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ROBERT HENRYSON

*The Testament of Cresseid
and Seven Fables*

translated by Seamus Heaney

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Introduction

Little enough is known about Robert Henryson, 'a schoolmaster of Dunfermline' and master poet in the Scots language: born perhaps in the 1420s, he was dead by 1505, the year his younger contemporary William Dunbar mourned his passing in 'Lament for the Makars'. In a couplet where the rhyme tolls very sweetly and solemnly, Dunbar says that death 'In Dunfermelyne . . . has done roun [whispered]/ To Maister Robert Henrisoun', although here the title 'Maister' has more to do with the deceased man's status as a university graduate than with his profession as a teacher or his reputation as the author of three major narrative poems – *The Testament of Cresseid*, *The Moral Fables* and *Orpheus and Eurydice* – as well as a number of shorter lyrics including the incomparable (and probably untranslatable) 'Robyn and Makene'.

The honorific title is an early indication that Henryson was a learned poet, even though his learning, according to one distinguished editor, would have been considered very old-fashioned by the standards of contemporary Continental humanism. 'In so far as the terms have any meaning,' Denton Fox writes in his 1987 edition of *The Poems*, 'Henryson belongs firmly to the Middle Ages, not to the Renaissance.' Yet he belongs also in the eternal present of the perfectly pitched, a poet whose knowledge of life is matched by the range of his art, whose constant awareness of the world's hardness and injustice is mitigated by his irony, tender-heartedness, and ever-ready sense of humour.

Most important of all, however, is Henryson's 'sound of sense', the way his voice is (as he might have put it) 'mingit' with the verse forms, the way it can modulate from insinuation to instruction, from high-toned earnestness to wily familiarity – and it was this sensation of intimacy with a speaker at once sober and playful that inspired me to begin putting the not very difficult Scots language of his originals into rhymed stanzas of more immediately accessible English.

But why begin at all, the reader may ask, since the Scots is not, in fact, so opaque? Anybody determined to have a go at it can turn to Denton Fox's edition or to the Henryson section of Douglas Gray's conveniently annotated *Selected Poems of Robert Henryson and William Dunbar*. Reading his work in this way may be a slow process – eyes to-ing and fro-ing between text and glossary, getting used to the unfamiliar orthography, ears testing out and taking in the measure of the metre – but it is still a fulfilling experience. And yet people who are neither students nor practising poets are unlikely to make such a deliberate effort.

I began to make the versions of Henryson included in this book because of a combination of the three motives for translation identified by the poet and translator Eliot Weinberger. First and foremost, advocacy for the work in question, for unless this poetry is brought out of the university syllabus and on to the shelves 'a great prince in prison lies'. But Weinberger's other two motives were equally operative: refreshment from a different speech and culture, and the pleasures of 'writing by proxy'.

Re-reading Henryson some forty years after I had first encountered him as an undergraduate, I experienced what John Dryden called (in his preface to *Fables, Ancient and Modern*) a 'transfusion', and the fact that Dryden used the term in relation to his modernisation of Chaucer made it all the more applicable to my own case: what I was involved in, after all, was the modernisation of work by one of a group of Scottish poets who shared Dryden's

high regard for the genius of 'The noble Chaucer, of makers flower', and who brought about a significant flowering in the literary life of Scotland during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

None of them, however, showed a greater degree of admiration for their English forebear or was more influenced by his achievement than Robert Henryson. Not only did he write *The Testament of Cresseid*, in which he explicitly acknowledges his indebtedness to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, but in *The Testament, Orpheus and Eurydice* and the fables, he employs the rhyme royal stanza, the form established by the English poet for work of high seriousness, although it must be said that Henryson made it a fit vehicle for much homelier modes and matter.

Chaucer's *Troilus* deals with that Trojan protagonist's love for Cressida (as Shakespeare names her in his dramatisation of the story) and with Cressida's subsequent betrayal of Troilus when she abandons him and goes off with the Greek hero Diomedes. Henryson takes all this as read but refers to another source which carries the story further, to the point where his Cresseid (stress on second syllable) is abandoned in her turn by Diomedes. After an introduction of several attractively confidential stanzas which present the poet as an ageing man in a wintry season, no longer as erotically susceptible as he would wish, we are quickly *in medias res*, in the Greek camp with the cast-off heroine who now goes about 'available' to the rank and file 'like any common pick-up'.

Subsequently she manages to return home to her father Calchas, where she begins to recuperate in isolation, but then – disastrously – she rebukes Cupid and Venus, the god and goddess of love, blaming her comedown on them:

O false Cupid, none is to blame but you,
 You and your mother who is love's blind goddess.
 You gave me to believe and I trusted you,
 That the seed of love was sown in my face –

and so on. And then, in a manner of speaking, all heaven breaks loose. A convocation of the planets occurs and the poet starts upon a long set-piece of characterisation and description as he introduces the gods who are the geniuses of the different planets, a passage which allows him to demonstrate rather splendidly his store of classical and medieval learning.

This interlude may hold up the action, much as a masque will in a Shakespearean play, or an Olympian scene in classical epic, but it is still thoroughly of its time – a pageant, a sequence of tableaux, reminiscent of those that rolled their way through medieval York and Chester at Easter, showing how the inhabitants of the Christian heaven were also crucially involved in the affairs of mortals on earth – not least those who, like Cresseid, had incurred the divine wrath.

Immediately then, as a result of the gods' judgement, Cresseid is stricken with leprosy and doomed to spend the rest of her life as a beggar in a leper colony, a fate which allows for another great set-piece, her lament for the way of life and the beauty she has lost; yet it is also a fate which will bring her in the painful end to an encounter with her former lover Troilus, as he returns in triumph from a victory over 'the Grecian knights'. This is one of the most famous and affecting scenes in literature, a recognition scene (as Douglas Gray observes) all the more powerful for containing no recognition:

*Than upon him scho kest up baith hir ene –
And with ane blenk it come into his thocht
That he sumtime hir face befor had sene.
Bot scho was in sic pley he knew hir nocht;
Yit than hir luik into his mynd had brocht
The sweit visage and amorous blenking
Of fair Cresseid, sumtyme his awin darling.*

Upon him then she cast up both her eyes
And at a glance it came into his thought
That he some time before had seen her face
But she was in such state he knew her not;
Yet still into his mind her look had brought
The features and the amorous sweet glancing
Of fair Cresseid, one time his own, his darling.

Swiftly then the tale concludes. Troilus is overcome by an involuntary fit of trembling and showers alms of gold into Cresseid's lap, then rides away, leaving her to discover his identity from the lepers. After which she utters another love lament, then takes pen and paper to compose her testament, bequeathing her 'royall ring set with this rubie reid' to Troilus, and having settled all earthly affairs, expires in grief.

Some said he made a tomb of marble grey
And wrote her name on it and an inscription
In golden letters, above where she lay
Inside her grave. These were the words set down:
'Lo, fair ladies, Cresseid of Troy town,
Accounted once the flower of womanhood,
Of late a leper, under this stone lies dead.'

It is customary to contrast Henryson's grave handling of this tale with Chaucer's rather more beguiling treatment. Both strike a wholly mature note, but the Scottish poet's is more richly freighted with an 'ample power/ To chasten and subdue'. Weight of judgement, a tenderness that isn't clammy, a dry-eyed sympathy – these are the Henryson hallmarks, attributes of a moral understanding reluctant to moralise, yet one that is naturally and unfalteringly instructive. Henryson is a narrative poet whom you

read not only for the story but for the melody of understanding in the storytelling voice. If Hugh MacDiarmid had been asked half a millennium later what he meant by saying that the kind of poetry he wanted was 'the poetry of a grown man', he could have pointed straight to *The Testament*.

This was also the poetry of a man whose imaginative sympathy prevailed over the stock responses of his time. To his contemporaries, Henryson's entitlement as a poet would have depended to a considerable extent on his intellectual attainments, his education in astronomy and astrology, in matters legal and literary, but from our point of view he proves himself more by his singular compassion for the character of Cresseid. Available to him all along was the rhetoric of condemnation, the trope of woman as the daughter of Eve, temptress, snare, Jezebel. But Henryson eschews this pulpit-speak:

And yet whatever men may think or say
Contemptuously about your quick compliance
I will excuse to what extent I may
Your womanhood, wisdom and loveliness
Which the whim of fortune put to such distress.

