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Affect and the Tomb in Robert Henryson's
The Testament of Cresseid[1]

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Abstract: The penultimate verse of Henryson's *The Testament of Cresseid* suggests the possibility that Troilus raised a monument in memory of his former love, Cresseid: "Sum said he maid ane tomb of merbell gray" (Some said he made a tomb of gray marble, l. 603). Examining the political implications of this uncertain act of memorialization, this article considers how Henryson's poem mobilizes the reader's emotional response to constitute Cresseid as a mourned subject, whose subjectivity is recognized only insofar as its expression is limited to suffering and death. In doing so, the *Testament* also establishes a subjectivity for women that offers conditional tolerance predicated on respectable behavior, contributing to the historical production of sexual respectability in exclusionary terms as the province of elite white femininity.

Keywords: Testament of Cresseid, Robert Henryson, affect, mourning, gender, sexuality

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Robert Henryson's late fifteenth century poem, *The Testament of Cresseid*, occupies a transformative relation to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. Chaucer's poem tells how the love affair between a Trojan prince and a young widow ends in the wake of a hostage exchange that leaves Criseyde among the Greeks, where she is seduced by Diomedes; it concludes with Troilus's death on the battlefield. Henryson's *Testament* diverges from its inspiration to offer an ending for Cresseid, in a narrative whose timeline runs parallel to that of *Troilus and Criseyde* but concludes before the death of Troilus. Henryson's penultimate verse reports the rumor that Troilus raised a monument in memory of Cresseid:

> Sum said he maid ane tomb of merbell gray,
> And wrait hir name and superscriptioun,
> And laid it on hir graue quhair that scho lay,
> In goldin letteris, conteining this ressoun:
> "Lo, fair ladyis, Cresseid of Troy the toun,
> Sumtyme countit the flour of womanheid,
> Vnder this stane, lait lipper, lyis deid."[2]

> (Some said he made a tomb of gray marble, and wrote her name and inscription, and laid it on the grave where she lay, in golden letters, containing this statement: "Lo, fair ladies, Cresseid of Troy the town, once counted the flower of womanhood, under this stone, lately one of the leprous, lies dead.")

The uncertainty of Troilus's act of memorialization is significant, raising questions as to the nature of the emotional response Henryson's poem seeks to cultivate within its readers. To commemorate Cresseid's death with such a monument is to affirm her value: the tomb's design finds an analogue in Lydgate's *Troy Book*, with Telephus's memorial for his adoptive father, King Teuthras, "of marbil gray ... Wiþ lettris riche of gold" (made of gray marble with

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2 Robert Henryson, *The Testament of Cresseid*, ed. Denton Fox (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 111–31, ll. 603–9. Hereafter references to *Testament* are to this edition and are given in the text.

costly golden letters).[3] Golden letters typically illuminate the names of distinguished men, such as Marcus Manlius or Bernard Stewart.[4] In Henryson's own locality, the highly elaborate tomb of Robert I (1274–1329) at Dunfermline Abbey, in imported white marble with gilding, would have been a familiar example of prestigious funerary art, for a monarch himself reported to have suffered from leprosy.[5] The possibility of Cresseid's tomb as product of a public and ostentatious act of commemoration carries a political charge whose import emerges when approached through the lens of Judith

3 John Lydgate, *Lydgate's Troy Book A.D. 1412–20*, ed. Henry Bergen, vol. 2 (London: Milford, 1906), ll. 7520–30. The parallel is noted by Fox in an editorial comment, *Testament*, 383, n. 604, 606. For an argument that Lydgate's *Troy Book* is a key influence on the *Testament*, and on circulation of Lydgate within Scotland, see W. H. E. Sweet, "The 'Vther Quair' as the *Troy Book*: The Influence of Lydate on Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*," in *Premodern Scotland: Literature and Governance 1420–1587: Essays for Sally Mapstone*, ed. Joanna Martin and Emily Wingfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 57–73, and "Lydgate Manuscripts and Prints in Late Medieval Scotland," in *The Anglo-Scottish Border and the Shaping of Identity, 1300–1600*, ed. Mark P. Bruce and Katherine H. Terrell (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 141–59. In contrast, A. S. G. Edwards argues that the *Troy Book* "was not a work that enjoyed discernible influence north of the border," "Lydgate in Scotland," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 54 (2010): 185–94, at 192. Whether or not the parallel reflects direct influence, it underlines the association of gilt and marble with elite tombs.

