



Science-Fiction Fanzine

Vol. XVIII, No. 4; April, 2006

The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy

כנס עולמות 2006

הכנס יתקיים בחול המועד פסח, 16-18 באפריל, במדיטק בחולון. הכנס יכלול הרצאות על פנטסיה ועל מדע בדיוני, על ספרים ועל סרטים, פרקים מסדרות קלאסיות וחדשות, מרתון לילי, סדנאות כתיבה ועוד. אתר הכנס (www.olamot.org)
 השנה תתקיים בכנס גם תערוכת אמנות בנושא "מדע פנטסטי". לפרטים נוספים יש לפנות לדורון קאלו: doroncalo@gmail.com

נא שימו לב לשינוי מקום ההרצאות בסדרת ההרצאות ע"ש עמוס גפן
 המפגש הבא יתקיים באוניברסיטת תל-אביב, בניין מקסיקו, חדר 120
 בחודשים מרץ ואפריל לא יתקיימו הרצאות גפן.

Rehovot Science Fiction Club - SFIR – חוג מדע בדיוני ברחובות

פעילויות התא מתקיימות בימי א' בשעה 20:00 בפקולטה לחקלאות ברחובות, חדר 2, בבניין ליד הבריכה.
 הפעילויות ללא תשלום.

מידע נוסף ניתן לקבל באתר התא (<http://sfir.tk/>) או בדוא"ל sfir42@yahoo.com

23.4 – הקרנה: הסרט "אגדה" (Legend)
 30.4 – הקרנה: הסרט "Aeon Flux"

סדנת הכתיבה ברחובות

סדנת הכתיבה הרחובותית תקיים מפגשים בתאריכים הבאים:
ygantman@yahoo.com בכתובת

More Society information is available (in Hebrew) at the Society's site: <http://www.sf-f.org.il>

Short Book Review by James Schlesinger

State of Fear by Michael Crichton (2004), 688 pages.

I like this book – a lot. It was a proverbial page-turner for me. I enjoy the ride within, and learn something from whatever interest that Crichton deliberately explores in his books.

He is a very commercial writer, it seems to me, campy almost – with James Bond and other heroic characters (who might not start out that way), silent, mysterious and faithful sidekicks, hodgepodge of villains, beautiful women, lots of near deaths and such.

Plain old, very good – and gripping – story telling for me. Very graphic / cinematic – which makes sense since so many of his books end up as movies. Very, very short chapters – like scenes, or a set sequence of scenes in a movie.

Crichton is a 'skeptical environmentalist'. This approach was new to me, and for me it was provocative and there was a revelation.

I recommend you consider reading *State of Fear*.

A Happy and Kosher Pesah - חג פסח כשר ושמח

In Memoriam: Stanislaw Lem: 1921-2006

By Aharon Hauptman

In 1983 an American literary critic wrote that if Stanislaw Lem doesn't get a Nobel Prize for Literature by the end of the 20th century, it will only be because someone told the judges that Lem writes science fiction. Lem did not receive a Nobel Prize (even though many people recommended his candidacy), but he was highly valued by tens of millions of loyal readers all over the world, and especially outside the United States. Many saw him as one of the great writers of the second half of the 20th century, and admiration for his writing, which is original, sharp-witted, deep, and multi-layered, went far beyond circles of science fiction fans.

Lem died at age 84, on March 27, 2006. These words were written three days before his funeral, which took place April 4 in Krakow, Poland, where he spent most of his years after the Second World War (he was born in the city of Lvov, which belonged to Poland before the war, and which today is part of the Ukraine). With his passing we undoubtedly lost one of the greats of science fiction literature, and one of the most brilliant minds of the last decades.

If I were asked to recommend one and only one book to a person who has never read science fiction (and perhaps will never again read any), I would chose *Solaris*, Lem's best know book, which was translated to 41 languages. *Solaris* was first published in Poland in 1961. After it was translated to English, British author and critic Brian Aldiss wrote that it was one of the greatest books of the decade, and this despite the fact that the English translation was far from being perfect. In fact, it was translated second hand, from the French translation, and many sentences and even important whole passages that were difficult to translate, were simply left out. This unfortunate fact became clear to me in 1980 when I translated the book from the original Polish, checking myself as I translated by looking at the English translation.

I read *Solaris* after I saw the first cinema version, done by the Russian director, Andrei Tarkovsky, in 1972. Like many other readers, I was caught up by the hypnotic magic of the book, by its deep use of language, and human imagination, to provide a stunning description of an alien and extremely strange world, raising questions about the limits of human capability to research, understand, and communicate with something frighteningly alien, the living ocean of the planet Solaris. Through almost pathetic attempts to study Solaris's ocean, the researchers are exposed to events which are truly terrifying – the hidden devils of their own psyche, which chase them physically, wearing actual living form through the incomprehensible powers of the ocean. This situation, in addition to being the base of an exciting plot, enabled Lem to say many things (often very sarcastic, as was his wont) on the souls of men, and their fears, on the nature of scientific enquiry, and on the logic (or lack of logic) in the desire for contact with an alien intelligence. These multi-level components, integrated with virtuoso use of language and imagination, make *Solaris* close to being the "perfect" science fiction book. And I have

not mentioned additional cultural, psychological and linguistic layers, connected certainly to Lem's Jewish roots. These have been ably discussed in Hebrew by Avraham Yosef on the site of the Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy (<http://www.sf-f.org.il/>).

