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# The Offices of Homeland Security, or, Hölderlin's Terrorism

Jennifer Bajorek

Right now, I am occupied chiefly with the fable, the poetic view of history, and the architectonics of the skies, especially our nation's.

—Friedrich Hölderlin, letter to Leo von Seckendorf, 12 March 1804

Terrorism, before it is an act, is a calculation, on the basis of future traces, in anticipation of how traces yet to be made will someday be read. As such, it is more than casually bound up with the complex movements of textuality on both sides—on the side (to use the familiar shorthand) of both the sender and the receiver of the message. Witness the emphasis placed by many professional readers in the days after the events of 11 September 2001 on the fact that they were readable and remarkable as “symbolic acts.”<sup>1</sup>

I am grateful to Andrzej Warminski for his response to an earlier version of this paper; to Peter Fenes, Sam Weber, and the Program in Critical Theory at Northwestern University and to Marion Picker and the Dickinson College German department for the opportunity to present earlier versions of this work to audiences at those institutions; above all, I am indebted to Eduardo Cadava for conversations at critical junctures along the way.

1. Gayatri Spivak used this phrase, and very explicitly placed such emphasis, at a teach-in organized by students and faculty of Columbia University held at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York City on 20 September 2001. Others who have focused on the symbolic nature of the events in their analyses include Geoffrey Galt Harpham, “Symbolic Terror,” *Critical Inquiry* 28 (Winter 2002): 573–79: “Terror is a feature of the symbolic order” (p. 573); John Frow, “The Uses of Terror and the Limits of Cultural Studies,” *Symplekx* 11, nos. 1–2 (2003): 69–76: “The event of 9/11 worked so powerfully because it was an extraordinary—an exemplary—piece of symbolism” (p. 72); and Homi K. Bhabha, “Terror and After . . .,” *Parallax* 8, no. 1 (2002): 3–4. Although Bhabha does not speak directly of the symbol, he mobilizes the language and logic of the symbol in his analysis of the events’ spectacular and even cinematic echoes and effects. Both Paul Virilio and Jean Baudrillard have made much of the symbolic dimensions of the Twin Towers, although not to the exclusion of theorizing a more general symbolism of terrorist violence. See Paul Virilio, *Ground Zero*, trans. Chris Turner (London, 2002), p. 82, and Jean Baudrillard, “*The Spirit of Terrorism*” and “*Requiem for the Twin Towers*,” trans. Turner (London, 2002). Baudrillard writes:

It is probable that the terrorists had not foreseen the collapse of the Twin Towers (any more than had the experts!), a collapse which—much more than the attack on the Pentagon—had the greatest symbolic impact. The symbolic collapse of a whole system came about by an unpredictable complicity, as though the towers, by collapsing on their own, by committing

What the reference to the symbol, however, with all that it necessarily entails of totalization, aestheticization, and extreme cognitive ambition, does not exactly cover over but does not exactly help us to isolate or pinpoint is the historical interruption that every text bears within it and that pushes our experience of the peculiar temporality of the terrorist act ineluctably in the direction of *accident*.<sup>2</sup> This experience is in error (in the sense that it does not correspond to the “truth” or “facts” of the event), and yet it accurately records the extent to which the calculation that preceded the event takes us to the limits of reason, even if it is not strictly speaking in itself irrational. Terror is infected by accident; it spreads toward accident as we try to read or understand it, not because it has to do with accident in any rigorous sense, but because it doesn’t, expressing instead the moment when calculation and incalculability collide.

This collision, whatever else it may be (more or less spectacular, harmless, or murderous in its effects), is not an accident and never takes place by accident. It is this same movement that, to paraphrase Mallarmé, restrains *every* action from the moment that it understands itself as something outside, or just plain *other than*, a text.<sup>3</sup> I cite Mallarmé, not because he was a so-called symbolist, but because he focuses our attention on the difference

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suicide, had joined in to round off the event. In a sense, the entire system, by its internal fragility, lends the initial action a helping hand. [Pp. 7–8]

And again: “The terrorist violence here is not, then, a blowback of reality, any more than it is a blowback of history. It is not ‘real’. In a sense, it is worse: it is symbolic. Violence in itself may be perfectly banal and offensive. Only symbolic violence is generative of singularity” (pp. 29–30). Finally, see Jacques Derrida’s nuanced and suggestive discussion of still other symbolic dimensions in his 22 October 2001 interview with Giovanna Borradori:

Right at the level of the head, this double suicide will have touched two places symbolically and operationally essential to the American corpus: the economic place or capital “head” of world capital (the World Trade Center, the very archetype of the genre, for there are now—and under this very name—WTCs in many places of the world, for example, in China) and the strategic, military, and administrative place of the American capital. [Jacques Derrida and Giovanna Borradori, “Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides,” in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, ed. Borradori (Chicago, 2003), pp. 95–96]

At the risk of stating the obvious, let us recall that to speak of the symbolism of terror and terrorist violence is not in any way to reduce or distract us from either their materiality or their political nature. On the contrary, as Bhabha reminds us: “The decision to *implement* and administer terror, whether it is done in the name of god or the state, is a *political decision*” (p. 3), and this decision is irreducible.

2. Derrida’s whole discussion of September 11 as a “date” and an “event” (a “major event”) is relevant here; see Derrida and Borradori, “Autoimmunity,” pp. 85–91.

3. See Stéphane Mallarmé, *L’Action restreinte*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry (Paris, 1945), pp. 369–73.

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between accident and calculation's failure with admirable precision. In texts like *Igitur* and *Un Coup de dés* the poet teaches us that it is never an accident that language refers. It is just that that reference is always incalculable.

For those who will by now be wondering whether we have not gone too far afield in citing a poet who died in 1898—and, worse, whose name is caught up with a poetics of blankness, sterility, and inaction—in the context of a reflection on terrorism, let us recall that Jean Paulhan repeatedly dubbed the attempt to cleanse language of incalculability, "Terror."<sup>4</sup> The point is not to suggest that the terrorism on our minds today is somehow purely linguistic or that the violent and terrible deaths caused by the terrorist acts of September 11 (and all the other dates, too) have existed only to end up "in a book."<sup>5</sup> The point, rather, is simply to remind us that books or, better, texts have some singular lessons to teach about the aberrant experience that we necessarily have every time that we try to calculate with the incalculable—the experience that we ourselves have had, and will doubtless continue to have, in trying to read or understand the traces of the terrorist calculation.

Who could disagree that any serious thinking about terrorism must try to keep this experience at its center? All the more so if it wants to think terrorism in terms of its temporal and historical dimensions and to "calculate" an appropriate response, and precisely insofar as this response must break with calculation, as I will argue it must?

### 1. Permanent Conditions

I first began to wonder whether such a thinking about terrorism—one that would be as attentive as possible to its relation to calculative thinking—was not called for when in the hours, days, weeks, and months immediately after September 11, I found myself, together with millions of other New York City residents, walking around in the city streets constantly looking up at the sky. In the beginning, we were pretty clearly looking *at* something: first, there were the fighter patrols, and then, after commercial traffic had resumed, came the passenger planes crisscrossing in unusual flight patterns, or at least in patterns we had never noticed before. But, in looking at these things, did we really know what we were looking at? Not only each plane, but the entire sky, had been transformed into a sign of terror. Even after the

4. Paulhan was, among other things, extremely well versed in Mallarmé's work. For his best known and most sustained treatment of Terror, see Jean Paulhan, *Les Fleurs de Tarbes; ou, La Terreur dans les lettres* (Paris, 1941). An English translation of this volume by Michael Syrotinski is forthcoming. See also Paulhan's early texts on rhetoric, especially Paulhan, "Rhetoric Rises from Its Ashes," trans. Jennifer Bajorek, in *A Larger Language: The Theoretical Writings of Jean Paulhan* (forthcoming).

5. I am alluding here to Mallarmé's much quoted if little understood statement: "Everything in the world exists to end up in a book."

planes were gone, we kept looking up, as if there were something we were looking for. What exactly were we hoping to read there? And didn't all this public reading, in itself, take us rather by surprise?

The second event, which convinced me not only that such a labor was necessary but that it had to come through Hölderlin, was the decision made by the Bush administration to organize the official U.S. response to the attacks of September 11 in the name of "homeland security" and the sudden advent in public discourse of the word and concept of the *homeland* with reference to what is also sometimes called, in the various sound bites and documents in which this unfamiliar word has become so familiar, "American soil." Although we now know that it was only for us (the public) that this advent was sudden and that the decision to use this word *homeland* was made not only by the Bush administration but by those who preceded it—for the decision had in a sense already been made *before* September 11, *in anticipation of* future terrorism<sup>6</sup>—the effect was at the time only slightly less astonishing than the events that had elicited this response. Since when did anyone think of, let alone call, the United States a homeland? How many of us even agreed with the determination of what had been attacked as a

6. It has been widely reported that, in choosing this word to refer to the scene of the events of September 11 already on 20 September 2001, in his address to a special joint session of Congress, Bush was essentially cribbing from the 1997 Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review. See George W. Bush, "We Are a Country Awakened to Danger and Called to Defend Freedom," 20 Sept. 2001, [www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html). For the earliest official usage on record, see William S. Cohen, *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review* (May 1997), [www.defenselink.mil/pubs/qdr](http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/qdr). Although the 1997 Pentagon report has been documented as the first occurrence of the word *homeland* and of the phrase *homeland defense* in an official administrative context, it is generally thought not to have come into its current usage until the February 2001 publication of the *Phase III Report of the U.S. Commission on National Security for the 21st Century* by former Senators Gary Hart and Warren Rudman in which it was recommended that Congress establish a special body to deal with "homeland security" issues; see Gary Hart et al., *Road Map for National Security: Imperative for Change: The Phase III Report of the U.S. Commission on National Security/21st Century*, 15 Feb. 2001, [permanent.access.gpo.gov/nssg/www.nssg.gov/PhaseIII/FR.pdf](http://permanent.access.gpo.gov/nssg/www.nssg.gov/PhaseIII/FR.pdf). This is the same report that, in the months immediately following September 11, the Bush administration was repeatedly accused of not having read well or closely enough. On 12 September 2001, Rudman went on record as saying, "I just have to say, 'We told you so'" ("Commission Warned of Such Attacks," Associated Press, 12 Sept. 2001).

