

Section 6 - Stanzas 59 - 66

The Complaint of Cresseid

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

Re-read this section of the poem.

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

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

This line signals the lament.

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

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

'Quhair is thy chalmer wantounlie besene...'

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

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

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

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

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

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

Past Quotation		Present

The Language of the Complaint

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

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

Look at Stanza 64

Cresseid addresses the female audience:

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

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

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