4 See David Parkinson's note to l. 606 in *Robert Henryson: The Complete Works*, ed. David J. Parkinson (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2010).

5 Iain Fraser, "Medieval Funerary Monuments in Scotland," in *Monuments and Monumentality Across Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Michael Penman (Donnington: Shaun Tyas, 2013), 9–17, at 13. On references identifying the illness Robert the Bruce suffered in the last years of his life as leprosy, appearing in non-Scottish chronicles, see M. H. Kaufman and W. J. MacLennan, "Robert the Bruce and Leprosy," *Proceedings of the Royal College of Physicians*, xxx (2000): 75–80, and Martin MacGregor and Caroline Wilkinson, 'In Search of Robert Bruce, Part II: Reassessing the Dunfermline Tomb Investigations of 1818–19,' *Scottish Historical Review* 98, no. 2 (2019): 159–82. With thanks to Alasdair A. MacDonald for advice to consider the material culture of Scottish tombs.

Butler's theorization of mourning. As Butler argues, "the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human."[6] The tomb, then, recognizes Cresseid as a life whose loss is to be grieved, yet its existence, and thus the extent of Troilus's grief, remains a matter of conjecture. Closer examination of how the *Testament* models and attunes an emotional response to the death of Cresseid indicates that the forms of subjectivity and humanity produced through the work of mourning are limited, the product of vested interests. Henryson's *Testament* plays a part in a process that cultivates a gendered emotional practice, producing a "feeling self" whose coherence depends on the exercise of compassion toward subjects whose agency is severely restricted.

Analysis of the *Testament* as a poem that seeks to train a particular habit of feeling requires some contextualization in relation to medieval and contemporary theorizations of affect. Recent work in medieval affect studies calls attention to significant disparities between modern and medieval approaches to affect, feeling, and emotion. Influential modern taxonomies seek to distinguish between affect, defined as preconscious and preverbal bodily responses, and emotion, as affect's mediation in culture and social practice. Pre-modern writing, however, points toward the interrelation of affect and emotion, and to the nature of feeling as a phenomenon constituted through the interaction of brain, body, and world.[7] Pre-

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6 Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), xiv–xv.

7 For an analysis and critique of this distinction between affect and emotion as developed in the work of Brian Massumi and Eric Shouse, see Michael W. Champion, "From *affectus* to Affect Theory and Back Again," in *Before Emotion: The Language of Feeling, 400–1800*, ed. Juanita Feros Ruys, Michael W. Champion, and Kirk Essary (New York: Routledge, 2019), 242–54. On the distinction between affect and emotion, see also Glenn D. Burger and Holly A. Crocker's introduction to *Medieval Affect, Feeling, and Emotion*, ed. Glenn D. Burger and Holly A. Crocker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1–24, and Holly A. Crocker, "Medieval Affects Now," *Exemplaria* 29, no. 1 (2017): 82–98.

modern accounts of feeling in this respect coincide with modern theories of distributed cognition—a diverse body of approaches that understand cognition as a process that extends beyond the brain, in which the environment plays a role—and with theories of situated cognition that regard cognition as inextricable from the social and cultural contexts in which it unfolds.[8] Work on emotion informed by these perspectives highlights the role of the environment in scaffolding emotion, both in the moment of a particular emotion's occurrence, and diachronically, in enabling and structuring the development of an emotional repertoire.[9]

Connecting the insights of these models of cognition with practice theory, Monique Scheer argues for the value of a methodology that approaches emotion as practice for the historical study of emotion. In identifying types of emotional practice, Scheer points to the importance of mobilizing practices, which seek to modulate or arouse particular feelings, in contributing to the acquisition and development of an emotional repertoire. Alongside ritual, Scheer identifies media use as a key example of emotional practice that contributes to the achievement, training, and articulation of particular modes of feeling.[10] In Medieval Studies, recognition of the capacity of literary texts to function as "affective scripts," generating

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8 For a concise overview of distributed cognition, see Miranda Anderson, Michael Wheeler, and Mark Sprevak, "Distributed Cognition and the Humanities," in *Distributed Cognition in Medieval and Renaissance Culture*, ed. Miranda Anderson and Michael Wheeler (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 1–17. On situated cognition, see Philip Robbins and Murat Aydede, eds., *The Cambridge Handbook of Situated Cognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

9 Paul Griffiths and Andrea Scarantino, "Emotions in the Wild: The Situated Perspective on Emotion," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Situated Cognition*, ed. Robbins and Aydede, 437–54.

