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IN DEFENCE OF CRISEYDE.

A consideration of the character
as seen by

Chaucer, Henryson and Shakespeare.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English at Massey University.

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PREFACE.

In 1969 with my youngest child at school and my schooldays more than twenty years behind me, I made my first very hesitant enrolment in a History unit as an extramural student of Massey University. I little dreamed that I would ever get as far as graduating, let alone ever write a thesis for a masterate. Now after thirteen continuous years as a student, I find myself surprisingly in that position. I am deeply appreciative of the assistance given me by many people over those years towards attaining this end.

I was an extramural student for the first six years and my thanks must go firstly to Massey's wonderful extramural service which makes it possible for those living outside university centres eventually to acquire a degree. The annual vacation courses, although exhausting, were the highlights of those years as was the emotional support gained from belonging to a small study group during my first year. When one experiences as an internal student the stimulation gained from contact with lecturers and other students, one is doubly conscious of the loneliness of extramural study.

I wish to thank all those with whom I have been associated in the English department over the years for their continual encouragement and also any in the History and French departments who may remember me as an undergraduate. Special thanks to Drs. Ross and Poole for the loan of helpful material.

My thanks to my family for putting up with my tendency to become short-tempered whenever assignments were due or exams looming and my

apologies for not always participating in their activities because of these reasons. My apologies, too, to my baby grandson, Peter, for not always being available to look after him during the final stages of writing.

The person to whom I stand most indebted for the eventual appearance of this work is my supervisor, Mr. Robert Neale. Although he must have despaired often of this thesis ever reaching completion, he never failed to encourage me gently with infinite patience whenever my interest or energy flagged. I am deeply appreciative of the generous way he gave me of his time unstintingly and of the promptness with which he returned each chapter as it took shape.

Lastly my thanks go to my typist, Mrs. E. Lynch, for her efficiency and eagerness to get the work completed.

With apologies for any neglect
my studies may have caused her over the years,
and with the hope that this thesis
may inspire her to continue with her studies,

I dedicate this
To my daughter Monica
who alone of my family
appears to have any "feel" for English.

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ABSTRACTIn Defence of Criseyde

The love story of Troilus and Criseyde has had a continuous appeal since the appearance of its first version in the mid-twelfth century. The character of the heroine has proved controversial because of her unconventional behaviour.

The earliest version by Benoît de Sainte Maure was used by Boccaccio as the basis for a love poem which expressed his personal grief at being separated from his beloved. Chaucer, in his turn, built on Boccaccio's work with a long narrative poem which incorporated many of the ideals of courtly love. His narrator is hopelessly biased towards Criseyde and lays the blame for any defects in her character on the reports of his authorities. We, too, are led by the narrator to sympathize with her by sharing in her motives and deliberations.

A century later the Scottish poet, Henryson, produced an imaginary ending to Chaucer's poem in which the heroine contracted leprosy for her sins of the flesh and died after repenting of her past life. For nearly two hundred years this poem was believed to have been written as a sequel by Chaucer.

Just over a century after Henryson's poem, Shakespeare produced the story as a drama interwoven with the military background of the Trojan war. The stage presentation, unpopular until this century, meant that the audience could see and hear Cressida's betrayal of Troilus in front of them. Shakespeare also adopted a derisive tone towards courtly love which by his time was outmoded.

Despite her extreme timidity, Chaucer's Criseyde is shown to betray Troilus for pragmatic reasons. This adds a realistic and opportunist dimension to her character. Chaucer implies ironically that we should not judge from appearances only.

Henryson's Cresseid is revealed as excessively vain but she does gain self-knowledge through suffering and comes to terms with her fate before death. Whether Henryson viewed his heroine in pagan, courtly or Christian terms, is a point of disagreement among critics as the poem contains moral overtones.

Shakespeare's Cressida is persuaded by Troilus to abandon her realism and surrender herself reluctantly to his idealism. Despite her later betrayal of him, her vows of love are sincerely made. Like most of the characters in the play she is unable to live up to her ideals.

The heroine does not set out to ensnare either Troilus or Diomedes but once they pursue her she cannot resist their advances. She reveals herself as being a victim of human frailty but her human weaknesses serve to endear herself to readers as a credible human being.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION.

For centuries the Trojan War and its associated legends have provided a wealth of romantic material on which writers can give vent to their imaginations. Among the colourful anecdotes for which the war provides a background, few have had such a lasting appeal as the love story of Troilus and Criseyde. That its potential has been appreciated is evident when one considers that writers of the calibre of Chaucer and Shakespeare have made use of it.

The character of the heroine of the story has provided critics with a fascinating subject for conjecture by the nature of her complexity and also because she fails to conform to the stereotyped standard of behaviour expected of a heroine in medieval and Renaissance literature. The three notable works on which she has made her mark in the English speaking world are Chaucer's long narrative poem, Troilus and Criseyde written in his distinctive rime royal form, The Testament of Cresseid written in similar stanzaic form but in Middle Scots, by the Scottish poet Robert Henryson, and Shakespeare's drama Troilus and Cressida. The actual date of writing of all three is uncertain but there is roughly a century separating the poems of Chaucer and Henryson and a little more than a century between the works of Henryson and Shakespeare.

The origins of the story are somewhat hazy and complicated. While the names of many of the background figures are renowned in Homer's Iliad, the principals are either non-existent or unimportant in his work. The episode is not mentioned in the two medieval supposedly "authentic" histories of the Trojan war in Latin prose: the more popular De Excidio Trojae Historia by Dares, who was said to have lived in Troy during the siege, and Ephemeris

Belli Trojani by Dictys who purported to be with the Greeks at the siege. The accounts therefore viewed the war from opposing sides. However, Dares' Latin was later proved to be that of the sixth century A.D., probably abridged from a now lost text, while Dictys' belonged to the fourth century, possibly a translation of a Greek original. The authenticity of their "eyewitness" accounts was questioned as early as 1401.

As far as can be gathered, the earliest version of the love story was a poem Le Roman de Troie, written in Old French in about 1155 by Benoît de Sainte-Maure. It appears to be an original invention with perhaps some ideas gleaned from Dares. The heroine's name is "Briseida" and her story is told in only 1350 of a total 30,000 verses, interspersed between accounts of battles, truces and activities of other Greeks and Trojans. The story opens at the point where the lovers are about to be separated and is exceptional in that it concentrates more on Diomedes' suffering than on Troilus'. On reading Gordon's translation of the sections pertaining to Briseida's story, one is surprised to discover how much of the bones of Chaucer's story lies here. Briseida's long monologue, in which she justifies her betrayal, is so reminiscent of her similar rationalizations in Chaucer. Her prediction of her future in Benoît,

"Henceforth no good will be written of me
nor any good song sung," (1)

is plainly echoed by Chaucer's Criseyde,

"Shal neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge
No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende." (2)

The next major contribution to the Troilus story was a translation in Latin prose of Benoît's poem. It was called Historia Destructionis Troiae

- (1) Benoît per R.K. Gordon (trans.) The Story of Troilus. (Toronto, 1978), p.19.
 (2) Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde, V, 1059-60.

and was written in 1287 by a Guido de Columnis. Although the style of the work was heavy and moralizing, it became more popular than the original. Its Latin text made it seem more scholarly and authoritative as well as making it accessible to a larger number of readers. The uncertainty about Briseida's motives that Benoît had sustained was removed by Guido who was explicit about her promiscuity, revealing her as a conniving hypocrite similar to the sixteenth century Cressida. Although Benoît is clearly his source, Guido nevertheless gives the credit to Dares and Dictys. Despite its being inferior as literature to Benoît's, Guido's work was regarded as the standard.

The principal forerunner of Chaucer's work and long considered as his chief source, was Boccaccio's Il Filostrato written in 1336. Instead of its being merely an episode in the Trojan wars, Boccaccio made the love story a complete poem in itself, using it as a vehicle for expressing his personal grief at being separated from his beloved Maria d'Aquino. As Troilus becomes the surrogate for his own anguish, the poem is infused with a passion absent in its predecessors. Boccaccio made other changes also. He altered the form of the heroine's name from "Briseida" to "Criseida" and made her a widow, presumably to make her more free than a married woman and yet more experienced than a girl. He introduced the figure of Pandarus as Criseida's cousin and Troilus' young friend. The personalities of the three protagonists are relatively simple with Criseida playing a minor part compared to Troilus. Boccaccio amplified Benoît's story by a detailed account of the lovers' affair prior to their parting. Because of Boccaccio's own disillusionment, the poem is tinged with a cynicism towards women, as can be seen clearly in the concluding stanzas:

"A young women is fickle and is desirous of many lovers She hath no feeling for virtue or reason, inconstant ever as leaf in the wind." (3)

Benoît's, Guido's and Boccaccio's stories were the chief precursors of the three works I am about to consider. Among the questions I plan to investigate is that of how far my authors have used these sources, particularly in relation to the characterization of the heroine. How far have they built on each other's work in the conception of their heroine and how far do their works overlap? To what extent is the heroine's character similar in the three works and to what extent different? How much of the difference is due to the different era in which each was written? How much of the difference is due to the demands of the genre? How much of the difference is due to the original creative conception of the individual writer? How far each ascribed to his characters the pagan values which historically they possessed and how far the writers' attitudes to their characters' behaviour were coloured instead by their own Christian values, is probably impossible to determine but an interesting subject for conjecture.

I hope to centre my main focus on whether my three writers have succeeded in creating a heroine who is credible as a human being and to identify the techniques they have used towards this end. Does the characterization of the heroine have relevance and appeal to a twentieth century audience and if so, why? Is the reader's view of the heroine influenced by previous knowledge of her reputation? Is her impact the same regardless of whether one reads one or all of the works and irrespective of in which order they are read? Bearing all this in mind, I shall now proceed to discuss each work in turn following the order in which they were written.

(3) Boccaccio per The Filostrato of Giovanni Boccaccio
trans. N.E. Griffin and A.B. Myrick, (New York), 8:30.

The chief emphasis in the next three chapters will be on the differing views of Criseyde/Cresseid/Cressida expressed by various critics. In the final chapter these views will be subjected to critical scrutiny, answers to the preceding questions will be attempted and conclusions about the character of the heroine will be deduced.

CHAPTER 2

CHAUCER'S "CRISEYDE".

It is generally accepted that the true source for Chaucer's great love poem, Troilus and Criseyde, was Boccaccio's Il Filostrato although at no point does Chaucer acknowledge this. Instead he lays claim to "myn auctour called Lollius"⁽¹⁾ and later excuses his inadequacy of expression because "I.../... out of Latyn in my tonge it write".⁽²⁾ As no such writer is known to us, it is usually assumed that this bogus Latin reference was a deliberate ironic concession to the medieval reverence for ancient authorities.

One writer who is in disagreement with the theory that Chaucer intended "Lollius" to be a joke, is Mario Praz⁽³⁾ who, in a fascinating chapter on the influence of the Italian writers on Chaucer, questions the supposition that Chaucer knew that Boccaccio was the author of the works he was exploiting. Praz contends that Chaucer saw Boccaccio as simply a mouthpiece for earlier historians and assumed some ancient author was originally responsible for the account of the story. Praz suggests that possibly Chaucer may have read in the Polycraticus of John of Salisbury a line of Horace alluding to a "Lollius" which Chaucer mistranslated as being the "greatest of writers of the Trojan war." However, Praz admits that since Chaucer visited Florence in 1373, it is unlikely he should not have heard of Boccaccio's renown.

(1) Troilus, I, 394.

(2) II, 13-14.

(3) Mario Praz. The Flaming Heart. (N.Y. 1958).

Whether Chaucer ever had an actual meeting with either Petrarch or Boccaccio during his Italian journey of 1372-4 remains a mystery but conjecture about it has provided writers with an absorbing topic. Be that as it may, Florentine culture was flourishing, dominated by Boccaccio's presence, during Chaucer's mission. This involved commercial negotiations on behalf of the English government at Genoa and included a pleasure trip to Florence. As a result the course of English literature changed from a French direction to an Italian one. Neville Coghill sees Troilus and Criseyde as "the greatest yield of Chaucer's Italian journeys."⁽⁴⁾ Until then the allegorical dream world of the Roman de la Rose had been Chaucer's model. From Boccaccio Chaucer learned how to depict a waking world of reality while retaining the French delicacy of feeling.

According to R.A. Pratt⁽⁵⁾ this French flavour was not entirely due to Chaucer's previous experience. Pratt contends that the French prose translation of Il Filostrato called Le Roman de Troyle et de Criseida by Beauvau, Seneschal of Anjou, and commonly thought to date from the early fifteenth century, was possibly in circulation earlier and available to Chaucer who used the text simultaneously with that of Boccaccio's.

