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I that am Lord of Lif: The Christ-knight figure of the Ancrene Riwle, Piers Plowman, and the Faerie Queene

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"I that am Lord of Lif": The Christ-Knight Figure of the *Ancrene Riwle*, *Piers Plowman*, and *The Faerie Queene*.

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Abstract

Throughout medieval literature, the allegory of Christ as a knight appeared in numerous texts, and the Christ-Knight figure was an extremely important literary, religious, cultural, and historical force. This thesis traces the origins and first appearance of the Christ-Knight figure in English literature and analyzes three prominent medieval and early modern texts which offer depictions of the figure.

Chapter One of this thesis explores the figure's first appearance in a chapter of the anonymous twelfth-century *Ancrene Riwle* and argues that, contrary to previous scholarship, the Christ-Knight figure originated in Old Testament depictions of God, not in secular romances. The figure borrowed imagery from romances and fused the imagery into a theological framework, but the *Ancrene Riwle*'s Christ-Knight story does not follow all the conventions that a romance requires. Chapter One also analyses the historical significance of two unique Middle English words in the text and the influence of mysticism, arguing that individual Christ-Knight figure presentations were influenced by their surrounding culture and that a study of these influences yields information about the cultural context in which they were created.

Chapter Two analyzes William Langland's *Piers Plowman*'s Christ-Knight, which appears as a more New-Testament presentation of Jesus and shows evidence of newer theological atonement beliefs. Langland's fuller integration of theology and romance imagery and his more detailed allegory about the nature of atonement and redemption provide evidence about how the idea of the Christ-Knight had developed during the centuries between the two texts. The text also borrows heavily from its

medieval setting, and political issues such as the Peasants' Revolt are notable forces within the Christ-Knight story.

Book I of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* presents Redcrosse, one of the final depictions of the Christ-Knight figure in English literature and a character representing the essential exhaustion of the Christ-Knight figure and its metamorphosis from Christ-Knight figure to man-Christ-Knight figure. As a theological figure, Redcrosse's character draws important parallels with eschatological Biblical literature, particularly Revelations, and combines aspects of both Protestant and Catholic theology. In all, the Christ-Knight stands as one of the most important figures in medieval literature.

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Introduction

During the medieval period, there was a well-developed and widely accepted literary tradition of portraying Christ as a knight. The incarnate Christ was depicted as the supreme chivalric lover-knight who rescued his beloved (representing mankind) from the clutches of an evil foe (representing the Devil). In battling the foe, the Christ-Knight figure usually died, then rose to life again, and he displayed his wounded body to his beloved to prove the depth of his love. The Christ-Knight figure existed in two essential forms: the overall idea of the Christ-Knight figure which remained consistent in purpose and individual presentations of the Christ-Knight figure which appeared in diverse texts and varied in form.

The Christ-Knight figure had manifold uses and carried a tremendous amount of religious significance and meaning. As a religious allegory, the Christ-Knight figure helped explain various atonement theories and provided an understandable allegory of how God interacts with humanity. These religious views varied throughout the medieval period, and the appearance of the Christ-Knight figure aided in the interpretation and spread of these ideas.

The Christ-Knight figure also allowed a marriage between the secular and sacred because the figure presented religious ideas and teaching against the backdrop of secular romance literature and chivalric imagery. Church leaders used imagery from secular romances and "spiritualized" them whereas otherwise the stories might have been discarded by more orthodox religious readers for being too worldly. As the chivalric code was elevating knights from fighters to warrior-lovers, the Christ-Knight was a picture of

the perfect, chivalric knight and the ideal standard for real knights to emulate. Women also profited from the Christ-Knight figure, because they could direct their emotional, romantic energy to Christ and not to human men, particularly if they had taken religious vows and had foresworn earthly men.

Along with combining theology with romances, individual Christ-Knight figures also integrated other aspects of medieval life. A study of the Christ-Knight figure does not end with medieval theology and literature but branches out into popular culture, social concerns, class relations, political issues, the development of the tournament system, and numerous other aspects of the medieval period. This was important for two reasons. First, the Christ-Knight figure's liberal borrowing from its surrounding environment ensured that it became more significant and relative to its medieval audience than it would have had it remained merely a religious or literary figure. The figure's relevancy no doubt contributed to its popularity; the Christ-Knight appeared in numerous poems, lyrics, sermons, and just about every extant genre of writing. Religious writing in particular made much use of the Christ-Knight figure; Rosemary Woolf states that, "One of the commonest allegories in medieval preaching books and manuals of instructions is that of Christ as a lover-knight" (99).

The second reason that the Christ-Knight figure's widespread medieval worldview is important is because it offers modern readers detailed insight into particular aspects of medieval life and culture. The Christ-Knight figure is an important medieval literary and religious figure, but, as I stated before, a study of individual Christ-Knight figure presentations yields a rich body of information about the medieval period. A

scholar of the medieval period would profit from studying this interesting figure, for I argue that no single literary figure offers modern readers as widespread a medieval worldview as the Christ-Knight figure.

The Christ-Knight is significant both as a literary and a historical figure and while I will be analyzing some of its historical aspects, my main concern in this thesis is exploring the Christ-Knight as a literary figure. The Christ-Knight as a literary figure contributed to the history of ideas and specifically the history of religious ideas. Developments and innovations in these ideas are particularly apparent in individual presentations of the Christ-Knight figure, and tracing these changes is both enlightening and useful. Certainly part of the Christ-Knight's contribution to the history of ideas includes cultural and historical concerns, but I am not attempting to present the Christ-Knight solely within a historical context and therefore qualify this thesis as a historical investigation. I am primarily interested in analyzing the Christ-Knight as a literary figure which embodies, transmutes, and affects particular aspects of the history of ideas.

The Christ-Knight has gained considerable scholastic interest, particularly in the last several decades, and this is no doubt due to its prominence in medieval literature and its rich complexity which creates many avenues for investigation. In her 1932 dissertation, *The Allegory of the Christ-Knight in English Literature*, Sister Marie de Lourdes Le May apparently was contending with a fairly new subject and negative attitudes towards it. Despite the fact that scholars before Le May had explored the subject of the Christ-Knight and found nothing objectionable about it, she states that:

> I am not sure, nevertheless, that we today do not feel a mild horror at the

> boldness of the (Christ-Knight) figuration. Indeed, discussion of the matter with confreres and professors of the Catholic University campus elicited from some the suggestion of indecency, and from others a mild and cynical smile. (xi)

The passage of over seventy years seems to have silenced any voices of protest about depicting Christ as a knight; recent scholarship has enthusiastically explored the Christ-Knight figure in medieval literature. Scholars after Le May have discovered other origins and instances of the Christ-Knight and found connections between different texts and figures.

While Le May's dissertation is insightful and was one of the initial sources that sparked my interest about this topic and overall thesis, I disagree with several of her claims, and I have discovered more recent material which also disputes various claims of older Christ-Knight scholarship. My primary concern with this older Christ-Knight scholarship, that of Le May in particular, is overturning the assessment that the Christ-Knight figure developed first from medieval romances and from that, took on religious elements. However, this thesis is not merely a rebuttal of Le May's argument. What I have attempted to accomplish in this thesis is establish what I believe is the true foundation of the Christ-Knight figure by looking beyond the obvious romantic connections that the figure had and searching for other sources. I have analyzed the history of both the form and the idea of the Christ-Knight figure, and I argue that the Christ-Knight figure remains consistent in purpose but varies in individual presentations. The purpose of the Christ-Knight figure was to allegorically represent theological beliefs

about Jesus Christ and the nature of the atonement and salvation. Within this identification is a noticeable amount of variance in how individual writers presented their particular Christ-Knight figures. I have concerned myself with these variances because they document changes in the idea of the Christ-Knight figure and also offer a wide variety of information about various aspects of medieval and Renaissance life and culture.

While Le May documented numerous examples of the Christ-Knight's appearance in English literature, I have focused on just three texts: the anonymous *Ancrene Riwle,* which is a guidebook written to three cloistered anchoresses, William Langland's *Piers Plowman,* and Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. Scholars generally agree that the *Ancrene Riwle* offers the first solidly identifiable Christ-Knight figure, and I have begun with this text in order to document the appearance and background of the Christ-Knight. *Piers Plowman* is important because many scholars argue that Langland's Christ-Knight is the most unusual presentation of this literary figure (Warner 129), and its uniqueness warrants further investigation. The Christ-Knight of *The Faerie Queene* is one of the last, if not the last, appearances of the Christ-Knight figure in English literature. Focusing on these three figures allows me to trace the rise and fall of the Christ-Knight and to provide a widely-encompassing view of this important figure. These three English texts present very clear and detailed Christ-Knight figures, and while each text does not exist primarily as a Christ-Knight story, the figure is a significant part of the text's overall purpose and meaning. Because these three texts

substantially utilize the Christ-Knight figure, they offer detailed information about the figure's most salient contributions to the history of ideas, particular religious ideas.

In studying these three texts, I have endeavored to answer three major questions: what were the origins of the Christ-Knight figure, to what degree did the surrounding culture influence the individual writers who produced particular Christ-Knight figures, and what specific information does the Christ-Knight as a literary figure have to offer about the history of ideas?

To briefly answer the first question, I have argued that the Christ-Knight originated not in courtly romances, but in the imagery and language of the Old and New Testaments. While the Christ-Knight does have the coloring and pageantry of a courtly knight, his behavior is sometimes directly contrary to how a chivalric lover should act, and his lady's actions are also frequently out of character for a courtly heroine. For example, the *Ancrene Riwle*'s Christ-Knight story uses romantic imagery, but the plot is not that of a romance. The lady is in grave danger of being damned, and the Christ-Knight must save her from this fate by any means possible, including threatening her with hell. Other individual Christ-Knight figures perform similar actions, taking on the coloring of courtly knights but not always subscribing to the behavior one would expect from romance heroes.

Because of these inconsistencies, I argue that the Christ-Knight figure has its roots not in the romance tradition exclusively but in the theology of the Old and New Testament. The Old Testament, in particular, often allegorizes God as a warrior-lover calling his faithless spouse (Israel) to return to him. The New Testament speaks of Christ

as the Bridegroom and the Christian Church as the Bride. While the Christ-Knight figure uses romantic imagery, the plot of the story is set within a theological, not a romantic, framework. The Christ-Knight idea was derived from religious teaching and adapted elements from chivalric literature, but it had its origins long before courtly romances appeared.

This is not to say that chivalric romances did not influence the Christ-Knight figure. What the chivalric code did for the Christ-Knight figure was to make the notion of Christ as a warrior-lover socially applicable. The chivalric code gave knighthood higher standards, exhorting marauding warriors to become courtly lovers, and the Christ-Knight figure became the highest example of this exhortation. For example, Le May states that the Anglo-Saxon word *cnight* frequently referred to a boy (8). With the help of the developing chivalric code, the term *cnight* was elevated and specialized, functioning not only as a description but also as a standard.

The cultural aspects of these three texts are tremendously important. The *Ancrene Riwle* contains two specific words that are unusual. The text states that the Christ-Knight rode in a *turneiment,* which is the first time this French word appeared in an English text, and it did not appear again for another century (Warner 64). Because tournaments and jousting imagery play a large part in many Christ-Knight stories, this word deserves careful attention. The text also updates the Anglo-Saxon-based word *knightship*, making it clear that Christ was a lover-knight, not merely a warrior (Warner 64). Along with vocabulary issues, the *Ancrene Riwle* shows a dependence upon mysticism because the text emphasizes a personal and emotional response to Jesus.

The Christ-Knight story of *Piers Plowman*, written approximately a century and a half after the *Ancrene Riwle*, also offers a significant amount of information about medieval English culture. Langland's Christ-Knight undergoes a joust, and specific details Langland offers about this joust indicated changes that had taken place in the tournament system, particularly since some aspects of the jousting scene resemble the elaborate Round Table tournaments that were quite popular during the medieval era. While the *Ancrene Riwle*'s Christ-Knight story dealt with individual salvation, *Piers Plowman*'s story is more corporate, involving humanity in general - both of which indicate changes in medieval theories of atonement. Langland also addresses the significant cultural issue of the Peasants' Revolt, particularly by giving his Christ-Knight the resemblance of Piers the Plowman

Redcrosse, the hero of Book I of *The Faerie Queene*, is specifically a Christian Protestant figure, and his presentation is largely colored by the religious struggles that surrounded England during this time. Redcrosse as a well-developed individual is not a medieval figure, despite his medieval romantic backdrop, and he represents cultural developments in the idea of selfhood. Redcrosse is also the most problematic of the three Christ-Knight figures, for several scholars have stated flatly that he is not Christ. I agree partially that Redcrosse is not meant to be completely identified as Christ because he is obviously human and faulty. Yet I argue that Redcrosse portrays the individual Christian struggling to become like Christ, and in doing so, he represents the Christ-Knight figure's final development - man becoming like Christ.

As I have studied these three Christ-Knight figures, I have also discovered that as theological figures, they share a progression of ideas that parallel different aspects of the Bible. I do not wish to argue that the three texts form one complete unit, and I will not force them into a narrow comparison. Yet, there is a connection between them that deserves consideration. The *Ancrene Riwle*'s Christ-Knight represents certain aspects of Old Testament teaching because the lyrical, allegorical nature of the Old Testament often pictured God as a husband urging his faithless wife, Israel, to return to him. The Old Testament also required human works such as sacrificing, repenting, and following the Law, so that humanity's response to God was important. Old Testament books such as the Song of Solomon suggest that God was imagined to desire a personal, intimate relationship with humans. The *Ancrene Riwle* can be seen as a sort of beginning of the atonement process – God calls out to mankind and moves to form a personal relationship with individuals so that, out of that trust and connection, humans would love God and move towards him. The Christ-Knight of the *Ancrene Riwle* is a more godly, divine person than an actual human, and he is God, the supremely powerful lover, calling to the individual soul.

The *Ancrene Riwle* falls more in line with Old Testament imagery, and *Piers Plowman* is cast more in the likeness of New Testament ideals, particularly as expressed in the Gospels. The Christ-Knight becomes a much more recognizable human figure in *Piers Plowman*, emphasizing Jesus' divinity and his sacrifice on the cross. Although the Old Testament emphasized human works and response, the New Testament states that salvation is a gift that is not earned by works. *Piers Plowman*'s Christ-Knight does not

woo the individual soul and the text does not focus too heavily on individual response; rather the Christ-Knight defeats the Devil, harrows hell, and corporately saves those who believe in him. The Christ-Knight of *Piers Plowman* is a clear picture of the incarnate, New Testament Christ who has corporately saved humanity.

Moving from the Old Testament to the Gospels, Spenser's Christ-Knight and Cantos 11-12 can be compared to Revelations, the restoration of all. Redcrosse defeats a dragon and restores not just a person or people, but an entire land which is identified as Eden. This is not a complete comparison because Redcrosse must leave Una to serve Gloriana for six more years, but Cantos 11-12 do provide a much clearer picture of the end result of Christ's sacrifice. In the *Ancrene Riwle*, the story is left dangling as the Christ-Knight waits for the lady's final choice, and *Piers Plowman* ends with salvation but it also ends in a battle. Yet Spenser's tale ends with restoration, peace, and joy.

From the twelfth to the sixteenth century, the Christ-Knight figure in general and individual presentations of the figure allowed theological ideas to both coexist and commingle with more secular literary models. The figure helped present and clarify a wide range of theological concerns, and it therefore records the gradual integration of religious thought and secular culture by coupling theology with romance stories. Although it is difficult to measure just how great an impact this coupling had on the surrounding culture, it is very clear that the Christ-Knight brought a wide variety of theological ideas to a broad English audience, and it did so in ways that were particularly relevant. As a transmitter of ideas which spans several centuries, the Christ-Knight figure's prominence cannot be overstated.

Chapter One

The Christ-Knight appears in the *Ancrene Riwle* in the third paragraph of a chapter entitled "On Love." In the second paragraph, the author hints at the story that is to come by comparing Christ to a king who loved a "gentil poure leafdi of feorrene londe" (Shepherd 21). To proclaim his love, he sent her copies of the Old Testament, then came to her himself with love letters written in his own blood. With that introduction, the author states, "Herto falleþ a tale, a wrihe forbisne" (Shepherd 21).

The Christ-Knight tale follows thus. There was a lady who had been attacked and besieged by a villain. All her property was seized and her lands destroyed, and she was hiding in a castle made of earth while her enemy attacked her. A king who loved the lady sent her food and soldiers to sustain her; she accepted the gifts but not the king's love. Finally, the king came himself to plead his case and woo her, but she still rejected him. In a last bid to save her and gain her love, the king told her that he would enter battle and destroy her enemy, although he knew that he would not survive the fight, in order to prove his love for her. He did so and was slain in battle, but rose to life again. The king is identified as Jesus who rode in a *turneiment* out of love for mankind. After the king had risen from the dead, he presented himself to the lady and showed her how he had been wounded for her sake, offered her everything she could possibly want and more in exchange for her love, and finally threatened her with hell if she refused him. The story then ends without naming the lady's final choice.

As I stated in my introduction, this passage is important because the *Ancrene Riwle* offers the first solid, clear example of the literary Christ-Knight figure. Before the

Ancrene Riwle, there were allusions to the Christ-Knight in different texts, but the image did not take on its full embodiment until the *Ancrene Riwle*. Le May and other scholars have argued that the Christ-Knight idea originated in secular romances and eventually adopted religious elements, therefore it is not likely that the figure could have appeared noticeably before this early Middle English text.

In this chapter, I have attempted to perform several tasks. First of all, I have essayed to demonstrate clearly that the Christ-Knight figure, as presented in the *Ancrene Riwle*, did not originate in courtly romances and have instead shown what its true foundation is. In its title of "Christ-Knight" the figure's essential identity is remarkably clear; the figure represents Christ who is portrayed in the guise of a knight. The Christ-Knight figure is based on the historical person of Jesus Christ, a man who appeared centuries before the medieval era, and as thus, the Christ-Knight figure's origins existed long before Middle English romances sprang into existence. As I have argued in my introduction, the purpose of the Christ-Knight figure is to allegorically represent how Christ's actions brought about salvation for humanity, and this essential purpose remains stable. However, individual writers offered unique presentations of the figure, and variances in these presentations reflect both what the author wished to emphasize about the nature of the atonement and also different aspects of the cultural context in which the individual figure was written. This analysis of the Christ-Knight figure's origins and structure is the foundation of this entire thesis. After discussing the Christ-Knight figure's background and purpose, I have explored the *Ancrene Riwle's* specific Christ-Knight,

highlighting what ideas the author borrowed from popular culture and theology and what information the Christ-Knight figure tells us about these ideas.

Despite the efforts of several dedicated scholars, the exact authorship and dating of the *Ancrene Riwle* cannot be decidedly proven. A specific date would be extremely helpful because the text has the first recorded instance of the Christ-Knight figure, the first English use of the French word *turneiment,* and an updated version of the older word *cnight*. Le May says that the possible dates for *Ancrene Riwle* fall between 1175 and 1325, two centuries that experienced the height of courtly romance and romantic love (7). However, since Le May, other scholars have suggested more specific dates for the *Ancrene Riwle*'s composition. Other scholars placed the date either at or a little after 1200, and E.J. Dobson has the strongest argument for a date between 1215-1222 ("Date" 188-92). For the purpose of this chapter, I have accepted Dobson's date of around 1215 and will be considering the *Ancrene Riwle* within the context of the early 13th century. The dating is important because it allows us to more clearly pinpoint what influence romance literature had on the text and to discuss what religious trends and teachings were popular at the time. Since the Christ-Knight figure's presentation describes different cultural and religious aspects during a specific time period, it is easier to highlight and discuss these trends with a more exact date in mind.

Although the early thirteenth century was most likely when the first Christ-Knight figure appeared in literature, its début in the *Ancrene Riwle* is somewhat unusual. Le May notes that the Christ-Knight figure merely appears in the text without the author giving much explanation (4). Because of that, she assumes that 1) the allegory of the Christ-

Knight in the *Ancrene Riwle* must have been as pertinent to its original audience as it is to modern readers, 2) since the *Ancrene Riwle* was written during a time of abundant romance literature, the readers would have understood its connection to the literature, and 3) the writer neither explains nor defends his portrayal of Christ as a knight, which indicates that the original audience needed neither explanation nor defense (3). Because of these three particularities, Le May states that one can almost assume that the allegory of Christ as a knight-hero, like the heroes of romances, was likely well-known and accepted by the time the *Ancrene Riwle* was penned (4). In her dissertation, Le May insists that romance literature conceived the Christ-Knight idea and religious literature eventually adopted the figure for its own purposes.

If the *Ancrene Riwle* had been written as late as the 1325 date that Le May allows, perhaps her claim would be more plausible. Yet she overlooks several key issues, and it is more valid to argue that the Christ-Knight figure emerged first from religious ideas, because it is an allegorical representation of a historical person and his actions, and gradually adopted courtly coloring during the medieval era. While romance literature left its mark on the Christ-Knight figure, the stories were likely not as prevalent in the early 13th century English audience as Le May has argued. Catherine Innes-Parker cautions that, "it is important to remember that the earliest romances in English did not appear in manuscript form until well after the *Ancrene* [*Riwle*] was written" (509). The *Ancrene Riwle* offers scholars little definite information as to the extent of which its anonymous author had access to courtly romances. While the text certainly shows its author's

familiarity with romances, the text does not follow most of the conventions of romance literature, especially in its description of the king and lady's behavior.