Quite apart from its historical value in view of this inaugural usage, the 1997 Defense Review report is not without interest to scholars and theorists of literature. Then Secretary of Defense Cohen opens the document with a call to "*separate fact from fiction*" and concludes his introduction with a quotation from the Greek rhetorician Gorgias on "the great challenge of choosing when the choosing is most difficult 'to speak or not to speak, to do or leave undone'" (Cohen, *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review*). The difficulty of every such decision—in light, precisely, of the (hyperdifficult) relation between speaking and doing—has been a major preoccupation of literary theory in recent years. See, for example, *Critical Encounters: Reference and Responsibility in Deconstructive Writing*, ed. Cathy Caruth and Deborah Esch (New Brunswick, N.J., 1995), and Thomas Keenan, *Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics* (Stanford, Calif., 1997).

territory? Above all, was it even possible to determine what had been attacked, not simply as a *home*, but as a *land*, given the sudden vertiginousness of the ground beneath our feet; given all our skyward reading, thanks to which the earth seemed suddenly to hang (to quote Wordsworth) “but ill sustain’d,”<sup>7</sup> radically reexposed to the sky? Where would a “homeland” stand with respect to *this* calculation? Does a “homeland” have—can it have, in what respect can it be understood to have—a sky?

Less spontaneous, less impulsive, less “romantic” than it may at first have seemed, it now seems to me quite clear that the impulse to turn to Hölderlin was in fact suggested by two distinct yet related strains of the poet’s legacy.

The first is, of course, Hölderlin’s legacy as the great German poet of the homeland. Straightaway it is necessary to clarify that he is not this poet in any simple sense or in any sense that would hang on a direct or idiomatic translation of any of the words that are generally taken to refer, in his texts, to the territory of the German nation or to the so-called German *people*, whose identity as a *people* would be rooted in the land or soil: *Heimat*, *Vaterland*, *Germania*, *Hesperia*, *Heim*, to name only the most obvious examples.<sup>8</sup> No, if we can refer to Hölderlin as the poet of the homeland, it is in

7.

Oh! when I have hung  
Above the raven’s nest, by knots of grass  
And half-inch fissures in the slippery rock  
But ill sustain’d, and almost, as it seem’d,  
Suspended by the blast which blew amain,  
Shouldering the naked crag; Oh! at that time,  
While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,  
With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind  
Blow through my ears! the sky seem’d not a sky  
Of earth, and with what motion mov’d the clouds!

(William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt [London, 1969], bk. 1, ll. 341–50, p. 10)

8. On the problems surrounding the interpretation of *homeland* as a translation of the German word *Heimat* in particular, see Peter Blickle, *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland* (Rochester, N.Y., 2002), esp. pp. x, 2–5. Note that Blickle, despite these cautions, accepts this translation in the title of his book.

Also instructive here is Elizabeth Becker, “Prickly Roots of ‘Homeland Security,’” *New York Times*, 31 Aug. 2002, p. A10. After quoting Tom Ridge, who acknowledges that the Office (now Department) of Homeland Security had received complaints that the word sounds “un-American,” Becker goes on to endorse the interpretation of “homeland” as a translation of *Heimat*, as does the spokesman for the German Embassy, Hans Dieter Lucas. Whereas Lucas speaks freely of Nazi associations (“The term was used by the Nazis—the notion derives from 19th-century Romanticism, to mean your roots, the region where you grew up, your identity, where you belong”), Ridge ducks the question of the word’s origins altogether: “Etymology unknown, don’t have a clue.” Becker’s source in the Pentagon, on the other hand—who offers that “no one can remember” who came up with the phrase “homeland security”—agrees that “it does sort of have Germanic implications to it, and from that standpoint, it may carry unfortunate baggage.”

a more mediated and, I will try to demonstrate, ultimately more powerful sense: in the sense in which all of these words come together in, and are in some sense translated *by*, the nationalist (and National Socialist) appropriations of the construction that we supposedly find in the poet's texts of German national consciousness and identity. This legacy is by turns false, contested, a source of shame, and it may indeed depend, in the end, on some very bad translations, and still it is not without a certain heuristic value. For it turns our attention to the construction that we *do* find in Hölderlin's texts a consciousness or identity—not necessarily of a nation or a people but let us say of a group or collectivity—that is defined by place or by *a special relationship to place*, in its turn defined by a special relationship to the *ground* or *soil*. The interest of this relationship, once we begin to read it, is that it cannot be reduced to one of rootedness or immanence—as it is almost invariably reduced by the word and concept of the *homeland* in any language—and can rather only be understood as a radical movement of exposure.

The second strain is Hölderlin's legacy as the poet who thinks the relationship between the earth and the sky and who supposedly thinks this relationship more rigorously than any other poet. We owe this legacy, in large part, to Martin Heidegger's lifelong engagement with and "elucidation" of Hölderlin, which holds the poet's thinking of the earth-sky relation to be so central, so *essential*, to our interpretation of his poems that it must be understood to define what, for Hölderlin, poetry *is*. It would be grossly inaccurate to say (as Heidegger sometimes seems to think) that Hölderlin is the only poet who takes up the sky as a place of calculation and incalculability or in whose texts the sky is privileged as a text and as a demand for reading. But it would not be inaccurate to say (following loosely from Heidegger's lessons) that Hölderlin is the poet for whom this privilege and this demand—to turn, precisely, *away from* the land *as ground*—are most explicitly bound up with the condition of any possible grounding of what his poems most often call, simply, *home*.

It is this double gesture reflected in these two strains, the positing of the *home* in a special relationship to the *land* and the description of the *earth*

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On the more general question of Americans' responses to the use of *homeland* in public discourse post-September 11, see Mark Feeney, "At Home, Uneasiness over a Word," *Boston Globe*, 26 Sept. 2001, p. D1, and Paul Richard, "For Americans, Homeland Is Down the Road a Piece," *Washington Post*, 22 Sept. 2001, p. C1. That Feeney in particular is attuned to a certain uncanniness of the word is legible in his title, as well as in his quotation of Deborah Tannen: "'My main feeling of discomfort with it is just that it's so unaccustomed. You want something that feels safe and secure and familiar, and this sounds foreign, as if it's another country they're talking about.'" See also Barbara J. Fields, letter to the editor, *New York Times*, 7 Sept. 2002, p. A14.

in a special relationship to the *sky*, that I want to trace through a reading of Hölderlin's "Heimkunft" and that I will suggest can help us to take the confusions brought on by the use of the word *homeland* with respect to the United States in a slightly different direction than has been done so far. Without wanting to diminish in any way the interest and value of those analyses that have emphasized the ways in which the word *homeland* recurs to notions of racial purity and ethnic homogeneity in order to operate an exclusionary logic, I want to propose that we spend some time thinking about this word *homeland* precisely *without* reference to its formidable labors in the imaginary and with a view to its *most literal possible* interpretation.<sup>9</sup> I am proposing that we take this word as an occasion to reflect on the mobilization of a whole set of relations between the word and concept of *home* and the words and concepts of the *land* or *soil*. For without land and without soil, there would be neither empire nor emigration nor any of the other words and concepts that have been so much in play in the analysis of recent political events—globalization, television or telecommunication, deterritorialization, and, perhaps most importantly, terrorism—even if (precisely if) all of these words and concepts can be understood to mark a shift in the supposed rootedness or immanence of human experience. I want to suggest that the persistence of this relationship between the homeland and the sky above it has critical lessons to teach us about the prospect of ever achieving any "homeland security." And I want to suggest that if for Hölderlin, as for the Bush administration, the homeland comes into being only *under threat* and with a view to a certain *inherently terroristic futurity*, it is not without opening a fatefully vexed and unexpected concept of security—one that would call upon the future as well as on the past and that would remain fatefully bound up with the peculiar modality of the threat, even as it threatens to remain itself, by definition, without certainty or guarantee.

