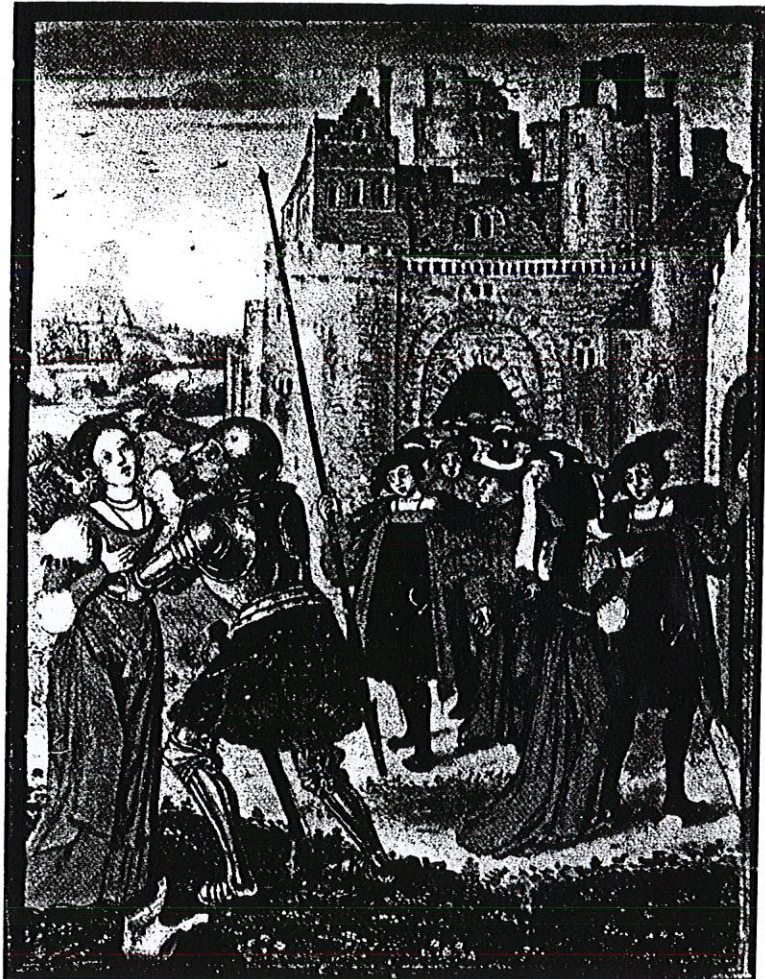


Famous Infidelity:
Geoffrey Chaucer's Criseyde and Robert Henryson's Cresseid



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Introduction:

Before *The Canterbury Tales* became known as Geoffrey Chaucer's greatest work, he was famous for *Troilus and Criseyde*. Written between 1382 and 1386, *The Troilus* is a romance set in the Trojan War. However, it is really much more. The story of the *Troilus* comes from a tradition used to warn young lovers to be faithful in love, and to choose a faithful lover. Essentially, these works created an illustration of feminine fickleness. Chaucer's Criseyde differed greatly from the others. She was no type figure. Criseyde does betray her lover and she does change her mind on several occasions, but Chaucer includes several reasons for her actions that are far more understandable than a fickle nature. Gwendolyn Morgan describes Criseyde as: "at once a pragmatic survivor, a puppet to the manipulation of others, and a plaything of Fate," (3).

Criseyde's story did not end with Chaucer. Scottish author Robert Henryson penned *The Testament of Cresseid* as a sequel to the *Troilus* in the late 15th Century. The *Testament* supplements the *Troilus* with the destiny of Cresseid (Henryson's version of the name) after her betrayal, which Chaucer decided to overlook. While some believe Henryson wanted only to punish his Cresseid for her betrayal of love, the *Testament* clearly goes deeper than that. In fact, Henryson, though he doesn't offer the number of excuses as Chaucer, treats Cressied with significant sympathy by giving her an opportunity for redemption. In a way, Henryson's was the best way to save Cresseid from an eternity of blame that had begun centuries before him.

The earliest mention of a love affair between Troilus and Criseyde appeared in the year 1155 with *Le Roman de Troie* by Benoît de Saint-Maure (Mieszkowski 79). In the lengthy account of the Trojan War, the story of Troilus and his love, whom Benoît called

Briseida, takes up a mere 1350 verses (87). The *Roman*, however, was “one of Europe’s most influential stories of the fall of Troy” for three centuries after its publication (87-8). Benoît’s tale contains the same major incidents as later versions. The theme of the poem is the fickleness of woman, actually containing a warning to men that all women are like Briseida in this way (81). Benoît’s poem was translated into many languages and likely would have been well-known in England by the 13th Century (88).

In 1287, Guido de Columnis widened the story’s popularity even more by translating it into Latin (89). His paraphrasing of the *Roman*, *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, made the fickle lover more of a type, a flat representation of a woman’s inconstancy (90).