If the *Ancrene Riwle*'s Christ-Knight figure drew its origins from courtly romances, it seems logical to argue, as does Le May, that the intended audience needed to be familiar with romances in order to understand the allegory (3). Innes-Parker says that the *Ancrene Riwle*'s original audience (three anchoresses) read French and perhaps had access to some of the popular French romances, however the text was meant for a broad audience and one that most likely did not read French (510). The Christ-Knight is applicable to all, and the lady of the *Ancrene Riwle*'s Christ-Knight story is "Everyman" in a sense; she allegorically represents the individual human who must decide how he or she will respond to Christ. It hardly needs stated that the success of an allegory depends upon its relevancy and application to the intended audience. If the *Ancrene Riwle's* broad audience needed to be well read in romances in order to understand the story's allegory, the author then cut himself off from a wide audience and created an unusual literary figure that arguably would not have become so popular so quickly. It also seems unlikely that the three anchoresses, confined to a cloister and living a strict, austere life, had access to romances at all or any encouragement to read the texts. But, the author did not provide much explanation or any defense of portraying Christ as a knight, and this evidences that the audience, both narrow and broad, clearly understood the Christ-Knight figure allegory.

Romance literature and imagery, though not crucial to the reader's understanding of the Christ-Knight story, did provide a certain amount of imagery and color to the tale.

What I will do in the next several pages is to discuss the *Ancrene Riwle* and chivalric romances, arguing that the Christ-Knight story is not a typical romance story, though it borrowed romantic imagery. Some of the ideals of courtly romance (love, passion, a knight battling to the death to rescue a lady) are part of the story; and, at first glance, the story appears to be a romance. However, the story contrasts with the romance genre in several ways because the two main characters do not behave like romantic heroes and heroines, because the context of the story deals with the spiritual issues of damnation and salvation, and because there is no conclusion to the end of the story, either happy or tragic.

In considering romances, Andrew King has provided an insightful analysis into the definition and nature of medieval English romances in his book *The Faerie Queene and Middle English Romance.* English romance literature was extremely popular during the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, and the stories were constantly created, revised, copied, and transmitted across a wide social span. Using the term *romance* as indicative of a genre is difficult because no "pure" romance form exists, due to the genre's occasional cross-incorporation of other genres and outside influences (14). Defining a text as a Middle English romance generally means that it 1) presents characters that are generally exaggeratedly good or bad but not idealistically perfect, 2) places a great emphasis upon time, and 3) focuses on the issue of providence - either the erratic nature of Fortune working under the general plan of providence or the direct interaction of God with creation (22-3). Within that context were the love relationships, battles, rescues, and troubadours that one generally expects with the term "romance."

In the chivalric imagery that permeated romances, tournaments were extremely important, and Christ-Knights often fought in tournaments and jousts. The Christ-Knight of the *Ancrene Riwle*, like all good courtly knights, rescues his ladylove from a villain bent on destroying her, and he does so by riding in a tournament. Yet, the word "tournament," like the word "knight," underwent a period of development during the early Middle Ages, and "tournament" had several different meanings in different times and areas.

The tournament was most likely of French origin, and Godefroy de Preuilly may have established the event in the mid-eleventh century (Paterson 72). However, the word *tornei* and its derivatives can indicate either the sporting war games normally associated with tournaments or it could also refer to real warfare and "it is wrong to assume that the word has the same meaning in all geographical areas and at different historical times" (72-3). Linda Paterson believes that *tornei* originally was a war term referring to cavalry tactics (74). Juliet Barker agrees and says that the idea of a tournament was most likely introduced by a new French cavalry charge, which involved a knight attempting to knock his opponents off their horses with a heavy lance held tightly under his right arm (4). When exactly the war tactic turned into a war game is unknown, but Barker convincingly argues that the tournament system as a series of war games appeared very late in the eleventh century (5). Tournaments were important because they allowed knights to experience real warfare for training purposes, helped settle legal disputes, were entertaining and popular, and offered fighters chances to gain glory and material possessions. Between 1100 and 1400, the Latin word *hastiludium* (gallicized as

hastilude) was the most common way of referring generically to war games, and this imprecise naming allowed for loopholes in laws that forbid the games (Barker 138). Regardless of terminology, these new war tactics relied on mounted warriors performing as a team and Le May states that:

> Naturally, when the method of conducting war changed under existing social and political conditions that phalanx and heavy footsoldier maneuvering of the imperial legions to the more open hand-to-hand conflict of the Middle Ages, when the mounted noble and his mounted squires in heavy armor riding their resistless steeds made the foot solider a follower and supporter of the thundering cavalcade rather than a separate unit of fighting strength, the figuration of Christian warfare, and the figuration of Christ as a warrior, would take on the semblance of the knightly combatant. (34)

Chapter Two of this thesis offers a more in-depth look at tournaments in connection with *Piers Plowman*, but for the older *Ancrene Riwle*, it is difficult to know exactly what the author intended by writing the word *turneiment*. Yet the wording of the text seems to provide evidence that the author had in mind more of a serious battle on horseback rather than a game or a dispute between two knights. The lady is in the midst of a besiegement in her own lands; she is not a prisoner in enemy territory. The story is set in the middle of a war and although the king sends his soldiers to strengthen the lady's defenses, the siege continues. In order to rescue her, the king must overthrow her enemy. The king also states that he will enter the fight to deliver her, not that he will challenge

her opponent and overturn him single-handedly, and it is a battle in which he knows he will meet his death. Although deaths were quite common in tournaments, bloodshed was regulated to a certain extent and knights tried to avoid killing their opponents (Barker 15). But in the *Ancrene Riwle*, it is clear that this tournament will be a deadly battle where the opponents will not desist until one of them is killed; they have entered the tournament to destroy their enemies. I argue that the *Ancrene Riwle* uses the word "tournament" to indicate real warfare, that the king enters a deadly battle to break the siege and overthrow the lady's enemy.

When the Christ-Knight rides in the tournament, he has only a shield to protect himself, and this shield is his human body which became cruelly pierced and was stretched out on the cross. In Christ-Knight literature, armor and weapons are important. Usually, the armor the Christ-Knight wears is his human body, and different texts place various emphases upon his armor. In the *Ancrene Riwle*, the author points out that the Christ-Knight's shield was broad at the top (his outstretched arms) and narrow at the bottom (his feet nailed on top of each other) (Shepherd 22). This shield had no sides, because his disciples fled from him and he has no one to defend him (22). However, this side-less shield exposed Christ's heart, both physically allowing it to be pierced for the sake of his lady and metaphorically opening his heart up to her so that she could see how much he loved her (22). Unlike a romantic hero who encases himself in strong armor, the Christ-Knight figure often fights with his frail human body, sometimes even weaponless.

While this Christ-Knight story has some romantic imagery, the context of the story is extremely serious. The lady stands in spiritual peril, caught between the forces of

God and Satan, and threatened with damnation. The seriousness of the situation indicates that this is not merely a romance story glossed over with religious significance. In further contrast, the story does not have all three elements that King states a Middle English romance usually had. The *Ancrene Riwle's* Christ-Knight story has an idealistically perfect character in the king, and time is not too greatly emphasized until the end of the story; both of which contrast with typical romances. Only the third element, God or Providence's interaction with creation, is present because the king is the incarnate Christ who interacts with a human lady and instigates change. The *Ancrene Riwle*'s Christ-Knight story is a weighty tale in desperate times where life and death, salvation and damnation, hang in the balance and there is no resolution at the end. It does not follow the typical romantic story of a knight-errant roaming the woods, fighting for glory and the love of ladies, struggling against fickle fortune, and racing the clock, all to end in peace and bliss. The context of the story has romantic allusions, but it is not a conventional romance.

The context of the story and the two main characters support the argument that the Christ-Knight figure did not originate in romance literature. The lady and the king, the heroine and hero of the story, do not follow what were generally prescribed behavior patterns for romantic heroines and heroes, and the two characters often act in complete contrast to the patterns. At the very basic of distinctions, heroes and heroines were allotted different behavior traits. Heroines were expected to remain completely steadfast and faithful in the midst of adversity, and their devotion often allowed them to influence events (King 154). Heroes, because their noble birth ensured that they would one day

become noble themselves, generally underwent a time of trial and error before they purged themselves of error (148).

The lady of the *Ancrene Riwle* is unnamed and thinly described, and she has no speaking role in the story. Presumably, she was once a person of wealth and standing because she has possession of lands and a castle, although her lands are destroyed and her earthen castle (pertaining to her human body and perhaps indicating how inefficient the castle is at withstanding a siege) is under attack. As the story progresses and the lady's actions and character come forth, it becomes apparent that she is not the heroine that is typically found in secular romance literature. Instead of acting as the heroine of the story, the lady becomes almost a villainous figure because she struggles against the Christ-Knight figure instead of supporting him.

The first reason that the lady of the *Ancrene Riwle* is not a heroine is because she hard-heartedly refuses the love of the Christ-Knight, rejecting the gifts and gentleness of her wooer and forcing him to take the extreme action of entering a battle where he knows he will meet his death. Even when he has done all this and miraculously rises from the dead, he still must plead his case to her and finally demand that she make a choice whether to love or reject him. Woolf states that "The unbounded loyalty of a lover deserved a reciprocal courtesy and consideration in his mistress, and a lady lacking in these would show a churlishness particularly unfitting in one of gentle birth" ("The Theme of Christ" 109). The lady has no reason whatsoever for rejecting the king and every possible reason for accepting him, but she continues to refuse him. Courtly romance literature provided no excuse for the lady's boorish behavior towards the king.

It seems apparent that the villain attacking the lady's land is the true antagonist of the story; however, the villain is only the antagonist by default. The villain is not directly attacking the king, and if the king did not love the lady, the villain's actions would not affect him. Yet because the king loves the lady, her rejection of him "forces" him to face the villain and his own demise in an effort to save her and win her love. The king only enters the battle as a last resort, and it appears that he would not have needed to risk his life in battle if the lady had simply accepted his love.

The second reason that the lady of the *Ancrene Riwle* is not a typical heroine is because she is faulty in the area of faithfulness. The heroine of medieval romance literature, once she had given her love, was supposed to remain faithful, and she was not worthy to be loved and pursued if she was not. In the *Ancrene Riwle*, the lady is unfaithful in the sense that she has accepted the gifts of the king, therefore placing herself under some measure of his authority and obligation towards him, yet refusing to love him. Dennis Rygiel points out that the lady does not reject the Christ-Knight outrightly but instead refuses to be moved to love him, which "does not blacken the lady as much as a direct rejection might have done" (352). However, I argue that these actions of accepting gifts yet rejecting the giver casts even more condemnation upon the lady because she now has even less reason to reject the king's love. If she had absolutely refused to accept anything from the king, she would have been hard-hearted but ultimately somewhat just because she would not have placed herself under any obligation or debt to the king that would have weighed against her had she refused to honor it. However, the lady has accepted help from the king and has therefore placed herself

somewhat in his debt and under his authority. By refusing his love, the lady is, in a sense, not owing up to her debt to him. In that sense, she can be said to be "unfaithful."

The author of the tale also hints at the lady's unfaithfulness by stating that even if a woman were to turn away from God and prostitute herself, he will always accept her back and make her a maiden again. He quotes from Augustine that, "swa muchel is bitweonen Godes neoleachunge & monnes to wummon, þet monnes neoleachunge makeþ of meiden, wife, & Godd makeþ of wif, meiden" (Shepherd 23-24). This is a sharp deviation from conventional medieval romance literature, which simply has no room for a cuckolded but still loving husband; this belongs to satires and fabliaux (Woolf "The Theme of Christ" 103). The heroine of romances remains a heroine because of her faithful heart, especially when this faithfulness is tested. There is some Christ-Knight literature that portrays the lady as deliberately breaking her love-vow to the Christ-Knight and running away with a villain, which the lady of the *Ancrene Riwle* does not do. But she does remain unfaithful to justice, in the very least, by not either outrightly refusing the king or wholeheartedly accepting all that he offers her.

The third reason that the lady of the *Ancrene Riwle* is not a heroine is that she is unworthy of the knight and much beneath him both by her position and by her behavior. The emphasis of the Christ-Knight story in the *Ancrene Riwle* is on the worthiness of the knight, not of the lady or the lady and the knight equally. There is no romantic description of the beauty of this beloved lady that the Christ-Knight adores, and indeed, there is nothing in the text that indicates anything desirable about her. Her person and character are not attractive, and she apparently is poor since her lands are destitute, so she

has very little to offer. As the story of the Christ-Knight's wooing, fighting, and dying progresses, the lady becomes increasingly more undesirable as she continues to reject him; the author finally says, in what one must presume to be a voice of disgust, that "nes neauer wurþe forte beon his þuften" (Shepherd 21). Courtly romances conventionally depended upon a story of a hero loving a lady above him, not below him, but the lady of the *Ancrene Riwle* is far below the king. She only has worth because the Christ-Knight loves her. Without his love, she is merely a destitute, besieged, and heart-hearted woman. She does not have the worth of a wealthy, powerful lady or the appeal of a poor but noble woman who has fallen from grace. The Christ-Knight fights for her because of his love for her, not because she is of any benefit to him. His love for her *makes* her worthy; she is not worthy on her own merit.

A final reason that the lady is not a romantic heroine is because her role in this tale is much different from the role of the typical heroine. The lady of a romance story is typically active and present while the lover woos her and the story unfolds. However, when the end of the story appears and the lady marries or otherwise gives her love to the knight, the active heroine essentially disappears from the action while the knight continues his quests (Innes-Parker 517). The lady of the *Ancrene Riwle* is essentially passive throughout the text. She accepts what the king sends her but does not make any active motions except to refuse the king's love, and the only area that she can actively move upon is in the area of her will, her choice of whether to love or reject the king (Rygiel 354).

The lady cannot free herself from her circumstances, but she can choose to love, and moreover her actions determine the king's response and his own actions. The lady is given three chances to accept the love of the king. The king sends her messages, and then appears to her in person to woo her, yet she remains unmoved. Both of these instances are placed in a past-tense context. But after the king overthrows her enemy, dies, and then is revived to life, the lady's response is set in the present tense - the lady must make a choice and the question is left in the air, in the present (Rygiel 357). The passage ends demanding an active, willful choice on the part of the lady, which in turn is a demand for an active choice from the reader (Innes-Parker 516). The lady of the *Ancrene Riwle* is passive until she actively chooses the love of the king, then she sets about to keep the love of God burning in her heart: "The anchoress does not sit idly by and wait for her redemption; rather, she actively embraces a life of suffering and toil in an aggressive search for union with the God who approaches her in human terms" (Innes-Parker 522).

If the Christ-Knight figure originated in courtly romances, it is curious that it would have been paired with such a character as the lady of the *Ancrene Riwle*. If the author had courtly romances in mind, he would have done better to create a heroine who was unwillingly carried away from her lover and was waiting anxiously to be reunited with him. The lady's actions are not what one would expect from a chivalric heroine, and she functions as vital evidence that the Christ-Knight figure was not solely a creation of chivalric literature.

The *Ancrene Riwle*'s Christ-Knight also behaves differently than a typical hero, and he strengthens the argument that the Christ-Knight figure did not originate from

courtly romances. Some of the king's actions in the story (sending gifts, wooing with words, and ultimately dying in battle for his lady) fit comfortably along the lines of a romance, but his overall purpose and movement lies in direct contrast with a typical courtly knight. The king's focus is on attaining the lady's love and well being, not on increasing his own glory and honor. He faces death for a hard-hearted, socially inferior woman, instead of seeking one who loves him and is more his equal. Dennis Rygiel points out that the story introduces the king as "A mihti kinges luue" not, as one would expect, "A mihti king," and this introduction puts a great deal of emphasis on the king's love for the lady, perhaps suggesting that the king cannot help loving the lady (352). The very choice the lady has (to love or not) appears to be the only choice that the king does not have.

The king "violates" three accepted rules for proper courtly love; he loves a lady who is below him socially and economically, he does not obey her wishes, and he shames her for her behavior. The lady is below him because she is poor and hard-hearted, but the king loves her anyway. While the lady does not exactly express a command or wish to the king, her actions show that she most likely wishes he would abandon his suit and desist asking for her love. But the king, unlike a typical romance knight, does not consider her wishes at all. For a medieval romance, it was a crime against chivalry for the lover not to obey the desires of the beloved. However, the king begs for her love because it means her salvation and her very greatest good. The king loves her for her sake, for what he can bestow upon her, and he wishes to save her from a dreadful fate that she is unable to avoid without him. Regardless of her wishes, the king will do whatever is

necessary to rescue and restore the lady because there is more at stake here than a simple exchange of devotion. The king's third violation is that that both he and the author speak about the lady with a note of shaming accusation. A knight of romances was to protect his lady from shame, but the Christ-Knight gently shames his ladylove for her hard-hearted behavior.

The end of the Christ-Knight story most strongly shows how the Christ-Knight deviates from typical heroic behavior. After he has wooed, died, and risen to life again, the king demands that the lady make a final choice of whether to ultimately reject or accept him. If she does refuse him, he threatens her with eternal damnation:

> ȝef þu art se swiþe anewill & swa ut of þi wit þet tu þurh nawt to leosen, forsakest swuch biȝete wiþ alles cunnes selhþe, lo, ich halde her heatel sweord up o þin heaued to dealen lif & sawle & bisenchen ham ba in to þe fur helle, to beon deofles hore schenfulliche & sorhfulliche, world abuten end. (Shepherd 25-26)

The story ends in tension, instead of the typical romance ending of a wedding or reunion of lovers. The king waits for the lady to make her final choice. This also is in contrast with courtly romances because, as Innes-Parker stated above, after a courtly romance ends, the knight usually marries the lady or otherwise wins her love, then goes about doing what he had been doing all along, being a knight and seeking adventure and battle (517). However, the story in the *Ancrene Riwle* leaves the king caught in a state of suspended climax, waiting to hear the lady's choice. The great actions and deeds have already been done, and there is a sense that there is nothing more the king can do except

act upon the ultimate choice the lady makes, either enjoy her love or suffer her rejection. As the lady moves into an active position, the king steps back from the action because he has no more to do.

Because the context of the story is more serious than a romance's typical plot and the two main characters act differently than the usual romance hero and heroine, it becomes difficult for scholars such as Le May to argue convincingly that the Christ-Knight figure originated in courtly romances. In fact, Innes-Parker says that of the *Ancrene Riwle* story that, "the attempt to read the parable of the Royal Wooing solely in the context of chivalric romances has led to some serious misinterpretation of the function of the parable...as a whole" (509). Some scholars who have tried to read the story as a romance argue that the king is cruel to the lady and the entire story is misogynistic because it encourages its (female) audience to focus on their emotional response to the text rather than engaging their intellectual consideration (509). If the story was a courtly romance, these accusations would have some validity; however, the story is not solely a romance. The text is not singling out only women for inappropriate behavior because the lady represents the individual human soul, male or female. Because the Christ-Knight story of the *Ancrene Riwle* originated not in romances but in much older Biblical ideas, both the lady and the king's actions are justified and proper to the context. In the proper context, the two are not odd deviants from typical heroine and hero behavior but are identifiable and appropriate characters in a religious-based story.

The Christ-Knight figure did not originate in romances, but it was instead established in the historical figure of Jesus Christ who was prophesized for centuries in

the Old Testament and documented in the New Testament. Old Testament imagery of God also provides much of the foundation for the Christ-Knight figure. Not only does the Bible clearly describe the Passion of Christ in all four Gospels and prophecy about it in other books, the Old and New Testaments depict God/Christ as a warrior-lover fighting to save his people and relating to humanity as a husband to a wife. God the warrior-lover appears countless times in the Old Testament, particularly in prophetic literature where God is often personified as a warrior; Exodus 13:5 clearly states that, "The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name." Along with a warrior, God is also allegorized as a husband to his people, and the language of the Old Testament is rich with this idea. Verses such as Isaiah 54:5 says, "For your maker is your Husband" and the erotic Song of Solomon is universally recognized as a metaphor of the romantic love between God and his beloved spouse.

The New Testament also uses the spousal imagery, although not quite as heavily or complex as the Old Testament. God the Husband becomes Christ the Husband and the Spouse Israel becomes the Christian Church. Ephesians 5:25-27 compares Christ to a husband who deeply loves his bride, the Christian Church; Paul says in II Corinthians 11:2, speaking of the Corinthian church that, "I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him." The Christ-Knight figure did not need romantic literary ideas to present God as a lover-warrior-husband; these ideas were in place millenniums before the chivalric code emerged.

The Biblical foundation also explains why the Christ-Knight's lady is hard-hearted and sometimes willfully unfaithful to him. The Old Testament in particular

describes Israel's rejection of God for idols as adultery. Ezekiel 16 tells a vivid story of God finding an abandoned infant (representing Jerusalem) that has been thrown out, still covered with natal blood, in a field. He tells the child to live, and she grows up into a beautiful woman. Later, God clothes her and adorns her richly, and she becomes his queen, but she abandons him to chase after other lovers, using his gifts to her as presents for other men. In Jeremiah 3, God says that Israel his bride and Judah her sister have prostituted themselves with other gods. Other verses of the Old Testament capture the words of God calling his adulterous beloved to turn aside from her sin and love him purely. Numerous sections of the Old Testament give God the voice of a husband calling back his faithless, unworthy wife.

The lady of the *Ancrene Riwle* is unfaithful because her character originated from Biblical depictions of Israel and the Christian Church. The author is not condemning women by making the lady unfaithful and unworthy; he is following the spousal imagery found in the Bible. The king's final speech is harsh and completely out of character for a romantic hero, but his character is a picture of God/Christ the Husband who calls his rightful love to turn back to him. He is ultimately concerned with the lady's soul; he wants her love for his sake, and he wants her to love him because it will save her from damnation. The Christ-Knight's words are harsh because the lady's soul hangs in mortal peril. Drastic measures must be taken and the lover must be a warrior, not only for his own sake that he might win the love he longs for, but primarily for the sake of the lady who is oppressed and destitute. Unlike some of the knights of romances, who fought for

their own glory or for the purpose of winning the affections of their beloved, the Christ-Knight of the *Ancrene Riwle* fights to restore his beloved to her former glory.

