands the future over to the destroyers of North America in the bittersweet post-holocaust story “Thunder and Roses” (1947), whose hero has discovered a way to bring equal destruction to the aggressors, but who is persuaded to let the victors survive so that the species will continue:

He looked down through the darkness for his hands.... These hands ... like the hands of all men, ... could by their small acts make human history or end it. Whether this power ... was that of a billion hands, or whether it came to a focus in these two ... was suddenly unimportant.... “You’ll have your chance,” he said into the far future. (21-26)

Smith takes no consolation in any thought of those “billion hands,” dramatizing instead the “first person singular,” the lonely quest of heroes. Even in Sturgeon’s “The Man Who Lost the Sea” (1959), the revelation that the main character is a heroic explorer, dying alone after the first crash landing on Mars, is reserved as a final surprise. The absolute isolation of the protagonist is, by contrast, the invariable ground of heroism in Smith’s stories.

Smith was interested in other sf writers, too. A playful echo of *Childhood’s End* occurs in *Norstrilia*. Lavinia, left behind on Norstrilia and fretting for news of Rod McBan, is given a drug by Rod’s aunt Doris and moves mentally across the light-years of space, seeing Rod alive and well on faraway Earth. Then she travels into Clarkeian profundity, recalling Jeffrey Greggson’s dream-travels in *Childhood’s End* (170-75) when she calls out in a (drunken) trance, “‘I see the proud pale people with strong hands and white eyes, the ones who built the palace of the Governor of Night.’... *She had glimpsed the Daimoni in their home world*” (127; italics in original). A major difference between the two writers lies in Smith’s refusal to imagine alien interventions (such as that of the Overlords in *Childhood’s End*) or any transcendence of the “temporary” nature of human consciousness (as in Clarke’s vision of the Overmind). A major similarity is that both Smith and Clarke are internationalists, choosing heroes (and villains) from a variety of cultures—not limiting themselves, like so many postwar sf writers, to Americans.

It is not surprising that Robert A. Heinlein, who dominated American sf in the postwar period, is addressed in several of Smith’s stories. Elms has noted the parody of Heinlein’s title “The Man Who Sold the Moon” (1950) in the title under which the first part of *Norstrilia* was published: “The Boy Who Bought Old Earth” (1964; Elms, *Norstrilia* xii). This same section of *Norstrilia* recalls one of Heinlein’s novels for children, *The Star Beast* (1954), which turns on the revelation in mid-story that John Thomas Stuart’s alien pet “LummoX” considers John Thomas *her* pet (Heinlein 179). Smith says of Rod’s genetically

coded entryway to his family's treasure-house: "It was not really his door. He was its boy" (40). Heinlein may have been reading Smith, too. In "The Boy Who Bought Old Earth," Rod's trusty family retainer is an ancient, contraband war-computer that can lie (41); this supercomputer, who has long ontological debates with Rod, may have had some influence on Mycroft/Mike/Michelle in *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* (1966), a super-computer who tells jokes and masterminds a revolution.

In "Alpha Ralpa Boulevard," the portion of the "northern side" that incorporates a moving roadway (392) glances at Heinlein's early classic "The Roads Must Roll" (1940); indeed, Smith's story could be read as a rejoinder. The central symbolic icon in each is a highway, but the very fact that Smith's is elevated conveys visionary interests at odds with Heinlein's more "down to earth" view of roadways and the people who build and use them. The difference between Heinlein's large-scale conveyor belt for commuters and Smith's barely visible sky-borne "vapor trail," inaccessible to all but the boldest of "true men," recalls a difference noted by Walter Benjamin between the modern word "street" and the more mystical connotations of the "older term 'way.'" The way brings with it the terrors of wandering.... The person who travels a street ... has no need of any ... guiding hand" (519). In his early sf especially, Heinlein offers a straightforward pathway that moves his readers along to a point of resolution. The problem driving the plot of "The Roads Must Roll"—a deputy has sown discontent among the workers entrusted with the maintenance of the highway—is decisively solved by its hero's decision to monitor more closely in future the "temperament classification test" (109). "[T]here had never been a failure" (108) of that test, though Van Kleek, the troublemaker, has been "falsifying" the results and promoting other "bad apples" (109): "The real failure had been in men. Well, the psychological classification tests must be improved to ensure that the roads employed only conscientious, reliable men" (108). In Heinlein's fiction, a test administered by a scientist can infallibly determine good or bad character, while in Smith's stories, people are tested at unpredictable moments of crisis and confusion. Their behavior under stress reveals their true nature—including, in "Alpha Ralpa Boulevard," Macht's instinct for cruelty, Virginia's unlovely contempt for underpeople, and hesitant Paul's sole (but saving) grace of kindness. Life, not a trained psychologist, administers the test of character in Smith. His heroes cannot, like Heinlein's commuters (or Tom Godwin's pilot in "The Cold Equations"), ensure that they will arrive safely at their planned destination merely by re-instituting standard protocols after some temporary disruption. They do not travel a street laid down for the sole purpose of taking them home, but thoughtfully, tentatively, pursue an upward "way."

