**Science Fiction Book Club**
**Interview with Rosana Hart (October 2022)**

*Rosana Hart is the daughter of Paul Myron Anthony Linebarger, better known to science fiction fans as Cordwainer Smith. Hart maintains a website about her father.* http://www.cordwainer-smith.com/

GENERAL COMMENTS FROM ROSANA:

I am his older daughter and in no way a Cordwainer Smith scholar. (My younger sister is even less than I am.) My parents were divorced when I was about six, and I lived with my mother Margaret. While I did see my father regularly after that, I left Washington, D.C. to go to college at Stanford. I never lived for any length of time in D.C. after that. Keep in mind that as a relatively normal teenager, I wasn't even very interested in his writings. Had I known he would become so well known, I might have paid more attention to what he was doing. I am currently working on a memoir which has the working title of *Science Fiction Daughter: Growing Up Weird with Cordwainer Smith.* I've already written and self-published three books of my memoirs, which you can find at Amazon or at my website https://zanahart.com/. My father is only mentioned in passing in those books.

**Ben Roylance: To what extent did Cordwainer Smith's intelligence/military work influence his science fiction?**

RH: Just reading it gives you the idea that there were influences, but I don't know more than any other reader.

**Ben Roylance: Also-- I've noticed CS is rather popular (or is at least subtly referenced in media) in Japan. do you see much interest in his work coming from that country still?**

RH: My sister and I constitute the Cordwainer Smith estate, and as such we receive occasional royalties from his writings. A good chunk of those royalties (though I can't guess what percentage) do come from Japan. So yes, there is ongoing interest there. I've also noticed European interest at times, mainly from Germany. I've wondered at times if he is less known here in the U.S. than he is abroad

**Jean-Michel Archaimbault: A very simple and simultaneously difficult question: had he drawn an overview scheme of his cycle, indicating the focus points for the stories, or did he only work following his inner threads and viewings?**

RH: I don't know. My guess: he might have held a lot in his capacious mind.

**Bill Rogers: Rosana, did your father ever discuss with you how he came to create his future history (the Instrumentality and the Rediscovery of Man)? What were his influences for it? Was there a deeper meaning in it for him beyond telling brilliant stories? Thank you!**

RH: Well, he did sometimes talk about such things, but I didn't care much at the time and I don't remember any of it. He liked deeper meanings so I would assume they are everywhere. Keep in mind that his mind was a very different one.

**Kevin Cheek/Jean-Michel Archaimbault: Did your father have any plans for more works about the Instrumentality of Mankind? I hate to be tantalized by the idea of works I'd love to read but will never exist, but do you know of any stories or novels your father was working on but never finished?**

RH: I think that had he lived longer, he would have written a lot more science fiction. That's part of the sadness that he was only 53 when he died. That age seems very young to me in retrospect. I don't know of unfinished science fiction.

**John DeLaughter: Which writers did he read for pleasure?**

RH: I'm sure he mentioned some to me, but I don't remember. His house had thousands of books on the many shelves he had built in. They were in the front hallway, the living room, the dining room, the back sun room, upstairs in the huge home office, and downstairs in the basement. Most were non-fiction. When I was looking for something to read, especially by the time I was in my teens, he could always mention several choices right off the top of his head.

**John DeLaughter: He was notorious for including wordplay and hidden comments in his stories. How was this reflected in his everyday life?**

RH: He was incorrigible.

**John DeLaughter/Kevin Cheek: Did he have a particular favorite among his stories?**

RH: I don't know about stories, but I would guess that he had favorite characters, such C'Mel.

**Marcus Murphy: Rosana, the underpeople strike me as a moveable symbol that could be used to illustrate oppression in many places. Do you think your father was influenced to any degree by issues around the then current Civil Rights struggle in the US in creating the underpeople?**

RH: This could be a comment of a daughter of a different generation, but I don't think he was influenced by the civil rights struggle. I was, but not via him.

**Dave Hook: Rosana, I assume that your father had a rich internal life that was a factor in his fiction. Did that come out to you? If so, how?**

RH: I would agree with you that he did, but I can't pinpoint exact memories. Passing comments he made probably reflected it.

**Cecelia Winger: If your father would've continued on with the stories for The Rediscovery of Man / Instrumentality of Mankind universe, do you think that eventually the animal underpeople would come to have equal rights to humans or do you think he would have kept them as an underclass? Throughout the series, I thought I saw hints of a revolution set to occur amongst the underpeople, e.g. the martyrdom of D'joan and the title of 'The Underpeople' that was used for the second half of Norstrilia where Rod McBan gives his whole fortune away to further the underpeople's cause, but I felt that it did not happen and was wondering if you knew if he was planning on some big revolt or revolution from them if he had concluded the series.**

RH: I don't think of happy endings when I think of him or his writing. I don't know what he was planning. His death was rather abrupt and came as a surprise.

