

= Stanisław Lem =

Stanisław Herman Lem ( Polish pronunciation : [ staˈʲiswaf ˈlɛm ] ; 12 September 1921 – 27 March 2006 ) was a Polish writer of science fiction , philosophy , and satire , and a trained physician . Lem 's books have been translated into forty @-@ one languages and have sold over forty @-@ five million copies . From the 1950s to 2000s , he published many books , both science fiction and philosophical / futurological . He is best known as the author of the 1961 novel *Solaris* , which has been made into a feature film three times . In 1976 , Theodore Sturgeon wrote that Lem was the most widely read science @-@ fiction writer in the world .

Lem 's works explore philosophical themes through speculation on technology , the nature of intelligence , the impossibility of mutual communication and understanding , despair about human limitations , and humanity 's place in the universe . They are sometimes presented as fiction , but others are in the form of essays or philosophical books .

Translations of his works are difficult due to passages with elaborate word formation , alien or robotic poetry , and puns .

= = Life = =

= = = Early life = = =

Lem was born in 1921 in Lwów , Poland ( since 1945 Lviv , Soviet Union ) . He was the son of Sabina née Woller ( 1892 – 1979 ) and Samuel Lem ( 1879 – 1954 ) , a wealthy laryngologist and former physician in the Austro @-@ Hungarian Army , and first cousin to Polish poet Marian Hemar ( Lem 's father and Hemar 's mother were brother and sister ) . Though in later years he sometimes claimed to have been raised a Roman Catholic , he went to Jewish religious lessons during his school years , and later became an atheist " for moral reasons . . . the world appears to me to be put together in such a painful way that I prefer to believe that it was not created . . . intentionally " . Lem called himself both an " agnostic " . and an atheist later in life . After the Soviet invasion and occupation of Eastern Poland , he was not allowed to study at the Polytechnic as he wished because of his " bourgeois origin , " and only due to his father 's connections was accepted to study medicine at Lwów University in 1940 . During the subsequent Nazi occupation ( 1941 – 1944 ) , Lem 's family , which had Jewish roots , avoided imprisonment in a ghetto , surviving with false papers . During that time , Lem earned a living as a car mechanic and welder . Lem declared :

During that period , I learned in a very personal , practical way that I was no ? Aryan ? . I knew that my ancestors were Jews , but I knew nothing of the Mosaic faith and , regrettably , nothing at all of Jewish culture . So it was , strictly speaking , only the Nazi legislation that brought home to me the realization that I had Jewish blood in my veins .

In 1945 , Polish eastern Kresy was annexed into Soviet Ukraine and the family , like many other Poles , was resettled to Kraków , where Lem , at his father 's insistence , took up medical studies at the Jagiellonian University . He did not take his final examinations on purpose , so as not to be obliged to become a military doctor . Earlier , he had started working as an assistant in a hospital and writing stories in his spare time .

= = = Rise to fame = = =

Lem made his literary debut in 1946 with a number of works of different genres , including poetry as well as a science fiction novel *The Man from Mars* ( *Człowiek z Marsa* ) serialized in *Nowy świat Przygód* ( *New World of Adventures* ) . Between 1948 and 1950 Lem was working as a scientific research assistant at the Jagiellonian University , and published a number of short stories , poems , reviews and similar works , particularly at *Tygodnik Powszechny* . In 1951 , he published his first book , *The Astronauts* ( *Astronauci* ) . In 1954 , he published a short story anthology , *Sesame and other stories* ( *Sezam i inne opowiadania* ) . That year he also married Barbara Leśniak . The

following year , 1955 , saw the publication of another science fiction novel , The Magellanic Cloud ( Obłok Magellana ) .

During the era of Stalinism , which had begun in Poland in the late ' 40s , all published works had to be directly approved by the communist regime . Thus Astronaucci was not , in fact , the first novel Lem finished , just the first that made it past the censors . Going by the date of finished manuscript , Lem 's first book was a partly autobiographical novella Hospital of the Transfiguration ( Szpital Przemienienia ) , finished in 1948 . It would be published seven years later , in 1955 , as a trilogy under a title Czas nieutracony ( Time Not Lost ) . The experience of trying to push Czas .. through the censors was one of the major reasons Lem decided to focus on the less @-@ censored genre of science fiction . Nonetheless , most of Lem 's works published in the 1950s also contain ? forced upon him by the censors and editors ? various references to socialist realism as well as the " glorious future of communism " . Lem later criticized several of his early pieces as compromised by the ideological pressure .