Smith's implied dialogue with Frank Herbert has been briefly touched upon. Paul Linebarger worked as a propagandist with US Army Intelligence in Egypt during the postwar period, but his late story "On the Sand Planet" (1965) also evidently responds to the early installments of "Dune World" in *Analogue* (1963-

64). Smith's Mizzer, like Herbert's Arrakis, is a desert land with a rich spiritual tradition that may have been implanted from offworld. The blue eyes of Smith's robots in "Under Old Earth" (1966) recall the results of melange-addiction among Herbert's Fremens; and melange itself, a substance that extends life and is found only on Arrakis, suggests Smith's stroom, the immortality drug distilled from sick sheep found only on Norstrilia. It is possible, too, that Smith's original spelling of "true men" ("trumen," according to Karen Hellekson, who has worked with Smith's archive at the University of Kansas) echoes Herbert's "Fremen" (free-men). Conversely, Herbert may have taken the idea for Salusa Secundus, the Imperial prison planet, from Smith's hell-planet, "Shayol"; that story appeared in 1961.

It is equally difficult to know in which direction influence is flowing in the case of "Himself in Anachron," first published in 1993 but written in 1946 and possibly revised during the early 1960s (though no copy of an intermediate draft survives). But additions by Smith or by his widow after his death evidently address Godwin's "The Cold Equations" (1954), in which a stowaway threatens the medical mission of a tiny ship that has no reserves of fuel to carry an extra passenger. Smith's ship is likewise "not built for two" (193). Caught in a "Knot in Time," his newlyweds, Tasco and Dita, eject everything expendable but find that their ship still must be lightened: "one of them must go, be lost in space and time forever" (194). Godwin's pilot jettisons the stowaway Marilyn Cross to save his mission—the medicine he carries is needed to cure an outbreak of a fatal fever—while Smith's hero saves his bride by jumping out of the ship himself. Like Godwin's Marilyn Cross, Smith's Dita is vulnerable, young, attractive—a civilian woman who has difficulty comprehending the stern necessity (scientific principle) that demands a human sacrifice. And like Godwin's hero, Tasco makes small adjustments to create time for explanations and goodbyes: "To postpone, if only for minutes, the eternal parting, he pretended to find some other instrument which could be disposed of, and sent through the hatch one person's share of the remaining nutrient" (194).

If he did revise this story in 1961, it would be like Smith to revisit Godwin's plot, in Arthur Burns's words, "in the way of contraries." But it is also possible that the first version of "Anachron," submitted to *Astounding* but rejected by John W. Campbell in "1946 or 1947" (Elms, email communication), itself influenced Campbell and Godwin. For the typescript of 1946—eight years before "The Cold Equations" was published—contains striking parallels not only in plot but in wording: "One of the two of them had to go. He couldn't murder her, so he had to widow her" (qtd. by Elms, email communication).

Anne McCaffrey's story "The Ship Who Sang" (1961) may have influenced Smith's "Three to a Given Star" (1965), with its sentient spaceship named Folly: "She had been a beautiful woman once and now she was the control of a small spaceship which fled across emptiness" (567). In "The Burning of the Brain," the idea of a spaceship that looks like Mount Vernon (lawns and acres included) echoes James Blish's "Okie" stories (appearing from 1950), in which

“spindizzies”—antigravity devices—enable whole cities to traverse space (cf. *They Shall Have Stars*; 1956). The steel teeth with which the convicts are fitted in “A Planet Named Shayol” (1961) may have lodged as an image in Philip K. Dick’s memory, inspiring the stainless steel teeth of Palmer Eldritch (*The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, written in 1964). Smith’s Daimoni, too—“people of Earth extraction, who came back from somewhere beyond the stars” with strange new talents (402)—may have had some effect on Dick’s planning of that novel, though the Daimoni are gifted architects, not monstrous changelings like Eldritch. Finally, in *A Scanner Darkly* (1977), Dick’s title evidently remembers the grim fraternity of voluntary cyborgs described in “Scanners Live in Vain.”

To trace Smith’s influence on more recent sf, one need think only of Norman Spinrad’s *The Void Captain’s Tale* (1983), with its concentrated and poetic imagery linking desire, telepathy, and space-travel; or to note Smith’s curious anticipations of the cyberpunks: “He remembered his last trial, himself wired and plugged into the witness stand” (“A Planet Named Shayol” 421); “He felt the squares of space around him, sensed himself in the middle of an immense grid, a cubic grid, full of nothing” (“The Game of Rat and Dragon” 163). The grotesque perpetual life-extension chosen by the Tessier-Ashpool clan, inhabitants of the Villa Straylight in William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984), seems anticipated in the plot of “On the Storm Planet,” in which T’ruth is the devoted servant of “Mister and Owner Madigan,” an ancient and very wealthy man who can postpone death almost indefinitely by remaining in a cataleptic trance (502-503).