There is a unique steadiness about the movement of Henryson's stanzas, a fine and definite modulation between the colloquial and the graver, more considered elements of his style. If his rhetoric is elevated, his sounding line nevertheless goes deep:

*Ane doolie sessoun to ane cairfull dyte
Suld correspond and be equivalent:
Richt sa it was quhen I began to wryte
This tragedie...*

Here the phonetic make-up contributes strongly if stealthily to the emotional power of the declaration. The 'oo' in 'doolie' makes the

doleful meaning of the word even more doleful, and the gloom of it is just that little bit gloomier when the 'oo' sound gets repeated in 'sessoun'; and then comes that succession of reluctant, braking Scottish 'r's in 'cairfull' and 'correspond' and (especially) 'tragedie'. Foreboding about the grievous story he has to tell is already present in the undermusic of what purports to be a mere throat-clearing exercise by a professional. And if my own sense-clearing could not hope to capture fully that tolling tragic note, it could at least echo the metre and approximate the rhyme:

A gloomy time, a poem full of hurt
Should correspond and be equivalent.
Just so it was when I began my work
On this retelling . . .

What had actually started me 'on this retelling' was the chance sighting of a Henryson text in a British Library exhibition called *Chapter and Verse*. This included an early illustrated manuscript of his 'moral fable', 'The Cock and the Jasp', and I was so taken by the jaunty, canty note of its opening lines that I felt an urge to get it into my own words. I was further encouraged in this because, a little while earlier, after I had given a reading of my *Beowulf* translation in the Lincoln Center in New York, the director had suggested that I should translate some other narrative that could be performed by an actor. Very soon afterwards, therefore, I began to do 'The Cock and the Jasp' into English stanzas, and even thought of preparing a Henryson selection to be called *Four Fables and a Testament*. So, working on the principle that the bigger job should be tackled first, I immediately faced into the 'tragedie'.

I enjoyed the work because Henryson's language led me back into what might be called 'the hidden Scotland' at the back of my own ear. The speech I grew up with in mid-Ulster carried more than a trace of Scottish vocabulary and as a youngster I was familiar with

Ulster Scots idioms and pronunciations across the River Bann in County Antrim. I was therefore entirely at home with Henryson's 'sound of sense', so much in tune with his note and his pace and his pitch that I developed a strong inclination to hum along with him. Hence the decision to translate the poems with rhyme and metre, to match as far as possible the rhetoric and the roguery of the originals, and in general 'keep the accent'.

After I read the full collection of thirteen fables, however, I realised that to present only four of them would be to sell Henryson short. The collection contains some of his fiercest allegories of human existence – 'The Preaching of the Swallow' and 'The Toad and the Mouse' – as well as some of his gentlest presentations of decency in civic and domestic life – 'The Two Mice', 'The Lion and the Mouse'; but in all of these, as well as in 'The Fox, the Wolf and the Carter' and 'The Fox, the Wolf and the Farmer', there is also satire and social realism – even if the society involved is that of wild animals.

Much can be said about the sources of these tales and about the overall structure of the collection, but here it will suffice to note that while Aesop is credited throughout as the original author, the fables derive from and greatly expand on later compendia and textbooks, in particular one by Gualterus Anglicus (Walter the Englishman) and another one, the *Roman de Renart*, a well-known anthology of fox tales. Equally important, however, is the fact that these tales of tricky and innocent beasts and birds were part of the common oral culture of Europe, a store of folk wisdom as pervasive and unifying at vernacular level as the doctrines and visions of Christianity were in the higher realms of scholastic culture.

Not that Henryson was indifferent to those higher registers of thought and discourse. The structure of his understanding was determined by the medieval world picture of human life situated on a plane between animal and angel, human beings

a dual compound of soul and body, caught between heavenly aspiring intellect and down-dragging carnal appetite. If he was a schoolteacher, he was also a school man. If he was professionally aware of the classics, he was equally and perhaps even anxiously aware of the confessional.

In fact, much of the charm and strength of the fables comes from the way Henryson's hospitable imagination seems to enjoy open access to both the educated *lingua franca* and the subcultural codes of his late medieval world. Sometimes this adds a touch of sophisticated comedy, as when the mouse (in the final fable) launches into an argument based on the principles of physiognomy; sometimes it adds pathos, as when the swallow preaches the virtue of prudence to the doomed, ineducable little birds; sometimes it adds a touch of donnish humour, as when the wolf unexpectedly adduces his knowledge of contract law to claim ownership of the oxen in 'The Fox, the Wolf and the Farmer'.

More importantly, this easy passage between the oral and learned culture, between the rhetoric of the clerks and the rascality of the beasts, establishes his world as a credible hierarchical place of social order and seasonal cycles, a world where custom and ceremony can never rule out criminality and deception or a judicious style occlude actual injustice. The stylistic reward for this inclusive vision is felt, moreover, in the nice modulation that occurs between the storytelling voice of the fable proper and the didactic voice of the 'Moralitas': if the latter is often much less confiding, more button-lipped and tendentious, this is no more than a dramatic rendering of the overall double perspective, of an intelligence stretched between the homely and the homiletic.

The genre demanded the application of a formal 'moralitas' yet the requirement also suited something strict and disciplined in Henryson's temperament, so there is integrity in the procedure rather than a mere tagging on of *sententiae*. But the richest moments in the fables are those when the natural world or the

human predicament calls forth Henryson's rapture or his realism, whether it be in the dream vision of his meeting with Aesop at the beginning of 'The Lion and the Mouse' or the description of the changing seasons in 'The Preaching of the Swallow' or the verve and villainy of the fox in dialogue with the wolf prior to their duping of the carter:

'Still,' said the wolf, 'by banks and braes you wend
And slink along and steal up on your prey.'
'Sir,' said the fox, 'you know how these things end.
They catch my scent down wind from far away
And scatter fast and leave me in dismay.
They could be lying sleeping in a field
But once I'm close they're off. It puts me wild.'

Beasts they may be, but through their agency Henryson creates a work which answers MacDiarmid's big challenging definition of poetry as 'human existence come to life'.

Acknowledgements and Notes

The translation of *The Testament of Cresseid* originally appeared in a limited edition with artwork by Hughie O'Donoghue (Enitharmon Press, 2004). Portions of the introduction to that volume have been included in the one included in this edition.

I am grateful for the commentaries, annotations and glossaries provided in *Robert Henryson: The Poems*, edited by Denton Fox (OUP, 1987) and *Selected Poems of Robert Henryson and William Dunbar*, edited by Douglas Gray (Penguin, 1998). Thanks are also due to Douglas Gray and to Penguin Books for permission to reproduce the original text of Robert Henryson's poems, as regularised and punctuated by Douglas Gray in the above-mentioned edition. I am grateful to Dennis O'Driscoll for providing me with George D. Gopen's helpful prose translation of *Moral Fables* (University of Notre Dame Press/Scottish Academic Press, 1987) at a moment when I might have been inclined to give up on the job. And to Professor Patrick Crotty for his encouragement and informed attention.

This book contains no critical apparatus (the above editions being readily available), but the following points may be of assistance or interest to the non-specialist reader:

'The Prologue': The Latin tag attributed to the legendary Aesop means 'serious subjects are more attractive [have a sweeter smile] when portrayed with a light touch'. The line is actually drawn from one of Henryson's medieval sources.

'The Cock and the Jasp' is included because the conclusion of the prologue requires it, although (as Douglas Gray comments) 'the allegorical interpretation [in the 'Moralitas'] comes as a surprise to most modern readers.' Traditionally, the cock who leaves the jewel in the dirt represents the foolish man who rejects wisdom and constitutes thereby a warning to the reader of the fables to pay attention to their hidden meanings – the kernels in the nuts. But confusion arises here because the cock's reasons for rejecting the jewel are rather praiseworthy and seem to go against the notion of him as a fool.

'The Lion and the Mouse': There is no proof that Aesop, who appears in the dream vision at the opening of this fable, ever existed. He is nevertheless credited with having invented the fable form and having composed the originals upon which all subsequent versions were based. Here his handsome appearance and medieval apparel are at variance with traditional classical accounts of him as an ill-favoured Greek slave of the sixth century BC.

'The Preaching of the Swallow': In the translation of this fable I retain the Scots words 'lint' and 'beets' (meaning flax and bound sheaves of flax) because they have always been part of my own Northern Irish vocabulary.

'The Fox, the Wolf and the Carter': This story involves a play upon words. When the fox has robbed the carter of his herring and escaped, the carter threatens him with a 'nekherring', a word which was not in common use but which occurs, as Denton Fox notes, in *Catholicon Anglicum* (c.1475) where it is glossed *colaphus* (in medieval Latin, 'a blow on the neck'). When the carter shouts

*'Abyde, and thou a nekherring sall haif
Is worth my capill, creillis, and all the laif,'*

the wolf hears the 'herring' bit, the only bit that interests him, and this provides the fox with an opportunity to invent his tale of the luscious 'herring treat'. My solution was to avoid any use of 'nekherring' in my version of the carter's threat and to exploit instead the violence and menace in the word 'gutting', so closely associated with the fish in the creel:

*'A gutting I'll give you, a herring treat,
A second helping that you'll not forget.'*

This allows the fox (and me, I hope) to play on the words when the wolf asks 'What was that idiot shouting/ When he hunted you and howled and shook his fist?'