Even President Bush seems to call for a transformation of this term when, in his speech to the American people of 24 November 2002, "Securing the

9. On the contrary, I hope it will be clear that my argument has sympathies with, and at points directly crosses, this critique. See, for two very different examples, Amy Kaplan, "Homeland Insecurities: Reflections on Language and Space," *Radical History Review* 85 (Winter 2003): 82–93, and Muneer Ahmad, "Homeland Insecurities: Racial Violence the Day after September 11," *Social Text*, no. 20 (Fall 2002): 101–15. It is an important achievement of Ahmad's analysis that it allows us to pinpoint the deep complicity between the hate violence unleashed in the days immediately following the events of September 11 and the disturbing state practices that have been on the rise ever since, including the restriction of immigration of men from Muslim countries and the racial profiling and detention of so-called Muslim-looking people. (To which would now have to be added the criminal abuses of Iraqi civilians by American soldiers in Iraqi prisons.) See also, for a recent and exceptionally powerful intervention in the post-September 11 literature, Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London, 2004).



Homeland, Strengthening the Nation,” he proclaims: “The terrorist threat to America takes many forms, has many places to hide, and is often invisible. We can never be sure that we have defeated all of our terrorist enemies, and therefore we can never again allow ourselves to become overconfident about the security of our homeland.” Even as he goes on to outline measures designed to “enhance” this security, he tells us that the “terrorist threat” is, within the very borders of the homeland, a “permanent condition.”<sup>10</sup>

This certainty—that the terrorist threat is without end, that it is, *within the very borders of the homeland*, boundless or “infinite”—is shared, albeit to very different ends, by Bush and Hölderlin.

## 2. “Heimkunft / An die Verwandten”

It is no secret that Hölderlin’s “Heimkunft: An die Verwandten” (Homecoming: To Kindred Ones) can be interpreted as a poem about the shoring up of identity against the incursions of difference in a way that resonates quite eloquently with the United States’s post–September 11 “homeland security” policies. We need only recall the closing lines of the poem’s third stanza in order to grasp how this interpretation might go and what it might share with the kinds of racializations and exclusions that have been mobilized by the word *homeland* and its myriad translations through history:<sup>11</sup>

Alles scheint vertraut, der vorübereilende Gruß auch  
Scheint von Freunden, es scheint jegliche Miene verwandt.

All seems familiar, even the hurried greetings  
Seem those of friends, every face seems a kindred one.<sup>12</sup>

10. Bush, “Securing the Homeland, Strengthening the Nation,” 24 Nov. 2002, [www.whitehouse.gov/homeland/homeland\\_security\\_book.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/homeland/homeland_security_book.html)

11. See Kaplan, “Homeland Insecurities,” Ahmad, “Homeland Insecurities,” and Blickle, *Heimat*. Blickle prefaces his study of the word and concept of *Heimat* with the observation that “the regressive aspects of the idea—variously translated as ‘home,’ ‘homeland,’ ‘hometown,’ ‘homestead,’ ‘native region,’ or ‘native country’—are troubling to us now. Any concrete interaction with the idea of *Heimat* in the political realm has, historically speaking, served sooner or later to further sharp exclusions of certain groups—usually ethnic minorities, less-propertied classes, or both” (p. x). Also telling in this respect is the attempt to recuperate a pre-German “etymology” of *homeland*:

In fact, “homeland” has far older origins in the Hebrew language—back to the book of Genesis. “Moledet,” or “homeland” in Hebrew, first came out of the mouth of God, when he told Abraham to lead his people to the molodet. “It is a biblical word, not part of the popular vernacular,” said Mark Regev, a spokesman at the Israeli Embassy. But it is part of the political vocabulary in Israel. “One of the right-wing parties has chosen that name—the Molodet, or Homeland, Party.” [Becker, “Prickly Roots of ‘Homeland Security,’” p. A10]

12. Friedrich Hölderlin, “Heimkunft: An die Verwandten,” *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Friedrich Beissner, 8 vols. (Stuttgart, 1946–85), 2:96–97; hereafter abbreviated “H.” In English, I quote Keith Hoeller’s translation in Martin Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*, trans. Keith Hoeller (Amherst, N.Y., 2000), p. 27; hereafter abbreviated *EH*.

Home, this interpretation goes, is where everyone looks like me.

But it remains possible to read Hölderlin's poem (I want, of course, to suggest that it is necessary to read it this way) as tracing a conception of home that would be rooted, not in the saving or preservation of identity, but in a "permanent condition" of exposure. At issue here, again, is the interpretation that we find in Hölderlin's text of the relationship between the home and the land or soil and not the fidelity of a given translation (of a given word, from or into a given language). That there is an alternative interpretation of this relationship is already evident when, in its fourth stanza, Hölderlin's text responds to this scene of recognition and familiarity as if it had come as a shock: "Freilich wohl! das Geburtsland ists, der Boden der Heimath" ("But of course! It is the land of your birth, *the soil of your homeland*") ("H," p. 97; *EH*, p. 27). The excesses of this response suggest that there arises, from this scene of recognition, already for the poem and its speaker some interpretive difficulty. It is precisely the *resistance* of this relationship, between the home and the land that would supposedly ground it, to inscription within any possible racializing and exclusionary political or ideological program that I will argue calls out for interpretation in Hölderlin's poem.

Critics of "Heimkunft" have traditionally approached the poem with regard to two sets of problems and have likewise organized their interpretations around one of two poles. The first is predicated on a literal or referential reading, not only of the poem's title, but of its many references to homelike signs and places: "das Vaterland" and "Landesleute!" in stanza 3, "das Geburtsland" and "die Heimath" in stanza 4, "O Stimme der Stadt, der Mutter!" in stanza 5, and so forth ("H," pp. 97, 98). This interpretation takes the poem to be, in a literal and strict sense, autobiographical, tracing through the poem the itinerary of Hölderlin's Alpine journey from Hauptwil, in Switzerland, to his mother's house in Nürtingen, via Lake Constance and the city of Lindau, in April 1801.<sup>13</sup> The second pole organizes a more

13. See, for example, Beissner's commentary on the poem: "Hier . . . ist es [der Gegenstand] eine wirkliche Heimkunft (von Hauptwil im Frühjahr 1801), mit allen Einzelheiten des Wegs und des Ziels" ("At issue here is a real homecoming [from Hauptwil in the spring of 1801], with all the details of the route and the destination") (Beissner, commentary on "Heimkunft," in Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*, 2:413). See also Peter Härtling, "Heimkunft," *Hölderlin-Jahrbuch* 25 (1986–87): 1–11, and Cyrus Hamlin, "Hölderlin's Elegy 'Homecoming': Comments," in *Friedrich Hölderlin: An Early Modern*, ed. Emery E. George (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1972):

The elegy was composed in 1801 and was occasioned by Hölderlin's return to Nürtingen from Switzerland. *The title thus refers to this event.* The dedication is similarly specific, indicating the members of his immediate family who welcomed him at his mother's home. The elegy describes his journey from the Alps across Lake Constance to Lindau, from there by foot northward to the Neckar valley, and finally to Nürtingen. [P. 234; my italics]

Even Heidegger opens his commentary with a version of this itinerary: "The poem tells of a trip across the lake 'from the shady Alps' to Lindau. In the spring of 1801, Hölderlin, then a private

allegorical interpretation and is concerned with the question of “the poet’s vocation,” particularly as it shows up in the famous lines (in stanza 6) about the lack of “holy names”:

Wenn wir seegen das Mahl, wen darf ich nennen und wenn wir  
Ruhn vom Leben des Tags, saget, wie bring’ ich den Dank?  
Nenn’ ich den Hohen dabei? Unschikliches liebet ein Gott nicht,  
Ihn zu fassen, ist fast unsere Freude zu klein.  
Schweigen müssen wir oft; es fehlen heilige Nahmen,  
Herzen schlagen und doch bleibet die Rede zurük?  
[“H,” p. 99]

When we bless the meal, whom shall I name and when we  
Rest from the life of day, tell me, how shall I give thanks?  
Shall I name the high one then? A god does not love what is unfitting,  
To grasp him, our joy is almost too small.  
Often we must be silent; holy names are lacking,  
Hearts beat and yet talk holds back?  
[EH, p. 31]

Of course, these two interpretations do not exclude one another and on the contrary can even be understood to reinforce each other at crucial points. The question of the poet’s vocation is surely an autobiographical one—for a poet—although to reduce it to autobiography in the everyday sense for Hölderlin is already to miss one of his poetry’s most unrelenting themes: that this vocation is related, even if only in a way that is highly fraught, to politics. It is not for nothing that the verse to which Hölderlin’s name is perhaps most firmly joined in the popular consciousness is “und wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit” (“and what are poets for in hard times”).<sup>14</sup>

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tutor, left the Thurgau village of Hauptwil near Constance and traveled back across Lake Constance to his Swabian homeland” (EH, p. 32); “Das Gedicht erzählt eine Fahrt über den See ‘von schattigen Alpen her’ nach Lindau. Der Hauslehrer Hölderlin ist im Frühjahr 1801 aus dem thurgauischen Ort Hauptwyl bei Konstanz über den Bodensee nach seiner schwäbischen Heimat zurückgefahren” (Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, in *Gesamtausgabe*, 90 vols. [Frankfurt am Main, 1976], 4:13).

