A Slayer Slays and a Watcher Mentors: A Comparison of Rupert Giles from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and Mentor from Homer's *The Odyssey*

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> Giles: A Slayer slays, a Watcher
> Buffy: Watches?
> Giles: Yes. No! He   he   he trains her, he prepares her
> Buffy: Prepares me for what? For getting kicked out of school? For losing all my friends? For having to spend all my time fighting for my life and never getting to tell anyone because I might "endanger" them? Go ahead. Prepare me.
> ("Welcome to the Hellmouth" 1.1, 18:52-19:14)

Introduction

While not explicitly stated on-screen, the relationship between Watcher and Slayer so closely resembles that of mentor and mentee that Giles is often casually referred to as Buffy's mentor as well as her Watcher in academic circles.[1] But to what extent does Giles mirror the original Mentor, the so-named character in Homer's *The Odyssey*? This essay compares the two characters and examines the parallels

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between Giles and Mentor. It will look at the ways Giles and Mentor as well as Athena when she is disguised as Mentor parallel each other and the ways Mentor could be seen as an archetype character in whose sandals Giles follows. It will also consider how gender is constructed in both *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and *The Odyssey* (8th century BCE) to evaluate parallels between the physically male Giles and the physically female Athena (who presents as male through most of *The Odyssey).*

The character of Buffy will be compared to both Odysseus and Telemachus, two mentees of the original Mentor. While Giles is the focus of this essay, reference to a mentor cannot be made without reference to the mentee, as one cannot exist without the other. To that extent, some value judgements will be made about the Giles/Mentor parallels through analysis of the Buffy/Odysseus and Telemachus parallels.

When Mentor enters Telemachus' life, the young man the son Odysseus left as an infant twenty years earlier is described as being *napios.[2]* The precise translation of this term is clarified by Gregory Nagy in an interview with B.R.J. O'Donnell as "disconnected,"[3] and we see that Telemachus "is disconnected from the ancestors, and disconnected intellectually, morally, and emotionally."[4] It is Mentor's intention, then, to reconnect Telemachus to life as a Greek man. Indeed, at the Council of the Gods, Athena says that by taking on Mentor's form, she intends to fill Telemachus with *menos,[5]* the "mental strength" which will allow him to deal with his mother's bullying suitors.

In "Welcome to the Hellmouth," the pilot episode, Buffy can similarly be described as *napios*. Having been expelled from Hemery High for burning down the school gym in a battle against vampires, Buffy is transplanted to Sunnydale High and left without friends or social status. She does not bring anything with her from her old life apart from

her mother, further reinforcing her connection to Telemachus, who must also be with his single mother while his father is away. Buffy goes as far as deliberately changing her social status by seeking out the geeky Willow and eschewing the more fashionable clique led by Cordelia. Buffy is disconnected from everything she had known until that point[6] and, unwilling to continue her Slayer duties, bereft of any plan for her future. Then she meets Rupert Giles.

Giles as Complex Classical Character

This is not the first time that a classical basis for the character (and acts) of Rupert Giles has been proposed. C. W. Marshall's essay "Aeneas the Vampire Slayer: A Roman Model for Why Giles Kills Ben" expertly puts forward the case for a Roman antecedent behind one of Giles' defining actions in the show. That essay has helped to refine the arguments here. The work of Naomi Alderman (discussed later) and of Janet K. Halfyard further supports the case for connection with classical literature.[7]

What follows here is not a suggestion of a causal link between *Buffy* and *The Odyssey.* Following Marshall's train of thought, it is possible that the writers of *Buffy* may have read *The Odyssey* (either in Greek or in translation) and it is highly likely that Giles' education would have involved a close reading. (He could have encountered it in his school studies of English or classics, his university history studies, or his Watchers Council training.) And while we could posit that, having read *The Odyssey,* Giles chose to model himself after Mentor, there is no textual evidence for that. Instead, we are drawing parallels between the two characters and suggesting there are similarities, not deliberating on whether or not these are purposeful.

It should be pointed out that the word *mentor* was not popularized by *The Odyssey.* Rather, it was brought into wider

use by Fenelon's 1699 didactic story "Les aventures de Télémaque" ("The Adventures of Telemachus"). Under the guise of a continuation of *The Odyssey,* Fenelon wrote a story which was both an attack on Louis XIV's absolutism and a guide for young princes in conducting themselves in royal affairs.[8] The book, then, takes Telemachus on more adventures which "uniformly illustrate his thesis that an ideal monarch should be a man of peace, wisdom and simple ways of life" (Kunitz and Colby 274). In this book, Mentor has a much-increased role and (as argued by authors such as Andy Roberts in "Homer's Mentor") acts in a capacity that a modern audience would consider mentorship more than his Homeric counterpart. However, this essay does not exist to debate the validity of assigning the term *mentor* to Mentor. Many other authors have already done that.[9] Instead, we are focussed specifically on the Homeric character and the evident parallels between him and Rupert Giles.

