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T. S. Eliot Comes to Television: *Buffy's* "Restless"

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> What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
> Out of this stony rubbish? Son of Man,
> You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
> A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
> And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
> And the dry stone no sound of water.
> T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

[1] In 1945, Joseph Frank said of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* that it "cannot be read; it can only be reread" (Brooker and Bentley 24). The same might be said of the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* episode "Restless," which aired May 23, 2000, as the last episode of the fourth season (4022). (I use the term reader to refer to someone engaged in intellectually active television viewing; cf. Fiske and Hartley's *Reading Television)*. In the Wilcox and Lavery collection *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Don Keller notes a third season dream sequence that draws on imagery used in the section of *The Waste Land* called "What the Thunder Said" (175-76). I would like to propose an even more thoroughgoing correlation of technique between *The Waste Land* and the "Restless" episode. I should note that, like David Lynch and Mark Frost's *Twin Peaks*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is generally seen as *auteur* television, with the *auteur* in question being creator, writer, and director Joss Whedon (Lavery 251-52). I should also emphasize at the outset that although there are also some specific similarities of content, my main focus is on similarities of technique. Both works are fragmented into major sections; both depend on dream logic and non-linear segues. Both also depend heavily on allusion and symbolic resonance. Finally, both overcome the fragmentation by thematic unity and the power of myth.

[2] At its first appearance, *The Waste Land* received both praise and repudiation, in part because of its fragmentary, nonlinear organization. In 1939, Cleanth Brooks declared, "There has been little or no attempt to deal with it as a unified whole" (59); though he and others like him soon addressed that critical challenge. The five sections of *The Waste Land*--"The Burial of the Dead," "A Game of Chess," "The Fire Sermon," "Death by Water," and "What the Thunder Said" are now generally seen as depicting the sterility of modern life in light of the ancient myth of the Fisher King (as described by Jessie Weston), who needs to be reborn and redeem the land. One dream-like sequence floats to the next, as we move from children at the archduke's to the Son of Man to the Hyacinth Girl to Madame Sosostris to Stetson's friend, and from the Cleopatra-like beauty at her dressing table to Philomela to Dido to Lil's friend in the pub, and so on and on.

[3] In television land, the dreamlike is justified by being presented as literal dream. The "Restless"

episode is constituted of four dreams of the four main characters, enveloped by brief opening and closing segments in which we see that they have gathered for a late-night video-viewing, only to fall asleep. The four characters are the hero, nineteen-year-old Buffy Summers, the Chosen One who battles vampires, demons, and the forces of darkness; her mentor or Watcher, the British scholar Rupert Giles; and her best friends, the brainy young budding witch Willow Rosenberg, and the loyal, funny Xander Harris, brave but apparently incapable of worldly success. A typical *Buffy* season ends with the grand fight against the year's major villain, whether it be an ancient vampire, demonic ex-lover, town mayor turned gigantic snake, or bitch-goddess from another dimension. In "Primeval" (4021), Season Four's penultimate episode, Buffy and company fight the Big Bad of the year, a California version of the Frankenstein monster made up of not only people parts but silicon, steel, and various demon bits. When the seemingly hapless but often helpful Xander points out that they'd need a "combo-Buffy" with the group's various skills to defeat their monster, Giles prepares them and Willow guides them in performing a magical joining of which the creature's mechanistic patchwork is mere parody. Together, they call on the spirit of Sineya, the very first Slayer in the long unbroken line of female fighters against evil, and together, they defeat the monster, the technological product of the science labs of The Initiative, a government-run military-industrial complex which represents, of course, the military-industrial complex.

[4] "Restless," as I have noted elsewhere, represents the psychic cost of that joining of the four friends ("Who Died," 9); most clearly, the emotional effort necessary for the magical bonding in the one episode "Primeval," but also, the difficulty of rejoining at the end of Buffy's freshman year of college, during which time the four friends have drifted apart (as episodes such as "The Yoko Factor" [4020] make clear); even further, it might be said to represent the cost of the effort necessary throughout the entire series for the group to work together. And as many of us have noted, relationship in community versus solo heroism is a highly important theme in *Buffy* (Wilcox, "Who Died"; Playdon; Rose; Wilcox, "Who Died").