THE TESTAMENT OF CRESSEID

*ANE DOOLIE SESSOUN to ane cairfull dyte
Suld correspond and be equivalent:
Richt sa it wes quhen I began to wryte
This tragedie – the wedder richt fervent,
Quhen Aries, in middis of the lent,
Schouris of haill gart fra the north descend,
That scant me fra the cauld I nicht defend.*

*Yit nevertheles within myne oratur
I stude, quhen Titan had his bemis bricht
Withdrawin down and sylit under cure,
And fair Venus, the bewtie of the nicht,
Uprais and set unto the west full richt
Hir goldin face, in oppositioun
Of god Phebus, direct descending down.*

*Throwout the glas hir bemis brast sa fair
That I nicht se on everie syde me by;
The northin wind had purifyit the air
And sched the mistie cloudis fra the sky;
The froist freisit, the blastis bitterly
Fra Pole Artick come quhisling loud and schill,
And causit me remufe aganis my will.*

A GLOOMY TIME, a poem full of hurt
Should correspond and be equivalent.
Just so it was when I began my work
On this retelling, and the weather went
From close to frosty, as Aries, mid-Lent,
Made showers of hail from the north descend
In a great cold I barely could withstand.

Still, there I stood, inside my oratory
When Titan had withdrawn his beams of light
And draped and sealed the brightness of the day,
And lovely Venus, beauty of the night,
Had risen up and toward the true west set
Her golden face, direct in opposition
To the god Phoebus, straight descending down.

Beyond the glass her beams broke out so fair
I could see away on every side of me.
The northern wind had purified the air
And hunted the cloud-cover off the sky.
The frost froze hard, the blast came bitterly
From the pole-star, whistling loud and shrill,
And forced me to remove against my will.

*For I traistit that Venus, luifis quene,
To quhome sum tyme I hecht obedience,
My faidit hart of lufe scho wald mak grene,
And therupon with humbill reverence
I thocht to pray hir hie magnificence;
Bot for greit cald as than I lattit was,
And in my chalmer to the fyre can pas.*

*Thocht lufe be hait, yit in ane man of age
It kendillis nocht sa sone as in youtheid,
Of quhome the blude is flowing in ane rage;
And in the auld the curage doif and deid,
Of quhilk the fyre outward is best remeid:
To help be phisike quhair that nature faillit
I am expert, for baith I have assaillit.*

*I mend the fyre and beikit me about,
Than tuik ane drink, my spreitis to comfort,
And armit me weill fra the cauld thairout.
To cut the winter nicht and mak it schort
I tuik ane quair – and left all uther sport –
Writtin be worthie Chaucer glorious,
Of fair Cresseid and worthie Troylus.*

*And thair I fand, efter that Diomeid
Ressavit had that lady bricht of hew,
How Troilus neir out of wit abraid
And weipit soir with visage pail of hew;
For quhilk wanhope his teiris can renew,
Quhill esperance rejoisit him agane:
Thus quhyle in joy he levit, quhyle in pane.*

*I had placed my trust in Venus, as love's queen
To whom one time I vowed obedience,
That she should sprig my fallow heart with green;
And there and then, with humble reverence,
I thought to pray her high magnificence,
But hindered by that freezing arctic air
Returned into my chamber to the fire.*

*Though love is hot, yet in an older man
It kindles not so soon as in the young:
Their blood burns furiously in every vein
But in the old the blaze is lapsed so long
It needs an outer fire to burn and bring
The spark to life – as I myself know well:
Remedies, when the urge dies, can avail.*

*I stacked the fire and got warm at the hearth,
Then took a drink to soothe and lift my spirit
And arm myself against the bitter north.
To pass the time and kill the winter night
I chose a book – and was soon absorbed in it –
Written by Chaucer, the great and glorious,
About fair Cresseid and worthy Troilus.*

*And there I found that after Diomedé
Had won that lady in her radiance
Troilus was driven nearly mad
And wept sore and lost colour and then, once
He had despaired his fill, would recommence
As memory and hope revived again.
Thus whiles he lived in joy and whiles in pain.*

*Of hir behest he had greit comforting,
Traisting to Troy that scho suld mak retour,
Quhilk he desyrit maist of eirdly thing,
Forquhy scho was his only paramour.
Bot quhen he saw passit baith day and hour
Of hir ganecome, than sorrow can oppres
His wofull hart in cair and hevines.*

*Of his distres me neidis nocht reheirs,
For worthie Chauceir in the samin buik,
In gudelie termis and in joly veirs,
Compylit hes his cairis, quha will luik.
To brek my sleip ane uther quair I tuik,
In quhilk I fand the fatall destenie
Of fair Cresseid, that endit wretchitlie.*

*Quha wait gif all that Chauceir wrait was trew?
Nor I wait nocht gif this narratioun
Be authoreist, or fenyeit of the new
Be sum poeit, throw his inventioun
Maid to report the lamentatioun
And wofull end of this lustie Creisseid,
And quhat distres scho thoillit, and quhat deid.*

*Quhen Diomeid had all his appetyte,
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.
Than desolait scho walkit up and down,
And sum men sayis, into the court, commoun.*

*She had promised him and this was his consoling.
He trusted her to come to Troy once more
Which he desired more than any thing
Because she was his only paramour.
But when he saw the day and the due hour
Of her return go past, a heavy weight
Of care and woe oppressed his broken heart.*

*No need here to rehearse the man's distress
Since worthy Chaucer in that selfsame book
Has told his troubles in beguiling verse
And pleasant style, whoever cares to look.
It was a different volume that I took
To keep myself awake, in which I found
Cresseid's most miserable and fated end.*

*Who knows if all that Chaucer wrote was true?
Nor do I know if this second version
Was genuine, or maybe something new
Invented by a poet, some narration
Framed so as to include the lamentation
And woeful fall of passionate Cresseid,
What she would endure and how she died.*

*When Diomedes had sated his desire
And oversated it on this fair lady
He sought fresh satisfactions with another
And sent Cresseid a banishment decree
To bind and bar her from his company.
She went distracted then and would ramble
And be, as men will say, available.*

O fair Creisseid, 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 maculait,
 And go amang the Greikis air and lait,
 Sa giglotlike takand thy foull plesance!
 I have pietie thow suld fall sic mischance!

Yit nevertheless, quhat ever men deme or say
 In scornefull langage of thy brukkilnes,
 I sall excuse als far furth as I may
 Thy womanheid, thy wisdome and fairnes,
 The quhilk fortoun hes put to sic distres
 As hir pleisit, and nathing throw the gilt
 Of the, throw wickit langage to be spilt!

This fair lady, in this wyse destitute
 Of all comfort and consolatioun,
 Richt privelie, but fellowschip or refute,
 Disagysit passit far out of the toun
 Ane myle or twa, unto ane mansioun
 Beildit full gay, quhair hir father Calchas
 Quhilk than amang the Greikis dwelland was.

Quhen he hir saw, the caus he can inquire
 Of hir cumming; scho said, siching full soir,
 'Fra Diomeid had gottin his desyre
 He wox werie and wald of me no moir.'
 Quod Calchas, 'Douchter, weip thow not thairfoir;
 Peraventure all cummis for the best.
 Welcum to me; thow art full deir ane gest!'

O fair Cresseid, the flower and paragon
 Of Troy and Greece, how could it be your fate
 To let yourself be dragged down as a woman
 And sullied so by lustful appetite
 To go among the Greeks early and late
 So obviously, like any common pickup?
 When I recollect your fall, I want to weep.

And yet whatever men may think or say
 Contemptuously about your quick compliance
 I will excuse to what extent I may
 Your womanhood, wisdom and loveliness
 Which the whim of fortune put to such distress –
 No guilt for it to be attributed
 To you, bad-mouthed by noxious gossip.

Then fair Cresseid, completely destitute,
 Bereft of comfort and all consolation,
 Friendless and unprotected, managed out
 By stealth and in disguise beyond the town
 A mile or two and crossed beyond the line
 To a splendid mansion in the Greek-held quarter,
 The residence of Calchas, her old father.

When he saw her there, he enquired why
 She had returned. 'From the moment Diomedes
 Had his pleasure,' she answered desperately,
 'He began to tire of me and have no need.'
 'There is nothing here to weep for,' Calchas said,
 'It could be all has turned out for the best.
 You are welcome, daughter dear, my dearest guest.'