The word *mentor* first appears (in any language) in Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey.* This poem tells the story of Odysseus, king of Ithaca, who goes to fight in the Trojan War and leaves the care of his household (specifically including his son, Telemachus) to his old friend, Mentor. Once the ten-year war is over, Odysseus is cursed to spend ten more years sailing in vain to find his way home. During those years, Telemachus (having reached manhood) sets out to find his father,[10] joined by the goddess Athena, who disguises herself as Mentor.

But why should we compare Giles to Mentor, other than his aforementioned role in Buffy's life? After all, while we can easily draw parallels between Buffy and Telemachus from the beginning of the show, it is harder to do so between Giles and Mentor. Mentor's introduction in Book 2 of *The Odyssey* clearly establishes who he is and what his role should be:

So he [Telemachus] spoke and then sat down. Next Mentor (a man with whom noble Odysseus had served in the army) stood to speak. When he had set sail for Troy, the King had committed his entire household to Mentor. He had ordered everyone to obey the old man and trusted that he would keep everything steadfast and undisturbed. (224-227)

Giles' introduction, however, is less clear. Aside from being an "old man" (at least from Buffy's perspective), Giles shares few of Mentor's qualities as outlined by Odysseus. He has not met Buffy's father, nor has he served in armed combat with him. He had not been left in charge of Buffy's household, only her career as Slayer. No one has been ordered to obey him (though it might have been presumed that Buffy would, if Kendra is to be seen as a model or even typical Slayer") and the idea that Giles would keep everything the same, in the tradition of the Watchers, was an assumed part of his job. Thus far, there is not a compelling reason to compare the two characters.

However, when we look at Mentor's presence in *The Odyssey* as tabulated by Stamatia Dova, we find that:

Mentor is mentioned nineteen times and makes ten appearances in the *Odyssey*; out of the nineteen times that his name is mentioned or he is addressed by name, only six apply to Mentor himself (2.225, 243, 253, 4.655, 17.68, 24.456). Further, Mentor appears *in propria persona* only once, in the assembly scene in *Od*.2.224-56 (Heubeck et al. 2008:145). The rest of the references to him occur in contexts where the external audience is aware of his double identity (2.268, 401, 3.22, 240, 4.654, 22.206, 208, 213, 235, 249, 24.446, 503, 548), while the internal audience is not.

This means that the vast majority of Mentor's appearances and mentions are not of Mentor himself, but of a goddess disguised as him specifically, Athena, the goddess of wisdom.[12] Much has been written about gender and gender presentation in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and I would argue that Mentor's dual role as a male role model (as Mentor) and a female role model (as Mentor-Athena) is paralleled in the character of the learned Rupert Giles.

Mentor and Maleness

First, we should consider the homosocial roles that Greek men and women were expected to play in daily life. In examining relationships between women in the classical world, Nancy Rabinowitz tells us that "both before and after marriage, Greek women occupied a largely homosocial world, a world in which they shared rituals and responsibilities" (116). This would have made mentoring a woman by a man (as we see with Buffy and Giles) incongruous in a classical society.

With regard to Mentor, it may explicitly be his gender that allows him to act in a mentoring capacity to Telemachus. Dova points out that:

> His relationship with Odysseus is based on mutual respect and trust earned in the male network of military performance. We may well assume that his social status is similar to Odysseus' and that his character is as *amúmon* (ἀμύμων, 'noble,' 2.225) as he is. Therefore, Mentor is a father figure, a miniature Odysseus placed in the household by Odysseus himself as a substitute overseer and, possibly, a reminder of his anticipated *nostos* [return].[13]

Thus Mentor was friends with Telemachus' father largely through their (male-only) military connections. He was chosen as an appropriate mentor because he upheld the virtues of Greek men, and he was able to take charge of Odysseus' house by virtue of his maleness.

Similarly, Giles may have been installed as Buffy's Watcher in part due to his maleness. The Council does contain female members, and there are active female Watchers,[14] but it is often read as a boys' club (see, e.g., Miller, 46-47; Williams, 62-63). This is likely a reflection of the socio-cultural patriarchy that defines the majority of our structural norms.

Sheehy draws attention to the lack of mentors for women and considers a range of the complications that arise when men are mentors to women *(Passages* and "The Mentor Connection"). Further discussion of this topic is outside the scope of this article, but attention should be paid to the fact that the only female mentors positioned within the show are highly ineffective and take advantage of their charges (Faith and Buffy respectively) for their personal gain (see n. 12). Stella Carter observes, "In all the films, shows, and books I can think of, the woman's mentor is normally a male, either gay or a potential love-interest."[15] Not only is Buffy mentored by a man, but she is mentored by someone who is specifically not a Slayer. (Indeed, she cannot be mentored by a Slayer, since, prior to the events of the series' last episode, a Slayer had to die for another to be called.) Thus her closest guide is someone who has personal experience of neither her calling nor her gender.

