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Orpheus and Eurydice and *The Testament of Cresseid*: *Robert Henryson's 'fine poeticall way'*

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No autograph copies of *Orpheus and Eurydice* and *The Testament of Cresseid* have survived, so we do not know exactly when, or in what order, these poems were composed. The earliest known, but the least complete, copy of *Orpheus and Eurydice* is the edition printed around 1508 by Walter Chepman and Androw Myllar. In his edition of the poem, Denton Fox supplements this text with readings from the Asloan MS (c. 1515–c. 1525), which preserves a fuller but still incomplete version, and from the Bannatyne MS (c. 1568), which is the most complete version.[1] The list of contents in the Asloan MS indicates that *The Testament of Cresseid* was once included in this early sixteenth-century anthology, but the earliest extant Scottish print of the poem, and the best text, dates from the end of the sixteenth century when the Edinburgh bookseller Henry Charteris printed, or possibly reprinted, it in 1593.[2] The *Testament* was also anglicized and inserted after *Troilus and Criseyde* in a compilation of Chaucer's works by the English printer William Thynne, in 1532. This edition and its many successors made the *Testament*, but not Henryson, known to English readers.

In 1639 an English scholar, Sir Francis Kinaston, translated *The Testament of Cresseid* into Latin and identified 'Mr Robert Henderson sometimes cheife schoolemaster in Dumfermling' as the author, but he was unaware that the same poet had composed the *Morall Fabillis* and *Orpheus and Eurydice*, let alone a number of minor poems, for he regrets that 'we haue no more of his work*es*'.[3] Even in Scotland *Orpheus and Eurydice* may not have been widely known as

1 All references are to Henryson, *Poems*, ed. Fox.

2 For details of the witnesses, including three sixteenth-century fragments, and evidence of the poem's circulation, see Henryson, *Poems*, ed. Fox, pp. xciv–c, and Sally Mapstone, '*The Testament of Cresseid*, lines 561–7: a new manuscript witness', *Notes and Queries* 230 (1985), pp. 307–10.

3 On Kinaston, see further, Richard Beadle, 'The Virtuoso's *Troilus*', *Chaucer Traditions: Studies in Honour of Derek Brewer*, ed. Ruth Morse and Barry Windeatt (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 213–33.

Henryson's, as neither the early print nor the Asloan MS attributes the poem to him, although the poet Gavin Douglas knew Henryson was the author of this 'New Orpheus', as he called it, and the early anthologist George Bannatyne assigned the poem, and a number of the *Fabillis*, to '*maister* R H', who elsewhere in his MS is identified as '*maister* R Henrysone'.[4]

Henryson's poetry was certainly appreciated by other poets. He was commemorated by William Dunbar, and emulated by Gavin Douglas, Sir David Lyndsay and others.[5] Kinaston's view that Henryson was 'a learned *and* a witty man' who wrote in 'a fine poeticall way' was no doubt shared by other readers. Although he was a serious, moral poet, his humour, playfulness and irony must have found early as well as more recent admirers. His original audience may have included the royal court at Dunfermline.[6] What does seem indisputable is that Henryson had a sophisticated, poetry-educated audience in mind for the full appreciation of his stylistic and generic range, and of the ironies and subtleties of these richly allusive and intertextual poems, one that would recognize his far from straightforward engagement with his 'sources' and the larger traditions in which he self-consciously worked.

Like the *Morall Fabillis*, *The Testament of Cresseid* and *Orpheus and Eurydice* are substantial narrative poems that retell well-known stories, and while they each conclude with explicit moralizations, Henryson seems less interested in delivering a 'didactic message than in involving his readers in a series of complex moral issues'.[7] As a fifteenth-century schoolmaster, Henryson probably taught his pupils by reading aloud (*DOST*, s.v. *rede*, sense 15), but as a poet he enables his readers to take responsibility for their own learning (*DOST*, *rede*, sense 7, 'to learn or discover by reading a book or other writing').[8] Reading books features prominently in both poems. Early in the *Testament* the poet-narrator reads and summarizes the final book of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* before turning to 'ane vther quair' in which he 'fand the fatal destenie / Of fair Cresseid' (61–3); and at the beginning of the *moralitas* section of *Orpheus and Eurydice* Henryson presents himself as a reader imparting what he has learned from his reading of Boethius and Trivet: 'I sall the tell sum part, as I haue red' (490).

In his *Fabillis* Henryson encourages the 'reader's involvement in a perpetual play of interpretation', and the same is true of the two poems under

[4] Henryson, *Poems*, ed. Fox, pp. xiv, cxiii, lxxxii.

[5] See Dunbar, *Poems*, ed. Bawcutt, 'I that in heill wes' (B 21), 81–2; Bawcutt, *Gavin Douglas* pp. 43–4; Lyndsay, *Selected Poems*, ed. Hadley Williams, p. xv, and Anne McKim, ' "Makand hir mone": Masculine Constructions of the Feminine Voice in Middle Scots Complaints', *Scotlands* 2 (1994), pp. 32–40 (38–40).