14. Here, as always, it is worth noting that the famous line from “Brod und Wein” (“Bread and Wine”) is less a question than a *statement of ignorance* and so syntactically complex as to inflect the whole question of the poet’s vocation with a powerful negativity: “und was zu thun inde und zu sagen, / Weiß ich nicht, und wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit” (Hölderlin, “Brod und Wein,” *Sämtliche Werke*, 2:94). One possible reading of the line is “and what to do and what to say, / I don’t know, and I don’t know what poets are for in a time of need.” It is symptomatic of Heidegger’s interpretation of this passage that it blots out this reading, posing in its place a question to the poet’s text (“Wozu Dichter?” [“What are poets for?”]) to which it already answers, “I don’t know”; see Heidegger, “What Are Poets For?” *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York, 1971), pp. 89–142.

To be sure, there is a peculiar fidelity to Hölderlin in the idea that the poet must return “home” in order to experience fully the failure (lack, poverty, dearth) of poetic language. But the reflex to map this experience (the idea that it could be so mapped) onto an autobiographical homecoming (from Hauptwil to Nürtingen, via Lindau and Lake Constance, in April 1801) fails to account for several of the poem’s more interesting difficulties, beginning with the difficulty of how we are to read the second half of its title: “An die Verwandten.” For Hölderlin’s poem, even as it presents itself as a poem about homecoming, ultimately works to question its speaker’s kinship with those to whom he is returning. And, in the remaining lines of this same stanza, the text seems to suggest that the speaker’s kinship with “the others” (“die anderen”) is actually *negated* by his vocation as a poet:

Aber ein Saitenspiel leiht jeder Stunde die Töne,  
 Und erfreuet vielleicht Himmlische, welche sich nahn.  
 Das bereitet und so ist auch beinahe die Sorge  
 Schon befriediget, die under das Freudige kam.  
 Sorgen, wie diese, muß, gern oder nicht, in der Seele  
 Tragen ein Sänger oft, aber die anderen nicht.

[“H,” p. 99]

But string-music lends its tones to every hour,  
 And perhaps brings joy to the heavenly who draw near.  
 This makes ready, and care too will almost be  
 Appeased, which came into our joy.  
 Cares like these, whether he likes it or not, a singer  
 Must bear in his soul, and often, but the others not.

[EH, p. 31]

Whether we read the title’s second half as a dedication (as saying that the poem was written for “die Verwandten”) or as an indication of direction (as saying that to be returning to those to whom one is related, this is what it means to be “coming home”), the autobiographical interpretation fails to account for, or for that matter even to address, the abruptness of the poem’s closing lines, which do as much to destroy as to affirm any relationship of kinship. Who are “the kindred ones” (“die Verwandten”) if not “the others” (“die anderen”)? And, yet, how kindred can they be if they don’t share the cares of the poet? The text quite clearly tells us they don’t: “Sorgen, wie diese, muß, gern oder nicht, in der Seele / Tragen ein Sänger oft, *aber die anderen nicht*” (“Cares like these, whether he likes it or not, a

singer / Must bear in his soul, and often, *but the others not*). Any reading that would make sense of the poem's claim to be about homecoming will have to account for this movement, which effectively moves kinship and alterity closer together even as it closes them off for the poet. "Nicht"—"no," "not"—lest it not be clear from the fragmentary citation, is quite literally the last word of the poem, lending a rather appalling negativity to the *Heimkunft*.

But, perhaps more than anything else, such a reading will have to account for the poem's profoundly *future* orientation in a way that the more traditional interpretations simply haven't. For, whether despite or because of the abruptness of its final "nicht," "Heimkunft" remains ineluctably turned toward the future, sketching gestures of "saving" ("sparen") and of "preserving" ("erhalten") something for the future and voicing a desire to be prepared for the future, both with respect to the threatened arrival (in stanza 3) of an unbidden spirit in the fatherland and with respect to the "cares" that, it is promised, will be appeased someday ("H," p. 97; *EH*, p. 27). This future orientation requires us to look more closely at the poem's description of the land to which it supposedly returns and gives the entire poem a level of temporal complexity that the autobiographical and vocational interpretations have left unplumbed. Where is this home to which we are returning? Where is it—is it even—named or described in the poem? Above all, in even gesturing toward this return, does Hölderlin's text refer to a past event or a future one, or does it refer, in a more complex movement, to both?

"Heimkunft" begins:

Drinn in den Alpen ists noch helle Nacht und die Wolke,  
 Freudiges dichtend, sie dekt drinnen das gähnende Thal.  
 Dahin, dorthin toset und stürzt die scherzende Bergluft,  
 Schroff durch Tannen herab glänzet und schwindet ein Stral.  
 Langsam eilt und kämpft das freudigschauernde Chaos,  
 Jung an Gestalt, doch stark, feiert es liebenden Streit  
 Unter den Felsen, es gährt und wankt in den ewigen Schranken,  
 Denn bacchantischer zieht drinnen der Morgen herauf.  
 Denn es wächst unendlicher dort das Jahr und die heiligen  
 Stunden, die Tage, sie sind kühner geordnet, gemischt.  
 Dennoch merket die Zeit der Gewittervogel und zwischen  
 Bergen, hoch in der Luft weilt er und ruft den Tag.  
 Jetzt auch wachet und schaut in der Tiefe drinnen das Dörflein,  
 Furchtlos, Hohem vertraut, under den Gipfeln hinauf.  
 Wachstum ahnend, denn schon, wie Blize, fallen die alten  
 Wasserquellen, der Grund unter den Stürzenden dampft,

Echo tönet umher, und die unermessliche Werkstatt  
Reget bei Tag und Nacht, Gaaben versendend, den Arm.

[“H,” p. 96]

Within the Alps it is still bright night and the cloud,  
Composing poems full of joy, covers the yawning valley within.  
This way, that way, roars and rushes the playful mountain breeze,  
Steep down through the fir trees a ray of light gleams and vanishes.  
Chaos, trembling with joy, slowly hurries and struggles,  
Young in form, yet strong, it celebrates loving strife  
Amidst the rocks, it seethes and shakes in its eternal bounds,  
For more bacchantically morning rises within.  
For the year grows more endlessly there and the holy  
Hours, the days, are more boldly ordered and mingled.  
Yet the bird of the thunderstorm notes the time and between  
Mountains, high in the air he hovers and calls out the day.  
Now in the depths within, the little village also awakens and  
Fearless, familiar with the high, looks up from under the peaks.  
Divining growth, for already, like lightning flashes, the ancient  
Waterfalls crash, the ground steaming beneath the falls,  
Echo resounds all about, and the immeasurable workshop,  
Dispensing gifts, actively moves its arm by day and night.

[*EH*, p. 24]

Already in its opening lines, the poem offers a plurality of possible answers to these questions, and we are not surprised to find a number of figural displacements, all in some sense predictive of the temporal complexity indicated above. On the one hand, the figural dyad of the mountain and the valley presents a kind of phenomenization or “landscaping” of the distance between the earth and the sky, limning a contour radically different from the flatness of a mappable trajectory. Setting out from this, the whole stanza is inscribed within a movement of powerful and insistent verticality; we are within the mountains (“Drinn in den Alpen”) but also, therefore, inside a valley; the valley is described as open (“das gähnende Thal”) but also, at the same time, as closed—sealed off or concealed by cloud cover (“die Wolke . . .dekt drinnen das . . .Thal”). The serial inversions (between light and dark, openness and concealment) would very quickly bring the poem’s language to the point of nonsense were it not for the presence of an equally powerful horizontal logic. The valley is sealed off only as long as it is still night within the mountains, and it appears more open as the sun rises.<sup>15</sup> This temporalizing movement is underscored by lines 9 and 10,

15. Hence Beissner’s note to “helle Nacht”: “Das Oxymoron bezeichnet recht den Zwischenzustand, da die Tiefe des gähnenden Tals vom vollen Licht des Morgens noch nicht

which seem almost to parody the romantic doctrine of *Dauer im Wechsel* (“Denn es wächst unendlicher dort das Jahr”). Quite apart from a figure of veiling and unveiling or unconcealment, the valley seems also to function, therefore, as a figure of the (strictly speaking, atemporal) passage of time.

By the time we get to the description of the village, however, it seems that the verticality of the stanza’s imagery will not be temporalized without remainder. For the village, which we might expect to be enclosed or sheltered within the valley’s depths, is actually associated, here, with an *openness* of the valley to “the high.” This inversion makes it possible to read the sunrise as a metonymy for verticality, and not vice versa, and to understand that the village looks up “fearless,” not, as we might expect, because it is sheltered within the depths, but because it is “*familiar with the high*”: “und schaut in der Tiefe drinnen das Dörflein, / Furchtlos, Hohem vertraut, unter den Gipfeln hinauf.” It is as if the village were simultaneously located in the depths (hence its “fearlessness”) and drawn up from them (hence its “familiarity” with what is high above it), with each of these terms passing imperceptibly into the other. One cannot be said to be “fearless” without having first been exposed to, and so familiar with, a threatened danger. And the same goes for “familiarity,” which, as Freud well knew, represses not only the distance but also the nearness of the thing it “familiarly” (secretly, uncannily) evokes.