At the beginning of *The Odyssey,* it is Athena in the guise of Mentes, king of Taphos who encourages Telemachus to learn about the heroic deeds of his father, in the same way that it is Giles' enthusiastic presentation of a vampire textbook and subsequent excited discussion of the Slayer's role during the pilot episode that helps Buffy accept

her role as Slayer. At this point, Telemachus and Buffy can be read as similar characters. If we consider the events of the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* feature film canonical to the show, Buffy was the typical cheerleader stereotype before her transfer to Sunnydale, just as Telemachus is described in Book 1 of *The Odyssey* as "a boy" who is "daydreaming of his father's return" (115). But why is it necessary for Athena to wear maleness during her exchange with Telemachus? Is it considered inappropriate for a woman (even a goddess) to mentor a man? This is less an issue in the world of *Buffy*, where being Angel's vampire sire is made a large part of Darla's character, and the vampire Drusilla nurses an ailing Spike. But both of those (and Maggie Walsh, discussed later) occur in the context of evilness, where subversions of what is considered standard are common.

Mentor, Mentor-Athena, Oikos, and Femaleness

For Roberts, Mentor-Athena represents the dichotomy of the male role played by a mentor (counselling) and the female role played by a mentor (emotional connection) ("The Androgynous Mentor"). Yet there are other considerations that link to gender, specifically the matter of *oikos.* The word *oikos* is generally used for the Greek household, sometimes translated as "nuclear family" but often expanding to multiple generations, slaves, and ancestors. This expansion beyond the nuclear family is worth considering initially, as I posit that Giles, Buffy, Willow, and Xander form their own *oikos* which expands to include other characters,[16] but ultimately has these four at its core.

According to James Shields, an *oikos* has "a number of unwritten rules or customs" which he states may be called an "oikos morality." Indeed, the core Scoobies adhere to internal rules, with the first rule being the secrecy of Buffy's identity as the Slayer. Any time an outsider is told the secret

(and thus brought into the fold), that person is initially met with confusion and distrust. According to J. Roy, Aristotle saw the *oikos* as the fundamental unit of the city, and it is the Scooby Gang that forms the fundamental unit of the show. Other characters come and go (Angel, Cordelia, Oz, Anya, Tara, Dawn to name some), but ultimately we start the show with the four Scoobies uniting together and we end with the four Scoobies still united.

In *The Odyssey,* it is Mentor's role to make sure that Odysseus' *oikos* is kept in order while Odysseus is away. Unfortunately, he fails in this task. As Dova points out:

> Odysseus' *oikos* is gravely suffering at the beginning of the *Odyssey*. From all the evils that have befallen it, lack of a father figure seems to be the worse [sic]; it is because of this organic deficiency that the very existence of the household is at great risk. Mentor, we may deduce, has failed miserably in his assignment and, as a result, the state of affairs in the house of Odysseus reached a dangerous low.

While Buffy's *oikos* is in good order at the start of the show (and by the end, as I have previously touched on), it falls apart during Giles' aforementioned bout of listlessness in Season 4. This season sees the trio of younger Scoobies splinter, as Willow widens her magical studies and spends more time with lover/magical mentor Tara,[17] as Xander moves from one menial job to another and deepens into his own depression in a storyline that parallels Giles', and as Buffy becomes more involved with The Initiative and spends time with people whom she perceives as better able to understand her fight and assist her in achieving its aims.

As Giles struggles with his own issues, he is not able to keep the *oikos* together. It should be noted that, during the first three seasons, that had not been his role. The three

younger members of the *oikos* were bonded together as a result of their youth and their small worldview. Like many school children, they were friends because they saw each other every day, not necessarily because they had much in common. Giles orbited their core. But as they moved on from high school and their worlds enlarged, the nature of the *oikos* changed, and Giles was unable to see through his issues in order to keep the household together. To what extent should a mentor put personal life aside in order to help the mentee? We will discuss the quality of the life of a mentor below, but there is a presumed pressure that someone in a mentorship role has their life in order so they can be in a position to give wisdom to someone else. However, unlike parents, mentors are rarely expected to be ever-present in their mentee's lives, and (for example) the personal life of a work mentor arguably has little to no bearing on how well they can perform (and so advise on) their job.

Ultimately, Buffy's *oikos* falls apart during Season 4 and has to be actively rebuilt by the combination of the core four into the Super Slayer during the penultimate episode. It is through this (literal) joining together of talents that the *oikos* is rebuilt and order is restored to Buffy's house. The creation of the Super Slayer in "Primeval" (4.21) was achieved through joining Buffy, Willow, Xander, and Giles into a literal *oikos* contained within Buffy's body. When deciding which talent each member of the group should contribute to the Super Slayer, Xander suggests that Giles' contribution will be his linguistic prowess. Languages are often seen as a domain in which women excel, and a study summarized by Nikhil Swaminathan in *Scientific American* "suggest[s] that girls are learning [language attributes] in a more abstract form, and that's the ideal objective when we're teaching things." Ultimately, Giles takes the role of "sophos […] mind" (33.33-35).[18] Here we have demonstrated another parallel with Athena, who was the goddess of wisdom and intellect. Even

in these easily overlooked ways, Giles is paired with Athena and thus has feminine coding.

