

The Bicentennial man



The story that inspired this (Isaac Asimov's "The Bicentennial Man") was originally a short tale that was published in 1976 in occasion of the anniversary of the American Independence. It won both a Hugo Award and the Nebula Award. A few years later (1992) Asimov wrote the novel "The Positronic Man" with Robert Silverberg.

PRODUCTION: USA 1999

DIRECTOR: Chris Columbus

STARRING: Robin Williams as Andrew, Sam Neil as Richard Martin, Oliver Platt as Rupert Burns

A SYNOPSIS

The NDR series robot Andrew is bought by the Martins to help in housekeeping. The family is composed by Mr and Mrs Martin and their two daughters. The youngest one appears curious about the new arrival, the eldest rejects it. Andrew discovers himself able to feel emotions when he tries to be forgiven for his accidental destruction of a figurine and creating another one out of wood. Andrew's unexpected creative qualities push Mr Martin to take him to a production company, but when the CEO states that it could just be a chip error to be debugged, Mr Martin takes Andrew back home and lets him cultivate his creativity. After a visit to NorthAm Robotics for repairs, Andrew alters his original robot state to be able to express emotions with his face language. He wants to feel more and more human, so he asks Mr Martin for freedom. He obtains it, but he feels lonely, so he starts looking for his similar NDR series robots. He finds out his designer's son, Rupert Burns, and an NDR series female robot, Galatea. Andrew decides to support Burns's research on the creation of humanlike organs for robots. In the end, Andrew becomes human and falls in love with Amanda's granddaughter, Portia. He keeps on trying to become a human by undergoing different operations to have artificial skin, hair and a nervous system. But the final step is still to be done: the World Congress has to recognise him as a human in order to legalise his marriage with Portia. Only after having inserted human blood in his machine system, he begins aging and can thus be declared human, on his death bed, at the age of two-hundred years old. Galatea will then accomplish Portia's wish to put an end to her life in order to die with her husband.



BEFORE VIEWING

1 After reading the plot, answer these questions.

1. What series of robots does Andrew belong to?
2. How old is Andrew when he dies?
3. What is Andrew's desire?
4. What is Portia's final desire?

FILM CLIP

2 Watch the clip and fill each gap with the correct word.

When Andrew is delivered at the Martins' house, the first thing he does, after opening his eyes, is a futuristic holographic show to introduce "the three Laws of Robotics" defined in Isaac Asimov's stories. Andrew follows the three rules till his death, even when becoming a human, though it is no longer necessary.

"First law of **1.**

A robot may not **2.** a human being, or, through inaction, cause a **3.** to come to harm.

Second **4.**

A robot must obey all human **5.**, except where those orders come in

6. with the first law.

Third law of robotics:

A robot **7.** protect itself, **8.** doing so does not conflict with the first two laws."

3 Answer the questions.

1. How would you describe the Martins' reactions when the robot starts speaking?
2. What special effects does Andrew use?
3. Does the soundtrack contribute to the presentation?
4. Why do you think the camera is often located at the eye level of the subjects?
5. Did you like the clip? Why? Why not?

AFTER VIEWING

4 This film provides food for thought. Discuss these ideas.

1. Do you think it possible that robots would become human or are we rather going towards a future in which people will act in a robot-like manner?
2. What is your reaction to the story? Do you think it right to declare Andrew a human being, in spite of the fact that he was not born from a mother?
3. Do you find any similarities with Carlo Collodi's "The adventures of Pinocchio"?

5 Search the Internet to find a definition of biological computer and write it down.

