



LEMISTRY: A CELEBRATION OF THE WORK OF STANISLAW LEM
 Edited by Ra Page & Magda Raczynska

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Reviewed by Andy Hedgecock

Lemistry is a celebration of the influence, vision and talent of Stanislaw Lem, a writer who wrestled with notions of consciousness, soul, simulation, identity, authenticity – and much more. Ra Page and Magda Raczynska, stressing the notion of a multiplicity of Lems, compere a clamorous raree show of ideas, styles, experiments and entertainments. They collect three newly translated original stories; thirteen 'Reconstructed Original' stories inspired by the focus and creative approach of Lem; and four essays exploring the literary and philosophical impact of Lem's career, as well as noting his role as a catalyst for innovative thought in science and technology.

The collection opens with three stories translated from the Polish by Antonia Lloyd-Jones and published in English for the first time. 'The Lilo' is a darkly witty tale exploring the boundaries between 'falsified' and 'genuine' reality; 'Darkness and Mildew' is a strange tale of transformation and out of control organic evolution; and 'Invasion from Aldebaran' is a tour de force of interstellar conflict, linguistic fireworks and political satire. While none of these three have the impact of Lem's most ontologically and



epistemologically unsettling masterpieces, such as 'The Seventh Sally', 'Non Serviam' or 'The Princess Ineffabelle', all are fine tales that will excite new readers every bit as much as Lem loyalists.

For readers whose only acquaintance with Lem is *Solaris*, the novel that provided the basis for the films by Tarkovsky and Soderbergh, Andy Sawyer's essay 'Stanislaw Lem – Who's He?' provides an erudite introduction to "the least read major author of sf". It goes way beyond a mere appraisal of Lem by examining his writing in the context of a range of sf traditions – satirical, philosophical, ludic, metafictional, prophetic and visionary. Sawyer provides some fascinating insights into the author's troubled relationship with sf fans and writers and outlines his curious role in the paranoiac imaginings of Philip K. Dick. A thorough, and thoroughly entertaining, piece of sf scholarship.

Mention of the relationship between Lem and Dick brings us to one of the fictional highlights of this collection, Trevor Hoyle's 'The 5-Sigma Certainty', a perfect marriage of style and theme that captures the acerbic playfulness and ontological terrorism of the Polish

master and his American soul mate cum adversary.

Toby Litt's 'The Melancholy' (previously published in *Interzone* #229) tackles a theme that frequently featured in Lem's work, the issue of integrity. Litt addresses the question of whether the identity of a system resides in its component parts, or if it has a more emergent, nebulous and holistic quality.

Lem the comedic satirist is, perhaps, best represented in 'Every Little Helps' by Frank Cottrell Boyce. Boyce's bravura piece of elliptical storytelling encapsulates the experimental ethos of the collection, as well as its fundamental sense of fun. The piece purposes to be a review of Boyce's eponymous story by Lem himself: working within a tight set of constraints Boyce produces a witty and scathing satire of consumerism driven by corporate power.

Other highlights in the 'Reconstructed Originals' section include Annie Clarkson's 'Toby', a tale that balances emotional ecology with notions of authenticity in beautifully spare and evocative prose; and Ian Watson's funny and surreal 'The Tale of Trurl and the Great TanGent', a sort of cyber-fairytale that could have descended into irksome whimsy in the hands of a less skilled storyteller.

The book closes with three entertaining and thought provoking pieces mapping Lem's critical and fictional writing to cutting edge developments in nanotechnology (Dr Sarah Davies); computer science (Professor Steve Furber); and robotics (Professor Hod Lipson). These essays highlight not merely the restlessly speculative and prophetic nature of Lem's writing but its inspirational qualities. Like Lem himself, these writers demonstrate the value of work that crosses the boundary between art and science.

Page and Raczynska have produced an unashamedly intelligent, relentlessly experimental and challenging anthology. Its combination of provocation, entertainment and migraine inducing paradoxes would be perfectly at home in Lem's finest writing.

Highly recommended.

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