From these two sources, Giovanni Boccaccio rendered his *Il Filostrato*. It is generally accepted that Boccaccio, whose work came out in 1336, was Chaucer’s principal source. Boccaccio’s lengthy poem was in many ways different from those of Benoît and Guido. He refocused the work from Criseida (his form of the name) to Troilo and followed Troilo’s love from its beginning (French 141). Also, he introduced Pandaro as Troilio’s means to court Criseida. Boccaccio, like his predecessors, described Criseida as a symbol of feminine changeability and a warning to young men (Mieszkowski 93). He went further to say that all women *delight* in many lovers (French 178).

While not more than one-third of Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* is directly translated from Boccaccio, only 200 of *Il Filostrato*’s 713 stanzas are not in some way featured in the *Troilus*. Chaucer, in fact, took all of the most important episodes (except one) from Boccaccio and expanded the story (French 179), using other sources such as Dante, Petrarch, and Boethius (Helterman 134), as well as his own original ideas. The

original work is especially prominent in the text before the lovers get together (French 182). Chaucer also discarded some more minor features that had been included in his sources (179). One of the chief differences between earlier stories and Chaucer's is the psychology and sympathy given Criseyde.

Part One: *Troilus and Criseyde*

Troilus and Criseyde, written in the 1380s, is often labeled the first psychological novel (Mieszkowski 76). George Lyman Kittredge claims it is a "masterpiece of psychological fiction" (109). Chaucer, like Boccaccio, focused the story on Troilus. The heart of the tale is, after all, the "double sorwe of Troilus" (I.1). However, Criseyde is arguably a more complex character. Mieszkowski asserts she is like a real woman (76), thereby possessing both flaws and noble qualities. It's a new development for the character, since the earlier representations were mere type figures. Chaucer gave his Criseyde a will of her own, and many defenses against her tarnished reputation. There are, in addition to blatant arguments by the narrator on behalf of Criseyde, numerous, more subtle justifications for the heroine's actions.

One such rationalization is the role of fate or the Boethian notion of Fortune's Wheel. Kittredge argues that fate determines the plot and there is no way for any of the characters to escape the tragedy (112). Jill Mann remarks how "the relentless rhyming of 'necessitee' and 'destinee' that ushers in Troilus's lament [in Book 4] expresses his sense of being imprisoned in a tyrannical world of fate which leaves no room for the exercise of the human will or the realisation of human desires," (77-8). The same is true for

Criseyde. Indeed, there are so many references to Fortune or fate in the text, it is impossible to overlook the implication. It is fate (through rare astrological arrangements creating unusual weather in Book 2) that keeps Criseyde at the house of Pandarus the night he brings her and Troilus together to consummate the affair. Fortune brings them together for a second night of love (III. 1667-70). Troilus calls on the gods, those who control fate, to help him in wooing his love (III. 712-35). Mann believes the chance event of Criseyde seeing Troilus out the window right when she was surprised by Pandarus's revelation of Troilus's love provides an example of the way Chaucer used fate as a means to both the formation and the destruction of the relationship (76). Others according to Mann include Antigone's song about love which conveniently answers Criseyde's fears, and Criseyde's prophetic dream, none of which exist in Boccaccio's version. The text also illustrates Troilus's acceptance that Fortune is to blame for his downfall when he acknowledges its role in Criseyde's exchange for Antenor (IV. 260, 274). Pandarus again brings Fortune's Wheel into the open with his explanation of the turn of events: "Ne trust no wight to fynden in Fortune," (IV. 391). Troilus still blames Fortune even after learning of Criseyde's affair with Diomedes: "But forth hire cours Fortune ay gan to hold / Criseyde loveth the sone of Tideus / And Troilus moot wepe with cares colde," (V. 1744-46).

In Chaucer, as well as much medieval literature, astrology was directly connected with fate. The planets and stars were believed to have great bearing on human actions and outcomes. There is much description using astrological and meteorological imagery in the *Troilus*, often used to describe Criseyde. R. A. Shoaf suggests the changing

weather and the movement of the planets are present to represent Criseyde's changeable nature (introduction xxi), such as in the following passage:

But right as when the sonne shyneth brighte
 In March, that chaungeth ofte tyme his face,
 And that a cloude is put with wynd to flighte,
 Which oversprat the sonne as for a space,
 A cloudy thought gan thorough hire soule pace,
 That overspradde hire brighte thoughtes alle,
 So that for feere almost she gan to falle. (II. 764-70)

I disagree with Shoaf's seemingly one-dimensional interpretation. The astrological and meteorological imagery could as easily represent the fickle nature of Fortune. The same type of descriptions can be found tied to other characters and situations, for example, the metaphor used to show the difficulty in seeing things rationally after the sun goes down in Book 2: "And white things waxen dymme and donne" (904-909). I believe the passage shows the lustful, impractical nature of people in general. More to the point is Criseyde's cursing the constellation under which she was born for causing her woe: "I, woful wrecche and infortuned wight / And born in corsed constellacioun," (IV. 744-45). While this type of behavior may be seen to illustrate Criseyde's refusal to accept blame for her own actions, as will be further discussed in the *Testament*, Chaucer leaves it unanswered, perhaps a viable justification, or, at least, an example of the assumed strength of astrological features to impact human events.

Criseyde has all along believed Fortune caused the events in her life. She bewails the curse Fortune put on her when she first hears of Troilus's infatuation, crying out: "A!