Lem became truly productive after 1956 , when the de @-@ Stalinization period in the Soviet Union led to the " Polish October " , when Poland experienced an increase in freedom of speech . Between 1956 and 1968 , Lem authored seventeen books . His writing over the next three decades or so was split between science fiction ( primarily prose ) and essays about science and culture .

In 1957 , he published his first non @-@ fiction , philosophical book , Dialogues ( Dialogi ) , as well as a science @-@ fiction anthology , The Star Diaries ( Dzienniki gwiazdowe ) , collecting short stories about one of his most popular characters , Ijon Tichy . 1959 saw the publication of three books : Eden , ?ledztwo and the short story anthology , Inwazja z Aldebarana . 1961 saw two more books , the first regarded as being among his top works : Pami?tnik znaleziony w wannie , Solaris , as well as Powrót z gwiazd . This was followed by a collections of his essays and non @-@ fiction prose , Wej?cie na orbit? ( 1962 ) , and a short @-@ story anthology Noc ksi??ycowa ( 1963 ) . In 1964 , Lem published a large work on the border of philosophy and sociology of science and futurology , Summa Technologiae , as well as a novel , The Invincible ( Niezwyci??ony ) .

1965 saw the publication of The Cyberiad ( Cyberiada ) . That year also saw the publication of a short @-@ story anthology , The Hunt ( Polowanie ) . 1966 is the year of " Wysoki Zamek " , and 1968 , " G?os Pana " and " Opowie?ci o pilocie Pirxie " . " Wysoki Zamek " was another of Lem 's autobiographical works , and touched upon a theme that usually was not favored by the censors : Lem 's youth in the pre @-@ war , then @-@ Polish , Lviv . 1967 and 1970 saw two more non @-@ fiction treatises , " Filozofia przypadku " and " Fantastyka i futurologia " . Ijon Tichy returns in 1971 's The Futurological Congress Kongres futurologiczny , the year of a genre @-@ mixing experiment , " Doskona?a pró?nia " ( a collection of reviews of non @-@ existent books ) . 1973 sees a similar work , " Wielko?? urojona " . In 1976 , Lem published two novels : " Maska " and " Katar " . In 1980 , he published another set of reviews of non @-@ existent works , " Prowokacja " . The following year sees another Tichy novel , " Wizja lokalna " , and Golem XIV . Later in that decade , he published " Pokój na Ziemi " ( 1984 ) and " Fiasko " ( 1986 ) , Lem 's final science @-@ fiction novel .

In the late ' 70s and early ' 80s , Lem cautiously supported the Polish dissident movement , and started publishing essays in Paris @-@ based Kultura . In 1982 , with martial law in Poland declared , Lem moved to West Berlin , where he became a fellow of the Institute for Advanced Study , Berlin ( Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin ) . After that , he settled in Vienna . He returned to Poland in 1988 .

= = = Final years = = =

From the late 1980s onwards , he tended to concentrate on philosophical texts and essays , published in a number of Polish magazines ( Tygodnik Powszechny , Odra , Przegl?d , and others ) . They were later collected in a number of anthologies .

In the early 1990s , Lem met with the literary scholar and critic Peter Swirski for a series of extensive interviews , published together with other critical materials and translations as A Stanislaw Lem Reader ( 1997 ) ; in the book , Lem speaks about a range of issues rarely touched on before in any interview . Moreover , the book includes Swirski 's translation of Lem 's retrospective essay " Thirty Years Later " , devoted to Lem 's legendary nonfictional treatise Summa Technologiae .

During later interviews in 2005 , Lem expressed his disappointment with the genre of science fiction , and his general pessimism regarding technical progress . He viewed the human body as unsuitable for space travel , held that information technology drowns people in a glut of low @-@ quality information , and considered truly intelligent robots as both undesirable and impossible to construct . Subsequently , Peter Swirski has published a series of in @-@ depth studies of Lem as a writer , philosopher , and futurologist ; notable among them are the recent *From Literature to Biterature : Lem , Turing , Darwin* ( 2013 ) , *Stanislaw Lem : Selected Letters to Michael Kandel* ( 2014 ) , *Lemography* ( 2014 ) , and *Stanislaw Lem : Philosopher of the Future* ( 2015 ) .

In 1996 , Lem received the prestigious Polish award , the Order of the White Eagle .