Gretchen Mieszkowski⁽⁶⁾ points out that Beauvau substituted the story of his own unhappy love at the beginning and end of his translation, using Troilus as his surrogate much as Boccaccio had done. Mieszkowski also makes the suggestion that Beauvau could have been the first crude

(4) Neville Coghill, Geoffrey Chaucer. (London, 1959), p.37.

(5) R.A. Pratt. Chaucer and 'Le Roman de Troyle et de Criseida'.

(6) Gretchen Mieszkowski. The Reputation of Criseyde, 1155-1500.

model for Chaucer's narrator whom she sees as being more like Beauvau than "the static lamenting young Boccaccio".⁽⁷⁾ Mieszkowski claims that this French translation was an addition to the many versions available to fourteenth century Englishmen. It is evident the story was well known in England, she says, from the number of casual allusions to it in fourteenth century literature. Chaucer's contemporary and friend, John Gower, to whom Chaucer dedicates Troilus and Criseyde, mentioned the story seven different times, with at least two of the references having been written before Chaucer's poem.

Assuming that Il Filostrato was, despite the forgoing controversies, Chaucer's main source, we need to look at it first of all, as Lewis⁽⁸⁾ did, to discover what alterations Chaucer made to the original to produce his own unique version.

As Lewis points out, the term "Renaissance" was unknown in England when Chaucer was writing at the end of the fourteenth century. His audience still looked at poetry in the medieval fashion and for them Chaucer's poem was an addition to the story of Troy. Chaucer, therefore gave his story an historical background which Boccaccio had ignored.

As a pupil of the rhetoricians, Chaucer also proceeded to "amplify" his source ending up with a poem almost half as long again, although he did reduce Boccaccio's nine books to five in the interest of symmetry. He also adopted Boccaccio's new use of stanzas instead of octosyllabic couplets for narrative.

(7) Ibid., p.97.

(8) C.S. Lewis, "What Chaucer Really Did to Il Filostrato".
(Notre Dame, 1961).

Above all Lewis avows that Chaucer approached Il Filostrato as a poet of courtly love and set about correcting the errors Boccaccio had made against its code. Towards this end Lewis sees a whole process of medievalization taking place. Chaucer achieved this by rendering his original more liturgical so that it acquired a didactic purpose as can be seen as early as the thirty-first line of his poem:

That Love hem brynge in hevenc to solas.⁽⁹⁾

Alterations were necessary to the conduct of Boccaccio's heroine who exhibited an eager sensuality condemned by the courtly code. Consequently Chaucer delayed her surrender by introducing romantic adjuncts such as the song of Antigone and the riding past of Troilus. These aided the impression of Criseyde's yielding gradually and reluctantly. She becomes a far more complex, elusive heroine with a depth and sincerity of character which make it necessary for Chaucer to put the responsibility for her later betrayal of Troilus on his authorities. The cynical Latin gallantries and contempt for women which characterize Il Filostrato, disappear from the English poem and Chaucer defends Criseyde's conduct on all counts. While Criseyde's character gains subtlety, Troilus remains essentially unchanged apart from an additional idealism typical of the courtly lover. Chaucer, however, does not identify himself with Troilus as Boccaccio does. Chaucer makes Pandarus the dominating character, manipulating the lovers mercilessly and steeping the poem in a genial atmosphere.

While Il Filostrato was written at the peak of its author's own passion, Chaucer composed his poem as a middle-aged man of wide knowledge and experience. What the latter loses in intensity, it gains in human appeal. As Praz sees it:

(9) Ibid., I, 31.

what the Italian had lived from within, the English poet saw from without. To this difference of attitude are to be traced Chaucer's psychological superiority to Boccaccio, as well as his emotional inferiority. This latter deficiency is largely compensated by the former quality, but one cannot help regretting sometimes, the deliberate suppression on Chaucer's part, of those fresh, direct effusions of naive sensual love which give such a juvenile charm to Boccaccio's account ... The central theme of Troilus is loyalty in love; the central theme of the Filostrato is Troilus's sorrow for the absence of his beloved.⁽¹⁰⁾

Praz believes the fruit of Chaucer's journeys to Italy may be seen in his works. As a direct observer of human life, Chaucer found Italy offered him not only an unique literature but an unique form of actual life. This sharpened his feeling for drama so that on returning to England he could see life around him in the light of this new experience which inspired him to express it in words.

Praz's stress on the importance of Italian life and literature in Chaucer's subsequent work does not appear to be consistent with Lewis's belief that Chaucer indulged in a process of medievalization. Praz is not alone in disagreeing with Lewis's interpretation of Troilus and Criseyde. Roger Sharrock,⁽¹¹⁾ in an article entitled "Second Thoughts: C.S. Lewis on Chaucer's Troilus", questions Lewis's conclusions regarding the meaning of the poem, particularly his emphasis on the importance of the courtly love code and his failure to consider the implication of the concluding stanzas. This allows Lewis to announce at the end of his commentary on the poem in The Allegory of Love that "Troilus is what Chaucer meant it to be — a great poem in praise of love."⁽¹²⁾ This statement, as Sharrock sees it,

(10) Praz, op. cit., pp.79-81.

(11) Roger Sharrock. "Second Thoughts: C.S. Lewis on Chaucer's Troilus".

(12) C.S.Lewis. The Allegory of Love. (N.Y. 1958), p.197.

"makes it possible for him to ignore that whole side of Chaucer's purpose which is rather a great poem about human frailty and exposedness, tender in its recognition of the limited human goodness of passionate love."⁽¹³⁾ Sharrock believes that the whole treatment of the lovers and Pandarus, such as "the colloquial naturalness of the interchanges, the proximity to the sublime of the ludicrous and frustrating, the continuous stress on the sheer vulnerability of Troilus and Criseyde, whether to suffering or to love, are all aspects of a general sense of human limitation."⁽¹⁴⁾

Sharrock points out that we can never be sure of the rightness of our responses to the nuances of humour or pathos in Chaucer because of our limited knowledge of the fourteenth century mind. He therefore sees flaws as well as virtues in Lewis's contention that "it is a wholly medieval poem. ... It speaks at once to our hearts, ... because it deals with those elements in the medieval consciousness which survive in our own."⁽¹⁵⁾

Sharrock believes that Lewis, in his emphasis on the medievalizing process that Chaucer applied to the Italian poem, has given insufficient recognition to Chaucer's transformation of the love tradition. Sharrock draws attention to the profound changes in the art forms of the period such as the exploitation of common life in the miracle plays and moralities and the rise of such bourgeois literary genres as the "fabliau." Sharrock sees Chaucer's vision of human nature and its weaknesses as more in keeping with the spirit of his own time than with such survivals from a past age as the dream-vision. Chaucer demonstrates this, says Sharrock, with "cold douches of the embarrassingly everyday such as the effect of Pandarus'

(13) Sharrock, op. cit., p.128.

(14) Ibid., p.130.

(15) Lewis, Allegory, pp.176-7.

presence on the lovers, the shocking clash between their ecstasy and his prosing."⁽¹⁶⁾

Sharrock believes that the poem's claim to special favour in the twentieth century lies not, as Lewis would have it, in that "it deals with those elements in the medieval consciousness which survive in our own",⁽¹⁷⁾ but "because it is a celebration of a love that goes wrong, not simply a story of an unhappy love or unfaithfulness, but of supreme happiness that turns sour: 'From wo to wele, and after out of joie'. "⁽¹⁸⁾ It is this disenchantment which attracts the modern reader, Sharrock claims.

The motives governing Criseyde's conduct are a source of endless debate. Sharrock remarks on the vagueness Chaucer assumes regarding her later behaviour in contrast to the detailed account of her falling in love with Troilus. He becomes oppressed by his responsibility as story-teller,

I fynde ek in the stories elleswhere,⁽¹⁹⁾

putting the kindest construction possible on the reasons for her surrender to Diomede:

Iwis, I wolde excuse hire yet for routhe.⁽²⁰⁾

Lewis is not prepared to be as kind; his verdict, in fact, is decidedly harsh, even pompous: "It is disgusting that she should give Troilus' brooch to Diomede, and her last letter to Troilus is abominable."⁽²¹⁾

(16) Sharrock, *op.cit.*, pp.134-5.

(17) Lewis, *Allegory*, p.177.

(18) Sharrock, *op.cit.*, p.126 and I,4.

(19) V, 1044.

(20) V, 1099.

(21) Lewis, *Allegory*, p.189.

Here again Sharrock takes Lewis to task for his attitude. Sharrock maintains Criseyde's degradation is not, as Lewis and other critics would have it, due to the flaw of "slydinge of corage"⁽²²⁾ in her character, but to "the common human degradation of being responsible for one's worst moments as well as one's best."⁽²³⁾ Sharrock sees Chaucer's point of view as always that of the suffering exposed human being. This makes Lewis's judgment on Criseyde unnecessarily positive, says Sharrock, as the horror into which she falls lies in wait for all of us.

Lewis sees Fear as Criseyde's ruling passion and from it springs her longing for protection. Lewis believes her trusting affection for her uncle Pandarus is another form of her desire for protection. He reminds us that at the opening of the poem we find her,

Wel neigh out of hir wit for sorwe and fere,⁽²⁴⁾

because of her situation as a traitor's widowed daughter alone in Troy. When confronted by Pandarus with the news that Troilus loves her, Criseyde, so Chaucer tells us, "was the ferfulleste wight/That myghte be."⁽²⁵⁾ This timidity is not, Sharrock maintains, the "tragic fault"⁽²⁶⁾ Lewis would have us believe. Mere human curiosity, not fate, makes Criseyde listen to Pandarus' pleading for his friend. While not admitting the flattery she feels at the prospect of a royal lover,

"What wonder is though he of me have joye?"⁽²⁷⁾

Criseyde's encouragement of his suit is largely human vanity. Chaucer himself asks,

(22) V, 825.

(23) Sharrock, op.cit., p.130.

(24) I, 108.

(25) II, 450-1.

(26) Lewis, Allegory, p.190.

(27) II, 749.

For who is that ne wolde hire glorifie,
To mowen swich a knyght don lyve or dye? (28)

Jane Adamson⁽²⁹⁾ believes that Criseyde's self-mistrust and fears eventually produce the very grounds that would justify them.

E.G. Stanley⁽³⁰⁾ raises the issue of the respective ages of the characters. He reminds us that by turning Pandarus into Criseyde's uncle instead of her cousin, Chaucer has made him not only both confidant of the lover and guardian of the beloved, but has turned him from the young friend in Boccaccio to a worldly-wise courtier in whom no prince should put his trust. Chaucer also introduces points to make Criseyde appear older than Boccaccio's counterpart. When Pandarus suggests they dance she replies,

"I? God forbede!" quod she, "be ye mad?
Is that a widewes lif, so God your save?

...

It sate me wel bet ay in a cave
To bidde and rede on holy seyntes lyves;
Lat maydens gon to daunce, and yonge wyves."⁽³¹⁾

That she has three nieces, one of whom is old enough to sing a love song, also invests her with the authority of a mature woman. Added to this is Chaucer's own significant comment:

But trewely, I kan not telle hire age.⁽³²⁾

The inference to be drawn from all this is that experience goes with widowhood. The opposite applies to Troilus who is made to appear all the more youthful and inexperienced against her. This is heightened by his being initially a scorner of love. Once smitten he shows a timidity which often surpasses Criseyde's.

(28) II, 1593-4.

(29) Jane Adamson. "Henryson's Testament of Cresseid", (Critical Review, 18)

(30) E.G. Stanley. "About Troilus" (Essays and Studies, 1976)

(31) II, 113-114, 117-119.

(32) V, 826.

Sharrock points out that Criseyde allows herself to be pushed about by both Troilus and Pandarus in a fashion altogether too passive for a courtly "domina" who should be mastering her lover by the brightness of her eyes. Other features too are out of keeping with the courtly love code, such as Criseyde's enigmatic response to Pandarus' "selling" of Troilus to her:

"Nay, thereof spak I nought, ha, ha!" quod she;
As helpe me God, ye shenden every deel!" (33)

We also have a lurking suspicion that Criseyde is not unaware of what may happen after Pandarus' dinner-party:

Nought list myn auctor fully to declare
What that she thoughte whan he seyde so,
That Troilus was out of towne yfare
As if he seyde thereof soth or no. (34)

Earlier she had avowed to Pandarus,

"Ne shal I nevere of hym hav other routhe." (35)

Even Lewis has to admit her betrayal of Troilus is unpardonable by the code of courtly love.