In a sense, it is precisely the uncanniness of this relation—of the depths to the high, of the valley to the peaks, of the supposed security of human habitation in relation to all that threatens it—that becomes the master trope of Heidegger’s Hölderlin interpretation. Indeed, in such texts as “. . . Poetically Man Dwells . . .” (“. . . dichterisch wohnet der Mensch . . .”) and “Building Dwelling Thinking” (“Bauen Wohnen Denken”) Heidegger embarks on what can be read as an excursus through Hölderlin on an essential uncanniness at the heart of what he calls “Wohnen” or “dwelling.”<sup>16</sup> The pervasiveness of this uncanniness, which effectively marks a displacement of place in and by the home, comes first and most clearly into view when,

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erreicht ist” (“The oxymoron accurately marks the intermediate state, in that the depths of the yawning valley have not yet been reached by the full light of morning”) (Beissner, commentary on “Heimkunft,” in Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*, 2:414).

16. I am alluding here to the controversy over the authorship of “*In lieblicher Bläue . . .*” (In lovely blueness . . .), the text that “. . . Poetically Man Dwells . . .” purports to be reading; see Heidegger, “. . . Poetically Man Dwells . . .” *Poetry, Language, Thought*, pp. 211–29; hereafter abbreviated “P.” For a concise yet rigorous account of the questions about the status of the text (a fragment, not written in verse, and not written by Hölderlin) and the crisis they open in Heidegger’s commentaries on Hölderlin, see Peter Fenves, “Measure for Measure: Hölderlin and the Place of Philosophy,” in *The Solid Letter: Readings of Friedrich Hölderlin*, ed. Aris Fioretos (Stanford, Calif., 1999), p. 418 n. 13. I am grateful to Fenves for emphasizing the interest of this problem in his response to an earlier version of this essay.

in “. . . Poetically Man Dwells . . .” Heidegger insists on the distinction between dwelling and other more mundane and unpoetic activities, such as the “inhabiting” or “occupation” of a dwelling: “Wohnen ist nicht das Innehaben einer Wohnung” (“P,” p. 214).<sup>17</sup> “Our dwelling,” suggests Heidegger, “is harassed by the housing shortage” (“Unser Wohnen ist von der Wohnungsnot bedrängt”) (“P,” p. 213; “D,” p. 191), and yet it is poetic. Here and elsewhere, the philosopher takes great pains to emphasize that whatever it is we do when we dwell it has nothing to do with a site or place that would be locatable in time and space in any simple sense. *Wohnen* is, in this respect, not simply something poetic, but already something *utopian*.<sup>18</sup> This is at least in part why he wants to preserve—or rather claims that Hölderlin wants to preserve—a dwelling that is not “merely one form of human behavior among many others” (“nur eine Verhaltensweise des Menschen neben vielen anderen”) (“P,” pp. 214–15; “D,” p. 192). “We work in the city,” he writes, “but dwell outside it. We travel, and dwell now here, now there” (“Wir arbeiten in der Stadt, wohnen jedoch außerhalb. Wir sind auf einer Reise und wohnen dabei bald hier, bald dort”) (“P,” p. 215; “D,” pp. 192–93). And yet none of these expressions adequately reflects dwelling’s poetic *essence*. This essence cannot be something added on to dwelling after the fact (“eine Zugabe zum Wohnen”) and must rather be the thing that “first lets dwelling be dwelling” (“P,” p. 215): “Das Dichten läßt das Wohnen allererst ein Wohnen sein. Dichten ist das eigentliche Wohnenlassen” (“D,” p. 193).

Of course, among the many possible translations of *wohnen* in English is “to make (a place) one’s home.” This translation, like the very possibility of the voyage out or departure from one’s home (“die Wanderung,” or “migration,” is one of Hölderlin’s words for this), only underscores the original disjunction between “house” and “home” that seems, for Heidegger, at once to ground and to render vertiginous the relation between poetic and other kinds of dwelling. If this home that man makes, always already at least potentially “away from home,” were not precisely *different from* a house, and if it were not, furthermore, dissociated from the inhabiting or occupation of a *particular house*, that is to say, of a site or place that would be simply locatable in time and space, it seems that, for Heidegger at any rate, there would be no home and certainly no dwelling.

17. Heidegger, “. . . dichterisch wohnet der Mensch . . .” *Gesamtausgabe*, 7:192; hereafter abbreviated “D.”

18. In *Parmenides*, Heidegger writes: “Demnach müßte das Sein auch eine ‘Utopie’ sein. In Wahrheit aber ist das Sein gerade und es allein *der topos* für alles Seiende” (“Being must be a utopia.” It must be, and yet it can’t, insofar as “Being, and it alone, is precisely the *topos* for all beings”) (Heidegger, *Parmenides*, in *Gesamtausgabe*, 54: 141; trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz, under the title *Parmenides* [Bloomington, Ind., 1992], p. 94).



Given this predicament, it is no wonder that, in the opening passages of “Building Dwelling Thinking,” Heidegger finds it necessary to distinguish those sites or places (really they are “buildings”) in which man dwells or makes his home in the everyday sense from those in which he may actually be “at home”:

The truck driver is at home on the highway, but he does not have his lodgings there [*ist auf der Autobahn zu Hause, aber er hat dort nicht seine Unterkunft*]; the working woman is at home in the spinning mill, but does not have her dwelling place there [*hat jedoch dort nicht ihre Wohnung*]; the chief engineer is at home in the power station, but he does not dwell there [*er wohnt nicht dort*]. These buildings house [*behausen*] man. He inhabits them [*Er bewohnt sie*] and yet he does not dwell in them, if to dwell means only to have lodgings [*daß wir eine Unterkunft innehaben*]. In today’s housing shortage even this much is reassuring and to the good: residential buildings do indeed provide lodging; today’s houses [*Wohnungen*] may even be well planned, easy to keep, attractively cheap, open to air, light, and sun, but—do the dwellings [*Wohnungen*] themselves guarantee that *dwelling* occurs in them?<sup>19</sup>

Here, Heidegger effectively tells us that every man’s house is, in fact, *not* his home—at least insofar as it *is* his house, of whose housing he is, at least in an everyday sense, presumably assured. There emerges in this description a kind of permanent ontological housing shortage, in which housing is always lacking, or always falling short, with respect to the peculiar *Heimlichkeit* of dwelling. In much the same way that, in the essay on “The Uncanny,” Freud uncovers an uncanny displacement and supplementarity of the home between two different meanings of the word “Unheimliche”—one derived from the home as that which is *most familiar*, the other derived from the home as a place of *Geheimnis* or *concealment* (“Oh, we call it ‘*unheimlich*’; you call it ‘*heimlich*,’” Freud famously quotes from one dictionary)<sup>20</sup>—Heidegger uncovers an essential if ordinarily repressed potential for displacement at the heart of this word *Wohnen*. We call it *Unheimlichkeit*, you call it *Heimlichkeit*, whereas Heidegger calls it—or rather he claims that Hölderlin calls it—dwelling.

The stakes of this potential for Heidegger’s as well as for our own reading come most clearly into view in his treatment of the earth-sky relation. Almost immediately upon returning to “. . . Poetically Man Dwells . . .” we

19. Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” *Poetry, Language, Thought*, pp. 145–46; trans. mod. For the original German, see Heidegger, “Bauen Wohnen Denken,” *Gesamtausgabe*, 7: 147.

20. See Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” *Writings on Art and Literature* (Stanford, Calif., 1997), p. 234.

learn that the kind of dwelling that would be poetic does not take place “on this earth,”<sup>21</sup> as a site or place that would be locatable in time and space in any simple sense but rather somewhere *in between* the earth and the sky. The activity that grounds this dwelling Heidegger calls *Bauen*, which in German means not only “building” but also “cultivating” or “caring,” and which is understood by Heidegger as extending to *all* of man’s technical manipulations: “Things that are built,” he writes, “include not only buildings but all the works made by man’s hands and through his arrangements” (“Gebautes und Bauten in diesem Sinne sind nicht nur die Gebäude, sondern alle Werke von Hand und durch Verrichtungen des Menschen”) (“P,” p. 217; “D,” p. 195). And, yet, even *this* building, taken in its most essential form, does not yet constitute dwelling’s ground: “aber nicht sein Grund oder gar seine Gründung.” This grounding, we are told, “must take place *in another building*” (“muß *in einem anderen Bauen* geschehen”) (“P,” p. 217; “D,” p. 195; *my italics*).

The building that “first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it” (“bringt den Menschen erst auf die Erde, zu ihr”) (“P,” p. 218; “D,” p. 196), this “other,” *poetic* building, consists in a complex operation that Heidegger calls “measuring” (“Messen”) and in a marking or remarking of the difference between the earth and the sky, in a movement that opens out, and that “measures,” “takes the measure,” and “spans” (“mißt,” “vermißt,” “durchmißt”) their distance. Thus Heidegger writes, quoting “In lieblicher Bläue . . .,” that

The godhead is the “measure” with which man measures out his dwelling, his stay on the earth beneath the sky. Only insofar as man takes the measure of his dwelling in this way is he able to *be* commensurately with his nature. Man’s dwelling depends upon an upward-looking measure-taking of the dimension, *in which the sky belongs just as much as the earth*. [“P,” p. 221; see “D,” p. 199; *my italics*]

Far from either bridging or reducing the distance between the earth and the sky (that is, from bringing it back to a predetermined measure), this movement of measure-taking brings about the “belonging together of what differs” (“das Selbe ist . . . das Zusammengehören des Verschiedenen”) by means of what Heidegger describes as a differential gathering (“aus der Versammlung durch den Unterschied”) (“P,” p. 218; “D,” p. 197). A few pages later, Heidegger seems at once to literalize this movement and to give it its

21. I am of course quoting Heidegger quoting “In lieblicher Bläue.” The full line reads: “Voll verdient, doch dichterisch wohnt / der Mensch auf dieser Erde” (“Full of merit, yet poetically, man dwells on this earth”).

most perfect figure in what he calls the “upward glance,” or “Aufschauen,” which “goes up toward the sky and yet remains below on earth” (“Das Aufschauen durchgeht das Hinauf zum Himmel und verbleibt doch im Unten auf Erde”) (“P,” p. 220; “D,” p. 198), recalling the movement we saw in the opening stanza of “Heimkunft.”

