



A Stanislaw Lem Reader (Rethinking Theory)

By Peter Swirski

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This collection assembles in-depth and insightful writings by and about, and interviews with, one of the most fascinating writers of the twentieth century. Anyone interested in Lem's provocative and uncompromising view of literature's role in the contemporary cultural environment, and in Lem's opinions about his own fiction, about the relation of literature to science and technology, and the dead ends of contemporary culture, will be fascinated by this eclectic collection.

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Editorial Review

From Kirkus Reviews

Contrary to what the title suggests, this is not so much a sampler of Lem's writings as an introduction to and overview of the Polish writer's work. Swirski, a lecturer at McGill University (Canada), opens with an essay summarizing Lem's career and the major themes of his writings. Then comes a long 1992 interview with Lem, "Reflections on Literature, Philosophy and Science." Lem contributes a retrospective essay primarily devoted to examining the accuracy of his 1964 book, *Summa Technologiae*, an essay in futurology in which he forecast (among other things) computer virtual reality. Another interview from 1994 consists of Lem's written responses to various broad questions on his thought and writings. The overall effect is to give an excellent, if very condensed, view of Lem's special concerns, particularly on the relationships between fiction and the real world. He comments in detail, for instance, on several writers who have attempted to portray Poland during the Nazi occupation, finding most to have missed the mark (Jerzy Kosinski in *The Painted Bird* overplays the peasants' sexual promiscuity, for instance). His observations on the ephemeral nature of much political satire (from Huxley's *Brave New World* to the Strugatsky brothers' attacks on Stalinism) draw attention to the rarely examined question of the place of the predictive element in fiction. While he has kept at arm's length from popular science fiction, Lem remains one of the few writers of fiction who is deeply conversant with scientific thought and who makes a point of getting his science right. His interest in philosophy is also genuine and wide-reaching, as numerous comments indicate. Densely written, with something to think about in almost every paragraph, this is probably the best quick introduction to the main currents of the large body of work Lem has produced over the last half-century. -- Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Review

"Densely written, with something to think about in almost every paragraph, this is probably the best quick introduction to the main currents of the large body of work Lem has produced". -- Kirkus Reviews

"Slim but fascinating... essential reading." --Booklist

"fascinating and insightful" --American Bookseller

"Expert meshing of literature, technology and contemporary culture" --San Diego Union Tribune

Often fascinating, even when presented in a somewhat Olympian manner. --Publishers Weekly

Having read no Lem before, this book was eye-opening. It's more than an introduction to his work, although it is that--it contains a rich couple of interviews with an outstanding scientific and literary mind. Rarely do these qualities come together so well, not from a style point-of-view, but from a critical one, as here. -- GoodReads

OF COURSE, IT IS ALWAYS A PLEASURE to listen to Lem's ideas, to read Lem's words, and an additional pleasure to "overhear" a more off-the-cuff-Lem--in a personal interview with the author. For readers like myself without knowledge of the Polish language, *A Stanislaw Lem Reader* presents the opportunity to discover aspects of Lem not otherwise accessible. --Utopian Studies

For those who only know him as a novelist, *A Stanislaw Lem Reader* is an excellent introduction to Lem's philosophy, scientific speculation, literary criticism, and social theory. It should, however, be perfectly

accessible to those unfamiliar with any of his works. --Danny Yee's Book Reviews

If the purpose of science fiction is to provoke thought rather than merely entertain, then A Stanislaw Lem Reader is well worth the reader's time and effort. --Extrapolation

About the Author

Peter Swirski is a Canadian scholar and literary critic featured in Canadian Who's Who. He is also Amazon's #1 Bestseller in American Literary Criticism and in Canadian Literary Criticism. Specialist in American literature and American Studies, he is the world's foremost scholar on Stanislaw Lem and author of fifteen award-winning books, including including *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)*.

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