

SAINT PAUL, WORDSWORTH, AND ROSSETTI'S "WORLD'S WORTH"

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The critic who approaches "World's Worth" must do so without the benefit of a critical corpus on the poem. Unlike many of Rossetti's poems, this one has received very little critical attention; we can read entire books devoted to a poem-by-poem analysis of Rossetti's output (Cooper, Howard, Johnston, Rees, Riede, and others) without finding any analysis or even a mention of "World's Worth" or its earlier version, "Pax Vobis." One can only speculate on the reason why. Perhaps the poem is seen as insignificant or obvious. Certainly, it is not typical Rossetti: it depicts a priest who is struggling to rekindle his waning faith. There are no blessed damozels, no sirens, none of the usual Rossetti imagery. The critics have thought best to pass it by and go on to other matters. A very recent exception is Ernest Fontana, who devotes a single paragraph to the poem, seeing it as "an apparently complete, but in fact truncated narrative that does not place, evaluate, or interpret the vividly rendered phenomenological experience it presents" (9). The poem is thus seen as a fragment whose purpose is to capture the sense of vertigo.

In this essay, I would like to argue that "World's Worth" rewards in-depth analysis, for the church Father Hilary moves in is symbolic and is his own body. Saint Paul asserts in the New Testament: "For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, *ye are* God's building.... Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the spirit of God dwelleth within you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are" (I Corinthians 3.9 and 16-17). In "World's Worth" Rossetti dramatizes Saint Paul's assertion. He focuses on a priest and treats his body as a temple of God. The poem is short enough to quote in its entirety:

'Tis of the Father Hilary.
He strove, but could not pray; so took
The steep-coiled stair, where his feet snook
A sad blind echo. Ever up
He toiled. 'Twas a sick sway of air
That autumn noon within the stair,
As dizzy as a turning cup.

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