

Metrowest Readers' Advisory Roundtable
Science Fiction – Futuristic subgenre
Benchmark title: "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep" by Philip K. Dick
Monday, March 13, 2017 @ 9:45 am
Bedford Free Public Library

Attendees: Liz Reed (Norwood, Morrill Memorial), Pam Aghababian (Bedford), Christine Muir (Bedford), Stefanie Claydon (Needham), Sarah Breen (Needham), Joellen Toussaint (Wellesley)

Benchmark Title – "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?"

- Generally the group liked the books, but for one member this book personified everything she doesn't like about SF – it was too disjointed and confusing
- Because it was published in 1968, this also counts as Classic SF
- Metaphorical content, could spawn great conversations
- Cinematic writing style that translates well to film: the movie is called "Bladerunner"
 - There are four different versions of the movie and they all differ from the book
 - There are timeless SF images from this movie
 - There is lots of Asian influence in the films which is not clear in the book
 - Asian influence is a common thing in SF films
- There are great details in the book that are not in the movie: no animals, Mercerism, empathy boxes, which are big themes in the book
- Empathy for animals in the book would be a good appeal factor for animal lovers
- Who has more empathy – androids or humans?
- People in the book often have more empathy for electric sheep than for electric humans
- Strong theme of social commentary
 - Social commentary is largely environmental in nature, and we see this environmental commentary a lot in SF
- Theme of appearances vs. actuality
 - "keeping up with the Joneses" aspect of just needing the appearance of having an animal
- Book holds up a mirror to the reader and to society
- Did the author take drugs? Drugs are a common theme in his books
 - Mood organ in this book, an interesting concept for altering perception and reality
- World War Terminus is a metaphor for the Cold War
- When did "android" become a term?
- Did these Classic SF authors predict technology or have inventors designed technology based on these SF novels?
- Dystopia still translates well to YA because of the current trend towards dystopia in YA lit
- Is Deckard a replicant? This is the biggest question in the book, and while it's also left open in the movie, the director believed that yes Deckard is definitely a replicant
- There is often a hope-crushing aspect to Philip K. Dick's novels
- There is now a full-text graphic novel version of this book that could really appeal to some readers
- This novel is less dry than other classic SF – there's more action and it kept the reader's interest
 - Touched on some of the same themes as "I, Robot" such as, can robots/androids be believable people? Does this matter?

- Not super technical, but dense writing – who’s really an android?
 - Maybe not the best book for beginning SF readers
 - Great book for discussion, so much to explore
- Much better character development than we’ve seen in other Classic SF
- Deep meaning gives this sort of SF a lot for you to talk about
- Reads “dated” from technological standpoint, but not really from a language standpoint
 - Would still read as “futuristic” to modern audiences though
- Interesting that there’s more variety in gender roles for android women than for human women
 - Also more variety of gender roles than in other SF books we’ve read
- Read-alike: “Ready Player One” by Ernest Cline

Topic Discussion

- See comparison with other Classic SF above
- Does Classic SF have more potential for discussion than more modern SF?
 - Depends on the subgenre
- Biggest aspects of robots have already been explored by SF and now we’re moving on; robots are not a common theme these days
- Cyberpunk was the trend in the 80s and 90s, and everything was about technology and computers
- Now we’re heading into biopunk as a key feature of Futuristic SF

Next Meeting: Monday May 8 at 9:45 am in Natick, Morse Institute Library
 SF subgenre: Space Opera
 Benchmark: “Old Man’s War” by John Scalzi

IMPORTANT PARKING INFO FOR OUR NEXT MEETING

While there is no free parking at the Morse Institute Library in Natick, we will be able to park for free in their lot thanks to Karen Perkins. See her message below:

“Unfortunately, the town took away the library's free parking in the public lot. Patrons either pay for lot parking or on street with a few free spaces for 15 minutes. The public lot closest to the library has kiosk parking or permit spaces. I will have permits for people that they can get from me at the side entrance to the library. The library doesn't open until 10 so they will have to enter the side door as well. Hopefully it won't be raining and I or Carol can wait for people on the side walk.

The parking lot for the Morse is behind the Police Station, which is right next to the library. Both are located on East Central St (Rt 135). Clarendon St, a one way street, is between the library and the police station from Rt 135. It has the side entrance to the library and the entrance to the parking lot is at the end of the street.