10 Monique Scheer, "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuian Approach to Understanding Emotion," *History and Theory* 51 (2012): 193–220. See also Kate Davison et al., "Emotions as a Kind of Practice: Six Case Studies Utilizing Monique Scheer's Practice-Based Approach to Emotions in History," *Cultural History* 7, no. 2 (2018): 226–38.

and refining feeling, offers a means to trace how emotion is imbricated with the history of the subject and sociocultural environment, illuminating "the *hows* of affective history."[11] Henryson's *Testament* can be approached in this context as a cultural artifact or technology that offers a script for emotional performance: a model for how to feel. This form of engagement is scaffolded by a religious culture that promotes deep investment in "material things that were sacralized by virtue of their functions as repositories and triggers of affect:" Sarah Salih's analysis of another poem focusing on the matter of Troy, Lydgate's *Troy Book*, might equally apply to Henryson's *Testament*.[12] It too is an "affect machine" that "reaches through time and space to allow … an affective identification with ancient Trojans," promoting the formation of individual and collective identities.[13]

The *Testament*'s capacity to make Cresseid imaginable as the focus of mourning and memorialization, to render her a grievable subject, depends on the poem's ability to arouse compassion within the reader. Within the *Testament*, the practice of compassion is modeled in Troilus's pivotal encounter with Cresseid. Although he is unable to recognize Cresseid, her appearance as a woman with leprosy, begging for alms, nevertheless stirs his memory, provoking an intense emotional response:

> 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 neuertheles not ane ane vther knew.
> For knichtlie pietie and memoriall
> Of fair Cresseid, ane gyrdill can he tak,
> Ane purs of gold, and mony gay iowall,
> And in the skirt of Cresseid doun can swak. (ll. 512–22)

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11 On affective scripts, see Sarah McNamer, "The Literariness of Literature and the History of Emotion," *PMLA* 130, no. 5 (2015): 1433–42, at 1436.

12 Sarah Salih, "Affect Machines," in *Medieval Affect, Feeling, and Emotion*, ed. Burger and Crocker, 139–57, at 139.

13 Salih, "Affect Machines," 150.

(A spark of love then sprang into his heart and kindled his whole
body into fire; with hot fever, a sweat and trembling took him, to
the point that he was ready to expire; his chest began to tire of
bearing his shield; in a short time he changed many colors; and
nevertheless neither one knew the other.

Out of the compassion befitting a knight and in memory of fair
Cresseid, he took a belt, a purse of gold, and many fine jewels, and
flung them down into her skirt.)

Henryson's depiction of this encounter reflects how apparently
spontaneous bodily responses function as conditioned or skillful
practices with particular significance: rather than being innate, they
are "more fruitfully thought of as habits emerging where bodily
capacities and cultural requirements meet."[14] Although embodied
and involuntary, Troilus's response to Cresseid is nevertheless
legible in terms of medieval emotional practice. The impact of
Troilus's feelings is profound and debilitating, almost causing him
to fall from his horse "for greit cair oft syis" (out of great sorrow
repeatedly, l. 525). On hearing of Cresseid's suffering and death, "He
swelt for wo and fell doun in ane swoun" (He was overcome with
woe and fell down in a swoon, l. 599). This capacity for profound
emotion, and especially in regard to love, is socially inflected: as
Rachel Moss argues, such emotional performances work to uphold
particular conceptions of heroic nobility, enforcing and maintaining
hegemonic masculinity.[15] Rather than being emasculating, Troilus's
emotional display enacts a cultural script that resonates with an
audience who share a collective investment in these idealized

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14 Scheer, "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice?" 202.

15 Rachel E. Moss, "'And much more I am soryat for my good knyghts':
Fainting, Homosociality, and Elite Male Culture in Middle English Romance,"
Historical Reflections 42, no. 1 (2016): 101–13. On the encoding of love as
elite social practice, see C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost
Sensibility* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Mary F.
Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The Viaticum and its Commentaries*
(Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990); and James A. Schultz,
Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality (Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, 2006).

masculine values. Although such values are specifically associated with elite men, they exert wider appeal as the object of aspiration and emulation, standards that medieval audiences can endorse even if they themselves are neither noble nor male.

