

Composting Holly (For Mary Oliver)

Take the holly leaf—
quasi-inorganic marvel:
plasticized green
chlorophyll, with stiffened
barbs that stick to you no matter
where you turn, awaiting
your intense attention.

So, how to cook it down,
to compost holly,
undigestible and worthless,
even to a worm?

It's tedious and tiresome,
causing mounds and mounds
of thorny obstacles.

First, cut the branches
into smaller pieces—
impossible with bare hands,
difficult enough with sharpened
tools, demanding of us
all our strength and will.

Then you must store
these scraps to hide in solitude
until they're broken down
(by time and heat and frequent
turning) into fragrant
fragments, fit to fertilize
a new and verdant life
as freshly softened soil.

Otherwise,
you are left forever
with the tenacious refuse
of our prickly lives.