The king's words are necessarily harsh, and the battle he faces for his beloved is similarly obligatory, both ideas which are borrowed from Biblical models. Woolf states that:

> The most important point in the story as it arose from the exegetic reconciliation of the Old and New Testament nuptial themes was the faithlessness of the lady which brought about the need for her husband to do battle and rescue her ("The Theme of Christ" 102).

The Christ-Knight, like God in the Old Testament, must fight because unfaithful beloved has fallen under the tyranny of an evil foe. The lady's rejection of king acts as both the cause of her difficulties and the necessity of the battle.

Although a chivalric knight would reject his lady if she were unfaithful to him, the Christ-Knight would gladly accept back his beloved regardless of what she has done. The author of the *Ancrene Riwle* contrasts God to man, saying that an earthly husband would turn aside an adulterous wife, but God never would (Shepherd 23). Although the lady is hard-hearted and unfaithful, the king longs for her love and will do whatever he can to gain it. As Woolf stated above, romantic heroes, particularly husbands, did not continue to pursue adulterous wives. Yet God continues to do so in the Old and New Testaments.

The Christ-Knight figure and the story in the *Ancrene Riwle* originated in Old and New Testament teaching, not in romance literature. These Biblical metaphors and ideas

were in place long before medieval Western culture emerged. This is not to downplay the role of the chivalric code and courtly romances in the Christ-Knight story. The Christ-Knight figure is specifically a knight, and romance imagery allowed for the presentation of religious ideas within a culturally relevant context.

Even before the emergence of romances in medieval culture, Western literature contained precursors of the Christ-Knight figure. Woolf points out that before the chivalric code elevated knights from mere fighters to courtly lovers, the idea of a warrior-king who saves his people from danger was certainly common enough. *The Dream of the Rood* is a good example as it depicts Christ as a warrior and the crucifixion scene as a glorious triumph. *Beowulf* and other examples of Anglo-Saxon, Slavic, and Nordic literature show pictures of warrior-kings and saviors (Woolf "Doctrinal Influences" 144). These stories continued the transmission of ideas set forth in the Old Testament, the notion of God as a warrior who saves his people. While these warriors were not typically lovers, the first steps of the foundation of picturing God as an earthly, saving king, were set down. However, it is not until the *Ancrene Riwle* that the first solidly identifiable picture of the Christ-Knight appears.

After this analysis of the background and origins of the Christ-Knight figure, I wish to examine the context and purpose of the specific *Ancrene Riwle* Christ-Knight figure. As I stated in my introduction, the general idea of the Christ-Knight figure remains the same throughout Christ-Knight literature. The character varies in presentation, and these variances represent changes in medieval theological beliefs and ultimately, what beliefs the author maintained and tried to emphasize through the Christ-

Knight allegory. The *Ancrene Riwle*'s Christ-Knight stresses two theological concerns for the twelfth century: current theories about the process of atonement and the development of mysticism.

One dominate medieval theological theory about the nature of the atonement was known as either the "Abuse of Power" or the "Devil's rights," theory. The theory, which was solidified by Augustine, stated that the Devil had some sort of right of possession over the souls of mankind. God had the ability to free mankind in whatever way he wished, but he respected the Devil's "right" and wished to resolve the situation justly, so Christ came to earth as a human man. When the Devil attempted to kill Christ, who had nothing worthy of death in him, this cancelled all rights of the Devil because he violated the law by attempting to kill an innocent man (Marx 8-9). This "Abuse of Power" theory emphasized a more corporate, war-like redemption because Christ defeated the Devil in a legal battle and the church was expected to respond with obedience (Woolf "Lover Knight" 99). The theory emphasized Christ freeing humanity; by dying, Christ made it possible for God to forgive sins and this forgiveness allowed mankind to reconcile with God (Marx 9-10).

Beginning in the twelfth century, theologians such as Anselm argued against aspects of the "Abuse of Power" theory. Anselm noted that 1) the Devil's rights were valid only if everything in creation did not ultimately belong to God and 2) if God was to deal with the Devil justly, then justice would demand that the Devil be punished, not that his rights be considered. Anselm said the work of the cross was Christ atoning for the sins of mankind (Marx 17-18). The twelfth century French philosopher Peter Abelard

offered a unique interpretation of Anselm's redemptive doctrine in his commentary on Romans. Abelard stated that Christ's suffering and death on the cross persuaded mankind to love him and this love freed humans from sin and reconciles them to God - this is often called the "subjective" view of redemption. This "subjective" view is the basis of the Christ-Knight figure - Christ redeemed mankind by demonstrating his love, and people are expected to respond by loving him, which reconciles them to God (Marx 20-21).

By the twelfth century, redemption theories focused less on Christ's conquest of the Devil and more upon emphasizing love and sacrifice. Christ's sacrifice worked to restore mankind's relationship with God; thus the "satisfaction theory" (Woolf Lover Knight 99-100). Woolf also states that Peter Abelard claimed that Christ demonstrating his love and achieving mankind's love was the sole means of redemption, which Woolf calls the "most exaggerated and heretical form" of this new theory (100). Aquinas later corrected Abelard's teachings by arguing that Christ's love is an important part, but not the entirety, of redemption, and it was necessary for him to give satisfaction for sin (100).

The Christ-Knight story of the *Ancrene Riwle* shows this newer trend towards focusing on a more emotional salvation rather than a warlike, legal salvation. The king woos the lady as a lover to a beloved, and it appears that she could find salvation if she would only accept his love, perhaps indicating that the author borrowed ideas from Abelard. The king finally enters the battle because she has rejected him, and fighting with her enemy is the last, most desperate way he can prove his love and save her. Even after the king overthrows the villian, the lady is still not safe until she accepts the king's love. Even though her enemy is presumably destroyed, she is still in threat of hell unless she

submits to the Christ-Knight and gives him her love. The author of the *Ancrene Riwle* uses the Christ-Knight figure to emphasize his belief in the newer theories of atonement, that Christ saved mostly through developing a personal relationship with the individual soul, not primarily by defeating the Devil.

At the same time these changes in medieval atonement theories were happening, mysticism was taking root in Western culture, and mysticism plays an important role in the *Ancrene Riwle*. Innes-Parker states that readers should read the Christ-Knight story with the twelfth and thirteenth centuries' focus on mysticism firmly in mind (510). The essentials of mysticism are a personal belief in a living God (and the individual's perception of God can vary widely) and an ability and desire to communicate with Him; the main goal of mysticism is the union of the soul with God (Underhill 3, 6). Underhill summarizes mysticism by saying:

> What is essential is the way the mystic feels about his Deity, and about his own relation with it; for this adoring and all-possessing consciousness of the rich and complete divine life over against the self life, and of the possible achievement of a level of being, a sublimation of the self, wherein we are perfectly united with it, may fairly be written down as a necessary element of all mystical life. (4-5)

For mysticism, the atonement was problematic because it both taught that Christ corporately saved mankind on the cross and called for the individual to work towards spiritual growth and purification (Underhill 44-45). Yet Underhill argues that the Apostle Paul linked these two issues together and answered this crux for mysticism. Paul's

teachings on the atonement viewed the separate soul and the corporate "body of Christ" as two parts of a whole, and "they seem to us to conflict, only because the totality to which they contribute is beyond the focus of the mind" (47-48). Atonement therefore is both the victory of Christ and the victory of the individual, and these two victories are linked together (50). The cross of Christ is central, for it represents the goodness of God balancing out the equilibrium created by the badness of evil (53).

The *Ancrene Riwle* strongly emphasizes this mystic interest in the individual's personal relationship and communication with God. The crux of the story lies with the communication (or lack of) between the lady and the king. Although the king speaks quite eloquently, the text does not record a single word from the lady; she appears to refuse discourse with the king. She passively accepts the gifts the king sends her, she allows him to stand before her and speak to her, but she withholds communion with him. The king's ultimatum that she either reject or love him is essentially a command for her to form a personal relationship with him or be eternally severed from him. This relationship is presented as lover to beloved, not a king to vassal or God to worshipper. From the story, it is clear that the Christ-Knight strongly desires a romantic, intimate relationship with the lady, which parallels the mystic, transcendent relationship the individual soul should have with God.

I have thus described the foundation of the Christ-Knight figure and its central purpose as an allegory – to depict clearly the work of Christ in redeeming humanity from the Devil. I have also explored the presentation of the *Ancrene Riwle*'s Christ-Knight figure, how it emphasizes the newer "Doctrine of Atonement" redemption theory and

mysticism. For the final section of this chapter, I wish to refocus on the lady and the king within their proper context and explore the ending to the story. The author has shown how redemption is gained and what God desires from the individual soul, and the ending of the tale puts the focus on the individual reader, requiring the same decision from the audience that the king compels from the lady.

I have already argued that the lady represents the individual soul and the king represents Christ. There are numerous signal words and phrases that connect the lady of the story to a religious depiction of humanity: "besieged," "destitute," "earthen castle" (which signifies the human body). Just before the Christ-Knight story begins in the *Ancrene Riwle*, the author likens Christ to a king who woos a lady in a foreign land, who represents the Church (Saub 172). Likewise, there are signal words and phrases for the king, "king" being the key one. After the king dies and rises to life again, the author identifies the king as Jesus (173). From these descriptions, it is abundantly clear that the king represents Christ and the lady represents the individual human soul.

There is some difference of opinions among scholars about how the audience is expected to connect with the story, particularly whether readers are to identify with the king or with the lady. Rygiel says that the audience identifies emotionally with the king because his actions and responses are present while the lady essentially does nothing (354). She is present in the text in the sense that the narrator discusses her, but her character and actions are not well developed. The audience is to identify with the king because of his passionate love and resulting actions for the lady. Only when the king gives his final wooing speech and requires the lady to make a choice does it become clear

that the lady represents humanity and that the reader is expected to identify with her. Until that crucial point, the reader is detached from the lady; the reader sees the lady's faults, which indirectly model his or her own faults, but does not wholly identify with the lady (357-8).

Innes-Parker disagrees with Rygiel, saying that "at all points, the language of the parable compels the reader to identify with the lady" (518). The beginning of the text speaks of a lady in an earthen castle, which is comparable to the anchoresses who are cloistered in their dwellings and in their bodies (515). The individual reader, anchoress or not, is also enclosed in a body. The text calls upon the lady and therefore the individual reader to make an active choice to love God and respond to that love by kindling love in his or her heart; the author uses the metaphor of Greek fire to show that the reader should partake in vigorous spiritual warfare (517). Finally, the lady never gives the king her final response, and the reason she does this is because the question is left open to the reader, who must make the choice whether or not to love God. Because the lady does not respond, the reader identifies with the lady and answers to the question, thereby responding for her (Innes-Parker 518).

Rygiel's argument that the audience is to identify with the king is faulty; however, I argue that there is room for the audience to *identify* with the lady and *empathize* with the king. The reader identifies with the lady, therefore understanding that he or she, like the lady, has insensibly rejected Jesus' love and needs to remedy the situation by forming a personal relationship with him. The reader also empathizes with the king, understanding how tragic it is to love and not be loved in return. The audience is moved to love Christ

because his great sacrifice deserves reciprocal devotion and because there is no logical reason to reject him.

Because the audience empathizes with the king, this helps counter objections that some readers have with the tale. Elizabeth Robertson says that the story is male-oriented because the king receives all the praise while the lady is given only condemnation. Because the audience identifies with the lady, the response is guilt (72). However, Innes-Parker argues that because the audience sees just how sincere the king's love is and empathizes with his plight as a rejected lover, readers are more likely to feel thankfulness and love instead of guilt. The king's passionate, sacrificial love moves the audience to return that love joyfully, not love because it is the only decent response. Because the audience empathizes with the king, the reader is encouraged to kindle love in his or her heart, not guilt (515).

The author wants the audience to appreciate deeply how much Christ desires a personal relationship with each human, and the reader's double response of identity and empathy helps this come about. This relationship is coached in the terms of lover and beloved, which requires action and commitment from both parties. As a lover and a beloved, both the king and the lady must respond, act, and communicate with each other, representing the active, progressive relationship that individual souls are to form with God.

The reader's double response emphasizes connection and identification with the text, and the text's style also encouragers the reader to connect emotionally with the

story. Rygiel analyzes a passage that appears before the Christ-Knight story in the *Ancrene Riwle*, which he says shows that the author:

> prefers short simple or compound sentences with relatively little subordination; and he avoids entirely beginning a sentence with a subordinate clause, something which tends to characterize formal-sounding intellectual analyses. This writer wants connectedness felt, not analyzed. For he is trying to move his audience, not prove abstract truth to them. (346)

The king does use logical persuasion in his speech, particularly in pointing out that the lady has everything to gain by accepting him and everything to lose by rejecting him, but the king's main appeal to the lady is to her emotions. He woos her, the author says, with words so loving and sweet that it is a wonder any woman could refuse them (Saub 172). Finally, when logic and gentle words have failed, the king threatens the lady with the torments of hell, invoking her fears as a final effort to convince her to love him. While logically the lady should accept the king's love, the author does not focus too heavily on logical analysis because that would not produce the desired result. Both the king and the author want a passionate, wholehearted acceptance of the king's love, beloved to lover, not a detached, pragmatic resignation.

The text also emphasizes personal relationship and emotional connection by hinging the entire story on the lady's choice. Earlier in his speech, the king notes that the lady's love can be treated three different ways: she can give her love away freely, she can sell it, or she can have it forcefully taken from her (Shepherd 25). The king cajoles her to

give or sell him her love, but he does not threaten to take the lady's love by force if she refuses him. He chooses not to exercise the one option that would take away her free will, and he gives her the ultimate choice of choosing or rejecting him. Granted, the lady's only other option is hell if she ultimately refuses the king, but the king does give the lady the choice between himself or hell and does not say that he will take her love regardless of what she chooses. The lady does have a final choice because the story breaks off at the climax with the king waiting to hear what it will be. Until she has made her choice, everything hangs in tension.

The Christ-Knight story ends with the king waiting to hear the lady's response, and ultimately, to hear the reader's response. Because the story ends as it does, this moves the attention of the story off the lady's choice and onto the individual reader's choice. While the audience has been identifying with the lady and empathizing with the king, the end of the tale makes it emphatically clear that the individual reader must answer the king's question.

The end of the tale calls for personal repentance and movement towards God's love from the individual reader. Throughout the story, the audience has read about Christ's great love and supreme worthiness, and the individual then must make the ultimate decision between Christ's love and the torments of hell. This choice is framed in the context of accepting or rejecting a love relationship with God, salvation or damnation.

The Christ-Knight's tale in the *Ancrene Riwle* began millenniums ago in the Old and New Testament teachings about God's redemption of and interaction with mankind. The Bible provided the framework for the Christ-Knight figure by allegorizing God as

both a warrior-king and a warrior-lover. Precursors of the Christ-Knight appeared throughout the centuries until social conditions were ripe enough to make the Christ-Knight figure an easily identifiable allegory. Twelfth century theories about Christ's atonement and the newly instigated religious branch of mysticism provided the specific purpose for the Christ-Knight figure, which was to demonstrate clearly that God redeemed humanity by developing a personal, intimate relationship with individual persons. The chivalric code used romantic imagery to present the Christ-Knight figure in a way that mirrored the chivalric code, romances, and tournaments that were heavily influential to the medieval era. The Christ-Knight story in the *Ancrene Riwle* is not a conventional courtly romance because it contradicts too many conventions from this particular genre. In a way, Christ-Knight literature presents an entirely new class of "romance," one that engages the individual reader and actively draws them into the drama, instead of leaving the reader only to vicariously participate through the main characters. The reader can understand that this is fanciful allegorical story, but one rooted in a historical person and in Biblical truths, and it is a story that they are called to take part in.

Chapter Two

Roughly one hundred and fifty years after the *Ancrene Riwle* was written, William Langland finished the B-text version of his *Piers Plowman*, most likely around 1379 (Schmidt xxii). We now turn from the origins and first appearance of the Christ-Knight figure to the fourteenth century when the figure was a well-established literary tradition, particularly in religious writing. *Piers Plowman's* Christ-Knight is an important Christ-Knight figure to consider because "it differs from other appearances of this motif in a crucial way, leading many critics to describe the depiction of Christ...as original or problematic" (Warner 129). Warner states that Langland presented his Christ-Knight in a way that allegorized the two dominate medieval theological atonement theories to a much greater extent than any other writer had previously done (129). Langland's presentation is also unique because at certain points in the story he presents his Christ-Knight as Jesus but also gives him the resemblance of two other men who appear in the story, resulting in somewhat of a triple identity. Because of these unique aspects, many scholars have argued that Langland's Christ-Knight does not properly belong to that motif's category.

James Weldon argues that Langland drew off the imagery of the Christ-Knight figure because the medieval reader understood the figure and made the correct connections, but the figure itself is merely a basis for further elaboration, not an end in itself (115). Pamela Gradon agrees with Weldon and states that the Christ-Knight is the "allegorical narrative needed" but not sufficient on its own (75). Since Langland associated his Christ-Knight figure with Christ, Piers Plowman, and the Samaritan, Gradon argues that this triple association allows the Christ-Knight figure to become an

actual person which impacts the text in a way that the merely allegorical Christ-Knight figure could not have on its own (76).

Although these claims deserve consideration, I have argued in my introduction and first chapter that the Christ-Knight figure is based on a historical person and has a central purpose, which is to allegorize how Christ's death on the cross redeemed humanity from sin. *Piers Plowman* describes a knight who is Christ, and this knight dies and rises to life again to rescue souls – thus clearly fulfilling the requirements for a Christ-Knight figure. From that purpose, Langland presents his Christ-Knight figure differently from the *Ancrene Riwle* and from some other Christ-Knights, but uniqueness in his presentation does not detract from the figure's central purpose.

Like the *Ancrene Riwle*, *Piers Plowman*'s Christ-Knight both presents religious ideas and offers information about the cultural and religious atmosphere surrounding the individual author. *Piers Plowman*, however, borrows much more imagery from the surrounding world that the *Ancrene Riwle*. Two of the main cultural forces at work in *Piers Plowman* are political issues such as the Peasants Revolt and other class upheavals and the continued development of the chivalric code, particularly tournaments and romance literature.

In the religious sector, *Piers Plowman's* Christ-Knight had to contend with the church's official position on tournaments and the influence of the older "Devil's rights" atonement theory along with the newer "satisfaction" theory. *Piers Plowman's* Christ-Knight encompasses a wide panoramic view of fourteenth century English culture, offering the modern reader a broad field of insight into what events were unfolding

during Langland's time. While this large scope can be puzzling to modern readers, it presents a richly complex Christ-Knight figure presentation that exists as an active and solid personality within a set culture, and this personality brings restoration to many aspects of life, not merely spiritual. Langland's uniqueness in his Christ-Knight figure presentation works to bring the mysteries of the atonement down to a recognizable human scale, placing Christ as an easily identifiable fourteenth century English character who is the nucleus of spiritual, physical, social, and emotional life.

The Christ-Knight figure does not appear in *Piers Plowman* until Passus XVIII; however, there are references to Christ's birth and Passion scattered throughout the text. Passus XVII is important for the Christ-Knight figure because it provides a background for the Passion story and introduces the Samaritan, who becomes an important part of the Christ-Knight figure. After the main action in Passus XVIII, Passus XIX offers a final overview of the Christ-Knight figure and helps clarify questions about the previous scene.

In Passus XVII, the Dreamer (the narrator of the story) and *Spes* (hope) come upon a Samaritan who is riding to a joust in Jerusalem on the back of a mule named *Caro* (flesh). The Samaritan stops to help an injured man on the side of the road who has been attacked by robbers. Dreamer, *Spes*, and Faith follow the Samaritan, who says that neither Faith nor Hope was able to help the injured man without Jesus' sacrificial blood and body. The Samaritan tells them of a robber Outlaw in the woods that became frightened of the Samaritan and hid in hell; the Samaritan then proclaims that in three days, the Outlaw will be bound in chains and never again be free to harm people. After

explaining the nature of the Trinity using his own hand as a metaphor, the Samaritan turns his mule and rides forward to Jerusalem.

Passus XVIII is set in Jerusalem, and the Dreamer sees a knight entering the city who resembles both the Samaritan and Piers Plowman. Despite his eagerness to joust, the knight is poorly armed and equipped for the battle. The Dreamer questions Will about what is happening, and Will states that Jesus has come to joust for Piers Plowman, who has been taken by the "fend." However, as Jesus comes to the joust, the Jews rise up in revolt and began calling for his death. They crucify him, and he dies upon the cross. The other knights are afraid to touch Jesus' body, so they do not break his bones as they did the other two crucified men; instead they send the blind knight Longeus to pierce Jesus' side with a spear. Longeus does so and receives his sight back when Jesus' blood falls on his eyes. Sorrowing, the Dreamer wanders away and finds himself in Hell where he observes Mercy and Truth, two of God's daughters, debating the strange events. Christ appears in Hell and triumphantly harrows it, after clearly proving that he has the right to the souls and that Satan has no legal grounds for claiming ownershup.

In Passus XIX, the Dreamer falls asleep and dreams that Piers, resembling Jesus, appears before him, carrying a cross and dripping with blood. When Dreamer questions Conscious whether the man is Piers or Jesus, Conscious replies that the armor is Piers' but the man is Jesus. Conscious then elaborates on the two titles "Jesus" and "Christ" and what implications both of these titles have: "Jesus" refers more to kingship, specifically his role as the king of the Jews, and "Christ" stands for a conqueror, specifically the conqueror of Satan.

