

## Section 1 - Stanzas 1 - 10

### Introduction: The Poet Reading in his Chamber

Re-read this section of the poem and answer the following questions. Make sure that your answers are written in such a way that you will be able to understand these at a later date when you come to use the notes for either a critical essay or as part of your revision for the exam.

### Stanzas 1 – 3

1. What is the weather like when the poet begins to write?
2. What time of year is it?
3. Why do you think the poet chooses to mention the weather?
4. Write down all the astrological and zodiacal references in this part of the poem.

### Stanzas 4 – 6

5. Why is his decision to pray to the goddess Venus and 'hir hie magnificence' an appropriate one?
6. What does the narrator say about love?
7. The poet changes his mind. What does the poet decide to do on impulse?

### Stanzas 7 – 9

8. In your own words, give a brief account of Chaucer's story as it is recounted in stanzas 7 – 9.

### Stanza 10

9. The narrator cannot guarantee the authenticity of the second story, anymore that he can be sure that Chaucer is telling the truth. What words tell you that the narrator isn't sure?
10. In what way does he open up the debate to discuss the wider 'world' of fiction?

## Henryson's Narrator

It should be clear from your reading of the first section that Henryson 'narrator' has a 'voice' in the poem. This is clearly established in the first six stanzas.

❖ Look at Henryson's '*persona*'.

- i) In your own words, describe the persona by making a list of what is he like in appearance, what he does and 'personality'?
- ii) Referring to the text, use a quotation to support what you have written in the list.
- iii) Finally, what do you think perhaps is the opinion Henryson expected us to have of his narrator? Is this the same as your own opinion? Why is this important for your further reading of the text?  
Give reasons for your answers.

## Section 2 - Stanzas 11 - 20

### Narrative Episode: Cresseid's Rejection, Return Home and Prayer

Re-read this section of the poem and answer the following questions. Make sure that your answers are written in such a way that you will be able to understand these at a later date when you come to use the notes for either a critical essay or as part of your revision for the exam.

#### Stanza 11

1. What was the outcome of Cresseid's fate?

#### Stanzas 12 – 13

2. i) What is the narrator's reaction to Cresseid's action and her fate?  
ii) How is this conveyed in the text?

#### Stanzas 14 – 17

3. Cresseid returns home to Calchas, her father. How does her father react?
4. Why is it important, do you think, that Calchas is a priest of Venus?
5. Why do you think Cresseid, 'hevie in hir intent/Into the kirk wald not hir self present'?

#### Stanzas 18 – 20

6. Cresseid goes into the small, secret chapel and there she laments on her situation.  
In your own words, write down the details of Cresseid's complaint.
7. Do you feel sympathy for Cresseid in her complaint against the gods or do you feel that she is misguided in her accusations? You must give reasons for your decision.

### Section 3 - Stanzas 21 - 38

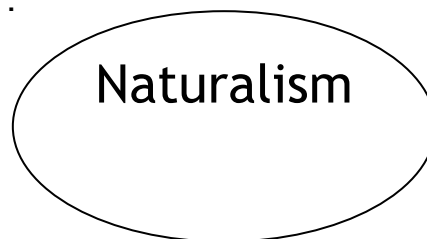
#### Cresseid's Dream

Cresseid falls into a faint and has a vision of Cupid. The planetary gods are summoned to give judgement on Cresseid for her blasphemy against Cupid's power and justice.

#### Interpretation of Cresseid's Dream

There are three ways of approaching the dream sequence. Read the following notes on the different interpretations. Your teacher will go over this with you in greater detail. As you read the notes, work through the various activities.

1.



“somnia naturale” - inspired by Cresseid's disturbed spiritual state and the onset of her disease. This assumes that leprosy has already been contracted.

but

Henryson's use of 'extasie' and 'ravischit in spreit' can be seen as language often used in spiritual and visionary writing.



Therefore, perhaps this sequence and Cresseid's experience is linked more to a 'vision' rather than a natural dream.

The idea of the pre-existence of Cresseid's leprosy can be taken from her speech:

*'that seid [of lufe] with froist is slane'*

This can be taken as a metaphor and is clearly linked to the wintry god Saturn who sentences her. This implies that she is already aware of the symptoms of leprosy. It could be argued, therefore, that Henryson is giving us a cue for a naturalistic interpretation.

2.

## Allegory

The allegorical interpretation links the pagan gods and their strong, traditional associations. These ideas of the gods were very much in the medieval consciousness and the physical descriptions of the gods are largely based on the mythical traditions of the Middle Ages.

### Allegorical Interpretation 1

Cresseid is 'devoted' to the goddess, Venus and as such, Cresseid displays the 'instability' that is attributed to the goddess.