[5] In *The Waste Land*, Tarot cards are used by Madame Sosostris on one level simply for cheap fortune-telling; however, her words also genuinely foretell the need for rebirth; she tells the truth in spite of herself. In "Primeval," Willow uses Tarot-like, large, named picture cards to identify each of the four main friends: Spiritus, spirit, for Willow, or Will, as she is called; Animus, Heart, for Xander; Sophus, Mind, for Giles; and Manus, the Hand, for Buffy. This segment is re-shown in the "Previously on *Buffy*" set of brief clips before the airing of "Restless" proper; and the dream sequences are presented in the given order: first Will's, then Xander's, then Giles's, then Buffy's. The card choices represent qualities of each of the characters: Willow, who as a witch acts in the spirit-world and whose very strong will-power is spiritual, not physical; the non-magical Xander, who often has nothing but heart to keep him going; Mind, for the erudition provided by the well-educated ex-librarian Giles; and Buffy the warrior as the hands in battle. It might also be argued, though, that Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body can be seen as aspects of one person; the first three all being non-physical qualities, and the fourth representing incarnation in the form of the hero. Thus, too, the four dreams in "Restless," the four acts in the teleplay, can each be seen as representations of the psychic difficulties of the four characters, and can also be seen as aspects of character necessary to be explored and joined in order to achieve a heroic wholeness. It is only when we reach Buffy's dream that the foe is conquered.

[6] It should also be noted that the seemingly external threat battled in "Restless" is actually something from within (paralleling the idea that the whole dream-set represents aspects within a person, not just separate personalities). The characters only gradually catch glimpses of the threat: in Willow's first brief view it is not possible to tell if what she sees is human (it seems it might be a giant spider; it turns out to be a head of hair); and the same thing can be said in the second segment, Xander's. In Giles's view it can be identified as a person (one whom *Buffy*-creator Whedon referred to as The Primitive), and the attentive reader may know by the end of Giles's section that the being who "never had a Watcher" is the very first prehistoric Slayer, Sineya (the beginning of an unbroken line of female champions), whom they called on in "Primeval." By the end of Buffy's segment, we are clearly seeing a young woman who, though she is dressed in ritual face paint, has a merely bemused expression on her face as she tips her head to listen to Buffy offering rather acerbic fashion correction. Though Buffy refuses to be controlled by the first Slayer (she tells her, "You're not the source of me"), still she recognizes that Sineya has shown her something within herself (the "roots that clutch"); and by the first episode of the following season, Buffy is asking Giles to help her explore that wilder side within. Thus the

battle being fought in "Restless" can be seen as a struggle with the self. The unity of these friends is parallel and equivalent to unity within the self, unity of spirit, mind, and heart embodied in the hands that, in the larger myth of *Buffy*, hold the fate of existence (whether that existence is personal or universal). And the actions and interrelationships of these characters show some of the major themes of *Buffy*--communal connection vs. the solitary fight; growth and the search for self; and the importance of the ordinary in making meaning of life.

[7] A thorough-going analysis of "Restless" would probably need to proceed act by act with exegesis. But for this brief essay, I will, act by act, abstract some examples. In addition to the fragmentary but unified structure, a notable commonality of *The Waste Land* and "Restless" is the use of allusion to a degree atypical for their respective formats. T. S. Eliot, of course, provided extensive notes to explicate his allusions. Joss Whedon, on the other hand, does not use footnotes on network television (though I will nostalgically note that *Northern Exposure* once included a bibliographic entry in the closing credits); however, the information is accessible to TV readers through the many active internet discussions of *Buffy*. I mentioned exegesis a moment ago; Kip Manley has a website devoted to "Exegesis and Eisegesis" of "Restless." Often information comes out bit by bit in various online discussion groups; but it is a testament to this unusually rich text that "Restless" has its own site. It is worth noting that many readers of Whedon engage actively with the text in order to gain their equivalent of footnotes. More recently, Whedon has also offered voiceover commentary on the fourth season DVD. "Restless" uses both extratextual and intratextual allusions. The intratextual are perhaps the most important; but for this essay, I will focus on the extratextual, which are actually simpler, and which more directly follow Eliot's methods.