Alice Miskimin⁽³⁶⁾ draws attention to the constant shifts of focus made by Chaucer's narrator. This makes it difficult for us to maintain a single view of the characters as the narrator persists in breaking in to undertake the role of moralist and to interpret motives rather than to narrate:

I fynde ek in the stories elleswhere,
Whan thorough the body hurt was Diomede
Of Troilus, tho wepte she many a teere,
Whan that she saugh his wyde wowndes blede;
And that she took, to kepen hym, good hede;
And for to helen hym of his sorwes smerte,
Men seyn - I not - that she yaf hym hire herte. (37)

(33) II, 589-90.

(34) III, 575-8.

(35) II, 489.

(36) Alice Miskimin. The Renaissance Chaucer. (New Haven, 1975)

(37) V, 1044-50.

It is at points such as this where the narrator seems to have slipped up and Criseyde's behaviour has become inconsistent with what has gone before that Chaucer, probably deliberately, gives us the clearest clues to his irony and makes us realize with what skill he has led us on to accept the narrator's view of Criseyde. This realization on our part is re-inforced by such lines as,

Ne me ne list this sely womman chyde
 Forther than the storye wol devyse.
 Hire name, allas! is punysshed so wide,
 That for hire gilt it oughte ynough suffise. (38)

Considering the constant pressure exerted on Criseyde by Pandarus, one can scarcely blame her for yielding to Troilus. As Lewis states, "her only natural protector... is on her lover's side, and working upon her by appeals to her curiosity, her pity and her natural passions, as well as by direct lying and trickery".⁽³⁹⁾ It is, however, rather her betrayal of Troilus and her relations with his successor, Diomedes, which arouse the greatest controversy regarding Criseyde's character and motives.

As Lewis sees it, the situation in itself is half the battle for Diomedes. In her desolation at the enforced separation from Troilus, Criseyde's normal hunger for comfort and protection is heightened to an imperative craving. The effect of Diomedes's tactics can be seen in the form of her pragmatic reasoning:

Retourning in hire soule ay up and down
 The wordes of this sodeyn Diomedes,
 His grete estat, and perel of the town,
 And that she was allone and hadde nede
 Of frendes help; and thus bygan to brede
 The cause whi, the sothe for to telle,
 That she took fully purpos for to dwelle. (40)

(38) V, 1093-6.

(39) Lewis, Allegory, p.183.

(40) V, 1023-29.

She does not reach this decision without a struggle and prior to it has even proposed to steal away by night:

"I shal to-morwe at nyght, by est or west,
Out of this oost stele on som manere syde,
And gon with Troilus where as hym lest.
This purpos wol ich holde, and this is best."

...

But God it wot, er fully monthes two,⁽⁴¹⁾
She was ful fer fro that entencioun!

As Kenneth Muir⁽⁴²⁾ points out, Criseyde is always tempted to take the line of least resistance. Lewis sees her "grasping at the last chance of self-respect, with the words, 'To Diomedes algate I wol be trewe.'" ⁽⁴³⁾

Once this point has been reached Lewis, unlike Chaucer's narrator, can only condemn Criseyde rather than make excuses for her conduct:

Her further descent from being Diomedes's mistress
to being a common prostitute, and finally a
leprous beggar, as in Henryson, cannot be said
to be improbable. ⁽⁴⁴⁾

Sharrock disagrees with this uncompromising stance of Lewis's and believes that despite what may be said about the brutal decisiveness of "sodeyn Diomedes", the significant fact is that, as her escort from Troy to the Grecian lines, he is the first man she meets. In the vulnerable position she finds herself, he is simply what happens to her next. McKay Sundwall⁽⁴⁵⁾ believes Diomedes's "by the reyne hire hente"⁽⁴⁶⁾ at the exchange of Criseyde is a symbolic gesture indicating he has assumed the role of her protector.

(41) V, 751-4 and 766-7.

(42) Kenneth Muir. The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays. (London, 1977)p.142.

(43) Lewis, Allegory, p.189 and V, 1071.

(44) Ibid., p.189.

(45) McKay Sundwall. "Criseyde's Rein" (Chaucer Review, 11:2).

(46) V, 90.

Sharrock sees a "kind of proneness",⁽⁴⁷⁾ not predestination, as the cause of Troilus' roving eyes first lighting on Criseyde rather than any other woman, just as mere human curiosity leads Criseyde to listen to Pandarus' pleading for his friend.

Criseyde's prediction of her future reputation after she has yielded to Diomedes reveals an innate realism and awareness of her human weakness:

" Allas! of me, unto the worldes ende,
 Shall neyther ben ywriten nor ysonge
 No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende.
 O, rolled shall I ben in many a tonge!
 Thoroughout the world my belle shal be ronge!
 And wommen moost wol haten me of alle.
 Allas that swich a cas me sholde falle".⁽⁴⁸⁾

Some critics such as Lewis accuse Criseyde of being over-sensual and falling in love too easily. However, it must be remembered that it is Troilus who falls in love with Criseyde at first sight. She is won over only gradually after lengthy debates within herself and pragmatic reasoning such as:

She thoughte wel that Troilus persone
 She knew by syghte, and ek his gentillesse,
 And thus she seyde, "A were it not to doone,
 To graunte hym love, ye, for his worthynesse,
 It were honour, with pley and with gladnesse,
 In honestee with swich a lord to deele,
 For myn estat, and also for his heele.

"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 myghte stonde in worse plit.
 Now were I wis, me hate to purchas,
 Withouten nede ther I may stonde in grace?"⁽⁴⁹⁾

(47) Sharrock, op.cit., p.131.

(48) V, 1058-64.

(49) II, 701-14.

When Diomedes offers himself as her protector after asking for her "mercy",⁽⁵⁰⁾ we find Criseyde again rationalizing his words⁽⁵¹⁾ and equivocating before she submits in much the same way as she did previously with Troilus. She seems to talk herself into falling in love rather than its being a spontaneous physical or emotional attraction. At Deiphobus's house Criseyde realizes Troilus' sickness is feigned just to get her to his bedside but she chooses to overlook it. Just as Troilus "wex sodeynliche red"⁽⁵²⁾ at her coming, so does she⁽⁵³⁾ when Pandarus brings him to her bedside in Pandarus' house. On this occasion we are not told of Criseyde's motives for kissing Troilus "although she siked sore."⁽⁵⁴⁾ One wonders if she is merely taking pity on him just as when informed later of their impending separation she seems to be conscious of his pain more than her own:

"But how shul ye don in this sorwful cas;
How shal youre tendre hert this sustene?"⁽⁵⁵⁾

Before Troilus and Criseyde separate, Criseyde takes the initiative in proposing several elaborate impractical schemes by which they can be re-united. Lewis is not impressed:

No one, not even Troilus, is deceived by those desperate speeches in which Criseyde, with pitiful ignorance of her self, attempts to assume the role of comforter and to become a woman of practical ability, resource and hardihood.⁽⁵⁶⁾

Troilus, with a premonition that Criseyde's father

"shal som Greek so preyse and wel alose,
That ravysshenn he shal yow with his speche,"⁽⁵⁷⁾

(50) V, 168.

(51) See p.16 above.(40)

(52) III, 82.

(53) III, 956.

(54) III, 972.

(55) IV, 794-5.

(56) Lewis, Allegory, p.187.

(57) IV, 1473-4.

then suggests an equally wild scheme for them to run away together which has the effect of restoring Criseyde's realism:

"But afterward, ful soore it wol us rewe."⁽⁵⁸⁾

Throughout the poem Criseyde's fearfulness is stressed. Once in the Greek camp she is too frightened to return to Troy in case she is caught and raped. One wonders if she has had this experience in her past. Diomedes plays on these fears by predicting that everyone in Troy will be killed by the Greeks. However, this overpowering fear and timidity of Criseyde's seems inconsistent with her appearance when Troilus first sets eyes on her in the temple:

With ful assured lokyng and manere.⁽⁵⁹⁾

Is one of them therefore just merely a pose, and if so, which? There are other aspects of Criseyde's appearance which seem at variance with her character. We are told at the beginning:

So aungelik was hir natif beaute,
That lik a thing immortal semed she,⁽⁶⁰⁾

while in the later description of her in the final book we learn,

That Paradis stood formed in hir yêñ⁽⁶¹⁾

In both descriptions there is a blurring of the religious and the secular which tends to recur throughout the poem. Chaucer appears to be telling us ironically that it is unwise to judge by appearances. Like many things in the poem it lies open to question so that we find it impossible to be definitive.

(58) IV, 1531.

(59) I, 182.

(60) I, 102-3.

(61) V, 817.

CHAPTER 3

HENRYSON'S "GRESSEID".

The earliest record of The Testament of Cresseid is in the table of contents of a 1515 manuscript but the portion of the manuscript containing the poem itself is lost. In 1532 William Thynne published an edition of Chaucer's works and Troilus and Criseyde was followed by a poem referred to as "the pyteful and dolorous testament of fayre Creseyde". This poem, which we now know as Henryson's Testament, was inserted on four extra leaves preceding The Legend of Good Women. The Testament appears to have been added after the rest of the volume had been printed since there is a gap in the foliation at this point. Thynne must have known from the Mid-Scots dialect that the poem was not Chaucer's but he may have wished to mislead readers. The table of contents was revised to make it appear to be Chaucer's poem. In reality it was written in Scotland nearly a century after Chaucer's death.

Henryson's Testament continued to be read as the traditional after-piece of Troilus in all subsequent editions of Chaucer until Urry's edition of 1721. The Mid-Scots dialect which would have betrayed its northern origin was smoothed away and replaced by London forms of English. There is no doubt that Henryson wrote the Testament. On the title page of the Charteris print, the oldest extant separate text, published in Edinburgh in 1593, Henryson is referred to as a schoolmaster of Dunfermeling and this is repeated in the Anderson print of 1663. Presumably Henryson's authorship was recognized in Scotland as long as the small Scottish editions were in circulation. Henryson is thought to have written it during the last quarter of the fifteenth century.

Francis Thynne was the first Englishman to state that the poem was

not Chaucer's in his Animadversions of 1599: "yt wolde be good that Chaucer's proper woorkes were distinguyshed from the adulterat, and such as were not his, as the Testament of Cressyde etc. whiche Chaucer never composed." However, this statement was not printed until the nineteenth century. Kinaston was the first Englishman to recognize Henryson's authorship: "it was made and written by one Mr. Robert Henderson". Urry had access to the Kinaston manuscript and copied this note without acknowledgement in his 1721 edition. This was the first English statement of Henryson's authorship to be printed but it was not until the nineteenth century that the poem was universally recognized as Henryson's. Attributing the Testament to Chaucer assured it ironically of a far larger audience than it would have had otherwise. In the two centuries between 1532 and 1721 it was the best known Scottish poem in England. Alice Miskimin reminds us that Henryson was writing for the new post-Caxton reading generation.

That the Testament was not written by Chaucer seems obvious to us by the poet's reference to him three times in the opening stanzas:

I tuik one Quair, and left all uther sport,
Writtin be worthie Chaucer glorious, (1)
Of fair Creisseid and worthie Troylus;

...

For worthie Chauceir, in the samin buik; (2)

...

Quha wait gif all that Chauceir wrait was trew? (3)

Perhaps sixteenth and seventeenth century readers were prepared to overlook this. As regards the questioning of the veracity of Chaucer's writing in the last quote, Miskimin sees it as indicative of the contemporary phenomena of scepticism and the new conceptions of writing history in the early Renaissance.

(1) Testament, ll. 40-42.

(2) 1.58.

(3) 1.64.

A.C. Spearing believes that in this questioning of his source Henryson exhibits a sturdy independence of the English master sufficient for him to offer, not a continuation, but an alternative ending which leaves the heroine dead instead of Troilus. Spearing alleges that by this "Henryson is aligning himself with a Renaissance conception of the poet as a creator rather than a reteller or commentator."⁽⁴⁾ Miskimin reminds us that Henryson needs Troilus alive and unchanged with Cresseid's image still perfect in his mind for the dramatic crisis of the pathetic non-recognition scene. Miskimin sees Criseyde and Cresseid as "before-and-after emblems."⁽⁵⁾

Henryson's narrator indicates he has a second source:

To brek my sleip aneuther quair I tuik,
In quhilk I fand the fatall destenie
Of fair Cresseid, that endit wretchitlie.⁽⁶⁾

In all likelihood the "uther quair" was a fictional one although Gretchen Mieszkowski believes it was Lydgate's Troy Book. She bases this on a similar comparison of Venus with a snake⁽⁷⁾ in both works.

C.W. Jentoft⁽⁸⁾ believes that the consistent similarities between the artistic poses of Chaucer's and Henryson's narrators account for the readiness of sixteenth century readers to ascribe the Testament to Chaucer. Jentoft sees both narrators as establishing the existence of mythical sources so that they are later able to use them to avoid condemning their heroine.