Athena's assertion that she is a goddess "who always stands beside [Odysseus], shields [him] in every exploit" (13.341-342) supports Murrin's assertion that Athena functions as a household goddess or a family *daimon*. However, Athena is a serial patron, offering her patronage to a range of heroes including Argos, Jason, Perseus, and Herakles. So while she does take an interest in Odysseus and grows to be fond of his family (hence her interest in mentoring Telemachus), it begins as a more 'professional' relationship. This mirrors the evolution of Giles' relationship with Buffy (and the Summers family at large) which starts overly professional and progresses into paternal and finally collegial.

But what of Odysseus' *oikos*? While Odysseus is away, his wife is courted by several suitors who abuse hospitality and whom Telemachus and Odysseus' aged father Laertes are unable to drive away. So there is an attack on the *oikos* by outsiders, just as Buffy's *oikos* is attacked by the outsiders of The Initiative (and, to a lesser extent, the outsider Tara.)[19] According to Dova, Mentor is unable to help here as a direct result of his age and "limitations of social status: despite their numbers, the suitors, with their youthful strength and, most of all, aristocratic background, constitute a dangerous rival that should not be underestimated under any circumstances."[20] These are things that Mentor can do nothing about. They are inherent characteristics of himself, and of the suitors, which he cannot change. Thus their sense of powerlessness casts Mentor and Giles in the same role. They are rendered helpless to keep the *oikos* together, which consequently eventually furthers Odysseus' and Buffy's power.

However, that Giles is cast in the role of keeping the *oikos* together at all is unusual from a classical Greek

perspective. In her essay "Oikos and Polis in the Medea: Patterns of the Heart and Mind," Debra Blankenship explains that the *oikos* "was the world of women, children and slaves, all of whom had no place or status in the workings of Athenian public life." We can argue that, in *The Odyssey*, Mentor's taking a female role of curator of the *oikos* is fitting as he is (for the most part) an avatar of the goddess Athena. Athena was goddess of not only wisdom but also defensive warfare; furthermore, Athena was understood to be a goddess of weaving, and so it would not be lost on a Greek audience that she could and should take an active role in an *oikos.* However, Giles is portrayed exclusively as cisgender male. In Greek society, he would have been more involved in the politics of the outside world than in maintaining the social norms of the 'family.' In having him play this domestic role by attempting to keep the family together, his role as the female-masquerading-as-male Mentor-Athena is reinforced.

Mentor, Age, and Wisdom

Whether or not the audience identifies Giles as being an "old man" will probably be the result of the age of the audience in question. The show is focalized through the teenage Buffy, and as a teenager she has a specific perception of what it means to be old. Research into perceptions of age by Chopik et al. shows that teenage participants considered mid-30s to be the age at which a person transitions from "adulthood to middle-age" and late 50s to be the transition point from middle-age to "older adulthood." Buffy, and an audience of her contemporaries, would see Giles as firmly in that middle-age category and moving towards old age. Conversely, an audience of adults in their 40s are more likely to perceive Giles as just approaching middle-age. This same ambiguity over what it means to be an "old man" is also evident in *The Odyssey*. Dova covers this in some depth and points out that:

> We do not know what prevented him [Mentor] from following Odysseus to Troy; was it perhaps his advanced age, especially given the fact that Mentor is referred to as *géron* (γέρων 'old man,' 227) at the beginning of the *Odyssey*? However, in *Od.* 22.209, Odysseus himself appeals to Mentor for help on account of their equal age ((ὁμηλικίη).

So why is Mentor described very specifically as being an old man? Dova suggests that the description exists to create a specific contrast between Odysseus and Mentor that Odysseus is presented "as the epitome of youth combined with maturity, the symbol of that which is old (customs, mode of government, political ideology) but dynamic and capable of reinventing itself in phoenix-like fashion" while Mentor "symbolizes the limitations of a static age that has gradually relinquished its ability to become new again."

It is certainly arguable that Giles is "of a static age" and has relinquished any desire to be new. This is clearest in his relationship with techno-pagan Jenny Calendar, who is deliberately styled to be young, hip and good with technology. As part of their playful banter, she delights in pointing out that he is stuffy. But rather than contrast him with Buffy's rarely mentioned father, Giles is contrasted with Buffy herself. She is young, stylish, and vivacious everything Giles (and Mentor) is not. Indeed, this dichotomy creates much of the comedic content of the first season, as we watch clueless Giles attempt to navigate the world of his charge, which is always just beyond his reach. Given that Buffy is our protagonist, and the show is focalized through her, we must read Giles as being her foil and so playing the subordinate role to her, as Mentor does to Odysseus in *The Odyssey*.