Popular sf has retained not Smith’s ideas so much as his visionary imagery: his imagination of a future integration of biological and mechanical—and human and animal—consciousness, and his portrayal of a deep space that is a dreamlike site of altruistic (not solipsistic) self-discovery. Bachelard explains the phenomenology of such flights as Smith’s:

The voyage into distant worlds of the imaginary ... takes the shape of a voyage into the land of the infinite. In the realm of imagination, every immanence takes on a transcendence. The very law of poetic expression is to go beyond thought.... The infinite is the realm in which imagination is affirmed as pure imagination.... There the images take flight and are lost.... We understand figures by their transfiguration. The word is a prophecy. The imagination is thus a psychological world beyond. (23)

Smith’s fictions are not a flight from reality, for they lead into “a psychological world beyond.” He dramatizes, like many writers of his day, conflicts of intellect and desire—a matter that John Huntington has addressed at length in *Rationalizing Genius*, the best book to date on the classic sf short story. But Smith differs from his peers in using fundamentally equivocal (symbolic) representations that depart from popular tradition in aspiring to a realm that is “beyond thought” in being beyond conventional extrapolative logic.

In “On the Storm Planet,” Casher O’Neill is asked to help educate the savage “wind-people” (probably an allusion to Marion Zimmer Bradley’s story

of 1959); he decides that what might be useful is not his experiences but his desires: "Use me ... to print on them nothing from my intellectual knowledge, but everything from my emotional makeup. Knowing things would not help these children. But *wanting*—" (536). Paul Linebarger likewise bequeathed to popular sf an imprinting of his emotional make-up, though the formidable intellect of the man lurks in the background, too. So his legacy is dual: the richly allusive, teasingly elliptical plots that he popularized during the 1960s, and a vision of emotion (constructive and destructive) as a force in the human future. His close reading of other sf of his day constitutes a deep analysis, even psychoanalysis, of sf's emerging vision of the future. And there is no doubt that the critique of the popular tradition imbedded in his stories inspired subsequent writers. Ursula Le Guin noted during the 1970s that she returned to her adolescent interest in writing sf only after reading "Alpha Alpha Boulevard" in her early thirties: "I don't really remember what I thought when I read it, but what I think now I ought to have thought ... is: 'My God! *It can be done!*' " (italics in original; "Citizen" 22).

"I wish no living thing to suffer pain."—Percy Shelley's Prometheus, freeing himself from bondage in *Prometheus Unbound* (composed 1818-19)

"I saw it once. I saw the people fall, and I never want to see another person suffer again."—Terza Vomact in "When the People Fell"

"Punishment is ended. We will give you anything you want, but not the pain of another person."—Lady Joanna Gnade ("grace" in German), liberating Shayol

When I was nine ... we went to Mexico. My father's tales overwhelmed me when he talked about the young maidens sacrificed in the well at Chichen Itza, or when he showed us the murals of Diego Rivera in Mexico City, huge walls full of agony and suffering. From that summer onward, the themes of suffering and human cruelty became central issues in my life—inevitably separating me from my "normal" suburban friends.—Rosana Hart, Paul Linebarger's daughter

Painful quest and difficult recuperation, not aggression and violence, are the way pursued by Smith's heroes. It is not well-appointed spacecraft but human suffering (whether physical, emotional, or political) that moves his plot and such pilots as Rambo and Taliano—and is intended also to move his audience. In his emphasis on the link between heroism and the survival of pain, Smith's fiction again recalls that of Frank Herbert. In *Dune*, Paul Atreides's first test is the "gom jabbar," a Bene Gesserit ritual undergone to "determine if you're human" (9). Paul thinks the hand he has placed in the box held by a Reverend Mother has been burned off, but he endures the pain without complaint, and sees when he withdraws his hand that the pain was an illusion: he is uninjured. The pain dramatized by Smith is used not to show his heroes' stoicism but to help them attain an improved self-knowledge, as Casher O'Neill uses his reversals of fortune to become a more insightful person. No hero in Smith's stories, not even D'joan in "The Dead Lady of Clown Town," primarily seeks martyrdom or personal redemption. In this respect less like saints than like the heroes of classical Greece, they seek to discover what their painful lives might be good for.

Smith uses many elements in the portrayal of heroes in epic and tragedy (closely related genres, for as Aristotle notes in *Poetics*, epic, the older form, often incorporates one or two tragedies [93]). Among these elements are the quest or journey of the hero, pivotal recognition scenes (sometimes, as in “The Burning of the Brain,” tragic recognitions following which the hero is destroyed), the descent of the hero into the underworld (the stories of Space³; “A Planet Named Shayol”), the consultation of seers (the Abba Dingo in “Alpha Ralpa Boulevard”; T’ruth in “On the Storm Planet”), and the return to plots said to be already ancient, legendary, and mythic. A final classical motif is “machinery,” intervention in the hero’s destiny by divine or preternatural beings—seen in “Alpha Ralpa Boulevard,” in which telepathic birds rescue Paul; “The Lady Who Sailed *The Soul*,” in which Captain Grey-No-More miraculously appears to advise Helen America; and “Think Blue, Count Two,” in which an immortal laminated mouse-brain guards heroic Veeseey. Much sf employs these same motifs (they are striking components of Frank Herbert’s *Dune* novels), which do not in themselves explain this writer’s enigmatic power. I don’t think that Smith is merely showing off his spectacular literacy, either, though his frequent classical echoes do call into question the critical presumption that his allusions are always to Asian or Christian motifs. To a degree unmatched by any sf writer (then or now), Smith’s range is global—from popular US sf to European and Asian classics of many eras.²¹