(4) A.C. Spearing. Criticism and Medieval Poetry, (London, 1972), p.158.

(5) Miskimin, op.cit., p.209.

(6) ll. 64-3.

(7) Mieszkowski, op.cit., p.136 and l.228.

(8) C.W. Jentoft "Henryson as Authentic Chaucerian" (Studies in Scottish Lit. 1972).

Just as Chaucer says,

Men seyn - I not - that she yaf hym hire herte,⁽⁹⁾

so we find Henryson saying,

Than desolait scho walkit up and doun,
And sum men sayis into the court commoun

...

Yit nevertheles, quhatever men deme or say
In scornfull langage of thy brukkilnes
I sal excuse, als far furth as I may.⁽¹⁰⁾

Mieszkowski⁽¹¹⁾ sees Henryson's narrator fighting against Cresseid's guilt for most of the poem. Only in the last stanzas does he cease talking about her as if she were as innocent of responsibility as she herself first claims.

Spearing's view⁽¹²⁾ is rather different. He sees Henryson's narrator as like Chaucer's Troilus; having experienced human love and its decay, he withdraws from involvement with it and is then able to see it in clearer perspective freed from the illusions of young Troilus. Spearing also believes Henryson's narrator is much closer to the poet than Chaucer's. There are remnants of Chaucer's technique in the early lines of the Testament but these devices are soon abandoned. In contrast to Troilus and Criseyde, the reader becomes less and less aware of any narrator at all.

The character of Pandarus becomes unnecessary in the Testament for once Troilus and Criseyde are separated his function as a go-between is superfluous. Henryson transfers his role as a vehicle for comic relief and common-sense to Calchas whose relationship with his daughter is transformed

(9) V, 1050.

(10) ll. 76-7 and ll. 85-7.

(11) Mieszkowski, op.cit., p.137.

(12) Spearing op.cit., p.182.

from one of antipathy in Chaucer's poem to one of mutual affection. This demonstrates Henryson's willingness to be an innovator. With Pandarus gone, Henryson's narrator is able to concentrate on the moral dilemma of Cresseid's guilt which Chaucer had left open. As Calchas is drawn as a loving sympathetic father, he cannot be blamed for Cresseid's wilfullness. Diomede's characterization in the Testament is only by report. His desertion of Cresseid denies her the fulfilment of her resolution in Chaucer:

"To Diomede algate I wol be trewe."⁽¹³⁾

Henryson's own contributions to the story are the leprosy curse, Cresseid's moral growth and her death. According to Denton Fox, Cresseid's leprosy has a special significance. The disease was endemic in Europe in the Middle Ages and lingered on in Scotland and Scandinavia after it had died out elsewhere. As it was believed to be a venereal disease, Fox considers Henryson assigned it to Cresseid because of her promiscuity. The disease was also seen as a punishment by God. Fox, therefore, sees Cresseid's leprosy as not only the result of her promiscuity "but as an inevitable and proper punishment for a corrupt, unnatural and sinful life".⁽¹⁴⁾ At the same time, Fox believes that this divine punishment indicates a special relationship between the leper and God with the possibility of the leper's suffering being a holy and purifying one. Fox reminds us of the Biblical associations of the disease with the raising to eternal life.

Spearing objects⁽¹⁵⁾ to Fox's symbolic interpretation of the facts and also to those of John MacQueen who believes Cresseid was already suffering from a venereal affliction when she returned to Calchas' house, and that her subsequent blasphemy and its punishment are purely symbolic. Spearing believes it is not the purifying and redemptive power of Cresseid's

(13) V, 1071.

(14) Denton Fox (ed) The Poems of Robert Henryson (Oxford, 1981), p.lxxxviii.

(15) Spearing, op.cit., p.186.

misfortunes which are stressed but their factual quality. The insistence on the facts of physical suffering which the leper's existence involves, makes the concise treatment of Cresseid's mental anguish possible:

And quhen scho saw hir face sa deformait,⁽¹⁶⁾
Gif scho in hart was wa aneuch, God wait!

Spearing sees the inescapable factuality of Cresseid's physical and mental anguish reinforced by the repetition of the word "pane". He sees no indication that Cresseid would have become leprous had she not blamed Venus and Cupid for her miseries and by this she brings punishment on herself. Spearing reminds us that Cresseid's world has to be conceived in terms of a pagan theology in which gods are vengeful and malicious. Jane Adamson⁽¹⁷⁾ supports this view by saying that nowhere does Henryson present Cresseid's world as a Christian one.

Cresseid's "moral growth", as seen by Mieszkowski, is also a contentious issue. Spearing points out that medieval writers usually use tragedy as a means of stressing some moral lesson and in this the Testament is no exception. However, this moralizing does not include any proposal for remedying the situation, such as Troilus' turning from earthly to heavenly love as at the end of Chaucer's poem. Spearing refers to the severely practical advice offered Cresseid by the "lipper-lady" who points out the uselessness of her "complaint" and recommends her rather to "mak vertew of ane neid".⁽¹⁸⁾ Her impulse is to help Cresseid and the painful wisdom she offers her has been hard-won from her own suffering. The "lipper-lady" recognizes the continual struggle Cresseid will have until she accepts the reality of her situation. This is the spirit in which Adamson believes Henryson sees Cresseid - "compassionately moral but utterly unmoralistic, grave, but not nagging at blame and guilt."⁽¹⁹⁾

(16) ll. 349-50.

(17) Adamson, op.cit., p.54.

(18) l.478.

(19) Adamson, op.cit., p.47.

Marshall Stearns believes that Henryson's narrator's concluding advice to women:

Ming not your lufe with fals deceptioun,⁽²⁰⁾

while a fitting moral, violates all courtly precedent and demonstrates that "the poem was composed from a recognizably moral point of view."⁽²¹⁾ Stearns points out that this general change in attitude from idealistic to realistic reflects a change in the respective societies of the two poets, and the decline of a great tradition. Stearns maintains Henryson is writing the poem according to the standards of orthodox morality by refusing to adopt Chaucer's courtly morality and presenting instead the punishment of his heroine for her sins of pride and lust.

Jentoft⁽²²⁾ disagrees with Stearns and believes Cresseid's sin is courtly, not Christian. She is punished, says Jentoft, not for committing deadly sins but for blaspheming against the deities of love because of their failure to make her "the flour of luif in Troy."⁽²³⁾ Jentoft further maintains that if we believe with Stearns that Henryson's morality in the poem is orthodox rather than courtly, we must consign Cresseid to Hell since she has not asked forgiveness of the Christian God. If, however, we believe she has committed a crime against the laws of courtly love, then Cresseid's contrition is sufficient to save her. Her lament,

"O fals Cresseid and trew knight Troilus!"⁽²⁴⁾

repeated at the end of three consecutive stanzas epitomizes her recognition of her own sins and Troilus' saintly knighthood. Jentoft sees the demands of poetic justice thereby being met because the punishment fits the crime.

(20) l. 613.

(21) Marshall Stearns. Robert Henryson. (N.Y. 1949), p.63.

(22) Jentoft, op.cit., p.100.

(23) l. 128.

(24) ll. 546, 553 and 560.

E.M.W. Tillyard⁽²⁵⁾ believes Henryson acknowledged two moral codes: the code of Love and the code of the Church, both of which conflicted and co-operated. The Church tolerated adulterous love providing the conflict was admitted. Within the courtly code the main condition was absolute fidelity. By her infidelity to Troilus, Cresseid offended against the code of love.

Kurt Wittig⁽²⁶⁾ sees the presentation of love in the poem as realistic, not courtly, and believes Henryson holds out the promise of Christian redemption for Cresseid.

Adamson notes⁽²⁷⁾ Cresseid's repeated use of the word "lufe" after she learns it was Troilus who gave her alms. His act forces her, says Adamson, to see what love can really be. She begins to realize her own destructive and self-destructive failure to love. The resolution of the poem comes when Cresseid blames herself and no one else:

"Nane but myself as now I will accuse"⁽²⁸⁾

Miskimin points out that Henryson's narrator both accuses and excuses Cresseid who is not ambiguous as in Chaucer but irredeemably guilty in simple absolute terms.

Stearns notes that Criseyde's prophecy of her own fate in Chaucer:

"Thorughout the world my belle shal be ronge!"⁽²⁹⁾

(25) E.M.W. Tillyard. Poetry and its Background (London, 1955).

(26) Kurt Wittig. The Scottish Tradition in Literature (Edinburgh, 1958).

(27) Adamson, op.cit., p.53.

(28) l. 574.

(29) V, 1062.

comes to pass in the Testament when:

Cupide the King ringand ane silver bell,
 Quhilk men nicht heir fra hevin unto hell. (30)

As regards Cresseid's death, there remains the question of how far we are to regard it as a Christian end to the poem as was that of Troilus in Chaucer's poem. Fox believes it is suggested that both characters go to a peaceful existence and that Christianity and the condemnation of earthly love are implicit in the end of the poem. (31)

Adamson notes that Christian references in Cresseid's testament are conspicuous by their absence. Henryson's point, as she sees it, is that as a pagan, Cresseid has no sense nor expectation of spiritual peace.

Spearing disagrees with Fox's contention that in leaving her spirit to Diana, the goddess of chastity, Cresseid "thinks she has emerged from her purgatory". (32) Spearing sees these beautiful lines:

"My spreit I leif to Diane quhair scho dwellis,
 To walk with hir in waist woddis and wellis", (33)

as communicating only a pathetic helplessness. Despite Cresseid's repentance, Spearing sees no suggestion of healing or purification. He points out the dangers in forming our own preconceptions of how readers would have interpreted a poem written centuries ago. On the other hand, Tillyard goes as far as saying that in dedicating her spirit to Diana, Cresseid is aspiring as far as she can to the monastic life.

Anthony Jenkins (34) draws attention to the striking image of death and decay with which Cresseid begins her testament:

(30) ll. 144-5.

(31) Denton Fox (ed.) Testament of Cresseid. (London, 1968), p.57.

(32) " " Poems, p.xci.

(33) ll. 587-8.

(34) Anthony White Jenkins, The Mind and Art of Robert Henryson. (Michigan, 1961)

"Heir I beteiche my corps and carioun
With wormis and with taidis to be rent."⁽³⁵⁾

With her death Jenkins sees an impression of restoration as Cresseid comes to terms with her fate.

Spearing focuses attention on the remarkable brevity with which the tale is told. We are quickly informed of the outlines of Cresseid's life up to the point where the action begins. Apart from the expansive introduction, the elaborate description of the gods and the details of Cresseid's "complaint", Henryson compresses much explicit meaning into as few words as possible. A concentration of effect results from the precision and completeness he employs to achieve this. So, we see the moral horror of Cresseid's "fleschelic lust"⁽³⁶⁾ merging into the physical horror of the uncleanness of leprosy. Henryson demonstrates in this way, says Adamsen, that he is more concerned with the extremes time can bring about than with showing, as did Chaucer, the gradual changes time effects. This accounts for the compression of the poem's final sentence:

Sen sche is deid, I speik of hir no moir.⁽³⁷⁾

Once Cresseid's death has been recounted, Henryson has nothing more to say.

Spearing sees the poem organized around certain crucial moments of recognition or realization such as the moment when Cresseid looks into the mirror for the first time and sees "hir face sa deformait";⁽³⁸⁾ the moment when Troilus sees the leprous beggar who reminds him of Cresseid:

And with ane blenk it come into his thocht⁽³⁹⁾
That he sumtime hir face befoir had sene;

the moment when Cresseid learns that it was Troilus who gave her rich alms:

"Schir Troylus it is, gentill and fre."⁽⁴⁰⁾

(35) ll. 577-8.

(36) l. 81.

(37) l. 616.

(38) l. 349.

(39) ll. 499-500.

(40) l. 536.

To Tillyard there are three clearly articulated crises; Cresseid's blaspheming of the gods, her Complaint and finally her self-accusation with its lyrical refrain:

"O fals Cresseid" (41)

Sydney Harth⁽⁴²⁾ draws attention to Cresseid's refusal to accept responsibility for her actions. When she blames Fortune for her leprosy Harth sees author and reader joined in recognition of her absurd self-deception. Harth notes there is no mention of Troylus in her Complaint. Instead she wallows in self-pity for what she has lost.

E. Duncan Aswell⁽⁴³⁾ sees Cresseid's blasphemy made poignant by her assumption that because she does not have a present lover she must therefore have lost her youth, beauty and capacity to attract men.

