

Proving Postmodern Science fiction writer Stanislaw Lem as the 'Philosopher of the Future' through Solaris and Modern Science

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Abstract- This paper argues that Stanislaw Lem, through his literary works, particularly "Solaris," should be considered the 'Philosopher of the Future.' Lem's fiction and non-fiction emphasize the ethical and existential dilemmas humanity faces due to advancements in science and technology. "Solaris" exemplifies these concerns by depicting scientists' futile and morally ambiguous efforts to contact a sentient ocean on an alien planet. The novel reveals how technological progress can lead to ethical degradation, loss of moral compass, and eventual self-destruction. Lem's work resonates with modern scientific concerns, echoing warnings from figures like Stephen Hawking about the potential dangers of unchecked technological advancement and artificial intelligence. Hawking's predictions about AI and the consequences of energy consumption align with Lem's bleak portrayal of the future. The paper concludes that Lem's prophetic vision and critical examination of human and technological evolution justify his designation as a 'Philosopher of the Future,' highlighting the importance of ethical responsibility in the face of rapid scientific progress.

INTRODUCTION

Stanislaw Lem considered literature to be a way through which we can get to know reality. Through many of his works, he has focused on human endeavours to go to other planets and the consequences of trying to overpower the other planets. Lem focused on different aspects of being a human being. His fiction and non-fiction manifest his concerns for humanity. Lem through his works kept on challenging human beings and making them question their beliefs in science and technology and what they can do. Lem explored the fundamentals on which we build our societies and do scientific research. Lem did different thinking experiments through his writings. We are not very far from the time when technology is going to overcome evolution. Technology will soon reach our mental conditions and it will use techniques to control our minds.

They go through torment. They don't even trust each other thinking that the other person may not be real and just a replica of a colleague. When Kevin has arrived he is not trusted by other scientists. Kevin himself begins to distrust them when he gets to know the situation there. They have become sceptical. Their

Lem wanted to make us aware of this. He is known for pushing the limits of science fiction (Swirski 23, 24). "He always went beyond the here-and-now of scientific achievements, Lem had the ability to anticipate the ethical struggles that await societies given our scientific and technological achievements" (Swirski 24, 25). We, humans, are producing war apparatuses. We are moving toward our destruction. Lem has a gloomy and bleak picture of the future of humanity. In one of his books, Lem says, "Happy end of the World" (Swirski 25). In this paper, I argue that Lem's literary works and the picture of the future of humanity that he presents make him the 'Philosopher of the Future' and even science has enough evidence that what Lem presented through his fiction will become our future if we do not take responsibility for our actions.

ANALYSIS

In Solaris scientist have gone to a planet Solaris which has a sentient ocean. They are there to make contact with the Ocean which is a living being. A lot of work has already been done and this quest has caused humans their lives. The ocean has a very unique way of dealing with these scientists. This ocean uses the memories of the scientists and presents them replicas of human beings that are in their memories. Kevin, for example, gets the replica of his dead wife Rhea. These replicas cannot be killed but like humans, they can feel pain. For the replicas, it is impossible to go away from the person whose memory produced that replica. The more the scientists at the station observe the ocean and react to it through different means the more the ocean reacts back. One of the scientists has committed suicide. Being fed up of living there, dealing with the replica of his memory and living in a paranoid condition he ends his life. The scientists have not been successful at making a contact with the ocean. One of them uses radiation to attack the ocean. They have lost their ethical standards and morality as they are faced with the absurdity of living on Solaris.

mission has failed. Through such happenings, one feels that such efforts to go to other planets are futile. The other planets and their creatures are much more advanced and dangerous. Humans may have to face such circumstances due to their scientific expeditions which can make them go mad and can force them to commit suicides. Technology that seems to be helping the human

beings to make progress and reach another world may be the very thing that will make us lose our morals and will lead us to our destruction as it happens to the scientists on Solaris. "Lem attacks the absurd excesses of modern civilization from many angles and his imagination never ceases to amaze readers with its sly and timely resourcefulness" (Wilson 549). By the reading of Solaris, we can see and feel that how we humans are fallible and the rationality of science is insufficient. "For four days running, Gibarian and Sartorius had submitted the ocean to radiation at a point 1400 miles... The use of X-rays was banned by a UN convention, because of their harmful effects, and...no one had sent a request to Earth for authorization to proceed with such experiments" (Lem 22).

Our endeavours of reaching other planets, searching for life on other planets and the desire to gain control over other planets can cause disasters and instead of doing something good to us it can do us harm as presented in Solaris. "He injected himself with pernostal and hid in the locker" (Lem 29). This is how one of the scientists has committed suicide because he was fed up with what the ocean at Solaris was doing to him through a replica of his memory. What we humans expect from our scientific experiments the total opposite of it can happen.

The contact that was needed was achieved. It was hideous. The scientists at Solaris begin to see themselves as monsters. Their foolishness becomes so clear to them and they find themselves as shameful creatures who have come thinking that they would pioneer something great and become champions. They have encountered their shortcomings and incompatibility to deal with the Ocean of Solaris. The ocean wishes to punish them and they can't do anything to stop it (Lem 64).

Lem reveals the dilemma of the modern human beings that we are all are dealing with. We face information crises. Machines produce useless information indiscriminately. We are bombarded with information which we don't need. We are being controlled. He believed that when our society is facing danger as in the example of scientists in Solaris we will lose our moral commitments. Solaris shows a gloomy picture of cosmic journeys. "Lem anticipated that future generation may be deprived of freedom through...technology that was supposed to liberate them...He stresses man's ultimate responsibility for his own destiny" (Wilson 552).