- ❖ Identify and make a note of any references to Venus in the poem which would point to her unstable character and/or nature.

but

At the same time, Cresseid herself complains against the inconstancy of Venus. Her punishment at the hands of the gods may well illustrate this.

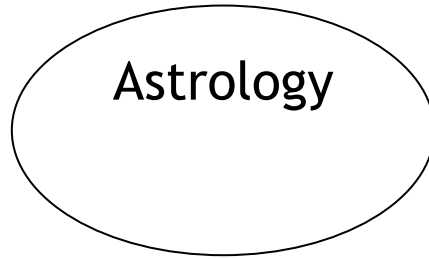
- ❖ By referring closely to the text, write down where you feel Cresseid criticises Venus.

### Allegorical Interpretation 2

The sentence of leprosy could also be taken as an allegory. For a medieval audience, the disease was sexually transmitted. Cresseid's punishment, therefore, might be taken as an allegorical statement of the relationship between wantonness and leprosy.

- ❖ What might be the argument against such an interpretation?

3.



Cresseid's dream can be interpreted in terms of astrology. The gods are presented to us according to astrological knowledge in the fifteenth century.

- ❖ As Henryson's presentation of the gods is fairly extensive, work your way through the activities which follow:

### Section 3 - Stanzas 21 – 38

#### Cresseid's Dream: The Gathering of the Gods

These stanzas present Henryson with the opportunity of using vivid language and imagery.

- ❖ Work your way through the presentation of the gods in stanzas 21 – 38. Your teacher will help you here.
  - i) In your own words and in note form, give an account of the sequence of planetary deities as they appear in the poem.
  - ii) Draft a table. Make the headings 'hostile', 'favourable' and 'ambiguous'. Going over your list, put in the different gods and their descriptions.
  - iii) Make another column. This time, the heading should 'temperament'. Write down the 'personality trait' of the different gods.
  
- ❖ Answer the following questions:
  - i) What do you notice about the way in which Henryson presents the planetary deities?
  - ii) Why do you think he has chosen to present the gods this way?
  - iii) What about Cresseid in this episode? What do you feel about her contribution here? Again, is there a reason why Henryson presents her in this way?

#### Critical Essay

- ❖ Now you have worked on Cresseid's dream, work on the following critical essay. Remember to plan your response before you begin.

Rubric : In blaming '*...fals Cupide...*', Cresseid is in effect blaming all the gods of her world. In what way can this be said to be true or are there any other interpretations of Henryson's dream sequence in 'The Testament of Cresseid'? Discuss

## **The Character of Cresseid**

*'...the fatall destenie  
Of fair Cresseid, that endit wretchitlie '*

From the quotation, we are led to believe that Henryson's portrayal of his heroine seems to be sympathetic. On closer analysis of the text, we can see that Henryson's treatment of Cresseid appears to be difficult, if at times problematic. In addition, there are also negative references made about Cresseid.

- ❖ By taking notes and making appropriate headings, look at the words/phrases that explicitly condemn Cresseid.
- ❖ Now, write down the words/phrases that invite our sympathy for her.
- ❖ Finally (and perhaps this is more difficult), look at the words which offer excuses for her behaviour.

As you work through the various sections of the poem, your teacher will refer you to your notes on this section. In addition, it would be helpful to you if you were to add to your list.



## **Section 4 - Stanzas 39 - 49**

### Cresseid's Dream: The Debate and Judgement of the Gods

Re-read this section of the poem and answer the following questions. Make sure that your answers are written in such a way that you will be able to understand these at a later date when you come to use the notes for either a critical essay or as part of your revision for the exam.

#### Stanzas 39 – 42

1. What does Cupide say about Cresseid's error of judgement against him?
2. In your own words, summarise the debate amongst the gods.
3. What is the sentence that is passed on Cresseid?

#### Stanzas 44

4. i) Who tells Cresseid of her fate?  
ii) Why do you think this god is chosen to deliver the sentence?

#### Stanzas 47

5. Where does the narrator's sympathy lie and why might this be important?

#### Stanzas 48 – 49

6. What form does Cresseid's disease take?

## Section 5 - Stanzas 50 – 58

### Narrative Episode: Cresseid's Leprosy

Re-read this section of the poem and answer the following questions. Make sure that your answers are written in such a way that you will be able to understand these at a later date when you come to use the notes for either a critical essay or as part of your revision for the exam.

### Stanzas 50 - 53

1. Why is it important do you think that Cresseid looks at herself in the mirror? (Clue: Is there a 'symbolic' reason? What might this be?)
2. Is there a cruel irony in this? If so, what is the irony?
3. In you own words, describe Cresseid's reaction to her deformity.
4. Notice that the narrator is scarcely evident here. In what way does his absence add to the drama?

