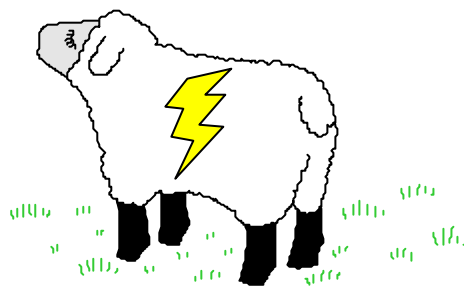


FutureScape

***Second Major;
Semester 2 2001***

Do Androids Dream of Electric
Sheep?



Blade Runner

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Discuss the themes of the novel, how do these differ from those of the film.

The themes and issues in the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* are many and various and most of them differ from those in its counterpart movie *Blade Runner*. Both explore the scenario of a post-nuclear war society devastated beyond salvation and ravaged by dangerous radioactive fallout, however only the novel fully explains the true extent of the situation. Where all but a few of the animals have been destroyed by the radiation and the ones that survived are treasured by the lucky ones who possess them as a social status symbol and those who don't, shame themselves with the knowledge that the animal they own is merely an electric fake. Some of the themes run parallel such as what truly makes up a human, appearance or is it something inside, empathy. Deckard differs in the movie from how he is portrayed in the book, an average man breadwinner, just going about his job with his wife at home, but in the movie he is a ruthless killing machine a 'one man slaughterhouse' who is forced back out of retirement to deal with the renegade Nexus 6's.

In the novel a widely represented theme is that of what is truly human, the mere physical side of the argument or a more inner definition. With the Androids looking indistinguishable from the humans in every respect so from a glance or a more thorough examination you can't tell the difference. During the course of the novel the androids are portrayed to be very cold and distant emotionally and do not care for other living beings, they lack empathy. Dick emphasizes this point greatly, for example the scene in which Pris cuts four of the legs off a spider because she doesn't think that it needs all of those legs to walk successfully. This point is again stressed when Batty talks repeatedly about killing J.R. while he is in the room and in earshot. The androids, human in appearance are made to look at some times very far from human but yet sometimes show human characteristics. The androids possessing great intelligence (shown in the fake police station setup) leads us to believe that being intelligent does not necessarily class one as human, after all chickenheads are humans too. This theme of the androids and the true definition of human nature is represented in the film although the Replicants are even closer to humans than the androids, they are actually made from human flesh and only the mind is different. In the film therefore this is explored in a different way; through the contrast between Deckard and the Replicants (Roy Batty) during the course of the film. At the beginning the Replicants are as cold-hearted and ruthless as they appear in the novel which can be seen by the scene when Batty leaves Chu to freeze to death after he is done questioning him. However as the movie proceeds they gain more and more humanlike qualities until the end when Roy shows empathy towards another being and saves Deckard from falling off the building, seemingly crossing the barrier between Replicants and humans. Another example is Rachel when she says that she loves Deckard and they run off together at the end, in stark contrast to the ending of the book where she throws his goat off a building instead. Despite the empathy displayed by the Replicants at the end of the film we are still left to question their true nature with the behaviour of the other Replicants in the film.

Another major theme in the novel is the extreme value of animals. Because the fallout after the nuclear war caused nearly all animal species to become extinct animals are prized above anything else and are a symbol of social status. If you don't have an animal you are probably a chickenhead. Yet even with this incredible value for animals, humans are worth nothing. Humans are treated like refuse and if you are not a good enough person you are just chucked onto the garbage heap and denied the privilege of emigration. This theme is only very loosely echoed in the film, there is only one scene where it is really mentioned; when Deckard first goes to the Tyrell corporation and admires their electronic owl. However the theme of the absolute devastation of Earth and degeneration of mankind (*Emigrate or Degenerate*) is reflected strongly in the latter medium. The city is dark and damp, dotted with tall furnace towers spewing flame hundreds of meters into the air and covered with dank looming, degenerating skyscrapers, some crammed with a plethora of crawling humans and some completely abandoned standing as a bleak testimony to the eventual fate of Earth and mankind. These depressing scenes represent this dark theme excellently and even enhance our true understanding of the ideas that Dick is trying to get across at these times.

The entire population of Earth's incessant watching of *Buster Friendly and his Friendly Friends* the 23 hour-a-day television show reflects the views and ideas of Dick himself. Writing this novel in the late sixties when television was just getting to its mass viewing audiences as it is today Dick felt strongly against television. This theme is a parody of television talk shows in the late sixties and the public's ability to be completely entranced by such a thing. Also Deckard's wife Iran, staying at home cooped up in their

apartment all day doing nothing but watch *Buster Friendly* all day and artificially alter her mood. This is also a parody; of the sixties housewife staying at home all day watching TV while the husband goes out and works and brings home the cash. The mood organ is a synonym for the mass drug use of the sixties, except instead of taking a substance, you can simply dial-a-mood as Iran often does with her six hour depression stints. These themes are not portrayed in the film at all, this is because the film was more of an action movie than a quality science fiction text with many satirical themes. The broader themes dealing with society as a whole were discarded and the film focused mainly on the major theme of the Replicants and true definition of humanity.

From this it can be seen that although the film is based on the book and the major themes of the Replicants and Deckard and even themes about the environment and post-nuclear war society are included within the story; most of the minor themes satirizing mass communication, drugs, industrialization and domestication of humans were left out. This is because the film was not about these things; but the story of Deckard and his struggle against the Replicants and own self-doubt about his almost non-existent humanity.