I think that Smith uses techniques of classical characterization to transpose autobiographical references—to portray painful experiences in his life as heroic rather than merely abject. That characters are heroes in these stories means that, unlike his early protagonists Ria and Carola, they are never only “cases.” The difference between tragedy, epic, and the far-future tales of Smith is a matter of scale. Though his time-line and vision of the future are suitably comprehensive and vast, these are short stories, miniature epics (oxymoron is again appropriate). They are also parabolic epics, for his stories remain (in their only partial revelation of their backdrop) full of provocative gaps.

Or perhaps a better oxymoron still is personal epic.²² The adolescent Kirk Allen imagined that space operas were all-triumphant prophecies of his own future life. But in the stories of Smith there is always a risk that the hero will not come back. In “On the Storm Planet,” Smith stages a tense encounter between epic and tragic versions of (evidently) Paul Linebarger: recovering adventurer Casher O’Neill faces down legendary but still delusional Go-Captain John Joy Tree. As in most of Smith’s stories, the epic figure O’Neill wins out over the tragic, but the struggle is hard-fought. A few of his heroes are destroyed by the hostile forces they encounter. D’joan, a genetically-enhanced dog, is burned alive in “The Dead Lady of Clown Town.” And Go-Captain Magno Taliano is psychically burned, his higher consciousness consumed “cell by cell” (184), though he does succeed in bringing his passengers home. But for the most part Smith’s heroes, like Odysseus or Dante, journey into hell, experience its terrors, but then recuperate—return to tell their story. Even

simple beasts enact this ancient epic pattern: the horse of Pontoppidan in “On the Gem Planet” (1963) is exactly like Martel, Rambo, or Helen America in struggling, persisting, and finally “climbing out of ... hell to get back to people” (467).

In a letter written from India to his infant daughter during World War II, Linebarger confesses that his life has been spent “wandering through whole throngs of myself”; he is at least “‘Three Pauls’—Watching Paul, Watched Paul, and Living-and-Doing Paul” (qtd. in Elms, “Creation” 272). In Cordwainer Smith’s sf, Watching Paul became the Scanner, the Pin-Lighter, the Instrumentality. Watched Paul eluded scrutiny by secrecy about his identity as sf author. And living-and-doing Paul was transformed into a succession of questing, suffering, sensitive heroes. The sf genre evidently contained enough space for all the Pauls there were to function freely. And if Paul Linebarger’s difficult life provided him with a wealth of identity conflicts, his study of psychology, distinctive language and style, and command of multiple genres and cultures all combine in his sf to powerfully amplify (like Mother Hitton’s “telepathic relay”) the significance of these parables of chastened survival. Like John Joy Tree, Cordwainer Smith traveled light-years further than any of his peers, but unlike the mad Go-Captain, he was able to use what he learned during his struggles in the Up-and-Out. With singular gifts of literacy, humanity, and intellect, he opened up new territory for the sf genre, proving to a popular audience in the 1960s (and now, I hope, to readers and critics today) that none of the Pauls lived in vain.

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NOTES

All parenthetical references to Smith’s short fiction are to *The Rediscovery of Man*. Except for the epigraph’s “Himself in Anachron” (written in 1946, long expected to appear in Harlan Ellison’s *Last Dangerous Visions*, but first published in 1993 in *Rediscovery*), all parenthetical dates refer to the date of first publication. The typographical rendering of Smith’s term “Space³” is highly variable among critics and editions; I have followed *Rediscovery* in using the superscript.

Lee Weinstein’s “In Search of Kirk Allen” appeared in *The New York Review of*

Science Fiction after my own essay was in final form; I have space here only to say that, while I place no confidence in the accuracy of Dr. Lindner's dates—a line of inquiry that occupies much of the author's attention—Weinstein advances a very persuasive argument about the identity of the sf hero of the 1930s with whom "Kirk Allen" became obsessed (6).

1. Linebarger's archaic signature refuses popular sf's aura of advanced technology and futurism. A cordwainer—the word has roots in Middle English and Old French—makes leather shoes (a possible allusion to Chaucer, whose name in French means maker-of-shoes or hosier); a smith—from the Anglo-Saxon—heats and forges metal: a secondary meaning is "one who fashions a thing."

2. Robert Scholes and Eric Rabkin have been the most influential critics to classify Smith's sf as "space opera" (173). Yet unlike space opera's focus on conquering heroes (as in the finale of *Star Wars*, in which triumphant heroes accept a standing ovation and the gratitude of the galaxy), the parables of Smith dramatize bare survival, difficult recovery. Scholes and Rabkin intend no denigration by their classification: "Although the term 'space opera' is often used with condescension, this variety of science fiction, like Western fiction, often produces well-crafted narratives, in which adventurous deeds and serious human considerations are skillfully blended" (173). Yet as Brian Stableford's entry on "Space Opera" in *The SF Encyclopedia* notes, the term today "still retains a pejorative implication" (1138).