[6] William Ramson, 'A Reading of Henryson's *Testament*, or "Quha falsit Cresseid?" ', *Parergon* 17 (1977), pp. 25–35 (27).

[7] C. David Benson, 'Critic and Poet: What Lydgate and Henryson did to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*', *Writing After Chaucer*, ed. Daniel J. Pinti (New York, 1998), pp. 227–42 (238).

[8] *DOST*'s citation is Henryson's 'Trial of the Fox', 471 (Bannatyne MS).

consideration here.[9] Critics have responded enthusiastically to the poet's encouragement and expectation, producing a wealth of interpretations and counter-interpretations, often consciously presented as 'readings' and 're-readings'.[10] Almost all recent studies of the *Orpheus* and the *Testament* begin by acknowledging the diversity of critical opinions, so much so that in her splendid 1984 review of modern Henryson scholarship Louise O. Fradenburg concluded that 'the genre of the rival reading' had come to dominate critical responses.[11]

Fradenburg's timely assessment highlights major developments in appreciations of Henryson's poetry, especially from the 1960s on. That decade saw the publication of significant new studies of *Orpheus* and the *Testament*, and two important books, John MacQueen's seminal study of Henryson's major narrative poems and Fox's scholarly edition of the *Testament*.[12] Among the main trends in the scholarship that followed, Fradenburg finds an over-emphasis on Henryson's originality and autonomy, itself largely a reaction to studies that had stressed the poet's debt to Chaucer, encapsulated in the 'Scottish Chaucerian' label long attached to Henryson (and Dunbar).[13] Increased attention to Henryson's artistry and rhetorical skills, and to his evident concern with the role of poet, followed.[14] Comparative approaches, in their infancy when Fradenburg wrote her overview, have considered Henryson alongside Chaucer and Lydgate, as well as Middle Scots 'makars', and this has not only heightened appreciation of his achievement, but has also led to a

[9] Gregory Kratzmann, 'The Poetics of the "Fenyeit Fabill": Chaucer and the Middle Scots Poets', *Of Lion and Of Unicorn: Essays on Anglo-Scottish Literary Relations in Honour of Professor John MacQueen*, ed. R. D. S. Jack and Kevin McGinley (1993), pp. 16–38 (37).

[10] For example, Susan Aronstein, 'Cresseid Reading Cresseid: Redemption and Translation in Henryson's *Testament*', *SLJ* 21.2 (1994), pp. 5–22; Mairi Ann Cullen, 'Cresseid Excused: A Re-Reading of Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*', *SSL* 21 (1985), pp. 137–59; Kevin J. Harty, 'Cresseid and Her Narrator: A Reading of Robert Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*', *Studii Medievali* 23 (1983), pp. 753–65; Jane Roberts, 'On Rereading Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice*', *Chaucer and Fifteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. Julia Boffey and Janet Cowen (London, 1999), pp. 103–21.

[11] 'Henryson Scholarship: the Recent Decades', *Fifteenth-Century Studies*, ed. R. F. Yeager (Hamden, Conn., 1984), pp. 65–92 (82).

[12] These include A. C. Spearing, '*The Testament of Cresseid* and the "High Concise Style" ', *Speculum* 37 (1962), pp. 208–25, later published as 'Conciseness and *The Testament of Cresseid*', in his *Criticism and Medieval Poetry* (London, 1964), pp. 118–44; Douglas Duncan, 'Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*', *Essays in Criticism* 11 (1961), pp. 128–35; Sidney J. Harth, 'Henryson Reinterpreted', *ibid.*, pp. 471–80; Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, 'Robert Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice* and the Orpheus Traditions of the Middle Ages', *Speculum* 41 (1966), pp. 643–55; E. D. Aswell, 'The role of Fortune in *The Testament of Cresseid*', *PQ* 46 (1967), pp. 471–87; John MacQueen, *Robert Henryson* (Oxford, 1967) and *The Testament of Cresseid*, ed. Denton Fox (London, 1968).

[13] 'Henryson Scholarship', *Fifteenth-Century Studies*, ed. Yeager, p. 71.

[14] The pioneers are Spearing, MacQueen, Fox, and Douglas Gray, *Robert Henryson* (Leiden, 1979). Particularly influential is the work of Ian Jamieson: 'Henryson's "Fabillis": an Essay towards a Revaluation', *Words. Wai-te-ata Studies in English* 2 (1966), pp. 20–31, and 'Some Attitudes To Poetry in Late Fifteenth-Century Scotland', *SSL* 15 (1980), pp. 28–42.

revaluation of his poetics, casting important new light on the characteristic tension in his work between moral purpose and the pleasures of poetry.[15] The remainder of this essay will focus on some of the chief interpretative issues that have exercised readers of *Orpheus and Eurydice* and *The Testament of Criseyde*, particularly in the last twenty years.