The focal point of this episode lends further significance to Troilus's emotional response. Compassion for those affected by leprosy held an important place in medieval Christian devotion, but scholarly understanding of the experiences and identities associated with the medieval disease has been complicated by its later history. The persistent association of leprosy with stigma and social exclusion into the twenty-first century is such that leprosy charities have long advocated for the complete avoidance of terms that perpetuate harm in the present, a position reflected in the language used to designate people affected by leprosy in this article.[16] Present-day stigma is, however, not a medieval legacy, but rather the lasting effect of nineteenth-century constructions of leprosy, driven by colonialist interests and serving to justify colonialism. As a result, how "medieval histories of leprosy were written, and continue to be understood by people today, are part of a troubling imperial legacy."[17] More recent work on medieval leprosy indicates that people affected by the disease were not ostracized but instead retained ties to the wider community; marks of difference such as entry into a *leprosarium* and the wearing of distinctive clothing indicated the subject's quasi-

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16 See discussion of terminology in Elma Brenner and François-Olivier Touati, "Introduction," in *Leprosy and Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Elma Brenner and François-Olivier Touati (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 1–17, at 6–7; the American Leprosy Missions information page, https://www.leprosy.org/dont-call-me-a-leper/; and the ILEP (International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations) publication *Zero Discrimination: Ending the Stigma of Leprosy* (ILEP, 2019), 9, accessible at https://www. leprosy-information.org/resource/zero-discrimination-ending-stigma-leprosy. Original usage is retained in quotations and titles.

17 Kathleen Vongsathorn and Magnus Vollset, "'Our Loathsome Ancestors': Reinventing Medieval Leprosy for the Modern World, 1850–1950," in *Leprosy and Identity*, ed. Brenner and Touati, 347–82, at 374. On the nineteenth-century construction of leprosy, see also Carole Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), 13–42.

religious status.[18] Leprosy was often perceived as a mark of divine favor, conferring the privilege of correction during mortal existence, with use of the term "lazarous," as employed in Henryson's poem, underlining the prospect of resurrection to eternal life (ll. 343, 531).[19] The performance of almsdeeds for those affected by leprosy recognized the sanctified status of sufferers and the spiritual efficacy of their prayers. Charity toward the leprous was also regarded as being more valuable because it required the benefactor to overcome material considerations such as the physical response provoked by aspects of the disease or, as Julie Orlemanski terms it, by the "visceral nature of the affective labor necessary to reverse disgust into love."[20] Acts such as kissing sufferers occupied an important place in medieval devotion as signs of compassion, and the emotional intensity of Troilus's response strongly evokes this tradition.[21] Troilus's act, then,

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18 *Leprosy and Identity*, ed. Brenner and Touati, as a whole offers much important evidence in this regard, but see especially Carole Rawcliffe, "'A Mighty Force in The Ranks Of Christ's Army': Intercession and Integration in the Medieval English Leper Hospital," 95–129, at 103; and Lucy Barnhouse, "Good People, Poor Sick: The Social Identities of Lepers in the Late Medieval Rhineland," 183–207, at 187, 188.

19 Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 114–17, 55–64; Luke Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine: A Malady of the Whole Body* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); Elma Brenner, "Between Palliative Care and Curing the Soul: Medical and Religious Responses to Leprosy in France and England, *ca.* 1100–*ca.* 1500," in *Medicine, Religion and Gender in Medieval Culture*, ed. Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa (Cambridge: Brewer, 2015), 221–35; Damien Jeanne, "The Disease and the Sacred: The Leper as a Scapegoat in England and Normandy (Eleventh–Twelfth Centuries)," in *Leprosy and Identity*, ed. Brenner and Touati, 67–92.

20 Julie Orlemanski, "How to Kiss a Leper," *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 3 (2012): 142–57, at 150. See also Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 133.

21 Julie Orlemanski, "Desire and Defacement in *The Testament of Cresseid*," in *Reading Skin in Medieval Literature and Culture*, ed. Katie L. Walter (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 161–81, at 176. On kissing, see also Courtney A. Krolikoski, "Kissing Lepers: Saint Francis and the Treatment of Lepers in the Central Middle Ages," in *Leprosy and Identity*, ed. Brenner and Touati, 269–93.

is precisely one of "knightlie pietie," distinguished as the devotional act of a noble in the quality of emotion it entails and in the material nature of its expression, both as it manifests in his body and in his gifts of gold and jewels (l. 519).