3. Smith's first schoolboy publication (*Rediscovery* prints a much later revision) considers a far future in which war has become "an enormous game" (*Rediscovery* 19). And in "Golden the Ship Was, Oh! Oh! Oh!" (1959), threatened war also precipitates a story. But Smith mainly focuses on the Instrumentality's effort to out-think the adversary: in a Cold War revisiting of Homer's Trojan horse, the story's ultimate weapon, an enormous mystery ship, is just a decoy.

4. Manipulations of credit are important, for example, in "Mother Hitton's Littul Kittons" (1961), "On the Gem Planet" (1963), and the early chapters of *Norstrilia*. According to Elms, Linebarger at 17 helped to negotiate a US loan of silver and wheat to China ("Creation" 266).

5. According to John J. Pierce, "most of the background for the Instrumentality saga was contained in a notebook that Linebarger accidentally left in a restaurant in Rhodes in 1965" (*Rediscovery* xiii).

6. The most important of the dead people in Smith's stories who help to change the world are Panc Ashash, in "The Dead Lady of Clown Town," whose personality was during her last illness transcribed to a computer; Citizen Agatha Madigan, whose knowledge is imprinted on T'ruth in "On the Storm Planet"; and Tice Angerhelm, who posts a message to his brother from the afterlife in "Angerhelm" (1959).

7. Lewis Padgett (Henry Kuttner and Catherine L. Moore) and Fredric Brown are like Smith in preferring eccentric plot-resolutions; like him, they are mid-century sf writers who nonetheless often resist "hard" extrapolative logic.

8. *Atomsk*, in which a secret Siberian atomic research site is sabotaged in a one-man raid, is dedicated in Russian to "future Russia, free, and therefore good." I thank Roman Kazmin for translating.

9. Helen America never knows why a vision of Captain Grey-No-More appears to instruct her when she cannot repair her ship; Veesev never understands (though she knows that she has been saved by) the laminated mouse-brain that rescues her from being raped and murdered by a deranged voyager.

10. In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the telepathic voice of Genly Ai sounds to Therem Harth like the voice of his dead brother (253).

11. Like the existential theologian Paul Tillich, Smith emphasizes that heroism is demonstrated by an immersion in being, the effort to achieve full psychic development or entelechy (a term echoed in the name Smith gives the leader of the underpeople, E'telekeli). As Leonard Wheatley paraphrases Tillich: "God is not a being but 'being itself'" (1). The final sentence of Tillich's most popular work, *The Courage to Be* (1952), captures the postwar, mid-century milieu—and something of the pessimistic humanism—of Smith: "*The courage to be is rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt*" (190; italics in original).

12. That Paul and Virginia do not recognize the bones as skulls—emblems of mortality—conveys how divorced from human reality the Instrumentality's misguided utopia has become.

13. In the opening pages of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud notes that, in Aristotle, dreams are said to be not of divine but of "daemonic" origin (36): "Dreams ... do not arise from supernatural manifestations but follow the laws of the human spirit, though the latter, it is true, is akin to the divine" (37). Unlike Philip K. Dick's Palmer Eldritch, who returns to the solar system as a demon in the usual sense of the term, Smith's post-human Daimoni are constructive, acting (as dreams do in Freud's account) to grant wishes—to make desires manifest instead of repressed. The two great Daimoni projects in Smith's stories are the Palace of the Governor of Night, a copy of the Temple of Diana at Ephesus acquired by one of Rod McBan's ancestors (and visible only to its possessor and his descendants), and the building/city/landing platform Earthport. Daimoni (or some other more-than-human agency) are implied but not stated as the architects/engineers of "Alpha Ralpa Boulevard" (385).

14. The "rat" and "dragon" of this story's title refer to the different ways that the predatory violence of deep space is perceived by the human telepaths (as dragons) and the cat-partners (as rats). But Smith's vision of a "partnering" of humans and felines may also allude to the Chinese zodiac, in which the rat and the dragon are considered ideal mates. If so, Smith's title refers to cat and human "Partners" (167) as well as to the story's menace.

15. Freud notes a difficulty in interpreting dreams, which "feel themselves at liberty ... to represent any element by its wishful contrary; so there is no way of deciding at first glance whether any element that admits of a contrary is present in the dream-thoughts as a positive or as a negative" (353).

16. Lillian Bearden Linebarger may be cast in Smith's sf as Casher O'Neill's bitter and rejecting mother, Trihaep (546-47), whose hostility O'Neill regrets but with which he has come to terms.