Book 2 of *The Odyssey* tells us that "[Telemachus] said a prayer, and Athena came to him in the form of Mentor, / in both body and in voice" (260-262). Coming to Telemachus' aid was not an altruistic act on Athena's part. As noted above, she was a goddess of war and of wisdom, and (as pointed out by Roy George, among others) Odysseus was a favorite of hers. So, by protecting his son and helping him to drive away rivals for Penelope's affections, Athena was ensuring Odysseus' future safety. Taking the aged form of Mentor, whom Telemachus trusted implicitly, is an act of wisdom on Athena's part as she did not need to convince him that she could be trusted. Rather she could get straight to work. It is no wonder that this industrious, favorite-protecting, wise goddess can be paralleled with Rupert Giles, wiseman extraordinaire.

It is not unreasonable to suggest the writers are evoking an Athenian form of Mentor in Giles, as this is not the only way Athena is referenced in the series. In her paper "'Those whom the powers wish to destroy, they first make mad": The Classical Roots of Madness in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,*" Naomi Alderman draws attention to parallels between classical forms of madness and madness as portrayed in *Buffy*, including Athena's driving the eponymous protagonist mad in Sophocles' *Ajax.* With classical allusions present throughout the series, it is reasonable to assume that at least some of these are intentional.

Of course, as Daniel Levinson reminds us, it is the role of a mentor to be a developer of skills and intellect. Giles does this in a way that could be considered to be Socratic another connection to wisdom. Although he is the embodiment of exposition and can be relied upon to give speeches which extend the narrative, nonetheless his speeches are often interrupted, and his ideas questioned. Whether this is a deliberate pedagogical choice or because he has no control over his Slayer is open to debate. Yet I

would argue that allowing students to question what they are being told and "think out loud" to make connections and create meaning through discussion is a sign of good teaching. (See, e.g., his own endorsement of the concept in "I Only Have Eyes for You," 2.19.) Giles allows his mentee to think for herself, and often to come to her own conclusions. He is less a vessel for answers than a conduit through which Buffy can find them for herself.[21]

This attitude contrasts with Buffy's own attempt at mentorship during Season 7. As Arwen Spicer points out in her essay "'It's Bloody Brilliant!': The Undermining of Metanarrative Feminism in the Season Seven Arc Narrative of Buffy":

> [...] the Potentials watch [Buffy] attentively like children in a schoolroom. Their visual representation suggests that they are receiving wisdom, not participating in its construction. At intervals throughout the episode, Buffy's speech on the virtues of the Slayer activation continues as a voice over. There is no sign of any Potential offering an opinion during any part of this exposition.[22] (para. 25)

This scene is, perhaps, a more accurate representation of classical teaching, at least in regard to Athena. Much of her mythology (and much classical mythology in general) involves her punishing the hubris of a mortal who dares think they are her equal.[23] For the Greeks, it was wrong to believe that a human was equal to the gods, and here Buffy is acting as the god "Slayer" contrasted with the human "Potentials."

Jean Rhodes, in "Who Exactly Was Mentor," suggests that "by assuming different roles, Athena also seemed to understand that young people need different and often multiple mentors" which is not the case for Giles. He seeks

to be Buffy's sole mentor and (as with Maggie Walsh) displays resentment when Buffy looks to others to fill that role.

In Giles' role as expositor, he does use his wisdom to advise the Slayer and give key information to the audience in order to move the action along. Quite often, these expositions are in the form of monologues. We also find Mentor-Athena delivering an overtly expository, though battle-rousing, speech, in effect mentoring Odysseus in Book 22 of *The Odyssey*:

> Odysseus, you have no strength, no bravery, like the time when, for nine years, you ceaselessly fought against the Trojans for fair-armed Helen, daughter of a noble sire! You killed many men in dreadful battle and the city of Priam was taken thanks to your advice. You have now returned to your own house and your own property. How can you cry over your lost power when faced with the suitors? Come here, old friend. Stand by me! Now you will see how Mentor, son of Alcimus, punishes your enemies and repays your kindness! (22.226-236)

Here, Dova argues, the audience sees Mentor transform from old man to leader, ready for battle against the suitors. So too do Giles' expository speeches take him away from his role as stuffy Brit and into the role of knowledgeable fighter of dark forces (albeit from behind a reference desk). After the revelation of his rebellious youth, this also reminds the audience of the first-hand experience Giles has of the dark forces his Slayer fights   comparable to Mentor-Athena and the goddess of war/wisdom.

This darkness can be seen in parallel epithets for Athena and Giles. The epithet "Pallas" is attached to Athena's name throughout Greek mythology. The Greek writer Apollodorus recounts the myth:

> They say that when Athena was born she was brought up by Triton, who had a daughter Pallas; and that both girls practiced the arts of war, but that once upon a time they fought; and when Pallas was about to strike a blow, a fearful Zeus interposed the aegis, and Pallas, being startled, looked up, and so fell, having been wounded by Athena.