What matters most for our purposes here, and what makes Heidegger’s treatment of the earth-sky relation so evocative for our reading of the poem about homecoming, is not simply the movement of this *Aufschauen* but the fact that it allows Heidegger to carve out—in the name of *togetherness* or *belonging*, but also in the name of *keeping things the same*—a space of radical alterity. Displaced in this gesture is not simply place but something approaching *the place of place* in the very definition of the earth, which can henceforth no longer be circumscribed by a notion of rootedness in place, at least insofar as our interpretation of rootedness, as of place, remains caught up in notions of immanence and identity.<sup>22</sup> For it is precisely *not* the *self-identity* and thus the solidity or gravity of the ground beneath our feet that Heidegger sees Hölderlin as poetizing, but rather all that the earth shares with the ethereal. Again: “Man’s dwelling depends upon an upward-looking measure-taking of the dimension, *in which the sky belongs just as much as the earth.*”

In the final movement of “. . . Poetically Man Dwells . . .,” as if wanting to drive home one last time the perplexities of this differential gathering, Heidegger indicates that it is someplace in between this “remaining below” on earth and the “voyage out” into the sky that dwelling receives, not only its poetic essence, but what he calls its *security*:

The taking-of-measure of the human being in the dimension measured out to it brings dwelling into its ground plan. Taking the measure of the dimension is the element within which *human dwelling has its security*, by which it *securely endures*. Measure-taking is what is poetic in dwelling.

[“P,” p. 221; see “D,” pp. 199–200, my italics; trans. mod.]

Whatever else it may do, this passage makes it clear that for Heidegger, the “security” of human dwelling does not lie in any one place, or in the

22. In this respect, the Hölderlin that emerges in “. . . Poetically Man Dwells . . .”—quite apart from the controversy over the authorship of the fragment it interprets—does not fundamentally differ from that which emerges in Heidegger’s other commentaries on the poet. Paul de Man, in an important but little-known essay on Heidegger’s interpretation of Hölderlin, “The Temptation of Permanence,” emphasizes what is achieved by what later becomes in Heidegger a three-fold differentiation between *earth*, *world*, and *sky*, while at the same time calling our attention to the dialectical temptations of this schema. See Paul de Man, “The Temptation of Permanence,” trans. Dan Latimer, *Critical Writings, 1953–1978*, ed. Lindsay Waters (Minneapolis, 1989), pp. 30–40.

ability to shore up the boundaries of a place, any more than does dwelling. Following this logic out, we can only conclude that the earth is not a place but an exposure to the most radical possible exteriority. Perhaps this is why Jean-Luc Nancy, in his reading of Heidegger's text, simply calls the earth "the outside."<sup>23</sup>

This is not to say that Heidegger's exegesis does not raise as many questions as it answers. What are we to make of this security (*Gewähr*), which is effectively the security of an exposure and which puts us in the position of grounding human dwelling in the abyss?<sup>24</sup> How are we to preserve (*wahren, bewahren*), that is to say, make securely endure (*währen*), this ground, which has no place, only an "in between"? Whence this demand for a ground of dwelling in the first place, with all that it necessarily entails of a demand for security? Finally, given this double figuration and this anti-radical interpretation of the earth, where is there any place left for the supposed rootedness of a homeland in the land or soil?

We must of course make our way, in the aftermath of this intervention, by returning to the poem. As we noted earlier, the *Hinaufschauen* of the village (from the valley to the peaks above it) might at first glance have seemed to promise a temporal and dialectical synthesis of "remaining on the ground" ("Verbleiben im Unten auf Erde") and "going up into the sky" ("Durchgehen das Hinauf zum Himmel"). Complicating this prospect significantly, however, is this potential for displacement of place and gathering through difference, which is evoked a second time and with still more serious consequences in the image of the waterfall in the stanza's closing lines. Although waterfalls are not without their own dialecticizing connotations (one thinks inevitably of Wordsworth's "stationary blast of waterfalls") here the falls would seem to indicate a certain vertiginousness, not only of water falling, but of *the ground*. This is, at any rate, how I propose we read the appearance of the land in these lines, and for the first time in the poem, *as ground*. That is to say, the land appears *as ground*—and not for example as a valley or a mountain—*only beneath the falls*. This inaugural appearance of the land calls the very possibility of its groundedness radically into question and, in this way, renders any synthesis impossible. For the land, precisely insofar as it appears *as ground*, figures a limit and, in the peculiar context of the stanza's imagery, the possibility that there is an *undialectizable* limit to permanence. That is to say, it figures the possibility, not simply that

23. Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Calculation of the Poet," trans. Simon Sparks, in *The Solid Letter*, pp. 71–72; see also Nancy, "Calcul du poète," *Des lieux divins* suivi de "Calcul du poète" (Mauvezin, 1997), p. 85.

24. Heidegger writes, in "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry": "We never find the ground in the abyss" (*EH*, p. 59). Elsewhere, he quotes Hölderlin: "Hölderlin speaks of the servants of the heavenly, that is, of the poets: 'Their step is toward the abyss / Of men.'"

the ground is in some sense the limit of water's falling (and thus a figure of permanence commensurate with change: the ground, as the endpoint or destination of the falling water is permanently falling's other), nor simply that water itself may function as a kind of limit (of groundedness, for example, if and insofar as the water is permanently falling, as it is in the figure of the waterfall), but the possibility that the ground *may itself be falling*. And it figures this possibility without, for all that, making of this falling a ground. How else are we to understand this land that first appears, as ground, *only under something falling*, and *under water*? Such a ground would mark falling's limit, but also its limitlessness—an end of falling and thus a difference from water, but also a reinscription of water within the ground. For the ground gives rise here, in the form of vapor, to always more water, without nonetheless ever stopping its fall. It is as if there were in this figure a kind of optical illusion, producing the effect of a logical disillusionment by exposing the essential vertiginousness of the land with respect to all that could ever make it a ground.

This description of the land as a kind of primal *Abgrund* seems rather an inauspicious way to begin a poem about homecoming, at least insofar as this homecoming is conceived as a *return* to one's native land or soil. Heidegger himself suggests in his commentary on "Heimkunft" that its first stanza gives us the impression of being somewhat *unheimisch*,<sup>25</sup> reasoning that this "(un)homeliness" can be accounted for by the poem's description of a *reservation* of the essence of the homeland just out of reach of the one returning—and thus by the *temporary absence of what is near*—citing the most famous verses of the fourth stanza in support: "Freilich wohl! das Geburtsland ists, der Boden der Heimath, / Was du suchest, es ist nahe, begegnet dir schon" ("But of course! It is the land of your birth, the soil of your homeland, / What you seek, it is near, already comes to meet you") ("H," pp. 97–98; *EH*, p. 27). But I would prefer to linger for a moment on this inversion in the direction of the stanza's verticality, which traces a movement between *the upward glance* and *the downward falls*. For it is this inversion, I want to suggest, that must be read as an allegory of the homecoming that is, in however vexed and mediated a sense, still the topic of the poem. This is not simply because it traces a movement of return—for example, in the returning, or falling back, or even the falling due (in the pastoral economy so dear to Heidegger) to the earth or to the land, of the water—but, on the contrary, because it inscribes a movement of *infinite return*, or of *returning without return*, at the beginning of every homecoming, as its very condition of possibility and as its falling ground.

25. See *EH*, p. 32, and Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, in *Gesamtausgabe*, 4:13.

Summing up, we might say that if for Hölderlin home, if and insofar as it is a place, can only be a place to which one returns, and more precisely to which one is *always* returning, this is not only because the home that man makes on this earth is not a dwelling place (“Wohnen ist nicht das Innehaben eine Wohnung”). It is because, for Hölderlin, “being-there” is always a “being-elsewhere” and first “takes place” by way of a departure. The fact that, in the poem’s framing stanza, the water that figures this movement of departure and return takes the form of the falls only literalizes this displacement of the homeland as a place of origin and as a place to which one might return—and to which one would *begin* returning only *after* having left it. It is, in the end (and also from the beginning), the possibility of any rigorous distinction between returning and its other(s) that is at stake in “Heimkunft.”

