

Telling Stories about Stories: *Buffy, Slayer of the Vampyres*

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While philosophers have long debated the difference between fact and fiction, recent scholars from across the academy ask: Why do we need fiction? Why are so many of our most beloved stories so dire, horrible, and fantastic? Jonathan Gottschall says we are “addicted to Neverland.” Just as we see faces in the clouds, our minds connect the dots between events in a relentless quest for meaningful narrative. According to Gottschall, “Story is the grease and glue of society: by encouraging us to behave well, story reduces social friction while uniting people around common values.” Mathias Clasan says we like horror stories because our ancestors led horrific lives. Scary stories teach not only what to fear but also how to experience and live through fear. Clasan’s stories about stories explain the monstrous fauna found in narrative niches by invoking both inherited traits and local ecologies. For example, vampire stories trigger adaptive fears of predation and contagion the world over even though the “vampire genotype appears as vastly different phenotypes in various cultural ecologies.” *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a sticky social adhesive, home to a veritable rainforest of demonic biodiversity. Significantly, not all vampires are villains. The series tells open-ended stories featuring what Matthew Pateman calls “a staggeringly strong refutation of prescriptions in favour of agency.” Both “Get It Done” and “Storyteller” from Season 7 suggest that villains can become heroes, not by rewriting their past or pretending to be someone entirely new, but by telling the truth about who they really are. Entertaining and educational, these stories extol the transformative power of honesty and humility while calling attention to the difference between not being bad and actually doing good. *Buffy* suggests we need stories because “life isn’t a story” even as David Lavery notes, “it cannot be lived without them.”