**Damo Mac Choiligh: Paul Linebarger worked closely with and indeed was personally very close to Sun Yet Sen; I have seen that he wrote several scholarly and political works on Sun and on the first Republic of China. How did he view the subsequent events in Chinese history and did this influence his writings and the depictions of government, class, conflict and notions of freedom?**

RH: There were two Paul Linebargers. His father, Paul Myron Linebarger, wrote some of those works. I never knew my grandfather, as he died in 1939 and I was born in 1942. My father did meet Sun Yat Sen when he was a child, but it was his father who worked closely with Sun Yat Sen. My father did write a book about Sun Yat Sen. See alibris.com and do a search for Paul Myron Anthony Linebarger for some books he wrote; there are inexpensive used copies there. That could also give you some ideas about the last part of your question. Or google and see what comes up, looking beyond the first page or two. (I was a reference librarian and I always give that advice on any subject.)

**Damo Mac Choiligh: One aspect of the writing of CS/PL that has always impressed me or caught my attention is the very catchy use of rhymes and the very rhythm of words in his story titles and the naming of concepts, such as 'Mother Hitton's Littul Kittons' for the story named after the Norstrilia defence system or 'The Dead Lady of Clown Town'. Did he find this poetic style somewhere and turn it to his purpose or was it entirely his own invention?**

RH: I think he picked it up somewhere, considering that he was reading widely and sometimes writing poetry from his teenage years.

**Damo Mac Choiligh: One of my favourite CS / PL stories is 'The Game of Rat and Dragon', where he depicts interstellar space as being itself a thing of horror and inhabited by creatures that terrorize men to the point of madness. This is a relatively unique idea, rare in the SF of the time. Did the idea originate in Linebarger's life experience or personal beliefs or was it simply a really inventive idea?**

RH: I can remember his describing that story with zest, but he was not very influenced by conventions of any sort. And any time you use the word “simply” about my father’s thought processes, you are off the track. Nothing about him was simple.

**Richard Whyte: First, I'm so grateful that you've taken the time to indulge us fanatics, and for creating your website, which I discovered way back when I thought it was just me…**

RH: I thought it was just me when I began the website! Sorry I can’t indulge you fanatics more fully, but there is so much that I never paid attention to.

**My question is about 'first readers' and how an author's work changes depending on their relationship: do you know if your father took advice from your stepmother regarding his stories, and if so, what do you think was the extent of their 'collaboration'?**

**I understand Genevieve completed a few 'Cordwainer Smith' stories - rather well, I thought - after his death, so I'm intrigued by the notion that this creative relationship might have run in parallel with their personal one. Thanks again!**

RH: In my opinion, Genevieve didn’t do enough to be considered a collaborator. I don’t really know how often she gave him opinions. He would only have taken them if they pleased him. She did finish at least one book after his passing, but I don't see the two of them as a team in that way. (in their daily lives, yes, they were very much a team.)

**John Grayshaw: What made him write novels? Was he a storyteller at heart?**

RH: Yes, he was a storyteller by nature. I remember once when we dropped off some clothing at a dry cleaner's. He said to the person working there, "I'm a college professor myself," and went on with more description of what he did. I think I remember this because I was in my teens and embarrassed!

**John Grayshaw: What was it like when you were growing up, was your dad talking about his science fiction stories at the dinner table?**

RH: He was not an easy parent, with his obsession with great themes of good and evil. I do remember being annoyed with him one time at dinner when he was talking about a story where the heroine was named Johanna. That was the first name that he and my mother gave me when I was born, and I thought he should have asked me before using it in a story. But he would talk about many other things too. After our parents divorced, my sister and I usually spent one afternoon / evening a week with him plus a couple of months most summers.

**John Grayshaw: What are some of your fondest memories of your father and what are some of the funniest memories?**

RH: Those will mostly be in my memoir. Here is a funny one from my website, set during World War II.

> One warm night in China, he was sitting in an outhouse. It was a two-seater, and as he idly glanced at the other open seat, he noticed little luminescent lights under the seat. He assumed they were fireflies. Then he heard the roar of trucks from not far away... it turned out the outhouse was perched on a cliff, and the lights he saw were from military conveys on the main highway far below, more or less directly below his seat!

**John Grayshaw: When did you first read your father's writing? Do you have personal favorites of his work? And why?**

RH: My favorite book of his is one that some of you may not know about. It's *Atomsk*, a spy novel. It may be the first thing I read of his. I'd guess I was about 12 when I first read it. I enjoyed the cleverness of the hero. It's written under his pen name Carmichael Smith, and I made it into a Kindle which is up on Amazon, with an introduction I did. Here is how it begins, right after World War II.

