

1993

The Intertextual Cresseida: Chaucer's Henryson or Henryson's Chaucer?

Melvin Storm

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl>

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Storm, Melvin (1993) "The Intertextual Cresseida: Chaucer's Henryson or Henryson's Chaucer?," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 28: Iss. 1.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol28/iss1/10>

This Article is brought to you by the Scottish Literature Collections at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Studies in Scottish Literature by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact dillarda@mailbox.sc.edu.

Melvin Storm

The Intertextual Cresseida: Chaucer's Henryson or Henryson's Chaucer?

Perhaps it is because rewards and punishments are so capriciously distributed in everyday life that readers sometimes seek in literature a more equitable apportioning of justice. In a fiction, after all, subject to the controlling hand of its creator, ends can be made appropriate to their beginnings. The fortunes of Criseyde among the critics provide a good case in point. As she made her way through literature different authors shaped her in different ways, the only truly common ground among her various permutations being the incontrovertible fact of her leaving the smitten Troilus for Diomedes. No such common ground, however, is to be found among authorial assessments of the act itself or among depictions of its narrative consequences for her. Judgment of her action is not always so explicitly expressed as in, say, Benoît de Sainte-Maure and Guido della Colonna, and even in Benoît's seminal, largely pejorative treatment Briseida's complexity of characterization is such as to render possible, though not to ensure, a degree of sympathy of response.¹ When the situation is more ambiguous, as in Chaucer and Henryson, critics have long shown themselves readily inclined to pick up where

¹For Benoît's treatment see *Le Roman de Troie par Benoît de Sainte-Maure publié d'après tous les manuscrits connus*, ed. Léopold Constans, 6 vols. (Paris, 1904-12), esp. II, 258-328; III, 1-16 and 288-95; Guido della Colonna develops Briseida's character and story in books eight, nineteen, twenty, and twenty-six of the *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, ed. Nathaniel Edward Griffin (Cambridge, MA, 1936). For a thorough survey of the tradition see Gretchen Mieszkowski. "The Reputation of Criseyde: 1155-1500," *Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 43 (1971), 73-153.

the authors left off and extrapolate from the uncertain textual evidence a more direct statement; strenuous asseverations both of guilt and of innocence comprise a substantial amount of the critical commentary addressed to Troilus' and Diomedes' lover. I will not attempt here to review the critical tradition in detail, other than to note that, if one compares the earlier part of this century with the later, the trend has been largely ameliorative. C. S. Lewis wrote of Chaucer's heroine, in 1936, "There have always been those who dislike her; and as more and more women take up the study of English literature she is likely to find ever less mercy."² Criseyde, both in her own Chaucerian person and in her Henrysonian manifestation, has in fact found considerable mercy, not least—although certainly not exclusively—at the hands of women.³

Robert Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* has had, with respect to its heroine, as varied a history, if not so voluminous a one, as Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. The textbook truism that Henryson visited upon Chaucer's erring but engaging figure a fate well-deserved—syphilis or, most likely, leprosy as the harlot's comeuppance—has given way, in recent years, to a more amiable series of attempts at a positive reading. Much of the criticism of the

²C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (New York, 1958), p. 182.

³Critical responses to Henryson's heroine, more manageable than the massive body devoted to Chaucer's, may be illustrative. Sympathetic readings of Cresseid's character take numerous forms, some critics arguing flatly that she dies purified, others that she undergoes spiritual growth at the very least, whether or not adequate for her salvation, others that she receives punishment disproportionate to her guilt. A representative but by no means exhaustive list of studies sympathetic in one degree or another would include E. M. W. Tillyard, "Henryson: The Testament of Cresseid 1470?" in *Five Poems 1470-1870: An Elementary Essay on the Background of English Literature* (London, 1948), pp. 17-8; Mairi Ann Cullen, "Cresseid Excused: A Re-reading of Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*," *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 20 (1985), 137-59; A. M. Kinghorn, "The Mediaeval Makars," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 1 (1959-60), 73-88; Robert L. Kindrick, "The Testament of Cresseid," Chapter 4 in *Robert Henryson* (Boston, 1979), pp. 118-48; Jennifer Strauss, "To Speak Once More of Cresseid: Henryson's *Testament* Re-considered," *Scottish Literary Journal*, 4 (1977), 5-13; Craig McDonald, "Venus and the Goddess Fortune in *The Testament of Cresseid*," *Scottish Literary Journal*, 4 (1977), 14-24; Edwin D. Craun, "Blaspheming Her 'Awin God': Cresseid's 'Lamentatioun' in Henryson's *Testament*," *Studies in Philology*, 82 (1985), 25-41; Peter Godman, "Henryson's Masterpiece," *Review of English Studies*, 35 (1984), 291-300; Mieszkowski, "The Reputation of Criseyde," cited above; A. C. Spearing, "The Testament of Cresseid and the 'High Concise Style,'" *Speculum*, 37 (1962), 208-25; Douglas Duncan, "Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*," *Essays in Criticism*, 2 (1961), 128-35; and Nikki Stiller, "Robert Henryson's Cresseid and Sexual Backlash," *Literature and Psychology*, 31.1 (1981), 88-95.