Because Langland's Christ-Knight is clearly identified with Christ and this figure performs knightly duties to provide salvation for humanity, Langland does not deviate at all from the Christ-Knight's central purpose. Langland does, however, present his figure differently from the *Ancrene Riwle* and, in some cases, from how other Christ-Knights are presented. I have identified five specific contrasts between the Christ-Knights of the *Ancrene Riwle* and *Piers Plowman*, and these contrasts help to elucidate what effect the passage of roughly one hundred and fifty years had upon the idea of the Christ-Knight figure and different aspects of medieval culture and religious thought. Within these contrasts, I will explore to what ends Langland made use of fourteenth century English culture and thought.

One of the first noticeable differences between the two Christ-Knights is that *Piers Plowman's* Christ-Knight fights a much more recognizable and detailed joust than the Christ-Knight of the *Ancrene Riwle* does. While in the *Ancrene Riwle*, it is highly likely that the Christ-Knight's tournament was a deadly, war-like battle, *Piers Plowman's* Christ-Knight rides in an event that is much closer the modern perception of the word "tournament," that is he rides forward to fight his enemy single-handedly from horseback while onlookers cheer and judge the event. Yet, Passus XVIII is not the only section of the poem that referrers to jousting; Langland scatters references to jousting and knights throughout the text, starting in the first Passus, I:98-99 by claiming that King David dubbed knights, foretelling Jesus' joust in Passus XVI:95, and giving Christ the title of "Jesus the justere" in XIX:10, among other passages that speak of knights and jousts. Some elements of the Christ-Knight's joust bear resemblance to the Round Table

tournaments that became popular during the Middle Ages. Since Langland specifically stated that his Christ-Knight has come to joust and Passus XVIII is set within a tournament scene, it is well worth the time to continue the discussion about tournaments introduced in Chapter One and identify how tournaments had developed throughout the centuries up to *Piers Plowman.*

Tournaments originated in war events roughly around the 1100's to help settle political issues and provide knights with combat training. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the center focus of the tournament was the *mêlée,* two teams of warriors fighting over a large swath of land. However, due to various problems such as the high death rate, the difficulty in regulating the events, and the danger of rebellion from the participants, the *mêlée* declined and a more individualized system of jousting gradually took over in the fourteenth century. This system became what is traditionally seen as the tournament, individual knights jousting against each other in a small area (Barker 13-15).

The basic system of the tournament as a regulated war games event became enormously popular, ranging over Western Europe, Outremer, and as far as Byzantium (Baker 7). However, by the middle of the fourteenth century, the tournament system was beginning to decline and tournament enthusiasts turned to other sources for inspiration and guidance. In the mid-thirteenth century, tournament enthusiasts began to use romance literature as models and started to emphasize pageantry and chivalry in tournaments instead of just knightly prowess and battle skills. Eventually the image of the Round Table became the most important borrowing from romance literature (Cline 204).

A Round Table tournament was by nature an entertaining spectacle, not a serious event for training or political purposes; it consisted entirely of jousts in a circular field and only blunted weapons were allowed (Cline 204). The more serious war games continued to be fought *a outrance* (with war weapons) but Round Tables were fought *a plaisance* (with blunted weapons) (Barker 15). Pageantry, ritual, the presence and involvement of women, and other imitations of chivalry were the focus of Round Table and entertainment jousts, so much so that the actual fighting often received much less attention (Cline 211).

Rodger Loomis pinpoints the 1223 crowning of Henry II of Cyprus as King of Jerusalem as probably the earliest definite event that showed how influential Arthurian romances were to the medieval period (80). Loomis says that there was a Round Table Tournament in Warwick in 1259 and another one held in the same location in 1279 (81). Ruth Huff Cline states that this 1279 Round Table was the first of such to attract scholastic interest, although Round Tables were practiced through Europe by 1279 (204). Round Table tournaments spread across Europe, and Edward III's 1344 Table marked the peak of the craze (207). However, Loomis states that the 1345 Round Table at Windsor was apparently the last recorded Round Table event in England, although the festivals continued in other countries, especially France (82).

By Langland's day, tournaments and the more specific Round Tables were a common, established part of culture. With Cline's claim that 1344 was the height of Round Table popularity, we can intelligently guess that Langland was born contemporary to the time that Round Tables were at their height and tournaments were commonplace.

Langland's use of tournament imagery for religious and social purposes was also commonplace. As I have stated before, the Christ-Knight figure was a stock literary image, and tournament and chivalric imagery particularly influenced religious literature. The Christ-Knight appeared in three types of clerical literature: service books, liturgy commentaries, and liturgical sermons (St.-Jacques 150).

Warner references a collection of late medieval sermons that used the imagery of the Christ-Knight figure within the context of Round Table tournaments, and he argues that these sermons could have been a source for Langland (129). These sermons focus on tournament imagery, Jesus' armor and his "disguise" in wearing it, and asked the question of why the Son, instead of the Father, became incarnate (130-131). In particular, the last question had heavy Round Table imagery, for one sermon likened the Trinity to three knights of the Round Table and their three shields. Christ had a shield of wisdom, and Satan touched this by promising Adam wisdom if he ate the forbidden fruit; this touching of Christ's shield was compared to a knight touching another's shield in order to challenge him (136-7). Warner argues that these sermons appear to have influenced Langland, and therefore it is inaccurate to claim that his Christ-Knight depiction is particularly original (129).

Because Langland does use elements of Round Table imagery for his Christ-Knight presentation, it is likely that he was familiar with the sermons Warner referenced and they very well could have inspired him. At the very least, Langland was part of an enthusiastic trend towards using tournament and Round Table imagery for spiritual purposes, yet he and other writers were working against the church's official position on

the actual tournaments themselves, which was extremely negative. Church leaders were concerned because tournaments offered too many dangers, both physical and spiritual. Tournament champions naturally profited from their activities, earning fame and wealth, and because of that "One of the commonest accusation was that tourneyers committed all the seven deadly sins" (Baker 72). Tournaments also had a high death rate, which worried church officials. Along with concern over individuals, the church was apprehensive that tournaments would attract attention and strength away from crusades (Baker 76).

Because of these concerns, the Council of Clermont issued a 1130 canon that forbade military sports. However, the canon did not use specific terminology, which provided a loophole for knights who could claim that they did not understand that tournaments were forbidden (Barker 5-6). The Third Lateran Council issued another stern condemnation of tournaments in 1179, this time specifically listing the word *turnoimentum* (Barker 6). Yet, since the term *hastitude* was the most common way of referring to war games, warriors could claim that they misunderstood the interdiction. Round Table tournaments and festivals also did not escape condemnation from the church: Clement V forbade Round Tables in 1313 (Loomis 83).

In England, the birthplace of the *Ancrene Riwle* and *Piers Plowman*, the tournament faced clerical and political opposition. Tournaments were banned during the reigns of Henry I and II but, despite the bans, tournaments still occurred occasionally in England (Baker 7). It appears that these political bans were as inefficient as the ecclesiastical bans because the games continued to spread throughout Europe despite rigorous opposition. In 1316, the church lifted the ban against tournaments, most likely

out of resignation to the inevitable conclusion that the bans were ineffective and also out of the gradual realization that tournaments could be directed towards useful ends (Baker 76). Internal disagreement within the church also helped break down resistance towards tournaments because many clerics did not agree with the ban and even participated with tourneyers (Barker 77-5). Barker comments that, "By the fourteenth century, the church had come to terms with the fact that she could not eradicate a sport which was so deeply embedded in knightly ideology" (82).

Thus from its beginnings before the *Ancrene Riwle* and roughly one hundred and fifty years after that to *Piers Plowman*, the tournament system had become the jousting system that is today generally classified as a "tournament." It took on a large amount of coloring and imagery from romantic literature, thrived in the face of vigorous bans by state and church, and found its way into medieval popular culture, religious writing, and thought. Langland's depiction of his Christ-Knight figure, which appears roughly half a century after the church lifted its official tournament ban, creates several important issues within the text. His presentation is particularly helpful to modern readers because it provides information about how tournaments had developed and spread in influence since the *Ancrene Riwle*. Even more so, Langland's use of the Christ-Knight motif is another firm example of how useful and practical the metaphor was in turning worldly ideas and imagery into solid religious means. Although Langland's Christ-Knight and the Christ-Knight of the *Ancrene Riwle* fought in tournaments as knights, their actions are spiritual and do not entice readers into committing any of the seven deadly sins that the church often blamed tournament warriors of perpetrating.

The jousting imagery and the Christ-Knight story in *Piers Plowman* also helps clarify the theology of Langland's Christ-Knight figure, how specifically Langland believed that salvation was accomplished through Christ's work. This brings us to the second comparison between the Christ-Knights of the *Ancrene Riwle* and *Piers Plowman*, and that is the two Christ-Knights' attitudes towards the joust. The king of the *Ancrene Riwle* only enters battle after he has tried otherwise to win his beloved's affection. It is only out of sheer necessity that he does so, and there is some indication that the cross would not have been necessary; the narrator claims that Christ could have redeemed humans through other methods, but he chose the cross to prove his deep love (Saub 174). In contrast, Langland's Christ-Knight rides forward eagerly to the battle. Passus XVII:50 says that the Samaritan was riding quite hastily to Jerusalem and XVIII:12 speaks of Jesus' eagerness for the joust. J.A.W. Bennett also points out the words *wole* and *shal* in XVIII:22-25 which emphasizes that Jesus both voluntarily rode in the joust and indicates that he was destined to do so (101).

As discussed in the first chapter, the older redemption theory focused on the "Devil's rights" and Christ's defeat of the Devil while the newer theory claimed that Christ provided satisfaction for mankind's sin, thus allowing God and humans to reform their relationship. Warner stated that Langland's Christ-Knight combines these two theories and presents them more dramatically and allegorically than any other Christ-Knight writer (129). The Christ-Knight story in *Piers Plowman* offers a vivid picture of Christ entering a battle with the Devil, and the story seems to be coached in war-like terminology. However, as I will elaborate on later in this chapter, Langland utilizes

imagery from both theories but he uplifts the newer theory much more than the older one. While Jesus does enter a battle, he does not actually physically fight, because he is crucified before he can joust against his opponent. There are several areas in *Piers Plowman* which clearly state that Satan did not have the right to the souls, and because of that, the joust is something more than a legal settling of a dispute. Despite his use of imagery from the older atonement theory, Langland follows the newer theory much more closely. The connections are more subtle, not as immediately apparent as imagery from the "Devil's rights" atonement theory, but a closer reading of the text brings these connections to light

The third different between the two Christ-Knights is that Langland's Christ-Knight is a much more recognizably human figure of the two. Langland elaborates on Christ's humanity and weakness while the *Ancrene Riwle* emphasized his powerful divinity without offering much information about his humanity. The king of the *Ancrene Riwle* is clearly a human man because he bleeds and dies, but the text describes him in terms of a mighty warrior who has no apparent weaknesses aside from his ability to die and his seemingly inability to not love. He overthrows his enemy and overcomes death by resurrecting himself, and he offers his beloved everything in heaven and earth in exchange for her love. The Christ-Knight story of the *Ancrene Riwle* elaborates on the powerful abilities Jesus has: he is able to heal sickness, forgive sins, restore virginity, and cleanse the soul. The entire story focuses on the omnipotent power of Jesus and from the beginning of the tale to the end he is presented as a mighty king with very little weakness about him.

But in *Piers Plowman*, the Christ-Knight appears not as an all-powerful warrior but as:

> Oon semnbable to the Samaritan, and somdeel to Piers the Plowman,
> Barefoot on an Asse back bootles cam prikye
> Withouten spores other spere; spakliche he lokede
> As is the kynde of a knyght that cometh to be dubbed,
> To geten hym gilte spores galoches ycouped. (Passus XVIII:11-14)

As he enters the city, the Christ-Knight does not immediately resemble the powerful king that he is in the *Ancrene Riwle*. This event obviously is the triumphant entry of Christ into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, but in both the Biblical account and *Piers Plowman*, Jesus rides a lowly ass and does not have the appearance of a conquering hero. Instead, in *Piers Plowman* the Christ-Knight resembles three different human men: the Samaritan, Piers Plowman, and Jesus. Both the Samaritan and Piers were not warriors but ordinary men, and Jesus initially appears to be unprepared for the joust at hand. Additionally, Passus XVIII repeatedly uses the name "Iesus" to emphasize the humanity, not the deity of the knight, and the title "Jesus" always indicates Christ's human nature (Bennett 101).

Langland's Christ-Knight is a definite human figure and, more specifically, he is associated with Piers the Plowman. This has important social and political implications, because Langland wrote the B-text version of *Piers Plowman* around the time of the Peasants' Revolt. In a brief survey of what was happening in England during Langland's day, James Dean reminds readers that fourteenth and fifteenth century English people

were largely tied to the land surrounding manors, and they suffered heavy political taxes and the demands of unscrupulous clerical members. While problems abounded and medieval writers blazed out moral condemnation and doomsday prophecy in their writings, Dean points out that most of these issues stemmed from the fact that financial and legal support was unfairly distributed (ix-x).

Out of these issues came medieval English political literature, and *Piers Plowman* belongs in the subcategory of Plowman Writings, which voices the complaints farm workers had about their superiors (vii). The Plowman figure was virtuous, restrained, and honestly poor, and his sober living shamed the excessiveness of clergy and the wealthy. The Plowman served as a political figure because his low status and poverty were factors that helped produce his virtue (xiv). Dean also says that one of the questions debated in fourteenth century England was whether nobility originated from bloodlines and inheritance or from the individual's character, and this question was both theological and politically important (viii). Langland presents his Christ-Knight in such a way that is directly relevant to these important social issues during his day. His Christ-Knight, although Passus XVIII:22 speaks of his "gentries" and nobility, does not ride into the city as a lavishly bedecked king lording over the onlookers but as a poorly equipped knight who resembles a plowman and a Samaritan. *Piers Plowman's* Christ-Knight is a clearly human figure and one who combines nobility with humility, lordship with serfdom, and divinity with humanity. Langland's Christ-Knight is not just a human figure but also a specific figure that is extremely relevant to its fourteenth century audience and one who embodies religious and cultural ideas and concerns.

Because Langland presented his Christ-Knight with a "triple identity," Weldon and Gradon have argued that Langland used the Christ-Knight allegory merely as a basis which conveyed the right mindset in the audience, yet the figure cannot stand on its own allegorical legs without its triple association. I argue that the Christ-Knight as Jesus alone would have fulfilled the figure's requirements and that is to portray clearly the process of atonement; Langland's Christ-Knight dies on the cross for the sake of humanity and rises again. While the Christ-Knight resembles Piers and the Samaritan at the beginning of Passus XVIII, these two identities fade away during the crucifixion scene where it is abundantly clear that "Jesus the justere" is the one sacrificing his life and harrowing hell. In the beginning of Passus XIX when the Dreamer asks if the "justere" is Jesus or Piers, Conscious reminds him that the man is Christ, wearing Piers' armor. Giving Jesus the resemblance of Piers and the Samaritan was not essential to upholding the Christ-Knight's central purpose, and Langland could have effectively communicated the process of redemption without bringing in the other two identities.

What the addition of Piers and Samaritan add to the Christ-Knight figure's presentation is lifting it out of its solely theological context (as in the *Ancrene Riwle*) and adding in important political elements. The *Ancrene Riwle's* Christ-Knight connected emotionally with its audience at a time where mysticism was popular, and Langland's Christ-Knight is associated with the peasant and middle classes who were uprising in revolt during that time period. Since Langland presents his Christ-Knight as resembling Piers and the Samaritan, this 1) helps prove this figure as one who is trustworthy and intimately familiar with the trials of the working classes 2) clearly highlights the

humanity of Christ and 3) emphasizes that God is concerned with both the spiritual and the physical well-being of people.

The *Ancrene Riwle's* Christ-Knight more closely resembles Old Testament depictions of God the Lover/Husband, while *Piers Plowman's* Christ-Knight has more in common with New Testament descriptions of Christ. The *Ancrene Riwle*, although it specifically states that the king is Jesus, has a Christ-Knight whose words and character resemble the way the Old Testament describes God the Father. The *Ancrene Riwle's* Christ-Knight is a lover, a wooer, and a mighty king, and the story is clearly allegorical and lyrical like the Old Testament; Langland's Christ-Knight is a much more human figure whose humanity sometimes momentarily overshadows his divinity. The storyline is present and dynamic, like the reporting style of the New Testament. While the *Ancrene Riwle's* narrator explains who the Christ-Knight is and elaborates on the work of redemption, *Piers Plowman*'s narrator, the Dreamer, reports the events as an eyewitness and leaves the reader to draw her or his own conclusions.

As I have argued in my introduction, there is a progression of ideas in the three Christ-Knight texts I chose, and this progression resembles the Bible's format in general, starting with the Old Testament and moving up to Revelations and restoration. *Piers Plowman* is in the center, providing a more New Testament view of the incarnate Christ who identifies with humanity and suffers as a human while still partaking of the divine nature. While the *Ancrene Riwle*'s Christ-Knight story has two main characters and focuses on individual salvation, *Piers Plowman's* Christ-Knight is much more corporate focused; he rides into a city full of people, interacts with different characters, and harrows

many souls out of hell. Langland's Christ-Knight figure resembles what the four Gospels report about Jesus' life and ministry on earth by showing Christ walking on earth, interacting largely with common people, healing, ministering, and ultimately dying on a cross.

A fourth reason that Langland's Christ-Knight differs from the *Ancrene Riwle*'s is that he does not fight for a specific lady. In contrast, Langland's Christ-Knight is jousting for a man, for Piers Plowman, because Will states that Jesus comes to "fecche that the fend claymeth, Piers fruyt the Plowman" (XVIII:19). Because of this, Raymond St.-Jacques says that Langland's Christ-Knight is only a fighter and not a lover (147). Wilbur Gaffney agrees and states, "the romantic features of the story are wholly discarded" (166).

Yet, I argue that while Christ is not a conventional lover in the sense that he does not have a specific maiden he is fighting for, love is not absent from this scene. Weldon claims that Langland modifies the romance element, not abandons it; the romance becomes humanity's response to Christ's sacrifice, which is the focal point of the story (116-8). Warner also adds that, "*Piers Plowman* is not unique in focusing on the atonement at the expense of the motif's romantic elements" (132). While the Christ-Knight scene does not have overtly romantic forms, Langland does give Christ an evocative and emotional speech segment in XVIII:366-370 where Christ proclaims his love for humanity before the gates of hell:

> For I that am lord of lif, love is my drynke,
>
> And for that drynke today, I deide upon erthe.

I faught so, me thursteth yet, for mannes souls sake;

May no drykne me moiste, ne my thurst slake,

Til the vendage falle in the vale of Josaphat

The allegory here is bit more pragmatic than in the *Ancrene Riwle*, for it is tied to physical, not spiritual or emotional, needs; it is coached in the terms of someone suffering from thirst, not from the pangs of unrequited love. However, the imagery is powerful, pragmatic or not. Physical thirst is a matter of life or death, and there is a sense that, like the Christ-Knight of the *Ancrene Riwle* who cannot but love, the Christ-Knight of *Piers Plowman* similarly cannot set aside his thirst for mankind's love. By using the metaphor of thirst for his Christ-Knight, this is one more example of how Langland presented his Christ-Knight within earthly parameters as a human man who experiences and sympathizes with the plights of humanity.

Langland's Christ-Knight is similar to how the New Testament describes the life and works of Jesus; he interacts with humanity in a more corporate, didactic way, dealing largely with crowds and dying to save many people instead of one singular person. He is depicted primarily in the context of Savior, unlike the Old Testament which often portrays God as a lover. Yet, emphatically, the Christ-Knight figure always dies out of love for humanity. It may not always be presented in terms of a romantic love between a man and a woman, but this certainly does not mean that the love element flees simply because the Christ-Knight does not have a specific ladylove.

The fifth and one of the most major differences between the two Christ-Knights is their identities. The *Ancrene Riwle's* Christ-Knight is fairly simple: he is a mighty king

who is later defined as Jesus. In *Piers Plowman*, the Christ-Knight carries a triple identity. In Passus XVII:49, a "Samaritan sittynge on a mule" rides into the story, whom Dreamer and *Spes* hail and journey with for a time. Throughout the Passus, the Samaritan speaks of the baby Jesus and the Trinity in the third person, not as if he was speaking of himself. Yet, in Passus XVIII, a knight rides into Jerusalem resembling both Piers and the Samaritan and wearing Piers' armor. In his confusion, the Dreamer must ask Faith who the jouster is, and Faith identifies him as Jesus (XVIII:19). Yet, the rider's semblance to Piers and the Samaritan makes it more difficult to determine his nature and character.