Lord! What me is tid a sory chaunce!” (II. 464). After taking part in the affair, Criseyde still believes Fortune will result in a bad end. She claims all love must end in woe in Book 4 (834). Any kind of joy is short-lived due to Fortune’s Wheel: “But al to litel, weylaway the whyle / Lasteth swich joie, ythanked be Fortune,” (IV. 1-2).

It is clear from early in Book 1, with Calkas’s warning that Troy is doomed, that it is impossible to escape Fortune. Mann states Chaucer intended to “reveal human efforts as negligible when weighed against the role of chance,” (76). Kittredge further argues that Troilus and Criseyde are caught in the same part of the wheel that Troy is, and are thus predestined for ruin (114). Criseyde’s breaking her promise is justified in part because she is up against the entire doom of Troy, not just her father and the Greeks (116). Although Kittredge points out the decisive role of Fortune, he says it does not provide an excuse for Criseyde, since destiny is not grounds for extenuation (113). I think it does, at least, justify Criseyde’s rationalization in Book 5. It would go against her practicality to return to a doomed city. And, the role of fate is not the only contributing factor Chaucer includes in the *Troilus*.

Criseyde’s manipulation, especially by Pandarus, may be the most pervasive justification in the text and perhaps the greatest. As Helterman states, the destruction of the romance is due to the false pretenses on which it started (136). Namely, Criseyde entered the relationship after being lied to, blackmailed, and frightened. Her position as the daughter of a traitor is used against her repeatedly, as well as threats to her character. The manipulation is so repetitive, in fact, it nearly reaches the point of *ad nauseam*, and that may be exactly the point.

The story begins with the people of Troy calling for blood after the betrayal of Criseyde's father, Calkas. Because of the violent threats to his family (I. 90-91), Criseyde is forced to beg for protection. She secures a promise from Hector, but her position remains unstable. Enter Pandarus.

His manipulation begins when he brings the news of Troilus's infatuation, which he calls love, like a winning lottery ticket: "...for in this world is noon / If that yow list, a wight so wel bygone," (II 293-94). There is no time for her to mourn her late husband, no time to consider life as a widow. This is an opportunity to be seized (an idea that will serve Criseyde later on). Good opportunity, however, is not enough for Pandarus. He tells Criseyde she will be the equivalent of a murderer if she will not bestow her good graces on the worthy prince:

The noble Troilus, so loveth the,

That, but ye helpe, it wol his bane be.

Lo, here is al! What sholde I moore seye?

Do what yow lest, to make hym lyve or deye. (II. 319-22)

And, if the supposed death of love-sick Troilus, a man she has never met, isn't enough to convince Criseyde, Pandarus makes it more immediate and concrete by threatening to kill himself right in front of her. He insults Criseyde, saying the world is a worse place for her being alive. He goes on and on, in effect attempting to brainwash the young widow (II. 323-350). Criseyde must decide the way Pandarus wants, and she must decide immediately. After all, no lovers will want her when she's old (another idea that will influence her later decisions).

Given little choice, she trusts her uncle to guard her, but he is much more interested in serving Troilus's desire. Pandarus is not satisfied with any of Criseyde's concessions. He literally forces her to accept Troilus's letter (II. 1149-55). He tells her to stop being a tyrant and make up her mind (II. 1240-45). He tells Troilus that Criseyde will give her love to him. Although she never made any such promise, it doesn't matter. Pandarus has no intention of giving her a choice.

Pandarus's manipulation is not disguised, but rather openly alluded to as he tries to mold Criseyde's emotions: "Pandare, which that stood hire fast by / Felte iren hoot, and he bygan to smyte," (II. 1275-6). "Now lat m'alone and werken as I may," he tells Troilus unabashedly (II. 1401). Pandarus seems to view the courting process as a game, a hunt. He remarks, "Lo, hold the at thi triste cloos, and I / Shal wel the deer unto thi bowe dryve," (II. 1534-5). He shows no shame in treating his niece like a witless animal whom he can drive straight into the prince's bed. He convinces Criseyde she is in great danger and in need of more protection, from Troilus, of course. Helterman points out that the exploitation of Criseyde's position makes her need Troilus (135). Moreover, she is not allowed to forget he is a prince (136), which provokes both guilty loyalty and the prospect of protection and luxury. Troilus is continually portrayed as a rock, a shelter (Helterman 136). It is such that first attracts Criseyde's attention. As she watches him in a procession of warriors, she sees he is someone who could protect her: "For swich a knightly sighte, trewely / As was on hym, was nought, withouten faille / To loke on Mars, that god is of bataille," (II. 628-30). Gwendolyn Morgan claims Criseyde provides a study in fear, as she weighs her options in practical terms: "the precarious freedom of

widowhood against a bondage to a powerfully protective lover, threats to her person or reputation against a loss of chastity . . .” (3).

The majority of Book 2 centers on the manipulation of Criseyde, and it continues in Book 3. After Pandarus admits to Troilus that he put a fantasy into Criseyde’s head that will make her his (III. 274-6), he lies directly to Criseyde and arranges for Troilus to show up in her bedroom. Pandarus actually invites Troilus into Criseyde’s bed (III. 975-6) and manages to partially undress Troilus, telling Criseyde to ease his pain (III. 1023-4). He has put pressure on the young woman for which she is unprepared. Criseyde is basically pushed into the relationship against her will.

