utmost danger, derails into a play of words, producing an effect like that which Benjamin attributes to the Baroque author Hallmann (I.1:375). Stupid puns interrupt and disorient even the most serious conversations. Nowhere though is the implicit rejection of an organic theory of language, in which sound and meaning are united, so evident as in the episode titled "Hush" (14 December 1999). Sinister old men come alive from a fairy tale and steal the voices from the residents of Sunnydale, forcing Buffy and her friends to figure out what has happened while communicating only through written marks and emblems. In a chill and haunting silence, written marks must unravel their own mystery.

2: A MOURNING PLAY WITHOUT MOURNING

Yet one thing above all is lacking for the analogy with the mourning play to be complete. There is no, or almost no, mourning. Despite the occasional brooding of the vampires and the human moodiness and all the travails that Buffy must endure as slayer, mourning, especially during the first three seasons, never becomes the dominant mood.[6] It is never allowed to develop according to its own logic, but instead is always transformed into something else, directed into another, essentially different af-

fect. This absence, it goes without saying, is of great consequence. Mourning (*Trauer*) for Benjamin is not simply one feeling among others; not just a characteristic of subjective experience let alone a mere psychological phenomenon. Not only does it encompass nature in its entirety, but it is the necessary correlate of its fallenness—the mode in which its fallenness is experienced—while at the same time intimately connected with the dumbness of nature, its absence of speech. "Fallen nature" not only mourns because it is dumb (*stumm*), but its mournfulness renders it speechless (*macht es verstummen*) (I.1: 398). Thus, whereas feelings and affective life are generally regarded as mere supplements to rationality, with the subjectivity of the former opposed to the objectivity of the latter, the mood of mourning for Benjamin stands opposed to, yet on par with, the *logos* itself. It is an epistemic regime in its own right, although one characterized not by the positivity of knowledge but by the feeling of being "thoroughly known by the unknowable" (*erkannt vom Unerkennbaren*) (I.1:398).

One thus cannot regard mourning simply as one aspect among many of the mourning play, or even as the foremost aspect, but rather as the principle which gives unity to the genre, holding together the elements which, in their fall-

enness, are always themselves on the verge of flying apart into chaos. A mourning play without mourning, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* must thus become something completely different, and indeed, this very absence may itself contain the principle for the transformation undergone by the genre with its resurrection in the new media. Yet given the importance of this point for an analysis of *Buffy*, one must proceed with the utmost caution. To substantiate the claim that *Buffy* lacks mourning, freeing this claim from its apparent subjectivism, one may consider one paradigmatic instance which proves that true mourning remains impossible amidst the palm trees and verdure of Southern California.

This is the case of Faith, the other vampire slayer, whose fall forms one of the principal story-lines of the third season. From the beginning, her situation resembles that faced by the king of the Baroque *Haupt- und Staatsaktion*. Standing at the pinnacle of creation, a superhero among ordinary human beings, responsible for preserving the world against the never ending onslaught of demonic forces, she nevertheless remains grotesquely inadequate to the task.[7] It is not simply that, like Buffy, she is ultimately mortal and subject to human passions, but that as a slayer, she is, and must be, unique-

ly chosen, and yet she is not *the* slayer. She is unique, and yet not unique in her uniqueness, nor even, like Buffy, the better of the two. This ultimate lack of uniqueness manifests itself quite immediately in the fact that, unlike the true slayer who has no one above her, Faith is afflicted with jealousy and pride. Unable to avoid taking a demonic pleasure in her powers, she cannot preserve the illusion that the two poles, the human and the demonic, are not infinitely intertwined. For it is, after all, the unique privilege of the slayer, and a privilege that could only belong to one, to have all her violent power, despite its own demonic origin, directed against the demonic. Experiencing so viscerally the fallenness of creation and the contradiction of her own nature should, it seems, give Faith cause to mourn. Yet instead, having discovered her demonic nature, and indeed without wasting a moment on solitary reflection, she embraces the new role with glee.

To see that Faith's apotropaic resistance to mourning is not merely a fluke, an accidental effect of her stupidity, we might consider the episode titled "Earshot," itself perhaps the most direct confrontation with the problem of mourning (21 September 1999). Here Buffy, infected with an "aspect of a demon," acquires the capacity to read minds. Perhaps nowhere does

the show's Baroque aspect appear with such visceral force as when her own mind begins to overflow with the thoughts of others, destroying the unity of subjectivity and linguistic meaning and dissolving her consciousness into a chaos of fragments, a swarm of isolated thoughts. The rupture of her subjectivity, far from allowing her a communion with all creation, is poisoned from the start with the subjective isolation that is the predicament of each human being; our fate as finite rational beings, which, as such, is rigorously opposed to the demonic whose aspect infects her.[8] Exposed to the din of everyone's thoughts, she experiences only their shared isolation; the shared impossibility of community. It is hardly surprising, then, that the one thought to rise with clarity above this universal lament is a scream to "kill them all."

This already suggests that in sunny Sunnydale the pain of a creation broken off into fragments cannot express itself through mourning, indeed not through any pathos whatsoever, but only through the inclination toward a specifically violent activity.[9] In a similar fashion, Buffy, hunting for the future killer, is led astray: not toward the cafeteria worker who had just poisoned the food, but instead toward Jonathon, who, poised atop the high school at a spot that

affords him a panoptic vision of the whole, is on the verge of killing, not others, but only himself. It is as though she were led toward the problem of mourning itself, if only to witness and even enact its necessary exclusion from the dramatic universe of the television show. For not only does Buffy, despite her telepathic gifts, take his suicidal tendencies for homicidal, but his sadness itself assumes the form of a desire to take his own life, and thus of violent action, which, aimed against human life, remains demonic both in origin and effect.

Mourning is thus all but impossible for humans, whose sadness at the fallenness and emptiness of creation is almost instantly transformed into demonic revelry in destruction. Instead it becomes the province of monsters, and specifically of those demons who have, in one way or another, outgrown their own demonism, and who are no longer capable of a childlike, even innocent, paradisial delight at the destruction of life. Spike, already afflicted by human passions and an all-too-human attachment to the earthly,[10] becomes ever more brooding once a surgical procedure deprives him of his capacity for violence. Likewise the "good" Angel, cursed with a soul, reads Camus as he sits alone in his crypt. Yet even here, mourning never appears in its purity and as its

own problem, but instead is given a markedly Romantic cast. The demonic desire for violence, forbidden its direct expression, becomes erotic yearning for an impossible object, and consequently both Angel and Spike's sadness is interpreted as the wretchedness of unrequited or insatiable love rather than the objectless lament of the melancholic at the fallenness of all—and above all his own—nature.

3: VIOLENCE AND MOURNING

Buffy the Vampire Slayer is a mourning play without mourning. It is the catastrophic history of an empty world,[11] as experienced by an age that has outlived the capacity to mourn; for whom mourning can only appear as an atavistic anachronism, a hold-over, even more ridiculous than the Vampire's passé clothing, from the bombastic and brooding culture of "old Europe." For it is not only as "neutered" demons that Spike and Angel mourn, but as children of the popular Romanticism of nineteenth-century Europe. Just as the teenagers of Sunnydale prove even more clueless as vampires than as humans,[12] Spike's (and to a lesser extent Angel's) vampirism is perhaps nothing more than the natural denouement of a human temperament prone to Romantic affect, dreams of gran-