

Commentary
between joel hoff's
bladerunner and the
shakespearean play,
merchant o...



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Common Themes in “ Blade Runner” and “ Merchant of Venice” The play “ Merchant of Venice” and “ blade Runner” both explore themes of humanity. While the former work explores this theme in the context of a medieval society in which Jews are not well accepted, the latter work plays out in a future scenario where robots represent the outcasts. Yet both works demonstrate how the notion of humanity can be explained in an unexpected manner, often revealing itself in unexpected areas and ways.

Both the works portray one group of individuals as outcasts of society - in the case of “ Merchant of Venice”, it is the Jews who are the minority that do not fit into the predominantly Christian mold. Their agony with the feeling of being constantly ostracized is portrayed by Shylock in his eloquent arguments that Jews are also humans. In “ Blade Runner”, the outcasts of society are the replicants, wanting desperately to belong to Earth and be human, yet doomed to never be able to achieve their objective because their life span is so short.

One of the major themes explored in both works is the nature of humanity. The character of Shylock in the “ Merchant of Venice” appears to exemplify the valuing of business relationships over human ones, in contradiction to the general trend in human relationships. This may be noted in particular when Shylock runs through the streets, moaning: “ Oh, my ducats! O my daughter!” (Shakespeare, II: viii: 15) thereby implying that he values money almost as much as his own daughter.

The film “ Blade Runner” also questions what it means to be human. The replicants are “ designed to copy human beings in every way except their emotions”, yet some of them appear “ more human than human (Blade Runner). Their creator Tyrell on the other hand is a man trying arrogantly to <https://assignbuster.com/commentary-between-joel-hoffs-bladerunner-and-the-shakespearean-play-merchant-of-venice/>

play God, creating human beings endowed with intelligence and super human strength but making them slaves because their termination dates cannot be reversed.

The divine quality of mercy is a strong theme in "The Merchant of Venice". The law is on Shylock's side and a strict application of the law would mean that Shylock does in fact, secure his pound of flesh. But the expectation is for him to demonstrate his humanity through the divine quality of mercy, which Portia explicates in detail beginning with "The quality of mercy is not strained." (Shakespeare VI: i: 179). A similar theme resonates in "Blade Runner", where the law is on the side of protagonist Deckard and supports him in his mission to destroy the four replicants, yet his human memories call to him to be merciful. He disregards the urge to spare the replicants, just as Shylock argues fiercely against sparing Antonio, from whom he must extract the pound of flesh.

These events in effect, form the subtext of both works, within which humanity and mercy are examined. Shylock refused to allow himself to be merciful, rather it is only through the cold application of the law that he is boxed into a corner. Deckard in "Blade Runner" relentlessly chases after the replicants and kills them one by one, showing no mercy and sneering inwardly at their desire to be human. But he is no match for the replicant Roy, in much the same way as Shylock is no match for Portia. At the end of the film, it is the replicant who holds the commanding position while Deckard teeters at the brink of death, but it is the replicant that shows him the divine quality of mercy, thereby revealing itself to be more human than arrogant human beings such as Tyrell are.

Works cited:

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* " Blade Runner" Film directed by Ridley Scott

* Shakespeare, W. " Merchant of Venice."