In presenting Troilus's emotional response to Cresseid, the *Testament* offers its readers the opportunity to train their feelings, taking their cue from Troilus's practice. Within the poem, Cresseid's own reaction to Troilus models this process, in making Troilus's feeling the agent of her moral transformation. Cresseid underlines the significance of Troilus's compassion, in characterizing it as a gesture that "Hes done to vs so greit humanitie" (has done us such great kindness, l. 534). It goes beyond commonplace almsgiving, as a human act that recognizes the humanity of those affected by leprosy, and Cresseid's realization that Troilus is behind it precipitates a conclusive reassessment of her own behavior, voiced in the repeated cry "O fals Cresseid and trew knight Troylus" (O false Cresseid and true knight Troilus, ll. 546, 553, and, with slight variation, 560). In its effects, however, as Felicity Riddy argues, Troilus's act is not inclusive, but instead "constitutes difference, since in order for him to do what he does, Cresseid has to be where and what she is."[22] The operation of compassion here can be examined productively through Sara Ahmed's discussion of how the public discourse of compassion in the present fetishizes generosity as a character trait, "something 'I' or 'we' have, which is shown in how we are moved by others."[23] Compassion is the trait which marks Troilus as the apogee of aristocratic masculine values, but its utopian promise conceals the operation of power structures underpinning Troilus's social status and economic privilege, and Troilus's own role in Cresseid's story. As in Ahmed's analysis of charitable discourse, Troilus's compassion is a gift that elides the giver's own responsibility for suffering:

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22 Felicity Riddy, "'Abject odious': Feminine and Masculine in Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*," in *Chaucer to Spenser: A Critical Reader*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 280–96, at 293.

23 Sarah Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 22.

the West gives to others only insofar as it is forgotten what the West has already taken in its very *capacity* to give in the first place. … [F]eelings of pain and suffering, which are in part effects of socio-economic relations of violence and poverty, are assumed to be alleviated by the very generosity that is enabled by such socio-economic relations. So the West takes, then gives, *and in the moment of giving repeats as well as conceals the taking.*[24]

Henryson's *Testament* parallels charitable discourse in inviting the reader to feel empowered by the experience of feeling sad about the pain of others, of Cresseid and women like her, and to understand that sorrow as the agent of change. The other is fixed "as the one who 'has' pain, and who can overcome that pain only when the Western subject feels moved enough to give."[25] Cresseid's capacity for change depends on how others feel about her, and requires affirmation of Troilus as the model of true feeling.

The satisfaction the *Testament* offers its readers, and especially its male readers, in feeling that they share in the compassion that brings about Cresseid's change of heart, is more subtle than the spectacle of misogynistic punishment. Cresseid displays her contrition in condemning her own behavior, decrying her "wantones" (wantonness) and how her "mynd in fleschelie foull affectioun / Was inclynit to lustis lecherous" (mind in carnal, repulsive passion was inclined to lecherous lusts, ll. 549, 558–59). Henryson's *Testament* validates her agency in the moment she exercises it to write herself out of existence, in drawing up the testament that gives the poem its name, leaving "corps and carioun / With wormis and with taidis to be rent" (dead body and flesh to be lacerated by worms and toads, ll. 577–78). Anticipating and assenting to her own demise, Cresseid's testament incorporates a legacy for Troilus, the "royall ring" given to her as "drowrie," a love token returned to him "To mak my cairfull deid wnto him kend" (to make my sorrowful death known to him, ll. 582, 583, 585). The return of the ring marks Cresseid's endorsement

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24 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 22.

25 Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 22.

of Troilus's feeling, provoking a new excess of overwhelming emotion, and perhaps, but only perhaps, the construction of a memorial.