Orpheus and Eurydice

The story of how Orpheus, through the power of his music, won back his beloved Eurydice from the underworld, only to lose her again forever through a forbidden backward glance, came down to the Middle Ages through Ovid, Virgil and Boethius, and became the subject of various moral commentaries. In medieval romance tradition, the story acquired a happy ending with the reunion of the lovers, exemplified in the Middle English *Sir Orfeo* (c. 1330). A number of readers have seen Henryson's poem as the culmination of these twin medieval Orpheus traditions.[16] Henryson cites only two sources: Boethius's 'gay buke of consolacion' (417), and the moral commentary of the thirteenth-century English Dominican and 'noble theolog', Nicholas Trivet (422). While he may have known the accounts of Virgil and Ovid, there is no reason to doubt that, in the main, his version derives from Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae* III, *met.* 12, with some characteristically amplified narrative details – notably Aristeus's attempted rape of Eurydice and Orpheus's futile search for his vanished spouse in the celestial spheres – taken, like the *moralitas*, from Trivet's well-known commentary on the myth.[17] The poet's debt to Macrobius and Eberhard of Bethune has been widely accepted, but the influence of Boccaccio, Ficino and Poliziano has not.[18]

There has been a steady trickle of critical appreciations of *Orpheus and Eurydice* since the 1960s, which almost dried up in the 1980s and 1990s, only

[15] Gregory Kratzmann, *Anglo-Scottish Literary Relations 1430–1550* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 63–103; Julia Boffey, 'Lydgate, Henryson, and the Literary Testament', *MLQ* 53 (1992), pp. 41–56; Nicholas Watson, 'Outdoing Chaucer: Lydgate's *Troybook* and Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* as Competitive Imitations of *Troilus and Criseyde*', *Shifts and Transpositions in Medieval Narrative*, ed. Karen Pratt (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 89–108; Ian Jamieson, ' "To preue thare preching be a poesye" ', *Parergon* 8 (1974), pp. 24–36; Denton Fox, 'The Coherence of Henryson's Work', *Fifteenth-Century Studies*, ed. Yeager, pp. 275–81 (278–9); Kratzmann, 'Poetics of the "Fenyeit Fabill" ', *Of Lion and Of Unicorn*, ed. Jack and McGinley, pp. 16–38.

[16] Gros Louis, 'Robert Henryson's *Orpheus*', p. 643, and John Block Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), p. 195.

[17] Henryson, *Poems*, ed. Fox, pp. cv–cvii and 384–92 for Trivet's commentary.

[18] See Fox's commentary *passim*; Dorena Allen Wright, 'Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice* and the Tradition of the Muses', *MÆ* 40 (1971), pp. 41–7; R. J. Lyall, 'Henryson and Boccaccio: A Problem in the Study of Sources', *Anglia* 99 (1981), pp. 38–59; John MacQueen 'Neoplatonism and Orphism in Fifteenth-Century Scotland: the Evidence of Henryson's "New Orpheus" ', *Scottish Studies* 20 (1976), pp. 69–89 (84), and Matthew P. McDiarmid, *Robert Henryson* (1981), p. 50; R. D. S. Jack, *The Italian Influence on Scottish Literature* (1972), pp. 7–14, and R. J. Lyall, 'Did Poliziano influence Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice*?', *FMLS* 15 (1979), pp. 209–21.

to flow again with some vigour in the last few years: six new articles have appeared since 2000, three of them in a 2002 special early Scottish Literature issue of *Forum for Modern Language Studies*. The first major studies of the poem were those by Gros Louis and MacQueen; subsequent readings have largely responded to their arguments. Gros Louis sees Henryson's poem as a 'fully mediaevalized classical myth' that combines allegorical and popular traditions and presents sympathetic characters in a novel and engaging way, whereas for MacQueen Henryson's allegorical purpose is paramount and explicit in the *moralitas*, a view he elaborated in a subsequent article where he argues that the poem is constructed on 'Neoplatonic principles to illustrate Neoplatonic doctrine'. Orpheus and Eurydice lack 'immediacy' because they are exemplary representatives of the intellectual and the appetitive parts of the soul respectively.[19]

The importance of the allegorical tradition is generally recognized, but the emotional power of the story has led a number of critics to agree with Gros Louis about Henryson's sympathetic treatment of convincing characters. Douglas Gray points out that a 'humane interpretation' allowing 'full scope to the emotional tensions of the story' was already part of the allegorical tradition Henryson inherited.[20] For Jamieson, however, the emotional moments in the poem, notably Orpheus's laments (154–83; 401–12) are not 'the dominant poetic mood'.[21] Attempts to define this mood have led critics to describe Henryson's retelling of the myth as variously an 'interior allegorical drama', 'a philosophical tale', a 'spiritual tragedy' and a romance that incorporates the ethical strain of the allegorical tradition.[22]

