

PENELOPE AND HER SUITORS:
WOMEN, WAR, AND WIDOWHOOD
IN A PRE-RAPHAELITE PAINTING

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On 28 November 2001 a group of paintings by John Roddam Spencer Stanhope, of which the most important was *Penelope* (1864) (fig. 1), was offered for sale at Christie's in London. (*Penelope*, like Tate Britain's *The Winepress*--also 1864--was started at Cobham, where Stanhope had a house designed for him by Philip Webb. Both pictures date from Burne-Jones's visit to the Stanhopes there, and share the boxy composition of *The Merciful Knight*, on which Burne-Jones began work at the same time). The pictures belonged to the De Morgan Foundation, and were part of the collection of work by Stanhope, his niece Evelyn, and her husband William De Morgan that was assembled at Old Battersea House by Evelyn's sister Anna Stirling.¹ It is apparently intended that the money released by their sale will be used to create an endowment to fund the running of a De Morgan Museum and a new study centre for nineteenth-century art and society. These will clearly be welcome assets, but the pictures sold, particularly the three which had been on loan to the National Trust, and which used to hang with *Penelope* at Craggside in Northumberland, will be sadly missed by many. In the sale catalogue, John Catleugh, the Chairman of the De Morgan Foundation, expressed the opinion that it would be better if the pictures they were selling "could shine in new locations" (Christie's 13). Christie's are properly discreet about their buyers, but one would have to be optimistic indeed to imagine that many – if any of them – will have ended up in public collections. We have probably seen the last of them. As it turns out, *Penelope* did not reach its reserve and remained unsold. What is going to become of it? (As this article went to press the painting was consigned for sale again, this time at The Fine Art Society, London.)

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