Wittig notes that when pathos seems to rise to its greatest pitch, Henryson turns abruptly to the common reality of day as when Cresseid, dazed with the horror of her fate, is called to supper by a child who makes the ironic comment that Cresseid's father considers she is spending too long on her prayers since,

"The goddis wait all your intent full weill."⁽⁴⁴⁾

Later when Cresseid has reached the high point of her Complaint she is brought back to earth by the Lipper-Lady whose rebuke serves to highlight the vanity of Cresseid's Complaint. Wittig sees an immense tension arising from the contrast between knowledge and ignorance which underlies the tragic irony of the scene when the lovers meet for the last time.

(41) ll. 546, 553 and 560.

(42) Sydney Harth. "Henryson Reinterpreted" (Essays in Criticism, 1961).

(43) E. Duncan Aswell. "The Role of Fortune in the Testament of Cresseid".

(44) l. 364.

Jenkins refers to the narrow emotional range of the poem. He sees, even in Cresseid's Complaint, an emphasis on what has happened to her rather than on the way she feels. We are reminded also by Aswell that we never share Cresseid's thoughts; we only hear her speak, never deliberate. This is in direct contrast to Chaucer's handling of Criseyde. The detached perspective makes us merely observers of the consequences of Cresseid's acts rather than sharers of her troubles and places us in a similar position to the narrator.

Fox contends⁽⁴⁵⁾ that in Henryson's oblique suggestion⁽⁴⁶⁾ that Cresseid became a prostitute, a moral connection is made between her misuse of her flesh and the resulting corruption of it long before she contracts leprosy:

O fair Cresseid, the flour and A per se
Of Troy and Grece, how was thow fortunait!
To change in filth all thy feminitie
And be with fleschelic lust sa masculait.⁽⁴⁷⁾

The metaphors used here, according to Fox, describe a moral corruption which later becomes literally true.

Fox draws our attention⁽⁴⁸⁾ to the emphasis laid on Cresseid's exclusion and alienation instead of the admiration, security and love which she is obviously seeking. He points⁽⁴⁹⁾ to the irony of her begging for sustenance where before men begged for her favours.

Miskimin reminds us that it was Henryson "who first pursued Cresseid

(45) Fox, Testament, p.28.

(46) l. 77.

(47) ll. 78-81.

(48) Fox, Testament, p.37.

(49) Ibid., p.38.

to her death and made her see herself in her own mirror."⁽⁵⁰⁾ Fox also refers⁽⁵¹⁾ to the importance of the two mirror images in the poem. When Cresseid first views her leprous face in a mirror, she sees herself only superficially in terms of her own vanity. Later when she warns other women in her complaint,

"And in your mynd a mirroure mak of me,"⁽⁵²⁾

she has realized that her beauty is but a fading flower. Fox believes that Henryson "uses the framework traditionally devoted to 'courtly love' poems in order to reveal the vanity of sexual love."⁽⁵³⁾

Altogether there is considerable variation in how critics see this poem. To Fox it is "a serious moral poem"; to Jenkins it is "an exemplum concerning the deceptiveness of sensual love" while to Harth it is "an ironic tale of a notorious fallen woman told with tongue in cheek."

(50) Miskimin, p.224.

(51) Fox, Testament, p.42.

(52) l. 457.

(53) Fox, Testament, p.56.

CHAPTER 4

SHAKESPEARE'S "CRESSIDA".

The origins of Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida are almost as unusual as its contents and the history of its performance.

A play of that title, presumably Shakespeare's, was first entered in the Stationers' Register in 1603 as "the booke of Troilus and Cressida, as yt is acted by my Lord Chamberlens men". The title-page of the first quarto edition of 1609 says it was acted at the Globe and it is entered in the Register as "a booke called the history of Troylus and Cressida". Before the second quarto was published in the same year attributing the play to Shakespeare, the statement on the original title-page, bearing on the play's performance at the Globe, was withdrawn. The epistle to the second quarto described it as "a new play, never stal'd with the Stage" and as the wittiest of Shakepeare's comedies. Uncertainty about its classification persisted as can be seen from its position in the First Folio of 1623 between the tragedies and histories. Critics have continued to be in similar disagreement about how the play should be categorized faced with its overwhelming ironies. To some it is a tragedy, to others a comedy. Oscar Campbell identifies it as a "comical satire", Kenneth Muir as a "tragical satire", Alice Miskimin as a "bitter satire". One who appears unable to make up his mind is John Palmer, who in 1912 dubbed it a tragedy and two years later called it a comedy. J.C. Oates refers to it as "a tragedy deliberately aborted by the savagery of its comic insight."⁽¹⁾

This confusion over its genre is possibly one of the reasons for the play's being one of Shakespeare's least popular for most of its existence.

(1) J.C. Oates. "The Ambiguity of Troilus and Cressida", p.150.

It is not known definitely whether it was ever performed actually during Shakespeare's lifetime. Although Dryden's adaptation was popular on stage from 1679 until 1734, the first recorded performance of Shakespeare's original was not until 1898 at Munich. There appeared to be no attempt to stage it in England until 1907 after which the critic of "The Times" declared that it was impossible to arrange the play for the stage. Critics in New York agreed with this after its first performance there in 1932. Since the Second World War there has been a great revival of interest in the play and many successful productions. It has a certain affinity with modern ideas on the nature of values and their practice which makes it more appreciated by the present generation than probably it has ever been.

By putting the story firmly back into the context of the Trojan war where Benoît had originally placed it, Shakespeare departed considerably from the strategy of Chaucer and Henryson. The love plot provides a continuous narrative within the larger confused framework of the war. The latter makes up two-thirds of the whole with only seven of the twenty-four scenes devoted to the love story. The effect, according to Miskimin, "is to disintegrate the tragedy, and make the history of the war a meaningless sequence of episodes."⁽²⁾ The war becomes the larger dimension and in keeping with the medieval tradition, stemming from Virgil's Aeneid, that Britain was founded by Aeneas' grandson, Brut, the Trojans are presented more sympathetically than the Greeks.

Shakespeare drew on at least three sources for his war plot:

Lydgate's Troy Book (1420), Caxton's Recuyell (1475) and the first instalment of Chapman's translation of parts of the Iliad (1598). For the love plot he remained closer to Chaucer than any of his predecessors despite the persistent deflation of Chaucer's heroic romance. Muriel Bradbrook shows

(2) Miskimin, op.cit., p.219.

us how Shakespeare represents each of Chaucer's five books by one or two scenes and how the division between Shakespeare's acts corresponds roughly to the division between Chaucer's books.⁽³⁾ It is in the most original parts of Chaucer, such as his subtle creations of Pandarus and Criseyde, that Bradbrook sees Shakespeare refashioning the most, much as Chaucer had done previously to Il Filostrato. Robert Presson believes that any deviations Shakespeare made from Chaucer are due to the demands of the dramatic genre.⁽⁴⁾

Did Shakespeare know of Henryson's Testament? If Shakespeare had seen Thynne's or any other subsequent edition of Chaucer, he would have read it as a sequel to Troilus and Criseyde. If so, he made no direct use of it. Hyder Rollins believes that Shakespeare ignored the pitiable end of Cresseid and dissolved the disease imagery associated with her leprosy into the language used by Thersites. We do find one echo of Henryson in Shakespeare. In the Testament Cynthia threatens Cresseid with the loss of "Thy voice sa cleir."⁽⁵⁾ Later again Cresseid in her complaint bemoans the loss of "My cleir voice."⁽⁶⁾ At the end of the second scene in Act Four, Cressida, when told she must leave Troilus, cries:

"(I'll)/... Crack my clear voice with sobs ..."⁽⁷⁾

Whereas Henryson's emphasis is on Cresseid's wantonness and treachery, Shakespeare treats her more gently. Due to the Testament her name, by Shakespeare's time, had become synonymous, not merely with unfaithfulness, but with a harlot.

Miskimin draws our attention⁽⁸⁾ to the influence the increasing

- (3) M.C. Bradbrook. "What Shakespeare Did to Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde", p.313.
- (4) R.K. Presson. "Troilus and Cressida" and the Legends of Troy, p.108.
- (5) l. 338.
- (6) l. 443.
- (7) IV, ii, 108.
- (8) Miskimin, op.cit., pp.191-3.

familiarity of the story has on its interpretation in successive versions. As has been pointed out in chapter two,⁽⁹⁾ Criseyde's betrayal was already a literary allusion in Gower before Chaucer's poem was written. Chaucer could appeal for and expect pity from "ye lovers"⁽¹⁰⁾ of the fourteenth century but Shakespeare could not rely on this response in the early seventeenth century. When a story becomes widely known the reaction of the audience can eventually be taken for granted. This can be seen in Lorenzo's speech at the opening of the fifth act in The Merchant of Venice, written by Shakespeare about five years before Troilus and Cressida;

"... in such a night,
Troilus, methinks, mounted the Troyan walls,
And sigh'd his soul toward the Grecian tents,
Where Cressid lay that night."⁽¹¹⁾

Miskimin points out that all that is necessary for the ironies of Lorenzo's lyric to take effect is the common knowledge of the Troilus story, not in Middle English, but in colloquial speech.

Many of the changes that would strike an audience watching Shakespeare's play after reading Troilus and Criseyde result from the demands a stage performance impels. The leisurely pace of Chaucer's narrative is no longer possible when the story has to be condensed to fit into a time limit of two and a half hours. The evasions of narrative vanish and the freedom of the audience to invent contracts. As Miskimin puts it:

... the transfer to the stage magnifies and makes explicit and concrete all the ironic implications of Troilus's tragedy.... the seduction of the lady... can no longer be distanced by an illusion of detachment; (the characters) are only one dimension away from the audience, made more, not less than real.⁽¹²⁾

(9) See p.8 above.

(10) I, 22.

(11) Merchant of Venice, V, 1, 3-6.

(12) Miskimin, op.cit., p 219.

The ambiguity that flickers around Chaucer's Criseyde disappears when we see her seduction before our eyes. Miskimin continues:

... in the play, doubt is not an option.
The 'olde books' are gone, and we are forced
to trust our eyes. There is no evasion of
the fact, "This is, and is not Cressida."⁽¹³⁾

There is no narrator to shield and filter the action. He is replaced by Pandarus and Thersites who comment on the war and love themes. The action is speeded up to cover only the confused days before and after the truce. Shakespeare increases the dramatic intensity by beginning the story just before Cressida yields to Troilus and concluding only three days later after she has yielded to Diomedes. Troilus and Cressida are alone only once; they have only one night together and on the morning after consummation she is handed over to Diomedes. This telescoping of the action has the effect of intensifying Cressida's unfaithfulness. The chief disadvantage of this rapid action is the adverse effect it produces on the clear development and motivation of character.

Kenneth Muir reminds us⁽¹⁴⁾ that Chaucer wrote his poem in the tradition of courtly love which laid down secrecy and fidelity as a code of behaviour for the lover. Faithful service, not marriage, was the aim, and the love affair was only frowned on if it became public knowledge. When Shakespeare wrote his play over two centuries later, the code of society had changed radically and marriage was assumed to be the proper end of love. Shakespeare's difficulty was that Troilus was traditionally the pattern of a faithful lover and yet in none of the sources did he marry the heroine. Although Shakespeare never raises the question of marriage, he reveals a post-medieval impatience with courtly love sentiments by showing the world of romance to be deluded and corrupted. There is an

(13) Ibid., p.220 and T. and C., V, ii, 146.

(14) Kenneth Muir. The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays, (London, 1977), p.142.

ironic awareness of the love affair among the other characters, while Cressida's entry in the fifth scene of Act Four with a kiss for each of the enemy generals, emphasizes Shakespeare's mocking of courtly love and its secrecy. In spite of the professed love of Troilus and Cressida, their union is made vulgar by the remarks of Pandarus. Cressida, however, is not shocked by her uncle's coarse jests nor his efforts to hurry the assignation. The coarsening of the love story can be seen when contrasted with the ardent devotion of Chaucer's lovers on the morning after consummation. Elizabethan audiences did not, however, find such scenes repellant.

Shakespeare's heroine is no longer the respectable widow of Chaucer. Muir sees her as "a coquette by temperament, sharpening the appetite of both men (Troilus and Diomedes) by her tactics."⁽¹⁵⁾ Bradbrook considers⁽¹⁶⁾ that Cressida proclaims the art of the coquette as her simple creed by her soliloquy at the conclusion of the second scene of Act One. Later Bradbrook goes even further by suggesting Shakespeare destroys Chaucer's whole vision by replacing Criseyde with "an amateur drab."⁽¹⁷⁾ She continues: "The lengthy wooing and three years 'bliss' of Chaucer's lovers are condensed by Shakespeare into a single meeting and one night's enjoyment." Rollins sees Cressida as a wanton in view of Ulysses' verdict on her as a "daughter of the game".⁽¹⁸⁾ Grant Voth and Oliver Evans are more sympathetic and point out that those critics who insist Cressida is a wanton have ignored or overlooked her speech when she is informed she must leave Troy:

(15) Ibid., p.142.

