

Watching The Watcher: Analysing the character of Rupert Giles by Barbara Maio

In every generation there is a chosen one but in every generation there is also a watcher who works side by side with the slayer against evil forces. In the buffyverse roles are quickly established: in *Buffy* the movie, we met for the first time slayer and watcher and we found out the rules that they have to follow. Buffy is not happy about her destiny but in the end she fights the right fight with Merrick who soon dies leaving the slayer all alone. At this point we already know about watcher and slayer but in the series the two characters are quite different from the movie: Buffy is again very unhappy about her role but she is going to accept her new life and at the end of season one she will be completely aware of the role. Giles is the replacement for Merrick: is younger, is shy, is not very self-confident.

Giles' first appearance is in the library, his 'home' for the first three seasons, is not very impressive: he is almost 'feminine' in his approach to Buffy. In the first few episodes, he is often knocked down in the fight or saved by Buffy but is also smart, bookish and quite useful in a non-physical kind of way. At a first glance it seems that Giles can hardly be a strong figure: mostly he appears to be destined to stay in the background, just a mere help when it's time to hit the books.

But in the buffyverse nothing is as it seems.

The character of Giles is one of the most complicated and well developed in the buffyverse. He is also the only adult figure in the main group. At the beginning he seems to adjust his life near Buffy acting as pure mentor and guide. He tries to act sometimes as chief of the action giving to his slayer some soft orders and suggestions but it's soon clear that the action leader is Buffy. In the first season he began slowly more confident in his role and in the last episode is ready to die for his slayer acting in a very strange way for a perfect watcher: but at this point slayer-watcher relationship is already changed in a personal way.

The second season is the first big moment of change for Giles: lots of things are going to happen, mostly not very good things. The introduction of Jenny in the first season is now developed and for the Scooby gang and for us as audience is a strong moment because we can think of Giles as a complete man, not just a mentor, not just a watcher, not just a librarian. He is also a romantic guy with a life aside the slaying. Second season can be called 'season of love' in the buffyverse because all the main group of characters are trying new relationships but particularly relationship between Buffy and Angel and Giles and Jenny are going to be tight bonds. Buffy had sex with Angel who killed Jenny leaving Giles almost destroyed and Buffy experimenting a fault sense for not being able to kill Angelus.

I think that this is a main point of change in relationship between Buffy and Giles because she is no more a child and Giles is ready to support her until the end also if is not going to accept all her decision. Giles can now be identified as a mentor but without be prevaricating in Buffy decisions.

It is in this relationship that the character of Giles can be defined. Slayer and watcher represent a team to service of the battle against evil. As we have learned from the film before and from the series then, the roles are well defined with a watcher that instructs and it lead a slayer who is generally very young and inexperienced.

But Buffy and Giles don't embody the ideal models of their roles: he has a rebel past and he is not very obedient to rules and constituted order; she doesn't have a nature that bring her towards an absolute obedience at the suggestion/order of the watcher council as written in slayer's mythology, pure tool in the hands of this male power.

In a hypothetical scale of importance, Buffy and Giles are on the same level, her the arm, him the mind. In theory the slayer should be the centre of the battle against evil while the watcher can be replaced (as happens to Giles in the third season with Wesley) but this couple makes exception since it breaks every possibility of definition and identification falling through the borders of their relationship in a kaleidoscope of reason and feeling.

In the movie, Buffy Summers become the slayer in unexpected and unpredictable way being a girl distant from the idea of sacrifice. As she is introduced to us in the movie her only worries are boys and shopping. Rupert Giles - as we discover through his own stories - he discovers his destiny of watcher in young age and he is not very happy about the mission, running away to his responsibilities and following his rebellious and violent vocation. Both don't seek the responsibilities of which are invested but they accept the mission after years of doubts and reflections.

In first season of the serie, first meeting happens in the library of the school of Sunnydale, the place in which big part of their interaction will be developed for the first three years of the series. Already from this first moments we understand that this relationship will be based on opposition of differences and affinity. In fact, if their destiny has a commune start during their meeting they appear two distant people: Buffy is a typical American teen-ager that dresses with wrong suits to the occasion; Giles is always impeccable in his tweed, maybe a little retrò under California sun.

Hardly during the first seasons we see him act without jacket or in attitudes less that formal. Their relationship start from a base of teacher-student but as Buffy is not a particularly careful student voted to the study so Giles is not a perfect teacher having to adjust to his pupil and to go down, therefore, to continuous compromises.