Henryson's use of romance conventions – the noble lineage of the hero, love by reputation, the identification of Proserpine as the Queen of Fairy, Orpheus's Complaint, the quest structure of the narrative, magic elements, and Orpheus's final bewildered apostrophe to love – has been noted, but Carol Mills has argued that these, and other motifs for which parallels can be found in *Sir Orfeo*, are merely decorative features of Henryson's classical tale.[23] More recently, Alessandra Petrina, developing the view of the poem as a culmination of two medieval literary traditions, has suggested that mixing or 'contamination' of genres causes the troubling disjunction between tale and *moralitas* and explains what for many modern readers is a problem, the

[19] Gros Louis, 'Robert Henryson's *Orpheus*', p. 643; MacQueen, 'Neoplatonism and Orphism in Fifteenth-Century Scotland', p. 74.

[20] Gray, *Henryson*, p. 216.

[21] Jamieson, ' "To preue thare preching" ', p. 36.

[22] MacQueen, *Henryson*, p. 38; Gray, *Henryson*, p. 236; Steven R. McKenna, *Robert Henryson's Tragic Vision* (New York, 1994), p. 195; and Friedman, *Orpheus*, p. 146.

[23] Friedman, *Orpheus*, pp. 196–204; Carol Mills, 'Romance Convention and Robert Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice*', *Bards and Makars*, ed. A. J. Aitken et al. (Glasgow, 1977), pp. 52–60. See also Enrico Giaccherini, 'From *Sir Orfeo* to "Schir Orpheus": Exile, and the Waning of the Middle Ages', *Displaced Persons*, ed. Sharon Ouditt, Studies in European Cultural Transition 14 (Burlington, 2002), pp. 1–10.

disturbing 'double nature' of Aristeus, portrayed as a sexual predator in the tale but as 'noucht bot gude vertewe' in the *moralitas* (436).[24]

The *moralitas* has certainly given rise to the greatest critical disagreement about the poem. While some have pronounced it 'pretentious, cloudy, prolix' and so 'uninspired' that it must be either an optional extra or someone else's appendix, for others it is 'artfully problematic', cleverly designed to balance the tale with which it is subtly interconnected.[25] Some disappointed readers rate the poem as an early and immature work.[26] Resemblances to Henryson's more acclaimed poems are quite apparent. Readers of the *Fabillis* will not be surprised by the disjunction between narrative and *moralitas*, and may be struck by the consistency in the modes of allegorical representation and characterization. Recent reassessments suggest that the 'jarring' effect readers feel as they move from tale to *moralitas* is engineered by Henryson to retain our attention at the end of his moving tale. The lengthy and ponderous moral application is in a different 'voice' – John Marlin detects a separate speaker or bookish narrator figure – the voice of reason or intellect and, as so often in the *Fabillis*, 'the reader is invited to negotiate apparently valid claims to truth from different sources – from affect and intellect'. The whole poem, in the sum of its parts, thus becomes an embodiment of its theme, which is 'the inherent tension between the soul's faculties'.[27]

Henryson's inventiveness is most marked in the 'agility' with which he interprets his primary sources, according to Johnson, who finds an intertextual and metatextual spirit at play in the poem.[28] The poet stresses the value of these sources at the beginning of the *moralitas*:

> Lo, worthy folk, Boece, that senature,
> To wryte this feynit fable tuke in cure,
> In his gay buke of consolacion,
> For oure doctryne and gude instruction;
> Quhilk in the self, suppose it fenyeit be,

24 Alessandra Petrina, ' "Aristeus Pastor Adamans": The Human Setting in Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice* and its kinship with Poliziano's *Fabula di Orpheo*', *FMLS* 38 (2002), pp. 382–95 (385).

25 Negative views are from H. Harvey Wood, *Two Scots Chaucerians* (London, 1967), p. 20; Wright, 'Henryson's *Orpheus*', p. 47; Giaccherini, 'From *Sir Orfeo* to "Schir Orpheus" ', p. 9; and Dietrich Strauss, 'Some Comments on the *Moralitas* of Robert Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice*', *SSL* 32 (2001), pp. 1–12 (9–10); positive views from John Marlin, ' "Arestyus is Nocht but Gude Vertewe": The Perplexing *Moralitas* in Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydices*', *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 25 (1999), pp. 137–53; Roberts, 'On Rereading', p. 118; and Ian Johnson, 'Hellish Complexity in Henryson's *Orpheus*', *FMLS* 38 (2002), pp. 412–19 (413).

26 Friedman, *Orpheus*, p. 208; Gray, *Henryson*, p. 209, and MacQueen, *Henryson*, p. 45.

27 Marlin, ' "Arestyus is Nocht but Gude Vertew" ', pp. 145, 149. On the tradition as gendered, see Kevin McGinley, 'The "Fenyeit" and the Feminine: Robert Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice* and the Gendering of Poetry', *Women and the Feminine in Medieval and Early Modern Scottish Writing*, ed. Sarah Dunnigan et al. (Basingstoke, 2004), pp. 74–85.