[8] Willow's dream begins with one of the most attention-getting extratextual allusions in "Restless." In Season Four Willow has entered into a lesbian relationship with Tara, a fellow UC Sunnydale student and witch, who makes her first appearance earlier in the season in the well-known episode "Hush" (4010). Willow's dream begins in Tara's red-curtained, womb-like room, where Willow is using a brush to write black Greek letters on Tara's back. It could hardly be more appropriate that she is spelling out a Sapphic ode, probably the most famous: the "Prayer to Aphrodite" ("[Throned in Splendor, Deathless, O Aphrodite]").[1] It is even more appropriate that in the second line, in the Richard Lattimore translation, Aphrodite is referred to as a "charm-fashioner"; the modern witch Willow is asking for a magic charm to gain love. Though in the source poem the love object is reluctant, Tara is not reluctant at this point (though she is later). However, Willow already has many self-doubts about her love relationships, which include years of unrequited love for Xander and a failed relationship with the werewolf musician Oz. Thus the allusion is multiply appropriate for Will because the poem touches on the ideas of Sapphic love, magic for love, and difficulty in love. Willow tells Tara, "I don't want to leave here"; she would prefer to stay in the womb-like space. But she needs to grow and uncover her true self.

[9] Outside the window is a glaring desert brightness which Willow contemplates but does not directly enter. (As Joseph Campbell notes, the desert is among "the regions of the unknown [. . . which] are free fields for the projections of unconscious content" [79], and which represent that other world in which a hero must quest [58].) Instead, having told Tara she may be late for drama class (cf. Alice in Wonderland), Willow finds herself at school in that class thrust into a performance of a cowboy musical version of *Death of a Salesman*, with stage curtains of the same dark red as Tara's room (and for that matter as the red-room dream space in *Twin Peaks*). Willow's fellow actor Buffy tells her, "Your costume's perfect. Nobody's going to know the truth--you know, about you." Tara, who is not in the play, serves now as a commentator to Willow (and later, even more like Eliot's Tiresias, to Buffy). When Willow asks Tara if something is following her and Tara says yes, Willow follows up by asking, "What should I do? The play's gonna start soon and I don't even know my lines." Tara answers, "The play's already started--that's not the point. [. . .] Everyone's starting to find out about you--the real you. If they find out, they'll punish you--I can't help you with that."

[10] In the sixth-season musical episode "Once More, with Feeling" (6007), one of the Whedon-written songs opens with the line, "Life's a show, and we all play our parts," and in "Restless," as in many other places in *Buffy*, the drama metaphor is very consciously explored. The play within Willow's dream has already started; the TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is at that moment under way; and of course, Willow's life (not to mention all of *our* lives) is already ongoing. She will have to step out of that

womb of safety whether she wants to or not. Willow's fear of revealing her real self is something with which many people can identify, and is certainly applicable to other *Buffy* characters. In this context the opening scene with the Sapphic ode may suggest that Willow fears others' judging her lesbian sexuality, which has only recently been revealed to her closest friends. But the fear for her (and some of us) has other elements; for Willow, her intellectualism has made her different. In the last scene of her dream, Willow has regressed to a young girl standing in front of a class giving a report on *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, being dressed in a childish jumper that looks just like the one she wore in the series' first episode (the clothing that lay underneath her college outfit when dream-Buffy ripped it off). She is being mocked by her current and former lovers and all the rest of her closest friends. "This book has many themes," offers the child-version of the young intellectual who grows up to write in Greek and who is very well aware that there should not be a cowboy in *Death of a Salesman*. As the Jewish Willow Rosenberg, always the good/obedient schoolgirl, begins to explicate a book well-known for its Christian symbolism, her breath, spiritus, is sucked out of her. This is the first of three deaths which reflect the victim's role as indicated by the Tarot-like cards.