In the first three seasons the relationship results well defined: despite the moments of rebellion and escape of Buffy it is from Giles however that the slayer search for help, comfort and information. Also in the moments of crisis the two search and help each other. In the episode *The prophecy* (01.12) Giles is ready to sacrifice his own life to save Buffy going against to his indications of watcher well knowing that its sacrifice would be useless however against the Master. In turn Buffy stop Giles and his sacrifice to take her responsibilities. Already in the first season, therefore, the roles lose clarity and blur the line while the couple purchases respect and trust in each other.

In second season the relationship still evolves since nothing in the buffyverse is stable and unchangeable, particularly human relationships.

Buffy start to understand better her role and responsibilities that derive from it; Giles is aware that Buffy is not just a slayer and not as the others and has to conform himself with flexibility to his role. The couple starts to know and to have self-respect themselves in deep way. It is in this season that the first great change happen in relationship among the two, due changes to the evolution of the characters by the authors.

In parallel Buffy and Giles live respective love stories with Angel and Jenny and also in this case the implications of these two relationships are mixed. We watch approach, betrayal, reconciliation, break-up in both stories: Buffy has her first sexual experience with Angel that loses his soul, Giles breaks with Jenny, Jenny tries to make peace with Giles but she is killed by Angel that leave the body in the bed of Giles that tries to take revenge and he is saved by Buffy. In the final embrace between Giles and Buffy there is the whole desperation of two lovers betrayed and wounded in deep way.

This is one of the rare moments of opening and contact, also physical, of the two characters, as a rule relegated to a relationship extremely 'formal' due also to the necessity of Whedon to not incur in a censorship.

From this moment the relationship change with Buffy that lives a sense of guilt because she hasn't kill Angel having the opportunity and Giles that lives his hate for Angel that has his strongest moment in the look of challenge to the vampire that is torturing him in the last episode of season two.

At the end of the season Buffy leave Sunnydale in searching of clarity and peace having killed Angel in the final battle. This escape allows the authors to build a beginning of third season with a parallel story among Buffy life in Los Angeles and the rest of the gang in Sunnydale. We see Giles that is in desperate search of Buffy while the gang wait confident her return. There is here also an opposition among adults world and the young people with Giles that has an active attitude in the search of Buffy realistically thinking that the situation cannot naturally be resolved while the gang

waits more naïvely for a natural and spontaneous resolution of the situation. With the return of Buffy roles and functions seem to take back soon their natural course but it is clear that things won't be as before.

Already at the beginning of the third season we find the main characters matured, more adults and less unworried. Buffy permanence in Los Angeles is a painful but necessary moment of growth: when Angel return from the infernal world in which he had been sent at the end of second season, the relationship with Buffy is clearly destined to fail. Buffy has lost the naivety of teen-ager.

In the third season they are different moments of crisis and discussion: the relationship between Faith and the Mayor is built in parallel with the Buffy-Giles relationship giving two different models. In the first one the parental aspect is evident even if it degrades in obsessive and distorted attitudes. Buffy-Giles relationship surely has some parental meanings but it overcomes well soon this level to go down in depth and complexity.

In these first three seasons the identification of Giles as a father figure his confirmed and strengthened by the relationship with Joyce. After a first phase of problems for opposite point of view about Buffy, in the episode *Band Candy* (03.06) the couple overcomes their own differences and became more near also physically.

The relationship won't last but this fact marks a turn in the relationship between Giles and Buffy since every following hypothesis of sentimental relationship among the two is denied by the incestuous veil that is created. In different analysis has been underlined as to this point the relationship between Buffy and Giles assumes some connotations to *Lolita* kind: the relationship among slayer and watcher never evolves sexually and the character of Giles never show a sexual interest for his protected. It is sure however that a complex text as Buffy cannot exclude at least the possibility of a deep relationship in the couple, relationship that will evolve even more in the following seasons.

But before this relationship make a step it has to still overcome lots of tests the most complicated of which it takes place the day of the eighteenth birthday of Buffy. In the betrayal of Giles that drugs Buffy to follow the orders of Watchers Council it is explained the struggle of a man between his feeling and his duties. First Giles follow the indications of his mission but soon he will line up completely beside Buffy denying years of preparation, study and devotion toward an institution. It is in this shift one of the keys of Giles's character, a man that has to rethink his life pushed in different directions and forced to cover more roles, not always for own wish. The third season is symbolic of this conflict with Giles that loses first its role as watcher - beside risking to lose the trust of Buffy herself- and then its job as librarian. At the end of the season we assist to a dramaturgical closing with the explosion of the school that symbolize a liberation from the past.

With the end of the school we assist to a new beginning that is introduced for Giles in a double metaphoric way, his dress and his dramaturgic development.

