

John Holmes. “Pre-Raphaelitism, Science, and the Arts in *The Germ*.”
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John Holmes’ “Pre-Raphaelitism, Science, and the Arts in *The Germ*” takes the four printed issues of *The Germ* (1850) together as its object of study and sets out to use the journal to draw a clearer picture of the early Pre-Raphaelites’ debate around the role of science *vis-à-vis* art. Holmes begins by examining some homologies between the language used in *The Germ* to discuss the artist’s relationship with nature, and that used in early Victorian works of natural history and philosophy of science, such as John Herschel’s *A Preliminary Discourse on the Study of Natural Philosophy* (1886).

Holmes urges a reading of *The Germ* in the context of Baconian reasoning, aligning the Pre-Raphaelites’ belief in the superiority of nature with empiricism and inductive methodologies. He argues for Baconianism as “an identity” – perhaps one to which the Pre-Raphaelites subscribed when they placed Bacon, alongside Newton, on their “list of Immortals” (696) – developing his argument through readings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s review of *The Bothie of Toper-na-fuosich* (*Germ* 34-46), Frederic George Stephens’ “The Purpose and Tendency of Early Italian Art” (*Germ* 58-64), and John Lucas Tupper’s “The Subject in Art” (*Germ* 11-18). In Tupper in particular, Holmes identifies an affinity between contemporary science and artistic methods, connecting Tupper’s study of Greek sculpture with his writing on electrophysiology.

In the second section of his essay, Holmes considers how, within the pages of *The Germ*, Baconianism, as a model for doing art, remained a matter of debate rather than a decided ideology. He reads John Orchard’s “A Dialogue on Art” (*Germ* 147-67) as a response to some of the arguments set out by Stephens and William Michael Rossetti in earlier issues of the journal, addressing in particular the question of whether an attendance to facts produces moral art. Holmes argues that the juxtaposition of Orchard’s essay with an apparently late addition by Stephen of “Modern Giants” reflects debates about the role of science in art that were ongoing amongst the Pre-Raphaelites and those sympathetic to their project.

Holmes’ essay provides a nuanced understanding of the thinking of the period, both in the sciences and the humanities. He highlights how the influence of Baconian induction on scientific disciplines was on the wane at the same moment that its focus on experimentation over theory was heavily influencing the Pre-Raphaelites’ thinking through of art. Accordingly, he notes how branches of science such as chemistry, wherein Baconian thought remained more influential, found favour with writers in *The Germ*, as when Stephens praises it over geology in several essays. His argument about the affiliation between *The Germ*’s language and “a commitment to truth grounded in a scientific understanding of nature” is strongly built and persuasive (690). Taking a dedication to scientific observation as an implicit tenet of much of *The Germ*, allows him to draw together patterns across the journal’s content, although Holmes’ quotations are mostly from its criticism (both reviews and broader essays) leading us to wonder whether a close reading of its verse might complicate or bolster Holmes’ argument.

At times, Holmes suggests where one feels he might be able to lead the reader more strongly. For example, from his juxtaposition of the two pieces by Orchard and Stephens in the final issue of *The Germ*, Holmes hints, but does not quite conclude, that the Pre-Raphaelites’ individual positions were firmly fixed, and that Orchard’s piece was printed with a view to rebuttal. Notwithstanding the openness to alternative

viewpoints that is apparent in the editorial decisions that Holmes charts, his careful account of that issue's production leads us towards this interpretation, and it would be interesting to know Holmes' thoughts on that reading.

Taking as a point of departure the critical consensus about the importance of Victorian science as a context for Pre-Raphaelite art, Holmes provides an in-depth examination thereof. Accounts of *The Germ* are often partial, cherry-picking specific articles – such as “The Purpose and Tendency of Early Italian Art” – as representative, or as part of author-specific studies, but Holmes' focus on the journal as a whole provides a new level of granular insight into the discussions and debates that were creatively productive for all of the journal's contributors. In doing so, his article opens up further avenues for both Pre-Raphaelite scholars and those interested in the symbiotic relationship between scientific discourse and developments, and literature and the humanities.

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