Testament of Cresseid has focused on the question of redemption, on the spiritual state of the heroine at the poem's conclusion. The link between the *Testament* and *Troilus and Criseyde* has been surely influential in encouraging this trend. *Troilus and Criseyde* itself ends with considerations—however inconclusive—of the progress of Troilus' soul, and, with regard to Criseyde herself, the nature of her actions, never fully judged by the narrator in Chaucer, provides a background of considerable depth and suggestiveness for the Henryson heroine. Chaucer leaves her unjudged by the narrator and unpunished by events, her fate, so to speak, almost a loose end. Look to other authors, he says, for judgment: "Ye may hire gilt in other bokes se. . . ." (5.1776).⁴ Of her subsequent fate he tells us nothing at all; after a final letter to Troilus she simply vanishes, like Lear's Fool, from the narrative. It is undeniably tempting to seek in Henryson the tying up of that loose end, whether in positive or in negative terms.

Critical exploration of the possibility of redemptive elements in Henryson's depiction of Cresseid has been paralleled by similar scrutiny of Chaucer's Troilus, for while Chaucer is silent regarding his heroine's end, he is at best ambiguous regarding his hero. Although Troilus' earthly fate is clearly enough delineated in Chaucer's narrative, the fate of his soul—and by extension its spiritual condition—is left in doubt. Sympathetic readers, to be sure, have not hesitated to give a highly positive reading to such evidence as the poem provides about Troilus' ultimate state and fate,⁵ yet there is no indication in Chaucer's description of Troilus' passage through the spheres and his laughing vision of "this litel spot of erthe" (5.1815) from the eighth sphere that he will stay in so exalted a position. In fact, the degree of exaltation itself at that point is unclear, scholars differing on whether Chaucer is counting outward toward the sphere of the fixed stars or inward toward the

⁴Chaucer citations follow *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston, 1987).

⁵T. A. Kirby, for example, representative of those who have found Troilus to be ennobled through his love for Criseyde, argues that his love so ennobles him, in fact, that it finally brings him to heaven (*Chaucer's Troilus: A Study in Courtly Love* [Gloucester, MA, 1958], pp. 246-84, esp. 282-83). Nicholas Rowe similarly argues that through his love Troilus' heart is directed toward heaven (*O Love O Charite! Contraries Harmonized in Chaucer's Troilus* [Carbondale, IL, 1976]. See esp. pp. 132-7 and 149). With regard to the spiritually ennobling effect of Troilus' love, see also Alfred David, *The Strumpet Muse: Art and Morals in Chaucer's Poetry* (Bloomington, IN, 1976), pp. 31-6, and T. P. Dunning, "God and Man in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *English and Medieval Studies Presented to J. R. R. Tolkien on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Norman Davis and C. L. Wrenn (London, 1962), pp. 164-82.

lunar.⁶ Wherever Troilus is, the fact that he is to be placed in some indeterminate elsewhere is clearly indicated in Chaucer's otherwise ambiguous comment that Troilus' soul finally makes its way "ther as Mercurye sorted hym to dwelle" (5.1827). If explicit authorial judgment be sought, Chaucer, here as in so many other works, is loath to oblige.

Taken individually, at least, Henryson, who ignores the fate of Troilus, is inconclusive with regard to that of Cresseid, and Chaucer, who ignores the fate of Criseyde, is inconclusive with regard to that of Troilus. In consequence, the critics who have striven to deduce less ambiguous determinations from the poems have often had to resort to notably subtle interpretive strategies or to seek support in extra-textual scholarly lore. In the case of Henryson a prominent example of the latter would be the exploitation of the tradition wherein leprosy, so important in the *Testament*, carries connotations of judgment (it is a punishment in the poem) and purgation. Positive readings predominate in this line of analysis, Cresseid's illness being seen as instrumental in her achievement of moral salvation. In the introduction to his edition of Henryson's works, Fox argues that Cresseid in her leprosy undergoes a "quasi-death,"⁷ supporting this contention by citing a medieval view of the leper as already dead and by adducing from Cresseid's remarks about joining the company of Diana's maidens that she thinks she has "emerged from her purgatory" (p. xci). Fox discusses at some length the medieval tradition that saw leprosy as a purifying suffering (pp. lxxvii-lxxxix). Cullen finds Cresseid's leprosy redemptive in the sense that it teaches her patience and spiritual maturity.⁸

Such studies are representative of those that draw upon materials outside the text to develop a more conclusive reading than the text in itself unequivocally supports. To the same end, I would suggest a somewhat amended approach, one that involves a reading based upon material drawn from no further afield than the primary texts of Henryson and Chaucer themselves. I propose, that is, the usefulness of reading the texts together, treating them, in a sense, as if they were the unified work, the latter Chaucer's own continuation of his poem, that readers as late as the nineteenth century thought them to be. This, to be sure, will be of little use with Chaucer's Troilus, at least as far as authorial intention is concerned, but viewing Henryson's poem in

⁶See, for example, John H. Fisher, ed., *The Complete Poetry and Prose of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1989), p. 539n.

⁷Denton Fox, ed., *The Poems of Robert Henryson* (Oxford, 1981), p. xc; subsequent references to *The Testament of Cresseid* will follow this edition.

⁸"Cresseid Excused," pp. 156-7.

relation to the earlier Chaucerian work from which it consciously takes its beginning can be of considerable help with regard to the Scottish poet's heroine.⁹ It is with that heroine and with what simultaneous examination of the poems reveals about her that I am primarily concerned here, although I will have occasion to speculate peripherally about the significance of Henryson's narrative to the final view of Troilus as well.