The sampling here of the way Criseyde is throughout the text manipulated by a man she trusts goes to show the clarity of Chaucer’s justification of the woman’s actions. Carolyn Dinshaw describes Criseyde as a “thing passed between men,” (58). In the process, she adopts the styles of the men around her. In the end, it is exactly the kind of behavior Criseyde has learned from Troilus and Pandarus that leads her to a relationship with Diomedes. According to Morgan, Diomedes’s courtship can be seen as a parody of that of Troilus. Helterman agrees: “It has been said that she falls too quickly for the Greek warrior Diomedes, but her actions are entirely explainable by the way Troilus and Pandarus have programmed her behavior,” (66). Diomedes stands for the same thing that Troilus did in Troy, protection in a dangerous situation. Diomedes advises Criseyde to force out of her heart any hope for Troy (V. 911-17) as no one will come out alive (V. 878-89). Up against the frightening proposition of suffering with the doomed Trojans, Criseyde considers the fact that she’s alone and in need of protection, as well as the estate and professed love of Diomedes, and she decides to stay with the Greeks (V. 1023-9). She

eventually gives Diomedes the brooch Troilus had given her, a seemingly appalling betrayal. But, it is to ease his pain, the same reason she gave herself to Troilus. She has been programmed to do all she can to ease a warrior's pain. Also, his approach of courtship is similar to that of Troilus, but more beneficial to Criseyde. Instead of merely begging for her help to ease his sorrow, which he does, Diomedes also promises from the beginning to help her in any way she desires (V. 106-75). Like Troilus and Pandarus, Diomedes uses all his cunning to bring Criseyde "into his net," (V. 775).

One of his approaches is to appeal to Criseyde's more practical side. It was this side of Criseyde that convinced her to give affection to Troilus. In Book 2, she carefully considers his estate and renown, his wit, shape, and "gentiles," (II. 659-65). Despite the brief surge of lust, "Who yaf me drynke?" (II. 651), Criseyde does not fall in love with Troilus in the conventional sense. She says she will set her heart against her desire (II. 476) and continues to think practically, showing she is not in love, but has convinced herself to give in. He is the prince, after all, and Criseyde knows putting up a fight may cause her to end up in a worse position:

Ek wel woot I my kynges sone is he;
 And sith he hath to se me swich delit,
 If I wolde outreliche his sighte flee,
 Peraunter he myghte have me in dispit,
 Thorough whicch I mighte stoned in worse plit. (II. 708-12)

In essence, as Dinshaw says, Criseyde's "slydyng of corage" represents her conformity to "masculine structures of control," (39), thus by transferring her affection from Troilus to Diomedes, she "acts in the best interest of Troy" and of patriarchal society

(57). Mann believes Criseyde falls in love with Troilus, for she does eventually feel love for him, because Pandarus has made her susceptible to it (81). Whether Mann is right, or Criseyde forces her heart to accept Troilus, the fact remains that, without the never-ceasing manipulation, Criseyde would never have been in such a difficult situation.

The courtly love element, which is a major theme in the plot, provides another reason for both the tragedy of Troilus and for Criseydes's changeability. French describes England in Chaucer's time as a "great age of satire," when old truths were being questioned (3). Morgan states Chaucer took *Il Filostrato* and "elevated idealized love," while representing the feeling and viewpoints of 14th-century England (2). Helterman argues Troilus's love is a case for "ennobling passion" (64). However, I find it more likely the *Troilus* presents an ironic view of courtly love. Evidence from Chaucer's other works suggests his view of courtly romance is less than agreeable.

In the *Parliament of Birds*, courtly love is portrayed as foolish and an obstacle to happiness. A similar view is present in "The Knight's Tale" and, to a degree, in "The Clerk's Tale" where "commune profyte" is ruined by impractical romantic ideals (Helterman 63). Elements of courtly love in the *Troilus* are such features as "love at first sight, prolonged secret courtship, pining suitor, coy but merciful mistress" among others (Morgan 2). In reality, there is no good reason why the affair needs to be a secret. Pandarus has as his sources medieval literature such as Andreas Capellanus's *Art of Courtly Love* (c.1174) and the *Romance of the Rose* (Helterman 65). The poem, in its portrayal of a courtly romance, obviously points out the faults of such an impractical system. The notions of love observed by Troilus and Pandarus can only exist in

adulterous relationships. Thus, the artifices of such love are shown through the disaster of Troilus and Criseyde (65).

Probably the most obvious example of the way courtly love hinders happiness comes out when the exchange of Criseyde for Antenor is first proposed. Hector argues that, as Criseyde is not a prisoner, she cannot be used or sold. Troilus remains silent, since people may suspect his feelings (IV. 148-54) and a courtly romance must remain a secret. Helterman believes the tragedy could have been avoided if Troilus had joined Hector's protest (66). Troilus, however, is not one for action. He also possesses another aspect of courtly love that clashes with Criseyde's practicality, and that is jealousy. Although it is a common element of courtly love, Criseyde pronounces jealousy is a wicked viper and not love (III. 1023-4). Jealousy fits better with the lustful, whirlwind romances which often run out of steam. As Criseyde's niece Antigone says: They wenen all be love, if oon be hoot," (II. 892). Indeed, a more practical reading suggests Troilus does not love Criseyde until she is lost. Until Book 5, she is to him an idealized beloved, not a real woman (Helterman 67). It is only in reflection after Criseyde is gone that Troilus finds real love.

