

THE LAST OF ENGLAND,  
THE LITERATURE OF EMIGRATION,  
AND "THE PATHOS OF THE SUBJECT"

D. M. R. Bentley

In *Ford Madox Brown: A Record of his Life and Works*, Ford M. Hueffer suggests that Brown's best-known historical painting, *The Last of England* (1852-55), had its genesis in Thomas Woolner's departure for the gold fields of Australia in July 1852. "The immediate result of Madox Brown's having accompanied Woolner as far as Gravesend was the conception of the picture of the *Last of England*," writes Hueffer, "and during the two years that followed a feeling of regret that he had not accompanied him still further to the Eldorado of the whole nation, crossed his mind frequently" (91).<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, Brown did not keep a diary in 1852, but in a retrospective account of the year written on 16 August 1854 he records that he "designed the subject of 'The Last of England'. . . about the End of Oct[obe]r [1852]" and "worked for about 6 weeks" on it "at the beginning of /53" (79-80). Subsequent diary entries indicate that the picture was largely executed between September 1854 and September 1855, when it was sold to Brown's dealer, D. T. White (see 90,153). *The Last of England* was thus conceived, designed, and executed over a period of some three years near the end of what Brown himself would later describe as "the great emigration movement" (Hueffer 100)--the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Britons to Australia and other destinations such as Canada and South Africa in the eighteen thirties, 'forties, and 'fifties. The fact that Brown himself seriously considered emigrating during the three years in which he was working on *The Last of England* naturally raises the question of whether he knew any of the manuals that were available to potential emigrants at this time and, if so, whether any of the information or perceptions present in such manuals found their way into the picture.

An indication that Brown was indeed familiar with contemporary emigration literature is provided by the analysis of the psychological effects of emigration with which he prefaces his description of *The Last of England* in the Catalogue of the 1865 exhibition of his paintings:

The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies, 5 (Fall 1996)