The peculiarly intricate structure of the *Testament of Cresseid* involves an elaborate, linked chain of causes and effects, with the first link in *Troilus and Criseyde* itself. Analysis of the chain, as it stretches from the earlier poem to the later, can provide useful evidence for evaluating the character of Cresseid in Henryson and offer at least an indication of Henryson's reading of Chaucer's own heroine. To explore the two poems in this manner is to read them as an extended sequence in which antecedent elements in Chaucer's narrative are given richer significance through the fruit they bear in Henryson. That is, consequences are extended beyond the boundaries of a single work, and closure opens into narrative impetus.

The sequence that overlaps the two narratives consists of an interwoven series of two transgressions, two punishments, and two recognitions. Relationships among the elements are complex: transgression, as would be expected, leads to punishment, but punishment also leads in turn to transgression, and both lead to recognition. It is in hard-won recognition and subsequent penitence that, as I will argue, Henryson finally brings Cresseid's (and Criseyde's) spiritual state to a kind of resolution. Still, while he may be informative about Cresseid's inward spiritual state, Henryson is as ambiguous regarding her spiritual *reward* as was Chaucer regarding that of Troilus. Perhaps the momentum of impelling links, beginning in Chaucer and accelerating through Henryson, finally drives the imagination beyond the bounds of Henryson's own poem and presents the possibility of consequences not realized even in his own continuation of Chaucer's work. Henryson, it may be, offers to us not absolute conclusion but rather echoing supplement, denying his own poem the very closure that he offered Chaucer's original.

The narrative moments at issue are familiar to all readers of the two poems, but because of the importance of emphasizing their relationships it may be useful briefly to sketch them here. In the fifth book of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Criseyde, to the reluctant chagrin of the narrator and to the gradu-

⁹I would like to credit Patricia P. Buckler's paper, for which I served as respondent, "Sinner and Saint: Henryson's Cresseid as Conclusion, Counterpoint, and Transformation of Chaucer's Criseyde," presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Modern Language Association in Columbus, Ohio, in 1987, for first suggesting to me the potential value of reading the two poems from the point of view of their connections. A grant from the Emporia State University Research and Creativity Committee assisted in the completion of this study.

ally illuminated dismay of the protagonist, succumbs to the seductive overtures of Diomedes. The narrator is gentle in revelation. He recounts her decision to remain in the Greek camp—evidently on the second day of Diomedes's wooing—, he recounts her gifts to Diomedes (a bay horse, a brooch that had once belonged to Troilus, and a pennon made of her sleeve). Finally, reluctantly, he concedes, even while holding personally aloof from the admission, "Men seyn—I not—that she yaf hym hire herte" (5.1050). Chaucer's narrator does not judge her explicitly, but, rather, seeks such justification as may be found for excusing her:

Ne me ne list this sely womman chyde
 Forther than the storye wol devyse.
 Hire name, allas, is publysshed so wide
 That for hire gilt it oughte ynough suffise.
 And if I myghte excuse hire any wise,
 For she so sory was for hire untrouthe,
 Iwis, I wolde excuse hire yet for routhe. (5.1093-9)

She is condemned, in fact, only in the words of Pandarus (5.1730-43). It is not surprising that the narrator leaves to another the condemnatory language. His position toward Criseyde throughout the poem is highly sympathetic, anticipating the stance that Henryson's own narrator will take. The story that Chaucer's narrator tells, however, inevitably undercuts the credulous, optimistic expectations of a speaker who identifies himself as one "that God of Loves servantz serve[s]" (1.15). Criseyde herself is readier than is the narrator to admit the difficulties of the situation, but as regards personal guilt she keeps her analysis firmly within bounds. Nevertheless, the nature of her reflections prepares the way for Henryson's continuation. Criseyde pointedly looks to the future, a future that, with the exception of Pandarus' excoriation and one brief but still sympathetic comment by the narrator, is neither realized nor even suggested in the remainder of the work:

She seyde, "Allas, for now is clene ago
 My name of trouthe in love, for everemo!
 For I have falsed oon the gentileste
 That evere was, and oon the worthieste!

"Allas, of me, unto the wordes ende,
 Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge
 No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende.
 O, rolled shal I ben on many a tonge!
 Thoroughout the world my belle shal be ronge!" (5.1054-62)

Her own expression of regret reflects chagrin at the calumny her name will inevitably suffer, what others will later say of her, rather than concern at the

nature of the act itself. And all this ill fame is to come, she says, implying its unfairness, even though she is "nat the first that dide amys . . ." (5.1067). Still, in looking toward the future she herself effectively sets the challenge that Henryson is to take up, for, however limited may be Criseyde's perception and admission here of personal wrong, she nevertheless introduces the theme of retribution. Thus the first transgression in the linked series of transgressions, punishments, and recognitions appears in Chaucer's narrative. The narrator himself speaks here only of fulfillment of the threat to her reputation: "Hire name, allas, is publysshed so wide / That for hire gilt it oughte ynough suffice" (5.1095-6). More severe punishment must await the *Testament of Cresseid*, which resumes, so to speak, Chaucer's story where the former leaves off and which develops the theme Criseyde has introduced.