28 Johnson, 'Hellish Complexity', pp. 416–17.

> And hid vnder the cloke of poesie,
> Yit maister Trewit, doctour Nicholas,
> Quhilk in his tyme a noble theolog was,
> Applyis it to gude moralitee,
> Rycht full of frute and seriositee. (415–24)

This defence of poetic fictions is consistent with the more extended apology developed in the prologue to the *Fabillis*, but the view of moral instruction and learning demands brief, special consideration. The 'feynit fable' of Orpheus and Eurydice opens with a similar statement of conviction about learning from noble 'eldirs', specifically how to be virtuous by 'herand reherse' stories of their 'nobilnes' or 'gentilnes'. We can learn, it seems, from both hearing and reading attentively how to 'enclyne' the heart 'to vertu and to worthynes' (4–5) and, with the help of a guide like 'noble theolog', Nicholas Trivet, how to apply what we have heard and read 'to gude moralitee' (422–3). The poet includes himself in this learning process by the repeated use of the first person plural pronouns 'our', 'we', and 'us', as in '*oure* doctryne and gude instruction' (418), and (in the *moralitas*) '*our* mynde', '*our* ressoun', '*our* soule', '*our* hert', '*our* understanding', '*oure* affection', '*oure* fleschly appetyte', '*our* synfull deidis', 'quhen *we* flee', '[s]chawand til *vs*'. While there is certainly a Trivet-inspired focus on our spiritual natures, on the intellectual and passional parts of the soul, the 'human reference' is as present in the *moralitas* as in the tale, and words for the emotional and volitional faculty – 'affectioun' in particular – actually predominate.[29]

The Testament of Cresseid

Readers of *The Testament of Cresseid* encounter a less reliable guide. In this poem Henryson created a narrator who is a poet, reader and critic who comments on Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, questions received views of Cresseid's reputation, and gets so emotionally involved in her story that he contradicts himself. In effect, the issues of readers' responses and critical interpretation are foregrounded in the poem itself. The aspects of the poem that have fomented most debate are its relationship to Chaucer's poem; its genre; the narrator's role and attitude to his subject; Cresseid's crime and punishment; the status of the gods and the associated question about whether the poem offers a Christian perspective; and the author's perceived anti-feminism.

Various views of the *Testament*'s relationship to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* have been offered over the years, and the opinion of an early critic, Kinaston, has found modern supporters:

> [W]ittily obseruing, that Chaucer in his 5th booke had related *th*e death of Troilus, but made no mention what became of Creseid, he learnedly takes

[29] Henryson, *Poems*, ed. Fox, p. 414.

> vppon him in a fine poeticall way to expres the punishment *and* end due to a false vnconstant whore, *wh*ich co*m*monly terminates in extreme misery.[30]

The *Testament* has been seen as a continuation of Chaucer's poem; an alternative conclusion to it; a penetrating, sometimes ironical, commentary on it; and as bearing a relationship to it not unlike a *moralitas* to a fable.[31] Walter Scheps shows that such views need not be mutually exclusive; he considers the *Testament* is 'a Scottish extension of and reply to an English poem'. The poem's 'Scottishness' has been reconsidered by David Parkinson who outlines prominent features – notably the treatment of exile and disfigurement – it shares with other Middle Scots texts.[32] In contrast, Melvin Storm intentionally excludes extra-textual information and, in a close, nuanced exploration of the inter-textual relationship between the *Troilus* and the *Testament*, shows how the two poems inform each other.[33]

Henryson's independence from his source of inspiration is conveyed in the *Testament* too. He draws attention to the role of *inventioun*, to individual poetic creativeness, in the much-analysed, enigmatic stanza beginning: 'Quha wait gif all that Chauceir wrait was trew?' (64).[34] Questioning the truth value of the *Troilus*, and the second book about Cresseid that the narrator has to hand, has been taken as Henryson's tongue-in-cheek way of authorizing his own new 'narratioun' (65), while simultaneously drawing attention to the fictional nature of stories, a strategy deployed in the *Fabillis* too. Reference to the other book that tells *another* story also promotes the idea that more than one account is in circulation, which is quite credible, as by the fifteenth century a number of poets had contributed to the Criseyde tradition.[35] On the whole, the 'vther quair' (61) has itself been supposed a fiction, like Chaucer's 'Lollius', although there have been several nominations.[36]

The poem's genre, like its relationship to Chaucer's poem, is explicit in the *Testament*:

[30] Henryson, *Poems*, ed. Fox, p. xiv. Tatyana Moran, '*The Testament of Cresseid* and *The Book of Troylus*', *Litera* 6 (1959), pp. 18–24, and Nikki Stiller, 'Robert Henryson's Cresseid and Sexual Backlash', *Literature and Psychology* 31.2 (1981), pp. 88–95.

[31] *Testament*, ed. Fox, p. 21.

