Travelling philosophy : from literature to film

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II. The Novel

Stanislaw Lem

(1921 – Present)
Introduction

Born in Lvov, Poland, Stanislaw Lem has become one of the most critically acclaimed science-fiction novelists of the twentieth-century. While his work was initially published in little known periodicals that specialized in the genre, Lem has gone on to earn worldwide recognition largely due to his innovative storytelling and his seemingly encyclopedic knowledge (Esmaeili 2005: 1). Translated into over thirty languages, Lem’s most recognized novels have sold over twenty-seven million copies worldwide and include such works as His Master’s Voice (1974), The Futurological Congress (1983), and The Cyberiad (1985).

Solaris (1961), Lem’s most popular work, is celebrated for its inventiveness and thematic profundity, which is a reason why many consider it to be a work of “metascience fiction.” However, Solaris is often branded as being a bit unsympathetic towards its readers because of several lengthy passages of “hard science” that do not seem relevant to tabula events. To make matters even more difficult for English-speaking readers, the novel is a double-translation from its original Polish to French and then to English. For some unidentified reason, the publishing house (Faber and Faber) that owns the license to the original text has failed to authorize a direct translation of Solaris from Polish to English.

While the assertion that Lem neglects the process of characterization may be an overstatement, Lem’s stories typically do not center on the characters as much as on the ideas they are forced to confront. In Solaris, the principal characters grapple with the possibility that humans may never be able to truly understand the “alien,” or as Lem refers to it, the truly “Other.” Humanity’s inability to grasp the other is an idea that seems to permeate his work in general. Solaris is science fiction in a pure sense, that is, fiction “about” science and its relationship to moral dilemmas. Lem’s work depends on masterful storytelling and compelling characters to frame philosophical questions, which, in turn, illuminate the stories from their depths, challenging the reader to see as far into them as possible (Powers 1999: 1).

Lem once said that: “Knowing is the hero of my books” (1), which is rather paradoxical when viewed in light of Solaris, which is, in many ways, a novel about the failure of knowing. However, despite the protagonist’s ultimate failure to know the alien other presented to him in the novel, it is the broader philosophical concept of “knowing” itself that is the deeper epistemological current of Solaris. In other words, by unyieldingly problematizing the Solaris Ocean (alien other), Lem transfers the narrative emphasis from the object to the process of inquiry. In his article “Filling the Void: Verne, Wells, and Lem” (1981), American literary theorist Mark Rose writes:

180 Peter Swirski, “Reflections on Literature, Philosophy, and Science,” in A Stanislaw Lem Reader (Evanston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), 66. Ironically, in his interview with Swirski, Lem states: “Reading should never be a matter of struggling through a jungle of words and concepts, with difficulty and discomfort, in order to grasp what should come naturally.”

190 Swirski, “Reflections on Literature, Philosophy, and Science” (1997), 60. Lem states: “Solaris is about love, and the mysterious ocean, and that is what is important about it.”


102 Paul Newall, “Soderbergh’s Solaris,” in The Galilean Library, 2002 (article online) http://www.galilean-library.org/solaris.html: “We assume that our reason is sufficient to comprehend what motivates God or an entity like Solaris but this presumption remains, for Lem, a barrier to any genuine understanding. Some have argued that we simply have no alternative but to judge the actions of gods or “higher forms of intelligence” by our own standards, but it seems
In Lem’s hands, cosmology, or the traditional concern of science fiction in the space category, yields to epistemology, an exploration of the limitations inherent in any human frame of reference (122).

Speaking with regard to His Master’s Voice, in a published interview, Lem reinforces Rose’s sentiment when he declares that human beings sometimes face “phenomena the essence of which we are unable to understand” even when “equipped with the most modern scientific apparatus and knowledge” (Esmaeili 2005: 1). Lem further asserts that Solaris is 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” (1). Lem goes on to state that in Solaris he has attempted to “cut all threads” that lead to personification. Lem endeavors to keep his sign of the non-human as empty, as nonreferential, as possible, and thus he prevents the metaphorical dimensions of his alien from freely developing (Rose 1981: 135). Nevertheless, Rose writes:

...because he must employ some sign, (Lem) must portray the non-human as “this” rather than “that,” not even Lem can entirely avoid metaphor. In selecting the sea as a sign, Lem employs a familiar image of the non-human, one already invested by ancient usage from Homer and Shakespeare to Melville and Verne with the idea of the infinite (135).

In Solaris, it is Lem’s attempt to diminish personification and maintain the Ocean’s nonreferential status that I examine in light of the novel’s abundance of “anthropomorphic theorizing.”

**The Fixed Cycle of Human Existence**

In this section, I first point out the ideas that manifest the fixed cycle of human existence, or simply “the cycle” around which the fabula wraps itself. I initially examine the cause of the cycle, and then I consider the full course of the cycle as it moves inexorably between its point of origin and completion. In the following passage, Dr. Kris Kelvin, the novel’s anti-hero protagonist, expresses the central problem presented in the narrative, which is the intrinsically human failure to achieve a kind of Hegelian understanding self-consciousness. In light of this notion, Kelvin believes that humans are utterly unable to comprehend the more “alien,” external world as he (the narrator) says in a succinct, almost programmatic fashion:

Man has gone out to explore other worlds and other civilizations without having explored his own labyrinth of dark passages and secret chambers, and without finding what lies behind doorways that he himself has sealed (157).

While there is a truth to his assertion, Kelvin will ultimately discover that this external exploration really is an unconscious attempt to explore our “own labyrinth of dark passages and secret chambers.” However, until Kelvin realizes that internal understanding lies in the other, he will be caught in a fixed cycle of existence. In spite of this, as on Kelvin notes, he and the other characters proceed with their “grand enterprise” without an appreciation of the external world’s implications on their ability to

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Lem is making the further suggestion that it is our viewing life as a mystery to be solved that is the deeper problem (an idea found in Wittgenstein, most famously)."
achieve a meaningful kind of self-realization, or a deeper understanding of the universe situated internally. However, it appears that such an understanding is restricted by an inherently human limitation, which is a finite capacity to reason. In the following passage, Kelvin speaks with regard to the futility of an experiment he has begrudgingly agreed to test on himself. Specifically, Kelvin will undergo an encephalogram, or an imprint of his brainwaves. What is more, this "impression" is beamed into a massive fluidic substance, or the "Ocean" that covers virtually the entire surface of the planet known as Solaris:

> Really, one of us ought to have the courage to call the experiment off and shoulder the responsibility for the decision, but the majority reckons that that kind of courage would be a sign of cowardice, and the first step in a retreat. They think it would mean an undignified surrender for mankind - as if there was any dignity in floundering and drowning in what we don't understand and never will (158).

Here, Kelvin speaks to Dr. Sartorius who, along with Dr. Snow, is one of only two men that remain on "Solaris Station" because of a strange phenomenon apparently caused by the Ocean. Through this experiment, both Sartorius and Snow hope to communicate with the Ocean they believe to be a sort of massive living organism. However, Kelvin subordinates "drowning" in the futility of such an exercise to the more prudent recognition of the indissoluble limits imposed by their finite capacity to reason and understand. Furthermore, it appears that this limited capacity is not self-contained, but sets a process in motion that leads to the second stage in the cycle, which is a kind of profound ignorance.

While the next passage reinforces this notion of ignorance, it also asserts that this condition results in an overcompensation, which is the attempt to understand the other through an innate propensity to anthropomorphize the non-human, external world. Here, Kelvin conveys his thoughts concerning a pamphlet written by Grastrom, who was a rather eccentric author of Solarist literature:

> I had read the pamphlet, which was dictated by the urge to understand what lies beyond the grasp of mankind, and aimed in particular against the individual, man, and the human species. (...) Grastrom set out to demonstrate that the most abstract achievements of science, the most advanced theories and victories of mathematics represented nothing more than a stumbling, one or two-step progression from our rude, prehistoric, anthropomorphic understanding of the universe around us (170).

Anthropomorphism, or the human tendency to interpret what is not human in terms of human or personal attributes, is the third stage in the cycle and is best demonstrated by Kelvin's predecessors who fell victim to a "latent anthropomorphism" that included: "many schools of thought which saw various other oceanic formations as 'sensory organs,' even as 'limbs'..." (116).

On page 174, Kelvin informs us that Dr. Gibarian - an "expert" on Solaris and Kelvin's mentor who committed suicide on the Station just prior to Kelvin's arrival - was greatly opposed to "anthropomorphizing interpretations" and mystifications of the psychoanalytic, psychiatric, and neuropsychological schools, which attempted to

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193 Lem, Solaris (1970), 198. At the end of the fabula, cf Kelvin, considering the utility of the other for the purposes of self-realization, states: "If there was a single human being in existence, he would apparently be able to attempt the experiment of creating his own goals in complete freedom - apparently, because a man not brought up among other human beings cannot be a man."
endow the ocean with the symptoms of human illnesses. Expounding on this point, Gibarian (in a recorded message) asserts that: “Any attempt to understand the motivation of these occurrences is blocked by our own anthropomorphism. Where there are no men, there cannot be motives accessible to men” (134). Gibarian’s second level dialogue demonstrates the fabula’s skeptical treatment of anthropomorphism as an operative means to comprehend the other, which is in this case the Ocean. Gibarian’s points reinforce a previously established notion, which is the futility associated with the human endeavor to understand the motivations behind the alien’s actions. It seems, then, that the encephalogram experiment would be more beneficial to the development of the characters’ self-consciousnesses if it were somehow designed to achieve self-realization through the other, rather than just an understanding of the other, which is something Kelvin sees as entirely futile.