Troilus's feeling grants validity to Cresseid, though the extent to which she is valued remains uncertain. In this respect, the recognition the *Testament* offers her corresponds to the subject position Erin J. Rand formulates, the "mourned subject" whose emergence is predicated "on the condition of a mourning that has the ability to grant validity and subjectivity to those mourned." Constitution as a mourned subject extends recognition at the expense of agency, as "the range of activities accorded to one who is mourned is essentially restricted to suffering and death."[26] Rand delineates the mourned subject position as one that becomes intelligible through public discourse, shaped through the construction and use of public memorials. Her specific concern is with the mourned subject position as one that afforded a limited form of social recognition to gay men during the early stages of the AIDS crisis. Although the contexts are not analogous, Rand's analysis of the mourned subject position illuminates the limits of the recognition the *Testament* offers Cresseid, and the inimical nature of the pleasure it offers its readers.

Rand points to the particular role of public engagement with one form of activist work begun in response to the AIDS crisis as an expression of collective loss and a challenge to public silence: the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt. For Douglas Crimp, the public acceptance of the quilt, in contrast to the hostility leveled at more militant forms of activism, like the work of ACT UP, is suspect:[27]

> That many in our society secretly want us dead is to me beyond ques-
> tion. And one expression of this may be our society's loving atten-
> tion to the quilt, which is not only a ritual and representation of

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26 Erin J. Rand, "Repeated Remembrance: Commemorating the AIDS Quilt and Resuscitating the Mourned Subject," in *Remembering the AIDS Quilt*, ed. Charles E. Morris III (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2011), 229–59, at 241.

27 The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) is a nonpartisan activist group committed to ending the AIDS crisis through direct action. For more information see the group's official website, https://actupny.com/.

mourning but also stunning evidence of the mass death of gay men. It would, of course, be unseemly for society to celebrate our deaths openly, but I wonder if the quilt helps make this desire decorous.[28]

Rand connects Crimp's words with Steve Abbot's reading of the public response to the quilt: "We didn't like you ... when you were wild, kinky and having fun. We didn't like you when you were angry, marching and demanding rights. But now that you're dying and have joined 'nicely' like a 'family sewing circle,' we'll accept you."[29] The recognition the *Testament* offers to Cresseid is similarly predicated on her disavowal of pleasure and her death. Her agency is sanctioned only in her acquiescence to her fate. In imagining compassion for Cresseid and the possibility of a memorial, the *Testament* invites its readers to feel with Troilus and, in doing so, to participate in the co-production of the mourned subject position. At the same time, it makes feeling sorrow for Cresseid a productive labor in its own right, not only decorous but also the precondition for her reinscription into the social order.

As Rand argues, the production of the mourned subject position enacted through commemoration also serves to constitute subjectivity for the living, carving out a space for those susceptible to sharing Cresseid's fate who are reminded that the acceptance they are afforded is only ever tenuous, a conditional tolerance predicated on respectable behavior. Henryson's *Testament* underlines this in its final verse:

> Now, worthie wemen, in this ballet schort,
> Maid for ȝour worschip and instructioun,
> Of cheritie, I monische and exhort,
> Ming not ȝour lufe with fals deceptioun:
> Beir in ȝour mynd this sore conclusioun

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28 Douglas Crimp, "The Spectacle of Mourning," *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 194–202, at 201.

29 Steve Abbot, "Meaning Adrift: The NAMES Project Quilt Suggests a Patchwork of Problems and Possibilities," *San Francisco Sentinel* 16, no. 2 (1988): n. p., quoted in Rand, "Repeated Remembrance," 241–42.

Of fair Cresseid, as I haue said befoir.
Sen scho is deid I speik of hir no moir. (ll. 610–16)

(Now, worthy women, in this short poem, made for your honor
and instruction, in charity I warn and urge you, do not mingle
your love with false deception: Bear in your mind this bitter
conclusion of fair Cresseid, as I have related earlier. Since she is
dead I speak of her no more.)

In this address, the charity Troilus extends to Cresseid is mirrored in
the charity the male narrator extends to the poem's female readers,
as he occupies the place of the feeling male subject whose emotions
about others establish their social acceptance and its limitations.
Cresseid's fate offers an object lesson on the gendered consequences
attached to mingling "lufe with fals deceptioun," and her behavior
within the *Testament* illustrates the limits of acceptability. This is
especially evident as Henryson picks up the thread of Cresseid's
narrative, describing her rejection by Diomedes and how "desolait
scho walkit vp and doun, / And sum men sayis, into the court,
commoun" (desolate, she walked up and down, and some men say,
into the court, common, ll. 76–77). Ambiguity within the language
makes it unclear whether Cresseid moves within the common court,
or has herself become common.[30] The equivocation is significant:
walking in public space underlines the implication of rumor here, as
an action often connected with sex work both in late medieval civic
ordinances and in present-day policing.[31] As Rebecca Solnit observes
in her history of walking: "Women have routinely been punished
and intimidated for attempting that most simple of freedoms, taking

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30 Here "commoun" may modify either "scho," suggesting that Cresseid
has become common property, or "the court," indicating a shared space: see
editorial notes in Fox's and Parkinson's editions.