Giles' epithet "Ripper" similarly calls back to a time that he had friends (or perhaps found-family, if we are to assume that his group of Ethan Rayne et al. parallel the Scooby Gang) alongside whom he fought. In this case, the naming is inverted, as Giles eschews the name Ripper after the dispersal of his group. Yet both these names are personal, used of Athena and Giles only by their peers or themselves, and not by anyone socially beneath them.[24] In this case, both characters have a name related to something potentially painful to them, buried in their own history, and which continues to impact their spheres of influence as time passes.[25]

Mentor, Absence, and Support

That Athena uses Mentor's appearance creates another parallel between Mentor and Watcher: relegation to supporting character status. Cole Salao describes a supporting character as a character who exists:

> to further flesh out a main character's story and development. Their biggest role is to bring conflict and change to the story that will affect the main character for better or worse, which helps readers better understand the protagonist.

Unfortunately, women in fiction are more likely to be cast in supporting roles than lead roles. In 2019, women accounted for 40% of the protagonists in the top-grossing 100 films and only 37% of the major characters ("2019 Statistics"). Given the deliberate reversal of traditional gender roles that it at the core of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* it is arguable that giving Giles a supportive role subverts the expectation that the middle-aged white man is the protagonist of the show. But through the lens of classical reception, we can say that he acts in the same role as Homer's Mentor, as well as taking on the traditionally 'female' supportive role that we might expect from Mentor-Athena.

Perhaps it is untrue to suggest that Giles is a supporting character. He is present in 121 episodes of *Buffy,* 43 issues of the comic continuation, 1 (vocal only) episode of *Angel,* 15 issues of *Angel and Faith* and 3 issues of *Angel and Faith: Season 10.*[26] However, his role is not as central to the narrative as that of Buffy and her friends. Particularly early in the show's run, he acts (as discussed above) mostly as an expository character. He is also absent for much of Season 6.

Mentor is a far smaller physical presence in *The Odyssey* than Giles is in *Buffy.* But their ability to blend into the background rather than take center stage is a clear parallel. It is necessary for the mentor to step back, so that the mentee can become the character they are destined to be.

Mentoring and Self-Awareness

In Book 13 of *The Odyssey* we learn how aware Athena is of the behind-the-scenes nature of her work. She reveals herself to Odysseus and exclaims:

> Ah, but you never recognized me, did you?
> Pallas Athena, daughter of Zeus   who always

stands beside you, shields you in every exploit. (340-342)

This scene is reminiscent of Giles' own dramatic reveal at the end of Season 6, when he returns from England to face off against Dark Willow ("Grave" 6.22). In stepping out from the shadow of their mentees, goddess and Watcher alike step into their own power and work with their charges to bring an end to their problems.

In defining what makes an effective mentor, the National Institute for Health and Care research states that "mentors need a high degree of self-awareness to recognise their own behavior and emotions within the relationship" presumably because rapport between mentor and mentee occurs when "they have mutual respect and positive regard and trust each other to do what they say they will" ("Before Embarking"). So the mentee must see the mentor demonstrating the values that the two hold in common. This is why the *Tento di Cruciamentum*[27] is so damaging to Buffy and Giles' relationship: Buffy watches Giles actively betraying the mutual respect and trust they have built up for each other. The relationship here breaks down not because Giles completely lacks self-awareness, but because he at first chooses to ignore it and follow his sense of duty to the Council rather than to his Slayer. His self-awareness is ultimately accelerated because of this experience.

In the end, Giles does "do what [he says he] will" because he intervenes in the test, which has the outcome one might expect from the mentor/mentee relationship: Supported by the mentor, the mentee succeeds in the task. Thanks in part to Giles' intervention, Buffy passes the test. However, when the Watchers Council relay this information to Giles (in Buffy's presence), they are very clear about the fact that he failed because of his intervention. Both are aware of his choice. He loses his position as Buffy's Watcher and

sacrifices an aspect of his livelihood in his effort to be a positive influence in her life.

Mentoring as a Negative

In contrast to the positives of mentoring as outlined until this point, C.E. Weber suggests that adults who take on a mentoring role may be unfulfilled in their own lives and seeking to live vicariously through their mentee. While Giles does not seem to want to be the Slayer, there are numerous times in which he seeks to engage in physical combat with the Monster of the Week. Perhaps the most memorable of these is in the first season's finale where, afraid that her encounter with The Master would kill Buffy, he prepares himself to take on The Master himself and avert the apocalypse. (While not necessarily the role of the Slayer in the past, Buffy very quickly adds 'Apocalypse Averter' to her list of titles.) However, there is an extent to which Giles can be considered to have an unfulfilled life. Giles' dream in "Restless," for example, opens with him and his girlfriend Olivia apparently on a date at a fairground. A pregnant Olivia pushes a stroller, while Buffy behaves as if she were a toddler. All of this suggests Giles' wish for a child and family. Later in the dream, while researching, he breaks into song, suggesting a frustrated musical ambition. In the episode "Tabula Rasa," Giles returns to England because he no longer has a defined role in Buffy's life and so has no reason to stay in California. Christina Casano points out that "His intentions are good, but he leaves Buffy at a critical moment because he feels that she needs to learn how to take care of herself." In this instance, Giles may feel he is being a good mentor by leaving his mentee when he feels she no longer needs him, but he is also demonstrating how his life has reached a point where he can move quickly back to a country

he has not called home for at least six years[28] because he has nothing keeping him in the United States.