As *Troilus and Criseyde* concludes, Troilus suffers. Of Criseyde the reader knows nothing. The *Testament of Cresseid*, which is set within the narrative time frame of *Troilus and Criseyde*—it takes place before the death of Troilus and might with some justice be viewed as an interpolation between lines 1804 and 1805 of Book Five of Chaucer's poem—opens with Troilus' suffering, thus establishing an overlapping chronological link. The narrator introduces the story by recounting his reading in Chaucer "How Troilus neir out of wit abraid, / And weipit soir with visage pail of hew . . ." (ll. 45-6). But sauce for Troilus is sauce for Cresseid as well, and immediately following the summary of Troilus' travails Henryson juxtaposes the information that Cresseid has been, as was Troilus by her, falsed by Diomedes and, moreover, "excludit fra his companie" (l. 75). This is the first of the punishments. Although the narrator, preserving as indulgent an attitude toward Cresseid as had Chaucer before him, suggests neither cause and effect nor just retribution, the immediacy of the juxtaposition tacitly indicates the appropriateness of her fate. Cresseid's subsequent actions are ambiguously narrated and have been variously interpreted. "Than desolait scho walkit vp and down," says the narrator, "And sum men sayis, into the court, common" (ll. 76-7). There is no general agreement among scholars whether this latter statement indicates that she, as some argue, became a prostitute. The following stanza, while by no means complimentary with regard to Cresseid's actions, is itself ambiguous. Does it refer to her doings in "the court" or does it merely refer to her relationship with Diomedes?

O fair Cresseid, the flour and A per se
Of Troy and Grece, how was thow fortunait
To change in filth all thy feminitie,
And be with fleschelic lust sa maculait,
And go amang the Greikis air and lait,
So giglotlike takand thy foull plesance! (ll. 78-83)

While the lines may hint at promiscuity, they specifically indicate only unchastity, and further illumination is to be found nowhere in the poem. But whatever the lines suggest, whether reference to activities with or activities following Diomedes, immediately thereafter Henryson's narrative tells us that Cresseid goes to her father's "mansioun," where she explains her desolate state to him:

Fra Diomeid had gottin his desyre
He wox werie and wald of me no moir. (*ll.* 101-102)

One may note that there is here no reference to intervening activities—although a daughter might be expected to be less than candid if indeed her activities were those suggested by the more negative readers of the passage with the ambiguous phrase, "court, commoun". The most significant omission at this point, however, is in Cresseid's disinclination to express any sense of guilt or personal wrong. She has lost, it seems, even such self-awareness as she had shown when expressing fear for her reputation in Book Five of *Troilus and Criseyde*. While the narrator himself refuses to suggest explicitly any appropriateness in Cresseid's present fate, he at least reflects, in his choice of language (esp. *ll.* 80-83), recognition of a degree of culpability. Cresseid avoids even that, and in the subsequent passage in the temple, in which she repudiates the gods, there is no indication that she in any way perceives herself to be blameworthy. One is reminded of Troilus' own reluctance in *Troilus and Criseyde*—reflected most notably in his soliloquy on predestination in Book Four (4.958-1078) but exemplified variously elsewhere as well—to admit responsibility either for his actions or for their consequences.

Cresseid's speech in the temple of Venus and Cupid, where her father is priest, is singularly significant: it is simultaneously a perpetuation of her refusal to admit personal responsibility and a demonstration of her inability to recognize the prerogative of the gods to withdraw the gifts they themselves have given. It is, thus, a speech both self-serving and presumptuous. Lamenting that ever she made sacrifice to them, Cresseid recalls both their gift and its loss:

Je gaue me anis ane deuine responsaill
That I suld be the flour of luif in Troy;
Now am I maid ane vnworthie outwaill,
And all in cair translatit is my ioy. (*ll.* 127-30)

As Cresseid continues her lament she imputes to the gods tacit blame not only for her exclusion from Diomedes, but, remarkably, for her exclusion from Troilus as well:

Quha sall me gyde? Quha sall me now conuoy,
Sen I fra Diomeid and nobill Troylus
Am clene excludit, as abiect odious? (*ll.* 131-3)

Attribution to the gods of the loss of Diomedes's company is appropriate enough, but it is questionable whether Criseyde recognizes the retributive aspect implied by the narrator in the juxtaposition of her exclusion with the recital of Troilus' sorrows. At the least, Cresseid's loss exemplifies aptly enough the changefulness of love that will be embodied in the iconographic description of Venus soon to follow. But it is both senseless and self-indulgent for Cresseid to lament, whether blaming the gods or not, the exclusion from Troilus for which she is solely responsible. Finally, as her speech draws to a close, Cresseid once again acknowledges—without gratitude for the gift but with resentment at its loss—the gods' generosity:

Je causit me always vnderstand and trow
The seid of lufe was sawin in my face,
And ay grew grene throw your supplie and grace. (*ll.* 136-8)

Cresseid has now committed her second transgression—this one inspired by her first punishment—and her speech of repudiation leaves her, it would seem, doubly in the wrong. It reveals her lack of perceptivity and wisdom, both with regard to personal responsibility and with regard to her place in the cosmic scheme as represented by the gods. It indicates also that she has not yet begun the process of learning that is about to ensue. Henryson has, by this point in the poem, initiated a scheme of linked actions and consequences. The recognitions that will be woven into the chain have yet to begin.

Her speech concluded, Cresseid falls into a vision: "[D]oun in ane extasie, / Rauischit in spreit, intill ane dreame scho fell . . ." (*ll.* 141-2). The planetary gods appear in iconographic pageant, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Phoebus, Venus, Mercury, and the moon, Cynthia. With them is Cupid, whose speech accusing Cresseid of blasphemy clearly defines the double wrong already adumbrated in her words of repudiation. She has blasphemed, he says. More to the point, she has attempted to transfer blame for her own actions:

Thus hir leuing vnclene and lecherous
Scho wald retorte in me and my mother,
To quhome I schew my grace abone all vther. (*ll.* 285-7)

The syntax of the final line is ambiguous, but the use of the preterit form, "schew," indicates the antecedent of "quhome" to be "Scho," that is, Cres-

seid, rather than "my mother," Venus.¹⁰ Thus Cupid's speech reiterates the past generosity of the gods to Cresseid, a point emphasized earlier in his accusation when he speaks of "þone wretchit Cresseid, / The quhilk *throw me* was sum tyme flour of lufe . . ." (*ll.* 278-9), emphasis added). To evasion of personal responsibility and presumptuous disregard of the gods' prerogatives—what they give they can take away—must be added, it would seem, ingratitude as well.