In addition to these numerous justifications, which Chaucer placed throughout the text, he also includes clear excuses for Criseyde. As Kittredge says, Chaucer claims he would leave out Criseyde's betrayal if he could and would excuse her guilt out of pity or grief. After all, she has already been punished by centuries of bad reputation, and can't be blamed for being tender-hearted (113). Chaucer's narrator remarks:

Ne me ne list this sely womman chide

Forther than the storye wol devyse.

Hire name, alas! is punysshed so wide,
 That for hire gilt it oughte ynough suffice.
 And if I myghte excuse hire any wise,
 For she so sory was for hire untrouthe,
 Iwis, I wolde excuse her yet for routhe. (V. 1093-9)

Chaucer's narrator also shows regret for even writing of Criseyde forsaking Troilus (IV. 12-18) and proclaims his distress in contributing to her suffering name: "Allas! that they sholde evere cause fynde / To speke hire harm," (IV. 20-1). In the end, Chaucer claims he would rather write about faithful lovers. He leaves the story as a warning, just as in earlier poems. Here is where Chaucer makes an obvious deviation from the warning traditionally drawn from Criseyde's story. His warning, in addition to the idea of concentrating on divine love, is for women to be wary of men (V. 1777-85).

Even with only little knowledge of earlier versions, it is easy to see that Chaucer has created a less anti-feminist, more deeply psychological portrait of a disloyal woman. No longer is Criseyde a type figure. In Chaucer's tale, she has become a multi-faceted personality, and worthy of as much sympathy as scorn; perhaps she is even to be admired.

Part 2: *The Testament of Cresseid*

Despite Chaucer's multiple justifications, sympathy, and excuses for Criseyde, Mieszkowski claims she was already a type figure in the 15th Century (78), and would have been recognized as a symbolic figure of an unfaithful woman (73). Perhaps the

audience of the time did not recognize the complex psychology at work in Chaucer's character, or maybe they were influenced by other writers. Chaucer's contemporary, John Gower, also wrote of Criseyde, both before and after the *Troilus* (98). His attitude toward the woman seems unchanged by Chaucer's (99). Later, John Lydgate's *Troy Book*, modeled partially after the *Troilus*, compares women to snakes (135). Many French writers also continued to write about the betrayal of *Troilus*, although Mieszkowski believes they likely didn't know Chaucer's version (107). Perhaps these works contributed to the continued degeneration of Criseyde's name.

It is rather obvious Henryson used Chaucer for his major source, as he states in the text: "Written by worthie Chaucer glorious / Of fair Cresseid, and worthy Troilus," (lines 41-2). Henryson, however, felt the need to reconcile *Troilus* and his beloved, according to Morgan (1). Other critics believe Henryson's aim was to illustrate a punishment which Chaucer left out. Henryson's narrator questions: "Quha wait gif all that Chauceir wrait was trew?" (64). He supposedly finds the *Testament* in another book "In quhilk I fand the fatall destenie / Of fair Cresseid, that endit wretchitlie," (62-3). Certainly, Cresseid is punished severely. I think the real puzzle is why. What was Henryson's purpose in continuing Cresseid's story?

There is a general agreement that the *Testament* is a morality tale. It seems likely in one respect, due to the other works by the same author. Henryson is best known for his *Moral Fables*, developed from Aesop. Many of the *Moral Fables*, written in the 1480s, illustrate how imprudent acts lacking morality or foresight lead to destruction (Craun 193). While the *Testament* does not contain the formal *moralitas* of the *Fables*, Smith asserts the end does state a moral (35).

G. Gregory Smith argues the *Testament*, a fabliau like Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice* (35), is a successful "plea for poetical justice," (36). It is part of Henryson's "tendency to moralize his fancy," (35). Although the poem's purpose is not immediately clear, Smith believes Henryson meant to humiliate Criseyde, but did so in a gentle manner (37). On the other hand, Robert Kindrick argues the *Testament* "shows the finest human sympathy for the fallen heroine," (181). If Henryson seems stern at times, Smith says, it is due to his caring about how humans affect one another (184). John Ross claims Henryson's poetry exhibits a "warm and living Christianity," (132). While I cannot put an end to the debates about the purpose of the poem or the way Henryson viewed his heroine, I think some questions can be answered by examining the text and considering it the contexts of Henryson's career as a writer and late 15th-century Scotland.

Scotland was still considered medieval in the 15th Century as the Renaissance had not reached so far north. Most people, even the educated, spoke Middle Scots (Craun 191). According to A.C. Spearing, medieval writers used "tragedie" for a moral lesson using two literary devices: a speculum and an exemplum (187-8). Cresseid's speculum comes out in line 457, as she advises other women to make a mirror of her in order to see their own true state. They are also to use her as an example of the transient nature of earthly joys (465-8). There is little doubt Henryson intended Cresseid to illustrate a moral. The real debate is over exactly what Cresseid's punishment and testament are meant to moralize.