In season four the gang is growing and they have to face a moment of crisis that will last the whole seasonal arc for being resolved only in last moments of the season. Both Buffy and Giles live a deep crisis that brings them distant from each other. Buffy have to redraw her role once out of the school and landed in that hostile world that seems to be the university; Giles lives a deep crisis of identity and role having lost the charge of watcher and librarian job. His choice to stay close to Buffy is a continuous challenge, always fought among want to give her autonomy and the desire to protect the slayer. The relationship teach-student is no more valid. The couple is often reported more and more as "couple" to all the effects: symbolic the episode *Pangs* (04.08) where Buffy and Giles recreate a conjugal relationship for traditional party of Thanksgiving. Their actions, their discussions, their interactions along the whole course of the episode represent the classical ones "scenes from a marriage". Also in this case it is completely absent the sexual component but this doesn't make less effective the sentimental side. Already in the following episode, *Something blue* (04.09), a father-daughter relationship resurfaces with Buffy that asks to Giles to give her away in her marriage magic-induced with Spike.

Generally speaking, season four proposes us this continuous exchange of roles: this evolution is also due from the presence, even sporadic, of Olivia, the occasional girlfriend of Giles. The presence of Olivia already in the first episode it has a double value: on one side it allows Giles not to entirely live his life in the optic of Buffy also having an external sentimental interest; from the other one it allows Buffy to frame Giles in a less stereotyped optic allowing to see the man under the watcher. The presence of Olivia in the episode *Restless* (04.22) it is also explanatory of the crisis of Giles, inclined in two different directions, Buffy and his private life, and aware that he have sacrificed the possibility to have an own family to stay beside Buffy and the group, transitory family substitute more and more weak the whole season.

From the visual point of view, the transformation of Giles is physically represented by a clean change in his look because in this season he is introduces more casual. The choice of the authors to give a more relaxed air to Giles it helps to visually accompany his metamorphosis. In this way also to a first look it is notable the change among Giles in tweed and this more casual man. It is, however, a painful change: in episode *A new man* (04.12) the metamorphosis of Giles is represented with his transformation in a demon, metaphor of his difficult identification. Only an exchange of looks between Buffy and the demon Giles it will avoid the worse, look that once again confirms the bond among the two.

The beginning of season five introduces us a Giles that has overcome his own crisis and decide to return in his country to be able to give a necessary space of growth to Buffy. The battle with Dracula brings to Buffy the necessity to still have a guide and Giles accepts gladly to remain to her side. From this moment the two characters can narratively look for new roads since the phase of critical stasis of season four is exceeded. Giles finds new force in the opening of the Magic Box that it determines for the character a new identification and legitimation inside the group. In this season they are two focal points of Buffy-Giles relationship: the arrival of Dawn, sister of Buffy and the death of Joyce.

The arrival of Dawn start new dynamics inside the group and particularly pushes Buffy to be more responsible; this necessity almost brings the slayer in a 'maternal' dimension that the moment of Joyce death accentuated. From this point, the story sees Buffy try more and more to become a substitute mother for Dawn more than a older sister: in this development it is interesting to notice that Giles is invested in a fatherly role bringing Buffy and Giles to become a virtual couple in the sphere of influence around Dawn. In this season are frequent the verbal exchanges among the two protagonists not about demons and vampires but on education and family.

The idea of family now is definitely realized because Joyce, the only true parent in the story, is dead. Already in the episode *Family* (05.06) is stressed the concept of alternative family that pervades the series in its entirety: this nucleus now becomes even more tied up, more binding, and more natural. As every real couple, Giles and Buffy cross different moments of crisis and clash; the end of the season sees the two separated on the future of Dawn, because the opening of the mystical portal that means the end of the world. Buffy is ready to sacrifice the whole world to save her sister while Giles is inclinable to the sacrifice, difficult but inevitable, of Dawn. Once more Buffy embodies the passion and Giles the rationality. At the end of the battle will be however Buffy to sacrifice herself leaving Giles and the whole gang bewildered in front of her dead body.

The last two seasons of the series are introduced rather different from precedents ones for style and tone. The passage to the network UPN allows the authors to develop strong and adult thematic. In the arc of this two seasons the story mostly works on characters introspection; is not a case that in season six the Big Bad is represented from Willow and in the following one it is the First, a less tangible enemy of the precedents and often incarnation of gang own fears and weakness.

Very different it is also the relationship between Buffy and Giles because he will be often absent from the scene. With Buffy return from the death, Giles finds the strength to complete that footstep only mentioned to the beginning of the fifth season leaving Sunnydale and the gang. It is not an escape or a defeat: on the contrary is a necessity to allow Buffy and the whole group to mature in autonomy.