This move is the climax of a storyline that begins in Season 4, when he is unemployed (as both librarian and Watcher) and ousted from his mentor role by Maggie Walsh, Buffy's psychology professor and, secretly, the head of The Initiative (who later tries to have Buffy killed). The following two seasons see Giles less and less able to define himself according to his relationship with the Slayer in general (and Buffy specifically) and seeking a range of hobbies and liaisons to fill his time. Even when he buys the Magic Box in Season Five, he is very quickly rendered redundant by Anya, who shows a distinct flair for American capitalism and is able to run the business more adeptly than he is. This aspect of Giles seems less like Mentor-Athena and more like the human Mentor.

Conclusion

Having looked at both Giles and Mentor/Mentor-Athena in their mentorship roles, can we conclude that they are effective? Rhodes would suggest that the Mentors of *The Odyssey* are not. Roberts states in "Homer's Mentor" that Mentor (as opposed to Mentor-Athena) is not portrayed as guiding Telemachus in any meaningful way   in fact there is "no mention of his advising, counseling or nurturing" in the poem. As Rhodes says, "What's more, rather than serve as protector, Mentor presided over utter havoc, allowing Odysseus' household to sink into ruin and to be overrun with unwanted suitors who bullied Telemachus and harassed his mother. This is a far cry from the image of the wise and nurturing advisor" ("Who Exactly").

Dova, however, disagrees and believes that:

As an integral part of Athena's plan for Odysseus, Mentor's guidance of Telemachus has to be viewed in the context of the poem's economy. Mentor per se is immaterial, as is Nausicaa or other characters that are used to promote the development of the plot in the *Odyssey*; and yet, his specific profile fits certain needs of the poem that require closer examination. While acting as the spokesperson for benevolent paternalism, Mentor meets the requirements of a mentoring position congruous with patriarchy. Moreover, he poses no threat to Odysseus' heroic profile and proves to be versatile in his transformations from youth counselor to companion-in-arms at the beginning and the end of the poem respectively. He is also a source of advice and encouragement for Telemachus and Odysseus, used by Athena as a character expedient for impersonation. In other words, he is a successful theoretical model of mentorship. I contend that he was chosen to promote the development of the plot in the *Odyssey* to prove that the social order is inherently healthy and functional. (Dova)

I think the efficacy of these mentors is a mix of both, caused by applying a loosely defined modern term. In terms of providing counsel, stability, and aid to their young charges, both Giles and Mentor succeed at different points in their journeys. And they fail too. Perhaps that is what it means to be a mentor in both the classical and modern world: to understand and embrace your own successes and failures, and use those as examples (both positive and negative) for your mentees. As Rhodes reminds us:

Although Mentor himself had his faults, no mentor is perfect and unrealistic ideals and expectations can be intimidating to everyday caring adults. Mentor may

have fallen somewhat in our collective mythology, but from his fall we reap an appreciation of the complexities of this role. ("Who Exactly")

This paper set out to examine Giles as a mentor in a classical sense, by comparing him to Mentor, including Mentor-Athena, from Greek mythology and examining the gender roles performed by both characters. From the evidence produced, it is clear that while they are not identical characters, Giles and Mentor/Mentor-Athena mirror each other enough to suggest that Giles in some important ways fits into a classical model of mentorship. Citing Roberts' "The Androgynous Mentor," Koopman et al. describe certain aspects of trends of mentoring as "psychological androgyny." That is exactly what Joss Whedon and his collaborators created: a mentor in the image of Mentor, with Giles as not only Mentor but also Mentor-Athena.

Notes

[1] See, for example, Gina Wisker or Holly Chandler for the term used in academic contexts.

[2] During the years that Odysseus is away because of the Trojan War, Telemachus grows up in his father's palace and tries to assume a protective role over his mother. At the urging of Athena (in one of her disguises, as king of Taphos), Telemachus resists the men who sought to marry Penelope and take his father's crown.

[3] This clarification is useful, because as Nagy himself points out, classicists used to translate *napios* as *inarticulate*, which does not follow in a contemporary setting (Nagy).

[4] Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Greek found in this essay are the author's.

[5] Listed in Liddell and Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon* as "might, force, spirit, passion" but suggested by Nagy to mean "mental strength."

[6] Even her relationship with her mother is clearly strained. Joyce's third line in "Welcome to the Hellmouth" is her telling Buffy to "try not to get kicked

out" (4:52-54), showing that the events at Hemery are still a barrier between them.