Lem did not care much for Tarkovsky's cinematic version of *Solaris*, and he ridiculed the new cinema version by Soderbergh (from 2003), emphasizing that he had no intention of watching the movie. In Lem's internet site (<http://www.lem.pl/>) (maintained by Lem's son Tomasz, in Polish and in English), he related that he read in the *New York Times* that Soderbergh's movie is "a love story set in outer space". Lem commented, with typical irony, "to my best knowledge, the book was *not* dedicated to erotic problems of people in outer space". Lem then continued, "as *Solaris*' author I shall allow myself to repeat that I only wanted to create a vision of a human encounter with something that certainly exists, in a mighty manner perhaps, but cannot be reduced to human concepts, ideas or images. This is why the book was entitled *Solaris* and not *Love in Outer Space*."



Picture from the Tarkovsky movie.

As a man with knowledge of many fields, an original and exceptional thinker, Lem was a guest at many academic conferences; for example, the inter-disciplinary European conference INSTRAT, whose participants included philosophers, linguists, sociologists, cognitive psychologists, etc. He was the only non-scientist invited to participate in the first American-Russian conference on the subject of extra-terrestrial intelligence (CETI) in 1971. In the last two decades Lem wrote very little fiction, and focused on writing treatises, articles and essays on philosophy, society, and futurology. On his internet site he wrote about events of the day, presenting sharp criticism of political events (I remember that after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, Lem commented that he would not be surprised if President of Russia Putin "secretly leapt in a little Cossack dance in the Kremlin").

Lem did not highly value – to put it mildly – American science fiction, and was extremely critical of the whole genre. In the 1970s he wrote an article in which he

described the American genre as “a lost cause, with a few exceptions”. As an “exception” among American writers, Lem was referring to Philip K. Dick, the only American writer that he valued highly (Dick himself, apparently as part of his severe mental disease, wrote letters to the FBI in which he contended that a writer name Lem does not in fact exist, and that Lem is the invention of a group of Marxist agitators who use science fiction in order to get access to centers of influence in the United States). Lem’s association with Science Fiction Writers of America (SFWA) is a story in itself, and it has two versions. In 1973, SFWA gave Lem an honorary membership, and after a few years cancelled the membership. On these two events there is factual agreement. There is no agreement as to the reason for the cancellation. According to one version, which Lem believed in, his membership was cancelled because of his harsh criticism of American science fiction. According to the official version, an honorary membership in SFWA is only given to writers whose works are NOT published in the U.S. In as much as it was “discovered” that some of his books had been published in the U.S., it seems that he was no longer entitled to an “honorary membership”, but he could register as a regular member if he were to pay the annual dues. Lem saw this as an insult to his honor, and refused. Which is the correct version? Perhaps both versions have some truth to them: a mixture of Polish honor and American dogmatism.



Lem’s sharp humor is expressed more in his other books, but in my opinion signs of it are found in *Solaris* too, especially his description of the history of research on the mysterious ocean, which seems here and there to be a caricature of scientific research (or perhaps a faithful description of it?), in the same way that the creatures created by the ocean are caricatures (or perhaps faithful copies?) of repressed human thoughts. Much wilder humor is found in the stories about Ivan Tichy, the pilot Pirx, and of course the remarkable adventures of two intelligent robots, Trurl and Klapaucius. These reach the height of grotesque humor in the wonderful collection of stories, *The Cyberiad*, in which Lem smirks at the many faces of human foolishness, like the tortuous path of the pursuit of supreme happiness.

I could finish this article by saying that Lem will continue to smirk at our folly from above, but such a remark would certainly not have found favor in Lem's eyes. He was far from having religious or mystic beliefs of any kind, and rejected any non-rational belief (an additional reason for my great affection for him). As an answer to an internet surfer (an "Internaut" in Lem's term) in Lem's internet site with respect to a belief in the World to Come, Lem wrote as follows: "Despite the fact that there are those who see me as a science fiction writer, I am a rationalist and at the same a terrible doubter. I don't believe in Bermuda Triangles, nor in Flying Saucers, and also not in telepathy or psychokinesis, nor in the spiritual life of plants, nor in thousands of other foolish ideas found in science fiction. If I ever wrote about such things in my books, it was only in an absurdist-humoristic context. I also do not believe in life after death, in as much as there isn't the slightest scientific evidence for such a thing."

In conclusion, I will note that while many of Lem's books have been translated into Hebrew, there are still many that have not been, and which are worthy of translation. For example, the books *His Master's Voice* and *Fiasco* (the last novel he wrote), or his book of short stories, *The Mask*.

We can only hope that there will soon appear a literary inheritor with the greatness of a giant like Lem, for, as it says in the last line of *Solaris*, "טרם חלף זמן של... נפלאות האימה".

(Mistranslated from the Hebrew by Aharon Sheer. The original is at http://www.sf-f.org.il/story_863)

Aharon Sheer adds: The cancellation of Lem's honorary membership in SFWA may be explained by Polish dogmatism versus American honor. Lem pointed out that the fact that Agatha Christie sold far more of her novels than Dostoyevsky did of his does not show that Agatha Christie's books are better literature. In the same way, the fact that Isaac Asimov sold far more of his novels than Lem did of his (a point that Asimov himself had made), does not show that Isaac Asimov is a better science fiction writer than Stanislaw Lem. Lem did not believe that science fiction should be entertainment, and he scorned the many highly entertaining American science fiction novels as being worthless trash. Lem's cruel East European dogmatism did not sit well with American honor. ("If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all", as Bambi's mother points out.)

Question: "Will *Solaris* ever be translated directly into English?"

Lem's site answers this: "Solaris indeed has never been translated directly into English and Mr Lem is dissatisfied with the current translation. Whether this state of affairs will change remains an open question. The following quote from a letter from the Managing Director of the Publishing House Faber and Faber serves as an explanation: '*With regard to Solaris, I am afraid that we would not currently be willing either to publish a new translation or to license one.*' If you want to write the Publisher about a new translation of Solaris they have a web-site at the location <http://www.faber.co.uk>"

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