Poem from Hölderlin
Susan Stewart

As from dark orchard leaves, from quiet scripts
where each shape sends its tendril reaching--
circle and line, the swaddled bud, the petiole
sprung, an envelope tendered.

By a window, the infant
turns, rooting
toward the breast,
sun-lit,
the mother humming.
(Those far things, sources
of power and
regret, cliffs and waves,
continue
at a distance.)

Here you’ll find
a name scrawled in the bark--
last words, left to chance
and strangers. There,
the black ant, burdened
by a crumb, and the weight
of her lacquered armor,
crossing—climbing,
switching, doubling
back—gnarl and crevice
and cul de sac.
Pinch-waisted, 
driven on, and trembling, 
does she have a notion 
of her own, or is it 
only species 
memory—so 
fearless, so abstract?

because it is winter everywhere, 
I spin my cocoon 
I dig my heart a grave

Indifferent, a blossom 
drifting, the knob swelling, 
the leaf turned to 
shadow: filigree, smudged. 
The petiole now brittle in 
the first cold nights.

   The burden, relieved, 
weighs all the more from the guilt 
of its release. 
Too light, too light, like a sudden 
waking, the sun in your eyes: 
you cannot see for it.

How long will we live 
in this leaf-strewn place, 
thinking we belong 
to the sky?