### 3. Hölderlin's Terrorism

With this movement of departure and return (we might also call it departure *as* return) we are on territory long familiar to readers of Hölderlin. It is what has always been at stake in the voyage out into foreign lands—to Greece or to France—as well as, by the same token, in Hölderlin’s rivers. Hölderlin’s rivers, as Maurice Blanchot has said, are less figures of language than “language itself.”<sup>26</sup> This is why we are not surprised when, in stanza 3, the journey is effectively resumed, and the movement of homecoming is repeated or restarted from the perspective of the water. The stanza of recognition and familiar faces, stanza 3 is also the stanza of the prayer for “the fatherland” and for those who have stayed at home:

Vieles sprach ich zu ihm, denn, was auch Dichtende sinnen  
 Oder singen, es gild meistens den Engeln und ihm;  
 Vieles bat ich, zu lieb dem Vaterlande, damit nicht  
 Ungebeten uns einst plötzlich befiele der Geist;  
 Vieles für euch auch, die im Vaterlande besorgt sind,  
 Denen der heilige Dank lächelnd die Flüchtlinge bringt,  
 Landesleute! für euch, indessen wiegte der See mich,  
 Und der Ruderer sass ruhig und lobte die Fahrt.  
 Weit in des Sees Ebene wars Ein freudiges Wallen  
 Unter den Seegeln und jetzt blühet und hellet die Stadt  
 Dort in der Frühe sich auf, wohl her von schattigen Alpen  
 Kommt geleitet und ruht nun in dem Hafen das Schiff.  
 Warm ist das Ufer hier und freundlich offene Thale,

26. Maurice Blanchot, “La Parole ‘sacrée’ de Hölderlin,” *La Part du feu* (Paris, 1949), p. 118.

Schön von Pfaden erhellt, grünen und schimmern mich an.  
 Gärten stehen gesellt und die glänzende Knospe beginnt schon,  
 Und des Vogels Gesang ladet den Wanderer ein.  
 Alles scheint vertaut, der vorübereilende Gruss auch  
 Scheint von Freunden, es scheint jegliche Miene verwandt.

[“H,” p. 97]

Much I spoke to him, for whatever poets meditate  
 Or sing, it mostly concerns the angels and him;  
 Much I asked for, for love of the fatherland, lest  
 Unbidden one day the spirit suddenly fall upon us;  
 Much also for you, who have cares in the fatherland,  
 To whom holy thanks, smiling, brings the fugitives,  
 Countrymen! for you, meanwhile the lake rocked me,  
 And the boatman sat calmly and praised the journey.  
 Far out on the surface of the lake was One joyous swell  
 Beneath the sails, and now the town blooms and brightens  
 There in the dawn, and the boat is safely guided  
 From the shady Alps and now rests in the harbor.  
 Warm is the shore here and friendly the open valleys,  
 Beautifully lit up with paths, gleam verdantly toward me.  
 Gardens stand together and already the glistening bud is beginning,  
 And the bird’s song invites the wanderer.  
 All seems familiar, even the hurried greetings  
 Seem those of friends, every face seems a kindred one.

[EH, p. 27]

I would like, in closing, to turn our attention to a structure that becomes legible in this passage and that is of pivotal significance for our understanding of what I am calling Hölderlin’s terrorism. I am referring to this strange yoking of that which *threatens* and that which *beckons* that comes into view in the description of the “prayer” for the fatherland and in relation to this surprise spirit attack. This yoking is strange at least in part because, as the speaker’s prayer suggests, it is not the poet who has been exposed to danger, but rather *those who have stayed at home*, although it is, as we have just seen, the very possibility of ever staying at home that is called into question by the most primitive logic of the homecoming.

This yoking becomes still clearer in stanza 4, where it can be traced to the poem’s juxtaposition of *that which is near* and *that which is still distant*, precisely here, at its midpoint and at a point of transition: from the water to the land; threatening to beckoning; a decreasingly narrative to an in-

creasingly exclamatory mode. This is the stanza of nearness, but also of distance, and it is critical that the passage describes the peculiar experience of *nearness-as-distance* (the condition of possibility both of threatening and of beckoning) at the same time that it names the *homeland*, as such, for the first time in the poem:

Freilich wohl! das Geburtsland ists, der Boden der Heimath,  
 Was du suchest, es ist nahe, begegnet dir schon.  
 Und umsonst nicht steht, wie ein Sohn, am wellenumrauschten  
 Thor' und siehet und sucht liebende Nahmen für dich,  
 Mit Gesang ein wandernder Mann, glükseeliges Lindau!  
 Eine der gastlichen Pforten des Landes ist diß,  
 Reizend hinauszugehn in die vielversprechende Ferne,  
 Dort, wo die Wunder sind, dort, wo das göttliche Wild,  
 Hoch in die Ebenen herab der Rhein die verwegene Bahn bricht,  
 Und aus Felsen hervor ziehet das jauchzende Thal,  
 Dort hinein, durchs helle Gebirg, nach Komo zu wandern,  
 Oder hinab, wie der Tag wandelt, den offenen See;  
 Aber reizender mir bist du, geweihte Pforte!  
 Heimzugehn.

[“H,” pp. 97–98]

But of course! It is the *land* of your birth, the *soil* of your *homeland*,  
 What you seek, it is near, already comes to meet you.  
 And not in vain does he stand, like a son, at the wave-washed  
 Gate, and sees and seeks loving names for you,  
 With his song, a wandering man, blessed Lindau!  
 This is one of the land's hospitable portals,  
 Enticing us to go out into the much-promising distance,  
 There, where the wonders are, there, where the divine wild game,  
 High up the Rhine breaks his daring path down to the plains,  
 And forth from the rocks the jubilant valley emerges,  
 In there, through bright mountains, to wander to Como,  
 Or down, as the day changes, to the open lake;  
 But you are more enticing to me, you consecrated portal!  
 To go home.

[*EH*, pp. 26–28; my italics]

On one level, this yoking of that which threatens (the surprise spirit attack) and that which beckons (“die vielversprechende Ferne”; “der Boden der Heimath”; the promise of homecoming) seems simply to reflect or repeat the ideas of openness and plurality that are evoked in a spatial register



by the image of the “portal” (“Eine der gastlichen Pforten des Landes ist diß, / Reizend hinauszugehn” [“This is one of the land’s hospitable portals, / Enticing us to go out”]). And, like this image, it warns us against mistaking the moment of returning for a moment of closure. For the portal is always open in at least two directions (beckoning to go out *and* beckoning to return), and there is, for that matter, always *more than one* (“Eine der gastlichen Pforten des Landes ist diß” [“One of the land’s hospitable portals”]). Insofar as the threatening of what threatens and the beckoning of what beckons are both made possible by the subtle interplay of nearness and of distance, and insofar as this interplay coincides, *stricto sensu*, with the naming of the homeland as ground (“der Boden der Heimat”) in the poem, the poem suggests that it is never simply those who have left, nor those who have “stayed at home,” who are exposed to danger, but always both. The more we stay, the more we are beckoned out, and it is only in proportion as we stay that we are exposed to attack on the homeland’s very ground or soil.

Our awareness of this structure clues us into one further and, one suspects, not unrelated difficulty. It is that, in the prayer for the fatherland in stanza 3, the poet claims to have beseeched the god *not* for the *security* but rather for the *preparedness* of his compatriots. How else are we to understand his concern that the spirit not fall upon the fatherland “unbidden” (“ungebeten”), an uninvited guest? Certainly the suggestion, toward the poem’s end, that the poet is preparing for some event—the event of giving thanks, the arrival of “the heavenly ones”?—contributes to our sense that it is itself not so much describing a past event as preparing a future one, suggesting in turn that it is not the return alone that is at stake in “Heimkunft,” and even in the very word and concept of the homecoming, but rather *the (im)possibility of our ever being ready for it to come*. For it is only if we could anticipate the closure of the land in both time and space—what Hölderlin’s text tells us we cannot—that we could ever be prepared *either* for that which threatens *or* that which beckons in the very name of the homeland—that we could ever be prepared, for that matter, to tell these two gestures apart.

This yoking gives a different meaning to the homeland, one that is diametrically opposed to any attempt to ground or secure it as a territory and which ensures that it is, precisely, for Hölderlin a *terroristic* concept. This is why every attempt to ground or secure the land or soil of the homeland is doomed incessantly to repeat its own deterritorialization.<sup>27</sup> As the *OED*

27. Bush’s own analysis of this problem in “Securing the Homeland, Strengthening the Nation” makes this clear:

There are two inescapable truths about terrorism in the 21st century:

First, the characteristics of American society that we cherish—our freedom, our openness, our great cities and towering skyscrapers, our modern transportation systems—make us

explains, while *territory* is “usually taken as a derivative of *terra*, earth, land,” its etymology is “unsettled,” having also a “suggested derivation from *terrere*, to frighten, whence *territor*, frightener, *territorium*: ‘a place from which people are warned off.’” Hölderlin warns us that the “homeland” will never be this place, and more than any other. The doors are always open, in at least two directions. This is its “permanent condition.”