[32] 'A Climatological Reading of Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*', *SSL* 25 (1980), pp. 80–7; 'Henryson's Scottish Tragedy', *Chaucer Review* 25 (1991), pp. 355–62.

[33] 'The Intertextual Cresseida: Chaucer's Henryson or Henryson's Chaucer?' *SSL* 28 (1993), pp. 105–22.

[34] *DOST*, like the *OED*, asssigns the first usage of *inventioun* in this sense to Henryson.

[35] See the survey by Gretchen Mieszkowski, 'The Reputation of Criseyde: 1155–1500', *Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences* 43 (1971), pp. 73–153.

[36] Eleanor R. Long, 'Robert Henryson's "Uther Quair" ', *Comitatus* 3 (1972), pp. 97–101; Robert L. Kindrick, 'Henryson's "Uther Quair" Again: a Possible Candidate and the Nature of the Tradition', *Chaucer Review* 33 (1998), pp. 190–220.

> Ane doolie sessoun to ane cairfull dyte
> Suld correspond and be equiualent:
> Richt sa it wes quhen I began to wryte
> This tragedie. (1–4)

The rhetorical correspondence between a doleful season and sorrowful writing prepares us for a medieval tragedy, that is, a 'literary work of a serious or sorrowful character, with a fatal or disastrous conclusion' (*OED*). Chaucer's first stanza stresses that his poem relates 'the double sorwe of Troilus' in 'woful vers', and he too called his work a 'tragedye' (*Troilus*, V, 1786). Henryson's use of the term seems deliberately to echo Chaucer's and his tragedy to *correspond* to Chaucer's.[37] Although Henryson's understanding of tragedy may derive from Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae* and Trivet's commentary on it, probably Chaucer's extensive use of these sources in *Troilus and Criseyde* exerted a strong influence. Trivet's concept of tragedy as 'a poem about great iniquities beginning in prosperity and ending in adversity' seems especially appropriate to Cresseid's story as told by Chaucer and concluded by Henryson.[38]

The chilly spring opening of the *Testament* evokes courtly associations that predispose the reader to expect 'a tragedy of love', and indeed the story the narrator tells focuses on the consequences of betrayal in love. Read as an allegory, the lovers' courtly relationship becomes a type of those relationships 'seen and judged in terms of Christian morality'.[39] Ramson sees Henryson as a critical 'outsider', satirically mimicking the figure of the poet as courtly lover as he reads his poem aloud to the ladies of the Scottish court.[40] Whoever the 'worthie wemen' addressed in the final stanza of the poem may be, and how, or by whom, the final lines are delivered, they contain a warning against deception in love:

> Now, worthie wemen, in this ballet schort,
> Maid for your worschip and instructioun,
> Of cheritie, I monische and exhort,
> Ming not your lufe with fals deceptioun. (610–13)

Critics have puzzled over Henryson's description of his poem as 'this ballet schort'. If it is a 'deprecatory term', as Fox supposed, then it is quite likely that

[37] *DOST* defines 'Traged(i)e' much like the *OED*, citing the *Testament*, 4, as the first instance in Scots.
[38] Boethian readings of the *Testament* include Aswell, 'The Role of Fortune', pp. 471–87; Craig McDonald, 'Venus and the Goddess Fortune in *The Testament of Cresseid*', *SLJ* 4.2 (1977), pp. 14–24; Anne McKim, 'Henryson's "Memoriall of Fair Cresseid" ', *Of Lion and Of Unicorn*, ed. Jack and McGinley, pp. 1–15; Sabine Volk-Birke, 'Sickness unto Death: Crime and Punishment in Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*', *Anglia* 113 (1995), pp. 163–83.
[39] MacQueen, *Henryson*, pp. 52, 93.
[40] Ramson, 'A Reading', p. 29.

Henryson is consciously imitating Chaucer, who refers to his poem as 'litel bok', 'litel myn tragedye' at the end of *Troilus* (V, 1786).[41] Whereas in Middle Scots poetry *ballatis* were often short, written in a range of metres about diverse subjects, including love, in Middle English, as Fox notes, a 'ballet' was usually a short poem in rhyme royal. It may have amused Henryson to compare his relatively short, tragic poem in rhyme royal (excepting Cresseid's Complaint) to Chaucer's long one in the same metre. Interestingly, Dunbar also links 'ballat making and trigide'.[42]

While there is general agreement that the narrator is a persona, there is a range of views on his role in the poem. For some he is a character, for some a point of view, and for others he is primarily an ironic device. Robert L. Kindrick considers the narrator is 'a fully developed character … capable of just the kind of patience she [Cresseid] lacks and has the kind of understanding of life she does not gain until the poem's conclusion'.[43] For Carol A. Cole, on the other hand, Cresseid's fall is a vehicle for the narrator's 'coming-to-knowledge'. Others believe he learns little or nothing, seeing him variously as 'sentimental and illogical', 'a figure of ridicule', 'the impotent senex of medieval literary tradition' who attains 'only partial understanding of what he is reading'.[44] For Lesley Johnson, the old, frail narrator is a character through whom the vicarious experience of reading is explored, and who, in resembling the later Cresseid, 'makes her end merely a reflection of his experience'.[45]