While there is no need here to examine the overall iconography of the pageant of the gods, the figure of Venus deserves at least brief attention. She is, significantly, given three full stanzas, the longest description of all (*ll.* 218-38). (The third stanza in the description of Phoebus is devoted solely to his horses.) At the heart of the description of Venus is the theme of doubleness. She is clad parti-colored, half in green and half in black, her face showing sometimes perfect truth, sometimes inconstancy. "Vnder smyling scho was dissimulait" (*l.* 225), and her provocative, amorous looks change suddenly to anger, while one eye laughs and the other weeps. The imagery is thoroughly traditional, as is the narrator's interpretation of its significance:

In taikning that all fleschelic paramour,
 Quhilk Venus hes in reull and gouernance,
 Is sum tyme sweet, sum tyme bitter and sour,
 Richt vnstabill and full of variance. . . . (*ll.* 232-5)

The details are those that Henryson's audience would know well, and the interpretive commentary would hardly surprise them. It is not unlikely that Henryson emphasizes the familiar at such length because of its multiple relevance to Cresseid and her state. The traditional image of Venus is cautionary, and to accept her gifts, as did Cresseid (and Troilus before her), is to risk their withdrawal. The wise anticipate her fickle nature. But, further, the fickleness of the image of Venus is image of Cresseid herself. As Venus, in her negative aspect, is to lovers, so was Cresseid to Troilus—and so was, in turn, Diomedes to Cresseid. The passage is thus suggestive both of Cresseid herself and her actions and of the wisdom that she has yet to learn.

But Cresseid is about to begin learning, to become progressively enlightened, her new insights adding links among the elements of the chain that Henryson has stretched from *Troilus and Criseyde* into the structure of his own poem. The pageant of the gods concluding, Saturn and Cynthia are chosen to pronounce sentence. Their doom is unquestionably harsh, that of Saturn so doleful as to provoke the sympathetic narrator's dismay: "O cruell

¹⁰Fox, p. 365n.

Saturne, fraward and angrie, / Hard is thy dome and to malitious!" (ll. 323-4). Nor is there comfort in Cynthia's continuation of the judgment. Cresseid loses all. She is bereft of wealth, station, her beauty in its many aspects, and her health, the totality of her loss subsumed within the encompassing bounds of her disease:

Quhair thow cummis, ilk man sall fle the place.
This sall thow go begging fra hous to hous
With cop and clapper lyke ane lazarous. (ll. 341-43)

This is the second punishment.

Hard doom indeed, a dreadful physic for a spiritual affliction, but inwardly Cresseid is about to turn, for she awakens from her vision into her first recognition, a recognition pertaining to her second transgression. For the first time she perceives, under the tutelage of her vision, the causal relationship between a wrong and its consequences. "My blaspheming now haue I bocht full deir," she says, her use of the active construction in the next line witnessing clearly her own agency in bringing about her fate: "All eirdlie ioy and mirth I *set* areir" (ll. 354-5, emphasis added). No longer concentrating solely upon her punishment, Cresseid now is ready to acknowledge cause, a development reiterated in the narrator's characterization of her subsequent interview with her father, in which she recounts what had happened:

[S]cho can all expone,
As I haue tauld, the vengeance and the wraik
For her *trespas* Cupide on hir culd tak.
(ll. 369-71, emphasis added)

But Cresseid has still further to go. The chain of transgressions and punishments has only begun to incorporate recognitions. At this point, in sum, in the linked sequence that began in Chaucer, Cresseid has transgressed against Troilus and found herself punished with like treatment by Diomed. Rejection by Diomed precipitating her blasphemy against the gods, she has been punished in turn by leprosy for that second transgression. Now, for the first time able to acknowledge personal responsibility, she recognizes her culpability and the justice of that latter punishment. But the first wrong, her offense against Troilus—the offense that initiated the entire sequence—she has yet to recognize in the context of Henryson's poem. The causal chain, nevertheless, is beginning to reveal itself. The punishment visited upon her for the second wrong will provide the opportunity for her to recognize, to admit, and to feel penitent for the first, for it is only because of her punishing leprosy that she ultimately meets Troilus in the poem's final, crucial scene.

Stricken now with her disease, Cresseid speaks a lengthy lament, "The Complaint of Cresseid" (ll. 407-69), mourning her loss and presenting herself as cautionary example for other "ladyis fair of Troy and Grece" (l. 452). Her complaint is truly elegiac, infused with such familiar topoi as a lengthy *ubi sunt* sequence (ll. 416-33) and reflections on mutability and the fickleness of fortune (ll. 461-9). Were it couched in alliterative verse her lament would seem not out of place in an Anglo-Saxon elegy. Unlike the earlier Cresseid, the Cresseid here, while clearly not welcoming her new state, makes no attempt to argue its unfairness. Whereas in Chaucer she feared for what others, especially women, would come to think of her, she now *invites* that scrutiny of her condition: "[I]n your mynd ane mirroure mak of me. . . ." (l. 457). The tone of the complaint is one of resignation, and the philosophical reflections drawn from the situation, while conventional, bespeak a wisdom Cresseid has not displayed before.