Priscilla Martin states that "Will sees the resemblance between Piers, the Samaritan and the one who rides into Jerusalem" (86). However, there is a deeper meaning than just mere resemblance, for each resemblance adds a particular meaning to Langland's presentation of his Christ-Knight, clarifying the figure's role and identity and tying it directly with different cultural and theological concerns. The Samaritan is the first concern, both socially and theologically. During Biblical times, Samaritans were the children of Jewish and Gentile intermarriages, and Jews and Gentiles alike usually shunned Samaritans; this somewhat resembles how plowmen were viewed during Langland's day. Since Jesus resembles the Samaritan and Piers Plowman, this strongly indicates that he is socially ostracized and powerless; he is associated with two despised social classes. This also echoes Isaiah 53, a passage that prophesies about the coming Messiah. Verse 3 states that, "He (Jesus) was despised and rejected by men...like one from whom men hid their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

Jesus' resemblance to the Samaritan also points to his healing and saving ability. Luke 10:25-37 tells the well-known "Good Samaritan" story: a robbed, wounded man receives help from a despised Samaritan after a priest and Levite had ignored the victim. Passus XVII:64-80 have the Samaritan performing the same actions. The Samaritan states that neither Faith nor Hope could help the man, and the man needed to eat and drink a baby's blood and body (i.e. take communion) before he could walk safely through the wood. Yet, the Samaritan does not merely say this and leave the man, but he binds his wounds and carries him to a hospital, showing that he has the ability to heal. By identifying Jesus as a Samaritan, this emphasizes Jesus' role as a healer and savior. Gradon argues that "The Good Samaritan is a type of Christ in his redeeming love, a typological metaphor" (74). But the Samaritan is primarily a healer; he both heals and foretells his healing by speaking about his incarnation. XVII:120 is cryptic for it records the Samaritan declaring, "Till I have salve for all sike – thanne shal I returne." This "salve" could very well be "salvation," the ultimate cure for spiritual sickness, but "salve" also emphasizes healing and rejuvenation. Because the Christ-Knight figure resembles the Samaritan, this emphasizes his ability to heal both physically and spiritually. His "salvation" heals the soul, but his work of "salving" the robbed man's wounds show that he is concerned with physical health as well.

Jesus also resembles Piers Plowman, an interesting concept that could be an entire chapter in itself, and this resemblance is directly linked to his incarnation and emphasizes his humanity. Bennett draws attention to the title *Petrus Plowman* which, he states, holds the central theme to the poem. The title is composed of two names: a scriptural Latin

name and a human English name, and these names become a synonym for the humanity of Christ. The cross is the climatic expression of Christ's humanity, acting as both the "axis and apex" (85). Passus XVIII refers to Christ as Jesus to emphasize his humanity, gives him the resemblance of the Samaritan to emphasize his role as the Isaiah 53 "suffering servant" and healer, and finally adds the resemblance to Piers Plowman to show Jesus' humanity and his identification with common people. Initially, Jesus is not presented as a mighty king or all-conquering warrior but as an ill-prepared knight, a despised half-breed, and a simple plowman.

Although the Christ-Knight resembles Piers and the Samaritan, he still maintains his primary identity as Christ. Despite his outward appearance and the social levels this appearance places him at, Langland does not allow his Christ-Knight to become simply a man. The jouster in Jerusalem is named "Jesus," and the townsmen welcome him as the Son of God. XVIII:22 says that Jesus will fight in his nobility, and line 26 reminds the reader that Jesus shares in God's divine identity.

By associating Christ with a plowman and a Samaritan, this allowed Langland another connection with fourteenth century Plowman writings which gave dignity and virtue to the common laborers and presented the Christ-Knight as both a theological and a political figure. Langland presented his Christ-Knight with a "triple identity," clearly implying that social stigma does not necessarily indicate personal character and innate worth. Langland's use of the Christ-Knight metaphor as a political figure indicates just how relevant and useful the figure was and how intricately it was linked to an array of earthly and spiritual concerns.

Jesus resembles Piers partially because he is jousting in Piers' armor; he wears Piers' "helm," "haubergeon," "*humana natura*," and "paltok" (XVIII:23,25) Not only does Jesus wear Pier's armor, but the armor is inadequate for the joust he is facing. Bennett points out that Jesus is "bootless, spurless, spearless" he is not wearing the metal shoes that knights used to protect their feet, nor does he have spurs or a spear (99). The "paltok" he wears is a tunic or cloak of sorts, but it is made of cloth, not metal (OED). The only armor Jesus wears consists of a helm and a haubergeon, which is a sleeveless, lighter weight mail jacket (OED).

Not only is he inadequately armed, but also Jesus does not even have the weapons he needs, neither offensive nor defensive. He does not carry a shield to ward off the blows of his opponents. He does not have a lance, which is crucial to the joust he is about to face. This is a joust, because the Dreamer specifically asks Faith, "Who shal Iuste wip Iesus" (XVIII:27). Another important weapon that Jesus is missing is a strong warhorse. He rides upon the back of a lowly ass, not upon the type of strong horse that a warrior would need to carry him and several hundred pounds of equipment thundering across the field. The Gospels report that Jesus rode to Jerusalem on the back of an ass, so in that sense, Langland is following traditional depictions of the Triumphant Entry. However, on the other level, the ass serves to reinforce the image of the badly armed, disadvantaged jouster.

This lack of armor and weapons is not unique in Christ-Knight literature, and Langland possibly drew this imagery from other sources. Bennett says that in *Piers Plowman*, Christ's "only weapons will be his sinless human nature" (101-102). However,

there is a historical tradition of the cross functioning as a weapon. St.-Jacques says that, "In the Postcommunion for the feast *In Inventione Sanctæ Crucis* and in the *Sequentia de Sancta Cruce*, the cross becomes the weapon with which Christ defeats Satan" (151). Martin also draws a parallel between Piers *Plowman* and *The Dream of the Rood*, where the cross functions as "the faithful retainer, and yet simultaneously the slayer, of Christ" (20). In the story, Jesus does not physically defeat his enemy by using the cross as an actual weapon, but metaphorically, the cross symbolizes a weapon that overcomes the Devil; by killing Jesus, it allowed him to win the battle and provide salvation for humanity.

Christ's inadequate armor also had a historical tradition. As we saw in the last chapter, the *Ancrene-Riwle's* Christ-Knight had only his human body for a shield. Other Christ-Knight stories depict the figure arming himself with fragile human parts or using the cross and the crown of thorns as weapons and armor. However, in *Piers Plowman*, the Christ-Knight wears specific armor, not merely human armor but armor associated with a particular person, Piers the Plowman. This borrowing from Piers is a ripe field for academic debate over what precisely Langland meant by dressing his Christ-Knight in the armor of a plowman.

Some scholars, such as Bennett, argue that Jesus wears Piers' armor in order to disguise his divine identity (102). This claim stems from a persistent medieval teaching, present both in the older and newer atonement theories, which stated that Satan tricked mankind into eating the forbidden fruit and therefore being dammed, and Jesus tricked the devil by disguising his deity with his humanity so that the devil would try to kill him

(Ashley 128). The trickster figure is a universal folklore figure, and the picture of both Christ and Satan as tricksters was popular from the patristic period to the sixteenth century, partially because the trickster archetype was deeply embedded in popular culture (126). Despite the fact that many influential church fathers such as Luther and Gregory the Great enthusiastically used this theory in their writings, trickster theory and trickster-oriented literature were aimed more at the lower classes and ecclesiastical orders (130).

At first glance, Langland appears to be using this "trickster" idea by having his Christ-Knight dressed in Piers Plowman's armor. He further emphasizes this when Mercy explains that Christ shall "bigile the gilour" and harrow souls out of hell (XVIII:159). Although Langland does seem to use the "trickster" motif, there is much evidence in the text which shows that disguising himself is not Jesus' main purpose in wearing Piers' armor.

If Jesus was attempting to camouflage himself, his disguise is apparently not functioning well because the people of Jerusalem clearly recognize his identity. When Christ rides into the city, Faith cries out, "*A! fili dauid!*"; the Son of David was a title for the coming Messiah (Finlay 15). The old Jews of the city cry out "*Benedictus qui venit in nomine domini*" (XVIII:17). Other characters in the story recognize the knight as Christ and enthusiastically welcome him into the city. In the middle of all this commotion, the Dreamer appears to be the only one confused about who the knight is, for he must ask Faith who the jouster is. Since so many people recognize the knight as the Messiah, Christ's "disguise" is inadequate and his identity and divinity are clear.

Piers Plowman's armor, instead of acting as a disguise to hide Jesus' divinity, actually works to emphasize it. Alison Finlay says that Christ's habergeon of *humana natura* is referring to the fact that his divinity is only revealed by him taking on human form and nature (20). Martin adds that Piers Plowman's simple arms and clothing allow God in the form of Jesus to interact directly with the world and sinful humanity (Martin 87). Despite his inadequate armor, Jesus triumphs and therefore reveals his divinity to a greater extent because he depended on his own power for victory and transcends the weak armor.

There is also a liturgical tradition about the Christ-Knight and his armor, which St.-Jacques points out. Both the phrases "*humana natura*" and "*consumatus deus*" say that Jesus' armor is his human body that he "borrowed" at his incarnation. This body is the same body he had during his crucifixion and battle with the devil: "Langland combines here, the ideas of armor, the Incarnation, and the Passion, a combination similar to that which appears in liturgical commentaries in connection with liturgical vestments" (St.-Jacques 154-5). St.-Jacques looks back to three liturgical commentators who wrote before Langland and associated different clerical garments with specific pieces of armor, finally concluding that:

> By the late thirteenth century all three interpretations had merged, allowing (medieval commentators) such as Durand to view vestments simultaneously as symbols of the Incarnation, the Passion, and pieces of a warrior's armor. Such a drawing together of all three interpretations provides a solid liturgical basis for Langland's borrowed armor. (156).

Reading from this light, one could in a sense associate Jesus' armor with priestly garments. Hebrews 4:14 names Jesus "the great high priest," and other passages such as John 1:29 name Jesus as the Lamb of God who was sacrificed to atone for all sin. While Langland might not have intended the comparison that St.-Jacques made, it is not unreasonable to see the connection in *Piers Plowman*. By wearing Piers' armor, Jesus can be seen as a priest officiating over the first communion service. The cross becomes an altar where Jesus performs the first communion ceremony by offering his own body and blood: sacrificing it on the cross, consecrating it at the altar, and bestowing it to his people.

Although Jesus is similar in appearance to Piers and the Samaritan, and this association emphasizes his humanity and connection with the common person, Langland is careful not to diminish Jesus' divinity and power. Jesus' armor could refer to clerical vestments, which may help remind the reader that this is no mere commoner. The word "*gentries*" in XVIII:22 states clearly that Jesus is nobly born but also that he has every character trait associated with "gentleness" (Bennett 100-1). While he may not initially look like a king, the Jews and onlookers recognize that the Messiah is riding towards them into Jerusalem.

Jesus' divinity is emphasized when Faith gives him the title "Lif" in XVIII:31. Jesus is "Life" and in contrast to his enemy Death. This title is also an assertion and functions as a challenge:

> A knightly challenger could properly pronounce his purpose in the terms Life uses; about them clings the colour of such manly *beots*, or vaunts, as

> Beowulf had made before fighting the enemies of man. Life is not saying that he will walk up to the Fiend, but that he will be alive and moving about; he is also rebutting the assertion of 1. 3 that *all* who live and move shall die. (Bennett 103)

Although Jesus' appearance may initially mislead some into thinking that he is a weak, untried knight, the onlookers' enthusiastic welcome of him by his proper titles and Faith's title of "Lif" foretells that he is mighty warrior who will conquer death and overthrow his enemy.

The onlookers' behavior show that Jesus' divine identity is clear, and his opponents also are well aware that this knight is much more powerful than he appears. There are three who will fight with Jesus: the Devil, False Doom, and Death. The Jews surrounding Jesus are not his real opponents, only envoys of the other three (Bennett 102). Dreamer asks whether "Jewes or scrybes" will fight with Jesus, making his enemies concrete, but Faith responds abstractly that "fend and fals doom" and "Deeth" are the opponents (XVIII:27-28). "Fend" refers to the Devil and his evil power displayed through wicked men, "fals doom" refers to Pilate's judgment and all miscarriages of justice that men make, and "Deeth" is the worldwide enemy of all mankind (Martin 84). The number three is obviously symbolic because it is the number of the Trinity. Since Jesus faces three opponents, their number hints at a mockery, or complete reversal, of the three-personed God. On a more practical level, three against one either indicates either an unfair fight or an extremely strong warrior who can defeat three opponents.

Later in the Passus, the Devil's speech in lines 294-305 throws more clarity upon this question of disguise. In these lines, the Devil claims that he had closely followed Jesus throughout his life, questioning him about his identity, attempting to overthrow him with sin, noticing that he was able to save men from sin, and striving to keep him alive because he suspected that Jesus would overcome sin if he died. From the Devil's speech, it appears that he was not absolutely certain that Jesus was the Messiah, but he believed his assumptions were correct and acted accordingly. In that sense, Langland could be alluding to the "trickster theory," as Bennett says he momentarily does so in XVIII:27-33 (102). However, the spectators are not mislead by Christ's armor, and it appears that the Devil only waits for conformation of what he innately knows is true: the knight is Jesus.

Jesus does not wear Piers' armor in an attempt to disguise himself, and his identity is clear. He is greeted with his proper title, and his enemies have outnumbered him three to one as if they wish to be certain of defeating who they know to be a mighty warrior. His armor reveals rather that conceals his divinity. Both his divine nature and human nature receive careful attention without one overshadowing the other. Jesus is both the human knight and the divine savior.

So far, I have focused more on the theological aspects of *Piers Plowman's* Christ-Knight. The figure emphasizes the humanity of Christ and his work on earth, vaguely parallel to the Four Gospels' account of Jesus' life and ministry. Since the Christ-Knight resembles Piers and the Samaritan, he is particularly relevant to various social issues burgeoning during the poem's creation. From the *Ancrene Riwle* to *Piers Plowman*, the Christ-Knight's presentation has changed from him being a Lover calling the individual

up to a higher plane of existence to a Savior descending to earth to walk amidst humanity and corporately bring salvation. However, while theological teachings are both the basis of and the purpose for the Christ-Knight figure, Langland uses romantic imagery extensively for his Christ-Knight figure. This imagery provides a non-religious purpose for some of the Christ-Knight's actions, such as wearing inadequate armor, but it also causes problems within the text that need answering.

While romance imagery is part of this Christ-Knight story, there is debate about how much influence romance writing had on *Piers Plowman.* Scholars such as Le May and Gaffney have explored the chivalric and romantic imagery behind the Christ-Knight figure, concluding that the figure sprung from these sources, but St.-Jacques looks to liturgical literature and claims that, "In all probability, then, the liturgy was Langland's source for his Christ Warrior-Knight" (157). While St.-Jacques has several important reasons behind his claim, the romance elements of *Piers Plowman* are important and should not be overlooked. As before, I argue that the Christ-Knight figure originated in religious ideas because it made for a useful and relevant allegory, but other sources influenced how individual Christ-Knight figures were presented in order to help the audience better connect with the message being taught. Romance literature was one influential source for Langland's Christ-Knight, and unlike the *Ancrene Riwle* which borrowed romance imagery but did not follow romance conventions, *Piers Plowman*'s Christ-Knight story partakes of both the imagery and many of the conventions of romances.

Some of the imagery surrounding Langland's Christ-Knight dates back centuries before romances started to appear. In *Piers Plowman*, Christ wears inadequate armor, and this follows ancient literary traditions of a warrior stripping himself of his armor before battle and fighting without protection. This motif of a hero entering a battle without armor or weapons appears in *Beowulf* and several Icelandic sagas (Finlay 28). When Jesus enters Jerusalem dressed in Piers' inadequate armor, this can be seen as a possible proclamation he did not need to rely upon armor for protection because he was mighty enough to defeat whoever stood up against him.

While I have argued that Jesus' is not disguised in Piers' armor and Langland is not subscribing to the "trickster theory," there are other scholars that would disagree with me. This debate could possibly stem from romance conventions; scholars such as Gaffney have argued that Langland's Christ-Knight is following the well-known chivalric romance custom of a powerful knight disguising himself so that his opponents will not recognize him and be afraid to fight him (156). Weldon says that, "he (Jesus) resembles more the 'fair unknow' of chivalric romances, whose status and identity are unknown or even mocked until revealed in subsequent deeds" (119). Jesus is also missing a physical shield, which typically displayed its owner's coat of arms to identify individual knights. However, although Jesus appears to be disguising himself, the context of the story shows that every onlooker in the event, with the exception of the befuddled Dreamer, understands that the knight riding forward is Jesus or at least perceives that this knight is much more powerful than he appears. This is one area where Langland, like the *Ancrene Riwle*'s author, subscribes to the imagery of romances without following through on the

conventions that imagery usually demands. Jesus has all the color of a "fair unknown" but the context shows that others are very much aware of his true identity. His opponents are afraid to fight him, and the onlookers recognize who he is.

There are several romance literature "catchphrases" in Passus XVII and XVIII which help further the romantic imagery in the Christ-Knight story. The text sometimes refers to the Christ-Knight spurring his horse forward; Passus XVII:351 says that the Samaritan "layard he prikede," which Bennett calls "a good romantic phrase, taken over by Spenser and Milton" (99). Passus XVIII:25 identifies Jesus as a "prikiere" which is a lightly armed horseman and is a word that appears during this time in *Morte Arthure* (Bennett 101). Bennett also says that the word "paltok," Piers Plowman's cloak, was starting to appear in romances by this time (101). In Passus XVIII:37 Pilate enters the events with the title *sedens pro tribunal,* indicating that he is in a judge-referee position who will ascertain that the joust is carried out under some semblance of order. When Pilate appears on the scene, he observes *doghtiliche* Death, which is a knightly, courtly description for a warrior (Bennett 103).

The joust that Jesus rides in is by far the most significant romantic borrowing in the text. Passus XVI:95 prophesies the joust by claiming, "And thanne shoulde Jesus juste therfore, and bi juggement of armes." Despite the fact that he is missing crucial armor and weapons and facing three opponents, Jesus has ridden into Jerusalem to joust and is eager to do so. Some of the jousting imagery of the Passus proposes that Jesus is riding in a Round Table tournament of sorts, although the description is nowhere complete. The joust is like a Round Table in that it is full of imagery and pageantry; Jesus

arrives in Jerusalem and the city dwellers enthusiastically welcome him with celebration and ceremony. Pilate's role as a judge of sorts is important because Round Table jousts and other courtly jousts typically had referees to ensure that the participants conducted themselves properly.

The joust begins like a Round Table tournament because it begins with pageantry, it is between a handful of fighters instead of a large battle, it apparently is judged and regulated, and some of the wording comes straight from courtly literature. A few Round Table elements continue as the story progresses; however, more serious matters quickly replace the pageantry and glamour of the tournament. Jesus enters the city with pomp and splendor, but the joust rapidly changes into a crucifixion.

While jousting imagery remains throughout the Passus, other aspects of the joust show that it cannot be identified solely as a Round Table tournament or even as a joust at all; "There is a textual warrant, as we have seen, for describing this contest as a 'joust'. But as the passus proceeds the 'romance' fades, the juridical colour grows stronger" (Bennett 104). Jesus jousts metaphorically but not actually; the Passion is seen as a joust and a battle, but Jesus does not defeat his opponents by physically knocking them over with a lance. As he enters the city as a jouster, the romantic imagery and pageantry of the joust quickly turns deadly in XVIII:39 when the Jews cry out for a crucifixion. The jousting scene becomes an execution scene, and violence and chaos overtakes order. Although the focus switches from the joust to the crucifixion, some jousting and romance imagery continues in the story.

One of the ways that the story keeps to some jousting imagery is by focusing on the repeating image of the jouster's lance; Jesus received death from three symbolic lances: the cross, the poisoned drink on a pole, and Longeus' lance. The cross is the first symbolic lance, and I have already mentioned that cross can be seen as a weapon according to liturgical teaching. The cross is a weapon that Jesus uses to overthrow his enemy, but it also functions as an immediate weapon for the Devil. Jesus is nailed to the cross, stabbed through the body as if impaled on a lance, and left to asphyxiate to death, thus dying from a symbolic jousting lance.

Jesus also receives death from a second "lance". While he is on the cross, the Jews lift up a drink of poison to his lips, an obvious parallel to the gall or vinegar that Christ drank on the cross. This is a mild jousting image because Christ is essentially receiving death from a pole as if he had been speared by a jousting lance. Bennett points out that the C-text suggests that the poison worked to prolong Jesus' life and agony, not shorten it (107). However, the B-text clearly names the liquid as poison and Jesus' "deeth-yvel" (XVIII:53). The imagery in the B-text version is that Jesus is nailed to a pole and drinking death from another pole, dying from the effects of two symbolic lances.

The third "lance" is blind Longeus' spear, which strikes Christ in the side and pierces his heart; "The centurion's spear has become a knight's jousting lance" (Bennett 109). Le May states that there was a well-known legend of Longeus piercing dead Jesus' side, and this legend originated in the earliest days of Christianity (39). Of the three "lances", this is the only one that actually strikes Jesus as a jousting lance would, but it does not technically cause his physical death since he has already died before Longeus

pierces him. Langland is careful to show in XVIII:85 that Longeus strikes Jesus in the heart. Bennett points out that "Langland writes *heart* rather than *side* partly doubtless out of alliterative necessity but partly because of its metaphorical force; the riven heart figures in illustrations of contemporary devotional pieces" (Bennett 87). Longeus strikes Jesus in the heart to absolutely prove that the physical heart has stopped beating and that the metaphorical seat of Jesus' emotions is broken.

The Jews send Longeus to pierce Jesus with the spear because only a knight was worthy to touch another knight's body, as Langland reminds the reader in XVIII:75-78. Both Longeus and Jesus are knights, but the two have remarkably different attitudes and actions. Jesus rides eagerly into the city, weaponless but spoiling for the fight ahead while Longeus is blind and reluctant to wound Jesus, crying out after he does so, "Ayeyne my wille it was, lorde, to wownde yow so sore!" (XVIII:88). Longeus is clearly troubled because he had no wish to harm Jesus, but his distress might also stem from the fact that his action of abusing a dead man is distinctly unchivalrous.