Gray, in contrast, regards the narrator as a ' "fictive" projection', not an 'autonomous character', and proposes an analogy with the *Morall Fabillis* in which there is 'a shifting and complex relationship between "poet" and "narrator", but the connection seems to be a fundamental one'.[46] Malcolm Pittock goes even further, detecting the presence of three narrators or 'fictive personae', by which 'elaborate means' Henryson draws attention 'to the fictionality of his own narrative', and undermines *fin amour*.[47] Several critics

[41] Henryson, *Poems*, ed. Fox, p. 383, n. 610; Henry Ansgar Kelly, 'Henryson's tragedy of Cresseid', in his *Chaucerian Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 216–59 (218).

[42] Dunbar, *Poems*, ed. Bawcutt, 'I that in heill wes' (B 21), 59. On the range of senses of 'ballat' in Scots, see Bawcutt, *Dunbar the Makar*, pp. 29–31.

[43] R. L. Kindrick, *Robert Henryson* (Boston, 1979), p. 123.

[44] 'Looking for Love in all the Wrong Places', *Michigan Academician* 29 (1997), pp. 511–20 (511); Henryson, *Poems*, ed. Fox, p. xciii; Mieszkowski, 'The Reputation of Criseyde', p. 137; Derek Pearsall, ' "Quha wait gif all that Chauceir wrait was trew?": Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*', *New Perspectives on Middle English Texts. A Festschrift for R. A. Waldron*, ed. Susan Powell and Jeremy Smith with a personal memoir by Derek Pearsall (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 169–82 (174); Alicia K. Nitecki, ' "Fenyeit of the New": Authority in *The Testament of Cresseid*', *Journal of Narrative Technique* 15 (1985), pp. 120–32 (125, 130).

[45] Lesley Johnson, 'Whatever happened to Criseyde? Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*', *Courtly Literature, Culture and Context*, ed. Keith Busby and Erik Kooper (Amsterdam, 1990), pp. 313–21 (319).

[46] Gray, *Henryson*, pp. 169–70.

[47] 'The Complexity of Henryson's *The Testament of Cresseid*', *Essays in Criticism* 40 (1990), pp. 198–221 (206–7, 212).

have regarded the figure of Mercury as another projection of the poet who ultimately determines Cresseid's fate, but this role is 'obscured by Henryson the narrator, who claims the role of a mere "speaker" of events against which he even at times dramatically protests'.[48]

It is often accepted that the aged male narrator's attitude to his young female subject, and fellow Venus worshipper, is crucial in the vexed question of whether the poem encourages sympathy for, or condemnation of, Cresseid. The lines that seem to hold the key, 78–91, perplexingly express both compassion ('pietie') and admonishment ('fleschelie lust' and 'brukkilnes'), defence and accusation. Further contradictions take the form of blaming fortune and the 'wickit langage' of Cresseid's detractors for her ignominious reputation, while also assigning to Cresseid responsibility for her actions.

Although there has been considerable debate about the actual crime for which Cresseid is punished, and even more about the appropriateness or otherwise of her terrible punishment, critics tend to agree that Henryson portrays her as a guilty creature who finally comes to admit her blameworthiness. Until recently, there was a consensus that she progresses from blindness to enlightenment, from wilful ignorance and error to wisdom and responsibility, but this essentially humanist view has been challenged, particularly in feminist analyses (discussed below). Readers are reminded early in the poem that in betraying Troilus, Cresseid has offended against the code of love (43–56); she then adds blasphemy to her crimes (354) by blaming Venus and Cupid for her 'infelicitie' (281). Whether her leprosy and death are to be interpreted as punishment for one or the other, or both crimes, has been a matter of critical contention. What is incontrovertible is that she undergoes mental and physical suffering that begins with her rejection by Diomeid and only ends when she dies a leprous beggar. During this painful ordeal she moves from anger to self-pity, from blaming her gods to blaming Fortune, and finally to self-reproach and belated remorse when she admits: 'Nane but my self as now I will accuse' (574).

Henryson's greatest innovation is this emphasis on Cresseid's moral growth, through which he makes the 'change in Cresseid's attitude towards herself … the central event of his story'.[49] Whether she is redeemed, especially given the absence of any explicit Christian reference in the poem, is an unresolved crux.[50] Recent criticism has shifted the discussion away from debating the Christian or

[48] Jennifer Strauss, 'To Speak Once More of Cresseid: Henryson's *Testament* Re-considered', *SLJ* 4.2 (1977), pp. 5–13 (12); Priscilla Bawcutt, 'Henryson's "Poeit of the Auld Fassoun" ', *Review of English Studies* n.s. 32 (1981), pp. 429–34; Jill Mann, 'The planetary gods in Chaucer and Henryson', *Chaucer Traditions*, ed. Morse and Windeatt, pp. 91–106 (101).