Not only Solaris but Lem's other works also show this dilemma of human beings that have lost morality. Technology has taken over them which was created by them and through this, he shows bleak future. As a science fiction writer, he saw what awaits us.

"In one of the Cyberiad stories, Trurl and Klapaucius often try to assert their miraculous powers of scientific invention and improvisation upon an unenlightened universe of men and other robots. The results are usually...tragic" (Wilson 551). They endow faculties to others which result in disaster. They have added the ability to do good to others and these other robots in helping humans are actually torturing them in their attempt to relieve them from pain. Stanislaw Lem has a distrustful view of our future. We humans due to our technological advancements

have become prey to other beings. Machines have the defects that are in their creators. If humans want to dominate. The machines made by them also want to dominate other machines and humans. With our limited understanding and rationality, we cannot understand the cosmos fully and its mysteries. Lem believed in science that it has the capacity to do wonders for human beings if used correctly but instead of its doing good he sees that science will take us in a different direction. In his science fiction stories, he shows missions failed. His space travellers during their journeys die or face enemies. We get the horrible image of ourselves through Lem's fiction and nonfiction.

Stephen Hawking one of the most famous Scientists, physicists and Cosmologists warned the world about things that can happen in future. He admitted that artificial intelligence (machines) can be helpful in eradicating poverty but he also warned human beings to find a way of controlling the development of it because the future would become uncertain. Artificial intelligence can dominate humans. The very intelligence that human beings are creating to make progress this technology and machines will overcome humanity. And this will be the worst event in the history of human civilization that something which the humans have created will bring the destruction of humanity and its slavery. Powerful weapons created by us would bring great disruption on the planet (Hawking).

What Lem has shown through Solaris planet is this that the other planets may not be friendly. They may be hostile. We are becoming slaves of technology. Hawking spent his whole life as a cosmologist. He warned humans about hostile alien planets (Hawking). Hawking stated that we must not send signals to space through computers which he had earlier initiated with the Russian scientists. He tells that if there are other creatures in space on the other planets they are much more developed than us and if our signals reach such species they can harm us. They can contact us, come to us and enslave us. Lem has shown the ocean at Solaris to be much more developed than human beings. It has the capacity to create what exists in human minds. The human beings are unable to understand why the ocean does this. They cannot deal with this. It is an absurdity which they have to face while staying at Solaris.

Like Lem Hawking has also shown the technology taking over. "We need to move forward on artificial intelligence development but we also need to be mindful of its very real dangers. I fear that AI may replace humans altogether. If people design computer viruses, someone will design AI that replicates itself. This will be a new form of life that will outperform humans" (Hawking).

Due to our increasing energy consumptions, the earth can turn into a fireball according to Hawking and this is what Lem knew and so he said: "Happy end of the World" in one of his books. According to Hawking humanity is at a tipping point. Global warming will increase to such levels that living on earth will become impossible. Drastic changes are to come in just one hundred years.

The fear that Lem presented through his science fiction of technology bringing destruction has also been shown by

Hawking. Before his death, he made this prediction that through technology we will destroy ourselves. "There is no sign of conflict lessening, and the development of militarized technology and weapons of mass destruction could make that disastrous" (Hawking). This he told in an interview to BBC at the age of 75. Great literature deals with the issue of being human. This is what Lem does through his writings. Our philosophical understanding of our beings gets challenged when we read Lem. Due to Lem's fiction and its closeness to reality he is given the title "Philosopher of the Future" and it suits him well. Peter Swirski who is the author of the book *Philosopher of the Future* is considered to be the most dedicated critic of Lem. Swirski delves into the depth of prophetic vision of Lem (Swirski).

A recurrent element in Lem is the path toward absolute control of bio-evolution made possible by technological advancements. In numerous of his works, he explores the progress outcome of this evolution, challenging on the way all that we think humanity is. Various humanistic concerns are developed throughout Lem's numerous fiction and nonfiction (Swirski 23).

Throughout the reading of *Solaris*, one feels that why do these scientists have to go to Solaris. A lot of scientific researchers were done. Many scientists had already gone to Solaris and many had lost their lives. After so much of work being done, they were not successful in doing what they wanted to do. But still, Kevin and his companions go there. Why are we humans so possessed with such curiosity of finding life on other planets and of making contact with other species living somewhere else? "We have no need of another world. We don't know what to do with other worlds. A single world, our own, suffices us; but we can't accept it for what it is. We are searching for an ideal image of our own world" (Lem 63).

CONCLUSION

The novel *Solaris* presents human condition. We want to continue our quests. Despite knowing the dangers, we want to move forward. Scientific expeditions can cost humans their lives but still, human beings are adamant to undergo such perilous journeys. Kevin is hopeful that his wife Rheya would come back though she is gone. We faced with the cosmic absurdity are still hopeful that things will turn up. Despite facing disastrous situations, we expect good things. One way it is good helping us go forward but at the same time dangerous and hazardous to venture into cosmic territories/ alien planets. In our attempts to find new living places through technology we may end up in

situations we have not projected and there may not be any return. Lem has given a true picture of humanity and of its living conditions. His futurology makes us confront reality. The way human beings are advancing and with proofs how technology brought destruction it is not difficult to imagine what future holds for us. What Stanislaw Lem has presented and what Stephen Hawking has predicted through years of science experiments and research may possibly be our future in which our creation (machines) will enslave us and there will be no returning. Humans may have to run from earth when machinery takes over. Stanislaw can truly be called a philosopher of the future because what he saw and wrote about future famous scientists and cosmologists like Stephen Hawking has also predicted and warned us about. It is not wrong to say that Stanislaw Lem is the Philosopher of the Future.

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