Faith condemns the Jews for their actions, and this condemnation is coached in terms of the chivalric code, which the Jews have violated (XVIII:92-101). Faith states that both sending blind Longeus to stab the helpless Jesus and mistreating a dead body are unknightly acts. Under the terms of chivalry, Longeus is now a "champion chevalier", a champion who gives himself up as a coward, and this term is rooted in chivalric vocabulary (Bennett 109-10). Since this joust has elements of a Round Table tournament, the "kene spere ygrounde" which Longeus was forced to carry onto the field could be

seen as a violation of the rules of the tournament which only allowed blunted weapons (XVIII:78).

Since the Jews have acted unchivalrously, Jesus, although he is dead, has won the tournament. In Langland's Christ-Knight presentation, Christ's defeat over the devil is coached in both chivalric and theological terms. In the actual crucifixion scene, Jesus' victory is accomplished through his opponents violating the rules of chivalry. After the crucifixion scene ends, the joust also ends and the Dreamer withdraws from the scene. The jousting image fades but does not entirely disappear; in Passus XVIII:180, "Pees" proclaims that "Jesus justede wel." In Passus XIX:10, the Dreamer asks about "Jesus the justere." In all, the jousting/Passion scene requires only 109 lines, and the remaining 324 lines of the Passus are devoted to explaining the theological meaning of the joust. After he has jousted and died, Jesus descends to hell and confronts the devil, and the subsequent scene explains what legal and theological effects the joust had.

Some scholars, such as Bennett, argue that this joust follows the older medieval theories of the "Devil's rights" and shows a picture of Christ overthrowing the devil in a joust. Bennett states that Langland saw the Passion in legal terms (95). He also says that the joust is like the Duel of Chivalry, which was standardized a few years after *Piers Plowman*. The winner could claim the loser as a captive, or if the loser had committed treason, the king was authorized to seize his lands (105). Lucifer claims in XVIII:276-279 that, "If he reve me of my right, he robbeth me by maistrie;/For by right and by reson the renkes that ben here/Body and soul beth meyne, bothe good and ille." However, there

is information in the story, particularly after the crucifixion, which indicates that Satan does not have the legal right over the souls.

After the Crucifixion, Christ stands before the gates of hell and argues his right to mankind with sound logic. He begins by addressing the "Devil's rights" theory. In XVIII:330-335, Christ argues that he has a double claim on the souls because they belong to him and came from him, and furthermore they were deceived by the Devil. Christ also argues in lines 338-345 that that his actions were completely just because he acted under the jurisdiction of the Old Testament law. This law both allowed for deceivers to be deceived and demanded payback for wrong. As I have previously argued, Christ is not truly disguised, but his mentioning of this rule invalidates any protests Satan might voice about having being misled by Christ's appearance. Christ's obedience to the old law falls more in line with the second requirement, that there be restitution for wrongdoing. Christ did not save souls by trickery but rather by ransomed the souls under the "eye for an eye" law. He atoned for mankind's sin by allowing the retribution to fall upon him, paying back for their sins, not by overcoming the Devil. Christ's actions and arguments prove that Lucifer's claim is false and that he no longer has any legal grounds for claiming humanity.

There are also elements of Langland prescribing to the "Devil's rights" theory before the Christ-Knight scene of XVIII. Martin points to XVI:95 where the text claims that Jesus shall joust to settle a legal issue and claims that "this sequence introduces a motif...Christ's 'joust' with the Devil to determine...who should possess human kind" (101). Yet Martin also identifies XVII:160-71 where Abraham claims that humanity lays

under the Devil's claim until Christ should come and pledge his life for human life. In this passage, Martin argues that:

> The Devil has the status of jailer, not one who has a legal right to possess humanity; he may have laid claim to humanity (I.278) but this gives him no legal right of possession. This passage suggests that for Langland the Devil's power was not absolute in itself, but that the Devil held humanity by God's permission, as a jailer. The 'legal forces' which prevent Christ from rescuing humanity are not his obligations to the Devil but to God. (102)

Martin's argument is particularly insightful and forceful. Whatever claims the Devil has made on the souls of mankind, Christ's final speech invalidates any of these claims.

Jesus' own words before the gates of hell also strengthen the argument that the joust was not to settle a legal matter. In XVIII:350-353, Jesus states twice that he ransomed the souls, and he amplifies this statement by declaring that salvation comes "thorugh raunsun, and by no reson ellis." Furthermore, in lines 348-363, Jesus speaks of "grace" four times, grace which acts as a countermeasure to Satan's deceit and treachery.

In summary, this is Christ's argument in XVIII:326-353. Satan first deceived humanity and stole it away from Christ although Christ had the right to souls since they belonged to him first and were created from him. Christ said that although his own law claimed that eating the "appul" would send men to hell, he also promised not to bind them in hell forever because they were deceived and therefore did not sin willfully. The Old Testament law allowed for deceivers to be deceived and for there to be "eye for an

eye" retribution. By sacrificing himself, Christ fulfilled the Old Testament law. Christ also fulfilled the New Testament law by saving through grace, for he proclaims that grace destroys the Devil's deceit. In line 350, Christ argues that his claim is doubly valid: he has the legal right to the souls because he has fulfilled the Old Testament law by sacrificing himself, and he also has fulfilled the New Testament by ransoming the souls through grace.

Although earlier passages appear to argue that the cross was a field of battle between Satan and Christ rather than a place of restitution, the Christ-Knight's speech in the latter part of Passus XVIII place the crucifixion outside of war terminology and into the context of ransom. The crucifixion itself is clearly a crucifixion and the actual joust/battle is metaphoric: Christ dies on a physical cross and the "lances" and other jousting imagery which affect him are symbolic. Langland uses the imagery from the older atonement theories and has his Christ-Knight act in accordance to what these theories and the Old Testament demanded. However, although his actions mirror the Old Testament law, Jesus' salvation comes about through ransom, grace, and satisfaction. The repetition of "grace" and "reason" throughout the Christ-Knight speech emphasizes this salvation. Christ only refers to fighting once in line 368, where he merely says, "I faught so;" the emphasis is upon *why* he fought, not *who* he fought, which he does not even name or mention.

Throughout *Piers Plowman*, Langland blends ideas and imagery from the older atonement theory with teachings from the newer theory, and there is a sense of a gradual development in the text: beginning with the "Devil's rights" and ending with souls being

harrowed because of the "satisfaction" theory. I argue that one way to see this somewhat puzzling mixture of ideas is to view the earlier prophecies of the atonement, which human characters and personified virtues make, as imperfect or incomplete understandings of the nature of the atonement. These predictions perhaps indicate what certain characters expected the atonement to be or offered only part of the information, but it is only until Christ dies upon the cross and rises again that complete knowledge is available, and Christ is the vehicle through which this complete knowledge is expressed. Christ's speech in Passus XVIII combines and completes these prophecies and expectations about the atonement, bringing divine knowledge and fullness to an event so eagerly anticipated.

As part of his speech before the gates of hell, Christ compares his actions during his life and crucifixion to Satan's deceit of mankind in XVIII:354-364, and his actions function as a counterpoint to Satan's. As Satan in a serpent's form deceived mankind, so Christ in a human form ransomed mankind. Adam ate from the forbidden tree and brought death to the world, and Jesus (whom the New Testament refers to as the "new Adam") brought salvation through another tree (the cross). This is important because it supports my earlier claim that Jesus did not wear Piers' armor solely to disguise himself. I have already shown how the "disguise" is flimsy, and this later speech shows that Christ wears Piers' armor partially in imitation of Satan's actions. Satan's disguise brought death and damnation, and Christ counteracts these devastating effects by mimicking him, thus fulfilling the Old Testament law and proving that Christ can turn Satan's own actions against him.

There is one more image in Christ's speech which deserves addressing because it supports the newer atonement theory. Christ speaks of thirst in XVIII:365-373, and this thirst is a metaphor for his love. Christ tells Satan to drink Death's poison and compares it to the love drink that he himself drinks which is revitalizing (Bennett 111). Christ states that "love is my drynke;" he suffered the cross in order to quench that thirst. On the cross, he received poison to drink, the symbolic second lance which helped to kill him. But this poison is transformed into a nourishing potion which quenches Christ's thirst because by killing him, the poison allowed him to die and therefore ransom his beloved people and slake his love-thirst. As the Lord of Life, Jesus is thirsty for the love of mankind, and he allowed himself to be crucified to satisfy this thirst (Bennett 110). The very poison that killed Christ's physical body slakes this emotional thirst.

This emotional thirst is also physical, and this image of thirst, Bennett says, is Langland's last jousting/knightly image in the Christ-Knight story. As a knight, Jesus would have been thirsty because of his physical activities, and medieval romances typically had images of knights stopping their activities to refresh themselves (Bennett 111). Jesus also states that he *continues* to thirst for mankind, "ne my thurst slake" (XVIII:369). For Jesus the jouster, there is still more action left for him to undertake. He has conquered the Devil and harrowed souls out of hell, but he will only be truly slaked when he returns to earth as a king and takes "all mennes soules" out of hell (XVIII:373). The image of Jesus the warrior-knight continues; he will be fighting, and therefore be thirsty, for mankind's love until he returns to earth at the end of times.

Thus from the *Ancrene Riwle* to *Piers Plowman*, we have a continued development in both the idea and the presentation of the Christ-Knight figure. The Christ-Knight figure remains consistent although theological trends, cultural forces, and the author's personal beliefs color the individual presentation of the figure. Yet, after studying the Christ-Knights of the *Ancrene Riwle* and *Piers Plowman*, it becomes clear that these individual presentations all center around one ultimate theme: God's love for humanity. This theme forms part of the basis for how individual writers presented the nature of the atonement. Redemption is either the result of love, as in the *Ancrene Riwle* where loving God brings salvation to the individual soul, or spurred on by love, as in *Piers Plowman* where Christ love for humanity moves him to redeem it. Sin hinders the love relationship between humanity and God: in the *Ancrene Riwle*, the individual soul rejects God's love, and in *Piers Plowman,* the Devil carries mankind away from God. The Christ-Knight's actions are correlative to the specific love relationship problem: he woos the heart-hearted beloved and rescues the hapless victim. All the atonement theories, theological teachings, and Christ-Knight figure presentations revolve around this central question: God loved mankind and wanted to restore his love relationship with it; how is it that the cross accomplished this?

Langland's Christ-Knight answers this question by carefully combining ideas from the two dominant medieval atonement theories. Langland addresses the "Devil's rights" theory, thus indicating that Christ restored the relationship by overcoming the Devil and rightfully taking back humanity which had been stolen from him. However, Langland subscribes to the newer "ransom" atonement theory to a much greater degree,

as evidenced in Christ's victory speech. Christ states in XVIII:353 that he won the souls back by ransoming them. This moves the atonement out of more impersonal legal terminology to a more intimate approach to salvation. Christ ransomed himself, allowing himself to be killed because of his deep love for humanity. To offer himself as a ransom, he descended to earth as a human man and identified with the outcasts and laborers of the day. His love for mankind led him not only to ransom himself for humanity but also to identify with humanity. Because of his sacrificial actions, human beings should be moved in turn to respond to Christ lovingly and thankfully.

Langland's presentation of his Christ-Knight figure is unusual to a certain degree, and this unusualness allowed Langland to integrate a wide scope of theology, popular culture, political issues, sermon material, and everyday ideas into his presentation, making his Christ-Knight story extremely relevant to a wide audience. To a much greater extent than the *Ancrene Riwle*, Langland's Christ-Knight story is a realistic allegory: it concerns peasants, plowmen, and travelers, not lords and ladies of a faraway land. In that context, Langland's Christ-Knight was highly relevant for its fourteenth century English audience, and it stands today as an interesting mosaic of cultural, religious, and literary imagery.

Chapter Three

At the close of her dissertation, Le May says:

> As one would expect, with the disappearance of Feudalism, with the waning of that ardent devotion inspired by the Crusades, with the passing away of Chivalry and knighthood, there was also an evanescence of the symbolic use of the term *knight*....after feudalism ceased to be the system of political organization...it is only at rare intervals that we find a writer who seriously symbolizes our Lord in chivalric guise. (77)

However, this is not to say that the glory of chivalry faded after Langland's time. On the contrary, Michael Leslie states that in England during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, chivalry resurged with considerable strength. Queen Elizabeth was often the center of this chivalric revival, proceeding over festivals and chivalric events as the unattainable virgin heroine (6-7). During this time period, there is one last Christ-Knight text to consider, and that is Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*.

As I mentioned in the introduction, Redcrosse is the most problematic of the three Christ-Knight figures. Redcrosse is undeniably human; he seeks adventures for his own glory, he falls into Errour's clutches, he is tricked into disbelieving Una's faithfulness, he must be taught and purified, and he must overcome many personal faults before he bears any true resemblance to Christ. Redcrosse is not a Christ-Knight figure equitable to the Christ-Knights of the *Ancrene Riwle* and *Piers Plowman*, and he does not fulfill all the requirements for the figure that I have established in this thesis. He is a human man, and his character is not based on the historical person Jesus but on the mythological figure St.

George. Elizabeth Heale flatly states that "Redcrosse is no Christ" (36). Graham Hough amplifies this statement, saying that Redcrosse is not Christ and does not become Christ at any point in the story (143).

While Heale and Hough have some basis for their claims, I have included Redcrosse in this thesis about the Christ-Knight figure for several reasons. I do not wish to argue that Redcrosse is a Christ-Knight figure equal with the *Ancrene Riwle* and *Piers Plowman*'s Christ-Knights, but I do contend that Redcrosse gradually develops into a Christ-Knight figure of sorts. Though he initially appears as a flawed human, Redcrosse matures throughout the text and takes on many of the characteristics and actions associated with the Christ-Knight figure. Both Redcrosse's character and place within the text undergo a "santification" until he bears unmistakable parallels to the Christ-Knight figure. Canto 11 of Book I offer the clearest picture of a proper Christ-Knight: Redcrosse battles a wicked dragon (a common metaphor for the Devil) for three days (similar to the three days Christ lay dead in the tomb) in order to free a land (associated with Eden) and to rescue a king and queen (symbolizing Adam and Eve) from destruction and enslavement (representing Christ freeing humanity from sin and death). During the fight, Redcrosse twice falls backwards into a symbolic death and resurrection, parallel to Christ's death and resurrection. On the third day, Redcrosse defeats the dragon and restores the kingdom. Canto 11 describes many distinct parallels between Redcrosse and Christ, and Carol Kaske claims that Redcrosse is fully identified with Christ on the third day of the battle (638). While I believe her statement to be slightly exaggerated, she is

correct in stressing a closer connection between Redcrosse and Christ, one that others such as Heale and Hough have dismissed.

Andrew King has insightfully pointed out that "Red-crosse is not equatable with Christ but rather represents the Christian's struggle to live in imitation of Christ" (153). This statement clearly summarizes both Redcrosse's identity and purpose within Book I. Redcrosse does not enter the text as a Christ-Knight figure; he is clearly a human man, and nothing in the beginning of the text allows Redcrosse to be confused with Christ. However, Redcrosse is a Christian knight, and his purpose is to live in imitation of Christ. This imitation finds its highest form in Canto 11 where Redcrosse resembles both Christ and consequentially the Christ-Knight figure, but this imitation must not be confused with a complete identification. As the Christian knight is called not to become Christ but imitate him, Redcrosse similarly is to imitate the Christ-Knight figure but not become the figure. His struggles in pinpointing his correct identity and then complying to it constitute most of his difficulties throughout Book 1, and these struggles directly parallel the individual Christian's difficulty with learning to imitate Christ.

While Redcrosse is not a solid Christ-Knight figure according to the standards I have established for the figure, this does not point to a failure on Spenser's part to create a Christ-Knight figure. Redcrosse as a hybrid or offshoot of the Christ-Knight figure motif is important, because his character not only addresses salvation and atonement but also grapples with the pressing question of how Christians are to properly live their lives. Redcrosse's battle with the dragon in Canto 11 is the climax of Book I, but it is quite obvious that before Redcrosse is able to restore "Eden" as a quasi Christ-figure, he

himself must be restored and matured into a proper Christian knight. Complementing other Christ-Knight writers who used the figure to allegorically present information about how humanity is saved, Spenser gracefully introduces a "Christ-Knight" who clearly depicts how a saved Christian is to live a proper, godly life.

Spenser's Christ-Knight figure effectively completes previous Christ-Knight literature by allegorizing atonement and sanctification, however this is only one of the several reasons I have included Redcrosse in this thesis. As a human man evolving into a Christ-Knight-like figure, Redcrosse represents the development in the interaction between humanity and God that I have discovered in the three Christ-Knight texts. In the *Ancrene Riwle*, there is spousal imagery that mirrors Old Testament depictions of God as the bridegroom and humanity as the bride. *Piers Plowman's* Christ-Knight represents the Gospels' account of God identifying with humanity by Christ becoming incarnate. *The Faerie Queene* offers a picture of a man becoming like God, thus obeying passages such as Ephesians 5:1 and I Thessalonians 1:6 which urge Christians to be imitators of God and Jesus. Redcrosse represents a final development in the interaction between man and God, culminating in a man taking on many of the aspects of Christ.

A third reason that I have included *The Faerie Queene* in this thesis is that its "Christ-Knight" story follows the Biblical chronological patterns I have found among the three texts. The *Ancrene Riwle* begins the story with Old Testament imagery about God and ends with a crux: does the lady accept the king's love or not? This crux is somewhat symbolic, similar to the Old Testament's anticipation of the coming Messiah and salvation. *Piers Plowman* brings a New Testament emphasis to the Christ-Knight figure,

presenting a very human Christ-Knight figure who interacts and identifies with humanity, similar to how the Gospels depict Christ's actions on earth. In *Piers Plowman*, the Christ-Knight brings salvation, but the story also leaves the reader with a sense of anticipation; Christ himself claims that his love thirst will not be slaked until he has returned to earth for a second time, and *Piers Plowman* ends in turmoil and confusion. The end of *The Faerie Queene*'s Book I is somewhat parallel to the book of Revelations, for Redcrosse restores "Eden" and the story provides a much better sense of closure and completion than the two previous texts. The restoration is not complete because "the wedding takes place but the Knight must return to Cleopolis to finish his service to Gloriana; heaven is seen and promised but the Saint must first live out his term on earth" (Nelson 150). Nevertheless, *The Faerie Queene*'s "Christ-Knight" story ends with parallels to Revelation and offers a clear picture of earthly restoration and peace.

Redcrosse is also important as a "Christ-Knight" figure because he represents a gradual integration of romance and theology which began in the *Ancrene Riwle* and finds its fullest culmination in *The Faerie Queene*. The Christ-Knight of the *Ancrene Riwle* is presented with romance imagery but acts in ways that often violates romantic conventions. Langland follows the romance genre slightly closer but still did not fulfill all the requirements of this genre in his Christ-Knight presentation. It is possible both Christ-Knights could have appeared and still remained valid allegorical figures without the romantic imagery. In contrast, Redcrosse and Book I of *The Faerie Queene* were dependent upon romance for structure and meaning (King 126).

A final reason I have included Redcrosse in this thesis is because of the historical context surrounding *The Faerie Queene*. We may safely consider Redcrosse to be one of the last "Christ-Knight" figures in English literature, and he is beyond the medieval background of his forebears. As a more modern adaptation of the Christ-Knight figure, I argue that Redcrosse's particular character was not probable within the medieval background in which the Christ-Knight first appeared because Redcrosse is both a universal Christian (i.e. Everyman) and a decidedly unique individual. Redcrosse's character evidences the post-medieval development of the idea of selfhood and the relaxation of strict social boundaries. In comparison, the two previous texts set their Christ-Knights within the context of social class distinctions. The *Ancrene Riwle*'s Christ-Knight story features a king and a lady, placing the main characters in aristocratic roles. *Piers Plowman* was heavily influenced by class struggles, and one of the story's main thrusts is that individuals can become dignified and holy regardless of social status. Redcrosse is a knight and he is obviously associated with a particular social class, but his place in society is not one of the text's primary concerns. Spenser's Letter to Raleigh introduces Redcrosse as a simple country lad who appears in Gloriana's court, and Redcrosse does not learn of his kingly ancestry until Canto 10. Redcrosse's identification is as a Christian knight, an Everyman figure, and a particular individual, and this identification is not bound up in a heightened sense of class consciousness and restraint. Redcrosse functions as an individual seeking to find his true path as a Christian in the world, not an individual learning to fulfill his role within a carefully defined social sphere.

Redcrosse's character also offers significant historical information about the Catholic and Protestant struggles that surrounded England during that time period. While the two previous Christ-Knights functioned as overall religious figures, Redcrosse in particular is a Protestant figure, and a study of his character must include consideration for the religious clashes Spenser experienced. While Langland brought in aspects of religious struggle by condemning the church for its excessiveness and hypocrisy in *Piers Plowman*, these issues were largely the result of powerful and unscrupulous classes abusing the weak and powerless classes. Book I of *The Faerie Queen* deals more extensively with doctrine than social standing.

All these above reasons have led me to include Redcrosse in this thesis about the Christ-Knight, and I shall hereon refer to Redcrosse as a Christ-Knight figure. For the sake of simplicity and focus, I have no intention of tackling all twelve cantos of Book I in this chapter. I will begin with the first Canto, for it offers the first view of the much-flawed Redcrosse and focus heavily on Canto 11, which describes Redcrosse's battle with the dragon. This enormous leap from Canto 1 to Canto 11 cuts out a tremendous amount of significant information, but it also provides a clear contrast between the flawed, rather foolish Redcrosse who begins his quest as an unprepared knight to the much more sober, mature Redcrosse who is finally prepared to fight the dragon.

