

Arthur Hughes's "Mildewed Boy"— *Home From Sea* and *Home From a Hostile* Reception in America in 1857–8

Arthur Hughes's *HOME FROM SEA* (Fig. 1, Ashmolean Museum) was one of several important Pre-Raphaelite paintings (including John Brett's 1856 *GLACIER AT ROSEN-LAUI*, Ford Madox Brown's *AN ENGLISH AUTUMN AFTERNOON* and *KING LEAR*, and versions of Holman Hunt's *THE EVE OF ST. AGNES* and *THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD*) to travel to America in 1857–8 for a little-known exhibition of British art organized by William Michael Rossetti and Augustus Ruxton and shown in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston.¹ Recent research on this subject has brought to light many new facts about paintings in this exhibition, including critical reception to Pre-Raphaelitism by American journalists. Such investigation conveys new information about Hughes's *HOME FROM SEA*, for example, which has for some time been thought to have been repainted after 1857 and before its 1863 Royal Academy showing. While there has been some suggestion since Ironside and Gere's 1948 book *The Pre-Raphaelite Painters* that the figure of the sister was added later, proof has been mostly based on visual evidence.² This is basically drawn from physical examination of the paint surface, for scrutiny of the paint layer suggests that the sister was indeed added onto the original surface, probably between 1858 and 1862, when the canvas was signed and dated. Other evidence is found in an 1857 drawing for the work (Fig. 2, Ashmolean Museum), which is inscribed on its verso "April 1857" and which was used as part of packing papers prior to the exhibition of *HOME FROM SEA* in the June 1857 installation of Pre-Raphaelite works at Russell Place.³

In this 1857 study for the figure of the bereaved boy, the abbreviated title of *HOME FROM SEA* has been inscribed on the bottom. The rounded top (which seems to have been painted over in the oil on canvas version) was a shape made popular by John Everett Millais' *A HUGUENOT* in 1852 and thereafter found in works such as Hunt's

THE AWAKENING CONSCIENCE and *THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD* as well as in Hughes's own *OPHELIA* of 1852 and *THE EVE OF ST. AGNES* of 1856. In both the drawing and the painting the child has flung himself down on the ground and weeps bitterly; his only witnesses in the drawing are two sheep scampering in the background on a hill. There is also a bird at left on the nearby bare branches of a tree, but this disappears in the final painting. The image of the prostrate boy had been relatively popular at the time Hughes's boy was created, notably in the dead figure of Chatterton in Henry Wallis' 1856 painting of that title, as well as in Millais' 1853 drawing of *AFTER THE BATTLE*. Another precedent can be found in Holman Hunt's lower "predella" illustration for the January 1850 issue of *THE GERM* (Fig. 3, Tate Gallery) which was intended to accompany Thomas Woolner's poem entitled "My Beautiful Lady." In Hunt's etching a prostrate, bereaved male also shields his eyes and buries his head upon a mound of grass; in the background are a related backdrop of a church wall and various tombstones from the adjacent cemetery. In addition, Hughes himself reused the composition in a later drawing entitled "And I may die but the grass will grow," in which another boy leans on his arms in a similar way and, like his counterpart in *HOME FROM SEA*, lies prostrate on the grass.

For the oil painting Hughes wrote in 1901 that he had modelled the female in her mourning attire (a full black cape) on his wife, who at that time "was young enough to sit for the sister."⁴ The landscape, yew tree, and churchyard were painted in the summer of 1856 at Chingford.⁵ The following year Hughes allowed this painting to be exhibited as number 35 (under the slightly different title of *A MOTHER'S GRAVE*) at the June 1857 exhibition of "Pre-Raffaelite" paintings at Russell Place in Fitzroy Square, London. In its June 15th issue of that year, *The Critic* mentioned several works of art in that venture, including Brown's *THE LAST OF*