(16) Bradbrook, op.cit., p.314.

(17) Ibid., p.316.

(18) IV,v, 63.

"I knew no touch of consanguinity;
 No kin, no love, no blood, no soul so near me
 As the sweet Troilus. O you gods divine!
 Make Cressid's name the very crown of falsehood,
 If ever she leave Troilus! Time, force and death,
 Do to this body what extremes you can;
 But the strong base and building of my love
 Is as the very centre of the earth,
 Drawing all things to it." (19)

Despite Cressida's ironic failure later to live up to this vow, she is as genuine as she can be when it is made.

Shakespeare's Troilus is as different a hero from Chaucer's as is the heroine. His anticipation speech⁽²⁰⁾ with its insistent sense-words reveals his sensuality and belies the ideal aspirations he professes. The true source of his vision is shown to be the desire to "wallow in (Cressida's) lily-beds."⁽²¹⁾ John Wilders tells us⁽²²⁾ that O.J. Campbell regards Troilus as "an expert in sensuality, a sexual gourmet." Troilus's youth is implied in the second scene of the play when Pandarus tells Cressida:

"he ne'er saw three and twenty",⁽²³⁾

and when Pandarus tells us of the general laughter over Troilus's small growth of beard:

"he has not past three or four hairs on his chin".⁽²⁴⁾

To Voth and Evans Cressida's behaviour is not vicious nor is her character static during the course of the play. They see in her⁽²⁵⁾ a movement from awareness, to self-deception and back to awareness again. Basically she is a cynic and a realist who knows what men value in women in spite of what they sometimes say they admire. For a time she allows

(19) IV, ii, 96-105.

(20) III, ii, 18-29.

(21) III, ii, 12.

(22) John Wilders. "The Problem Comedies" (Shakespeare: select bibliographical guides), p.99.

(23) I, ii, 236.

(24) I, ii, 113.

(25) G. Voth and O.Evans. "Cressida and the World of the Play" (Shakespeare Studies, 8), p.231.

herself to be seduced from this philosophy by Troilus who persuades her to believe in his inadequate ideal vision. Once she is confronted with the real world of Diomedes and the Greek generals, she is forced to re-adopt reluctantly her former understanding of what life is all about. This illustrates the complexity of her character and role. From her soliloquy⁽²⁶⁾ we know she has no illusions about the "enterprise"⁽²⁷⁾ of love. She realizes fully that "Things won are done"⁽²⁸⁾ and that "Men prize the thing ungained more than it is"⁽²⁹⁾ and that "all lovers swear more performance than they are able".⁽³⁰⁾ Voth and Evans see⁽³¹⁾ Cressida's wit as the chief element of her self-defence. By this means she feigns misunderstanding of Pandarus when he is trying to convince her of Troilus' worth in the second scene of the play. Later after yielding to Troilus she admits:

"Hard to seem won; but I was won, my lord,
With the first glance that ever — " ⁽³²⁾

She then regrets this abandonment of her wit and revelation of her feelings:

"Where is my wit? I know not what I speak".⁽³³⁾

Cressida knows the world well enough to recognize the illusory nature of Troilus's idealistic vision but repeatedly he misunderstands her every effort to enlighten him. At length she gives up the struggle with "Prophet may you be!"⁽³⁴⁾ and makes her vow to have her name stand for faithlessness if she ever prove false. The extent to which she is taken in by Troilus' vision is indicated by her repetition of this vow when

(26) I, ii, 283-96.

(27) I, ii, 284.

(28) I, ii, 288.

(29) I, ii, 290.

(30) III, ii, 83-4.

(31) Voth and Evans, op.cit., p.234.

(32) III, ii, 116-7.

(33) III, ii, 150.

(34) III, ii, 182.

informed of her imminent separation from him:

"O you gods divine!
 Make Cressid's name the very crown of falsehood,
 If ever she leave Troilus!" (35)

Voth and Evans see⁽³⁶⁾ the directness and simplicity of her words as an indication of the sincerity of her resolve.

Once in the Greek camp Cressida discovers she is unable to escape from her earlier, more accurate vision. When she finds herself pushed like a puppet from one commander to the next in order to be kissed, she falls back on her wit once more as her only form of defence against a corrupt environment. This gives Ulysses, who has initiated the kissing scene, the basis for his claim that she is but a "daughter of the game".⁽³⁷⁾

Voth and Evans believe⁽³⁸⁾ Diomedes' function is as much symbolic as literal. As one who has no use for the "fooling"⁽³⁹⁾ of wit, Diomedes is poles away from Troilus and as a representative of the real world, he comes to reclaim Cressida. Voth and Evans stress the reluctance with which she returns to that real world. We witness her ineffectual efforts to resist Diomedes' demands and the guilt which accompanies her acquiescence and parting with Troilus' sleeve:

"O, all you gods! O pretty, pretty pledge!
 Thy master now lies thinking in his bed
 Of thee and me, and sighs, and takes my glove,
 And gives memorial dainty kisses to it,
 As I kiss thee." (40)

Voth and Evans see the sleeve as the symbol of Cressida's brief stay in the

(35) IV, ii, 99-101.

(36) Voth and Evans, op.cit., p.236.

(37) IV, v, 63.

(38) Voth and Evans, op.cit., p.236.

(39) V, ii, 102.

(40) V, ii, 78-82.

sway of Troilus' vision. Her final wistful words as she bestows it on Diomedes indicate her realization that she has left Troilus' vision behind her.

"Troilus farewell! One eye yet looks on thee (41)
But with my heart the other eye doth see."

Voth and Evans believe (42) that the "folly" (43) for which Cressida is responsible and for which she has received a disproportionate share of blame, is that of forsaking her own realistic vision for the ideal one of Troilus.

The climax for Troilus comes with overhearing the words exchanged by Cressida and Diomedes and observing the handing over of his sleeve. His words:

"This is, and is not, Cressid", (44)

indicate he has split in two what he sees, keeping his ideal vision of Cressida and rejecting her mortal counterpart, seen as "Diomed's Cressida". (45) This is his response when confronted with human folly, enabling him to continue to affirm his own values:

"Let it not be believed for womanhood!" (46)

The play's legacy to the audience is Pandarus' obscene and malevolent curtain speech in which he wills on them the corruption of both sex and old age. Miskimin sees this (47) as the closest point of tangency between the versions of Henryson and Shakespeare. The symbolic disease which kills

(41) V, ii, 107-8.

(42) Voth and Evans, op.cit., p.237.

(43) III, ii, 101.

(44) V, ii, 146.

(45) V, ii, 137.

(46) V, ii, 129.

(47) Miskimin op.cit., p.170.

Henryson's Cresseid becomes Pandarus' curse on the audience and on himself as the price of their witnessing his failure. Shakespeare thereby inverts Henryson's moral theme.

Many critics have bewailed the fact that the end of the play offers no demonstration of poetic or any kind of justice which also accounts probably for the play's long history of unpopularity. Oates sees Shakespeare's refusal to produce "the savage poetic justice of a Henryson"⁽⁴⁸⁾ as due to his conviction that "such pat reversals are contrary to life".⁽⁴⁹⁾ Oates sees the play rather as an investigation of life with an incompleteness of action which is curiously modern. The play demonstrates Shakespeare's consciousness of the power of Time as a destroyer of relationships because of the fluctuating nature of human personality. Muir sees the play⁽⁵⁰⁾ as an exposure of idealism and points out that Shakespeare is not demolishing idealism itself but implying that men are deluded by passion to fix their affections on unworthy objects. Wilders, too, sees⁽⁵¹⁾ the unity of the love story and political action stemming from the common collapse of the ideals which inspired them. The characters are frustrated persistently "by sheer human fallibility and fickleness".⁽⁵²⁾

John Dryden, in the Preface to his wholesale adaptation of the play, comments on the defects of Shakespeare's drama which he attempts to overcome. Among his objections are that "The chief persons, who give name to the tragedy, are left alive; Cressida is false, and is not punished".⁽⁵³⁾

(48) Oates, op.cit., p.146.

(49) Ibid.

(50) Kenneth Muir. "Troilus and Cressida," (Shakespeare Survey,8) p.38.

(51) Wilders, op.cit., p.99.

(52) Ibid., p.100.

(53) John Dryden. Troilus and Cressida, Preface, paragraph 2.

Dryden is also concerned with the moral focus of the play and above all with its shapelessness and confusion. Consequently, he continues: "I undertook to remove that heap of rubbish under which many excellent thoughts lay wholly buried."⁽⁵⁴⁾ To this end Dryden invents Cressida's constancy and she dies on Troilus' sword proving her innocence.

Miskimin sees ⁽⁵⁵⁾ Dryden's tragedy as a failure because he revised the fundamental elements in the conflict at the heart of Shakespeare's play. He violated the integrity of the legend in order to moralise its paradox. Miskimin considers Dryden unwise to tamper with the truth of the old story: that Cressida was false and Troilus loved her to the end.

Among the critics' views considered in this chapter, prominence has been given to those expressed by Grant Voth and Oliver Evans. Their sympathetic stance toward Cressida is comparatively modern, having been published in 1975. Fashions in criticism change like everything else so it is interesting to compare their verdict on Cressida with that of J.S.P. Tatlock who, in his weighty volume, The Siege of Troy in Elizabethan Literature especially in Shakespeare and Heywood published in 1915, has the following to say:

As to the love-story, no sympathy is aroused, or at any rate maintained by it, - by Troilus' callow enthusiasm, Cressida's weak voluptuousness and bold coquetry, and Pandarus' elderly prurience. . . . The poet's attitude toward this story was the only one possible in his day; Chaucer, tho' he would fain have excused Criseyde, had left her without excuse, Henryson had degraded and chastised her; by Shakespeare's day her good name was gone forever, and she was merely a by-word for a light woman; ⁽⁸³⁾ and in her descent she had necessarily dragged down her lover and her uncle, whose name had already long become that of his trade.

(54) Ibid.

(55) Miskimin, op.cit., 224.

Tatlock's note "83" reads:

He could no more have made her pure and attractive than he could have given Cleopatra what the elderly English ladies called the 'home-life of our own dear Queen'. (56)

Shakespeare's play reiterates constantly the theme of the common failure of human beings to live up to their ideals and practise what they preach. Conscious of her previous failures, Cressida, unlike most of the principal characters, has the humility not to preach about ideals she knows she cannot practise.

According to Kenneth Muir, G. Bernard Shaw's verdict on Cressida was that she was Shakespeare's first real woman! (57)

(56) J.S.P. Tatlock. "The Siege of Troy in Elizabethan Literature".
(P.M.L.A., xxx), p.764.

(57) Muir, Sources, p.144.

CHAPTER 5CONCLUSION.

Before commenting on some of the views expressed by critics in the preceding chapters, it is worth summarizing two articles which have a particular bearing on the question of the changing reputation of Criseyde/Cresseid/Cressida.

The first of these was written in 1917 by Hyder Rollins and entitled The Troilus-Cressida Story from Chaucer to Shakespeare. In it he argued that Henryson's Testament had a profound effect on Cressida's later notoriety and was the turning-point in her changing reputation. According to my second author, this view went virtually unchallenged for fifty years. In 1971 Gretchen Mieszkowski published an article called The Reputation of Criseyde, 1155-1500 in which she refuted Rollins' thesis. She claimed that Cressida's reputation was constant and that it was only Chaucer's sympathetic treatment of her which was exceptional.

Rollins begins his article by pointing out that although Shakespeare portrays Cressida as a wanton, he is not without sympathy for her as can be seen by her qualms of conscience when pinning Troilus' sleeve on Diomedes,⁽¹⁾ but for all that she "is a woman of loose morals".⁽²⁾ Rollins, however, questions whether Shakespeare, as some critics have said, pursues Cressida with relentless hatred. Rollins agrees with Tatlock's analysis of the play and believes that a knowledge of the history of Troilus and Cressida from Chaucer to Shakespeare is essential for a genuine understanding of what Shakespeare tried to do.

(1) V, ii, 67-99.

(2) H.E.Rollins, "The Troilus-Cressida Story" (P.M.L.A. 32), p.383.

Rollins refers to Sir Sydney Lee, who in his 1916 biography of Shakespeare, saw Cressida as a heartless coquette and believed this was Shakespeare's innovation to deprive fickleness in love of any glamour.

Rollins reminds us that thirty years after Chaucer's Criseyde bewailed her fickleness,⁽³⁾ Lydgate retold her story in a translation of Guido. Lydgate was in thorough sympathy with his Criseyde and reproved Guido for his slanders of women.

