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Mulberries

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MULBERRIES

I brush into a pile
the fallen mulberries,
good for nothing but to make us
slip and break our bones,
and so I give them to my youngest
trees, to my linden and my birch,
to nourish them.
I never want my children
to eat mulberries,
because once upon a time
I had to live on them,
sitting with my sister
in the branches. We were
bitter, having nothing else,
nothing save mulberries
which we work now
into proverbs, as I sweep
into a pile the fallout-
dusted twigs
which are good for nothing
in modern times
though the Chinese found them
first-rate for paintings
on silk, and children once
took them into their bellies
with defeat.