

ON *SOLARIS*: EXILE THE SF WAY

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Abstract: According to Stanislaw Lem, men are forever imprisoned by the structure of their minds and bodies; wherever they go, they will encounter only extensions of themselves. While a genuinely new reality, beyond all subjective/objective systematizing, is assumed to exist, that reality is never truly encountered. There is, however, an illusionary new reality consequent upon the continual rediscovery of the old one. Lem's conviction is best illustrated by *Solaris*, his masterpiece, where human beings attempt to grapple with the reality of a strange planet by the same name, a reality that is especially untractable by virtue of its pliability. Because the whole planet is covered with a malleable substance and because that "organic ocean" is able in various ways to imitate human artifacts and mental images, *Solaris* is unusually well equipped to mirror man's hopeless imprisonment in himself.