The narrator shows a certain amount of sympathy for the fallen Cresseid as he introduces his "quair." But he also points out her betrayal, her supposed negative actions

after being dropped by Diomedes, and her self-absorption in rather unflattering terms (78-83) Then, he expresses pity and an excuse:

I have pietie thou suld fall sic mischance.
 Yit nevertheless quhat ever men deme or say
 In scornful langage of thy brukkilnes,
 I sall excuse, als far furth as I may,
 Thy womanheid, thy wisdome and fairness:
 The quhilk Fortoun hes put to sic distress
 As hir pleisit, and nothing throw the guilt
 Of the, throw wickit langage to be spilt. (84-91)

Here, Henryson echoes Chaucer's view by introducing the element of Fortune. Rather than alluding to it, Henryson clearly points out that fate had, at least in part, caused Cresseid's downfall. However, Henryson makes Cresseid's placement of blame on the gods, the controllers of fortune, seemingly the greatest reason for punishment.

Kindrick states the *Testament* looks at the psychological development of character and explores the development that love and maturity add to a person's temperament (181). Dolores Noll believes the *Testament* presents a courtly love morality (20). Cresseid, Noll says, does not renounce earthly love. She merely warns men to be wary of whom they love. In this way, Cresseid's warning is an anti-feminist testament as "she castigates the all-too-common unfaithfulness of women," (21). This part of the poem has led many to view the *Testament* through terms of human practicality and loyalty. Kindrick believes Henryson's belief in God and charity are based in part on faith, but mostly on "practical human results," (184). This would reflect the changing time in

which Henryson lived, when humanistic thought, stressing the importance of human values and ideas, began to seep into the medieval mindset. Henryson thus has Cresseid judged and punished because she hurt both Troilus and herself. This idea is also tied partly to medieval church teaching. Kindrick points out Henryson's judgment of ethics and morality in terms of human results may be based on the virtue of *caritas*: "the general love of one's fellowman," (182). Cresseid's lack of *caritas* is the reason the gods and nature judge her with little sympathy (184).

If Cresseid's punishment is a direct result of her betrayal of Troilus, Catherine Cox believes it is because patriarchal society is threatened by promiscuous women (60). A blatantly feminist critic, Cox states Cresseid "incorporates the errant text of both the narrator's reading of the 'quair' and Henryson's own reading of Chaucer," (58). It is due, then, to Cresseid's impropriety in sexual matters that has led to her position as an outcast and one worthy of punishment (59). Also, where Chaucer left multiple justifications for Criseyde's actions, Cox believes Henryson presents female changeability as wrong regardless of circumstances (63).

Indeed, by beginning the tale after Cresseid's unfaithfulness, Carol A. Cole points out, the reader has no sense of the story other than her betrayal (513). And, the poem both begins and ends with a reference to Cresseid's infidelity and Troilus's constant love. It is, in fact, only after seeing the worthiness of Troilus through his charity that Cresseid repents of any wrong-doing. She exclaims she was wrong not to place more value on his devotion:

Thy lufe, thy lawtie, and thy gentilnes,

I countit small in my prosperitie,

Sa elavati I was in wantones,
 And clam upon the fickill quheill sa hie:
 All Faith and Lufe I promissit to the,
 Was in the self fickill and frivolous:
 O fals Cresseid, and trew Knicht Troilus. (547-53)

Cresseid's last thought as she dies is of the brooch and belt Troilus had given as love tokens which she, in turn, gave to Diomedes (589-91). This seems to show she was most concerned with her betrayal in love rather than any higher morality. There are events in Henryson's Scotland which may indicate loyalty might have been his intended moral. Loyalty in love, namely monogamy, would have been viewed as a necessary virtue. Leprosy, in fact, was believed to be a venereal disease (Craun 195), which would demonstrate Cresseid's affliction as a direct result of promiscuity. Also, the ideal of communal life which had long pervaded Scottish society was broken in Henryson's lifetime by treachery in politics. The assassination of King James I by nobles in 1437, struggles with the Stuarts, and the assassination of James III by barons who opposed his alliance with England are a few examples of hardship in Scotland brought on by disloyalty. Craun states the *Moral Fables* may have been in reaction to this break in communal life (191), so it's not a far stretch to assume the *Testament* may also contain this element. Spearing says the *Testament* is organized around three important moments: when Cresseid sees her deformity, when Troilus sees the leper, and when Cresseid finds out the charitable knight was Troilus (161). If these are, indeed, the most significant parts of the plot, it shows the emphasis of the love/betrayal element. Also, as Cole points out, Troilus earns redemption, after lying and manipulating Criseyde, by being faithful in

love (518). That being so, it seems logical to conclude that Cressied's redemption can only come from repentance of disloyalty, once again making loyalty the focus of the moral.