The failure to see themselves through the other leads to the fourth stage of the cycle, which resonates with a kind of existential humanism. I define humanism as a doctrine, attitude, or a way of life centered on human interests or values, which affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their lives. Furthermore, it is a philosophy that typically rejects supernaturalism and stresses an individual’s dignity, worth, and capacity for self-realization through reason. In Solaris, if the human actors have an inherently limited reasoning capacity, then their potential for a meaningful self-realization appears finite as well, which, at specific points in the fabula, results in a rather humanistic rejection of the supernatural. What is more, this particular rejection appears to flow from the actors’ anthropomorphic tendencies that blind them not from a comprehension of the unknowable other, but really themselves.

In the following passage, Kelvin describes his notion of an imperfect god, which, as Snow points out, essentially reflects humanity:

“I’m not thinking of a god whose imperfection arises out of the candor of his human creators, but one whose imperfection represents his essential characteristic: a god limited in his omniscience and power, fallible, incapable of foreseeing the consequences of his acts, and creating things that lead to horror. He is a sick god whose ambitions exceed his powers and who does not realize it at first. A god who has created clocks, but not the time they measure.” (...) “This god has no existence outside of matter. He would like to free himself from matter, but he cannot...” (...) “If I understand you, and I’m afraid I do, what you have in mind is an evolving god, who develops in the course of time, grows, and keeps increasing in power while remaining aware of his powerlessness. For your god, the divine condition is a situation without a goal. And understanding that, he despairs. But isn’t this despairing god of yours mankind, Kelvin?” (197).

Here, it appears that the finite human actors do not create “God” in an infinite, omnipotent sense, rather, they resort to anthropomorphically creating a more limited, ineffective “god” that reflects their own image. In other words, they tend to anthropomorphically envision god as themselves, which results in a kind of humanistic rejection of supernaturalism. This notion is reinforced in the following exchange between Kelvin and Snow towards the end of the fabula:

“What gave you this idea of an imperfect god?” “I don’t know. It seems quite feasible to me. That is the only god I could imagine believing in, a god whose passion is not redemption, who saves nothing, fulfills no purpose—a god who

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104 Paul Kurtz, In Defense of Secular Humanism (New York: Prometheus Books, 1983), 5. The high emphasis existentialists place on freedom is reinforced by Kurtz who wrote: “Basically, humanists believe in freedom and pluralistic democracy as virtually our first principle...”

Here, the apparent dismissal of the supernatural is demonstrated by Kelvin’s and Snow’s conclusion that god is a very old “mimoid.” A mimoid is a structure the Ocean produces that “mimics,” or re-creates things (objects and memories) external to it. This act of recreation gains meaning in view of the anthropomorphic tendencies of humans who innately desire to see themselves mimicked by the external, rather than to truly understand it.

It would appear, then, that the characters’ inherently limited and anthropomorphic nature results in a failure to achieve a meaningful self-realization, which is the beginning and ending of the fixed cycle of human existence. This cycle is no more escapable than it would be to “destroy our own thoughts,” which Gibarian further asserts is an act “not within our power” (134). However, at the conclusion of the fabula, it appears that Kelvin does attain a kind of understanding self-realization, which is the recognition of oneself within the fixed cycle. Kelvin’s comprehension is best demonstrated in his monologue seen at the conclusion of the fabula (204). The tenor of this speech likens itself to the rather deterministic passages seen at the conclusions of the literary texts of Clockwork and Fight Club respectively:

And so it would itty on to like the end of the world, round and round and round, like some bolshy gigantic like cheloveck, like old Bog himself (by courtesy of the Korova Milkbar) turning and turning and turning a vonly grahznny orange in his gigantic rookers (191).

I look at God behind his desk, taking notes on a pad, but God’s got this all wrong. We are not special. We are not crap or trash, either. We just are. We just are, and what happens just happens (207).

The cyclically deterministic tone of Fight Club’s conclusion is further developed when it is implied that despite his apparent freedom from Tyler, Project Mayhem will continue. For example, Joe’s followers, who are also hospital employees, continue to refer to him as “Mr. Durden” and one of them whispers: “Everything’s going according to the plan. We’re going to break up civilization so we can make something better out of the world. We look forward to getting you back” (208). Similarly, Kelvin—who likens humanity to a clock, or a record caught in an endless cycle and at the mercy of some “indifferent” and “unknowable” external force—conveys an existential tenor as he resigns himself to a limited awareness of the fixed, cyclical nature of human existence. With this point in mind, in the following analysis of Solaris, I examine the deep structure of the narrative text in order to concretize a story, which articulates a fabula that further conceptualizes this cycle and the manner it bears upon the central existential question.

Robert G. Olson, Existentialism (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), 14. This passage demonstrates Olson’s belief that existentialists generally scoff at the notion of a “complete and fully satisfying life. The life of every man, whether he explicitly recognizes it or not, is marked by irreparable losses. Man cannot help aspiring toward the serene detachment from the things of this world which the traditional philosopher sought; but it is not within his power to achieve either of these ambitions, or having achieved them, to find therein the satisfaction he had anticipated.”
Kelvin: Triple Narrative Agency

Analogous to his literary counterparts in both Clockwork and Fight Club, Kelvin represents Solaris’ anti-hero protagonist who functions as cn, cf, and actor in the fabula. Kelvin’s triple-narrative agency is initially established on page 1 of the text when cn Kelvin states:

At 19:00 hours, ship’s time, I made my way to the launching bay. The men around the shaft stood aside to let me pass, and I climbed down into the capsule. Inside the narrow cockpit, there was scarcely room to move. I attached the hose to the valve on my space suit and it inflated rapidly. From then on, I was incapable of making the smallest movement. There I stood, or rather hung suspended, enveloped in my pneumatic suit and yoke to the metal hull. I looked up; through the transparent canopy I could see a smooth, polished wall and, far above, Moddard’s head leaning over the top of the shaft.

Here, cn Kelvin’s first level speech autobiographically recounts the actions of the “experiencing” cf Kelvin who prepares to depart from the Prometheus (a large ship in orbit above Solaris) for Solaris Station, which is on the planet itself. Although it cannot be definitively determined, there appears to be a relatively small temporal narrative distance between the “experienced” cn and the younger version of himself. However, the exceedingly thorough recitation of fabula time and events indicates that they are rather fresh in cn Kelvin’s memory, which typically signifies a shorter, rather than longer gap between the experienced cn and the experiencing cf.

However, although the temporal distance appears to be nominal, the psychological distance appears much greater and finds itself in a direct correlation with the reliability of cn Kelvin as the narrator of events. This becomes even more explicit when – just after Kelvin arrives on the Station (approximately halfway through the primary fabula) – Kelvin wakes up to see his “visitor,” the re-creation of his dead wife, or the “real” Rheya who exists as a human in the embedded fabula in the narrative then. Shortly thereafter, Kelvin tricks Rheya into a shuttle and ejects her into space, which we assume will eventually destroy her. However, despite his actions, another “visitor” Rheya appears the following morning and it is at this point in the fabula that Kelvin’s consciousness begins to transform:

I dropped off several times after that, and each time an anguished start jolted me awake. Panting, exhausted, I pressed myself closer to her; my heart gradually growing calmer. She touched me cautiously on the cheeks and forehead with the tips of her fingers, to see whether or not I was feverish. It was Rheya, the real Rheya, the one and only Rheya (93).

From the information provided in the passage above, it is quite reasonable to begin questioning the reliability of Kelvin as cn, which is chiefly due to the motivational ambiguity behind his newfound acceptance of another visitor Rheya.

As the following passage demonstrates, however, the uncertainty of the situation becomes clearer when Snow explains how Kelvin’s reasoning capacity has yielded to his emotion. As a result of his past experience with his own visitor, Snow’s observations of cf Kelvin’s experience with visitor Rheya demonstrates that Snow’s second level dialogue serves as a “voice of reason”:

“Who are you trying to please? Who do you want to save? Yourself? Her? And which version of her? This one or that one? Haven’t you got the guts to face them both? Surely you realize that you haven’t thought it through.” (...) I’m
sorry, Kelvin, but it was your idea to spill all this. You don’t love her. You do love her. She is willing to give her life. So are you. It’s touching, it’s magnificent, anything you like, but it’s out of place here — it’s the wrong setting. Don’t you see? No, you don’t want to. You are going around in circles to satisfy the curiosity of a power we don’t understand and can’t control, and she is an aspect, a periodic manifestation of that power” (152-154).

Here, the passage effectively reveals the precariousness of cf Kelvin’s emotional state as it observed by Snow who was able to draw from his own experience and who was in a unique position to point out the obviousness of a man blinded by his emotions.

