

“ODYSSEUS” IN JOHN RODDAM SPENCER STANHOPE’S
PENELOPE

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In a most interesting article titled “Penelope and Her Suitors,” published in *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies* in 2002, Simon Poë examines John Roddam Spencer Stanhope’s 1864 painting *Penelope* (Poë 68-79). Poë discusses how Stanhope’s wife Lilla’s mourning for her first husband George Dawson was a major impetus to his creation of *Penelope*. I wish to show that hiding in plain sight in Stanhope’s work is an apparently overlooked detail which strongly supports Poë’s assertion. Additionally I wish to draw attention to alternative suggestions about the subject of *Penelope* put forward recently in 2021 by Natasha Bershinsky that share equal validity.

Captain George Frederick Dawson, born in Brockton, Staffordshire, on 1 June 1827, married Elizabeth “Lilla” Wyndham King (sister of Dawson’s younger sister Emily Mary’s husband) on 31 August 1854. As hostilities in eastern Europe increased, he was ordered to the Crimea where he was killed during the war. Capt. Dawson’s death is recorded in *Hardwicke’s Annual Biography for 1856, containing memoirs of celebrated characters that have died during the year 1855*:

June 7th, in the trenches before Sebastopol, aged 28, Captain George Frederick Dawson, Royal Engineers, last surviving son of the late Hon. Lionel Dawson (son of John, 1st Earl of Portarlington), by the Lady Elizabeth Emily Nugent, eldest daughter of George Frederick, 1st Earl of Westmeath. Capt. Dawson married in August, 1854, Lilla, youngest daughter of John James King, Esq., of Coates House, Sussex.¹ (Walford 147)

Dawson’s wife Lilla, however, just 19 years old, had become pregnant. Only four months after the death of her husband, Lilla had become a mother. The birth and long life of their child is recorded in *Burke’s Peerage*:

Georgina Frederica Dawson was born posthumously on 6 October 1855. She