Many critics, however, argue the *Testament* requires a Christian interpretation. E.M.W. Tillyard asserts the theology of the poem is a given (12). Cole states that although the Christian God is not actually mentioned, it was the accepted view at the time that God controlled everything, and Henryson's immediate audience would have easily found His influence in the plot. In fact, Henryson states in other works that nothing happens by chance but through God (Ross 132). It may seem improbable that the Christian God is at work in the *Testament* when the text deals with the multi-deities of Roman mythology. However, the descriptions of the gods only vaguely match any of Greek or Roman origin or art. Rather, they represent a more medieval imagination (135). Tillyard agrees, saying Henryson's gods are astrological, representing the medieval belief that the stars and planets had much influence on the lives of people (19). They were "the perpetual instruments and diffusers of his [God's] will," (20). These gods, especially Cupid and Venus, seek to punish Cresseid for blasphemy. She angers them with her irate exclamation in the temple: "Allace that ever I maid you Sacrifice / O fals Cupide, is nane to wyte bot thow / And thy Mother, of lufe the blind Goddes!" (134-5). When asked the reason for the gods' meeting, Cupid replies, "quha will blaspheme the name / Of his awin God, outhir in word or deid," (274-5). The gods, in general, seem completely unconcerned with the issue of disloyalty. Cole claims this is because they, unlike the true God, "are not concerned with faithful, divine love," (516).

Blasphemy against these gods, however, cannot go unpunished. Tillyard explains that Cresseid's blasphemy against Venus and Cupid offends God's laws because the planets operate under His power (16). Tillyard also sees the *Testament* as more tragic than the *Troilus* (5-6) in the manner that a tragedy is the story of a person falling from prosperity to adversity (6). Here, Tillyard seems to contradict himself. If the poem has the Christian framework he suggests, then Cresseid actually rises from an adverse state to a much higher position of morality and redemption. Tillyard describes how the idea of love of life and contempt of the world that existed in the Middle Ages, in which decay or hardship was often seen as better than prosperity in the eyes of God (23). Tillyard admits this creates a bit of a paradox. After all, Cresseid's repentance creates the moral of the poem, according to critics who use a Christian interpretation, in that she receives a type of "salvation according to the Christian scheme," (17).

Cole claims the *Testament* can be seen as a "treatment of sin, divine punishment, and repentance," (511). However, while Tillyard focuses Cresseid's sins on pride and anger (16-17), Cole argues her greatest mistake is believing in the love of Venus, who is true to her inconstant nature described in the text (515). Because of Venus's lack of constancy, Cresseid is not wrong to regret having formerly served her. Henryson shows plainly Venus's nature:

Bot in hir face semit greit variance,
 Quhyles perfyte treuth, and quhyles inconstance.
 Under smyling scho was dissimulait,
 Provacative, with blenkis amorous,
 And suddanely changist and alterait,

Angrie as ony serpent vennemous. (223-8)

The root of the moral, Cole claims, is in the Boethian philosophy of downplaying earthly love and uplifting the faithful love of God (511-12). Like Cresseid, the birds in Henryson's "The Preaching of the Swallow" meet with misfortune due to their seeking immediate, earthly pleasures. Similarly, Henryson's images of Cresseid represent the temporary, based on physical beauty, such as "that Lady bricht of hew," (44) and "The seid of Lufe was sawin in my face," (137). It is only through turning from inconstant love to the everlasting love and mercy of God that Cresseid can come to redemption. If Cresseid were to continue to follow Venus, she may meet with any kind of fortune, for Henryson writes:

In taikning that all fleschelic Paramour
 Quhilk Venus has in reull and governance,
 Is sum tyme sweet, sum tyme bitter and sour
 Richt unstabill, and full of variance,
 Mingit with cairfull Joy and fals plesance,
 Now hait, now cauld, now blyith, now full of wo,
 Now grene as leif, now widderit and ago. (232-8)

The passage could possibly, as in Chaucer's treatment of his Criseyde, show that Henryson also used changing Fortune as a justification for Cresseid's actions. However, it's also easy to see how, perhaps, it was Cresseid's placement of importance on earthly joys that created her trouble.

When Cresseid makes her formal complaint, she laments that, as a leprous beggar, she no longer has good wine or meat, seasonings or precious metals. Most of all,

Cresseid misses her beauty and status. She eventually realizes the temporariness of such earthly goods and warns other women:

Nocht is your fairness bot ane faiding flour,
 Nocht is your famous laud and hie honour
 Bot wind Inflat in uther mennis eiris.
 Your roising reid to rotting sall retour:
 Exempill mak of me in your Memour,
 Quhilk of sic thingis wofull witnes beiris,
 All Welth in Eird, away as Wind it weiris. (461-7).

If Cresseid does earn redemption, it's not through merely realizing the transient nature of earthly things, but by seeking an eternal reward. She does repent, but her penance is for being inconstant. Though Tillyard judges Cresseid cleansed of her deadly sins by the loss of pride upon seeing Troilus and re-placement of blame upon herself rather than the Fortune (17), the text contains little to support his theory. I find Cole's analysis more fitting. Cresseid does penance by taking responsibility for her own actions as she warns men to choose their lovers wisely. She also becomes more generous, leaving her money to the other lepers, which contrasts with her earlier self-absorption. And Cresseid turns from Venus to Diana, the goddess of chastity (517). It is unclear, however, how Cole sees these changes as comparable to a Christian salvation. He states Cresseid has no hope for eternal love but is to have a heavenly reward (518). The only way I can find a Christian interpretation valid depends on the amount of allegory one assumes. Troilus can easily be seen as a type of Christ figure. He is the representative of constant love, and as such, is able to absolve Cresseid of her betrayal. In this way,

Cresseid becomes the average human being, diseased with sin, having no hope without the love of Christ. Cole believes the evidence of Cresseid's redemption lies in the statement that she was *formerly* "the flour of womanheid" and *formerly* a leper, which are "associated with her former devotion to the fleshly, temporal love of Venus," (518).