Although Kelvin does begin to regain control of his passions towards the end of the fabula, there is still a part of his emotional faculty that appears permanently attached to visitor Rheya, which is indicated when he states: “True, I was not absolutely certain, but leaving would mean giving up a chance, perhaps an infinitesimal one, perhaps only imaginary...” (204). At the conclusion, Kelvin decides to remain on the Station and exist in the irrational belief that visitor Rheya — who at her own request has been destroyed by Snow — would somehow reappear. Thus, Kelvin’s seemingly irrational decision to stay on the Station, rather than return to Earth, should cause the reader to question the trustworthiness of his narration as a whole. If the reasoning capacity of cf Kelvin (who becomes cn Kelvin) is still impaired by emotion at the end of the fabula, then the reader must question the accuracy of his narration from not only the point at which Kelvin begins to believe that the visitor Rheya is real, but also the whole of his external narration.

While the reliability of cn Kelvin’s narration is tenuous at best, his functions cf and actor are easier to circumscribe by comparison. With the absence of any embedded fabulas that Kelvin is involved in as an actor, the narrative situation exists in a more stable relationship between cn Kelvin’s external focalization “of” the narrative now and cf Kelvin’s internal focalization “in” the narrative now. In other words, the reader quickly becomes acquainted with the narrative situation, which is never really broken by the distracting nature of the cn’s involvement in the embedded fabulas presented in the narrative then, which is a technique used extensively in both Fight Club texts and the filmic adaptation of Solaris.

Similar to the character-bound narration seen in its literary counterparts, Kelvin’s threefold capacity creates a subjective feel in that the narrator tells a story about himself which, in conjunction with his often tenuous emotional state, reinforces the perceived unreliability of his narration. Although the consistency of cn Kelvin’s autobiographical account of the fabula events is in question, his implicit narratorial characterization remains a primary source of information through which cf Kelvin is transformed from an actor in the fabula to a character in the story.

**Characterizing Kelvin**

In Solaris, while he is primarily characterized implicitly though narratorial characterization, the initial examples of explicit narratorial auto-characterization and explicit figural alter-characterization assist to flesh out cf Kelvin early in the fabula. Cf Kelvin is initially imaged as a rather conventional, professional type when cn Kelvin states that: “By nature, I had always been scrupulous about keeping engagements, whether important or trivial” (14). Additionally, in an instance of alter-characterization, Snow informs us that cf Kelvin is a psychologist and an expert on Solaris, which was indicated at the outset of the fabula when we learned that he was a rather meticulous man of science.

With this information in mind, it is through the wealth of implicit narratorial characterization that the dynamic nature of his character is revealed as the man of
Science is confronted by something that lies exclusively "beyond science" — external to his finite understanding. The following passage demonstrates cf Kelvin's reliance on his reasoning capacity as the key to understanding reality. After his first confrontation with Gibarian's visitor (the "Negress") who mysteriously wanders the Station, Kelvin devises an experiment in logic, which he believes will assess his sanity:

If I could only think up some experiment in logic — a key experiment — which would reveal whether I had really gone mad and was a helpless prey to the figments of my imagination, or whether, in spite of their ludicrous improbability, I had been experiencing real events (49).

At this point in the fabula, Gibarian is dead as a consequence of his suicide on the Station. Although it is never overtly revealed, from the effect a similar experience has on Kelvin, it is safe to assume that Gibarian committed suicide as a result of the continuous reappearance of his visitor — the "Negress." The Negress is a large, half-naked woman who appears, wanders the corridors of the Station, and then mysteriously disappears; her function is never overtly revealed.

After Kelvin's experiment has determined that he is sane, his reliance on logic will soon be truly put to the test when he is forced to confront his own visitor — Rheya. It is Rheya's appearance that marks the beginning of Kelvin's transformation from one who is "being-seen-by-another" to one who sees the truth in himself by "Being-seen-by-the-Other." The first time she appears in the fabula, cf Kelvin has already determined that he is indeed sane, and thus he reasonably concludes she is not real. As a result, Kelvin is able to rather calmly deceive visitor Rheya into a shuttle where he launches her into space, which cf Kelvin describes in the following passage:

I judged that the easiest thing to do would be to place it in a stationary orbit around Solaris and then cut the engines. I verified from the table that the required altitude was 725 miles. It was no guarantee, of course, but I could see no other way out (65).

However, after visitor Rheya miraculously appears once again, Kelvin reacts quite differently at the thought of her possible destruction, or an act he had little difficulty performing just a short time before.

Here, cf Kelvin and Snow discuss what to do about their visitors after several unsuccessful attempts had been made to contact the Ocean in an effort to get to the bottom of the phenomena:

"Okay," he went on. "There is a second plan — to construct a Roche apparatus." "An annihilator?" (...) "And its effect?" Simple. It will be a negative neutrino field. Ordinary matter will not be affected at all. Only the... neutrino structures will be destroyed. You see?" (...) "We abandon the first plan then, the 'Brainwave' plan? Sartorius is working on the other one right now. We'll call it 'Project Liberation.'" "I had to make a quick decision. Snow was no physicist, and Sartorius' videophone was disconnected or smashed. I took the chance; I'd rather call the second idea 'Operation Slaughterhouse'" (128).

Sartre, Being and Nothingness (1956), 257: "In a word, my apprehension of the Other in the world as probably being a man refers to my permanent possibility of being-seen-by-him: that is, to the permanent possibility that a subject who sees me may be substituted for the object seen by me. 'Being-seen-by-the-Other' is the truth of 'seeing-the-Other.'"
This passage contrasts cf Kelvin's behavior concerning the idea of destroying the visitors. Specifically, Kelvin's reaction to the first visitor Rheya is consistent with someone who is more logically detached from the dramatic nature of the situation. However, the second passage is in harmony with the behavior of someone who has become more emotionally engaged with the situation, a point implicitly gleaned from his "Operation Slaughterhouse" remark.

Recalling Jack's reaction to the destructively liberating goals of Project Mayhem seen in Fincher's Fight Club, the dynamic disposition of Kelvin's character begins to take shape in response to the similar consequences and ends of Project Liberation. Considering this idea, the next passage further reveals a character whose emotions have taken a more primary position in his decision-making capabilities. Here, cf Kelvin and visitor Rheya discuss their future together:

"Let's decide to stay together. What do you say?" "Listen Kris, there's something else I must ask you... am I... do I look very like her?" "You did at first. Now I don't know." "I don't understand." "Now all I see is you." "You're sure?" "Yes. If you really were her, I might not be able to love you." "Why?" "Because of what I did" (146).

This rather striking change in cf Kelvin is implied in the way he now acts toward the control stimulus--visitor Rheya. Instead of attempting to send her away, he now tries to stay with her indefinitely on the Station, which is a decision obviously guided more by passion than reason. In addition, the reader should begin to recognize the impetus behind his psychological transformation, which is cf Kelvin's belief that he caused the real Rheya's suicide. This information now causes us to interpret his actions as an attempt to atone for his perceived mistakes.

Towards the end of the fabula, cf Kelvin's psychological transformation appears complete. In the following dialogue between Kelvin and Snow, we see Kelvin's reaction after learning that Snow had disintegrated visitor Rheya (at her own request) because she had resigned herself to the fact that she would never be the real Rheya:

Kelvin: "Tell me how." Snow: "Disintegration." (...) Kelvin: "She will come back." Snow: "No." Kelvin: "What do you know about it?" "You remember the wings of foam? Since that day, they do not come back." Kelvin: "You killed her," I whispered. "Yes... in my place what else would you have done?" (...) Kelvin: "The planet will no longer be subject to the four-power convention. We'll be authorized to use any means at our disposal. We can send for anti-matter generators. Nothing can stand up against them, nothing..." I was shouting now, and blinded with tears. Snow: "You want to destroy it? Why?" (191).

Here, the second visitor Rheya's destruction signals the eradication of the possibility that cf Kelvin could set himself free from his remorse by "making things right." As a result of this loss, the narrative presents the transformation of a character who had spent a great deal of his life studying the Ocean in an attempt to understand it, to one who now seeks to destroy it in a fit of blind rage. In other words, the more coldly calculating cf Kelvin who sent the first visitor Rheya away has become the more irrational cf Kelvin who would seek to annihilate the Ocean. Since the "wings of foam" event when the planet was said to have shed its skin, the visitors do not return after they are destroyed, which means that there is no hope that Kelvin could atone for his perceived mistakes.

Finally, at the conclusion of the fabula, the reader is confronted with a cf Kelvin who has been irrevocably altered through his experience on the Station— a character more disillusioned as he ponders a return to Earth: "I shall find new interests and
occupations; and I shall not give myself completely to them, as I shall never give myself completely to anything or anybody” (196). Thus, cf Kelvin ultimately becomes a permutation of sorts between the man of science we saw in the beginning of the fabula and the more irrational one we see in the middle. Along these lines, after the second visitor Rheya had been destroyed, cn Kelvin describes cf Kelvin’s state of mind after he chose to remain on the Station rather than return to Earth:

Must I go on living here then, among the objects we both had touched, in the air she had breathed? In the name of what? In the hope of her return? I hoped for nothing. And yet I lived in expectation. Since she had gone, that was all that remained. I did not know what achievements, what mockery, even what tortures still awaited me. I knew nothing, and I persisted in the faith that the time of cruel miracles was not past (204).

