

GERM: THOUGHTS TOWARDS NATURE IN POETRY, LITERATURE, AND ART (1850) A monthly* magazine of art and literature* launched in January 1850 by a group of artists, writers and critics associated with the Pre-Raphaelites, the *Germ* foundered after four numbers, having sold fewer than 300 copies in its entire print run. Its importance, however, should not be measured in its unprepossessing form or immediate readership*, but rather in the originality of its conception and contents and the influence it exerted over the Arts and Crafts movement and fin-de-siècle magazines that followed. Also, it has been considered as the first 'little magazine' (Hosman, Demoor).

The *Germ* was a modest magazine printed by G. F. Tupper and published* by Aylott and Jones. No number exceeded 50 pages of letterpress plus the single illustration* that acted as frontispiece and a few pages of advertisements*; the table of contents was printed on the verso of the cover sheet. The title page duplicated the pale yellow wrappers' cover design: a sonnet in black letter surrounded by a gothic border, with title and publishing information likewise printed in gothic font. The interior contents were similarly severe, with black-letter titles printed over single-column* texts on thinly calendered paper*. Its price* of 1s may have seemed unreasonably high to the common reader, and the periodical was a commercial failure, with the loss principally borne by the printer. But this was no common periodical: rather than a wood-engraver's* interpretation of an artist's design, the *Germ* offered original artists' etchings; 50 copies of the first number printed the etching on India paper. In a material instance of the Pre-Raphaelite emphasis on the sister arts, each original etching was connected to the leading poem* of the issue.

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GIFFORD, WILLIAM (1756-1826)



Figure 23: The cover page of the first issue of the *Germ*, Jan. 1850.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti initiated the idea of a monthly magazine of art and literature and the venture was supported by most of the initial Pre-Raphaelite circle. William Michael Rossetti, who went on to become the regular art critic of the *Spectator* later that year, was the *Germ's* editor*; he also contributed the sonnet for each cover. After the first number the anonymity* policy was relaxed and all contributions were signed, although some under pseudonyms. Christina Rossetti, the only female contributor to the magazine, published her poetry* under the name 'Ellen Alleyn', and Frederick George Stephens published his essays on art variously as 'John Seward' and 'Laura Savage'. A new title of the magazine – *Art and Poetry* – was introduced in its third number; it clarifies the focus of the magazine on poetry and visual art, while the subtitle – *Being Thoughts towards Nature Conducted Principally by Artists* – underscores its unique managerial approach, as it was 'conducted principally by artists'. The *Germ* thus unites the collaborative

aesthetic of the early Pre-Raphaelites with a nascent Arts and Crafts emphasis on the artist-practitioner.

Although Robert Buchanan called the *Germ* 'an unwholesome periodical' in his vitriolic 'The Fleshly School of Poetry', its contents were in fact conducted on an elevated plane. The dominant concerns of its prose contributions include art's moral purpose, the connection between medieval religious painting and contemporary artistic practice, and the importance of truth to nature in representation. Poetry was central to the magazine in both literary reviews and original contributions. Romances of love and death, celebrations of the natural world and imagined scenes from the medieval or Shakespearean past are the characteristic topoi of the *Germ's* poetry. Of the four etchings, two (by Ford Madox Brown and Walter Deverell) illustrate scenes from Shakespeare, one (by James Collinson) takes the Child Jesus as its subject and one (by William Holman Hunt*) represents a medieval diptych of love and loss.

The influence of the *Germ* on later periodicals of art and literature was profound. The lead artists of Pre-Raphaelitism's second phase, William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, launched the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* in deliberate imitation. The first magazine of art and literature to emerge out of the Arts and Crafts movement, the *Century Guild Hobby Horse**, likewise took its inspiration from the early example of the *Germ*. Fin-de-siècle magazines like the *Dial**, the *Yellow Book**, the *Savoy**, the *Quarto*, the *Evergreen*, the *Pageant** and the *Dome** owe their late flowering to the seed planted by the *Germ*. LJK/TT

Sources: Buchanan 1871, Demoor 2008, Fredeman 1972, Hosman 1970, Hunt 1913, Noble 1882, Radford 1898, Rose 1992, Rossetti 1975, Rossetti 1992, Rossetti Archive online.

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