In the early Tudor period Cressid was often glorified as the highest type of sweetheart who "yielded grace" and was worthy of emulation. Her exultation as a modern mistress began with Tottel's Miscellany (1557) in which an unknown poet compares his love with that of Troylus and Creside. Cressida was the subject for numerous ballads by early Elizabethan poets. Rollins considers that Shakespeare would form a distaste for the story from hearing them sung about the streets of London. He finds it surprising that Henryson's story was not worked into the many moralizing popular ballads of the time.

According to Rollins, Henryson perceived that inherent in the theme was the real tragedy of Criseyde. Henryson's poem answers all the questions about her that Chaucer leaves unanswered. In doing so, however, "he rang Criseyde's 'bell' so loudly that it reverberated to the time of Shakespeare, and forever damned her as a loose woman".⁽⁴⁾ Rollins sees Henryson's influence on the story as "immense",⁽⁵⁾ reminding us that up to 1600 at least, every mention of Cressid as a leper is an allusion to Chaucer whom people thought they were reading.

(3) V, 1052ff.

(4) Rollins, op.cit., p.397.

(5) Ibid., p.400.

Rollins cites numerous minor Elizabethan poets who made use of the Troilus-Cressida story. Many of their poems were sheer doggerel and helped to make Cressid's name either odious or comical. Henryson's Testament was obviously the source of many of them and Rollins holds it responsible for the sad state of Cressid's reputation. He believes "Shakespeare deserves our thanks for pulling Cressid out of the mire in which Henryson's followers had placed her".⁽⁶⁾

By 1596 when Thomas Heywood's Iron Age was first performed, Cressid's features were so fixed that she could not have been degraded further. Henryson's poem clearly coloured the plot and the resemblances to Troilus and Cressida suggest that either Shakespeare was influenced by it or that they shared a common source. When Shakespeare wrote his play "Cressid's kind" was the ordinary euphemism for "harlot". Rollins considers it "almost certain"⁽⁷⁾ that Shakespeare thought the Testament to be Chaucer's own work and sees him borrowing liberally from both per Speght's 1598 edition. Rollins sees Alexander's remark about Ajax being "a very man per se"⁽⁸⁾ to be an echo of Henryson's reference to Cresseid as "A per se/ of Troy and Greece".⁽⁹⁾ Rollins also sees Cressida's cry to Diomedes:

"I shall be plagued"⁽¹⁰⁾

as a reminder of the Testament.

Rollins refers to Dr. George Brandes, who in his biography of Shakespeare (1898) found Shakespeare's attitude towards Cressida as one of

(6) Ibid., p.409.

(7) Ibid., p.426.

(8) I, ii, 15.

(9) ll. 78-9.

(10) V, ii, 105.

"passionate heat and hatred, boundless bitterness... a shallow, frivolous, sensual, pleasure-loving coquette... One is astounded by the bitterness of the hatred he discloses."⁽¹¹⁾ The remarkable thing to Rollins, in the light of the history of the love story, is that Shakespeare dealt with her so mildly since "the subject of the play must have been extremely distasteful to him ... he does not punish her as did Henryson; he does not make her a common harlot,"⁽¹²⁾ nor a leprosy-stricken beggar as do some of his predecessors.

Rollins does marvel, however, as did Dryden, that Shakespeare leaves both Troilus and Cressida alive. The explanation Rollins offers is that for some reason Shakespeare's play, begun in 1599, was laid aside unfinished for a year or two before the last few scenes were added by another hand, with slight revisions by Shakespeare, for performance about 1602. Otherwise,

it is almost incredible that, with his knowledge of Henryson, his pre-conceived ideas of the character of Cressid and the reward of her treachery, and his respect for what the public wanted, Shakespeare should have ended his play without at least punishing Cressid. How can the present ending have pleased his audiences?... surely (they) were dissatisfied when the play abruptly dropped the leading characters instead of carrying them to the logical and traditional 'dénouement.'⁽¹³⁾

It was no wonder the play received no contemporary praise. Rollins' final conclusion is that we cannot feel sure that Shakespeare was responsible for all the play because Cressida is left unpunished.

Rollins' thesis says little for his opinion of Shakespeare's powers of originality and creative imagination. If Dryden could invent Cressida's

(11) Rollins, *op.cit.*, p.427.

(12) *Ibid.*, p.427.

(13) *Ibid.*, p.428.

constancy, why then could not Shakespeare change the traditional story by leaving both Troilus and Cressida alive and Cressida unpunished? Chaucer, after all, chose to leave Criseyde alive and unpunished and Henryson subsequently altered the story to include Cresseid's punishment and death while Troilus remained alive. Rollins' theory that Henryson's poem was the turning-point and responsible for Cresseid's poor image in all subsequent works, seems to break down here. The Testament was obviously not the strong influence on Shakespeare that Rollins would like us to imagine.

Mieszkowski begins her article by agreeing with Rollins that when Shakespeare wrote his play, his characters were already infamous and Cressida an example of a loose woman. However, Mieszkowski points out that readers in Chaucer's time would also have recognized Criseyde as a standard example of an unfaithful woman. Even then she was a figure to laugh at or moralize over. Her position in the literature of the two periods was therefore fundamentally the same.

Mieszkowski points out that Cressida's late-Renaissance reputation was the explanation offered by scholars for the change in the heroine between the two works. Tatlock established a similarity between Shakespeare's Cressida and the Cressida of popular tradition. This was why Tatlock believed Chaucer's sympathy for his heroine was turned into scorn by Shakespeare whose attitude was the only one possible in his day.

Mieszkowski then turns to Rollins and his theory that Henryson's Testament was responsible for Cressida's new notoriety. This was caused by sixteenth century readers not only misunderstanding Henryson's gentle treatment of her but by mistakenly believing they were reading Chaucer. Mieszkowski objects to Rollins spending "a bare two paragraphs"⁽¹⁴⁾ on fifteenth century

(14) Mieszkowski, op.cit., p.76.

century treatments of Criseyde such as Lydgate's Troy Book, The Laud Troy Book and Caxton's Recuyell. She believes Rollins overlooked indications in all these works that the authors' attitudes towards Criseyde were not significantly different from those of the sixteenth century.

Mieszkowski points out that most early twentieth century critics made no attempt to distinguish between Chaucer and his narrator or to detect his irony. They saw Criseyde as a tragically flawed personality, too weak, too timid or too indecisive to be faithful. "Tatlock and Rollins assigned a large and important role to Cressida's sixteenth century reputation in order to justify isolating Shakespeare's bawdy stereotype from Chaucer's realistically portrayed woman loved by poet and reader alike."⁽¹⁵⁾

Mieszkowski believes Rollins is wrong in seeing Criseyde's late-Renaissance reputation as a new development. She avows that in 1420 Lydgate used her as the object lesson Shakespeare knew and that all evidence suggests her reputation was continuous throughout the fifteenth century irrespective of Henryson's Testament. Mieszkowski claims that the striking resemblances between the earliest versions of Criseyde's story and sixteenth century treatments of her, have been overlooked. Well before Chaucer wrote his poem, Criseyde had acquired the reputation she was to have throughout the Renaissance. She was a type-figure right from Benoît's original version. Benoît's theme was the fickleness of women and his characterization of Briseida is complex so that the reader is never sure how to judge her. Since Benoît's poem was for three centuries one of Europe's most influential stories of the fall of Troy, Mieszkowski believes it established Briseida as a type of the fickle woman.

(15) Ibid., p.77.

The Briseida of Guido's Historia was "even more rigidly a lesson in the fickleness of women".⁽¹⁶⁾ Guido makes her unambiguously self-seeking and lecherous without any feelings of guilt and the anti-feminist moralizing is expanded. Mieszkowski considers it would be astonishing if the resemblance between this Briseida and the sixteenth century Cressida were just a co-incidence.

Although Boccaccio's Criseida is a minor character, her significance is still that of a warning to men of the fickleness of woman. All three versions of the story were in circulation when Chaucer wrote his poem as well as many other allusions to it in fourteenth century literature.

Mieszkowski can find no evidence in the literature of the period of any "post-Chaucerian" Criseyde different from Benoît's, Guido's and Boccaccio's. This continuity of ideas about her is an indication to Mieszkowski of the strength of her early reputation. That Chaucer expected his readers to recognize Criseyde as an example of a fickle woman, is evident, says Mieszkowski, from her own prediction of her reputation:

"Allas! of me, unto the worldes ende
 Shal neyther ben ywritten nor ysonge
 No good word, for thise bokes wol me shende
 O, rolled shal I ben on many a tonge!
 Thoroughout the world my belle shal be ronge!"⁽¹⁷⁾

This is a recapitulation of Briseida's monologue in Benoît. Mieszkowski finds Criseyde's position as a type-figure accounts for this speech which is surprisingly inappropriate for her situation. The narrator speaks openly about her fourteenth century reputation when he says:

Hire name, allas! is punysshed so wide.⁽¹⁸⁾

(16) Ibid., p.90.

(17) V, 1058-62.

(18) V, 1095.

Mieszkowski alleges that Rollins misunderstood Lydgate's conception of Criseyde. Rollins has missed the ironic point of Lydgate's pseudo-defence of Criseyde and has accepted Lydgate's sympathetic narrator's outrage at Guido's antifeminism. Lydgate actually sees Criseyde as promiscuous and opportunistic. As in Chaucer, someone else is to blame for parts of the story that criticize Criseyde. "Guido seith" performs the same function for Lydgate's narrator as do old books for Chaucer's. Because Lydgate distinguished between Chaucer and his narrator, he arrived at a special conception of Criseyde. Mieszkowski considers Chaucer's Criseyde not objectively different from the traditional one. In contrast to Rollins' contention that Henryson's Testament revolutionized attitudes towards Criseyde between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Mieszkowski maintains that Criseyde's literary position was always fundamentally the same. The only difference was that more bawdy poems about her survived from the Renaissance than from the Middle Ages. Her sixteenth century reputation was therefore a straight outgrowth of fourteenth and fifteenth treatments of her.

What Mieszkowski considers is Henryson's most interesting addition is not suggested in any of the earlier versions. The central event of his story is Cresseid's change in attitude towards herself. For much of the poem she avoids facing her own responsibility for her situation. Instead of warning other women against fickleness and promiscuity, she blames Fortune. Finally she accepts her guilt and repents:

"None but myself as now I will accuse".⁽¹⁹⁾

This concentration on Cresseid's change of attitude was new but it carried the same moral that it had for centuries: beware of fickle women.

Mieszkowski believes Rollins accepted Chaucer's narrator's sympathy for Criseyde at face value. His explanation of why late-Renaissance writers

(19) l. 574.

should have produced suddenly such a different Criseyde was that Henryson's poem was the pivot for her reputation. Mieszkowski, on the other hand, is of the opinion that Chaucer's original audience identified Criseyde's name from the outset with that of a false woman. "No fourteenth century reader... could have responded to Troilus and Criseyde as Tatlock and Rollins did. 'Criseyde' for them was a synonym for a fickle woman".⁽²⁰⁾

Mieszkowski is here pre-supposing that Chaucer's original audience was sufficiently well-read to be conversant with all the previous versions of the story. This attitude also assumes that Chaucer was duty-bound to follow his predecessors. Furthermore, as I have already noted,⁽²¹⁾ we can never be sure of the responses of the fourteenth century mind because of our limited knowledge.

Mieszkowski believes that for someone who knows Criseyde as a type figure, her reputation accentuates her jokes with Pandarus on the morning after consummation. The reader is held between alternating responses of judging and empathizing but passive receptiveness is impossible.

Mieszkowski sees Criseyde's reputation as answering her sixteenth century position and being far more valid than "Rollins' strange account of a sudden reversal of attitude toward Criseyde in the last years of the fifteenth century."⁽²²⁾ Lydgate and Henryson both demonstrate they did not mistake the feelings of the narrator for Chaucer's judgement of his heroine. This "re-inforces the evidence for Criseyde's type-figure status and shows the technical complexity Chaucer's followers expected in his works. Twentieth century critics were not the first to discover Chaucer's

(20) Mieszkowski, op.cit., p.141.

(21) See p.11 above.

