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How *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* Defines the Ideal of Humanity

The consideration of what constitutes the ideal of humanity has been going on for centuries, and the ways in which this ideal has evolved demonstrates the changing perspectives of the different eras. The ideal of humanity is by no means a concrete and universal definition, but it is important to understand how people view the boundaries of humanity because when people are dehumanized and not considered to be part of humanity there is a sense of justification for mistreating and even killing these people. Even today, there are many people that constitute humanity that are portrayed as inhuman due to the fact that they are different or because of something bad that they may have done, but despite these things, these people are still human. Therefore, to prevent the atrocities that mankind commit against each other, it is crucial to expand the limited scope of what traditionally constitutes as the “ideal of humanity”. This ideal of humanity has been redefined in the cult television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.* The episode “Surprise” of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* defines humanity in traditional terms and then expands the traditional boundaries of humanity to create a new, more broad “ideal” for humanity in the episode’s embodiment of humanity in Dalton’s academic lifestyle, the love Spike and Drusilla have for each other, and the humanity present in Spike despite his role as a villain. This broader scope in the ideal of humanity emphasizes the full range of human nature including the good and the bad and that even those that do bad things are considered in this ideal.

As a whole, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* constantly explores the idea of humanity throughout all seven seasons of the show through its depictions of demons versus humans, and the good and bad that exists in both the humans and demons, but the episode “Surprise” deals with humanity very explicitly through the character the “Judge”. The “Judge” is a demon that is brought forth by the vampires Drusilla and Spike, and the “Judge” kills anything that it constitutes as containing humanity. Thus, the “Judge” literally acts as a judge of humanity, and it is through this character’s judgment of humanity that the show takes a clear stand on how humanity has expanded in modern times to encompass a more diverse group than traditional ideas of humanity.

Historically, the Renaissance was a time when the ideal of humanity was explored and humanity as an academic discipline was emerging, and this academic aspect of humanity is emphasized when the “Judge” remarks on the humanity that the vampire Dalton possesses due to his knowledge*.* The Renaissance was a time of the “rebirthing” of ideas and many of the ideas that were brought up from the past were classical Roman and Greek works, which emphasized the ideal of humanity through citizenship and the service of the citizen to the common good of the state. However, a good education was the foundation for a man to be able to be of service to his community, so being a useful citizen and thus an ideal of humanity was synonymous with being well educated and knowledgeable. This connection between humanity, education, and citizenship is demonstrated in the article *Citizenship, Knowledge, and the Limits of Humanity* by Walter Mignolowhen he states, “The paradigm of the ‘human’ defined by Christian men of letters during the Renaissance became the paradigm of the ‘citizen’ defined by secular philosophers during the European Enlightenment” (Mignolo 314). Mignolo not only emphasizes that the traditional ideal of humanity constituted educated citizens, but he also underscores that this ideal of humanity was defined by “Christian men of letters”. This means that the traditional ideal of humanity was determined by educated, European men, and so this ideal depicts humanity as being white, educated men. The vampire Dalton exemplifies this traditional view of humanity because upon examining him, the Judge proclaims, “This one is full of feeling. He reads”. The Judge acknowledges that the accumulation of knowledge and emotion that Dalton has acquired through reading gives Dalton humanity. Therefore, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* entrenches traditional ideals of what constitutes humanity because of the emphasis of Dalton’s humanity through his knowledge. However, *Buffy* extends this traditional view of humanity because although Dalton is white and educated which are qualities inherent in traditional ideals of humanity, he is a soulless vampire and not human. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* ‘s inclusion of Dalton in humanity despite his condition of not actually being human emphasizes that humanity includes human nature and the “feeling” part of living is what distinguishes humans apart from the rest of living things. Therefore, Dalton’s character embodies how *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* both acknowledges past, traditional ideals of humanity like knowledge while expanding the scope of humanity to include feeling and emotion as ideals of humanity.