Although Kelvin exhibits a kind of existential “serene detachment” from the things of this world and resigns himself to being a “clock that measures the passage of time” just prior to this passage, Kelvin rather illogically chooses to stay on the Station and “persist in the faith” that he would one day see a visitor Rheya again. Thus, he is simultaneously cognizant of the futility of his decision and driven by a kind of transcendent, intuitive hope that there is something “beyond logic.” Despite his resignation, Kelvin clings to a fading belief that the limitations of his finite consciousness may allow room for the unexplained – the miraculous. Thus, it is this seemingly illogical, foolish hope that appears to, at least in some small way, sustain cf Kelvin at the conclusion of the fabula.

Characterizing Rheya

In the novel, Rheya the actor is, in fact, developed into two distinct characters in the story. Therefore, I investigate the characterization of both the real Rheya (whose suicide occurred prior to the primary fabula) and the visitor Rheya, or the Ocean’s creation via cf Kelvin’s memories. Sartorius explains this creative act: “The origin of the materialization lies in the most durable imprints of memory, those which are especially well-defined...” (102). The characterization of the real Rheya exists in a unique reciprocating dynamic with that of visitor Rheya. To put it another way, it is through the characterization of visitor Rheya that the human one manifests itself. The source of this dynamic exists in the fact that visitor Rheya is a precise re-creation of the real Rheya, as Sartorius explains: “The Phi-creatures (visitors) reappear exactly as they were, down to the last detail... (103).

In light of this reality, however, the reader must consider the potential fallibility of cn Kelvin’s narration when examples of narratorial characterization are provided. This caveat is made more evident in the film when cn Kelvin recognizes the fact that he (as cf) may have “remembered her wrong.” Since cn and cf Kelvin transcend time and space through memory, if the younger one remembered her wrong, then the narration of that memory by the older one may be inaccurate as well. Nevertheless, while the memory of both Kelvins may be unreliable, they are the only sources from which visitor Rheya flows. Since there is no other character besides Kelvin that knew the real Rheya in the narrative past, the reader must accept, perhaps grudgingly, both cn Kelvin’s narratorial and cf Kelvin’s figural characterization of the visitor Rheya and its bearing upon her human antecedent.

In an example of explicit narratorial alter-characterization, cn Kelvin describes what he saw (as cf) the first time visitor Rheya appeared on the Station:

It was Rheya. She was wearing a white beach dress, the material stretched tightly over her breasts. She sat with her legs crossed; her feet were bare.
Motionless, leaning on her sun-tanned arms, she gazed at me from beneath her black lashes: Rheya, with her dark hair brushed back. For a long time, I lay there peacefully gazing back at her. (...) Her lips were pouting slightly— a habit of hers— as though she were about to whistle; but her expression was serious. I thought of my recent speculations on the subject of dreams. She had not changed since the day I had seen her for the last time; she was then nineteen. Today she would be twenty-nine (52).

Here, since visitor Rheya is a re-creation, her description may provide insight into the appearance of the human Rheya as well. Although the real Rheya would have been twenty-nine at this point in the fabula if she were still alive, visitor Rheya could not have aged past the point when the human one died (age 19) because it was the last time cf Kelvin would have had any recollection of her.197 Similar to the passage above, the following passage exhibits this reciprocating characterization dynamic:

It was her voice, that familiar, low-pitched, slightly faraway voice, and that air of not caring much about what she was saying, of already being preoccupied with something else. People used to think of her off-hand, even rude, because the expression on her face rarely changed from one of vague astonishment (54).

Here, cn Kelvin— after cf listened to visitor Rheya speak— is reminded of what the real Rheya was like. Specifically, it was the familiar resonance in visitor Rheya’s voice that further stimulated Kelvin’s memories of the real Rheya. In this way, the preliminary information the reader ascertains about the real Rheya is later juxtaposed with visitor Rheya, which elucidates the dynamic development of the latter into something more than merely the physical manifestation of cf Kelvin’s memories.

While the initial examples provide lucid connections between the two Rheyas, conversely, the preponderance of the examples seen in the latter half of the text distinguish one from the other. In other words, visitor Rheya is not characterized in relation to the human qualities she shares with her human counterpart, but as a separate entity that unveils her more “alien” composition:

“Let’s call them Phi-creatures,” Snow interjected. (...) “Everything looks normal, but it’s a camouflage. A cover. In a way, it’s a super-copy, a reproduction which is superior to the original. I’ll explain what I mean: there exists, in man, an absolute limit — a term to structural divisibility — whereas here, the frontiers have been pushed back. We are dealing with a sub-atomic structure.” (...) “Consequently, the albumen, the cell, and the nucleus of the cell are nothing but camouflage. The real structure, which determines the functions of the visitor, remains concealed” (100-102).

Here, the corporeal differences between the two Rheyas are explicitly revealed and the once apparent humanness of the visitor version begins to fade. In the following two passages, it is not her composition, but rather her actions that distinguish the alternate existence of visitor Rheya from the human version. In the first passage below, cn Kelvin explicitly notes that she was not the real Rheya. This observation manifests in the disconnection between visitor Rheya’s actions and those of the real one he remembered:

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197 Lem, Solaris (1970), 70. It is revealed that the real Rheya committed suicide by lethal injection after an argument she had with Kelvin. Although it is safe to assume that she acted in a “fit of despair,” or a moment of “temporary insanity,” the motivation behind her action is never overtly revealed.
She had changed. This was not Rheya at all; the real Rheya never imposed herself, would have never forced her presence on me. (...) Suddenly she jerked her elbows together, and there followed a powerful recoil. I resisted for barely a second. Thrown backwards and almost lifted off my feet, even had I been an athlete I could have freed myself (59).

Here, visitor Rheya acts quite differently than the human Rheya he remembers. This tends to mute the relevance of the reliability of cf Kelvin's memories as visitor Rheya begins to take on a life of her own despite what he remembered of the real one.

This growing disconnection is further evidenced in the following passage that reveals her "super-human" ability to drink scalding hot liquid with no ill effects:

"Are you angry with me?" she asked, in a low voice. "No. Drink this." Unconsciously, I had known all along that she would obey me. She took the glass without a word and drank the scalding mixture in one gulp (60).

Soon thereafter, visitor Rheya becomes conscious of the fact that she is not the real Rheya. In accordance with phenomenological and existential thought, visitor Rheya senses that her identity is not an internal conception, but rather being somehow externally projected onto her when she states:108

"I have dreams... I don't know whether they really are dreams. Perhaps I'm ill. I lie there and think, and..." "What?" "I have strange thoughts. I don't know where they come from." It took all my self-control to steady my voice and tell her to go on, and I found myself tensing for her answer as if for a blow in the face. "They are thoughts..." She shook her head helplessly. "...all around me." "I don't understand." "I get a feeling as if they were not from inside myself, but somewhere further away. I can't explain it, can't put words to it..." (108).

In this exchange between cf Kelvin and visitor Rheya, the reader is exposed to a "budding awareness" of the nature of her non-human existence. In particular, the lack of connection between the behavior and abilities of the two Rheyas appears to stem from a deeper "disconnection of consciousness" (191) between her own autonomous consciousness and that of cf Kelvin's. This burgeoning awareness further matures in the following passage:

"I had been telling myself that the... unknown force might be concealed somewhere inside me, and that it might not occupy very much space. But I did not know whereabouts it was. I think now that I was evading the real issue because I didn't have the nerve to make a decision. I was afraid, and I looked for a way out. But Kris, if my blood is like yours... if I really... no, it's impossible. I would already be dead, wouldn't I? That means there really is something different – but where? In the mind? Yet it seems to me that I think as any human

108 Hegel, Phenomenology of the Spirit (1977), 111: "Self-consciousness is faced with another self-consciousness; it has come out of itself. This has a twofold significance: first, it has lost itself, for it finds itself as an other being; secondly, in doing so it has superseded the other, for it does not see the other as an essential being, but in the other it sees its own self." Sartre, Being and Nothingness (1956), 256-257: "it is in and through the revelation of my being-as-object for the Other that I must be able to apprehend the presence of his being-as-subject. For just as the Other is a probable object for me-as-subject, so I can discover myself in the process of becoming a probable object for only a certain subject. (...) This is the relation which I call 'being-seen-by-another'..."
being does... and I know nothing! If that alien thing was thinking in my head, I would know everything" (144).

Visitor Rheya conveys her separation from simply being a product of Kelvin’s memories to something more, or a non-human sentient being established via a negative relation of what she is not; she is neither human nor an "alien thing." Furthermore, the two preceding passages above convey instances of visitor Rheya’s direct speech in a personal language situation at the second level. With regard to her status as a self-conscious being, this is important to note because both second level passages show signs of emotive function where the actor (visitor Rheya) refers to herself. If in a statement the feelings of the speaker are expressed, the statement is about the speaker, and signs of emotive functioning are, therefore, also signs of self-reference (Bal 1997: 47).

Apparently the result of independent reasoning capabilities, visitor Rheya has attained a level of self-realization that exists distinct from cf Kelvin’s memories, although such an achievement does not carry with it positive results. In other words, she suffers and kind of alienated anxiety after being disillusioned by the recognition that she is not human like she originally believed:

"It’s not possible.” Her clenched fist struck her chest. “What else could I think, except that I was Rheya! Maybe you believe this is all an act? It isn’t, I swear it isn’t.” Something snapped in my mind, and I went to put my arms round her, but she fought free: “Don’t touch me! Leave me alone! I disgust you, I know I do. Keep away! I’m not Rheya…” (141).