*This auld Calchas, efter the law was tho,
 Wes keiper of the tempill as ane preist
 In quhilk Venus and hir sone Cupido
 War honourit, and his chalmer was thame neist;
 To quhilk Cresseid, with baill aneuch in breist,
 Usit to pas, hir prayeris for to say,
 Quhill at the last, upon ane solempne day,*

*As custome was, the pepill far and neir
 Befoir the none unto the tempill went
 With sacrifice, devoit in thair maneir;
 Bot still Cresseid, hevie in hir intent,
 Into the kirk wald not hir self present,
 For giving of the pepill ony deming
 Of hir expuls fra Diomeid the king;*

*Bot past into ane secreit orature,
 Quhair scho nicht weip hir wofull desteny.
 Behind hir bak scho cloisit fast the dure
 And on hir kneis bair fell down in hy;
 Upon Venus and Cupide angerly
 Scho cryit out, and said on this same wyse:
 'Allace, that ever I maid yow sacrifice!*

*'Ye gave me anis ane devine responsaill
 That I suld be the flour of luif in Troy;
 Now am I maid ane unworthie outwaill,
 And all in cair translatit is my joy.
 Quha sall me gyde? Quha sall me now convoy,
 Sen I fra Diomeid and nobill Troylus
 Am clene excludit, as abject odious?*

Old Calchas, as the law required then
 Of temple-keepers, was a temple-priest,
 Servant of Venus and Cupid, her young son,
 Keeper of their precincts where, distressed,
 Cresseid would go, heart heavy in her breast,
 To hide from public notice and to pray.
 And then it happened on a certain day

When custom called for general devotion
 And sacrifice was due, the people went
 Devoutly to the temple before noon;
 But still Cresseid stayed firm in her intent
 To avoid the sanctuary and not present
 Herself in public, to keep her secret safe,
 Not let them guess her prince had cast her off.

She moved instead into a cell, in private,
 Where she might weep for what had come to pass.
 Behind her back she closed the door and barred it,
 Then hurriedly fell down on her bare knees,
 Crying all the while, berating Venus
 And Cupid angrily, in words like these:
 'Why, alas, did I ever sacrifice

To you, you gods, who once divinely promised
 That I would be the flower of love in Troy?
 I have been demeaned into an outcast,
 Translated and betrayed out of my joy.
 Who's now to guide, accompany or stand by
 Me, set at odds and made so odious
 To Diomed and noble Troilus?

'O fals Cupide, is nane to wyte bot thow
 And thy mother, of lufe the blind goddes!
 Ye causit me always understand and trow
 The seid of lufe was sawin in my face,
 And ay grew grene throw your supplie and grace.
 Bot now, allace, that seid with froist is slane,
 And I fra luifferis left, and all forlane.'

Quhen this was said, doun in ane extasie,
 Ravischit in spreit, intill ane dreame scho fell,
 And be apperance hard, quhair scho did ly,
 Cupide the king ringand ane silver bell,
 Quhilk men nicht heir fra hevin unto hell;
 At quhais sound befoir Cupide appeiris
 The sevin planetis, descending fra thair spheiris;

Quhilk hes power of all thing generabill,
 To reull and steir be thair greit influence
 Wedder and wind, and coursis variabill.
 And first of all Saturne gave his sentence,
 Quhilk gave to Cupide litill reverence,
 Bot as ane busteous churle on his maneir
 Come crabtilie with auster luik and cheir.

His face fronsit, his lyre was lyke the leid,
 His teith chatterit and cheverit with the chin,
 His ene drowpit, how sonkin in his heid,
 Out of his nois the meldrop fast can rin,
 With lippis bla and cheikis leine and thin;
 The ice-schoklis that fra his hair doun hang
 Was wonder greit, and as ane speir als lang.

O false Cupid, none is to blame but you,
 You and your mother, who is love's blind goddess.
 You gave me to believe and I trusted you
 That the seed of love was sown in my face
 And would grow greener through your constant grace.
 But now, alas, that seed with frost is killed
 And I from lovers banished forth and exiled.'

When this was said, her spirits ebbed away
 In a fainting fit and into dream she fell
 So that it seemed she heard from where she lay
 Cupid the King ringing a silver bell
 That filled men's ears from heaven down to hell.
 At which sound before Cupid there appear
 The seven planets, descending from their spheres.

They of all things brought into creation
 Have power to rule through their great influence
 Wind and weather and the course of fortune,
 And Saturn, being first up to pronounce,
 Treated Cupid with no great reverence
 But crabbedly, with cramped look and demeanour,
 Behaved in his churlish, rough, thick-witted manner.

With rucked and wrinkled face, a lyre like lead,
 His chattering teeth sent shivers through his chin,
 His eyes were droopy, holes sunk in his head,
 His lips were blue, his cheek hollow and thin,
 And from his nose there streamed a steady nose-run.
 And lo too, and behold! Down from his hair
 Hung icicles as long as any spear.

Atovir his belt his lyart lorkis lay
 Felterit unfair, ovirfret with froistis hoir,
 His garmound and his gyte full gay of gray,
 His widderit weid fra him the wind out woir,
 Ane busteous bow within his hand he boir,
 Under his girdill ane flasche of felloun flanis
 Fedderit with ice and heidit with hailstanis.

Than Juppiter, richt fair and amiabill,
 God of the starnis in the firmament
 And nureis to all thing generabill;
 Fra his father Saturne far different,
 With burelie face and browis bricht and brent;
 Upon his heid ane garland wonder gay
 Of flouris fair, as it had bene in May.

His voice was cleir, as cristall wer his ene,
 As goldin wyre sa glitterand was his hair,
 His garmound and his gyte full gay of grene
 With goldin listis gilt on everie gair;
 Ane burelie brand about his middill bair,
 In his richt hand he had ane groundin speir,
 Of his father the wraith fra us to weir.

Nixt efter him come Mars the god of ire,
 Of strife, debait, and all dissensioun,
 To chide and fecht, als feirs as ony fyre,
 In hard harnes, hewmound, and habirgeoun,
 And on his hanche ane roustie fell fachioun,
 And in his hand he had ane roustie sword,
 Wrything his face with mony angrie word.

Around his belt, his hoary lank locks lay
 Tousled and messed and tinselled with the frost.
 His cloak and suit were of a gloomy grey,
 Like faded flags they flapped on him and tossed.
 He held a hefty bow in his strong grasp,
 A sheaf of cruel arrows in his sash
 With hailstone heads and feather-flights of ice.

Then Jupiter, so amiable, so handsome,
 God of all stars in the firmament
 And nurse of all potential and creation,
 The son of Saturn but far different:
 Fine-featured face, his forehead radiant,
 A garland on his head, a lovely spray
 Woven of flowers that made it seem like May.

His voice was clear, his crystal eyes were keen,
 His fair hair had the shine of golden wire,
 His cloak and suit were of a glorious green
 With gilt appliqué hems on every gore.
 A gallant sword strapped to his waist he wore
 And in his right hand held a sharpened spear
 To keep us safe and ward off Saturn's anger.

Next after him came Mars, the god of ire,
 Of strife and of debate and all dissension,
 To quarrel and attack as quick as wildfire,
 In armour dressed, helmet and habergeon.
 He flaunted at his hip a dangerous falchion
 As rusty as the sword he held aloft,
 And raged, grimaced, rampaged and bawled and scoffed.

Schaikand his sword, befoir Cupide he come,
 With reid visage and grislie glowrand ene,
 And at his mouth ane bullar stude of fome,
 Lyke to ane bair quhetting his tuskis kene;
 Richt tuilyeour lyke, but temperance in tene,
 Ane horne he blew with mony bosteous brag,
 Quhilk all this warld with weir hes maid to wag.

Than fair Phebus, lanterne and lamp of licht,
 Of man and beist, baith frute and flourisching,
 Tender nureis, and banischer of nicht,
 And of the warld causing, be his moving
 And influence, lyfe in all eirdlie thing,
 Without comfort of quhome, of force, to nocht
 Must all ga die that in this warld is wrocht.

As king royall he raid upon his chair,
 The quhilk Phaeton gydit sum tyme unricht;
 The brichtnes of his face quhen it was bair
 Nane nicht behald for peirsing of his sicht;
 This goldin cart with fyrie bemis bricht
 Four yokkit steidis full different of hew
 But bait or tyring throw the spheiris drew.

The first was soyr, with mane als reid as rois,
 Callit Eoye, into the orient;
 The secund steid to name hecht Ethios,
 Quhitlie and paill, and sum deill ascendent;
 The thrid Peros, richt hait and richt fervent;
 The feird was blak, and callit Philogie,
 Quhilk rollis Phebus down into the sey.

Shaking this sword, before Cupid he comes,
 Red in the face and glowering balefully.
 Like a boar that whets its tusks, he grinds and fumes
 And foams at the mouth, making spittle fly.
 Brawling, spoiling, keeping himself angry,
 He blows coarse, constant blasts upon a horn
 That has rocked this world with war to its foundation.

Then Phoebus fair, lantern and lamp of light,
 Tender nurse of flourishing and fruiting,
 Of man and beast; the banisher of night;
 By influence and motion cause and spring
 Of life in the world and every earthly thing;
 Without whose comfort, all that has been brought
 Into being needs must die and count for naught.

