

THE WIDOW BEGINS TO EXPLAIN

They hard-sell the guilt-stricken: "Custom hairshirts!"
shout Rumpelstiltskin and his new recruit,

Penelope, waiting and flirting and longing
with pleasure and aimless intent.

He stamps his right foot to pick up
her pace, to quicken her dirges, her slow,

side-long glances, her bridled desire.
Odysseus wanders. A widow remembers.

The shroud she envisions would fit like a glove
around her own white arms, her smooth,

untouched body, the voices
of suitors, the buzzing of bees.

Once a woman lay hands on a terrible dream
and found she had entered her life:

a hollow so narrow -- the cave she was born in --
no one full-grown could escape.

This was it then: unable to draw the walls closer,
to pull her flesh tighter, to suck in

her bones, she sang open every closed
door in her memory. Lifted each window

by lifting her voice with the high C
that shattered the dust for Rapunzel,

the maiden who longed in her tower, to let down
her hair, feel her lover's sweet weight,
swinging up, hand over hand.