### Stanzas 54 - 57

5. Read over Stanza 54. This stanza seems intensely sad. How does Henryson use the language to evoke great sympathy both for Calchas and Cresseid?

### Stanza 58

6. In this stanza, there is a sense of 'mood' setting and of 'time endured'. How does Henryson convey this?

### Critical Essay

Now you have worked on the first main section of the poem, work on the following critical essay. Remember to plan you response before you begin.

Rubric: It could be argued that Cresseid's blasphemy is at the centre of Henryson's poem. In what ways can Cresseid be considered responsible for her own fate?  
In your answer you must refer closely to the text and include Word-choice, imagery, tone or any other appropriate feature.

## **Section 6 - Stanzas 59 - 66**

### **The Complaint of Cresseid**

Throughout this section there are short questions and activities. Make sure that your answers are written in such a way that you will be able to understand these at a later date when you come to use the notes for either a critical essay or as part of your revision for the exam.

Re-read this section of the poem.

This section deals with the Complaint of Cresseid. The Complaint is introduced in the previous sections by the line:

'And on this wyse, weiping, sho maid hir mone'  
(Stanza 58)

This line signals the lament.

The first thing to notice here is that the pattern of the poem changes from the seven –line rhyming ababbcc ('rhyme royal' form) to a nine-line rhyming stanza form.

This is important, as it is a recognised medieval genre, with its own stylistic conventions. Look closely at Stanza 60. It begins:

'Quhair is thy chalmer wantounlie besene...'

The use of 'Quhair is...' follows, the *ubi sunt* (Lat. 'where are they?'), the tradition of Latin complaints. This is a common tradition in medieval lyric poetry where the poet grieves at the loss of pleasures and comforts, often dealing with the brief nature of life on earth or man's vulnerability to the rule of Fortune.

- ❖ After reading the stanza, which theme of the *ubi sunt convention* do you think best sums up Cressied's Complaint? Write a brief paragraph and remember to give a reason for your answer.

Here though, Cresseid's Complaint deals with the idea that she has been a victim and the lament is about her miserable condition. Henryson's audience would have immediately recognised this literary convention. The use of repetition is important to the medieval complaint poem. Look closely at Stanza 65:

'Nocht is your fairnes bot ane faiding flour'  
*Nocht is your famous laud and hie honour'*

Repetition is also used in the final stanzas of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, so Henryson clearly takes his form from a standard medieval convention.

- ❖ Read Stanzas 59 to 65. The contrast between Cresseid former life and her present misery is clear. Copy the table below and complete it using your own words, giving the parallel points between her past and present fortune.

| Past<br>Quotation |  | Present |
|-------------------|--|---------|
|                   |  |         |

## The Language of the Complaint

As you read the poem, you will notice that Henryson makes use of alliteration.

- ❖ Write down examples of the alliterative nature of the language used.
- ❖ Explain why Henryson might have used the language in this way and its effect on the reader.

### ***Look at Stanza 64***

Cresseid addresses the female audience:

*'O ladyis fair of Troy and Grece, attend  
My miserie, quhilk nane may comprehend...'*

Here, she presents herself as an example and suggests that she has learned something from her experience. (Note: she does address the *'ladyis...of Troy and Grece...'* but Henryson is directing this to Scottish women)

- ❖ Looking at the dramatic structure of the whole poem, why do you think Henryson includes a lament from Cresseid at this point?
- ❖ Why do you think it is important that the Complaint is in Cresseid's own voice?
- ❖ What are we led to believe she has learned?
- ❖ At this stage in the poem, who does Cresseid think is to blame for her misery?
- ❖ Given your knowledge of the poem so far, is Cresseid's judgement correct? Give a reason for your answer.
- ❖ What modern day parallels can be drawn here?

## **Section 7 - Stanzas 66 - 76**

### **Cresseid, the Lepers and Troilus**

Throughout this section there are short questions and activities. Make sure that your answers are written in such a way that you will be able to understand these at a later date when you come to use the notes for either a critical essay or as part of your revision for the exam.

There are two things to notice about these sections; firstly, the rhyme pattern of stanza 66 reverts to the seven-line, rhyme royal and secondly, this is a narrative episode. In many ways, this can be considered the main dramatic action of the poem.

❖ Answer the following questions:

#### ***Look at Stanzas 66 and 67***

1. In stanza 66, Henryson describes Cresseid's '*drerie destenye*'.
  - i) Give three phrases from the stanza which describe Cresseid's condition.
  - ii) What is the effect of the language used by Henryson in describing Cresseid's condition?
2. The '*lipper lady*' approaches Cresseid. She appears to give Cresseid good counsel. In your own words, write down what she tells Cresseid to do.

