NOTES AND REVIEWS

THE NARRATOR OF D. G. ROSSETTI'S "TROY TOWN"

After his brief and disastrous love affair with Jane Morris in the late 1860s, Rossetti's attitude toward sexual love became negative and the figure of the siren came gradually to replace that of the heavenly lady in his poetry and painting.[1] "Troy Town,"[2] written in 1869, is an early example of this new attitude: the destruction of Troy is dramatically presented by Rossetti as the direct consequence of the lust of Helen and Paris. The poem, however, is full of complexities and subtle ironies, and these revolve mainly around the figure of the narrator, whose mysterious identity is crucial to a full understanding of the poem.

The speaker of "Troy Town" is evidently a person who has been much shaken by the destruction of the Trojan city. He speaks in two voices. One is a calm, balanced voice that recounts Helen's love for Paris and how she obtained him after praying to Venus. The second is a shocked, emotional voice that interjects itself frequently to lament the fall of Troy and to plunge the reader into the very heart of the city's tragedy, removing all distance between him and the terrible event. Most readers would agree that the two voices belong to the same person.[3] The speaker tries to relate a tale in an objective voice, but when his feelings overwhelm him, he shifts to a very emotional, subjective voice.

Yet the problem of the speaker of "Troy Town" is much more complicated than that, for he is an unreliable narrator. In Greek mythology, Paris awarded the "apple of discord" to Venus after she promised to give him the most beautiful woman alive. As a result, Venus helped him to seduce Helen, which led the Greeks to launch the Trojan war.

The speaker of "Troy Town," however, relates the tale differently, and not from ignorance, since he seems quite aware of the true version. Helen says, addressing Venus:

> "Each twin breast is an apple sweet,
> (O Troy Town!)
> Once an apple stirred the beat
> Of thy heart with the heart's desire: --
> Say, who brought it then to thy feet?
> (O Troy's down,
> Tall Troy's on fire!)