[7] Editors' note: For another discussion of mentoring of a contemporary young woman in a text with classical parallels, see Croft's "Psyche in New York: *The Devil Wears Prada* Updates the Myth."

[8] While he was writing the book, Fenelon was the teacher of the Duke of Burgundy, who was both Louis XIV's grandson and heir apparent; hence Fenelon's desire to teach a young royal how to properly comport himself. It might be argued that he saw himself as Mentor in this relationship.

[9] See, as a selection, Anderson and Shannon; Carruthers; Daloz; Donovan; Jarvis; Kalbfleisch & Keyton; Meginnson & Clutterbuck; Shea; Smith and Alred; Stammers; Tickle.

[10] Editors' note: The first four books of the 24-book *Odyssey* focus on the son's search for his father   a little odyssey.

[11] Editors' note: Kendra is a duty-bound Slayer who first appears in Season 2, activated after Buffy briefly dies at the end of Season 1.

[12] To clarify the difference between the two variants, the mortal Mentor will be referred throughout this essay as Mentor, whereas the goddess Athena in disguise will be referred to as Mentor-Athena.

[13] Editors' note: However, translation of Homeric epithets and ἀμύμων in particular is debated; see Parry on the murderous adulterer Aegisthus, and consider Combellack's reference to "occasional inappropriate adjectives" used in a "generic" way (361).

[14] We know of three who were integral to the plot: The Slayer Faith's first (unnamed) Watcher (who is killed), Gwendolyn Post (who betrays Faith) and Lydia (who wrote her thesis on Spike). We also know that Giles' grandmother was a Watcher. From the ancient female Guardian's comments in Season 7, it might be fair to assume women have joined the Council comparatively recently.

[15] Cf. Schlegel. Carter adds, "if a woman happens to give the heroine some mentoring, it's limited to certain advice-giving incidents, which are often questionable and sometimes destructive." In their relatively homosocial society, the ancient Greeks seemed to follow some of the same negative pattern, further tied into the strict gender roles performed by their society. But see Rhodes, "Gender Matching" and Kanchewa et al. for research that casts doubt on cross-gender advantage in mentoring.

[16] Who may be regular (e.g. Spike) or sporadic (e.g. Faith), and range from short-term (e.g. Oz) to long-term (e.g. Anya) but are always temporary.

[17] Tara's role as dual mentor/lover who is later surpassed by mentee is a subject worthy of an essay in its own right.

[18] The transcript on the Buffyverse Wiki suggests that Giles says "Sophus" which is a masculine Latin adjective meaning "wise." I am inclined to believe he says 'sophos' which is the form also used by the Pop Classics blog (*"Buffy the Vampire Slayer:* Restless").In the interest of being a language

pedant, I should point out that "sophos" does not mean mind. When read in Greek, it is an adjective meaning "clever" or "wise." When read in Latin (as the other parts of the spell are) it is a noun meaning "a wise man" or "a sage."

[19] I would argue that Tara is not a direct threat to the *oikos* as she is very concerned that Willow's friends will like her and accept their relationship. However, she represents the threat that Willow will be pulled away from the *oikos* in a direction that none of the other members can follow.

[20] Editors' note: The problem of the suitors is a complex one, relating as it does to the abuse of sacred bonds of hospitality and the politics of trying to take the place of the ruler of Ithaca while consolidating power by controlling his household and spouse. The editors and author are also aware of the binarized consideration of gendered attributes and the contemporary feminist problematization of Penelope's suitors versus Odysseus' repeated sexual encounters. See, e.g., Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*.

[21] Editors' note: See Zoe-Jane Playdon on training versus education in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

[22] All of this occurs in "Chosen" (7.22). Editors' note: See Lee-Anne Broadhead's analysis of the series' implications here versus Buffy's attitude (in this issue of the journal).

[23] Loosely defined as "arrogance," hubris is the human condition of believing that you are equal, or superior, to the gods, an attribute with dangerous consequences for those who cannot overcome it. Consider, for example, the story of Athena and Arachne. Arachne was a skilled weaver who boasted of being better than Athena herself. As punishment for this hubris, Athena transformed her into a spider.

[24] Jennings Rose and Simon Hornblower tell us, "We have no instance of Athena being called Pallas in cult, yet it is not easy to suppose that so familiar a name was never used for her by worshippers."

[25] It is my view that the Giles of "Witch" (1.3), who claims never to have cast a spell before, is a persona created directly as a response to what happened with Eyghon, in an attempt to bury his guilt over Randall's death.

[26] Appearances counted using the information available from the Buffyverse Wiki.

[27] Editors' note: In the ancient ritual of the Cruciamentum, the Watcher tests the Slayer against a deadly threat without her knowledge that he has artificially weakened her strength by drugs ("Helpless," 3.12).

[28] This assumes that Willow's assertion that he transferred from "some British museum, or *The* British Museum" (13:50-53) just before school starts in the pilot episode is correct.

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