This is the problem with Heidegger's commentary on “Heimkunft”: that it anticipates this impossible closure and looks forward to a time when the exposure to difference would end and when the voyage out into foreign lands would no longer be necessary. The problem is not (as is sometimes still thought) the “Germanicizing” tendency of Heidegger's interpretation—a tendency that has doubtless done as much to secure the philosopher's place as a Nazi in intellectual history as any participation in party politics. (Even if, as Heidegger himself will eventually claim, the question of “Germanness,” of who “the Germans” are, of what it means not simply for a people, but for a language, and even a poem to be “German,” is definitely Hölderlin's own. I refer the reader here to the infamous 1976 interview with *Der Spiegel*, in which the interviewers confronted Heidegger directly with the question of his Nazi past: *Spiegel*: “You assign in particular a special task to the Germans?”—“Yes, in the sense of the dialogue with Hölderlin.”)<sup>28</sup> It is not the heavy-handed and apparently politically suspect references to race or to the historical destiny of the homeland that run throughout Heidegger's “Heimkunft” commentary, nor is it even the moves he makes to support these references with “textual evidence,” introducing a variant from a second *Reinschrift* (or “clear copy”) of the poem, in which what has been “saved up” or “reserved” (“gespart”) in the homeland is identified as “der Schatz, das Deutsche.” The problem, rather, is what Heidegger's interpretation *does* with the nationalization or racialization of this

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vulnerable to terrorism of catastrophic proportions. America's vulnerability to terrorism will persist long after we bring justice to those responsible for the events of September 11.

Second, the technological ability to launch destructive attacks against civilian populations and critical infrastructure spreads to more and more organizations and individuals with each passing year. This trend is an unavoidable byproduct of the technological, educational, economic, and social progress that creates jobs, wealth, and a good quality of life. The combination of these two facts means the threat of terrorism is an inescapable reality of life in the 21st century. It is a permanent condition to which America and the entire world must adjust. [[www.whitehouse.gov/homeland/homeland\\_security\\_book.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/homeland/homeland_security_book.html)]

28. “Only a God Can Save Us: *Der Spiegel*'s Interview with Martin Heidegger,” trans. Maria Alter and John Caputo, *Philosophy Today* 20 (Winter 1976): 281. For a reading of this exchange that brings it provocatively to bear on the larger problem of Heidegger's Hölderlin interpretation, see Andrzej Warminski, “Monstrous History: Heidegger Reading Hölderlin,” in particular the prefatory note that accompanied the essay on its first publication in *Yale French Studies* 77 (1990): 193–95.

“treasure,” which is to flatten out the peculiar temporal complexity of this yoking. For Heidegger’s Germanicizing interpretation ultimately turns what in Hölderlin’s text remains a question simply of *preservation* into a *reserve* that will someday be overcome.

The difference is subtle insofar as it depends upon the elision that takes place in Heidegger’s language when we move from this national “treasure” to the spirit that (in stanza 3) at once threatens and beckons: *threatening* to come when those “who have cares in the fatherland” do not expect it; *beckoning* at least insofar as the poet seeks to prepare for its arrival. For this spirit is almost immediately identified in Heidegger’s text as the spirit of “the German.” In identifying the spirit in this way, however, he makes the spirit not only nationally but *historically* symmetrical to whatever it is that has been “saved up” or “reserved” in the poem (“Aber das Beste, der Fund, der unter den heiligen Friedens / Bogen liegt, er ist Jungen und Alt gespart” [“But the best, the real find, which lies beneath the rainbow / Of holy peace, is reserved for young and old”]).<sup>29</sup> After thus determining the spirit’s historical referent as “German,” Heidegger can only interpret the poem as preparing for one thing and *one thing only*: as saying that there will be no future for the homeland, and therefore *no homecoming*, until “the German people” become, as it were, “German” enough:

“But the treasure, the German . . . is still reserved.” All that is most unique to the homeland was prepared long ago, and apportioned to those who lived in the land of one’s birth. The homeland’s own special nature was a gift of destiny, or what we today call history. Nevertheless, this destiny has not yet conveyed what is most distinct about it. That is still held back. And that is why whatever pertains to this destiny itself, what is becoming to it, has yet to be found. What has been granted, and yet is still denied, is, we say, reserved. And so this real find that we meet is still reserved and still being sought. Why? Because those who “have

29. There would be much to say here about the poem’s supposed reference to the Treaty of Lunéville—and so to the spirit of *two peoples*, or of “the German” *in relation to* “the French.” (The Treaty of Lunéville, marking the cession of the territories on the left bank of the Rhine to the French Republic, was signed in February 1801, just a few weeks before Hölderlin’s journey from Hauptwil.) On the question of the poem and the treaty, see Beissner’s commentary (“Hölderlin meint hier einen ganz bestimmten Friedensschluß” [“Hölderlin means a very particular peace treaty here”] [Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*, 2: 415]), as well as Rolf Zuberbühler’s “Hölderlin: ‘Heimkunft,’” *Hölderlin-Jahrbuch* 19–20 (1975–77), both of which depend, in addition to historical and autobiographical data, on the “holy rainbow of peace” in stanza 5 as well as on certain thematic and linguistic similarities between “Heimkunft” and another poem by Hölderlin, “Friedensfeier.” Lurking in the background here—as in so many of Hölderlin’s poems about peace and freedom—is also the figure of Rousseau, who stands, if not for the spirit of the Swiss, then for a kind of popular spirit tout court.

cares in the fatherland” are not yet ready. . . . Therefore what constitutes the homecoming is that the countrymen must first become at home in the still withheld essence of their homeland—indeed, even prior to this, the “dear ones” at home must first learn how to become at home. [*EH*, p. 33]<sup>30</sup>

In determining the essence of the homeland as what has been *withheld*, Heidegger interprets the poem as oriented toward *a single* future: the future disclosure of the national essence of the homeland, and *only this one*. Again, the problem is not even this singularization of the future (whether we like it or not, this is what it means to have a destiny, and Heidegger's insistence on this singularization actually allows him to describe much more faithfully than the traditional interpretations the poem's concern with *destination* and thus with preparedness for future events as yet unknown). The problem is that Heidegger claims to be able to read the future and to know how “we” should get ready for it, claiming, on the basis of his interpretation, to have identified what will eventually be reached at the end of this “reserving nearness” (“die sparende Nähe”) that defines the peculiar temporality of the homecoming. As if Hölderlin's “Heimkunft” did not call into question precisely *this* possibility: of our ever being “prepared” to know or tell the difference between threatening and beckoning, including the difference between that which threatens and that which beckons in, *or as*, both the future and the past: the future as that which remains to come; the past as that which would remain *in the past*, without the possibility of ever coming back. As if his text did not inscribe in its own path these very questions—of future readings, of its own future readings, and of the ineradicable necessity of reading the future when, and only when, it comes.

Heidegger also writes, at the close of his essay:

Assuming then that those who are merely residents on the soil of the native land are those who have not yet come home to the homeland's very own; and assuming, too, that it belongs to the *poetic* essence of homecoming, over and above the merely casual possession of domestic things and one's personal life, to be open to the origin of the joyful; assuming *both* of these things, then are not the sons of the homeland, who though far distant from its soil, still gaze into the gaiety of the homeland shining toward them, and devote and sacrifice their life for the still reserved find, are not these sons of the homeland the poet's closest kin?

30. For the original, see Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, in *Gesamtausgabe*, 4:14.

Their sacrifice shelters in itself the poetic call to the dearest in the homeland, so that the reserved find may remain reserved.

So it will remain, if those who “have cares in the fatherland” become the careful ones [*wenn aus denen “die im Vaterlande besorgt sind,” die Sorgsamten werden*]. Then there will be a kinship with the poet. Then there will be a homecoming. [*Dann ist die Verwandtschaft mit dem Dichter. Dann ist Heimkunft.*] But this homecoming is the future of the historical being of the Germans [*des Deutschen*].

They are the people [*das Volk*] of poetry *and* of thought. . . . By thinking again of the composed mystery of the reserving nearness, the thinking of the careful ones alone is the “remembrance of the poet.” In this remembrance there is a first beginning, which will in time become a far-reaching kinship with the homecoming poet. [*EH*, p. 48]<sup>31</sup>

What must be preserved, if we follow Hölderlin’s text to the letter, is not a treasure that has been saved up, nor a reserve that will someday be disclosed (and in so being overcome), but a kind of rootedness *in* exposure—less a *Schatz* than a *Landschaft*, riven by its own lack with respect to all that could be securely grounded. If there is a “treasure” here, it is one of erosion and of dissipation, shored up by nothing.

What must be preserved is this structure (really it is an event or operation) yoking nearness and distance, that which threatens and that which beckons, ensuring that the identity of any group, be it a nation, a people, or some other collectivity, will only ever be “secured” in the most (anti)radical “proximity” to alterity.

What must be preserved is this event or operation, for which the names are indeed lacking, and the “homeland” is one of them. This is why, if the poet brings anything back from his migration, a remembrance or a souvenir, it is not the lacking names, nor even any knowledge (not even knowledge of this lack), but only this experience of kinship. It is also an experience of difference, in which nothing (no difference) is held back.

In no way figures of resemblance, these faces are legible as figures of an immeasurable distance drawing near. Home is not, one might therefore venture, where everyone looks like me. It is where they do not, and it is through this difference that we are gathered together on this earth, like one big happy family. Provided that we submit the earth, here, to its most terroristic interpretation, in the sense that we find it in Hölderlin.

If the poet brings anything back, it is, perhaps, a prayer but also a warning: that the earth cannot be secured in this way, that this is both its threat

31. For the original, see *ibid.*, 4:28–29.

and its promise. For Hölderlin's text teaches us that, if there is going to be this earth, the difference between the threatening of what threatens and the beckoning of what beckons will have to remain incalculable.

And let us not forget (it is a kind of remembrance, although not the kind that could be held back until we were ready for it): it is those who are prepared to kill in the name of this calculation who are the terrorists.