**S6 Robert Henryson: *The Testament of Cresseid* Worksheet**

Name………………… Teacher………………… Date………….

This great poem is one of the many mediaeval versions of the story of Troiius and Cressida, two fictional figures of the Trojan War. French versions of the story were in existence in the twelfth century, after which the best‑known versions were *Il Filostrato* by the Italian writer Boccaccio (1313‑1375) which gave rise to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde.* Henryson's version was a deliberate sequel to Chaucer's story, and Shakespeare's play *Troilus and Cressida* showed the popularity of the story continuing into the seventeenth century.

The Trojan War

This celebrated conflict, half history and half myth, is believed to have taken place about a thousand years BC. Paris, the son of Priam, King of Troy, abducted Helen, the wife of Menelaus of Sparta, and in an attempt to win her back, the Greeks besieged the city of Troy (in what is now modern Turkey) for ten years. The story is told in the two great Greek poems attributed to Homer, *The Iliad* (the story of the war) and *The Odyssey* (the story of the wanderings of Odysseus after the war.)

Briefly, the love between Troilus and Cresseid was interrupted when Cresseid was required to join her father, Calchas, in the Grecian camp, where she began an affair with Diomeid (as a result of which she became a symbol of the fickleness of woman throughout the misogynistic Middle Ages). After she had lived with Diomeid as his mistress, he tired of her and she had to return to her father. Henryson's interest begins where Chaucer's poem leaves off, and deals with the fate of Cresseid after her return.

Chaucer's poem, in more than a thousand stanzas, runs to more than eight thousand lines; Henryson's poem, far more terse and concentrated, consists of six hundred and sixteen lines, which may be divided for convenience:

1. Get to know the overall shape of the poem by filling in the line numbers for the following sections:

i The introduction Line 1 -Line……….

ii The beginning of the narrative Line .-Line……….

iii Cresseid's dream Line .-Line……….

iv The remainder of the narrative Line .-Line……….

v Cresseid's lamentations Line .-Line……….

vi The meeting of Cresseid and Troilus Line .-Line……….

vii From Cresseid's realisation that it had been Troilus to her death

Line ….-Line……….

viii The Conclusion Line ….-Line……….

2. Explain clearly what has happened with regard to the weather in the first

stanza.

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…………………………………………………………………………………………..

3. For what purpose had the narrator gone into his *oratur*? (ll.8‑26)

. .

4. What stopped him from carrying out his intention?

. .

5. What information about the narrator do we get in lines 29‑35?

. .

. .

6. What THREE things does he do to cope with the cold?

i ii iii ……………………...

7. Lines 42‑56 form a version of part of Chaucer's story; give a brief summary of

what these two stanzas report:

. .

.............. .

. .

8. Henryson mentions Chaucer three times in this introduction (ll. 41, 58 & 64);

in what way is his final reference to him different from the two others?

…………………………………………………………………………………………..

9. The *vther quair* mentioned in line 61 almost certainly never existed; for what

reason did Henryson suggest that there had been such a volume?

. .

10. Notice how often Henryson uses the first person in this introduction, from line 3 to line 87; it is not used again in reference to the narrator (with the exception of the little tag on line 370) till the very last stanza of the whole poem. Why might this be?

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11. The narrative proper begins with line 71: what then is Henryson doing in

lines 78‑91 ?

. .

. .

12. After Cresseid has returned to her father, she *cryit out* against two gods;

which two?

i ii ……………………………………...

13. This outcry is of great importance, and her later suffering arises directly from

it; what does she blame the gods for?

. .

. .

14. Cresseid's dream (itself a convention of mediaeval poetry) introduces yet another convention.. the list of the planetary gods. Be familiar with the qualities associated with each of them; each is given roughly two stanzas (except Phebus, who gets an additional one for the description of his horses, and one other: which one?………. ). In a few words, describe the main features (both appearance and personality) of each:

Saturn: ..................................................................................................................

. .

Jupiter: ................................................................................................................

. .

Mars: ..................................................................................................................

. .

Phebus: .................................................................................................................

………………………………………………………………………………………….

Venus: ..................................................................................................................

. .

Mercury: ..................................................................................................................

. .

Cynthia: ..................................................................................................................

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15. Give an account of the case presented by Cupid in lines 276‑294:

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16. Which two gods are given the task of assessing Cresseid's guilt?

i................................................................. ii…………………………………………..

17. The word *leper* (or *lazarous)* is not used in Saturn's sentence; what does he

sentence her to?

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…………………………………………………………………………………………..

18. What is unusual about lines 323‑329?

. .