Lem died from heart disease in Kraków on 27 March 2006 at the age of 84 .

= = Controversies = =

= = = SFWA = = =

Lem was awarded an honorary membership in the Science Fiction Writers of America ( SFWA ) in 1973 . SFWA Honorary membership is given to people who do not meet the publishing criteria for joining the regular membership , but who would be welcomed as members had their work appeared in the qualifying English @-@ language publications . Lem , however , never had a high opinion of American science fiction , describing it as ill @-@ thought @-@ out , poorly written , and interested more in making money than in ideas or new literary forms . After his eventual American publication , when he became eligible for regular membership , his honorary membership was rescinded , an action that some of the SFWA members apparently intended as a rebuke , and it seems that Lem interpreted it as such . Lem was invited to stay on with the organization with a regular membership , but declined . After many members ( including Ursula K. Le Guin ) protested Lem 's treatment by the SFWA , a member offered to pay his dues . Lem never accepted the offer .

= = = Philip K. Dick = = =

Lem singled out only one American SF writer for praise , Philip K. Dick ? see the 1986 English @-@ language anthology of his critical essays , *Microworlds* . Dick thought that Stanislaw Lem was probably a false name used by a composite committee operating on orders of the Communist party to gain control over public opinion , and wrote a letter to the FBI to that effect . Stanislaw Lem was also responsible for Polish translation of Dick 's work , and when Dick felt monetarily short @-@ changed by the publisher , he held Lem personally responsible ( see *Microworlds* ) .

= = Significance = =

Lem has become one of the most highly acclaimed science @-@ fiction writers , hailed by critics as equal to such classic authors as H. G. Wells and Olaf Stapledon . In 1976 , Theodore Sturgeon wrote that Lem was the most widely read science @-@ fiction writer in the world .

In Poland , in the ' 60s and ' 70s , Lem remained under the radar of mainstream critics , who dismissed him as a " mass market " , low @-@ brow , youth @-@ oriented writer ; such dismissal might have given him a form of invisibility from censorship .

The total volume of his published works is over twenty @-@ eight million volumes . His works were widely translated abroad , appearing in over forty languages , though the bulk of them were in Eastern Bloc countries ( Poland , Germany , and the Soviet Union ) . Franz Rottensteiner , Lem 's former agent abroad , had this to say about Lem 's reception on international markets :

With [ number of translations and copies sold ] , Lem is the most successful author in modern Polish fiction ; nevertheless his commercial success in the world is limited , and the bulk of his large editions was due to the special publishing conditions in the Communist countries : Poland , the Soviet Union , and the German Democratic Republic ) . Only in West Germany was Lem really a

critical and a commercial success [ . . . and everywhere . . . ] in recent years interest in him has waned .

But he is the only writer of European [ science fiction , most of whose ] books have been translated into English , and [ . . . ] kept in print in the USA . Lem 's critical success in English is due mostly to the excellent translations of Michael Kandel .

His best @-@ known novels include *Solaris* ( 1961 ) , *His Master 's Voice* ( *Głos pana* , 1968 ) , and the late *Fiasco* ( *Fiasko* , 1987 ) . *Solaris* was made into a film in 1968 by Russian director Boris Nirenburg , a film in 1972 by Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky ? which won a Special Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 1972 ? and an American re @-@ adaptation in 2002 by American director Steven Soderbergh , starring George Clooney .

*Solaris* is not the only work of Lem 's to be made into a movie . Over ten movie , film , and television adaptations of his work exist , such as adaptations of *The Astronauts* ( *First Spaceship on Venus* , 1960 ) and *The Magellan Nebula* ( *Ikarie XB @-@ 1* , 1963 ) . Lem himself was , however , critical of most of the screen adaptations , with the sole exception of *Przek?adaniec* in 1968 by Andrzej Wajda . More recently , in 2013 , the Israeli ? Polish co @-@ production *The Congress* was released , inspired by Lem 's novel *The Futurological Congress* .

Lem 's works have been used in education , for example as teaching texts for philosophy students .

Lem 's works have influenced not only the realm of literature , but that of science as well . For example , *Return from the Stars* includes the " option " , which is often cited as the first published appearance of the idea of electronic paper .

In 1981 , the philosophers Douglas R. Hofstadter and Daniel C. Dennett included three extracts from Lem 's fiction in their annotated anthology *The Mind 's I* , accompanied by Hofstadter 's comment , which says in part that Lem 's " literary and intuitive approach . . . does a better job of convincing readers of his views than any hard @-@ nosed scientific article . . . might do " .