As king in state, he rode his chariot,
 The one that Phaeton had once driven off course.
 The brightness of his countenance when not
 Shielded would hurt the eyes of onlookers.
 The golden coach, with its gleaming fiery rays,
 Four harnessed steeds, each differently coloured,
 Drew through the spheres and never slowed or tired.

The first was sorrel, his mane red as a rose,
 Eous his name, the east his element.
 The second was the steed called Ethios,
 Whitish and pale, inclined to the ascendant.
 The third was Peros, hot-blooded and ardent.
 The fourth, a black steed named Philogeus,
 Rolls Phoebus down into the western seas.

Venus was thair present, that goddes gay,
 Hir sonnys querrell for to defend, and mak
 Hir awin complaint, cled in ane nyce array,
 The ane half grene, the uther half sabill blak,
 Quhyte hair as gold, kemmit and sched abak;
 Bot in hir face semit greit variance,
 Quhyles perfyte treuth and quhyles inconstance.

Under smyling scho was dissimulait,
 Provocative with blenkis amorous,
 And suddanely changit and alterait,
 Angrie as ony serpent vennemous,
 Richt pungitive with wordis odious;
 Thus variant scho was, quha list tak keip:
 With ane eye lauch, and with the uther weip,

In taikning that all fleschelic paramour,
 Quhilk Venus hes in reull and governance,
 I sum tyme sweet, sum tyme bitter and sour,
 Richt unstabill and full of variance,
 Mingit with cairfull joy and fals plesance,
 Now hait, now cauld, now blyith, now full of wo,
 Now grene as leif, now widdirit and ago.

With buik in hand than come Mercurius,
 Richt eloquent and full of rethorie,
 With polite termis and delicious,
 With pen and ink to report all reddie,
 Setting sangis and singand merilie;
 His hude was reid, heklit atovir his croun,
 Lyke to ane poeit of the auld fassoun.

Venus attended too, that lovely goddess,
 There to plead her son's case, and to make
 Her own complaint, dressed with a certain feyness,
 Half of her costume green, half sable black,
 Her golden hair combed, parted and drawn back;
 But in her face great variance seemed to be,
 Inconstant now, now faithful absolutely.

For all her smiling, she was a deceiver.
 Her insinuating becks and glances
 Could change all of a sudden and reveal her
 Serpent anger, in the spit and hiss
 Of language that was truly venomous.
 Her changeableness was there for all to see:
 A tear in one, a smile in the other eye.

Betokening this: that bodily desire
 Which Venus has it in her power to rule
 Is sweet at times, at times bitter and sour,
 Unstable always, ever variable,
 Its pleasures sad, joys unreliable,
 Now hot, now cold, now blithe, now full of woe,
 Now green in leaf, now withered on the bough.

Then, with his book in hand, came Mercury,
 So eloquent, adept in rhetoric,
 With stylish terms and sweet delivery,
 Ready to record in pen and ink,
 Composing, singing, setting tune and lyric.
 His hood was red, a thing of frills and scallops
 Worn above his crown like an old-time poet's.

Boxis he bair with fyne electuairis,
 And sugerit syropis for digestioun,
 Spycis belangand to the pothecairis,
 With mony hailsum sweit confection;
 Doctour in phisick, cled in ane skarlot gown,
 And furrit weill – as sic ane aucht to be –
 Honest and gude, and not ane word culd lie.

Nixt efter him come lady Cynthia,
 The last of all and swiftest in hir spheir;
 Of colour blak, buskit with hornis twa,
 And in the nicht scho listis best appeir;
 Haw as the leid, of colour nathing cleir,
 For all hir licht scho borrowis at hir brother
 Titan, for of hirsself scho hes nane uther.

Hir gyte was gray and full of spottis blak,
 And on hir breist ane churle paintit full evin
 Beirand ane bunche of thornis on his bak,
 Quhilk for his thift nicht clim na nar the hevin.
 Thus quhen thay gadderit war, thir goddes sevin,
 Mercurius thay cheisit with ane assent
 To be foirspeikar in the parliament.

Quha had bene thair and liken for to heir
 His facound toung and termis exquisite,
 Of rethorick the prettick he nicht leir,
 In breif sermone ane pregnant sentence wryte.
 Befoir Cupide veiling his cap a-lyte,
 Speiris the caus of that vocatioun,
 And he anone schew his intentioun.

Boxes he bore with fine electuaries
 And sugared syrups, aids for the digestion,
 Spices belonging to apothecaries
 And many other wholesome sweet confections.
 Clad in scarlet, doctor of medicine,
 Gowned and well furred – as such a one should be –
 A good and honest man who did not lie.

Next after him came Lady Cynthia,
 Last of all and swiftest in her sphere,
 Darkling and in double-horned regalia
 As in the night she likes best to appear –
 Blue-grey like lead, a colour that's unclear
 Since all her light she borrows from her brother
 Titan, her single source. She has no other.

Her gown was grey with patterned spots of black
 And on her breast a painting of a peasant
 Bearing a bunch of thorn sticks on his back,
 The theft of which still foiled his climb to heaven.
 And so from among themselves, that group of seven
 Gods chose Mercury with one assent
 To be the spokesman in their parliament.

Whoever had been there and interested
 To hear his speech, so well turned and precise,
 Would have learnt the art of rhetoric, how to put
 A weighty meaning in a brief address.
 Doffing his cap to Cupid, he requests
 To know why they'd been summoned there in session
 And Cupid promptly made his accusation.

'Lo,' quod Cupide, 'quha will blaspheme the name
Of his awin god, outhir in word or deid,
To all goddis he dois baith lak and schame,
And suld have bitter panis to his meid;
I say this by yone wretchit Cresseid,
The quhilk throw me was sum tyme flour of lufe,
Me and my mother starklie can reprufe,

'Saying of hir greit infelicitie
I was the caus, and my mother Venus,
Ane blind goddes hir cald, that nicht not se,
With sclander and defame injurious.
Thus hir leving unclene and lecherous
Scho wald retorte in me and my mother,
To quhome I schew my grace alone all uther.

'And sen ye ar all sevin deificait,
Participant of devyne sapience,
This greit injure done to our hie estait
Me think with pane we suld mak recompence;
Was never to goddes done sic violence.
As weill for yow as for myself I say:
Thairfoir ga help to revenge, I yow pray!

Mercurius to Cupide gave answeir
And said, 'Schir King, my counsall is that ye
Refer yow to the hiest planeit heir
And tak to him the lawest of degré,
The pane of Cresseid for to modifie –
As God Saturne, with him tak Cynthia.'
'I am content', quod he, 'to tak thay twa.'

'Whoever', he began, 'blasphemes the name.
Of his own god, in either word or deed,
To all gods offers insult and brings shame
And deserves hard punishment upon that head.
I say this because yon miserable Cresseid
Who thanks to me was once the flower of love
Offered me and my mother stark reproof,

Saying I was the cause of her misfortune;
And furthermore she called my mother Venus
A blind goddess, thus slandering love's queen
In terms defaming and injurious.
So for her life unchaste and lecherous
She whom I favoured more than any other
Would lay the blame on me and on my mother.

And since you seven all participate
In power divine and knowledge, you are owed
Due recompense; the slight to your estate
Should be, I think, most painfully repaid.
There never was such violence done to gods.
So as much for you as for myself I say,
Come lend a hand: revenge! That is my plea.'

Mercury answered Cupid, 'Royal sir,
This counsel I would give your majesty:
Rest your case with the highest planet here.
Let him, with her who's lowest in degree,
Decide how painful Cresseid's fate should be –
Saturn and Lady Cynthia, I mean.'
'I am content,' he said, 'I agree to them.'

*Than thus proceidit Saturne and the Mone
 Quhen thay the mater rypelie had degest:
 For the dispyte to Cupide scho had done
 And to Venus, oppin and manifest,
 In all hir lyfe with pane to be opprest,
 And torment sair with seiknes incurabill,
 And to all lovers be abhominabill.*

*This duleful sentence Saturne tuik on hand,
 And passit down quhair cairfull Cresseid lay,
 And on hir heid he laid ane frostie wand.
 Than lawfullie on this wyse can he say:
 ‘Thy greit fairnes and all thy bewtie gay,
 Thy wantoun blude, and eik thy goldin hair,
 Heir I exclude fra the for evermair.*

*‘I change thy mirth into melancholy,
 Quhilk is the mother of all pensivenes;
 Thy moisture and thy heit in cald and dry;
 Thyne insolence, thy play and wantones
 To greit diseis; thy pomp and thy riches
 In mortall neid; and greit penuritie
 Thow suffer sall, and as ane beggar die.’*

*O cruell Saturne, fraward and angrie,
 Hard is thy dome and to malitious!
 On fair Cresseid quhy hes thow na mercie,
 Quhilk was sa sweit, gentill and amorous?
 Withdraw thy sentence and be graciös –
 As thow was never; sa schawis throw thy deid,
 Ane wraikfull sentence gevin on fair Cresseid.*

Thus they passed sentence, Saturn and the Moon,
 After due process of deliberation:
 Since the injury that Cresseid had done
 Cupid and Venus was manifest and blatant
 She would live in painful torment from then on,
 By lovers be despised, abominable,
 Beyond the pale, diseased, incurable.