. .19. What was largely abstract in Saturn's judgement *(tairnes .... bewtie .. mirth .....*

*melancholy…diseis…neid…penuritie) is* now made concrete and specific, and

thereby more awful when Cynthia speaks *(ene…voice…lyre…spottis…lumpis…*

*cop and clapper*) ‑ and she concludes with the word *lazarous*.

20. Dreams are common enough in mediaeval poetry; what is different about

Cresseid's wakening?

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21. Henryson is particularly careful in this section to guide and control the

reader's reactions: what is the intended effect of line 350?

…………………………………………………………………………………………..

22. Notice the variety of speech forms employed by Henryson in this section: after Cynthia's sentence, Cresseid is given a stanza of direct speech in the form of a soliloquy, then the *chyld* brings the message from her father, then Cresseid speaks to the chyid; Henryson uses dialogue between Cresseid and Calchas, then reported speech where her father's reaction is given (ll.374‑5) and finally Cresseid expresses her desires.

23. Line 370 is the only place between the introduction and the ending where the

narrator appears, however briefly, in the first person, again underlining the

*vengeance* taken on Cresseid. Read the stanza of her father's reaction *( He luikit ...*

what is the effect of line 378?

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24. Mention some ways by which Henryson arouses our pity for Cresseid in the

last two stanzas of this section (lines 386‑406):

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25. Another feature to observe is the movement between concrete and abstract, the concentration on the physical on the one hand and the spiritual background on the other. Pick out some concrete nouns in this section (lines 386‑406) which emphasize the physical:

…………………………………………………………………………………………..

1. The seven stanzas of the Complaint are differentiated by not being written in

the Rhyme Royal of most of the rest of the poem, but in a complex nine‑line stanza. The basic idea is the contrast between the pleasures formerly enjoyed and the misery of the present. This is a standard subject, or topos, in mediaeval poetry, often known as the *Ubi sunt …*? theme, from the Latin for *Where are …*? Itis highly significant that the tone is primarily self‑pity; Cresseid still has a long way to go on her road towards self‑knowledge. Find a phrase in the first stanza which seems to you to be self‑pitying:

. ……..

27 One of the features of the Complaint is Exclamation. give an example:

…………………………………………………………………………………………..

28 Another is rhetorical question; example?

. .

29 Another is repetition of structure, or parallelism; example?

. .

30 What is she regretting in the second stanza (lines 416‑424)?

. .

31 And in the next (lines 425‑433)?

. .

32 And in the next (lines 434‑442)?

. .

33 And in the next (lines 443‑451)?

…………………………………………………………………………………………

34 In what way is the subject of the following two stanzas (lines 452‑469) slightly different?

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35 Cresseid is brought down from her abstract lamentations by the practical

advice of *ane lipper lady,* who tells her to:

…………………………………………………………………………………………

36 The "meeting" between Troilus and Cresseid is one of the most delicately written pieces of work in mediaeval poetry; notice how it is presented from the point of view of Troflus; it is written without any speech (and Henryson draws attenflon to this fact in line 523)‑ it employs several phrases denoting uncertainty: *not witting*

*quhat scho was come into his thocht sumtime he knew hir nocht.*

; find another:

. .

37 Note that the key stanza is largely monosyllabic (lines 498‑504); can you

suggest a reason for this?

. .

38 After the tension of the passage without speech, notice how rapidly Henryson varies the speech, with the lepers, then Cresseid, then a *lipper man* all speaking within a few lines. After this, what kind of writing follows, yet again, in lines 542‑574?

. .

39 What antithetical phrase is used three times in almost the same words, and

put at the end of the stanzas for emphasis?

. .

40 Cresseid has at last come to a form of self‑knowledge; write down a line

which sums this up..

………………………………………………………………………………………….

41 Cresseid bequeaths her body to:

her possessions to:........................................................................

her ring to:....................................................................................

her spirit to:..................................................................................

42 Although she seems to be making her peace, her last words express deep

regret; for what?

. .

43 Henryson is always very brisk with matters he wishes to get over quickly; look

at the four lines 592‑5; find three expressions which indicate a lack of delay:

…………………………………………………………………………………………..

44 After the very physical Testament *(corps…carioun…wormis…taidis…cop*

*and clapper…)* the account of Troilus's mourning (lines 596‑602) is strikingly

distant, an effect achieved by the use of abstract nouns; write down five of them:

. .

45 What might this indicate about Troilus?

...................... ………………………………………………………………………

46 Look at the most effective little phrase *Sum* *said* .... at the beginning of the

penultimate stanza; what effect does it have?

. .

47 The last stanza brings us back to Henryson. to whom has he addressed the

*ballet schort*?

. .

48 What is the presumed moral of the tale?

. .

49 What do you make of the last line?

. .

1. Brilliant, innit?

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