Unlike the *Ancrene Riwle* and *Piers Plowman*, *The Faerie Queene* opens by introducing the Christ-Knight figure, and the poem devotes the first three stanzas of Canto 1 to describing him. From the beginning stanza, it is clear, as King pointed out, that Spenser was heavily dependent upon romances for *The Faerie Queene*, and

Redcrosse is the most "romantic" of the three Christ-Knights. Canto 1 abounds with romantic imagery, and stanzas 1 and 3 place Redcrosse within the context of a romance hero, complete with his lady and all the trappings of a knight-errant. At first glance, it is difficult to see the allegory and theological meaning of Canto 1 because romance provides both the scaffolding and coloring for the story.

Canto 1 begins with the line "A Gentle Knight was pricking on the plaine." Judith H. Anderson notes that this line has caused a considerable amount of raised eyebrows in academic circles because the problematic word "pricking" has both an innocent and a bawdy meaning. "Pricking" refers to rapid horseback riding, which contrasts to Una's slow ass and the dwarf which lags behind her on foot (166-7). Anderson also says that "pricking" has a figurative meaning of urging or compelling desire, force, or appetite forward (167). However, "prick" also has an undeniably sexual meaning, also seen in Chaucer and Shakespeare (169). Redcrosse's horse is rearing and foaming against the bit (1.6-7), and a moving horse was an Elizabethan metaphor for sexual energy; Redcrosse appears to be barely able to contain the horse (i.e. restrain his sexual energy) (Levin 4). A.C. Hamilton also points out the word "iolly" and "seemd" in 1.8: "iolly" has, among its many meanings, the sense of amorousness or lust, and "seemd" warns the reader that the poem is often inconsistent with distinguishing what is true and what merely appears to be (31). Redcrosse's vivid description in the beginning of the narrative clearly establishes the Canto's romantic context, but the ambiguous "seemd" and the sexual innuendo running through the first stanza make it unclear exactly what sort of romantic knight he is supposed to be. In one sense, Redcrosse could be a knight of purity and devotion as Book

I's title "The Legend of the Knight of the Red Cross, or Holiness" indicates; Redcrosse could also be a lusty knight bent on conquering dragons and maidens.

This ambiguity is also heightened by Redcrosse's armor. He is:

> Ycladd in mightie armes and siluer shielde,
> Wherein old dints of deepe woundes did remaine,
> The cruell markes of many' a bloody fielde;
> Yet armes till that time did he neuer wield: (1.1.2-5)

The first four lines of the stanza begin like a typical romance, "doggedly stereotypical," but the statement that Redcrosse did not dint this armor himself is particularly startling (Gless 50). Although this image does bear some resemblance to the common romantic motif of a knight disguised in another knight's armor, Redcrosse is not attempting to conceal his identity as a powerful knight so that other knights will not be afraid to challenge him. Instead, he is an untried knight wearing well-worn armor, and it is unusual in a romance to have an inexperienced knight wearing battle-tested armor (Lees-Jeffries 141). Redcrosse's horse is also rearing and straining at the bit, which hints that Redcrosse is an inexperienced horseman (King 149).

Although Redcrosse is the most "romantic" of the three Christ-Knights, Spenser, like the two previous Christ-Knight writers, does follow romance imagery but omits some of the conventions that this genre required. This is important because Book I of *The Faerie Queene* is not merely a conventional romance but an "adaptation of native romance to Protestant theology" (King 126). The story is not a mere romance but a

theological allegory, and Redcrosse as a Christ-Knight figure is not called simply to be a knight but to be a Christian knight and a Christ-like figure.

Spenser's Letter to Raleigh offers a background to Book I and places the characters and story in a more theological setting than is apparent in Canto 1. The letter describes Redcrosse as a "tall clownish younge" man who appeared in Gloriana's court and begged to be given a quest. When Una appeared in the court and requested that a knight come free her lands and parents from a horrible dragon, Redcrosse sprang to the challenge. Una eventually relented but warned him that he could not defeat the dragon unless he wore the armor she had brought with her. Only when Redcrosse dons this armor does he appear to be "the goodliest man in al that company." Although modern readers tend to use the letter as a guide to the poem, Gless states that publishers did not begin to use the letter as a preface to the poem until the eighteenth century (48-9). Instead of viewing the letter as a preface, Gless argues that readers should search Spenser's text for allegorical clues and not read it within the narrow constrains of what the letter dictates (48).

Lines such as "Yet armes till that time did he neuer wield" spur the reader on to searching for allegorical meaning in the poem (Gless 50-1). This line comes just five lines into Spenser's twenty-seven line description of Redcrosse, and it should alert the reader that more of these contrasts, by which Spenser may be signaling allegorical intention, are ahead. Redcrosse "seem(s)" to be a "iolly" knight, battle-tested and courageous, but he has not worn armor before and is obviously just beginning his career as a warrior. Although romance imagery permeates the beginning of Canto 1, romance

conventions do not allow for an inexperienced knight to wear battle-proven armor. Since this contradicts romance conventions, Spenser clearly must have a non-romantic reason for placing Redcrosse in the used armor.

Stanza 2 more clearly identifies Redcrosse's identity and the strange armor he wears. The 1596 edition of *The Faerie Queene* opens stanza 2 with the word "But," the conjunction that Spenser appeared to have intended, and "And" did not appear again until the eighteenth century (Gless 50, 225). "And" simply indicates further information while "But" hints at tension and contrast between the imagery in the first stanza and the meaning of that imagery in the second stanza (50-51). "But" also serves to further state to the reader that this story is not a conventional romance, and deeper meaning and allegory surround Redcrosse. "But" offers a better contrast to the first three stanzas of Canto 1 because stanzas 1 and 3 work together to present a typical romantic knight. The intrusion of "But" alerts the reader to the contrast that this is a particular knight, associated with Christ, and he is not intended to be taken as just another romantic hero.

Redcrosse bears a red cross upon his chest and his shield, which is a symbol of Christ's blood and cross and functions as the badge of a Christian warrior (Hamilton 31). These two crosses stand as constant reminders to Redcrosse of his "dying Lord" whom he loves "dead as liuing euer" (2.4). This line is a paradox, meaning not only that Redcrosse loved his Lord before and after his death, but it also carries the deeper meaning that "Christ dead is Christ living," and this paradox appears throughout Book I (Nelson 147). Redcrosse's badge and the appearance of Una and her milk-white lamb connect Redcrosse with the Legend of St. George story, and Legend and Book I of *The Faerie*

Queene both deal directly with salvation (150-1). From the first two stanzas, it is clear that although Redcrosse appears to have all the color and glamour of a hero straight from a good romance story, this romance is intertwined with spiritual meaning. Redcrosse is a knight, but a knight whose quest is bound up in holiness, salvation, and the truth, as is essential for a Christ-Knight figure.

Redcrosse bears the red cross on two specific and important areas: his breast and his shield. The cross is over Redcrosse's heart, the seat of his physical and emotional life; it symbolizes his emotional commitment to Christ and foreshadows the physical and emotional actions he will undertake as a Christ-Knight figure. *Piers Plowman*'s Christ-Knight was stabbed through the heart; Redcrosse will similarly "bleed" emotionally and bleed physically in his quest. Redcrosse also carries a red cross on his shield, and is the only Christ-Knight of the three who carries an actual shield instead of a metaphorical shield that is his body. Yet this physical shield also works to become a metaphor for Redcrosse's human body. The red cross on his shield and on his breast are both symbols of Christ's crucifixion and a personification of Redcrosse's name. Redcrosse is symbolically bearing the cross of Christ and, as a Christ-Knight figure, bearing his own human body and his own cross, thus in a sense carrying his body as a shield, in imitation of the two Christ-Knight figures. As a Christian, Redcrosse "takes up his cross" which verses such as Matthew 10:38 command, and he "symbolically bears the cross" (Hamilton 32). As a Christ-Knight figure, Redcrosse also symbolically carries his cross to his battle with the dragon, similar to Jesus bearing his cross to the crucifixion.

Redcrosse's armor is also the "armor of God" which Paul speaks of in Ephesians 6. The imagery is unmistakable in Canto 1, and Spenser clearly states that this armor is "the armor of a Christian man specified by Saint Paul v. Ephes" in his Letter to Ralcigh. The Ephesians 6 passage runs thus:

> Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

This passage, Redcrosse's identification as a Christian warrior, and his connection with St. George all provide a reason for why this inexperienced knight is wearing used armor, an image that the romance genre would not support. The armor that Redcrosse wears carries the sense that it is both armor he has borrowed from another person and his own proper armor. Many Christians in the past had fought in this armor, and Redcrosse received this armor from Una, and in that sense, it is "borrowed." Yet, this armor also functions as the "uniform" which all Christians are expected to wear. Redcrosse is a Christian warrior and this corporate, uniform armor properly belongs to him.

We have elsewhere seen Christ-Knights fighting in borrowed armor, but Redcrosse inverts the normal order; instead of God taking on the armor of man, we have man taking on the armor of God. Redcrosse arms himself not with a frail human body but rather protects his body with stronger armor. While the Christ-Knights of the *Ancrene Riwle* and *Piers Plowman* won their battles because of their divine nature and not because of their equipment, Redcrosse is completely dependent upon his armor in order to overcome the dragon. In Spenser's Letter to Raleigh, Una warns Redcrosse that he cannot succeed in defeating the dragon without it.

In taking on the armor of God, Redcrosse's identity is revealed, much as the two previous Christ-Knights donned the armor of mankind to reveal their divinity. Spenser's Letter to Raleigh states that when Redcrosse first puts on the armor, he is transformed from a simple-appearing fellow to a powerful-looking knight. Near the end of Book I, Redcrosse learns that he has descended from a line of Saxon kings but was spirited away by fairies and left to be raised by a plowman in Faerie land (10.65.1-9). The armor reveals Redcrosse's identity, but he does not transcend it as in *Piers Plowman.* The armor transforms him and functions as the acting agent in this transformation. While Langland's Christ-Knight graciously allows his armor to be worthy of him wearing it, Redcrosse must live up to his appearance and prove himself worthy of the armor he wears (Hamilton 31).

Redcrosse in the armor of God is an appropriate Christian figure, but his presentation includes elements of both Protestant and Catholic theology. Quite obviously, Spenser wrote *The Faerie Queene* during the Reformation while Catholics and

Protestants clashed bitterly, and these struggles are particularly visible in *The Faerie Queene*. Gless argues that Protestantism won slow ground over England, particularly because Elizabeth showed a disinclination to proselytize, and it was individuals who were responsible for England's gradual conversion to Protestantism. Among these, Gless offers Spenser as a probable force (10-1). As a Christ-Knight figure, Redcrosse's presentation offers clues about the social, religious, and historical context he was created in, and part of Book I's focus revolves around the Catholic/Protestant unrest during England at the time.

As King notes, it would seem more logical to have Book I revolve around a Catholic (works-oriented) theology, because Redcrosse performs noble deeds and actively works towards his sanctification (126). Heroic romances required powerful, self-sufficient warriors and would have little use for a weak, dependent hero (127). In contrast, Una chastises Redcrosse for relying solely on his own strength when he fights Despair (128). Nevertheless, King and other scholars have identified Redcrosse as a Protestant figure. King claims that Spenser was able to adapt the romance genre, and understanding this adaptation is key to understanding how Spenser used romance genre to support Protestant theology (126). Spenser reformatted romances by two means: he used the allegory of the "armor of God" listed in Ephesians 6 which allowed Redcrosse's physical actions to become God's actions working through him, and he used specific patterns in the romance genre that were particularly useful for presenting Calvinistic and Protestant theology (129). Redcrosse's purpose is not to act in his own powers, valiantly trying to attain salvation by works. Instead, he has been appointed to carry out God's

works, depending utterly on grace and spiritual guidance to direct his actions. Una reminds Redcrosse that he has been "chosen" (9.53.4-5), a loaded term with many possibilities; Una has chosen him as her knight, he has been chosen for salvation (predestined) and he has been chosen as St. George to defend the faith (Hamilton 123). Redcrosse is "chosen," which obviously parallels Calvinistic predestination theology, and he has been predestined for victory (King 148).

Yet there are Catholic overtones throughout Book I. Redcrosse, in the armor of God, performs works, undergoes a process of sanctification, enters the House of Holiness for a time of physical penance, and undertakes what appears to be sacraments in his two falls during the dragon fight. While various scholars have attempted to explain away the Catholic overtones with Protestant theology, James Schiavoni offers an insightful argument by stating that in Book I, Spenser allowed both human effort and supernatural grace to work together and similarly used predestination and free will both as operatives in sanctification and justification (176). Spenser, Schiavoni suggests, viewed Augustinianism in a way that no established church promoted and framed Book I around a theological view that combined grace, free will, sacraments, and predestination (178-9). He argues that, "Book I of *The Faerie Queene*, then, revolves around Spenser's reading of Augustinian theology, a pattern of free will operating paradoxically within the context of divine election and grace" (191). Redcrosse must perform works, but he does so in the armor of God, symbolically taking on the grace of God, and his faith, not his works bring about his salvation.

In the first canto of Book I, stanza 1 opens right in the middle of a romance, stanza 2 brings the reader's attention sharply on the spiritual allegory of the story, and stanza 3 moves right back into the story's romance. Once the reader has learned of this knight's identity as a Christian knight in Christian armor, the romance of stanza 3 is somewhat surprising. As a Christian knight, Redcrosse is not bound on a fight against spiritual foes but instead "Vpon a great aduenture" (1.3.1) where he hopes to win glory for his Queene Gloriana and himself. Although his hope is in God, his greatest earthly desire is to win glory and his queen's grace, and he longs to prove himself in battle. Not until the last line of the stanza is Redcrosse's foe mentioned, a dragon, which has some spiritual connections with being a metaphor of the devil, but the entire coloring of the stanza is within the context of a romance. There is very little in stanza 3 to indicate that Redcrosse is a Christian knight and functioning as one.

There is, however, a great deal of information in this passage which reveals that despite his identity as a Christian knight within a romantic context, Redcrosse misunderstands his role and wishes to become a romantic knight. While Spenser effectively marries theology with romance, Redcrosse in effect takes the romance allegory and backdrop and overemphasizes it to the point that the religious significance and seriousness of his quest sometimes become secondary matter. Although Redcrosse is bound on a quest to defeat a dragon, he rides into the story as a romantic knight-errant searching for adventure (Lees-Jeffries 141). Later in stanza 5, the reader learns that Una has recruited Redcrosse to defeat the dragon that is ravaging her homeland, but stanza 3 indicates that Redcrosse is more interested in seeking after adventure and gaining glory

than defeating the dragon. Spenser's Letter to Raleigh also indicates that Redcrosse's primary interest is seeking adventure as a romantic knight. Redcrosse begs Gloriana for an adventure and wishes to fulfill Una's plea for a challenger apparently because she is the first person who presents an adventure to him.

Rosemond Tuve apparently finds no difficulty with Redcrosse's interests in being a romantic knight because she claims that Redcrosse is both Gloriana's and Una's knight, and part of Redcrosse's responsibilities as Gloriana's knight is to win honor for himself and her. Tuve states that "the two fidelities do not collide" (347). However, these fidelities do clash in the early part of Canto I when Redcrosse faces his first opponent, Errour.

In stanza 6, a storm erupts and Redcrosse and Una withdraw to the woods, partially to escape the storm, but also because doing so is a conventional action of a knight seeking adventure. Lees-Jeffries points out that "it is because Redcrosse mistakenly wants to be a romance hero, a knight *errant*, that he enters the 'wandring wood' (Lat. *errare*, to wander) and hence that he encounters *Errour*" (142). When Una warns him to turn away from Errour's den, Redcrosse ignores her urging and marches forward into danger. This scene marks the first collision between Redcrosse's responsibilities to Gloriana and Una. While he may be fulfilling his loyalties to Gloriana by seeking adventure, he is momentarily abandoning his loyalties to Una. He ignores her wishes, and his rash battle with Errour might deprive Una both of her champion and her protector, leaving her stranded in a perilous wood.

Because of his own willful error in dismissing Una's better judgement and placing his own desires to become a romantic knight above his true quest, Redcrosse encounters Errour, the embodiment of his previous actions. In this context, Lees-Jeffries states, Errour represents the romance genre, a genre that Redcrosse is seeking to align himself with. Her long coils wrapped around him are like the never-ending tangles of a romance plot (142). While there is more metaphoric meaning to this battle than Redcrosse's misunderstanding of his identity, Lees-Jeffries statement is insightful, particularly because of further details Spenser provides in the story. Redcrosse becomes entangled in Errour's "traine" which Hamilton highlights as a word carrying the sense of deceit (36). Redcrosse wishes to become a romance knight, but he has been somewhat deceived about this identification. Only when Errour, the representation of romance, wraps herself around him does he realize the danger of this single-minded pursuit and is forced to realizes that the very thing he wanted may result in his death. This sudden clarity is most likely what causes Redcrosse's "great perplexitie" (1.19.5), a word that has a moral connotation of distress (Hamilton 36). Redcrosse has every right to be morally distressed; if he dies in Errour's clutches, he deprives Una of her champion and himself of life, he dies far from his true quest as a Christian knight, and he fails in his attempts to become a romantic hero.

Lees-Jeffries argues that in the Errour battle, Redcrosse is "still the *miles Christi* in his theological essence" (142). However, there is some debate about whether Redcrosse is a Christian at the beginning of the text. In the dragon fight in Canto 11, scholarship has traditionally argued that Redcrosse undergoes a baptism on the first day,

and some have taken this to indicate that he is not a Christian until that point. In Redcrosse's battle with Errour, there is little in the story to remind the reader that Redcrosse is a *miles Christi*. King points out how little light shines from Redcrosse's armor into Errour's cave, symbolizing Redcrosse's weak dependence upon spiritual strength (111). When Una urges Redcrosse to "Add faith vnto your force," Redcrosse responds, not by praying or invoking any spiritual aid, but with *gall* (jealous anger) *griefe* (anger) and *high disdaine* (1.19.6, Hamilton 36). Una's admonition may be spiritual, but Redcrosse responds with his own strength, tightening his resolve and calling upon his own reserves, not on a spiritual source: "Spenser carefully avoids any suggestion that Redcrosse overcomes Errour by adding faith to force through an act of will" (Dughi 26). As a Christian knight, Redcrosse's anger would be better directed at himself for falling into a trap of his own making, but instead his anger is reserved for Errour.

The question of whether Redcrosse is a Christian in the beginning of the text is best left to Canto 11's discussion, but for now it is sufficient to say that Redcrosse is a Christian, albeit a poor one at this point of the tale. He is wearing the armor of a Christian man, as Spenser states in his Letter, and it is logical to say that only a Christian can wear this armor. Stanza 2 also gives many clues that indicate Redcrosse is a Christian. He wears a red cross to symbolize Christ his lord, obviously indicating that he has sworn fealty to God and serves him. His hope is in Christ, and he looks to Christ for help (1.2.6). Redcrosse is a Christian, but an immature one. He has yet to wield his new armor and he foolishly approaches Errour when he is unprepared for the fight he has instigated.

Redcrosse is the picture of a Christian maturing into a Christ-like figure, and at the beginning of Canto I, he is clearly quite immature as a Christian warrior.

As a Christian, albeit an inexperienced one, Redcrosse is able to defeat Errour, but he still has not rid himself of his desire to become a romantic knight-errant. Lees-Jeffries argues that as Redcrosse fights Errour, her offspring hamper his movements and although they do not harm him, they do distort him "in a generic or textual way" because he continues to desire to become a romantic knight for the first half of Book I (142). Although Redcrosse does defeat Errour and thus symbolically kills "the romance monster which he has sought (and perhaps even summoned)" she continues to corrupt him even after her death by essentially making him exactly like the person he wanted to be, a romantic hero, for the first half of the book (Lees-Jeffries 142).

Una's praise to Redcrosse in stanza 27 is puzzling because although she warned him not to confront Errour, she applauded his effort after his victory. Una praises Redcrosse, repeating the words "you" and "yours" to emphasize his worthiness of the armor he wears (Hamilton 38). Although Una urged Redcrosse to remember his faith during the battle, her praise is reserved solely for his own efforts and not for God's work through him. Una does mention that Redcrosse was born "vnder happie starre" which could refer to predestination (1.27.3). Redcrosse's foolishness, though misguided, resulted in some good. He has proven himself in battle and gained new prowess and power. Apparently, Redcrosse has also gained some sense from his battle because after killing Errour, he and Una leave the woods on the straightest path (1.28.2-5)

Nonetheless, as Lees-Jeffries has pointed out, Redcrosse has not escaped completely unharmed from his battle with Errour. Once he has exited the woods, he immediately sets out to seek more adventure as a knight errant instead of finding out the quickest path to his true quest: the dragon fight. Una and Redcrosse come upon Archimago, and Redcrosse inquires if Archimago knows "of straunge aduentures, which abroad did pas" (1.30.9) Redcrosse's desire to be a romantic knight and seek out adventure leads to his questioning Archimago, who responds that he knows of a creature who is destroying a land. The creature Archimago describes is the dragon that is ravaging Una's homeland, but Archimago's description places Redcrosse solely in the context of a knight-errant, not a Christian knight (Hamilton 39).

Archimago offers the travelers a night's rest in his house and, while they are asleep, summons several evil spirits, one that assumes the shape and manner of Una, and one that fetches a false dream from Morpheus. Asleep, Redcrosse finds himself in the middle of amorous dreams, which hearken back to his earlier description as "iolly" (1.1.8). Sexual imagery infuses Canto 1, not only in Redcrosse's description but also in the storyline as it unfolds. Of the three Christ-Knights, Redcrosse is the only one who encounters sexual temptation. The *Ancrene Riwle*'s Christ-Knight is a lover, but his speech is chaste and he fights out of love, not lust for his lady. *Piers Plowman's* Christ-Knight does not even have a specific ladylove. However, Redcrosse has Una, his beautiful traveling companion, and one who offers a certain amount of sexual possibility if not outright temptation. The storm that breaks out over the travelers hints at the sexual temptation Una and Redcrosse face in the woods, particularly as the dwarf lags behind

and leaves them to travel together alone (Levin 5). Once inside Archimago's house, Redcrosse is inundated with sexual temptation.