[49] Mieszkowski, 'The Reputation of Criseyde', p. 132. Cf. Strauss, 'To Speak Once More', p. 8; and Benson, 'Critic and Poet', p. 239.

[50] E. M. W. Tillyard famously claimed that Cresseid achieves Christian salvation in 'The Testament of Cresseid', *Five Poems 1470–1870* (London, 1948), reprinted as *Poetry and its Background* (London, 1955), pp. 5–29 (17). Lee W. Patterson sees the poem as centrally concerned with 'the nature of the Christian experience': 'Christian and Pagan in *The Testament of Cresseid*', *PQ* 52 (1973), pp. 696–714.

pagan nature of Cresseid's experience to focus on issues of power and identity, especially in relation to spirituality and gender. Sabine Volk-Birke sees the poem as about 'the spiritual emancipation of a woman', and Cresseid's 'recognition of her guilt brings with it the recognition of her freedom to act, which confirms her individuality'. Catherine A. Cox finds in this 'text obsessed with errancy' that Cresseid's discursive as well as her sexual 'errancy' are perceived as feminine threats to masculine stability and propriety.[51]

Feminist approaches to the poem have challenged arguments that allow Cresseid agency, whether in a legal, moral or spiritual capacity.[52] Felicity Riddy contends that Cresseid should be read as a voice speaking in 'different genres that provide discontinuous subject positions', and that if her debasement is considered in the light of Kristeva's model of the abject we can see that 'Cresseid's abjection borders and maintains Troilus's truth'. She is allowed only to be 'the agent of her own fall', according to Susan Aronstein, to make an example of herself in a misogynist text that seeks to restore the pre-Chaucerian Criseyde, so the *Testament* brings her to a point where she is able to read herself correctly, 'to read her own story like a man'.[53]

Such readings explore and sometimes challenge longstanding views of Henryson's poem, including its place in medieval anti-feminist tradition. Postmodern approaches have found ambiguities, discontinuities and incoherencies in the text of particular interest, a trend that contrasts with earlier emphases on the poem's 'balance', 'logic' and 'pattern of facts'.[54] Derek Pearsall has responded to such readings with a reminder that the *Testament* is a poem, and what makes it a great poem is its 'poeticness', manifested in its 'intensity, the sense one has in reading the poem that everything that is happening is of enormous significance', and its 'connectivity, the way all its parts knit and work together to make of a linear narrative a *composition* full of echoes and anticipations'.[55]

Ongoing critical debate about the tale-*moralitas* relationship in *Orpheus and Eurydice* and, in *The Testament of Cresseid*, the nature of Cresseid's offence, the narrator's function, the status of Cresseid's dream-vision, the role of the

[51] Volk-Birke, 'Sickness unto Death', pp. 182, 177; Catherine S. Cox, 'Froward Language and Wanton Play: The "Commoun" Text of Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*', *SSL* 29 (1996), pp. 58–72 (63–4).

[52] Marion Wynne-Davies, ' "Spottis blak": Disease and the Female Body in *The Testament of Cresseid*', *Poetica* 38 (1993), pp. 32–52 (52, 43); Jana Mathews, 'Land, Lepers, and the Law in *The Testament of Cresseid*', *The Letter of the Law: Literary Production in Medieval England*, ed. Emily Steiner and Candace Barrington (Ithaca, NY, 2002), pp. 40–56 (63).

[53] Felicity Riddy, ' "Abject Odious": Feminine and Masculine in Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid', The Long Fifteenth Century: Essays for Douglas Gray*, ed. Helen Cooper and Sally Mapstone (Oxford, 1997), pp. 229–48 (244, 239); Aronstein, 'Cresseid Reading Cresseid', pp. 15, 9.

[54] Pittock, 'The Complexity', p. 204 and Riddy, ' "Abject Odious" ', p. 236; Nitecki, ' "Fenyeit of the New" ', p. 121; Patterson, 'Christian and Pagan', p. 698, Spearing, '*The Testament of Cresseid* and the "High Concise Style" ', p. 144 and Ramson, 'A Reading', p. 25.

[55] Pearsall, ' "Quha wait gif all that Chaucer wrait was trew?" ', pp. 169, 170, 172.

planetary gods, and Cresseid's final affecting encounter with Troilus, ultimately testifies to this awareness of their 'significance' and 'connectivity'. Henryson's artistry, his long-recognized 'fine poeticall way', continues to be appreciated in the most sensitive studies of his poetry. In their uses of familiar characters from well-known stories, both poems have an exemplary aspect. Nevertheless, Henryson's memorably recreated figures – the haunting portrait of Eurydice in hell, 'warsch and wan and walowit as the wede' (350), Orpheus the forlorn and 'wofull wedow' (414) and 'catiue Creisseid' (408) – linger in the mind long after the reading is over.