

Allison Funk
Penelope At Home

At first light she imagines crimson,
Threads stained with saffron,
The madder root's orange.

But what use if the wool's not
Between her forefinger and thumb – and,
And, this is it: how can she bear to begin,

Start over each morning,
When it's all she can do to dress?
The food she puts in her mouth,

Tasteless. The least wind
Has subsided, she says to herself
As a sailor might to his ship.

How can *she* move it?
The body that through childhood and since
Had borne her, always headed somewhere,

As if possessed of a power
Outside her. Any more,
To go on, she forces the voices

Down, one after the next
Calling from inside her house.
Loudest of all: her son blaming her

For his father's absence
Until she escapes to her loom
Where armed with her *spatha*,

The one sword she owns,
She tightens the weave
To keep him, everything out.

At noon, she vows to have the last word,
But who knows when she'll finish
Her pattern of doubled hearts,

Each lobe coiled like the sea snail
Prized for its drop of blue purple?

Torchlight

Shows her unravelling,
How at night she tugs, she tears out
The strands of her hair.

Dark and graying they fall
As slowly as motes to the floor,
Where the threads she wove by day,

Now unstrung, also lie –
One over, one under the other.
Undone!

The chorus of a hundred mollusks
Sacrificed for their tint
Cry out from the fringes,

Undone.
A shroud, she'd lied,
When asked at first,

Not guessing it would come to this:
Every day she rises
To weave herself one.