mulberry fields

By Lucille Clifton

ey they thought the field was wasting
    and so they gathered the marker rocks and stones and
    piled them into a barn  they say that the rocks were shaped
    some of them scratched with triangles and other forms  they
    must have been trying to invent some new language they say
    the rocks went to build that wall there guarding the manor and
    some few were used for the state house
    crops refused to grow
    i say the stones marked an old tongue and it was called eternity
    and pointed toward the river  i say that after that collection
    no pillow in the big house dreamed  i say that somewhere under
    here moulders one called alice whose great grandson is old now
    too and refuses to talk about slavery  i say that at the
    masters table only one plate is set for supper  i say no seed
    can flourish on this ground once planted then forsaken  wild
    berries warm a field of bones
    bloom how you must i say


Source: Mercy (BOA Editions Ltd., 2004)