Accordingly, while this realization does seem to, at least in part, free her from a slavish connection to cf Kelvin’s memories, it also creates within her suicidal tendencies.

Although the real Rheya died by suicide, the visitor Rheya’s circumstances are decidedly different. While she does not exhibit the same serene detachment as Kelvin, visitor Rheya reacts with a powerless resignation after beginning to comprehend what she believes to be the deterministic nature of her existence. Her perceived inability to either change or accept her real identity leads to an alienated acquiescence revealed in her suicide note to Kelvin where she crosses out her signed name – “Rheya.”

**Characterizing Solaris – the Ocean**

As stated in the general introduction, an actor is an agent that performs actions and is not necessarily human and such is the case for the Ocean that covers the face of Solaris. Yet, in some fabulas there are actors who have no functional part in the structure of that fabula because they do not cause or undergo functional events. Functional events

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199 Hazel Barnes, “Sartre’s Ontology: The Revealing and Making of Being,” in The Cambridge Companion to Sartre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 15. Barnes argues that being-for-itself is distinguished from being-in-itself by the presence of in itself of the active negating activity we experience as consciousness. She loosely defines being-for-itself as conscious being and being-in-itself as non-conscious being. Thus, being-for-itself is equated to a human being.

200 Bal, Narratology (1997), 48: “When the signals of the personal language situation refer to the language situation of the narrator, we are dealing with a perceivable narrator (n1(p)). When the signals refer to the language situation of the actors, and a clear change of level has been indicated by means of a declarative verb, a colon, quotation marks, etc., we speak of a personal language situation at the second level (cn2). This situation can be called dramatic; just as on the stage, the actors communicate through speech in a personal language situation.”

201 Bal, Narratology (1997), 195. The analysis presented in this section is based on Bal’s assertion that actors will be regarded in their relation to the sequences of events which – as follows from our definition – they cause or undergo. Actors who do not cause or undergo functional events may be
open up a choice between two possibilities, realize this choice, or reveal the results of such a choice, and once a choice is made, it determines the subsequent course of events in the developments of the fabula (Bal 1997:184).

It appears, then, that the Ocean is a functional actor that, for instance, acts to create Rheya and the other visitors on the Station. These actions greatly influence the subsequent course of events in the developments of the fabula. Our problem lies in the truth-value of the Ocean, or its reality as an actant within the actantial structure. “Truth” exists in the coincidence of existence and appearance, of the identity and qualities of an actor on the one hand and the impression s/he makes, his or her claims, on the other. When an actor is what s/he appears, s/he is true. When s/he does not put up an appearance, or, in other words hides who s/he is, this identity is secret (Bal 1997: 206).

While this is certainly helpful, the Ocean is neither a she nor a he, but rather an “it”: a non-human freed from the teleological presupposition that human thinking and action are directed towards an aim. Along these lines, although the network of events in the fabula gives the impression that the Ocean is a functional actor, the nature of its function as subject-actant is indecipherable because its motivations are never revealed. In other words, although the Ocean acts to create Rheya, we cannot say the Ocean (sa) wants to torture (function) Kelvin (oa). Nevertheless, the Ocean’s secret identity within the actantial structure does not prevent either the reader or the characters in the story from the tendency to anthropomorphize the Ocean and, in a way, artificially force it through the process of characterization. Hence, in this section, I examine how the fabula addresses the existence of a non-human, functional actor whose secret identity is never revealed. This relates to a central problem presented in Lem’s work, which is the characters’ failure to understand themselves because of their propensity to understand the other through anthropomorphic means.

Actor is a broad term for anything that acts, while character is a more specific term for the anthropomorphic figures the narrator tells us about;202 The analysis of the fabula’s third principal actor problematizes the process of characterization. In the case of Solaris, the fabula articulates a not-so-subtle admonition with regard to the innate tendency to anthropomorphize that which is not human, a notion expressed by Kelvin when he states: “Even when on their guard, human beings inevitably theorize” (111). Along these lines, it is the Ocean that provides a “sounding board” for the fabula’s attempt to tackle the notion of anthropomorphism.

I previously addressed anthropomorphism as it generally functioned within the fixed cycle of human existence. Here, I examine the Ocean and its function, which is to reveal the specific anthropomorphic tendencies of the characters who are forced to interact with the manifestations of its actions. The idea that human beings have an innate tendency to anthropomorphize, first established by Gibarian’s dialogue, is further reinforced when Snow states: “You yourself instinctively treat it like a human being, now more than ever” (192). In both cases, the context of surrounding events generally characterizes the speaking subjects’ (Gibarian and Snow) statements as objective and reliable. The perceived reliability of these statements is imperative if the reader is to accept a more universal notion of anthropomorphism that is not limited to specific actors, but rather a characteristic that exists in the whole of humanity. After the fabula overtly established the intrinsically anthropomorphic tendency of humans, it then treats that tendency as something that must be first recognized and then resisted. The novel goes to great lengths to describe and summarize various anthropomorphic tendencies

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202 Bal, Narratology (1997), 114. Bal further specifies the distinction between the two terms: an “actor” provided with distinctive characteristics creates the effect of a “character.”
and theories (past and present) in an attempt to understand the Ocean. Kelvin’s own doctoral thesis is devoted to such a pursuit:

It was based on the discoveries of Bergmann and Reynolds, who had succeeded in isolating and “filtering” the elements of the most powerful emotions – despair, grief, and pleasure – out of the mass of general mental processes. (…) The journalists pounced on my thesis, and in some newspapers my name was coupled with grotesque headlines – “The Despairing Jelly,” “The Planet in Orgasm” (175).

Despite the negative reaction his thesis receives in this instance, it does not necessarily mean that such anthropomorphic pursuits are treated negatively by the fabula in its totality. Rather, a stronger argument for a larger thematic thrust in this direction is made by the fact that despite his own research (and his knowledge of similar pursuits), neither Kelvin nor his predecessors understand the Ocean. For it resists all such endeavors and is described as defeating “all attempts at analysis” (21) and “indifferent to the point of obstinately ignoring all their advances” (168). Hence, it appears that their epistemological failures eventually lead to more practical ethical concerns that they relate to Kelvin’s interaction with visitor Rheya. For, because he cannot understand the function of the creator Ocean, Kelvin is unsure how to treat its creation – visitor Rheya.

Despite devoting large blocks of text (roughly five sections of 5-10 pages) to the delineation of Solaristic analysis and theory, or the hard science of “Solaristics,” there are no theories in particular that Kelvin endorses or believes to be definitively truer than others. In this drier portion of the text, the reader learns that the Ocean has (for a century) been the center of scientific research and philosophy and a source of great interest to the general public. As a result, massive amounts of written material (scientific and otherwise) fills the world’s data banks and libraries. Despite the tremendous amount of research that has been performed, the failure to understand the Ocean results in a “dying out” of Solaristics not only from academic circles, but from the public’s consciousness as well:

The quest for this key, the philosopher’s stone of Solaristic studies, had absorbed the time and energy of all kinds of people with little or no scientific training. During the fourth decade of Solaristics the craze spread like an epidemic, and provided a fertile ground for the psychologists. An unknown number of cranks and ignorant fanatics toiled at their fumbling researches with a greater enthusiasm than any which had animated the old prophets of perpetual motions, or the squaring of the circle. The craze fizzled out in only few years, and by the time I was ready to leave for Solarii it had vanished from the headlines and from conversation, and the ocean itself was practically forgotten by the public (169).

Solaristics was considered a lost cause and began to fade from the radar screen of human inquiry because – although it was widely agreed that the Ocean was a living organism – it could not be effectively understood through any known means. Since the Ocean had successfully resisted analysis and could not be anthropomorphically comprehended, not only was research neglected by a lack of funding, but also the totality of its formal inquiry became viewed as a “body of incommunicable knowledge” (172). It is seen this way because the transposing of such knowledge into “human language” loses “all substance” because it cannot be “brought intact through the barrier.” To state it differently, due to the Ocean’s apparent refusal to be understood anthropomorphically, there is a barrier that cannot be crossed by humans who are
intrinsicly limited to a rather narrow comprehension of only those things they can relate to in human terms.

Although the Ocean resists being understood anthropomorphically, it is still an actor in the fabula. I even contend that it is not completely free from the process of characterization in the story. As an actor, the Ocean creates huge structures called "extensors," "mimoids," "symmetriads," and "asymmetriads" with functions, although widely studied, that remain ambiguous. Besides forming these structures that exist in the Ocean itself, it also acts to re-create the extremely complex visitors that materialize on the Station. For this reason, I consider it an actor.

With the Ocean’s status as an actor thus established, the following passage addresses its rather tenuous status as a character in the story:

Yet it had infiltrated my mind without my knowledge, surveyed my memory, and laid bare my most vulnerable point. That was undeniable. Without any assistance or radiation transmission, it had found its way through the armored shell of the Station, located me, and come away with its spoils... (156).

