

REVIEWS

James Smetham: Artist, Author, Pre-Raphaelite Associate by Susan P. Casteras. Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995. ix, 193 pp. ISBN 1-85928-103-6, \$59.95 (cloth).

There are times when the view from the periphery provides a clearer--and more telling--perspective than that from the centre. Susan P. Casteras has recognized that moment in her new book *James Smetham: Artist, Author, Pre-Raphaelite Associate*. In this richly documented and lucid study Casteras has done more than restore a neglected figure to the history of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. Through recontextualization, comparative analysis, and an innovative organization Casteras takes a fresh look at the interconnections and ideas among the members of the extended Pre-Raphaelite circle.

James Smetham (1821-1889)--painter, etcher, and poet--maintained a close association with key members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Ford Madox Brown, and John Ruskin, throughout his career. Despite his high productivity (over 400 paintings, as well as etchings, book illustrations, and poetry), Smetham has been remembered less for his own work than for his comments on that of others. His letters--edited and published by his widow Sarah Smetham and his friend William Davies in 1891 and 1902, an article on "Modern Sacred Art in England" in *The London Review* of 1862, and contemporary accounts of friends and acquaintances have long been the basic sources for understanding his career. But Casteras shows us that these sources provide a limited image of Smetham as an artist and a man with opinions on art. Smetham left a wealth of personal documents; in addition to journals and sketchbooks, he recorded his thoughts in idiosyncratic forms, including squarings (miniature pictorial narratives, sometimes used to gloss a text [31]) and ventilations (the recording of random impressions, personal and religious in nature, bound into notebooks called ventilators [41-42]). Noting that "Few artists. . . have bequeathed as provocative a body of material," Casteras acknowledges that these unorthodox documents made her study "simultaneously easier and harder," but all the more "compelling" (2, 1).

This curious collection might suggest that Smetham's ideas developed in a kind of intellectual isolation. His life's narrative similarly reveals conditions and events that encourage this impression. Smetham's almost fanatical devotion to Methodist practice and ethics, his refusal to live in London, his distrust of critics, and his vision of the art world as hostile to an artist's development and very existence might have led another biographer to portray Smetham as a marginal figure, the stereotypical "outsider." It is true that Smetham suffered from a bipolar disorder (manic/depression), and his last years were spent in melancholic despair (161-67). But Casteras refuses to let that notion shape or limit the scope of her study, explaining that "although he may have viewed himself as an outcast and alien in artistic spheres, he managed to function on their perimeters" (4).