This grievous sentence Saturn took charge of,
 And coming down to where sad Cresseid lay
 He placed upon her head a frosty tipstaff
 And spoke as follows in his legal way:
 ‘Your great good looks and your delightful beauty,
 Your hot blood and your golden hair also
 Henceforth forevermore I disallow you.

Your mirth I hereby change to melancholy
 Which is the mother of all downcastness,
 Your moisture and your heat to cold and dry,
 Your lust, presumption and your giddiness
 To great disease; your pomp and show and riches
 To fatal need; and you will suffer
 Penury extreme and die a beggar.’

O cruel Saturn, ill-natured and angry,
 Your doom is hard and too malicious.
 Why to fair Cresseid won’t you show mercy
 Who was so loving, kind and courteous?
 Withdraw your sentence and be gracious –
 Who never have been: it shows in what you did,
 A vengeful sentence passed on fair Cresseid.

Than Cynthia, quhen Saturne past away,
 Out of hir sait descendit doun belyve,
 And red ane bill on Cresseid quhair scho lay,
 Contening this sentence diffinityve:
 'Fra heit of bodie I the now depryve,
 And to thy seiknes sall be na recure
 Bot in dolour thy dayis to indure.

'Thy cristall ene minglit with blude I mak,
 Thy voice sa cleir, unplesand, hoir and hace,
 Thy lustie lyre ovirsprede with spottis blak,
 And lumpis haw appeirand in thy face:
 Quhair thow cummis, ilk man sall fle the place.
 This sall thow go begging fra hous to hous
 With cop and clapper lyke ane lazarus.'

This doolie dreame, this uglye visioun
 Brocht to ane end, Cresseid fra it awoik,
 And all that court and convocatioun
 Vanischit away. Than rais scho up and tuik
 Ane poleist glas, and hir schadow culd luik;
 And quhen scho saw hir face sa deformait,
 Gif scho in hart was wa aneuch, God wait!

Weiping full sair, 'Lo, quhat it is', quod sche,
 'With fraward langage for to muse and steir
 Our craibit goddis; and sa is sene on me!
 My blaspheming now have I bocht full deir;
 All eirdlie joy and mirth I set areir.
 Allace, this day! allace, this wofull tyde
 Quhen I began with my goddis for to chyde!'

Then Cynthia, when Saturn moved away,
 Left her seat and descended down below
 And read decrees on Cresseid where she lay
 Spelling out the last word of the law:
 'I hereby of your body's heat deprive you
 And for your sickness there shall be no cure,
 Your days to come days solely to endure.

Your eyes so bright and crystal I make bloodshot,
 Your voice so clear, unpleasing, grating, hoarse.
 Your healthy skin I blacken, blotch and spot.
 With livid lumps I cover your fair face.
 Go where you will, all men will flee the place.
 From house to house you'll travel thus, a leper
 Begging your way, bearing a cup and clapper.'

When this dark dream, this terrifying vision
 Concluded, Cresseid, released, awoke
 And all that sitting court and convocation
 Vanished away. Then up she rose and took
 A polished looking glass where she could look
 And when she saw her face in it so ruined
 God knows if she was not heartsore and stunned.

Bitterly weeping, 'Lo, what it means', said she,
 'To contradict and aggravate and rouse
 Our ill-set gods. Look and take note of me.
 My blasphemy is paid for now, alas.
 I leave behind all earthly happiness.
 Alas the day! Alas the time and tide
 I ever remonstrated with a god!'

Be this was said, ane chyld come fra the hall
 To warne Cresseid the supper was reddy;
 First knockit at the dure, and syne culd call,
 'Madame, your father biddis yow cum in hy:
 He hes merwell sa lang on grouf ye ly,
 And sayis your beedes bene to lang sum deill;
 The goddis wait all your intent full weill.'

Quod scho, 'Fair chyld, ga to my father deir,
 And pray him cum to speik with me anone.'
 And sa he did, and said, 'Douchter, quhat cheir?'
 'Allace!' quod scho, 'Father, my mirth is gone!
 'How sa?' quod he; and scho can all expone,
 As I have tauld, the vengeance and the wraik
 For hir trespas Cupide on hir culd tak.

He luikit on hir uglye lipper face,
 The quhylk befor was quhite as lillie flour;
 Wringand his handis, oftymes he said, allace
 That he had levit to se that wofull hour!
 For he knew weill that thair was na succour
 To hir seiknes, and that dowblit his pane;
 Thus was thair cair aneuch betuix thame twane.

Quhen thay togidder murnit had full lang,
 Quod Cresseid: 'Father, I wald not be kend;
 Thairfoir in secreit wyse ye let me gang
 Unto yone spitall at the tounis end,
 And thidder sum meit for cheritie me send
 To leif upon, for all mirth in this eird
 Is fra me gane – sic is my wickit weird!'

When this was said, a child came from the hall
 To notify Cresseid supper awaited.
 He knocked first at the door, then gave the call:
 'Madam, make haste. Your father bids. You're needed.
 He is amazed you lie so long prostrated.
 He says you spend too long at your devotions,
 That the gods well know your prayers and petitions.'

'Fair child,' she said, 'go to my father dear
 And pray him come to speak with me anon.'
 And so he did and 'Daughter,' exclaimed, 'what cheer?'
 'Father,' she cried, 'alas, my mirth is gone!
 'How so?' he asked, and she told there and then
 What I have told, the vengeance and redress
 Cupid had exacted for her trespass.

He looked upon her ugly leprous face,
 Fair until then as any lily flower.
 Wringing his hands, he cried and cried alas
 That he had lived to see that woeful hour
 For well he knew that there would be no cure
 For her disease, which doubled his own grief.
 And so between them there was pain enough.

Together they lamented long, and then
 'Father,' said Cresseid, 'I cannot bear
 To be recognised, so let me go unknown
 To yon leper house beyond the town, and there
 Keep me in food and charitable care
 And I will live. All happiness on earth
 Has left me now, I take my fated path.'

Than in ane mantill and ane baver hat,
 With cop and clapper, wonder prively,
 He opnit ane secreit yet, and out thairat
 Convoyit hir, that na man suld espy,
 Unto ane village half ane myle thairby;
 Delyverit hir in at the spittaill hous,
 And daylie sent hir part of his almous.

Sum knew hir weill, and sum had na knowledge
 Of hir becaus scho was sa deformait,
 With bylis blak ovirspreid in hir visage,
 And hir fair colour faidit and alterait.
 Yit thay presumit, for hir hie regrait
 And still murning, scho was of nobill kin;
 With better will thairfoir they tuik hir in.

The day passit and Phebus went to rest,
 The cloudis blak overheled all the sky.
 God wait gif Cresseid was ane sorrowfull gest,
 Seing that uncouth fair and harbery!
 But meit or drink scho dressit hir to ly
 In ane dark corner of the hous allone,
 And on this wyse, weiping, scho maid hir mone:

'O sop of sorrow, sonkin into cair!
 O cative Creisseid! For now and ever mair
 Gane is thy joy and all thy mirth in eird;
 Of all blythnes now art thou blaiknit bair;
 Thair is na salve may saif or sound thy sair!
 Fell is thy fortoun, wickit is thy weird,
 Thy blys is baneist, and thy baill on breird!

For her then, in her cloak and beaver hat,
 With cup and clapper, very stealthily
 He opened secret gates and let her out,
 Conveying her unseen by anybody
 To a village about half a mile away;
 Left her there in the leper colony
 And sent in victuals to her every day.

Some knew her well, and others not at all
 Because of her appearance, so deformed,
 Her face all covered over with black boils,
 Her colour pale, her lovely skin ringwormed.
 Still, they assumed from grief so mildly borne
 And yet so cruel, she was of noble kin
 And with better will, therefore, they took her in.

The daylight died and Phoebus went to rest.
 Black nightclouds spread out over the whole sky.
 Cresseid, God knows, must have been a stricken guest
 As she viewed her plate and pallet in dismay.
 Eat or drink she would not, but made ready
 For bed in a dark corner where she went
 To weep alone, and utter this lament.

CRESSEID'S LAMENT

'O sop of sorrow, sunk and steeped in care!
 O poor Cresseid! Now and for evermore
 Delight on earth is gone, and all your joy.
 There is no salve can heal or soothe your sore.
 Your spirit flags that was flushed up before.
 Your fate will doom you, destiny destroy.
 Your bliss is banished and fresh fears annoy.