The Judge’s recognition of the humanity in the vampires Spike and Drusilla in the emotions that they feel for each other further demonstrates how *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* broadens the scope of humanity in its inclusion of human nature. The Judge’s recognition of humanity in these characters is apparent when the Judge tells Spike and Drusilla, “You two stink of humanity. You share affection and jealousy”. This instance underscores the show’s emphasis of emotion being a basis for humanity because the Judge explicitly states that the affection and jealousy that Spike and Drusilla have for each other gives them humanity. Therefore, the act of “feeling” as reflected with Dalton through his reading of books is now exemplified in Drusilla and Spike through their loving of each other, and the show defines humanity as those that can feel emotionally. The Judge mentions affection and jealousy as the two emotions that Spike and Drusilla share that give them humanity, and this demonstrates two varying spectrums of human nature. Affection portrays the positive aspects of human emotion whereas jealousy is considered negative and sinful. The lumping together of both these emotions to embody humanity implies that not only does humanity incorporate human emotions, but the full spectrum of human emotion and human nature ranging from the good like affection to the bad like jealousy. These emotional feelings are what constitute human nature, so *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is expanding the definition of humanity to not only include humans, but also those that can feel.

This episode’s establishment of humanity in the villain Spike demonstrates the show’s position that humanity can exist even in those that do bad things. The emphasis of the ideal of humanity in the past like in the Renaissance and the European Enlightenment centered on doing good for the community and being a beneficial citizen to the society. Therefore, when the Judge describes Spike as containing humanity, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* broadens humanity to not only include the heroes and the protagonists but the “villains” as well. Despite the terrible things Spike has done and his portrayal as being evil, he is still considered being a part of humanity, which furthers the notion that humanity includes all aspects of human nature. Humans contain flaws and human nature has many positive qualities, but through Spike, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* underscores the fact that doing wrong and sin is still a part of being human. The atrocities that Spike has done are acknowledged in the article *Rooting for the Bad Guy: Psychological Perspectives* by Richard Keen when Keen states, “While it is true that he does very bad things, you learn why over the course of the series. Spike was ridiculed as a young man; he was rejected by his first love and his mother; he is now in love with a woman he cannot have” (Keen 131). Keen acknowledges that Spike has done bad things but he argues that these actions are given context, and the contexts of these actions are rooted in human emotions like love and rejection, which establishes the humanity behind these actions that are normally considered inhuman. Therefore, the Judge’s recognition of Spike as an ideal of humanity despite what he’s done and the context that the show gives to Spike’s actions to show the humanity behind “inhuman” crimes demonstrates how *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* shows that context to acts gives them humanity.

The implications of villains like Spike being a part of humanity despite what they’ve done ties to real world situations like terrorism because terrorists are the real-life “villains”, so the question comes up that if a villain like Spike can have humanity, if this humanity translates to terrorists too. Drucilla Cornell explores this idea in her article *Facing our Humanity,* which argues that the United States’ aggression against Afghanistan post 9/11 is wrong. She articulates that the terrorist activity that the U.S. has suffered at the hands from some terrorist groups in Afghanistan have caused the U.S. to retaliate negatively, and the root of this negative retaliation stems from the U.S.’s dehumanization of these terrorist groups. The United States’ view that these groups are not a part of humanity serves as a justification for the violence and hate subjected at these terrorists. Cornell acknowledges that terrorists do terrible, unforgivable things, but she argues that despite these wrongdoings, terrorists are still humanity. This emphasis on humanity remaining inherent in those despite the wrongdoing they may have committed is seen when Cornell states, “…we are part of the ideal of humanity no matter what we do; we should never be excluded from it”(Cornell 173). Cornell accentuates that humanity is composed of everyone despite what they’ve done, which is the same argument that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is making with the character Spike because Spike is shown as having humanity even though he has committed some terrible acts. Therefore, Spike serves as a parallel to real people who are considered inhuman because of their crimes and his pronouncement from the Judge as containing humanity demonstrates how *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* widens the ideal of humanity to encompassing everyone even if they’ve done wrong.

The ideal of humanity is an interpretation and like all interpretations, what it means is up to the interpreter. The interpretation of humanity in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is that humanity constitutes everything with human nature whether the good parts or the bad, and that humanity is linked to feeling whether through books or human emotions like love and jealousy. The Judge’s establishment of humanity in the characters Dalton, Drusilla, and Spike demonstrate the show’s expansion of the ideal of humanity to include the full range of human emotion and action thus providing implications that all people, including those considered villains and inhuman, have humanity.

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