Following her complaint, Cresseid takes a still further step into wisdom, a step that proves instrumental in enabling the climactic meeting with Troilus to take place. A "lipper lady," hearing her complaint, advises that she leave fruitless mourning, become one with her fellows sufferers, and accept their company and their ways:

I counsall the mak vertew of ane neid;
Go leir to clap thy clapper to and fro,
And leif efter the law of lipper leid. (ll. 478-80)

This Cresseid does: "Thair was na buit, bot furth with thame scho zeid / Fra place to place . . ." (ll. 481-2). Thus, significantly, because of this very resignation and the learning of a new, albeit harsh, wisdom, she is among the lepers later when Troilus, having taken pity on then, goes to the place where they—and Cresseid—are.

The narrative suggests that the meeting takes place soon after Cresseid becomes a beggar, the opening phrase of the stanza that brings them together implying, in fact, simultaneity:

*That samin tyme, of Troy the garnisoun,
Quhilk had to chiftane worthie Troylus,
Throw ieopardie of weir had strikken doun
Knichtis of Grece in number meruellous;
With greit tryumphe and laude victorious
Agane to Troy richt royallie thay raid
The way quhair Cresseid with the lipper baid.*
(ll. 484-90, emphasis added)

Their meeting is perforce a dramatic moment in the poem, even though, remarkably, neither recognizes the other. Although Troilus fails to recognize

the grotesquely disfigured beggar before him, he does, indeed, find something familiar in her face that brings to his mind the image of the Cresseid he once knew, with the result that "Ane spark of lufe than till his hart culd spring / And kendlit all his bodie in ane fyre" (ll. 512-3). Henryson has, in fact, prepared us for this partial recognition by noting that, when Criseyde first joined the lepers, "[s]um knew hir weill," and the others, although her illness disguised her, could perceive nevertheless that she was of noble birth (ll. 393-9). Moved by this memory, he gives, "For knichtlie pietie and memoriall / Of fair Cresseid" (ll. 519-20), a rich gift, which he throws into the lap of the unrecognized beggar and rides silently away.

Rather more remarkable, though, than that Troilus should fail to recognize Cresseid is that she should fail to recognize him. Cresseid, after all, even following her affliction, has adequate eyesight to view her disfigurement in a mirror (ll. 347-50) and later still to write out, so the text implies, her own will (ll. 575-6). Numerous arguments have been adduced to account for her lack of recognition, but whether it is logically and realistically justifiable or not, what is important is its *thematic* appropriateness. Because Cresseid fails to recognize the living presence of Troilus, her recognition of the wrong done to him in the past and of her personal responsibility for it, once she is informed of the generous knight's identity, is made all the more emphatic by contrast. Here the chain of interlaced transgressions and punishments and penitential recognitions finally receives its completing link, one that rounds out the circle by returning Cresseid's moral attention to the opening of the sequence. The Cresseid who speaks the series of stanzas each with the burden, "O fals Cresseid and trew knicht Troilus!" (ll. 540-60), is far removed from the Cresseid of the poem's beginning. These stanzas and the accompanying ones that constitute her final speech are rich with recognitions and admissions, and, most importantly, show Cresseid finally coming to terms with the treatment of Troilus in the Chaucerian episode that initially gave impetus, linked from one poem to the next, to Henryson's narrative chain.

Cresseid recognizes, as the refrain itself indicates, the injustice of her response to Troilus's faithfulness: "Thy lufe, thy lawtie, and thy gentilnes / I countit small in my prosperitie, / Sa efflated I was in wantones . . ." (ll. 547-9). She recognizes, as before, the capriciousness of fortune, but now is able to see that same fickleness in herself:

[I] clam vpon the fickill quheill sa hie.
All faith and lufe I promissit to the
Was in the self fickill and friuolous. . . . (ll. 550-52)

This passage illuminates an earlier one. Because the iconographic portrait of Venus in the pageant of the gods included like elements, one is reminded of

the implicit venereal implications for Cresseid in the depiction of fickle Venus herself. Cresseid, continuing her self-condemnation, excoriates her own passions ("My mynd in fleschelic foull affectioun / Was inclynit to lustis lecherous . . ." [ll. 558-9]), contrasting them with the ennobling effect that love of her had on Troilus. Finally, offering herself, as she had before, as object lesson to lovers, she draws the crucial parallel between Diomedes's treatment of her and her treatment of Troilus, the final, long-delayed recognition that the one injury led justly to the other when the chain began:

Becaus I know the greit vnstabilnes,
 Brukill as glas, into my self, I say—
 Traisting in vther als greit vnfaithfulnes,
 Als vnconstant, and als vntrew of fay—
 Thocht sum be trew, I wait richt few ar thay;
 Quha findis treuth, lat him his lady ruse;
 Nane but my self as now I will accuse. (ll. 568-74)

The first four lines are critical, the first two referring to Chaucer, the second two to Diomedes: the 'vnstabilnes' that she knows to have been part of herself she in turn found, to her own hurt, in Diomedes. Cresseid thus achieves her second recognition. The second punishment and the wisdom stemming from the first recognition create the circumstances that enable it; but it itself is a recognition concerning the first transgression—which took place in Chaucer's poem. The chain is complete and the chain is long. Cresseid has come far to forge this final link. Punished by Diomedes's unfaithfulness for her falsing of Troilus in Chaucer's seminal original, Cresseid first recognizes neither the aptness of her fate nor the degree of her personal responsibility but instead blames the gods, her blaspheming of them becoming her second transgression. The punishment for that transgression, her leprosy, brings about a limited recognition, that of her culpability in the latter offense of blaspheming the gods, and that same punishment, in turn, when she has acquiesced in it by joining the lepers, brings about the meeting with Troilus that leads to her full recognition of her place in the earlier transgression itself. The last link thus looks backward to the beginning of the entire chain, her final recognition linking end with beginning. The cunning chain that Henryson has forged binds Cresseid at last in an unbroken set of links and she ends illuminated in the full recognition of who she is, what she has done, and why she has suffered.