*Under the eirth, God gif I gravin wer,
Quhair nane of Grece nor yit of Troy nicht heird!*

*'Quhair is thy chalmer wantounlie besene,
With burely bed and bankouris browderit bene?
Spycis and wyne to thy collatioun,
The cowpis all of gold and silver schene,
The sweetmeitis servit in plaittis clene
With saipheron sals of ane gude sessoun?
Thy gay garmentis with mony gudely gown,
Thy plesand lawn pinnit with goldin prene?
All is areir, thy greit royall renoun!*

*'Quhair is thy garding with thir greissis gay
And fresche flowris, quhilk the quene Floray
Had paintit plesandly in everie pane,
Quhair thou was wont full merilye in May
To walk and tak the dew be it was day,
And heir the merle and mawis mony ane,
With ladyis fair in carrolling to gane,
And se the royall rinkis in thair ray,
In garmentis gay garnischit on everie grane?*

*'Thy greit triumphant fame and hie honour,
Quhair thou was callit of eirdlye wichtis flour,
All is decayit, thy weird is welterit so;
Thy hie estait is turnit in darknes dour;
This lipper ludge tak for thy burelie bour,
And for thy bed tak now ane bunche of stro,
For waillit wyne and meitis thou had tho
Tak mowlit breid, peirrie and ceder sour:
Bot cop and clapper now is all ago.*

God send me under earth, down through death's door
Where no one's heard the name of Greece or Troy.

'Where is your chamber's cushioned chair and screen
And handsome bed and hand-embroidered linen?
The wine and spice, the supper that you supped on?
Where are the cups of gold and silver sheen,
The sweetmeats and the saffron sauce, the clean
Platters they were seasoned and served up on?
Your goodly raiment and many a stately gown,
Your shawl of lawn pinned up with its gold pin?
It's as if it never was, your high renown.

'Where is your garden full of herb and spray
And Flora's flowers, which she so pleasantly
Planted in every cranny where they sprang,
And where most blithely in the month of May
You'd walk and wade the dew at break of day
And hear the thrush and blackbird at their song
And go with ladies, carolling along,
And see the knights beribboned *cap-à-pie*,
Arrayed in ranks to crowd the royal throng.

'Your name and fame that held the world in thrall,
Your triumphs there, the flower among them all,
Fate overturned. Those days won't come again.
Your high estate is in decline and fall
So make this leper's hut your banquet hall
And make your bed up now in this straw pen.
For the choice wines and dishes you had then
Take mouldy bread, sour cider and pear-gall.
Make do with cup and clapper. They remain.

*'My cleir voice and courtlie carrolling,
 Quhair I was wort with ladyis for to sing,
 Is rawk as ruik, full hiddeous, hoir and hace;
 My plesand port, all utheris precelling,
 Of lustines I was hald maist conding –
 Now is deformit the figour of my face;
 To luik on it na leid now lyking hes.
 Sowpit in syte, I say with sair siching,
 Ludgeit amang the lipper leid, "Allace!"*

*'O ladyis fair of Troy and Grece, attend
 My miserie, quhilk nane may comprehend,
 My frivoll fortoun, my infelicitie,
 My greit mischief, quhilk na man can amend.
 Be war in tyme, approchis neir the end,
 And in your mynd ane mirroure mak of me:
 As I am now, peradventure that ye
 For all your micht may cum to that same end,
 Or ellis war, gif ony war may be.*

*'Nocht is your fairnes bot ane faiding flour,
 Nocht is your famous laud and hie honour
 Bot wind inflat in uther mennis eiris;
 Your roising reid to rotting sall retour;
 Exempill mak of me in your memour,
 Quhilk of sic thingis wofull witnes beiris.
 All welth in eird, away as wind it weiris;
 Be war thairfoir, approchis neir the hour:
 Fortoun is fikkill quhen scho beginnis and steiris!'*

*'My voice once clear from courtly carolling
 With ladies whom I used to meet to sing
 Is like a rook's, grown husky, hoarse and raucous.
 I who once moved attractively, excelling
 And acknowledged in my beauty, now must hang
 My head and turn aside my deformed face.
 Nobody wants to see my changed appearance.
 Lodged among leper folk, in grief past telling,
 I sigh a sore and desolate, Alas!*

*'O ladies fair of Troy and Greece, attend
 To my sad state which none may comprehend,
 My fickle fortune, lost felicity,
 My great distress that no man may amend.
 Beware in time, the end draws close, attend
 And in your mind a mirror make of me.
 Remember well what I am now, for ye
 For all your strength may come to the same end
 Or worse again, if any worse may be.*

*'Your beauty's nothing but a flower that fades,
 Nothing your honoured name and famous praise
 But mouthfuls of air in other people's ears.
 The rot will fester in your cheek's red rose.
 Remember and take cognisance: my woes
 Bear witness to a world that's full of tears.
 All wealth on earth is wind that flits and veers;
 Beware therefore in time. The hour draws close
 And fate is fickle when she plies the shears.'*

Thus chydand with hir drerie destenye,
 Weiping scho woik the nicht fra end to end;
 Bot all in vane – hir dule, hir cairfull cry,
 Micht not remeid nor yit hir murning mend.
 Ane lipper lady rais and till hir wend,
 And said: 'Quhy spurnis thow aganis the wall
 To sla thyself and mend nathing at all?

'Sen thy weiping dowbillis bot thy wo,
 I counsall the mak vertew of ane neid;
 Go leir to clap thy clapper to and fro,
 And leif efter the law of lipper leid.'
 Thair was na buit, bot furth with thame scho yeid
 Fra place to place, quhill cauld and hounger sair
 Compellit hir to be ane rank beggair.

That samin tyme, of Troy the garnisoun,
 Quhilk had to chiftane worthie Troylus,
 Throw jeopardie of weir had strikken down
 Knichtis of Grece in number mervellous;
 With greit tryumphe and laude victorious
 Agane to Troy richt royallie thay raid
 The way quhair Cresseid with the lipper baid.

Seing that companie, all with ane stevin
 Thay gaif ane cry, and schuik coppis gude speid;
 Said: 'Worthie lordis, for Goddis lufe of hevin,
 To us lipper part of your almous deid!
 Than to thair cry nobill Troylus tuik heid,
 Having pietie, neir by the place can pas
 Quhair Cresseid sat, not witting quhat scho was.

And so she pleaded her sad destiny
 And couldn't sleep for weeping out the night,
 But all in vain – her grief and painful cry
 Could neither remedy nor mend her plight.
 A leper woman rose, went to her side.
 And 'Why', she said, 'do you kick against the wall
 To destroy yourself and do no good at all?

'Your weeping only doubles all you suffer.
 Make virtue of necessity. For my sake,
 Go and learn to wave and clap your clapper
 And live the life required of leper folk.'
 There was no help, so out with them she took
 Her way from place to place, till cold and hunger
 Compelled her to become an utter beggar.

At that same time the garrison of Troy
 Led by their chieftain, worthy Troilus,
 Had beaten down, by war and jeopardy,
 The Grecian knights. The rout was marvellous
 So back to Troy, triumphant, glorious
 In victory, right royally they rode
 Past where Cresseid with lepers made abode.

Seeing that company, they cried as one
 And shook their cups immediately and prayed,
 'Good lords, for the love of God in heaven,
 Spare us your alms, our lepers' livelihood.'
 Then noble Troilus to their cry paid heed
 And pitied them and passed by near the place
 Where Cresseid sat, not knowing who she was.

Than upon him scho kest up baith hir ene --
 And with ane blenk it come into his thocht
 That he sumtime hir face befoir had sene.
 Bot scho was in sic plye he knew hir nocht;
 Yit than hir luik into his mynd it brocht
 The sweit visage and amorous blenking
 Of fair Cresseid, sumtyme his awin darling.

Na wonder was, suppois in mynd that he
 Tuik hir figure sa sone -- and lo, now quhy:
 The idole of ane thing in cace may be
 Sa deip imprentit in the fantasy
 That it deludis the wittis outwardly,
 And sa appeiris in forme and lyke estait
 Within the mynd as it was figurait.

Ane spark of lufe than till his hart culd spring
 And kendlit all his bodie in ane fyre:
 With hait fewir, ane sweit and trimbling
 Him tuik, quhill he was reddie to expyre;
 To beir his scheild his breist began to tyre;
 Within ane quhyle he changit mony hew,
 And nevertheles not ane ane uther knew.

For knichtlie pietie and memoriall
 Of fair Cresseid, ane gyrdill can he tak,
 Ane purs of gold, and mony gay jowall,
 And in the skirt of Cresseid down can swak;
 Than raid away and not ane word he spak,
 Pensive in hart, quhill he come to the toun,
 And for greit cair oftsyis almaist fell down.

Upon him then she cast up both her eyes
 And at a glance it came into his thought
 That he some time before had seen her face.
 But she was in such state he knew her not;
 Yet still into his mind her look had brought
 The features and the amorous sweet glancing
 Of fair Cresseid, one time his own, his darling.

