

Humanity in solaris



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

What does it mean to be a human being? Everyone has their own opinion and rarely is it as simple as biology. When science and technology are placed in this question the answer becomes even less clear. This question of when does giving technology humanity make them human has been asked in numerous mediums, from films such as Her, to Doctor Who and Twilight Zone episodes, science fiction has wrestled with the idea of merging humanity and technology. Stanislaw Lem's novel Solaris is yet another source of this merging, providing in Rhexya a character who is a product of alien technology that is inherently inhuman but has human qualities and tendencies. Rhexya has human emotions, as is evident in her horror at finding out she is a 'visitor' and tries to kill herself (Lem 141). She has human memories of her life before Solaris, and her existence is rooted in human experience. This essence of perceived humanity is why her presence is so haunting to Kelvin. If she simply appeared human but lacked the emotional capacity that she showcases in the novel, Kelvin would not be so tortured by his duality of love and fear towards her. Just like Kelvin's dual emotions, Rhexya has a dual existence. She has experienced humanity, at least in her memories, but she is currently living outside the boundaries of mankind. However, these memories of humanity are not truly her own, since she is made from the memories Kelvin has of his deceased wife she has no true human core of her own. The nature of her existence, as essential projections of Kelvin's memories of her into a living being, as well as how she herself identifies deems her to be inhuman.

The main reason why Rhexya cannot be classified as truly human is because she lacks her own identity. Rhexya is based off of Kelvin's memories of her,

and thus is not a fully formed human being. People have secrets and different sides around different people, they are different people around different people. And since Rheya is only made up of Kelvin's memories, she lacks the dimensions of a true human being. Kelvin at first seemed to be aware of this, while he is convinced that it is truly the real Rheya the first time she appears to him, he states, " she seemed somehow stylized, reduced to certain characteristic expression, gestures and movement" (58). This is because she is stylized; she was made out of his memories for him. If Rheya's mother or best friend were somehow on that station, they would all receive different versions of Rheya who in turn would still be different than the deceased human Rheya. Snow realizes this and tries to explain to Kelvin that, " she is a mirror that reflects a part of your mind" (154). All she is a reflection, an image of how Kelvin remembers her without the substance that makes her a true person. Snow's statement echoes something he said to Kelvin before, " We are only seeking Man. We have no need for other worlds. We need mirrors" (72). Snow claims that humans are not as adventurous and sophisticated as we believe ourselves to be, rather people look at the alien universe through the lens of humanity and expect humanity to look back at them. Kelvin has this reaction in relation to both Rheya and the Ocean itself. When Rheya dies he is distraught and projects human emotions of malice onto the Ocean, to which Snow tells him that " You yourself treat it like a human being" (192). Kelvin views the Ocean as a being with intent, such as he would view a human. His inability to see things without projecting humanity onto them can be seen in his relationship with Rheya. He has accepted that she is not his real wife, as he states he doesn't know if he would love her if she were (146). Yet, he still cannot bring himself to view her

as truly alien either; he cannot see that Rheya's humanity is in fact just his own memories of her humanity reflected back to him.

Throughout the novel Snow is used as a way to force Kelvin to question his feelings towards Rheya. When Kevin argues with Snow about Rheya he states, “ ‘ you want opposition’ ” (154). Kelvin's conscious is still guilty about his wife killing herself due to him leaving her, and these feelings has transferred over to the Rheya of Solaris. He asserts multiple times to Snow that he loves her, to which Snow replies, “ ‘ Her memory, you mean?’ ” (153). While Kelvin denies this, it is true on a few faucets. The consciousness of the Rheya present on Solaris is made from Kelvin's memories of her. She is, in fact, just a collection of his memories of her projected into a copy of her body. Kelvin does still love her in his memory, so of course when his memories of her seemingly come to life in this version of Rheya he would love her. Snow is not so naïve as Kelvin, in fact since the reader never sees his visitor one can assume that he disposes of them regularly when they reappear. Rheya is then the only visitor that is allowed to stay for a prolonged period of time. During this time, Kelvin seems to grow more attached to her and view her more and more as human, even admitting to her that he loves her (188). This idea of a humanoid life becoming more human the longer a person spends time with it has also been present in a multitude of science fiction, since Rheya is who Kelvin spends most of his time with the longer he is with her the more human she becomes to human. While Kelvin may view her as human, his motives for doing so, his guilt and his love for her, showcase that his point of view cannot be trusted as a fair analysis of her humanity or lack thereof.

Even moments that appear to give Rheya some humanity are not as simple as they seem. The most human thing about Rheya is her reaction to finding out she is a product of the ocean and separates her identity from the 'real' Rheya who died ten years ago. However, even this moment is inherently one that shows Rheya is not human. She separates herself from the human Rheya of the past, telling Kelvin not to "forget that I am the one who is here, not her" (146). This seems like a human moment, though she is made up from Kelvin's memories and thus does not have an identity separate from him, she appears to create one and thus gives herself some level of autonomy. Rheya is embracing an identity, but it is one that is not human. Before this moment in the novel she was blissfully unaware of her origin and took her humanity for granted. Now, she knows where she comes from and what she is and she embraces it, taking a step away from the human Rheya and becoming her own person. She does not continue with the faced that she is human Rheya, nor does she ever in the novel make the claim that she is human. In her suicide note to Kelvin she even crosses out the name Rheya, as if signifying that she knows she is not and never truly was Rheya. Her suicide could be seen as another moment of humanity or at the very least autonomy, sacrificing herself in order for Kelvin to have a future since she knows he cannot have one with her. However, even this decision reflects her nature as inhuman. Once again, Rheya is composed of memories and perceptions of Kelvin. The original Rheya killed herself when she and Kelvin were having marital troubles, to him suicide would be the natural response Rheya would have when faced with a disastrous problem. With this in mind, Rheya's final act is not as autonomous as it appears to be.

Humans have an innate desire to copy their image onto technology and science fiction has long been fascinated by the outcome. Rheya is unique in the sense that she is a seemingly human copy made by alien technology rather than human. She is only an essence of herself, since she is composed from memories of her lover, she is only the perception of Rheya and thus only the perception of an actual human being. Yet, she had consciousness; she expressed horror and sadness as well as love. Surely she was alive, she had a heartbeat and blood coursed through her veins, but is that enough to qualify her as human? A closure examination of her nature and existence leans to no.