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# **Of fair Cresseid**

a setting of lines from

*The Testament of Cresseid* by Robert Henryson

for contralto, baritone, woodwind and strings

**Richard Barron**

## The Text

The text of the piece is taken directly from the original Scots of Robert Henryson's poem *The Testament of Cresseid*. Written in the late 15<sup>th</sup> Century, the poem tells Cresseid's story after she has left her lover Troilus for Diomedes. She is in turn abandoned by her new lover, curses the gods for her loss, and is judged mercilessly by them. She is stricken with leprosy, losing her beauty and ultimately her life.

Henryson's poem has over six hundred lines. This piece uses around fifty of these, picking out only a few of the key moments of the poem and, even there, treating the text selectively. Much of the original Scots remains accessible today, but the text used in the piece is shown here along with a version in modern English. This version is functional rather than poetic, and is in many places simply a transliteration of the original.

Henryson      I tuik ane quair...  
Of fair Cresseid and worthie Troilus.  
And thair I fand, efter that Diomeid  
Ressavit had that lady bricht of hew,  
How Troilus ...weipit soir.  
Thus quhyle in joy he levit, quhyle in pane.

Quhen Diomeid had all his appetyte  
.....fulfillit of this fair ladie,  
Upon ane uther he set his hail delyte.

Cresseid      'Allace, (*Cupide*,) 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 unworthy outwaill,  
And all in cair translatit is my joy.

Quha sall me gyde? Qhua sall me now convoy?  
O fals Cupide, is nane to wyte bot thow,  
And thy mother, of lufe the blind goddes!  
*I took a book...*  
*Of fair Cresseid and worthy Troilus.*  
*And there I found, after Diomedes*  
*Had taken as his lover that lady bright of hue,*  
*How Troilus...wept sorely.*  
*Thus at times he lived in joy, at times in pain.*

*When Diomedes had all his appetite*  
*.....fulfilled of this fair lady,*  
*Upon another he set his whole delight.*

*'Alas, (Cupid,) that ever I made you sacrifice!*  
*You gave me once a divine response*

*That I should be the flower of love in Troy.  
Now I am made an unworthy outcast,  
And all in care translated is my joy.  
Who shall guide me? Who shall now be my escort?  
O false Cupid, none is to blame but you,  
And your mother, the blind goddess of love!*

Henryson      Quhen this was said,..intill ane dreame scho fell,  
And be appearance hard....  
Cupide the king ringand ane silver bell,  
Quhilk men might heir fra hevin unto hell.

[*Cresseid has a dream of the judgement of the gods.*]

Henryson                      Than rais scho up and tuik  
Ane poleist glas, and hir schaddow culd luik;  
And quhen scho saw hir face sa deformait,  
Gif scho in hart was wa eneuch, God wait!

Cresseid      'O sop of sorrow, sonkin into cair!  
O captive Cresseid! For now and ever mair  
Gane is thy joy and all thy mirth in eird.

O ladyis fair of Troy and Grece, attend  
My miserie.  
Be war in tyme, approchis neir the end,  
And in your mynd ane mirrou mak of me.'

Henryson                      Of Troy the garnisoun,  
Quhilk had to chiftane worthie Troylus,  
Agane to Troy richt royallie thay raid  
The way quhair Cresseid with the lipper baid.

Cresseid      'Worthie lordis, for Goddis lufe of hevin,  
To us lipper part of your almous deid!'

Henryson      Than upon him scho kest up baith her ene -  
And with ane blenk it came into his thocht  
That he sumtime hir face befor had sene.  
But scho was in sic plye he knew hir nocht.

*When this was said,..into a dream she fell,  
And seemed to hear....  
Cupid the king ringing a silver bell,  
Which men might hear from heaven to hell.*

*Then she rose up and took  
A polished glass, and looked at her reflection;  
And when she saw her face so deformed,  
If she was woe enough in heart, God knows!*

*'O sop of sorrow, sunken in care!  
O wretched Cresseid! For now and evermore  
Gone is your joy and all your mirth on earth.*

*O ladies fair of Troy and Greece, attend  
My misery.  
Beware in time, the end approaches near,  
And in your mind a mirror make of me.'*

*The garrison of Troy,  
Whose chieftain was worthy Troilus,  
Were riding right royally back to Troy  
The way where Cresseid with the lepers lived.*

*'Worthy lords, for love of God in heaven,  
Share your alms with us lepers!'*

*Then upon him she cast up both her eyes –  
And with a blink it came into his thought  
That he had sometime seen her face before.  
But she was in such a plight that he knew her not.*

Cresseid      'Heir I beteiche my corps and carioun  
With wormis and with taidis to be rent.

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.'

Henryson      Sum said he maid ane tomb of merbell gray,  
And wrait hir name...quhair that scho lay,  
In goldin letteris,....  
'Lo, fair ladyis! Cresseid of Troyis toun,  
Sumtyme countit the flour of womanheid,  
Under this stane, lait lipper, lyis deid.'

*'Here I give up my corpse and carrion  
To be rent by worms and toads.*

*This royal ring, set with this ruby red,  
Which Troilus sent to me as a token of love,  
To him again I leave it after my death.'*

*Some said he made a tomb of marble grey,  
And wrote her name where she lay,  
In golden letters.  
'Lo, fair ladies! Cresseid of Troy town,  
Once counted the flower of womanhood,  
Under this stone, late a leper, lies dead.'*

## Of fair Cresseid

### Characters

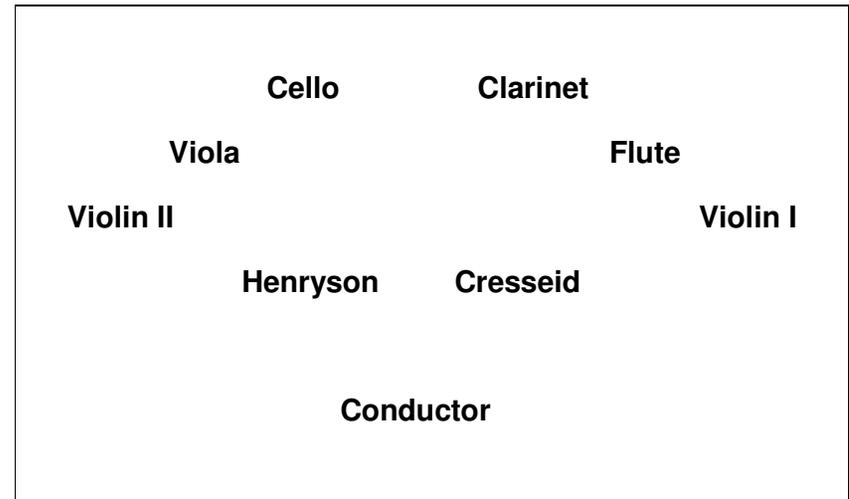
Cresseid.....Contralto  
Henryson.....Baritone

### Instrumentation

Violin I  
Flute  
Clarinet in A (Basset clarinet), doubling Bass Clarinet

Violin II  
Viola  
Cello

### Suggested set-up for performance



Duration: 17 minutes approximately

The piece was first performed at the Sound Thought Festival of March 2012, at The Arches in Glasgow.