> "I want you to spoil the secret of Atomsk."
>
> "Atomsk?"
>
> Coppersmith spelled it out, adding, "It's the Russian atomic center. We want them to know that we know all about it. We want them to guess as to how we

> know about it. We want to get the information for our own use, but we don't just want to know about it as a bombing target. We want the Russians to suspect us so much that they will not fool themselves. For that, we need a man as a weapon."
>
> "To go in, to get out, and, after he was out, to leave traces?"
>
> "Right. If the Russians think we know about their precious secret, they will be less disposed to take a chance. If we ourselves do know what the secret is, we will be less inclined to wage war against an unknown and therefore exaggerated danger. This is the meanest kind of fight there is, Major. It's a fight to keep the peace."

**John Grayshaw: Did Alan Elms ever finish the biography of your father that he was working on? Is he still working on it?**

RH: Sadly, he never finished it. He hasn't answered any emails from me for years now but I can find no mention online of his dying. He's about 84 now, and I doubt he has the energy to complete it. If you google his name and Cordwainer Smith, you can find at least one or two of his articles.

**John Grayshaw: Your father had such an extensive career in the military, as a professor, as an advisor to the CIA and President Kennedy. Was sci-fi writing just a lark to him. Just a fun secret hobby?**

RH: I think it was really quite important to him. I don't think it was a lark at all.

**John Grayshaw: I know the military and the CIA can be quite secretive so was your family aware at the time that he was advising them?**

RH: Genevieve knew. She told me many years later.

**John Grayshaw: You said that your father said he spoke 13 languages. Do you know which ones, or some of them anyway?**

RH: He spoke English, French, German, Spanish, Mandarin, and maybe some others. His important non-fiction work *Psychological Warfare,* written under his own name, was translated into something like 13 languages.

**John Grayshaw: Has your family ever commented on whether your father was the patient described in Robert Lindner's "The Fifty-Minute Hour"?**

RH: Not really. For a long time I didn't think he was, but now I think he might have been. It's one of those things I will probably never know.

**John Grayshaw: On Wikipedia, it says that your father lost a notebook with ideas about the Instrumentality and that's why he stopped writing those stories. Is there any truth to this story?**

RH: I've read that notebook story, and it may be true that he lost it. But with the mind he had, I really doubt it would stopped his writing Instrumentality stories.

**John Grayshaw: Barry Malzberg said about your father "No one in or out of science fiction, wrote like Linebarger; his work retains its mystery and power decades later, a mystery swathed within the enigma of that style." Why do you think your father's stories have kept that mystery for so many years?**

RH: Because they are so steeped in mystery!

**John Grayshaw: Your father said, "In my stories I use exotic settings, but the settings are like the function of a Chinese stage. They are intended to lay bare the human mind, to throw torches over the underground lakes of the human soul, to show the chambers wherein the ageless dramas of self-respect, God, courage, sex, love, hope, envy, decency and power go on forever." Do you think these are some of the reasons your father's stories are still so highly regarded?**

RH: Yes, very much so.

**Stevie Book: I understand that whilst your father was reluctant to reveal the true identity of Cordwainer Smith, his editor Frederik Pohl once persuaded him to meet a small group of his fellow science fiction writers. Would you happen to know which writers Fred Pohl brought to your house, & how your father felt about the meeting afterwards?**

RH: I didn't know about this, and it wasn't my house by then, as I was likely in college or in Europe. It surprises me.

**John Grayshaw: Were there any science fiction writers he had correspondence/friendships with?**

RH: Not that I know of.

**John Grayshaw: Are there any examples of Smith corresponding/meeting with fans?**

RH: I very much doubt it. He didn't want to be known as a science fiction writer, partly because it could diminish his serious reputation as a scholar.

**John Grayshaw: What are some of the most interesting/surprising things you've learned about your father over the years?**

RH: Hmm, good question for me to mull over for my memoirs! I am a bit surprised at the depth of this set of questions you've sent me.

**John Grayshaw: What were some of your father's hobbies other than writing?**

RH: Talking. Playing with his cats. Sometimes going for a walk, but not in the sense of athleticism.

**John Grayshaw: Did your father have a writing routine he stuck to?**

RH: No, not that I know of. He wrote whenever he could fit it in, day or night.

**John Grayshaw: What is Smith's legacy? Why was his work significant at the time? And why is it still important today?**

RH: Maybe one of your group members can do a PhD thesis on this! As for me, I'll just say it was different and fascinating.