Although he agrees with Gibarian’s and Snow’s earlier warnings against the anthropomorphic nature of his observations, Kelvin proceeds to describe the Ocean’s actions anthropomorphically, an act that most likely stems from his emotional involvement with visitor Rheya. Snow’s speech displays a similar anthropomorphic quality:

It spies out desires in our brains, and only two percent of mental processes are conscious. That means it knows us better than we know ourselves. We’ve got to reach an understanding with it (183).

Here, despite his warning to Kelvin, Snow falls into a similar pattern of anthropomorphic description. It is reasonable to assume, much like the characters in the story, that the reader also begins to interpret the Ocean’s actions anthropomorphically. In other words, the reader tends to identify with the focalizer and, therefore, is inclined to accept the vision presented by that character (Bal 1997: 146). Through such phrases and words as “come away with spoils,” “infiltrated,” “vulnerable,” and “spies,” it stands to reason that the reader will also anthropomorphize the Ocean as having the intent to steal.

Although such descriptions function to provisionally characterize the Ocean, the process is concurrently stunted as those who made the statements also refute the latent anthropomorphic presuppositions behind them. In the next passage, Kelvin explains (to Snow) the intent of the Ocean’s actions. However, he does so in anthropomorphic terms:

“It has performed a series of... experiments on us. Psychic vivisection. It has used knowledge which it stole from our minds without consent.” “Those are not facts, Kelvin. They are not even propositions. They are theories. You could say that it has taken account of our desires locked into secret recesses or our brains. Perhaps it was sending us... presents” (192).

In response, Snow correctly points out the theoretical nature of his assumptions, but in offering an alternative he cannot help but address the Ocean in a similar anthropomorphic fashion. Thus, it seems that the Ocean presents a particularly thorny

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203 Lem, Solaris (1970), 110-124. Although these structures are described in detail in the text, their appearance is not relevant to this discussion; rather, it is more important to note that despite their complexity and grandeur, no one is aware of their particular functions.
problem as it relates to the process of characterization. The text clearly points out the ineffectuality of the attempt to understand something non-human, a notion best summarized by Gibarian who states: "Where there are no men, there can be no motives accessible to men" (134).

Thus, taken as a basis the teleological presupposition that human thinking and action are directed toward an aim, this particular dialogue underscores the basic crux of their problem. The fact that the Ocean is not human makes it impossible to comprehend its function and therefore its actions can never be clearly interpreted. So, although the Ocean appears to be a functional actor in the fabula, its status as a non-human helps to maintain its secret identity that – in conjunction with the characters’ limited reasoning capacities and anthropomorphic tendencies – makes any attempt to understand the Ocean an exercise in futility. Despite its actions that appear to have logical meaning, it seems that the Ocean provides a truly unknowable other, an epistemological barrier the characters are unable to cross because of their own shortsighted anthropomorphism.

Sequential Ordering

The sequential ordering of fabula events in Lem’s novel is the most linear of the three literary texts examined thus far. The fabula begins in medias res as Kelvin makes his way to the launching bay en route to the Station. From this point, the narrative now moves forward as Kelvin arrives at the Station where, with the exception of a short trip to Solaris, he remains for the rest of the primary fabula. While the larger part of the text is devoted to the narration of the primary fabula, there are several anachronies in the form of both anticipations and retroversions.

There are a number of passages that anticipate the Ocean’s unexplained creative acts. These particular anachronies are internal anticipations, or internal analepses, which occur within the time span of the primary fabula and tend to function as announcements. In an announcement, attention is explicitly drawn to the fact that the reader is now concerned with something that will only take place later on. An example of an internal anticipation that functions as an announcement is seen in chapter one when Snow first tries to warn Kelvin that he may see someone he does not expect:

“He’s (Sartorius) up there, in the laboratory, and I doubt if he’ll come down before dark, but... In any case, you’ll recognize him. If you should see anyone else – someone who isn’t me or Sartorius. you understand, then...” “Then what? (…) Who could I see?” I flared up. “A ghost?” “You think I’m mad, of course. No, no, I’m not mad. I can’t say anything more for the moment. Perhaps... who knows?... Nothing will happen. But don’t forget I warned you” (10).

Shortly thereafter, the internal status of the anticipation is revealed as Kelvin sees Gibarian’s visitor – the Negress. Later in the primary fabula, the reader again sees this same type of internal anticipation that explicitly announces an event that occurs only a short time later when Snow – who has already experienced a visitor of his own – again serves as a conduit through which the anachrony is revealed:

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204 Bal, Narratology (1997), 90: "If the retroversion occurs within the time span of the primary fabula, the we refer to an internal analepsis, an internal retroversion." “Anticipations, too can be grouped as internal or external, even though it is not always possible to establish the dividing line” (95).

205 Bal, Narratology (1997), 97. In an announcement, adverbs such as “later” and verbs such as “expect” or “promise” are used in the text or may be logically added to it. Conversely, hints are implicit. A hint is simply a germ, of which the germinating force can only be seen later.
"Hello Kelvin!" he croaked. "Well, did you discover anything?" "Yes... he's not alone." Snow grinned sourly. "Oh, really? Well, that's something. Has he got visitors?" "I can't understand why you won't tell me what's going on," I retorted impulsively. "Since I have to remain here, I'm bound to find out the truth sooner or later. Why the mystery?" "When you've received some visitors yourself, you'll understand" (46).

Once more, this passage functions as an internal anticipation that announces a forthcoming event, which is the appearance of Kelvin's visitor – Rheya. While these passages convey insight into Snow as a character who appears to experientially "know things," the reader also gets a sense that Solaris allies itself with the mystery or detective genres. However, in contrast to these genres, Solaris tends to use announcements, rather than hints. Yet, the "great mystery" (the function of the Ocean) of the narrative is never revealed. Thus, it would appear that the use of explicit announcements is a stylistic device to create an "unsolvable mystery," which supports the notion that there are some things cannot be understood by the human mind.

Conversely, while anticipations are used to create suspense and add thematic weight, retroversions in the form of embedded fabulas provide indications about the antecedents, the past of the actors concerned, in so far as the past can be relevant for the interpretation of events (Bal 1997: 91). In particular, the external retroversions, or external analepses, which take place completely outside the time span of the primary fabula occur when Kelvin peruses texts he finds in the Station's library. In these cases, Kelvin reads narrative accounts of past Solaris explorations that provide background information about the Ocean. In the following passage, Kelvin reads from a book he found in Gibarian's room titled Historia Solaris:

I rested the thick, solidly bound volume on my knees and began leafing through the pages. The discovery of Solaris dated from about 100 years before I was born. The planet orbits two suns: a red sun and a blue sun. For 45 years after its discovery, no spacecraft had visited Solaris. (...) A few decades later, however, observations seemed to suggest that the planet's orbit was in no way subject to the expected variations: it was stable, as stable as the orbit of the planets in our own solar system. (...) During the following ten years, Solaris became the center of attraction for all observatories concerned with the study of this region of space, for the planet had in the meantime shown the astonishing faculty of maintaining an orbit which ought, with any shadow of doubt, to have been unstable (16-17).

The external retroversion, in the form of an embedded fabula, moves the reader chronologically forward toward the more contemporary scientific thought of those in the narrative now. Although roughly ten pages of text are devoted to the exposition found in this particular retroversion, even the modern thinkers presented in the primary fabula are still at a loss as to the purpose, or function of the Ocean.

Another example of an external retroversion in the form of an embedded fabula that provides expositive material with regard to the Ocean is found in chapter six. In the following passage, Kelvin examines another textbook ("The Little Apocrypha") Gibarian directed him to read before he committed suicide earlier in the fabula:206

206 Edgar J. Goodspeed, trans., The Apocrypha (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 1: "The Apocrypha consists of the books that are found in the Greek version of the Jewish Bible – the Septuagint, the earliest complete version of the Bible we possess – but that were not included in the final, canonical version of the Hebrew Bible. For this reason, they were called 'Apocrypha,' the hidden or secret books, and while they formed part of the original King James version of 1611, they..."
BERTON: When I reached 100 feet it became very difficult to maintain altitude because of the violent gusts of wind inside the cone. I had to hang on to the controls and for a short period — about ten or fifteen minutes — I did not look outside. (...) I had to maneuver against the wind, and when I was able to look down again, I saw something which looked like a garden. Yes, a garden. (...) QUESTION: Did the trees and plants you saw have leaves on them? BERTON: No, the shapes were only approximate, like a model garden (78-79).

Here — in an embedded fabula that exists externally to the time span of the primary one — Berton (a Solarist) recounts his unique experience with the Ocean before the “Commission of Enquiry.” Similar to the first one, this embedded fabula takes up about ten pages of text and exposes Solaris in so far as that past can be relevant for the interpretation of events in the primary fabula. While this is typically the function of such a device, Solaris presents the reader with a rather unique version. Specifically, these embedded fabulas — while replete with information about the Ocean — do not help the reader interpret events in the primary fabula because s/he relies on the teleological presuppositions that do not apply to the Ocean.

Thus, the Ocean, while a functional actor, is not human. Despite the “enlightening nature” of the information provided in the embedded fabulas, this disclosure still does not facilitate the reader’s understanding of the Ocean’s function when it acts similarly in the primary fabula. To take a different approach — just like the great number of scientists that precede the existence of primary fabula — the reader is not able to effectively interpret the information because s/he cannot understand the motivations of something non-human. This notion is further evidenced later in Berton’s report as he describes seeing the re-creation of a monstrous child in the Ocean:

BERTON: It was more like a doll in a museum, only a living doll. It opened and closed its mouth, it made various gestures, horrible gestures. (...) QUESTION: Try to be more explicit. BERTON: It’s difficult. I’m talking of an impression more of an intuition. I didn’t analyze it, but I knew that those gestures weren’t natural.