17. I wonder whether Linebarger's devout religious observances during the later 1950s and the 1960s—Arthur Burns reports that the Linebargers attended sung Mass every Sunday and said grace at every meal (9)—may not have been a safe way of re-introducing the aura of the miraculous into the daily routine of his more settled later life. Burns remembers that "his religion in a strange way meant a great deal to him—in a funny way, one might even say.... [W]hen he was ill in Mexico, he said he thought he was pretty bad and that the only thing to do was to invoke the Virgin Mary, because Mexico was her territory" (Foyster 19). Religious devotion (like the writing of sf) would not bring Linebarger's sanity into question, yet to be religious is to practice a socially acceptable form of alternative reality.

18. Elms questions the arguments of Terry Dowling and Arthur Burns that the

underpeople are a “device for representing American racial conflict” (“Origins” 173), arguing that the “homunculi”—Smith’s earliest term for the underpeople—were politically rooted in Linebarger’s sympathy for the mainland Chinese people under communism and imaginatively rooted in his fascination with H.G. Wells’s *Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896). He does quote a letter in which Linebarger boasts that the School of Advanced International Studies had been “chartered as non-segregated”—that phrase is echoed in Linebarger’s published history of SAIS. And he describes both the Linebargers’ close friendship with Eleanor Jackson, the African-American who kept house for them and died suddenly in 1963 at age forty-five in their spare bedroom (she was staying with the author, who was recuperating from an illness, while his wife was herself hospitalized). *Space Lords* is prefaced by a (peculiar) dedication to Eleanor Jackson, but Smith does her more justice in *Norstrilia*: after many adventures as Rod McBan’s surgically altered double on earth, Eleanor, Rod’s former house servant at the Station of Doom, is chosen in recognition of her courage and cheerful adaptability to become Roderick Eleanor, Lord of the Instrumentality.

19. J.J. Pierce has noted the interplay of opposites in Smith’s stories, but concludes that this is a dialectical pattern that proceeds to synthesis: Smith was a “synthesist, a man of ideas, and—more important than that—a reconciler of ideas” (*When Worlds* 168). The comprehensive survey of Terry Dowling likewise seeks to reconcile Smith’s contraries, which Dowling defines as “winning and losing,” by invoking Jungian archetypes (11, *passim*). By contrast, in *Rationalizing Genius* John Huntington has argued for the unusual “potential for ambiguity” even in “Scanners Live in Vain,” Smith’s first published sf story (88). Indeed, with the exception of a few comic tales that are plot-driven toward punch lines or surprise endings (e.g., “From Gustible’s Planet” [1962], which is a blatant science-fictionalization of Charles Lamb’s “A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig” [1823]), Smith typically invites alternative interpretations.

20. In *Norstrilia*, a minor character named Paul also has a cameo role as a Propaganda Man or dupe of the Instrumentality, patiently “brainscrubbing” a lady who has been gossiping with him in a coffee shop. Smith’s ironic portraits of compliant “Pauls” are probably significant, given Robert Lindner’s report of “Kirk Allen’s” fascination with fictional characters sharing his name—which also may explain Paul Linebarger’s deep interest in *Dune*’s Paul Atrides.

21. Smith’s transposition of Chinese literature is plain in “Western Science is so Wonderful”: its shape-shifting “Martian” hero finds a perfect disguise as a demon in China but moves on to Connecticut after taking the form of a “small, laughing Buddha seven inches high, carved in yellowed ivory” (*Rediscovery* 627). Both the sixteenth-century *Journey to the West* (also known as *Monkey*), whose protagonist is a shape-shifter, and the eighteenth-century *Story of the Stone* (also known as *Dream of the Red Chamber*) feature heroes who begin as pieces of stone (on which the writer carves “characters,” a story). *The Story of the Stone*, despite its fantastic frame, realistically traces an important family’s fall from imperial favor. *Monkey*, though more concerned with joking adventures, recreates a historical journey: “the Taoist patriarch Chiu Ch’u-ki (1148-1227) ... in 1219 was invited by Genghis Khan to visit him in Central Asia” (*Monkey* 3). Smith’s sf shares with Chinese fiction mixture of realistic/historical and magical characters; he also echoes plot details. The “pleasure caps” in “A Planet Named Shayol,” for instance, suggest—though in a typically contrary way—the pain-producing cap by which the master controls the Monkey on their journey (142).

22. One especially personal epic is “A Planet Named Shayol,” which addresses Paul Linebarger’s series of hospitalizations beginning in 1960 and also (in compressed form)

revisits the “Inferno” of *The Divine Comedy*. In Canto 28, the Sowers of Discord are punished in Circle Eight by a demon who cuts off their limbs. The damned drag themselves slowly around their assigned pit and their wounds begin to heal—but when they come full circle, the demon mutilates them again with his bloody sword. This is the scene on Shayol, too. Smith’s hero Mercer joins his “herd,” naked people who are growing spare body parts for offworld organ replacement. A life-form indigenous to Shayol called “dromozoa” soon appears as a cloud of flashing lights (Smith’s description also recalls Clarke’s “Overmind” in *Childhood’s End*). The dromozoa cause the growth of the additional body parts; their contact with human beings makes humans virtually immortal but also causes horrifying pain. In a plot detail that recalls the voluntary mutilation of the Scanners, some prisoners elect to be lobotomized and to have their eyes put out; they suffer less. An existential hero, Mercer (like the crunched Martel) elects full consciousness, as do the small group of allies he soon forms in the herd despite the pain and the addictive super-condamine (the convincing sounding name was inspired by Australia’s Condamine River) that sedates the prisoners during their surgeries. Part of Canto 14 of *Inferno* describing Circle Seven shows how closely Smith’s imagery parallels Dante’s:

Enormous herds of naked souls I saw
 lamenting till their eyes were burned of tears;
 They seemed condemned by an unequal law,
 For some were stretched supine upon the ground,
 some squatted with their arms about themselves
 and others without pause roamed round and round.
 Most numerous were those that roamed the plain.
 Far fewer were the souls stretched on the sand,
 but moved to louder cries by greater pain.
 And over all that sand on which they lay
 or crouched or roamed, great flakes of flame fell slowly
 as snow falls in the Alps on a windless day. (1065)

POSTSCRIPT: A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE



The author’s father, Paul Myron Wentworth Linebarger (1871-1939), was an “eccentric” retired Federal District judge in the Philippines who devoted himself to the cause of Sun Yat-sen, partly financing the revolution of 1911 (Pierce, “Introduction–Shaper of Myths” xii). Sun was the younger Paul Linebarger’s godfather and gave him his Chinese name, three characters (Lin Bah Loh—it would be Lin Bai Le today) translated by Linebarger himself as “Forest of Incandescent Bliss,” though more literally translated, according to Mikael Huss, as “Forest,” “White,” “Joy.” Linebarger signed his first novels *Ria* and *Carola* “Felix C. Forrest”; there may be some echo of his Chinese name, too, in Go-Captain John Joy Tree, the legendary but inconveniently psychotic houseguest of T’ruth in “On the Storm Planet” (1965).

“Lin Bah Loh” loosely corresponds to Line-barg-er and parallels the Chinese name of Judge Linebarger, which J.J. Pierce gives, evidently in error, as Lin Bah Kuh (“Forest of 1,000 Victories”—but “Bah” means 100, and “Kuh” is not readily identifiable as meaning “victory” [*Rediscovery* vii]):

“Lin” is the character for “forest” ... [but] Chinese names are usually not meant to convey one single idea like “Forest of Incandescent Bliss”....Le (or Loh) is a very common character meaning “joy,” “happiness,” or why not “bliss.” I think Bah/Bai just means “white”.... I have no idea about the father’s name. “Lin” is the same, of course. “Bah” could be “bai” (not the same as above) meaning one hundred (not one thousand). I can’t find any character for “victory” even close to being pronounced “kuh”.... “Victory” is usually translated as “sheng.” (Huss, email communication)

The website of Rosana Hart, Paul Linebarger’s daughter, translates a reference to Judge Linebarger’s name as “Lin Bai Jia,” which would closely approximate the pronunciation of the name in English: see <cordwainer-smith.com/photogallery>. “Jia” means “home,” so the characters (if the first sense of “Bai” mentioned by Mikael Huss is retained) would mean Forest-White-Home. I wonder whether “white” (and even “white-home”) might have referred to the elder Linebarger’s non-Chinese ethnic/national status.

Linebarger’s parents were both in their forties when they married; to ensure that he would be eligible for the presidency (Judge Linebarger had run for Congress in 1910), they returned to the US (Milwaukee) for his birth (Pierce, “Introduction—Shaper of Myths” xii); most of his early childhood was spent at “Point Paul Myron,” an estate in Mississippi (Elms, “Creation” 265). From age five, he resided in far-flung cities, including Honolulu, where at age six he lost his left eye when a playmate threw a wire at it, an image that recurs nightmarishly in *Ria* (218); also in the “cranching” wire of “Scanners Live in Vain” and the self-mutilation of Benjacomin Bozart, who plucks out his own left eye in “Mother Hitton’s Littul Kittons” (1961). The family lived by turns in China, Monaco, Paris, Washington D.C., and Baden-Baden, where he spent two years at the *Oberrealschule* (Wolfe and Williams, “Cordwainer” 128). *Ria* is largely set in impoverished south Germany during the 1920s.

Elms notes that, contrary to repeated assertion by fans and critics, Linebarger never lived in Japan as a child: “his parents ... did ‘take him to Japan’ when he was six years old; but they merely stopped off there for a few days of touring, en route to ... Shanghai” (rev. of *Rediscovery* 166). Arthur Burns reports that Linebarger’s admiration for Japanese culture grew when he worked with the Nisei, Japanese-Americans serving in the Allied Forces during World War II: “He spoke very highly of one chap who had ... volunteered as an American soldier, and his Japanese family went through this rather strange ritual ... a sort of ritual burying.... They washed him with rice spirit.... And he said the reason these Nisei were so incredibly brave was that every morning they’d wake up and say well, I should be dead!” (Foyster 24). A ritual of the same kind is performed before Rod McBan’s trial in the Garden of Death, when following a prescribed tradition, Rod’s female relatives bathe and groom him (*Norstrilia* 14).