For second time in the series after *Passion* (02.17), Buffy is set in position of inferiority towards Giles saying "You can't leave me. I can't do this alone" but this time, from an adult, the declaration is not enough to hold back her watcher. In the precedents episodes to his departure, Giles has been run over more and more by Buffy of the fatherly role and, in general, of a role of almost passive maintenance. Paradoxically, more the protagonists grow and become adult, more Giles grow away from them since he loses his primary function of guide. It is interesting to notice as in the passage *I've got to theory* of musical episode *Once more, with feeling* (06.07), the voice of Giles is almost dissonant from the rest of the group in an almost a-solo performance. Even more evident in the song *Standing in the way* where Giles sings all his doubts but Buffy cannot feel him, they are on two different floors physically represented also by the choice to make move Buffy in slow motion.

This is a Giles monologue. As it notices Rhonda Wilcox "while the principal characters fight for entering the maturity, *Once more, with feeling*, represents the difficulty to balance the individual with the group." In practice, it represents the two Giles greater worries that Buffy grows and becomes autonomous, not only as slayer but, above all, as woman.

Giles departure is a trauma for the whole group: Buffy devotes herself to a self-destruction relationship with Spike, Xander doesn't find the courage to follow his sentimental choice with Anya, Dawn will be more and more skidded, Willow is drag in the abyss of magic. It is inevitable to this point to wonder: "All of this would be happened if Giles had remained to Sunnydale? ". Answers are only in the mind of the authors but analyzing precedents developments I think its "no". It is however through the sufferings of the sixth season that the young protagonists finally grow up. And the end of the season with Buffy and Giles that desperately laugh, it shows the acceptance of Buffy that has understood the cause for the departure of her mentor.

In following season Giles also being narratively present in greater way compare to precedents one, he results incoherent and uprooted from every group dynamics.

Sometimes irritating, sometimes useless, the character of Giles in the season seven is, mainly, groundless: he doesn't give the necessary physical support and culture, he doesn't act as guide for the group, he is not able to take responsibility for carrying out action. His only initiative, Spike tried murder, serves only to create a strong breakup with Buffy. It is, in my opinion, a general weakness of last season where the authors have to manage an infinity of characters and storylines, not could necessarily give the correct space to whole material.

For example, the clash between Buffy and Giles about Spike results to be one of the weakest moments of the season: how can Buffy, even furious, beat the door in front of his mentor for Spike that few months before tried to rape her? And even more unreal is the peace between the two sealed with just a look and a smile after days of hard recriminations and accusations. In the general

weakness of the season it is, therefore, Giles character to suffer more of it and his relationship with Buffy.

Giles has reached his goal, now Buffy is adult and independent but perhaps it was not this the way to which the watcher would have liked the emancipation of his pupil.

In conclusion, the character of Giles results one of the most interesting of the buffyverse and it is strange if we considered that adults world is relegated soon in second level and just few recurrent characters overcome thirty years embodying as a rule negative values.

The position of Giles in the buffyverse it is develops through a complicated relationship of integration and exclusion. Giles belongs to the scooby gang to all effects but, contemporarily it doesn't have any affinity with the other components that is not the struggle against evil. Because of his age, his being English, his role, is out of the group - not only Buffy, Willow and Xander but also for brief periods Cordelia, Oz, Tara, Riley -; the group lives out also in night time but Giles doesn't belong to the evenings among friends, to parties, to raids to the Bronze. This exclusion is underlined in a social level amplified by the ethnicity of the character, an English in America.

This reading escapes partly to Italian spectator since over that to a visual level it develops to a lexical level that is lost in Italian adaptation. The use of typical English terms - often dated and unusual - it is contrasted with the slang used by the young protagonists, slang that grows through the use of continuous popular culture references and incomprehensible neologisms to an English of Oxford education.

Giles is however inside the group from the sentimental point of view. Also if the difference of age can make to seem him away from the daily life of the young people, in reality it is completely conscious of what happens around him. For instance, in the third season, when Buffy is left by Angel, Giles is the only one of the group to realize it and try to console Buffy as a friend.

An analysis apart will be interesting about Giles moral development with Giles who kills Ben, is willingness to kill Dawn for greater good and so on but will be too long in this context.

Beyond high and low moments, Giles not only is absolutely a remarkable character in the buffyverse but in general in the television series world since is rare to see in a teen-drama an adult character so well delineated and perfectly justified, rich of tones and character. It is important that authors have devoted so much time and energies to a character that is not the absolute protagonist, rare thing in the world of tv series.