QUESTION: Do you mean, for example, that the hands didn’t move as human hands would move, because the joints were not sufficiently supple? BERTON: No, not at all. But... these movements had no meaning. Each of our movements means something, more or less, serves some purpose... (82).

Here, although Berton does provide the reader with descriptive information about the Ocean, he (like the reader) is unable to interpret the signs he observed — even though they were produced from what appeared to be a human child.

Although these external retroversions are quite extensive and provide a wealth of information, they are unique in that they are not relevant for the interpretation of events in the primary fabula. Rather, the abundance of Ocean-related information these devices supply can be juxtaposed with the continuous ignorance of both those in the narrative then and those in the narrative now. Such a juxtaposition reinforces the fabula’s contention that this information is rings hollow unless it can be interpreted and understood. However, since the Ocean is a non-human and we are denied access to its function, the reader cannot successfully interpret and, therefore, understand the events are no longer included in modern Bibles.” Lem, Solaris (1970), 85. “The Little Apocrypha” contains an account of an explorer (Berton) that was kept out of the permanent record because it was deemed “symptomatic of hallucinations caused by atmospheric poisoning, consequent upon inflammation of the associative zone of the cerebral cortex, and Berton’s account bears no, or at any rate no appreciable, relation to reality.” In other words, Berton was considered “temporarily insane” due to his exposure to the atmosphere.
caused and experienced by the Ocean which, in turn, confirms its secret identity as an actor in the fabula.

Literary Space and Implied Temporal Derivatives

Solaris. Even the title conjures up images of a narrative set some time in the future and – similar to both Clockwork and Fight Club – it is through the stylized delineation of literary space that the time of the story, in the most general sense, is implied. The following passage depicts the narrative’s first, or largest degree of literary space:

A wide slit opened at eye-level, and I could see the stars. The Prometheus was orbiting in the region of Alpha in Aquarius and I tried in vain to orient myself; a glittering dust filled my porthole. I could not recognize a single constellation; in this region of the galaxy the sky was unfamiliar to me. I waited for the moment when I would pass near the first distinct star, but I was unable to isolate any one of them. Their brightness was fading; they receded merging into a vague, purplish glimmer, the sole indication of the distance I had already traveled (2).

While on Kelvin’s first level dialogue indicates the second degree of space (the ship he is on), this passage gives the reader an initial taste of the story’s first degree of space, which is the “region of Alpha” in the “Aquarius” galaxy. This example offers one of the relatively few insights into the delineation of literary space in the novel. Accordingly, in Solaris, literary space is merely a frame, a place of action. Used in this limited capacity, a less detailed presentation of space typically leads to a less concrete picture of that space and thus the space tends to remain in the background.207

Besides Kelvin’s commute on the “Prometheus” (which only takes up a few pages), the vast majority of fabula events occur on another second degree of space, the Station, which on Kelvin describes below:208

I found myself inside a vast, silver funnel, as high as a cathedral nave. A cluster of colored pipes ran down the sloping walls and disappeared into rounded orifices. I turned round. The ventilation shafts were roaring, sucking in the poisonous gases form the planet’s atmosphere which had infiltrated when my capsule had landed inside the Station. (...) I went down a small stairway. The metal floor below had been coated with a heavy-duty plastic. In places, the wheels of trolleys carrying rockets had worn through the plastic covering to expose the bare steel beneath. (...) The moving walkway set me down at the far end of the gallery, on the threshold of a dome. Here there was a greater disorder. A pool of oily liquid spread out form beneath a pile of oil-drums; a nauseating smell hung in the air (5).

207 Bal, Narratology (1997), 136. In opposition to a “less detailed” presentation of space that remains “in the background,” Bal argues that in many cases space came become “thematized.” In other words: space becomes an object of presentation itself, for its own sake (although this is not true in the case of Solaris). Space thus becomes an “acting place” rather than the “place of action.” It influences the fabula, and the fabula becomes subordinate to the presentation of space. The fact that “this is happening here” is just as important as “the way it is here,” which allows these events to happen.

Here, similar to the scarcity of first degree description, even though the majority of fabula events occur within the second degree space of the Station, this passage is one of only a handful of descriptive passages. The scarcity of such descriptions in light of the tremendous quantity of events that occur on the Station further reinforces the Solaris’ literary space as merely a place of action rather than an acting place. Kelvin’s description also conveys a certain kind of disorder, a point that parallels the general sense of disorientation implied by Kelvin in the first passage in which describes Kelvin’s inability to locate his bearings because he was unable to identify the unfamiliar resident stars as he merged into a “vague, purplish glimmer” (2).

The concepts of disorientation and disorder are further reinforced in the following passage that describes Gibarian’s room, which was abandoned after he committed suicide:

The room was larger than mine. (…) Both shelves were piled into heaps, amongst the furniture. At my feet, blocking the way, were two overturned trolleys buried beneath a heap of periodicals spilling out of bulging brief cases which had burst open. Books with their pages spayed out fanwise were stained with colored liquids which had split from broken retorts and bottles with corroded stoppers, receptacles made of such thick glass that a single fall, even from a considerable height, could not have shattered them is such a way. Beneath the window lay an overturned desk, an anglepoise lamp crumpled underneath it; two legs of an upturned stool were stuck in the half-opened drawers. A flood of papers of every conceivable size swamped the floor (26-27).

As I demonstrated, the general sense of disorientation that depicted outer space became a more specific sense of confusion when Kelvin first sees the Station. This increase in disorder as the degree of space decreases becomes even more explicit as Kelvin describes the space of Gibarian’s room, which anticipates the disorienting and chaotic events that will ensue once visitor Rheya appears. Thus, the presentation of space as a place of action is made readily apparent. The space is not of primary importance, but rather the events that occur within it. In this way, the depiction of space tends to function as an anticipatory reflection of the principal characters’ disoriented, disordered state of mind. In other words, the correlation between the chaotic condition of Gibarian’s his suicide signifies Gibarian’s past state of mental confusion while, concurrently, it anticipates the similarly profound uncertainty that Kelvin will endure as he confronts his own visitor.

Lastly, there is rather large amount of text devoted to the description of the Ocean, which could be interpreted as the presentation of yet another second degree of literary space in which events take place. However, I contend that the “events” that occur on (or in) the Ocean are better understood as the actions of an actor in the fabula, rather than events that occur on a place in the fabula. For example, in chapter eight, roughly fourteen pages of text are devoted to the Ocean’s description. Here, Kelvin reads an account of the discoveries and observations of Dr. Giese (a Solarist) who discusses unique formations that exist on (or in) the Ocean:

For the rest of his life, he studied and described them and brought all his ingenuity to bear on defining their nature. The name he gave them indicated their most astonishing characteristic, the imitation of objects, near or far, external to the Ocean itself. Concealed below the Ocean surface, a large flattened disc appears, ragged, with a tar-like coating. After a few hours, it begins to separate into flat sheets which rise slowly (113).
While this appears to be an illustrative presentation of space, I contend that it is really a descriptive account of the Ocean’s actions, which occurred prior to the beginning of the primary fabula. Referred to as “mimoids” by Giese, the Oceanic formations mimic objects that are foreign to it. While anticipating its more functional actions in the primary fabula when it mimics Kelvin’s memories in the form of visitor Rheya, this account (and others like it) also describes the actions of an actor in the fabula and, consequently, theoretically functions more as a form of implicit characterization rather than the delineation of literary space. As a consequence, the reader, like the characters, tends to anthropomorphize the Ocean by attributing intent to its functional actions despite the absence of any other textual clues that would help substantiate such a position. The Ocean invites both the characters and the reader into making unsubstantiated conjectures as to the aims of its actions and, in this way, the Ocean becomes a device through which the blinding nature of anthropomorphism can be thematically treated.

Besides characterizing actors and anticipating future events, the delineation of space in Solaris also operates in coordination with its presentation of literary time. Similar to the technique utilized in both Clockwork and Fight Club, the juxtaposition of the familiar with the unfamiliar implies a general sense of literary time. For example, as seen in the preceding passages, Kelvin finds himself on a space ship in the “region of Alpha” in the “Aquarius galaxy” and then inside a “vast, silver funnel,” which is a large space station with moving walkways and clusters of colored pipes that “ran down the sloping walls and disappeared into rounded orifices” (5). While the reader is familiar with space ships, s/he is likely unfamiliar with those that can transport passengers to the region of Alpha in the Aquarius galaxy. Similarly, while the reader is familiar with space stations, s/he is unfamiliar with those located on distant planets covered by a massive living organism. Juxtaposing familiarity with a mild unfamiliarity, Solaris’ particular depiction of literary space generally implies a sense of the near future.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, I provided several textual examples that revealed the fixed cycle of human existence as it presented throughout the course of the fabula. This cycle is kept fixed by the central problem presented in the narrative, which is the intrinsically human failure to achieve a kind of Hegelian understanding self-consciousness (much less a more transcendent absolute consciousness) in which the self understands itself through the other.