#### ***Look at Stanzas 68 to 76***

3. Stanza 68 signals a change in focus to Troilus.
  - i) Look closely at the language used to describe Troilus in this section of the poem. In what way do the words/phrases used to describe Troilus present us with an indication of his moral standing?
  - ii) What might that moral standing be?
  - iii) Stanza 71 describes the way 'memory' works. Notice how in the previous stanzas the events are presented from Troilus' viewpoint. Why do you think Henryson includes this one-off stanza at this point in the section?

- iv) Look carefully at Stanza 72.  
What is Troilus' reaction to seeing Cresseid?
  
- v) Stanza 73 sees Troilus' leaving Cresseid.  
How does the line '*For knightlie pietie and memoriall*' fit in with your earlier ideas of Troilus' moral standards?
  
- vi) Troilus' actions are steered by powerful emotion.
  - a) What is the effect of the word '*swak*'?
  
  - b) In what way do his actions here seem contradictory with his emotion in the rest of this section?
  
- vii) When Cresseid finds out that the generous lord is Troilus, she is beside herself with grief.  
Henryson again uses alliteration to describe Cresseid's reaction.  
Give three examples and explain the effect of each.

### **Our Reading of the Character of Troilus**

The actions of Troilus can be read on three levels:

1. Troilus' generosity is an indication of his loyalty to the memory of his love for Cresseid.
  2. He is a good man and is compassionate. He embodies the 'pietie' of stanza 73.
  3. He is used symbolically by Henryson as an illustration of the morals of the poem, that is, 'duty' and 'chivalric virtue'.
- ❖ Which of the above do you find the most convincing? Or can the character of Troilus be all of these?

## **Section 7 - Stanzas 77 - 86**

### **Testament and Death of Cresseid**

In this section, Cresseid now laments her lover, Troilus and how worthy he was of her faithful love. She realises her own unworthiness and warns other lovers of how rare true love actually is.

Henryson uses alliteration once again to open Cresseid's repentance and Testament, beginning in stanza 76. This is continued throughout this section and is used to intensify Cresseid's emotional last 'scene'. In stanzas 76, 77 and 78, Henryson also uses a refrain as a lament with the repetition of:

### **'O fals Cresseid and trew knicht Troylus!'**

This increases the power of Cresseid's lament. Therefore, rather than changing the stanza form, Henryson cleverly uses another device to indicate a shift in tone.

- ❖ What other literary device does Henryson use here and what is its effect?
- ❖ Look back at Cresseid's Complaint (Stanzas 59 – 66) and your notes on the section.
  - 1) What are the similarities between the first Complaint and Cresseid's Testament (Stanzas 77 – 86)?
  - 2) What are the differences between the two?

In stanzas 81, 82 and 83, Cresseid dictates her Will, disposing of her few belongings.

- ❖ Look at these stanzas now and make a note of:
  - 1) the number of lines in her brief Testament,
  - 2) the bequests that she makes,
  - 3) the stage she has reached by the end of her life.
- ❖ Cresseid wants to leave her '*spreit...to Diane*' (stanza 82)
  - 1) As Diana is the goddess of chastity, what is the importance of this action?
  - 2) What is the symbolic statement that Henryson is making at this point?
- ❖ Note that Cresseid wants Troilus to have her ring (stanza 83)
  - 1) Why is this important to the story?
  - 2) This makes the conclusion ambiguous in respect of Troilus' part in the events. (Look at stanzas 84 and 85)  
Why? Give a reason for your answer.



## **Section 7 - Stanzas 77 - 86**

### **Testament and Death of Cresseid**

#### **Questions**

Throughout this section there are short questions. Make sure that your answers are written in such a way that you will be able to understand these at a later date when you come to use the notes for either a critical essay or as part of your revision for the exam.

#### ***Look at Stanza 77***

1. In this stanza, Cresseid speaks directly. Why do you think Henryson uses direct speech at this point in the poem?
2. a) How does Cresseid describe herself?  
b) Write down three word or phrases as examples.
3. *'O fals Cresseid and trew knicht Troylus!'*

What is the effect of the refrain in Stanza 76,77 and 78?

#### ***Look at Stanzas 78 – 80***

4. According to Cresseid, what is the difference between Troilus' conduct and her own?
5. In stanza 79 - 80, there is a change of focus in Cresseid's speech.
  - a) What is the change of focus and how is it signalled?
  - b) What is the tone of stanzas 79 – 80?
  - c) In your own words, give a brief summary of her account.
6. The last line of her Complaint in stanza 80 is important.
  - a) Who does Cresseid now accuse?
  - b) How does this differ from her previous accusations?
  - c) What is the brief '*moralitas*' (the moral conclusion) here?