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How *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* Extends 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. This paragraph outlines a somewhat different central argument than your introduction does. Try to be cohesive but also consistent.

Historically, the Renaissance was a time when the ideal of humanity was explored and humanity as an academic discipline was emerging*.* 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. This definition of the ideal of humanity that was established in this time marked a clear boundary between what was considered the ideal and what was not. Those that were not included in the ideal were thought of as barbaric and were placed into this “other” category. Therefore, even though these people were human, since they didn’t possess the attributes that were defined by the ideal of humanity, they were not treated as humanity. There was no recognition of these people as being human, and so there was justification for enslaving or even killing them. Thus, the fact that the Judge recognizes and acknowledges the humanity in some characters on the show that would not constitute this traditional ideal of humanity is significant. This is because that in the traditional ideal of humanity, humanity is not acknowledged or even recognized in those that do not meet the ideal. Therefore, the acknowledgement of humanity in this group extends the boundary of humanity and with it the ideal of humanity.

The vampire Dalton’s scholarly pursuits demonstrate how *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* both entrenches and then expands the traditional ideal of humanity. 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. In this show, when a person turns into a vampire they essentially die, a demon takes over their body, and they lose their soul thus they cease to be human. Therefore, *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. Since you have two dynamics here, that of re-entrenchment and that of complicating/challenging (I think is more accurate than extending), you should consider separating it into two paragraphs.

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 include not only those few that constitute the traditional ideals of humanity, but to anyone 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. The traditional ideal of humanity would not include Spike because he is not beneficial to society and a good citizen. Thus, in a traditional standpoint, Spike’s humanity would be unacknowledged since he does not meet the ideal. However, the Judge’s recognition of Spike’s humanity reflects how *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* extends the ideal of humanity past the “good citizen”.

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”. Therefore, the implication arises that if a villain like Spike can have humanity, 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. Again, you’re dealing with the complication of binary views. Capitalize on this theme.

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 traditional ideal of humanity only applies to a very select group of people, and those not included in this group are put into an “other” category and thought of as subhuman. Therefore, the Judge’s establishment of humanity in the characters Dalton, Drusilla, and Spike demonstrate the show’s expansion of humanity to those outside the traditional ideals of humanity.

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Writer’s Memo

I think the biggest problem with my paper was that there was some disconnect between the ideal of humanity versus humanity. I didn’t make it explicitly clear that the ideal of humanity in traditional terms marks a division between what is humanity and what is not. Therefore, if one was not included in this ideal they weren’t acknowledged as having humanity, which is why the show’s recognition of humanity in those that would not meet this traditional ideal was significant. Initially, I didn’t make this distinction clear, which led to some holes in my argument. Therefore, the majority of my focus in this revision process was to clarify this distinction and provide a stronger context and framework for the rest of my paper. I did this by articulating the significance of being considered humanity in traditional terms when I was discussing the traditional ideals of humanity. I also went through my paper and made sure to make it clearer that the characters that were acknowledged as having humanity in *Buffy* were characters that would not meet the criteria for the traditional ideal of humanity. I tried to elaborate why they would not meet the standards for the traditional ideal of humanity and why this was significant. I think these explanations and clarifications went a long way in making my paper easier to follow and understand. There were also several sentences that were worded a little awkwardly, so I went through and reworded in some areas or broke up some sentences that were too long. I think one of this paper’s greatest strengths is that I really worked hard to find a broad range of relevant sources, and I think these sources did a good job of backing up my argument. I also think that I picked a topic that was well backed by the show, and I could find specific instances in the episode where this topic was specifically addressed. One thing that needs to still be worked on is that there still exist some places where I think I could still make some distinctions between what I mean by humanity and the ideal of humanity clearer.

Chanelle,

You’re absolutely right that the caliber of research here is outstanding. You start to make some pretty good intertextual connections as well, but the next step is make those connections work better in the paper as a whole rather than individual moments. I think the main issue here is with scope. You deal with Dalton (or, more specifically, The Judge’s use of knowledge as a defining feature of humanity), the mechanism of The Judge himself, Spike and Drusilla’s emotions, and Spike as a larger character to deal with humanity versus ideal humanity. That’s a lot of ground to cover and while it all, yes, is related, the amount of material you end up having to cover leaves a lot of your paper feeling underdeveloped and, moreover, disconnected (an issue which you seem to be aware of in your memo but, perhaps, for different reasons). If you look at where you’re ending up in most of your paragraphs, what you really seem to be doing (to me, at least), is articulating how the episode deconstructs binaries. Rather than humanity and ideal humanity being different things, you are instead articulating a range of characteristics that speak to the complexity of the human condition, exacerbated here by their location within non-human subjects. But this destabilization of binary thinking also extends to hero versus villain, which relates to the us versus them mentality that you open with and that also seems to structure Cornell’s argument about 9/11. If you can shift the focus of your main claim to The Judge as a mechanism through which the show performs this destabilization/deconstruction (and exclude Spike’s larger role in the show, perhaps), you’ll have a more manageable amount of material to cover and a more clear and productive through-line in your paper as a whole.