Other influences exerted by Lem 's works include Will Wright 's popular city planning game *SimCity* , which was partly inspired by Lem 's short story *The Seventh Sally* .

= = Writings = =

= = = Science fiction = = =

Stanisław Lem works were influenced by such masters of Polish literature as Cyprian Norwid and Stanisław Witkiewicz . His prose show a mastery of numerous genres and themes .

One of Lem 's major recurring themes , beginning from his very first novel , *The Man from Mars* , was the impossibility of communication between profoundly alien beings , which may have no common ground with human intelligence , and humans . The best known example is the living planetary ocean in Lem 's novel *Solaris* . Other examples include swarms of mechanical insects ( in *The Invincible* ) , and strangely ordered societies of more human @-@ like beings in *Fiasco* and *Eden* , describing the failure of the first contact . In *His Master 's Voice* , Lem describes the failure of humanity 's intelligence to decipher and truly comprehend an apparent message from space .

Two overlapping arcs of short stories , *Fables for Robots* ( *Bajki Robotów* ) , translated in the collection *Mortal Engines* ) , and *The Cyberiad* ( *Cyberiada* ) provide a commentary on humanity in the form of a series of grotesque , humorous , fairytale @-@ like short stories about a mechanical universe inhabited by robots ( who have occasional contact with biological " slimies " and human " palefaces " ) .

" ?ledztwo " and " *Katar* " are crime novels ( the latter without a murderer ) ; " *Pami?tnik . . .* " is a psychological drama inspired by Kafka . " *Doskona?a pró?nia* " and " *Wielko?? urojona* " are collections of reviews of non @-@ existent books and introductions to them . Similarly , " *Prowokacja* " purports to review a Holocaust @-@ themed work .

= = = Essays = = =

Lem's criticism of most science fiction surfaced in literary and philosophical essays *Science Fiction and Futurology* and interviews . In the 1990s , Lem forswore science fiction and returned to futurological prognostications , most notably those expressed in *Blink of an Eye* ( *Okamgnienie* ) . He became increasingly critical of modern technology in his later life , criticizing inventions such as the Internet .

*Dialogi* and *Summa Technologiae* ( 1964 ) are Lem's two most famous philosophical texts . The *Summa* is notable for being a unique analysis of prospective social , cybernetic , and biological advances ; in this work , Lem discusses philosophical implications of technologies that were completely in the realm of science fiction at the time , but are gaining importance today ? for instance , virtual reality and nanotechnology .

= = Honors = =

1957 ? City of Kraków's Prize in Literature ( *Nagroda Literacka miasta Krakowa* )

1965 ? Prize of the Minister of Culture and Art , 2nd Level ( *Nagroda Ministra Kultury i Sztuki II stopnia* )

1972 ? member of commission " Poland 2000 " of the Polish Academy of Sciences

1973

Prize of the Minister of Foreign Affairs for popularization of Polish culture abroad ( *nagroda Ministra Spraw Zagranicznych za popularyzację polskiej kultury za granicą* )

Literary Prize of the Minister of Culture and Art ( *nagroda literacka Ministra Kultury i Sztuki* ) and honorary member of Science Fiction Writers of America

1976 ? State Prize 1st Level in the area of literature ( *Nagroda Państwowa I stopnia w dziedzinie literatury* )

1979

Grand Prix de Littérature Policière for his novel *Katar* .

A minor planet , 3836 Lem , discovered by Soviet astronomer Nikolai Stepanovich Chernykh in 1979 , is named after him .

1981 ? Doctor honoris causa honorary degree from the Wrocław University of Technology

1986 ? Austrian State Prize for European Literature

1991 ? Austrian literary Franz Kafka Prize

1994 ? member of the Polish Academy of Learning

1996 ? recipient of the Order of the White Eagle

1997 ? honorary citizen of Kraków

1998 ? Doctor honoris causa : University of Opole , Lviv University , Jagiellonian University

2003 ? Doctor honoris causa of the University of Bielefeld

2007 ? A street in Kraków is to be named in his honour .

2009 ? A street in Wieliczka was named in his honour

2011 ? An interactive Google logo inspired by *The Cyberiad* was created and published in his honor for the 60th anniversary of his first published book : *The Astronauts* .