

Introduction to Science Fiction

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 12–1 p.m. or by appointment

November 9, 2023. Feminism, cont.; Lem.

review: Russ: let me count the ways

- ▶ the female society is just fine
 - ▶ and not everyone is Supergirl
 - ▶ world reduction
- ▶ subversion of gendered expectations
 - ▶ ...of the gender binary itself
 - ▶ ...of “nature”
- ▶ men are pigs
 - ▶ “Where are all your people?”
 - ▶ “That’s not what we had in mind”
 - ▶ the psychology of discrimination
- ▶ the second wave as a conversation
 - ▶ take that, UKL!

I saw pale kings, and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
Who cry'd—"La belle Dame sans merci
Hath thee in thrall!"
I saw their starv'd lips in the gloam
With horrid warning gaped wide,
And I awoke, and found me here
On the cold hill side.



John Keats, "La Belle Dame sans Merci" [The Beautiful Lady without Mercy] (1820), rpt. [Representative Poetry Online](#).

Image: Alice Sheldon in 1977, [jamestiptreejr.com](#), accessed November 3, 2023.

feminism and SF redux

- ▶ What can a feminist SF do?

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- ▶ What can a feminist SF do?

But as the women's movement in all its forms touches more and more deeply the lives of women in all sorts of situations and all states of minds, I think that more and more of them will try to regain the habit of questioning, and will discover the uses and delights of sf in that process.

Suzy McKee Charnas in "Women in SF," *Khatru* 3-4 (November 1975): 78.

Stanisław Lem

- 1921 b. Lwów/Lviv (then Poland, now Ukraine)
- 1939–45 resistance activities, many family members murdered
- 1946 family relocated by USSR to Kraków; med school
- 1954–84 Ijon Tichy stories
- 1956 the Polish October (post-Stalin thaw)
- 1961 *Solaris* in Polish
- 1964 “Microx and Gigant” and “The Seventh Voyage” (Polish)
- 1966 *Solaris*, trans. J-M Jasienko (Paris: Denoel)
- 1970 *Solaris*, trans. Joanna Kilmartin and Steve Cox (New York: Walker)
- 1972– *Lem Recommends* series in Poland: Dick, Le Guin (suppressed)
- 1974 *The Cyberiad*, trans. Michael Kandel (New York: Continuum)
- 1973 honorary member of SF Writers of America
- 1976 *The Star Diaries*, trans. Kandel (Continuum)
- SFWA membership rescinded
- 1990 stops writing SF
- 2006 d.
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As a matter of fact, I do not consider myself an SF writer. The question of genres is simply unimportant for me, and very often I turn to different modes of writing. I want to write about things that interest me and in ways that interest me. One could simply say that I attempt certain mental experiments and try to create certain situational models. I would also add that the conventions of normal, realistic literature, or whatever you call it, are insufficient for me....

Federman. But then, do you read SF?

Lem. Well, not any more, because it is usually so bad.

Lem, interviewed by Raymond Federman, *Science Fiction Studies* 10, no. 1 (March 1983): 3–4, [JSTOR](#).

A literary work considered as a game has to be played out to the finish under the same rules with which it was begun. A game can be empty or meaningful....What if not only the objects but also the problems have no chance of ever being realized, as when impossible time-travel machines are used to point out impossible time-travel paradoxes? In such cases SF is playing an empty game. Since empty games have no hidden meaning, since they represent nothing and predict nothing, they have no relationship at all to the real world and can therefore please us only as logical puzzles, as paradoxes, as intellectual acrobatics....They must contain a multitude of rules; they must be elegant, strict, witty, precise, and original.

Lem, "On the Structural Analysis of Science Fiction," *Science Fiction Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 26–27, [JSTOR](#).

- ▶ Is "The Seventh Voyage" an empty game? If so, how does it meet Lem's criteria for success? If not, then what makes it meaningful?

I reached my destination safely, thanks to the courage and resourcefulness I had displayed when only two children. (506)

next

- ▶ Gibson, “Burning Chrome” (*Wesleyan*)
- ▶ Gibson, “Time Machine Cuba” (*Canvas*)