There is a cyclical force to the thematic movement of the *Testament of Cresseid* that not unworthily invites comparison with such poems as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Pearl*, whose ends do indeed bring the reader back to their beginnings. In the *Testament of Cresseid*, however, the circle closes by a return not to its own beginning but to an antecedent poem,

as though Henryson, setting out to write a poem deliberately sequel to Chaucer's, constructed his narrative in such a manner that the two become joined not by simple but by compound linkage. Not only does his opening—as in a sequel it must—link with the former work, but so too does his ending. In this regard it is appropriate that Cresseid's will, the testament that gives the poem its title and with the making of which Cresseid ends her story and life, should refer prominently to a ruby ring, a brooch, and a belt (ll. 582-95). The brooch is clearly drawn from *Troilus and Criseyde* (5.1040 and 1654-66); the ring may be drawn from Chaucer as well, although in *Troilus and Criseyde* a ring only, not the stone, is specified (3.1368; there was a ruby on the brooch Criseyde gave Troilus, (3.1370-72); Henryson's Cresseid, at least, calls the ring a gift from Troilus (ll. 582-3), which would place it in the chronological context of the Chaucerian narrative. But the belt seems to be Henryson's own addition, even though it, too, is called a gift from Troilus (ll. 589-91). Each of the three is appropriate enough to the context, but the latter two objects are particularly intriguing. The brooch undoubtedly serves as echo of the original poem and underlines the continuity of the narrative action. While the ring may serve the same function, it has even greater significance, initiating an element that Henryson's addition, the belt, furthers. Both are images of circularity and continuity. Belt and ring are endless, or, rather, their ends are one with their beginnings. So too the moral and personal aspect of Cresseid's narrative circles finally back, at the end of a tightly bound sequence of actions and consequences, to its own beginning. After many vicissitudes the circle is made complete, and the objects in the testament of Cresseid, at the end of the poem called by its author *The Testament of Cresseid*, themselves serve as images of that completeness.¹¹ The brooch and belt, gifts from Troilus, she has long since given to Diomedes, but the ring, also a gift from Troilus, she bequeaths to its giver. The circular object, like the sequence of Cresseid's acts and thoughts, and like the linked narrative, returns to its beginning.

One can surely admire the intimate intricacy of Henryson's linking structure on the grounds of compositional artistry alone. His poem is an unusual manifestation of the medieval author's respect for his *auctoritas*, for he takes the parent work and, in effect, amends or completes it even while allowing it to retain its original integrity. When the two poems are read together, *Troilus and Criseyde* is thus, paradoxically, changed without being changed. But Henryson's work embodies more than the pure aesthetics of structural cunning. To examine it along with Chaucer's poem is to find both

¹¹Fox, p. civ, points out, "The poem is called *The Testament of Cresseid* in all of the complete witnesses, as well as in the table of contents in A, and it seems likely that this title is authorial."

works mutually illuminated, for the *The Testament of Cresseid* develops further the considerations of morality and spirituality opened in Chaucer's narrative; conjoint reading by no means answers all questions, but it nevertheless enriches the information on the basis of which those questions can be contemplated, and the reader is in consequence more thoroughly prepared to speculate about Cresseid's inner moral and spiritual state. Concerning her spiritual status, however, the evidence is considerably less firm, although even here the second poem still represents an advance over the first. Chaucer leaves Criseyde with not even the opportunity for penitence. She disappears from the poem, as it were, with all her imperfections on her head. Henryson, tortuously, gives her her chance, and she takes it. What is the final disposition of her soul? What reward or what salvation it is given is uncertain, just as there is no assurance of the place of Troilus' soul at the end of Troilus and Criseyde, but her penitence is beyond question. She has been punished for both sins, and she has repented of both sins.¹²

Discussion to this point has centered primarily upon the structural inter-relationship joining the two works, and I have concentrated chiefly on the heroine to the exclusion of the hero. Troilus, nevertheless, is deserving of at least brief comment, for his actions in Henryson's poem may have bearing retrospectively upon his place in Chaucer's: in Henryson he is given the opportunity to perform an act of pure charity—a far remove from the conclusion of *Troilus and Criseyde*, where he is last seen before his death slaying thousands of Greeks in his wrathful search for Diomedes. Chaucer leaves pointedly unstated the disposition of Troilus' soul at the end, and even though he may have tentatively initiated a positive, hopeful tone in the stanzas recounting Troilus' passage through the spheres and the gaining in that passage of new wisdom and perspective (5.1807-27), he draws back rhetorically into the negative in the sequence of dismissive lines that immediately follows:

Swich fyn hath, lo, this Troilus for love!
 Swich fyn hath al his grete worthynesse!
 Swich fyn hath his estat real above!
 Swich fyn his lust, swich fyn hath his noblesse!
 Swych fyn hath false worldes brotelnesse! (5.1828-32)

¹²The details of the poem suggest that the Christian concept of penitence, which, as Chaucer's Parson points out, "stant on three thynges: / Contricioun of Herte, Confessioun of Mouth, and Satisfaccioun" (ParsT 106-7), may be reflected in Cresseid's situation, albeit in an unorthodox order. Contrition and satisfaction are evident enough, and her speech in lines 546-74, demonstrably spoken in the hearing of the company of lepers and hence public, is surely confessional. The relevance of the scheme to the narrative and its significance in terms of Cresseid may be worthy of further investigation.