While the experienced Kelvin ultimately recognizes that we must explore our “own labyrinth of dark passages and secret chambers” before we can hope to comprehend the external universe, the narrative demonstrates that it is only when one explores the other with the intent to better understand themselves that a higher level of self-consciousness is possible.209 In light of this, it is not until Kelvin realizes that internal understanding lies in the other that he begins to free himself from the cycle. In other words, Kelvin’s burgeoning appreciation of the second visitor Rheya is what leads to a more meaningful kind of self-realization at the conclusion of the primary fabula.

However, it appears that such a realization is restricted by an inherently human limitation, which is a finite capacity to reason.210 What is more, this restricted faculty is not self-contained, but sets a process in motion that leads to the second stage in the cycle.

209 Lem, Solaris (1970), 157. Kelvin states: “Man has gone out to explore other worlds and other civilizations without having explored his own labyrinth of dark passages and secret chambers, and without finding what lies behind doorways that he himself has sealed.”

210 Lem, Solaris (1970), 158. Addressing the “encephalogram experiment,” Kelvin states: “They think it would mean an undignified surrender for mankind – as if there was any dignity in floundering and drowning in what we don’t understand and never will.”
which is a kind of profound ignorance. This condition results in an overcompensation that further compounds the problem, namely the endeavor to understand the other through anthropomorphic theorizing - the cycle's third stage. Kelvin's understanding of consciousness is accomplished by beginning to see himself through the other, as opposed to anthropomorphizing the other. His ultimate failure to fully understand the other, and therefore himself, leads to a kind of existential humanism, which rejects supernaturalism and stresses freedom and a capacity for self-realization through reason.

In the novel, Kelvin hopes to achieve self-realization, not through a kind of contact that may provide new insight into the "meta-function" of the external, but through his own reasoning capabilities. Ironically, in spite of his freedom, the limitations of human reason prevents Kelvin from a deeper self-realization and he is left with a profoundly "unknowable Other," which inexorably inhibits the transcendence of self-consciousness. It seems, then, that Kelvin's understanding self-consciousness is the recognition of his place in the cycle. In Solaris, although the characters have the existential freedom to give meaning to their lives, the humanistic capacity for self-realization through reason is limited by the very boundaries of human intellect. Kelvin's denial of the supernatural and his existential responsibility based on limited reason would seem to deny him transcendence from an understanding to a more absolute self-consciousness. It is this denial that, at the end of the primary fabula, motivates Kelvin's rather existentially humanistic resignation with regard to an incomplete life marked by irreparable losses. Kelvin's particular brand of acquiescence appears to be the natural extension of his awareness of his existence within a deterministically repetitive cycle not predetermined by an Infinite Other, but rather driven by the intrinsic finiteness of his own humanity.

Like his literary counterparts, Kelvin functioned as en, cf, and actor in the fabula. The perception of Kelvin as an unreliable narrator is due, in large part, to the mechanism that drives the psychological distance between en and cf Kelvin, which is his interaction with the Ocean. Driving a large number of functional events, the Ocean is perhaps the most important functional actor in the fabula through its creation of the visitors, or Phi-beings. In spite of this fact, the particular function of its actions remains unclear because it is a non-human freed from the typical teleological presuppositions. Such an actor provides the perfect vehicle through which Kelvin's anthropomorphic tendencies can be negatively expressed. The Ocean supplies the stimulus that forces Kelvin, as a being-for-self, to confront the unknowable, which appears to be the alien, external world, but ultimately turns out to be himself. Visitor Rhey A - the manifestation of his memories of the real Rhey A - provides the other, the negative relation that establishes his own subjectivity by the awareness of being-seen-by-another.

The interaction between Kelvin and visitor Rhey A (a mental projection) exists as a metaphor for the notion that our interaction with the other is not about understanding the other, which is a futile pursuit, but rather ourselves as we see beyond our own reflection. However, because Kelvin and the other characters cannot completely see the other, or fully comprehend even that which springs from their own mind, they

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211 Lem, Solaris (1970), 170. Cn Kelvin notes that: "...Grastom set out to demonstrate that the most abstract achievements of science, the most advanced theories and victories of mathematics represented nothing more than a stumbling, one or two-step progression from our rude, prehistoric, anthropomorphic understanding of the universe around us."

212 Lem, Solaris (1970), 134. With this point in mind, Gibarian states: "Any attempt to understand the motivation of these occurrences is blocked by our own anthropomorphism. Where there are no men, there cannot be motives accessible to men."

213 Sartre, Being and Nothingness (1956), 4: "But each type of human conduct, being the conduct of man, the world, and the relation which unites them, only on condition that we envisage these forms of conduct as realities objectively apprehensible and not as subjective affects which disclose themselves only in reflection."
experience a kind of alienation from themselves, which leads to suicide in Gibarian’s case and anxiety in Kelvin’s. Kelvin’s anxiety results in his feeling of isolation and the collapse of his meaningful immersion in the world. This anxiety is evidenced when – after his experience with visitor Rheya – he declares: “I shall never again give myself completely to anything or anybody” (196).

Although she is not human, the visitor Rheya also experiences a kind of alienated anxiety. As a product of cf Kelvin’s memories, she experiences a “disconnection of consciousness” from those memories as a result of her own autonomous reasoning capabilities. However, these capabilities appear similarly limited in the fact that she cannot come to terms with the nature of this disconnection. Consequently, the visitor Rheya’s burgeoning awareness results in an existential alienation she feels powerless to either change or overcome, which, like Gibarian, leads her down the path of self-destruction facilitated by Snow.

The temporal and spatial aspects of the story further assist in the articulation of the fabula that conceptualizes the cycle central to the thematic treatment of anthropomorphism. There are several occasions in particular when internal anticipations announce events that occur later in the fabula. Although specific events are announced by these anachronies, their revelation does not assist us to ultimately solve the “great mystery” of the novel, which is the hidden function of the Ocean. The fact that these explicit announcements have no real bearing on this most pressing question exposes their status as stylistic devices used to create an unsolvable mystery. Similar to the dead-end informational nature of announcements, the external retroversions in Solaris – while replete with information about the Ocean’s history – do not help us interpret events in the primary fabula because we are unable to rely on the conventional presuppositions in regard to the teleological nature of human thinking and action. In this way, the seemingly enlightening abundance of information is juxtaposed with the continuous ignorance of those in both the primary and embedded fabulas. Thus, this particular juxtaposition reinforces the fabula’s contention that such information is useless unless it can be interpreted and understood, which it cannot.

The aspect of literary space and its implied derivative of literary time reveals that the narrative is set in a space station above an ocean-covered planet in a distant region of space. However, descriptive examples of this place are relatively sparse, which renders Solaris’ literary space a place of action. Although the literary space is subordinate to the events that occur within it, the limited description does reveal a certain kind of disorientation and disorder that functions as a reflection of the characters disoriented, chaotic state of mind. The description also functions temporally through its anticipation of future chaotic events as a result of the Ocean’s actions.

While there is a rather large amount of descriptive text devoted to the Ocean, it is not spatial description, but rather it describes an actor’s actions. In line with this view, such description is more a form of implicit characterization rather than the delineation of literary space. As a result, like the readers, the reader is inclined to anthropomorphize the Ocean by attributing intent to its functional actions despite the want of any other textual clues that would help corroborate such a position. In this way, the Ocean deceives both the characters and the reader into making unsubstantiated conjectures as its purposes. To put it another way, the Ocean is a mechanism through which the stunting nature of anthropomorphism can be treated thematically which, through the description of space, tends to exhibit the timeless quality of a narrative set in a perpetually near future.

The story articulated a fabula that conceptualized the cycle and the particular manner it bore upon the question: Who am I? It is not until cf Kelvin realizes that internal

214 Sartre, Being and Nothingness (1956), 257: “...the permanent possibility that a subject who sees me may be substituted for the object seen by me. ‘Being-seen-by-the-Other’ is the truth of ‘seeing-the-Other.’”
understanding lies in the other, or visitor Rheya, that he begins to free himself from the cycle. However, this critical realization is restricted by a finite capacity to reason, which leads to a kind of profound ignorance that results in an anthropomorphic overcompensation. In contrast, Kelvin’s understanding consciousness is accomplished by beginning to see himself through the other. However, his failure to fully understand the other, and thus himself, leads to a kind of existential humanism. The unresolved tension between Kelvin’s humanistic denial of the supernatural and his existential responsibility based on limited reason is what prevents Kelvin from achieving a Hegelian absolute consciousness. Although Kelvin ultimately defines himself to being a clock that measures time, he does clung to a measure of a more transcendent hope that the “time of cruel miracles was not past” (204). I trace this desperate hope in the following chapter in order to discover whether or not it can ultimately permit the filmic Kelvin to transcend some of the limitations that haunted his literary predecessor. In addition to the concepts of the cycle, alienation, and anxiety, I also examine how the principal characters confront their own moral anthropocentrism.

Swirski, “Lem in a Nutshell” (1997), 66. In light of Kelvin's existential humanism, it is interesting to note that Lem has argued that under the pressure from future empirical evidence, there are philosophies like phenomenology or existentialism which would clearly undergo a shift in the direction of religious faiths, especially godless ones, like Buddhism.