[11] Eliot took his original epigraph for *The Waste Land* from Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* (Brooker and Bentley 34), and *Heart of Darkness* in the cinematic form of *Apocalypse Now* is the guiding allusion for Xander's dream. In the opening envelope section, Xander asks the friends at this vid-fest to choose to view the "feel-good romp" of *Apocalypse Now*, though Will asks for something "less *Heart-of-Darknessy*." Both Eliot and Whedon chose *Heart of Darkness* in part, of course, because it is a story of a soul's descent into the underworld of darkness. Though the kindly Xander, the "heart" of the group, does not seem a candidate for darkness, and indeed his dream (like the entire series) has touches of revealing humor, it is still true that he grapples here with his own hidden problems. While Buffy and Willow have gone off to college, the academic underachiever Xander has not, and in the fourth season he searches fruitlessly for good work and is forced to live in the basement of his parents' home, a dark place from which he is unable to emerge. Metaphorically, he is unable to emerge from his parents' kind of life and from the darker sides of their natures. As the repeated line for Willow's dream is "they're going to find out about you," the repeated line for Xander (said by both Buffy and Willow) is "I'm way ahead of you." Near the beginning of Xander's segment, as they watch a purposefully bad dream representation of *Apocalypse Now*, " Giles says, "I'm beginning to understand. It's all about the journey," and on the journey of life Xander feels his friends are ahead of him. He is still in the dark place, as a seriocomic interlude with Sunnydale Principal Snyder in the role of Mr. Kurtz makes clear.

[12] David Lavery points out that in this dream sequence, the character/actor, in moving from one dream moment to another, is literally moving from one connected series set to another (253-54). In effect, the dark space we need to explore is not only the parental basement but also the backstage of the series (a continuation of the stage metaphor in Willow's segment)--and the subconscious of our minds. Xander tells Snyder, "I'm just trying to get away"; he tells Buffy, "You gotta be always moving forward." He addresses her as she plays in a sandbox which is film-cut to be revealed as a desert--the desert Willow saw out her window. When he warns Buffy that "it's a pretty big sandbox," she answers, "I'm way ahead of you, big brother." But every time he tries to move forward, he finds himself back in the basement. Time and again he looks up the stairs towards the place his parents live--parents that Buffy-readers know to be drunken, argumentative, and neglectful--and Xander says, "That's not the way out." (It is no wonder that two years later, the sight of his arguing parents decides him against going through with his own wedding ceremony.) In the last scene of his segment, he confronts the dream version of his father, who berates him for not coming upstairs, saying Xander cannot change things: "You haven't got the heart." Then we see a blurry image of the face of Sineya as she rips his heart from his chest. Xander may be trying to acknowledge his dark side, as represented by his failed familial relationships, his sexual desires, the qualities in himself he sees as like his parents, and his own self-doubts--but he is not yet truly ready to move forward.

[13] While Xander carries forth the desert motif, Giles moves forward more overtly with the dramatic motif. In his segment he takes a childlike Buffy and his overseas girlfriend Olivia, pushing an empty baby stroller, to a carnival in a cemetery, where the punk vampire Spike has hired himself out as a sideshow attraction. Like Willow, Giles is faced with performing in this segment, though he--the most mature member of the group--is not troubled by being on the stage of life, and sings quite comfortably at the local hangout, The Bronze (where Xander's girlfriend Anya also tells jokes in Giles's dreams). But

like the others, he feels something is missing in life; both Buffy, as they enter the carnival, and Spike, as Giles turns from Spike's crypt, tell the Watcher, "You're gonna miss all the good stuff" (Spike says "miss everything"). Olivia reappears weeping by the overturned baby stroller, clearly suggesting some unfulfilled elements of Giles's life (and, in fact, of Buffy's life: a normal marriage with children seems unlikely for either). And Spike, as he vamps for tourist's photographs, admonishes Giles: "You gotta make up your mind, Rupes. What are you wasting time for? Haven't you figured it all out yet with your enormous squishy frontal lobes?" The power of the mind is not adequate to solve all problems, as Spike, the ultimate id-character (Wilcox, "'Every Night'"), well knows. The source of Giles's problem is indicated by an extratextual allusion. When Olivia tells him to "go easy on [Buffy] the girl," he answers, "This is my business--blood of the Lamb and all that." The blood of the Lamb, of course, is the sacrifice of the innocent, specifically Jesus; and, as more than one Buffy reader has noted, especially since her sixth season sacrificial death and rebirth, Buffy is often a Christ-figure. Giles's life is absorbed by guiding the savior of the world--to the point that he has perhaps lost perspective on life. In the opening and closing scenes of his dream, he refers directly to his job as Watcher. In the latter, he recognizes the first Slayer and declares, "I can defeat you with my intellect"; but we next see thick blood pouring down as Sineya, the Primitive, slices his head: sophus. No matter how noble your purpose, enormous squishy frontal lobes are not enough.