31 On the equation of walking and sex work in medieval civic ordinances,
see Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in
Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 16, 23, 70, 111.
On present-day policing, see Andrea J. Ritchie, *Invisible No More: Police
Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color* (Boston: Beacon Press,
2017), esp. 168–71.

a walk, because their walking and indeed their very being have been construed as inevitably, continually sexual in those societies concerned with controlling women's sexuality."[32] Cresseid's walking functions as a mark of the inclination to "lustis lecherous" she later condemns within herself (l. 559). Her association with active desire is reinforced in the grievance she raises against Venus and Cupid for the loss of her status as "the flour of luif in Troy" (the flower of love in Troy), leaving her "fra luifferis left, and all forlane" (kept from lovers and utterly forgotten, ll. 128, 140).

The nature of Cresseid's transgression and punishment contributes to the historical construction of female sexuality as threat, positioning its containment and control as necessary to the social order, and for women's benefit. Cresseid's disease is instrumental to this process, though its significance is partially obscured by a historical tendency in modern scholarship on leprosy to emphasize the currency of medieval theories of sexual transmission: Carole Rawcliffe highlights the particular impact of this bias in Denton Fox's influential edition of the poem.[33] Within the *Testament*, the origins of Cresseid's leprosy are overdetermined, as the poem invokes possible causes ranging from the astrological to retribution, or divine correction, enacted by the Christian god.[34] Despite this ambiguity, however, leprosy's effect on Cresseid's body is the literal manifestation of the narrator's moral judgment of her as being "fleschelie lust sa maculait" (so stained with carnal lust, l. 81). It deprives her of "fairnes" and "bewtie," leaving her "lustie lyre ouirspred with spottis blak" (fair complexion covered with black spots, ll. 313, 339), "The quhylk befor was quhite as lillie flour" (the which before was white as lily flower, l. 373). The framing of Cresseid's sexuality

32 Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (London: Granta, 2001), 233.

33 Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 88.

34 For recent work theorizing the causes of Cresseid's leprosy, see essays by Sharon E. Rhodes, "Legible Leprosy: Skin Disease in *The Testament of Cresseid*, Chaucer's Summoner, and *Amis and Amiloun*," 77–96 and Sealy Gilles, "Doctrinal Dermitologies," 19–54, in *Writing on Skin in the Age of Chaucer*, ed. Nicole Nyffenegger and Katrin Rupp (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018); on astrological causation through the conjunction of Saturn and the moon, see Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 99–102.

in terms of blackness reflects the metaphorical function of blackness in a medieval Christian context as signifying a universal spiritual condition; associated with original sin and death, this conception of blackness carries implications that differ from modern racial thinking.[35] At the same time, however, the representation of an inclination to carnal desire as the blackness of a woman's skin participates in the historical construction of the racial economy analyzed by Kim F. Hall, in which "The blackness used to demonize and devalue women also heightens the brilliance and luster of the light used to praise them; both gestures are racial in that they link moral and physical states within a hierarchy of culture and ethnicity."[36] In this respect, Henryson's *Testament* contributes to the history that frames purity and sexual respectability as the province of white femininity, associated with the absence of desire, and the concomitant hypersexualization of Black women and women of color.[37]

In producing Cresseid as a mourned subject, who becomes acceptable insofar as she disavows her sexual desire and endorses her own suffering and death, the *Testament* also sets out the terms of social acceptability for "worthie wemen," whose worthiness depends on their deference to men's judgment, embodied in the narrator's charity and Troilus's compassion. Exercising judgment is positioned as a particular prerogative and responsibility for elite men, while the emphasis on benevolent intention makes subjection to judgment more palatable. The bargain of tolerance in return for living within the limits of respectability is pernicious, however, prefiguring its

35 See Cord J. Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), esp. ch. 4.

36 Kim F. Hall, "Beauty and the Beast of Whiteness: Teaching Race and Gender," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (1996): 461–75, at 467.