If the reader was earlier hopeful about Troilus' status, the tone of this series of dismissals of his various volitions, possessions, and even virtues when set against the touchstone of the eternal surely raises doubts. But the state of Troilus' soul, which Chaucer leaves ambiguous, may perhaps be the more positively read if one allows a composite reading of the two poems in which, between the time of Criseyde's leaving him and his death, the Henrysonian episode of charitable almsgiving—inspired by Cresseid—intervenes. Thus, perhaps, Henryson's linked narrative is suggestive of the state and fate even of Troilus' soul. The act of charity revealed in his gift is, at the least, a literal example of the courtly tradition's ideal of an earthly love inspiring a noble, even a spiritual, act. In consequence, Troilus' soul may be thought the purer at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde* if one assumes the interpolation of this episode into the Chaucerian chronology. The Troilus of the final pages of Henryson is far more admirable than the one who emerges from an unamended reading of the final pages of Chaucer. If one brings to Chaucer an attention imaginatively mindful of the Henrysonian emendation, the possibility of positive reward, which Chaucer leaves uncertain, becomes the more likely.

While with regard to Criseyde the addition of Henryson to the narrative sequence brings her story far nearer a conclusion than is to be found in Chaucer alone, one sees, nevertheless, much more of punishment than of reward. Further, although the composite sequence shows Cresseid to have passed through such an expiatory sequence of actions and reflections that she may be deserving of forgiveness or grace, what she in fact receives is no more sure than is the nature of Troilus' fate at the end of Chaucer's poem, or, for that matter, of the soul of Arcite in the *Knight's Tale*, which, the Knight brusquely informs us, "chaunged hous and wente ther, / As I cam nevere, I kan nat tellen where" (ll. 2809-10). Although the narrator insists that Troilus felt "greit sorrow" at the death of Cresseid (l. 600), Troilus' own words are little more gracious than those of the Knight: "I can no moir; / Scho was vntrew and wo is me thairfoir" (ll. 601-2). Troilus' words, in fact, despite what the narrator says in introducing them, attribute his sorrow more to Cresseid's ill-treatment of him (simultaneously reminding the audience of that long-past wrong) than to care for her infirmity, sorrow, and poverty. So too the inscription Troilus composes for her tomb, golden though the letters may be, is both brief and blunt. It expresses no sense of personal loss but rather concentrates on Cresseid as example:

Lo, fair ladyis, Cresseid of Troy the toun,
Sumtyme countit the flour of womanheid,
Vnder this stane, lait lipper, lyis deid. (ll. 607-9)

Finally, when the narrator, in a like tone, so abruptly takes leave of Cresseid and ends his story, the rhyme itself recalls Troilus' words two stanzas earlier: "Beir in your mynd this sore conclusioun / Of fair Cresseid, as I haue said befor. / Sen scho is deid I speik of hir no moir" (ll. 614-6). Tone is indeed important at this point in the narrative, for in a manner rather like that of Chaucer in his final remarks about Troilus, even though what leads up to the conclusion of Henryson's poem may arouse hope for Cresseid, the final words both of Troilus and of the narrator offset any firm expectation of redemptive resolution. The language destabilizes whatever positive sense of Cresseid's status the narrator may have begun to insinuate.

Thus while, as I noted in the early pages of this study, Chaucer is silent regarding Criseyde's end and noncommittal regarding the eschatological fortunes of Troilus, Henryson takes Chaucer's treatment of Troilus' end one step further, supplying information to make the audience more sure (though admittedly not certain) of Troilus' state, but remains himself noncommittal regarding that of Cresseid. In consequence, a degree of the closure that Henryson offered for the Troilus of Chaucer's narrative is lacking, in turn, for the Cresseid of his own narrative. Cresseid has done all she can. She seems to be positioned, as numerous critics have argued, for some manner of salvation, but Henryson, both through his own final words and through those of Troilus, keeps himself as emphatically noncommittal as was Chaucer before him: Cresseid's ultimate fate, like that of Troilus in Chaucer, remains a mystery, one that perhaps must await another poem for its solution. The relationship of Henryson's poem to its Chaucerian parent is extraordinary indeed and tantalizes even as it satisfies, for as the later poem completes its circular unification with Chaucer's, the circle simultaneously opens into an ambiguity echoing that found in the earlier. It is as if Henryson, completing one curving sequence, introduces in turn the opportunity for a sequence opening out beyond his own. Viewed in this light, *The Testament of Cresseid*, then, has its beginning in Chaucer's ending, circles in its conclusion back to partial resolution of Chaucer's ending, and at the same time opens up a new irresolution of its own that mirrors Chaucer's original irresolution. In Henryson's complex homage, the poems become bound by more than the intricate interweaving of their remarkable structural relationship; they become bound even by the things they leave unsaid.