(22) Mieszkowski, op.cit., p.148.

narrative mask".⁽²³⁾ Knowledge of Criseyde's reputation ensures a constant awareness of her future action. "Criseyde's reputation", Mieszkowski concludes, "both clarifies the structure of Troilus and Criseyde and complicates even more the reader's already highly complex response to Criseyde."⁽²⁴⁾

As regards Mieszkowski's claim that "knowledge of Criseyde's reputation ensures a constant awareness of her future action", I question why it should be desirable to be aware of Criseyde's future action. Surely this would destroy much of the reader's suspense and enjoyment. Although Mieszkowski is probably justified in her rejection of Rollins' hypothesis that Henryson's poem was the crucial factor in Criseyde's subsequent reputation, there are flaws in her own conclusions. I find it disappointing that in her anxiety to prove that Criseyde was continuously "a type-figure of the fickle woman", Mieszkowski neglects to make any definite statement on how effective she regards Criseyde/Cresseid/Cressida to be as a character in any of the works she appears. Whether she was or was not always "a type-figure of the fickle woman" seems to me to be relatively unimportant.

It is now appropriate to discuss some of the attitudes to Chaucer's Criseyde mentioned in chapter two. We first have to decide whether Chaucer gave first priority, as Lewis contends, to establishing an historical background and in so doing indulging in a process of medievalization in order to highlight the courtly love code, or whether, as Praz believes, the poem demonstrates the strong influence exerted on Chaucer by his travels in Italy. It seems as if Chaucer has managed to combine successfully both the elements of courtly love as seen in the behaviour of the lovers, together

(23) Ibid., p.148.

(24) Ibid., p.148.

with the humour and realism of the bourgeois fabliau illustrated by the constant undercutting of Pandarus, or, as Sharrock puts it vividly, "cold douches of the embarrassingly everyday."⁽²⁵⁾

There are special merits in Sharrock's claim that the poem has a particular attraction for the twentieth century "because it is a celebration of a love that goes wrong".⁽²⁶⁾ The fragility of the relationship between Troilus and Criseyde strikes a responsive chord in the modern reader who sees around him everywhere relationships sliding so easily from a state of similar idyllic ecstasy to one of soured disenchantment. Other relationships, sad to say, despite the best intentions of those involved are unable to survive, as was the case of Troilus and Criseyde, the strain of enforced separation. Tragedy enters when one partner, like Troilus, is able stoically to remain loyal, while the other, like Criseyde, finds through human weakness that a replacement is necessary. The universality of the plot therefore ensures that a reader from any century can readily identify with it. Consequently Sharrock's belief that the poem is concerned with human frailty seems more valid than Lewis' statement about its being "in praise of love".⁽²⁷⁾ Adjectives such as "disgusting" and "abominable" used by Lewis to describe Criseyde's conduct seem in such circumstances to be unduly extravagant.

Lewis and Sharrock both produce possible reasons for Criseyde's excessive fear and timidity but no one as far as I know has suggested that not only her timidity but also her self-mistrust and realism could all spring from her previous experience and recognition of her own weakness. Stanley has drawn attention⁽²⁸⁾ to the various clues Chaucer has provided to inform us that Criseyde is by no means an innocent young girl in love for the first time.

(25) See p.11 above.

(26) See p. 12 "

(27) See p. 10 "

(28) See p. 14 "

As regards criticism of Criseyde's transferring her affections eventually from Troilus to Diomedes, one cannot escape the fact that Criseyde is an opportunist. For a time Troilus fulfils her needs but once the realization strikes her that she is in the Greek camp to stay and Troilus can never be available to her again, Diomedes becomes his replacement. She is easily seduced by Diomedes because, as a man of experience, he recognizes her weaknesses far better than Troilus. He offers her instant support when she is desperately lonely. He has a firmness of purpose which Troilus lacks and he does not give her the chance to waver and equivocate that Troilus does. Criseyde demonstrates repeatedly her need for masculine support by her lack of independence. She does not set about deliberately ensnaring either Troilus or Diomedes but once they pursue her she is unable to resist their advances. Of Criseyde's falling in love with Troilus Chaucer tells us:

For I say nought that she so sodeynly
 Yaf hym hire love, but that she gan enclyne
 To like hym first, and I have told you whi;
 And after that, his manhood and his pyne
 Made love withinne hire herte for to myne;
 For which, by proces and by good servyse,⁽²⁹⁾
 He gat hire love, and in no sodeyn wise.

And of Criseyde's falling in love with Diomedes we are told:

For tho that he bigan to wowe hire soone
 Er he hire wan, yet was ther more to doone.⁽³⁰⁾

Criseyde was obviously not the calculating wanton that some critics have alleged. Diomedes had some hard work to do before "she yaf him hire herte":⁽³¹⁾

So wel he for hymselfen spake and seyde,
 That alle hire sikes score adown he leyde.
 And finally, the sothe for to seyne,
 He refte hire of the grete of al hire peyne.⁽³²⁾

Once Criseyde fully realizes Troilus' support is lost forever, she yearns for its replacement. That void is filled by Diomedes who, as Sharrock tells

(29) II, 673-9.

(30) V, 1091-2.

(31) V, 1050.

(32) V, 1033-6.

us,⁽³³⁾ "is simply what happens to her next". "This sodeyn Diomedes",⁽³⁴⁾ so much more pressing than the vacillating Troilus, probably even fulfilled her needs more adequately until what Henryson sees as the inevitable result. It is this betrayal of Troilus for Diomedes which invokes the strongest criticism of Criseyde's character. Yet if she had not been exchanged for Antenor, can we imagine her relationship with Troilus continuing on a permanent basis? Surely its very deception would preclude this. Is it not likely that to a woman of Criseyde's age and experience Troilus' behaviour would in time appear adolescent?

Finally Pratt's theory⁽³⁵⁾ that Chaucer used Beauvau's translation of Il Filostrate in addition to Boccaccio's, seems to stand on shaky foundations in view of the work's having been commonly assigned to the early fifteenth century. Mieszkowski's suggestion⁽³⁶⁾ that Beauvau was the model for Chaucer's narrator is equally doubtful.

Much of the critics' controversy over Henryson's poem revolves around whether Henryson saw Cresseid's sin and punishment in pagan, courtly or Christian terms. In the first half of the poem, Henryson's narrator, like Chaucer's has a blatant bias towards Cresseid but he quietens down after his indignant outburst against Saturn's sentence and appeal for him to:

Withdraw thy sentence and be gracious —
As thow was never.⁽³⁷⁾

He becomes detached until he re-emerges in the final stanza, still charitable towards Cresseid:

(33) See p.17 above.

(34) V, 1024.

(35) See p.7 above

(36) See pp. 7-8 "

(37) ll. 328-9.

Sen scho is deid, I speik of hir no moir. (38)

At the same time there is a distinctly didactic and moralistic savour to his exhortation to women of his own time:

King not your lufe with fals deceptioun. (39)

This admonition is not specifically Christian but it is a warning against breaking one of the tenets of courtly love: fidelity.

Part of our confusion arises from the fact that our authors are writing in a Christian society about a pagan one, and because they are writing in the first person we tend to forget that they are not expressing their own personal moral views or philosophies but those of their narrators. In fact their very use of a narrator seems to be their way of coping with this problem of historical authenticity. Chaucer does abandon his narrator's perspective at the end of his poem to present his own Christian philosophy but one cannot say this definitely about Henryson.

Because writers of modern novels take such pains to present authentic backgrounds to their stories and because writers of detective fiction are so meticulous about tying up all their ends, we tend to be over-sensitive to any discrepancies. It has to be borne in mind that my authors were not historians. Their main concern was to produce a good story which would please contemporary audiences. Anachronisms are therefore inevitable in their works but are relatively unimportant, particularly to my topic.

Henryson has given us a highly original and intriguing account of what he imagines to be the inevitable outcome of Criseyde's betrayal of Troilus:

(38) l. 616.

(39) l. 613.

Quhen Diomeid had all his appertyte,
 And mair, fulfillit of this fair ladie,
 Upon ane-uther he set his haill delyte,
 And send to hir ane lybell of repudie,
 And hir excludit fra his companie.
 Then desolait scho walkit up and down,
 And sum men sayis into the court commoun. (40)

Eventually Cresseid has to suffer the humiliation of returning to her father's home with the explanation:

"Fra Diomeid had gottin his desyre.
 He wox verie and wald of me no moir." (41)

As Aswell has pointed out,⁽⁴²⁾ because Henryson does not allow Cresseid to reveal her thoughts and motives to us, we cannot feel as sympathetic towards her or feel as much affection for her as we do for Criseyde with whom Chaucer permits us to share in her interior monologues. Both narrators, however, excuse their heroine's conduct because their authors recognize her misdemeanours as due to human frailty. Shakespeare fails to condemn her for the same reason.

Shakespeare does allow us to participate in Cressida's thoughts and motives through her soliloquy at the end of the second scene of the play after she has rebuffed all Pandarus' attempts to make her admit that Troilus is superior to all the other Trojan warriors. Surely Bradbrook is mistaken in claiming⁽⁴³⁾ that by it Cressida "proclaims her simple creed, the art of the coquette".⁽⁴⁴⁾ We discover that to Pandarus Cressida's professed

(40) ll. 71-7.

(41) ll. 101-2.

(42) See p.32 above.

(43) See p.39 "

(44) Bradbrook, op.cit., p.314.

lack of interest in Troilus has been feigned and that in reality:

"But more in Troilus thousandfold I see
 Than in the glass of Pandar's praise may be
 Yet hold I off: women are angels, wooing;
 Things won are done - joy's soul lies in doing.
 That she beloved knows nought that knows not this:
 Men prize the thing ungained more than it is.

...

Then though my heart's content firm love doth bear,
 Nothing of that shall from mine eyes appear." (45)

Cressida admits to herself that she loves Troilus but she has resolved not to reveal it because she knows from her previous experience that once Troilus has won her he is bound to lose interest and she is frightened of that contingency. This indicates her realistic attitude which is later highlighted in contrast to Troilus' idealism:

Troilus: " This is the monstrosity in love, lady —
 that the will is infinite and the execution
 confined; that the desire is boundless and the
 act a slave to limit."

Cressida: " They say all lovers swear more performance
 than they are able, and yet reserve an ability that
 they never perform; vowing more than the perfection
 of ten, and discharging less than a tenth part of one." (46)

Later when she has submitted to Troilus comes her admission to him:

"But, though I loved you well, I wooed you not." (47)

Cressida here reveals an aspect of her character that has been ignored by the critics I have read. She is capable of a surprising degree of self-control. Allegations of coquetry therefore seem unfounded. Even Muir, who is one who accuses her of it, (48) admits "she is as genuinely in love with Troilus as her shallow nature will allow." (49) Neither can it be denied that her vow to be always true to Troilus is sincerely made even if she fails to live up to it.

(45) I, ii, 285-90 and 295-6.

(46) III, ii, 79-86.

(47) III, ii, 125.

(48) See p.39 above.

(49) Muir "Troilus", p.31.

As Shakespeare's drama unfolds before us, we find that our imaginations no longer have the freedom allowed us by Chaucer and Henryson. When we eavesdrop with Troilus on Cressida's seduction by Diomedes, we, like Troilus, find difficulty in believing that this woman is the same one we knew.

We have seen how both Henryson and Shakespeare have used Chaucer's poem as the basis for their contributions to the story; Henryson by his use of a similarly biased narrator and Shakespeare by making the events in the love story correspond closely with the major outlines of Chaucer's story. Each, however, has added his own original variation to endow his work with an individual stamp; Henryson by continuing the story of the heroine, as he imagines it, until her death and by introducing moral overtones; Shakespeare by allowing Troilus and ourselves, through the immediacy of his dramatic medium, to overhear the heroine's betrayal, and also, by debunking the courtly love ethic no longer respected by contemporary society, to add a new perspective.

Criseyde/Cresseid/Cressida certainly fails to fulfill our expectations of the stereotyped ever-virtuous and faithful heroine. Nevertheless this makes her all the more realistic as a human being.

Does the impact of the character depend on the order in which the works are read or whether one reads them all? I can only answer from my own experience. My first acquaintance was with Henryson's Cresseid in 1978 and I was gripped immediately by the compelling power of Henryson's portrait. The following year I met firstly Cressida and lastly Criseyde. The former's fascination arises from her wit and humour as well as the pathos of her eventual fate. The latter has a charm all her own so that

we end up, like her narrator, prepared to forgive her anything.

The love story of Troilus and Criseyde emphasizes the fragility of human relationships. In Chaucer it is presented as opposed to the permanence of a relationship with God. In the characterization of the heroine in both Chaucer and Shakespeare, one is constantly struck with the realization of how well these writers knew, understood and sympathized with human nature and, in particular, how well they knew, understood and loved women! We have not the same assurance regarding Henryson because he does not reveal as much of his heroine's thoughts and motives, but she redeems herself by her repentance.

It is the very complexity of the female character that Chaucer and Shakespeare have created that makes her rounded and therefore a credible human being and the secret of her timeless appeal lies in her very human frailty. It is because of her common human weaknesses that she will continue to exert a fascination and an affection for her on readers in any century.

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