Spearing, along with others, argues against a Christian reading. The setting is pagan, after all, and there is no formal *moralitas* (187). Also, Henryson offers no concrete statement that Cresseid received any kind of salvation. Again, her last words are of the tokens she gave to Diomedes. Craun points out the popularity of testaments in the Middle Ages was due to their presentation of "the final disposition of the soul at death," (196). Spearing avers Cresseid cannot be seen as healed and repentant through suffering, or as purified through penance (191). And, leaving her spirit to the goddess of chastity only expresses helplessness (192). Spearing disputes the bearing of Henryson's medieval surroundings and moral background on the *Testament*, saying, "Henryson was evidently bound by convention only as far as he chose," (180).

This doesn't mean the *Testament* poses no moral. Some critics view the poem as a sort of severe coming of age story in which Cresseid matures and finds wisdom (Cole 511). Noll believes Henryson's universe of love is "self contained and eclectic," (17). Cresseid obviously regrets her transgressions and comes to a realization that she is to blame for her own actions. Such is an insight that she does not reach in the *Troilus*, as Fortune is shown throughout as strongly affecting everyone. However, Cole states her testament and bequeathal are only illustrations of her maturing in character, rather than acknowledgement of a higher morality (20). One aspect of her maturity, I think, is shown by leaving her body to worms and toads. Throughout both the *Troilus* and the *Testament*,

she has been concerned with what other people will think of her. Yet, at her death, Cresseid asks for no monument or obituary. She no longer shows any juvenile preoccupation with the way others will judge her. While Cox claims Cresseid's leaving her body to be devoured is a metaphor for having been "corrupted and violated by men," (68), I find it unlikely Henryson had such a metaphor in mind. It is logical to assume he may have intended to provide a morality tale in which Cresseid teaches others to take responsibility for their lives. Craun argues that, while the narrator seeks to show Cresseid's guilt did not cause her misfortunes (195), Cresseid finally comes to realize she led herself to her own destruction. This recognition of guilt is the final stage in her growth "from ignorance to self-knowledge," (195-6).

Regardless of which moral best fits, Cresseid is used as an illustration of vice changed, at least to some degree, to an improved state overall. Mieszkowski claims Henryson did not at all worsen attitudes toward Criseyde/Cresseid (131). She argues that Henryson's treatment of the fallen heroine is still the traditional one, just a different way of telling the moral (135). But, the message is not the same as Chaucer's, even if it comes simply from the warning to lovers. Where Chaucer warns young women to be wary of men, Henryson ends with an exhortation to women:

Now worthie women, in this Ballet schort,
 Made for your worschip and Instructioun,
 Of Cheritie, I monische and exhort
 Ming not you lufe with fals deceptioun.
 Beir in your mynd this schort conclusioun
 Of fair Cresseid, as I have said befoir.

Sen scho is deid, I speik of hir no moir. (610-16)

If one were to read only this last stanza, it makes sense to blame Henryson, at least to some extent, for the worsening of reputation that led to Shakespeare's lewd Cressida. However, the *Testament* in its entirety makes it less simplistic. Cresseid is used for a moral, but manages to achieve an amount of growth not featured in the earlier versions of her story. Although she is sorely punished, Tillyard claims: "Henryson is as kind to his Cresseid as he was free to be within the scheme of orthodox theology," (13). In fact, I would argue Henryson's Cresseid has the chance for redemption she has not had elsewhere, making the *Testament of Cresseid* nearly as defensive of its female protagonist as *Troilus and Criseyde*.

Conclusion:

Although neither author could leave out the betrayal of the female character, both Chaucer and Henryson show more sympathy for the fallen woman than any writers had before. They do so in very different ways. While he doesn't cut out her changeability entirely, Chaucer provides the careful reader with seemingly endless justifications for Criseyde's actions, by exposing the manipulation by the male characters, the foolishness of courtly love, and the role of Fortune. No longer does she seem a flat type figure of the fickle woman. Criseyde has motivations far beyond a promiscuous nature. It may seem Henryson brings Cresseid in another direction by making her deserving of punishment. However, he also gives Cresseid the opportunity to redeem herself. Tillyard says Chaucer would likely have punished Criseyde, but it may have distracted from Troilus

(13). I think Tillyard is missing the point of the *Testament*. Cresseid's punishment is clearly "the instrument to her moral growth," (Mieszkowski 132).

Both Chaucer and Henryson attempt to take the blame away from the fallen heroine through statements that they'd excuse her. While Mieszkowski finds these excuses illogical and inadequate (137), I wholly disagree. A careful reader will find enough reason for excuse. After all, she is, in a way, only human. I believe anyone who truly seeks to understand Criseyde or Cresseid will discover much more than a fickle woman in *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Testament of Cresseid*.

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