37 I am indebted here to Melissa E. Sanchez's discussion of this history, which builds on Kim F. Hall's body of work, although she does not cite "Beauty and the Beast of Whiteness" specifically. Melissa E. Sanchez, *Queer Faith: Promiscuity and Race in the Secular Love Tradition* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 131–56. On the construction of Black women's sexuality, see Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 123–48.

modern manifestations in offering a tainted gain for the few who have the capacity to meet this standard, and framing those who do not as a threat to their status; the disadvantaged are rendered doubly expendable.[38] Acceptance of the principle of patriarchal control lends tacit approval to more aggressive forms of regulation: Carissa M. Harris's powerful analysis of how the language of service and protection in chivalry and present-day policing overlaps with the complicity of knights and police in perpetrating and enabling sexual violence is indicative in this regard.[39] The conjunction of walking, sex work, and blackness in Cresseid's story anticipates the convergence of racism and anxieties surrounding sex work in the modern history of immigration control. Activists argue that contemporary sex work is a site where

> race and gender *co-produce* racist categories of exclusion: men of colour as traffickers; women of colour as helpless, seductive, infectious; both as threats to the body politic of the nation. These histories help us see that police and border violence are not anomalous or the work of "bad apples"; they are intrinsic to these institutions.[40]

The disavowal of white women's sexual agency inscribed within Cresseid's testament has as its legacy the gendered racial profiling and endemic violence within policing, with particular impact on trans and gender-nonconforming people, documented in the present.[41]

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38 See, for example, Joey L. Mogul, Andrea J. Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock, *Queer (In)justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 145–46.

39 Carissa M. Harris, "Service and Protection: Medieval Knights, the Police, and Sexual Violence," paper presented at "To Protect and Serve, A RaceB4Race Roundtable,' July 23, 2020, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Arizona State University, https://acmrs.asu.edu/RaceB4Race/Protect-and-Serve.

40 Molly Smith and Juno Mac, *Revolting Prostitutes: The Fight for Sex Workers' Rights* (London: Verso, 2020), 16.

41 See Ritchie, *Invisible No More*, and Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock,

Rejecting the goal of tolerance opens up the possibility of changing existing systems and challenging systemic violence. As Erin J. Rand argues, it is necessary to risk losing the limited acceptance the mourned subject position offers in order to reimagine the conditions of subjectivity and enable new forms of action.[42] Henryson's *Testament*, and the gendered and raced model of sexual respectability it endorses, still resonates:

> The absence of an affirmative theory of female promiscuity bespeaks the limitations of queer as well as feminist theory. Given the psychological and physical attacks to which women are uniquely vulnerable in a society premised on male supremacy, the always feminized, heteroerotic slut is a sad figure, neither as edgy as the gay male cruiser nor as empowered as the straight male playboy or philanderer.[43]

Calling for a re-examination of "the possibilities that open up when we accept and revalue female promiscuity," Melissa E. Sanchez highlights the "fragility of the racial and sexual taxonomies that underpin the modern Western ideal of sincere, monogamous love."[44] Reconsideration of the *Testament*'s role in mobilizing emotion in the service of influential models of elite men's compassion and women's transgressive desire has the potential to contribute to this project, offering resources for rethinking the legacies of female subjectivity and sexual agency. In tracing the political impact of compassion as it is constructed within the *Testament*, this article exposes part of the history through which differences acquire their weight, settling over time: "'sedimented histories,' how histories become second nature, what bodies do not have to think (to think)."[45] Against this background, the apparently natural and spontaneous responses

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Queer (In)justice.

   42 Rand, "Repeated Remembrance."

   43 Sanchez, *Queer Faith*, 104.

   44 Sanchez, *Queer Faith*, 104–5.

   45 Sarah Ahmed, "Race as Sedimented History," *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 6, no. 1 (2015): 94–97, at 95.

of sorrow and love emerge as skillful practices that function to train habits, shaping the historic development of paternalistic conceptions of charity in the global North, and of racialized ideals of the desirable woman as one who is only ever the passive object of masculine desire. Dismantling the mythologies underpinning these emotional practices is necessary reparative work and an incremental step toward making the transformation of our subjectivities and social conditions possible.