No wonder then if in his mind he promptly
 Received the likeness of her -- this is why:
 The image of a thing by chance may be
 So deeply printed in the memory
 That it deludes what's in the outer eye,
 Presenting a form similar and twinned
 To that which had been shaped within the mind.

A spark of love then sprang into his heart
 And kindled his whole body in a fire.
 A fever fit, hot tremblings and a sweat
 Came over him: he was ready to expire.
 The shield upon his shoulder made him tire.
 Quickly and often his countenance changed hue
 But neither, even so, the other knew.

For knightly piety and in remembrance
 Of fair Cresseid, a girle he took out,
 A purse of gold and many shining gemstones,
 And threw them down into Cresseid's skirt,
 Then rode away and didn't speak a word,
 Pensive in heart, until he reached the town
 And often for great grief almost fell down.

The lipper folk to Cresseid than can draw
 To se the equall distributioun
 Of the almous, bot quhen the gold thay saw,
 Ilkane to uther prevelie can roun,
 And said; 'Yone lord hes mair affectioun,
 However it be, unto yone lazarous
 Than to us all; we knaw be his almous.'

'Quhat lord is yone,' quod scho, 'have ye na feill,
 Hes done to us so greit humanitie?'
 'Yes,' quod a lipper man, 'I knaw him weill;
 Schir Troylus it is, gentill and fre.'
 Quhen Cresseid understude that it was he,
 Stiffer than steill thair stert ane bitter stound
 Throwout hir hart, and fell down to the ground.

Quhen scho ovircome, with sicing sair and sad,
 With mony cairfull cry and cald ochane:
 'Now is my breist with stormie stoundis stad,
 Wrappit in wo, ane wretch full will of wane!
 Than swounit scho oft or scho culd refrane,
 And ever in hir swouning cryit scho thus;
 'O fals Cresseid and trew knicht Troylus!

'Thy lufe, thy lawtie, and thy gentilnes
 I countit small in my prosperitie,
 Sa elevait I was in wantones,
 And clam upon the fickill quheill sa hie.
 All faith and lufe I promissit to the
 Was in the self fickill and frivolous:
 O fals Cresseid and trew knicht Troilus!

The lepers, to make sure the alms were doled
 Equally among them, pressed together
 Around Cresseid, but when they saw the gold
 Each in secret whispered to the other,
 'Yon lord has more affection for this leper
 Than for the rest of us, whatever be
 The sense of it. Look at this charity.'

'Yon lord,' she said, 'who is he, can you tell,
 Who has shown us such great charity?'
 'Yes,' said a leper man, 'I know him well,
 Sir Troilus it is, high-born and free.'
 When Cresseid understood that it was he,
 A stun of pain, a stroke sharper than steel,
 Went through her heart and to the ground she fell.

When she came to, she sighed sore and bewailed
 Her woeful plight, and cried in desolation
 'Now is my heart with gusts of grief assailed,
 Swaddled in sadness, wretched and undone.'
 Often she fainted before she quietened,
 And in her fainting fits kept crying thus:
 'O false Cresseid and true knight Troilus!

Your love, your loyalty, your noble ways
 I took small notice of when I was happy,
 Giddy and loose in loving as I was
 And fixed upon the fickle wheel so high.
 The love I vowed, the faith I plighted you
 Were fickle in themselves and frivolous:
 O false Cresseid and true knight Troilus!

*'For lufe of me thow kept gude continence,
Honest and chaist in conversatioun;
Of all wemen protectour and defence
Thou was, and helpit thair opinioun;
My mynd in fleschelic foull affectioun
Was inclynit to lustis lecherous:
Fy, fals Cresseid! O trew knicht Troylus!*

*'Lovers be war and tak gude heid about
Quhome that ye lufe, for quhome ye suffer paine.
I lat yow wit, thair is richt few thairout
Quhome ye may traist to have trew lufe agane;
Preif quhen ye will, your labour is in vaine.
Thairfoir I reid ye tak thame as ye find,
For thay ar sad as widdercok in wind.*

*'Becaus I knaw the greit unstabilnes,
Brukill as glas, into my self, I say,
Traisting in uther als greit unfaithfulnes,
Als unconstant, and als untrew of fay –
Thocht sum be trew, I wait richt few ar thay;
Quha findis treuth, lat him his lady ruse!
Nane but myself as now I will accuse.'*

*Quhen this was said, with paper scho sat down,
And on this maneir maid hir testament:
'Heir I beteiche my corps and carioun
With wormis and with taidis to be rent;
My cop and clapper, and myne ornament,
And all my gold the lipper folk sall have
Quhen I am deid, to burie me in grave.*

For love of me you kept desire reined in,
Honourable and chaste in your behaviour.
Defender and protector of all women
You always were, their good names' guarantor.
But I with my hot flesh, my mind a fetor,
Was lustful, passionate and lecherous:
Fie, false Cresseid! O true knight Troilus!

Lovers beware and take good heed to whom
You give your love, for whom you suffer pain.
I tell you there are few enough among them
To be trusted to give true love back again.
Make proof, your effort will be proved in vain.
Therefore I urge you, take them as you find,
For their constancy's like weathercocks in wind.

Because I know in my own self how quick
I am to change, to snap like glass in two,
Because I assume that others are alike
Faithless, inconstant, light, I counsel you:
Though some be sound, I warrant they are few.
Who finds truth in his lady, let him praise her.
I myself will be my own accuser.'

When this was said, with paper she sat down
And made her testament as hereunder:
'I here commit my bodily remains
For earthworms and for toads to break and enter.
My cup and clapper, the ornaments I wore,
And all my gold the leper folk shall have.
To pay for my interment and my grave.

*'This royall ring set with this rubie reid,
 Quhilk Troylus in drowrie to me send,
 To him agane I leif it quhen I am deid,
 To mak my cairfull deid unto him kend.
 Thus I conclude schortlie, and mak ane end:
 My spreit I leif to Diane, quhair scho dwellis,
 To walk with hir in waist woddis and wellis.*

*'O Diomeid, thou hes baith broche and belt
 Quhilk Troylus gave me in takning
 Of his trew lufe!' and with that word scho swelt.
 And sone ane lipper man tuik of the ring,
 Syne buryt hir withouttin tarying;
 To Troylus furthwith the ring he bair,
 And of Cresseid the deith he can declair.*

*Quhen he had hard hir greit infirmitie,
 Hir legacie and lamentatioun,
 And how scho endit in sic povertie,
 He swelt for wo and fell down in ane swoun;
 For greit sorrow his hart to brist was boun;
 Siching full sadlie, said, 'I can no moir –
 Scho was untrew and wo is me thairfoir.'*

*Sum said he maid ane tomb of merbell gray,
 And wrait hir name and superscriptioun,
 And laid it on hir grave quhair that scho lay,
 In goldin letteris, conteining this resoun:
 'Lo, fair ladyis! Cresseid of Troyis toun,
 Sumtyme countit the flour of womanheid,
 Under this stane, lait lipper, lysis deid.'*

*This royal ring, set with this ruby red,
 Which Troilus sent me for a love token,
 I leave to him again when I am dead
 To make my death and suffering known to him.
 Thus I briefly end and make conclusion:
 I leave my spirit to stray by paths and springs
 With Diana in her wildwood wanderings.*

*O you have belt and brooch, both, Diomede,
 That Troilus gave me for a sign and sealing
 Of his true love,' and with those words she died.
 Then soon a leper man took off the ring
 And buried her. There was no tarrying.
 Forthwith to Troilus the ring he carried
 And made report of how Cresseid had died.*

*When he had listened to the whole story
 Of her ordeal, her keen, her testament,
 And how she ended in such poverty,
 He swooned for grief and fell down in a faint.
 The sorrow in his breast could scarce be pent.
 Sighing hard, 'I can do,' he said, 'no more.
 She was untrue and woe is me therefore.'*

*Some said he made a tomb of marble grey
 And wrote her name on it and an inscription
 In golden letters, above where she lay
 Inside her grave. These were the words set down:
 'Lo, fair ladies, Cresseid of Troy town,
 Accounted once the flower of womanhood,
 Of late a leper, under this stone lies dead.'*

*Now, worthie wemen, in this ballet schort,
 Maid for your worschip and instructioun,
 Of cheritie, I monische and exhort,
 Ming not your lufe with fals deceptioun.
 Beir in your mynd this schort conclusioun
 Of fair Cresseid, as I have said befoir.
 Sen scho is deid, I speik of hir no moir.*

Now, worthy women, in this short narration
 Made in your honour and for your instruction,
 For charity, I urge you and I caution:
 Do not pollute your love with false deception.
 Bear in mind the final quick declension
 Of fair Cresseid, as I have told it here.
 Since she is dead, I speak of her no more.