[14] In the last dream, the longest and farthest sojourn in the desert is made: by Buffy. There she sees a spirit guide in the form of Tara, who, like Eliot's Tiresias, is a character who has crossed sexual boundaries and now acts as a wise observer in strange places. On her way there, Buffy confronts her current boyfriend, an officer in The Initiative, and she meets the never-before-seen human version of The Initiative's Frankensteinian creature, who is himself an extratextual allusion, and not just to Mary Shelley. The creature is called Adam. Riley tells her, "Buffy, we've got important work to do. Lot of filing, giving things names." Buffy then asks of Adam, "What was yours?" And he answers, "Before Adam? Not a man among us can remember." After he says the name Adam, blue emergency lights come on and an intercom voice says, "The demons have escaped--run for your lives." When Adam says no one can remember the name he owned before he became changed by the military-industrial complex, he is referring to his loss of human identity. Also, though, given that he has worn the name of the Biblical first man, the namer of all creatures, it can be suggested that he refers to a prehistoric, pre-patriarchal age; and Zoe-Jane Playdon connects *Buffy* to pre-biblical, female-centered mythology. Now in her dream Buffy goes forth to the place of testing in the desert (cf. Jesus) and meets the first Slayer, whom she is able to resist. She holds a stack of the Tarot-sized picture cards, and we see for the first time on the cards not a single still, drawn image, but the moving picture of the four friends, seated in Buffy's living room. With this talisman, visually representing the communal spirit of the four friends, Buffy is able to resist; and when told, "The Slayer does not walk in this world," she answers with an assertion combining the love of the simple and everyday with the voice of heroism and the saved Fisher King's prediction of the flood of redemption: "I walk. I talk. I shop. I sneeze. I'm going to be a fireman when the floods roll back. There's trees [cf. the tree of life] in the desert since you moved out. And I don't sleep on a bed of bones. Now give me back my friends!"

[15] Given this essay's limits, I cannot finish here, but I will briefly conclude. ("Hurry up, please, it's time.") It is not possible to fully understand "Restless" without having viewed the other 120+ hours of the *Buffy* series: it both reflects the past and predicts the future of the series. To give just one example: Don Keller points out that in Buffy's dream in the third season episode "Graduation Day" (part two), a second Slayer, Faith, refers prophetically to "Little Miss Muffet counting down from seven-three-o," and thus adumbrates the arrival of Buffy's heretofore nonexistent sister Dawn two years later, with 730 equalling two times 365 days, or two years (167; cf. Kaveney 24). Now, in "Restless," Buffy says, "Faith and I just made that bed," explicitly recalling the third-season dream (through the intermediate reminder of a dream in the fourth season's "This Year's Girl," [4015]) before we hear from another prophetic voice, Tara's. Buffy says that her friends need her to find them, and notes, "It's so late" (Xander and Willow have said the same). She looks at a clock which says 7:30 a.m.--showing the numeral seven-three-o, again; but now spirit guide Tara says, "That clock's completely wrong," because, in fact, Dawn will appear in the next episode, the first of Season Five; she is no longer 730 days away. And as Buffy leaves, Tara quietly tells her, "Be back before dawn," referring to a time of day and naming a character not yet in existence, but prepared for two years earlier. In the depth of his intratextual references to over six seasons of material, Whedon explores untraveled territory. In this respect more than any other, perhaps, "Restless" needs to be re-read, not just read.

[16] But for now it is worth noting that in his extratextual allusions, dream logic, mythic explorations, and unity beyond fragmentation, Whedon follows the path of T. S. Eliot. This essay has only touched the deep waters of the desert dreams of "Restless." I'll close with the last words of the episode, spoken in the prophetic voice of Tara: they apply most directly to the nineteen-year-old Buffy, but also, as the episode's structure shows us, to the whole series (Lavery 254), to its authors, and to us the readers: "You think you know what's to come--what you are. You haven't even begun."

Notes

[1]Having studied Greek a bit myself, I used the pause button (repeatedly) to verify that it is, indeed (as various internet lists noted), Sappho's Aphrodite Ode written on Tara's back. The presentation is a bit confusing because the words are not separated; hence, on Tara's back, the second line begins "tAphrodite" (to use our alphabet).

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