In 1931, the younger Paul was sent on an extended trip to the Soviet Union to “cure” him of what his father perceived as leftist leanings (Pierce, *Worlds* 168). He completed his B.A. at George Washington University at 20 (he had enrolled at age 14, and as editor of the literary magazine had published a story by L. Ron Hubbard [Hartwell and Cramer 1; Elms, “Creation” 282]). Linebarger’s undergraduate years were punctuated by periods of extended study in China; one semester was spent in England at Oxford, where

he studied medieval literature. In the autumn following his graduation from George Washington, he began PhD studies in political science at Johns Hopkins, receiving his degree at age 22 (Elms "Creation" 266). A professor at Duke—from 1947, at the newly established School of Advanced International Studies in Washington D.C., which became affiliated with Johns Hopkins in 1950 (Gutner 21)—Linebarger was stationed in India and China and at the Pentagon during World War II, serving as a linguist, propagandist, and liaison in Chungking "between US Army Intelligence, Chinese Nationalist Intelligence, and Chinese Communist Intelligence" (Elms, email communication). An officer in the Army reserves, he also served in Korea; by the end of his military career he had achieved the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. In 1948, Linebarger published *Psychological Warfare*, a military intelligence textbook that went through multiple editions and popularized that term. A never-published manuscript, *Ethical Dianetics*, was written in 1950 in response to Hubbard's movement, referred to as a "closed cult"; Linebarger designed his own book "to teach a mass audience how to engage in 'mutual emotional aid' with a sympathetic friend or spouse" (Elms, "Creation" 275).

A postwar mental illness of Paul Linebarger may partly have inspired the portrait of the sf writer "Kirk Allen" in Robert Lindner's psychiatric memoir *The Fifty Minute Hour* (1954). Even the dates of the two stories that seem most closely to echo Lindner's account—"The Burning of the Brain" (1958) and "Nancy" (1959)—are suggestive. *The Fifty Minute Hour* was a popular book of 1954, even inspiring a film, *Pressure Point* (1962), in which Sidney Poitier played Lindner and Bobby Darin the patient (though the movie adapts a different case, not Kirk Allen's). By the later 1950s, a recovered Linebarger may have wished to take back his own story, retelling it as sf, not clinical case-history. There is no question that Linebarger consulted a series of psychiatrists over a period of about fifteen years; Mike Bennett's checklist notes that Linebarger received a certificate in 1955 from the Washington School of Psychiatry.

He advised Presidents Eisenhower (Burns 6) and Kennedy (Pierce, "Introduction—Shaper of Myths" xiii) on Asian politics. Brought up to support the nationalist movement in China, he was distressed by the postwar communist victory on the mainland and supported Taiwan; the comic "Western Science is so Wonderful" (1958) and the tragic "When the People Fell" (1959) are the stories that most directly consider China under communism. An expert in "small wars" (the title of Chapter 14 of *Psychological Warfare* uses that phrase), Linebarger thought that US military intervention in Vietnam was a mistake (Clute 1121).

He was married twice. The mother of his two daughters was Margaret Snow, to whom he dedicated *Carola* in 1948 but whom he divorced in his "hell year," 1949 (Elms, "Creation" 267, 275; a similar phrase recurs in "Scanners Live in Vain" [80]). His second wife was Genevieve Collins, his former student; this second marriage began in 1950. Linebarger's conversion to Episcopalianism at this time was a compromise between his own "nominally Methodist" upbringing (Elms, *Norstrilia* xii) and Genevieve Linebarger's Roman Catholic background.

Linebarger's premature death at 53 after a stroke was preceded by years of serious illness. In a brief history of SAIS written for its bulletin in 1963, he remarks on his medical woes of 1960, which included a bout of peritonitis that led to his hospitalization in Mexico, followed by five "trips to the operating table" ("Informal" 31). Alan Elms's eagerly awaited full-length biography will be helpful in contextualizing the emphasis on ill-health, intense suffering, and (conversely) survival and immortality in Cordwainer Smith's stories.

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ABSTRACT

Defining historical, biographical, and literary contexts for Smith's writings, I analyze his oblique, elliptical style and discuss his approach to the portrayal of heroes. Smith's consistent focus, even in such non-sf as *Ria* (1947), *Carola* (1948), and *Atomsk* (1949), is on isolated protagonists caught in a maelstrom of contrary impulses; Martel in "Scanners Live in Vain" is torn between body and spirit, domesticity and duty, indoctrination and independent thought. Smith's sf also assesses the "human" cost of shifting paradigms—sudden social and scientific change—and provides a haunting critique of social control, a matter addressed covertly in his fiction and quite openly in his military intelligence textbook, *Psychological Warfare* (1948). Inherently speculative, science fictional, in his bold extrapolation (into a very far future) of postwar social and epistemological issues, Smith is unique among postwar writers in rejecting the violence and xenophobia of the popular tradition and also the tidy closure of Campbellian hard sf. During the 1950s and 1960s, his enigmatic stories redrew the boundaries (and re-stocked the visionary imagery) of science fiction.