Anderson points out that when Archimago tempts Redcrosse with the dreams, these dreams originate in the knight's own mind and represent his failure to align his own natural impulses and energy with truth (171). Like his rearing horse which he can barely restrain, Redcrosse similarly has a shaky hold upon his sexual energy. The work "prick" in the beginning of the first stanza foretells Redcrosse's later difficulty in reconciling the various inclinations and problems he comes up against (171). Redcrosse "seemd" "iolly," and he is "iolly" in the sense that he has a natural inclination towards sexuality that he has difficulty mastering. In Archimago's house, he does master his sexuality somewhat by not taking advantage of the false Una's advances; however, his rage at finding "Una" and a squire in bed together is surely heightened by his barely-contained desire. Only Archimago prevents Redcrosse from killing the two lovers, and in the morning, the knight abandons the true Una, believing her false (2.6.7-9)

In just the beginning of Book I, Redcrosse commits two serious mistakes because of his desire to become a romantic knight instead of a Christian knight with a higher quest than seeking adventure. While his lust for adventure led to a near-fatal encounter which ended in some good (battle experience for Redcrosse), his natural human lust and his difficulty in placing it within the proper context results in him divorcing himself from his true quest to slay the dragon and striking out on his own as a knight-errant. In the beginning of Canto 2, Redcrosse is enraged at Una and clearly not interested in expending himself for her sake. By abandoning Una, Redcrosse has abandoned his

mission and his true identity in favor of his desire to become a romantic knight, and in a very real sense, he has also rejected the Christ-Knight figure his character is supposed to mirror. He has completely inverted the Christ-Knight genre, fulfilling the romance imagery at the expense of the Christ-Knight figure's central purpose. As a result, Lees-Jeffries says that "Redcrosse becomes a traditional and superficially quite successful knight errant, but as a misguided and unsuccessful Protestant...he travels further and further from the true end of his quest as a knight of holiness" (142-3).

As both the Christian knight Redcrosse is supposed to be and the romantic hero he wishes to be, Redcrosse is nowhere near a perfect example of either. By abandoning his true quest for a quest of his own desire, he has essentially failed both identities as a Christian knight and a romantic knight. Redcrosse is unsuccessful as a romantic knight because he is dependent upon his armor, and ultimately on the grace of God, for success instead of having the physical strength and fortitude to fight in his own power. Yet as a Christian knight, Redcrosse is unskilled at calling upon spiritual aid when he needs it.

Although Redcrosse does begin badly, both the Christian tradition he is supposed to follow and the romantic genre he is wanting to follow provide him with ways of redeeming himself. As a Christian knight, Redcrosse has been predestined to salvation and victory over the dragon. His blunders and rash actions do not ultimately hinder him from fulfilling his destiny. Just as his rash battle with Errour resulted in victory and goodness, Redcrosse's misguided behavior at the beginning of Book I ultimately does not hinder him from conquering the dragon. As a Protestant Christian, Redcrosse is predestined to succeed. Yet, as Schiavoni noted, Spenser juxtaposed elements of

Catholicism with Protestantism, and Redcrosse must actively work to bring about his sanctification, with varying measures of success.

The romance identity which Redcrosse is bent on following also provides some excuse for his earlier actions and project that he will eventually find his way back to the right path. Redcrosse, like many romantic heroes, was born of a noble lineage but raised in obscurity until a later time when his true heritage is revealed to him. This is important because medieval romances stated that nobility is a gift of birth, not a prize to be won (King 148). Despite Redcrosse's problems and flaws, he was born with the correct lineage and therefore has been given the gift of nobility; he is destined to fulfill the role conferred upon him.

Because Redcrosse was raised in obscurity by a plowman, his character follows the "Fair Unknown" romance motif, and he is something King calls a "displaced youth" that is a nobly-born young man raised by commoners and separated from his true inheritance (146). Not only is Redcrosse displaced, but also King insists that he is "one of the most displaced and dispossessed of all heroes" because the Fall of mankind nearly wiped out of his mind the fact that he originated in the image of God (149). King says that this "displaced youth" theme allows Redcrosse some connections with the historical Christ. Both Redcrosse and Christ were born in obscurity and away from their true fathers, raised in humble surroundings, given a higher calling, accepted a mission, and became saviors of helpless people (153).

As a "displaced youth" of noble birth, Redcrosse will eventually rise to fulfill his destiny, but while he is attempting to find his rightful path, his noble birth also provides him with a certain amount of freedom in his actions. King states that:

> In the romances of displaced male youths, we saw (and will continue to see) great value attached to aristocratic birth as the prerogative of chivalric nobility; even if the character's behavior is boorish or incompetent because of his displaced upbringing, his birth ensures that he will eventually regain his correct place in society. (83)

Thus Redcrosse is allowed to start out on a quest which he expects to personally gain from, falling headlong into rash battles, hastily rejecting Una and accepting Duessa, and tripping over the other pitfalls that plague his path. As a "displaced youth" Redcrosse is predestined to eventually overcome his personal problems and become the man he was born to be. For the romantic genre, Redcrossé cannot help but succeed because he was born of noble lineage.

From this rather haphazard beginning, Redcrosse ventures across Book I, eventually shedding his determination to become a romantic knight and gradually assuming his true role as a Christian knight who is prepared to fight the dragon. In Canto 10, Redcrosse undergoes a spell of spiritual training in the House of Holiness, receives his new name as St. George, the patron saint of England, and learns of his true heritage. In Canto 11, after a multitude of adventures, hazards, and battles, Una and Redcrosse have at last approached Una's homeland and the dragon that ravages it.

The identification of this land is directly bound up in Una's identification. From the first Canto, we learn that Una is descended from royal bloodlines whose kings and queens ruled the east and west (1.5.4-5). Hamilton points out line 6 "And all the world in their subiection held" refers to Genesis 1:28 when God granted the dominion of the earth to unfallen man (32). Furthermore, Hamilton claims that the "natiue soyle" Una speaks of in 11.2.1 is an exclusive title for Eden (123). Una's land represents Eden, a world where sin is absent and human nature is uncorrupted (137). However, the land is destroyed because of the dragon, similar to how Eden was destroyed after the serpent's deceit (Hough 144). Although Una's parents are not specifically named, the imagery surrounding the land heavily indicates that they are Adam and Eve.

As Redcrosse and Una approach the "brasen towre" (11.3.2) where Una's parents languish, the dragon is alerted to his challenger because Redcrosse's glittering armor shines brightly. This contrasts to how poorly it shone in Errour's cave, when it made merely a "litle glooming light" (Hamilton 137). When Redcrosse comes forward to meet the dragon, his armor is glistening supernaturally, "heuen with light did fill" (11.4.8). However, while Errour sought to flee the pale light of Redcrosse's armor, the dragon races forward to challenge him. Light and darkness function as long-standing metaphors for righteousness and sin, and Redcrosse's shining armor reflects his state of holiness. He has reached the end of his destined quest and he is standing under the sun; the sun alludes to God and also Christ the "son," placing Redcrosse in his correct location in regards to his relationship with God and his duty as a Christian knight.

The chain of events in Canto 11 is as follows. When Redcrosse first encounters the dragon, the pair has a brief skirmish before the dragon bears the knight and his horse away to another area. Redcrosse wounds the dragon under his left wing, thus preventing him from flying, and the dragon wrests the spear out and snaps it. In retaliation, the dragon unhorses Redcrosse, which places both contestants on equal footing (Hamilton 141). The dragon spurts flame at Redcrosse that so overheats his metal armor that Redcrosse, almost mad with pain, frantically wants to disarm. The dragon strikes Redcrosse and sends him tumbling backwards into the well of life which can restore the dead. Night falls, and Redcrosse springs to his feet the next morning, revived and renewed. He takes up the fight and the dragon pierces his armor with his tail, stabbing Redcrosse in the shoulder. Redcrosse retaliates by slashing part of the dragon's tail off and receives a second burst of flame in return. Redcrosse steps back in order to move away from the flame and slips a second time, falling underneath the tree of life and remaining there for the night. On the third day, Redcrosse rises again, fresh for battle, and is able to destroy the dragon.

This story is not original; Redcrosse is obviously a picture of St. George, (he is given the title of St. George in 1.10.61), and both characters battle with dragons in similar ways. However, Nelson states that no writer contemporary with Spenser would have thought that St. George's legend made for a respectable story model. By Spenser's time, Nelson claims, the legend had become so inflated with comical overtones and impossible action sequences that it had become ludicrous. Yet, Spenser was able to take the essential

ideals of the legend, particularly devotion and valor, and use these elements for more serious ends (150).

Redcrosse had another predecessor in the Middle English romance *Bevis of Hampton* (King 130). Redcrosse's fight with the dragon is quite similar to Bevis'. Many of the descriptions of the dragon remain consistent, and Bevis falls twice into a well, like a dead man, but it restores him completely (131). King contends that Spenser clearly wanted to show that both this battle and Redcrosse are different from other wars and warriors (136). Although Bevis makes a perfunctory prayer to God, he nevertheless fights the dragon in his own might and receives all the praise for conquering it (140). Redcrosse, though a mighty warrior, is utterly dependent upon the providence of grace to win the battle (137).

It appears that Redcrosse, like Bevis, also shows somewhat of a dependency, at least in the beginning of the fight, upon his own strength and not God's. On the first day of the dragon fight, Redcrosse is not in the complete armor of God for he does not use his shield (the shield of faith) until the second day (Hamilton 142). In particular, the Ephesians 6 passage states that the shield of faith does not merely *deflect* objects, but it *extinguishes* the "flaming arrows of the evil one." Without this shield, Redcrosse is both burnt directly when his beard catches fire and embroiled in his own armor, leaving him with only the desperate desire to take off the blazing hot armor (Kaske 609). This scene is a paradox to earlier in Book I when Orgoglio the giant defeated Redcrosse because the knight was not wearing his armor; here in Canto 11, Redcrosse's armor is in danger of killing him (Hamilton 142).

This paradox is troublesome because the armor of God that Redcrosse wears, rather than protecting him, is severely harming him. One interpretation could be that Redcrosse's first fall represents baptism and therefore Redcrosse is not a Christian until this point in the story. After his fall and renewal, 11.36.4 speaks of his "baptized hands," perhaps pointing to his recent baptism. But, Gless points out that "the hands are not said to be *newly* baptized (166). Kaske also remarks that Redcrosse is a "recent graduate" of the House of Holiness, and it seems quite odd that such a person would not be a Christian (610).

The solution to the above scholarly argument lies back in the previous ten cantos of Book I. The cantos clearly present Redcrosse as a Christian warrior, not a perfect, sinless being but a Christian able to overcome the proclivities of his corrupt body. He is not the picture of God incarnate, not a verifiable Christ-Knight picture, but rather a reversal, man becoming deified, taking on the character and nature of God while still under the influence of a physical, fallen body. By Canto 10, Redcrosse is a mature Christian, fit for spiritual battle, not because his faith is faultless but because he has an internal, renewable, fount of spiritual force. This is further indicated by Una's actions; she had aided him in his battles with Errour and Despair, but she withdraws during the dragon fight, symbolizing that Redcrosse is able to fight solely in the strength of this inward spiritual source (Dughi 29).

Redcrosse's struggles, faults, and actions during Canto 11 do not indicate that he is not a Christian, but instead show that however sanctified and mature he may be, he is still very much human. Kaske focuses on the image of flame in the story, noting that

many Christian writers, from St. Paul to Hooker, have taught that Christians live in sinful bodies, and concupiscence (either involuntary inclination or purposeful action) is a permanent condition. Fire and flame stands as widely known metaphors for concupiscence, and the dragon's flame which ignites Redcrosse's beard hearkens to this parallel with lust; "The whole incident of the spark seems to be a development of the universal metaphor of sin as fire" (Kaske 610-11). Redcrosse's fight with the dragon, on one level, is his attack against his own lecherousness which he has struggled to master from the very beginning of Canto 1. This struggle is not indicative that Redcrosse is not a Christian, it is a sign that he is alive and still trapped in a human body.

The armor of God surrounding Redcrosse suddenly becomes a heat trap, nearly boiling him to death. This paradox is troubling, but, as noted before, Redcrosse does not use his shield (the shield of faith) until the second day of the battle. Redcrosse is enflamed in his armor, but he is decidedly not wearing the complete armor of God, and Ephesians 6 emphasizes this completeness, commanding Christians to put on "the full armor of God." Redcrosse has, for some reason, momentarily abandoned the flame-extinguishing shield of faith, and he is in agony as a result of his own actions, not because the armor has failed him. This section is rich with Protestant theology: Redcrosse is performing works, but he is not performing these works with the shield of faith. Without faith, the armor becomes deadly. It has functioned somewhat, protecting his body from the dragon's blows, but it is completely inefficient against the dragon's flaming fire. To return to Kaske's argument, Redcrosse is battling his own concupiscence and he does so without the shield of faith. As a result, he unable to stand up against his own

sinfulness. Without the shield of faith, Redcrosse cannot utilize the armor of God (truth, righteousness, peace, salvation, etc.), and the armor works against him by mortally overheating him.

It is also interesting to note that at the same time Redcrosse abandons a crucial element of the armor of God, he takes up another traditional knightly weapon that is not mentioned in Ephesians 6: a spear. The dragon's hide is nearly impenetrable, and Redcrosse must use three men's strength for it to be effective in wounding the dragon under his left wing; this triple strength is the strongest force that a man can produce naturally (Hamilton 140). The dragon attempts to fly, either to escape Redcrosse or gain a better position, and finds his wing unusable. Only when he cannot escape does he shoot flame at Redcrosse, perhaps in retaliation for the spear wound. While the spear does wound the dragon and prevent it from escaping readily, Redcrosse wields the spear naturally, not supernaturally, and it appears to be the catalyst that produces the flame of fire. It is apparent that even as late as the first day of the dragon fight in Canto 11, Redcrosse has still not completely given up his desire to be a romantic knight. He has foregone one of the weapons of a Christian warrior for a knight's spear, and he wields this spear with his own strength, not divine strength. The spear is unable to protect him from the dragon's flame, and it has perhaps triggered the flame. Redcrosse loses this spear when the dragon breaks it, and this loss parallels the other two Christ-Knights who also did not carry spears. In all three Christ-Knight texts, the spear is not ultimately essential to the battle.

Embroiled, staggering, and near death, Redcrosse falls backwards into the well of life, and Gless states that readers can understand the dragon's flame and Redcrosse's agony as manifestations of grace (164). Though the dragon momentarily triumphs and reduces Redcrosse to near death, this temporary defeat allows Redcrosse to tumble involuntarily back into the well. Grace has allowed the dragon's victory and Redcrosse's resulting agony because both result in Redcrosse's fall, which restores him. Similar to his misguided fight with Errour, Redcrosse's faults do not hinder his ultimate purpose, and grace is able to work to bring about greater good despite of, or perhaps because of, Redcrosse's errors.

The well of life has been traditionally interpreted as baptism (Dughi 21). Redcrosse's fall into the well of life is a symbolic death, parallel to Christ's death, and Redcrosse as a Christ-Knight figure also "dies." His first fall has a very strong color of death about it; right before he tumbles into the well, he is "Faynte, wearie, sore, emboyled, grieued, brent" (11.28.1). He is beyond despair, desiring only death, and the dragon fulfills this desire by striking him heavily (Hamilton 142). Redcrosse is tottering on the brink of death, and the dragon's final blow appears to have been the death stroke. Spenser does not emphatically state that Redcrosse *is* dead, but stanza 28 indicates he is dying. Since Redcrosse falls into a well, he most likely fell down *underneath* the ground in a symbolic burial, and the well is the well of *life*, in contrast to his "death." After a night of soaking in the well of life, Redcrosse springs up "new-bourne" (11.34.9). His *felix culpa* has resulted in restoration, renewal, and regeneration.

The imagery of the first fall heavily suggests baptism; however, this reading is troublesome because it would appear to mandate that Redcrosse is not a Christian until that moment of battle, an argument I have already addressed. Instead, Dughi argues that the well is a compilation of three different Biblical "wells": the river in Eden, the well of life Jesus offered the Samaritan woman in John 4:1-14, and the water of life which issued from the throne of God in Revelations 22:1 (29). The well is not primarily a baptism that restores Redcrosse; rather, it is a source of grace that invigorates his faith. This is particularly important since Protestants of Spenser's era believed that faith, not sacraments, brought salvation (30-1). The well of life is a well of grace, and its faith-restoring properties are precisely what Redcrosse needs at this hour. He has not taken up his shield of faith and because of that omission, he has become severely wounded to the point of death. Grace has allowed the dragon to win, which sends Redcrosse falling into the well of life, and grace is also in the well, restoring Redcrosse to health.

When Redcrosse rises again the next day, his body has been restored to health and he has symbolically been "reborn": appearing stronger than he was before, which leads the dragon to wonder if another knight had replaced Redcrosse (35.4). While Redcrosse and the dragon struggle for many stanzas before Redcrosse can wound the dragon during the first day, Redcrosse springs up on the second day of the fight and immediately strikes a wound on the dragon's head.

On the second day, Redcrosse takes up the shield of faith and is finally outfitted in the full armor of God, but the dragon's sting pierces the shield and penetrates Redcrosse's shoulder (11.38.6-7). This is also a problematic crux; once again, Redcrosse's armor has

failed to protect him even though this time he has taken on the full armor of God. The armor has also become another encumbrance as when it nearly embroiled him to death on the first day. Redcrosse not only has the dragon's sting embedded in his shoulder but apparently has his shield of faith also fastened to him, perhaps partially driven into his body and thereby hindering his motions.

Kaske interprets the sting as also pertaining to the sin that the Christian must struggle with throughout his life. The sting relates to Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (II Cor. 12:7), which is often translated to be the sin of lust. The sting also is mentioned in I Corinthians 15:55-56, "Where O Death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin." Kaske states that Augustine translated this sin as concupiscence since the law provokes it (613-4). Both these passages and the association with the dragon's sting point back to Redcrosse's earlier and long-standing struggle to master his own sexual impulses. However, while the flame of fire burnt away any last desire Redcrosse had for continuing the battle and living, the sting wounds Redcrosse but he remains "more mindfull of his honour deare" and strikes off five joints of the dragon's tail (11.39.1). Redcrosse's shield has been pierced and he has been wounded, but he fights back, against the dragon and his own propensity towards sin.

While on the first day the dragon sought to overthrow Redcrosse, on the second day the dragon fights to destroy Redcrosse's shield of faith. After piercing it with his sting, the dragon wraps his claws around the shield and seeks to wrest it from the knight. Redcrosse fights back, not so much seeking to destroy the dragon but to win back his

shield of faith. He manages to strike off the dragon's paw, but the claws still remain embedded in the shield as a reminder of the dangers of sin.

The dragon again shoots flame at Redcrosse, perhaps again in retaliation for his injury. Redcrosse has won back control of his shield and this time the flame does not harm him quite as much. He is injured and overheated by the flames, yet he still maintains some control over the situation. He moves "backeward for his best defence" indicating that, unlike the first fall, he still has a desire to fight and defend himself (11.45.3). When his foot slips on the mire and he falls under the tree of life, he is not longing for death but rather petrified that his actions will bring him dishonor. Despite this, the second fall is also a symbolic "death" because Spenser clearly states that the tree saved Redcrosse from death (11.48.9). It is apparent in Redcrosse's second fall that his body has been nearly overcome, but unlike the first fall, he has retained some control over his mind and will.

The tree is similar to the well of life, traditionally associated with communion (Dughi 21). However, Spenser does not indicate that Redcrosse either drinks the tree's balm or eats its fruit, which would symbolize communion. Instead, the imagery suggests that Redcrosse is restored by an external balm, not by internal consumption (33). To further emphasize this point, this tree is associated with the tree of life in the garden of Eden, and therefore it is particularly important that Redcrosse not eat from the tree and therefore commit the same sin that damned Adam and Eve. The tree of life is a reminder of Eden, the paradise that was lost, and Redcrosse's fall symbolically brings him back to

the garden and restores him to his original state. By killing the dragon, Redcrosse restores "Eden" and by falling under the tree, he himself is restored.

Whereas the tree of life has some sacramental imagery, its central function is to amplify the work of the well of life. The well of life transformed Redcrosse into a new man and it is able to bestow life and heal chronic diseases such as sickness and old age. The tree of life transforms Redcrosse from new man into an even greater man; the tree is able to give happier life, not merely life, and the tree is able to treat mortal wounds while the well cures less serious wounds (Kaske 637).

When Redcrosse rises up from under the tree, he appears in his fullest representation as a Christ-Knight figure. I have previously mentioned Kaske's claims that Redcrosse has a "complete identification with the risen Christ" on the third day of the battle (638). Kaske supports her argument by saying that the Christ symbolism of the story's structure would only require that Redcrosse be a Christ-figure on the third day of the battle (during the harrowing of hell) not on all three days (630). Redcrosse fought the first day of the battle without his shield of faith and symbolically dies when his own sinfulness and actions overcome him. On the second day of the battle, Redcrosse attempts to imitate Christ by overcoming the dragon but, "A 'sting of death' which 'is sinne' would not get 'stuck' inextricably in a hero who typified Christ" (Kaske 630). The second day of the battle leads the reader to expect a Christ figure although Redcrosse is not quite at that level yet (614). Finally on the third day of the battle, "Red Cross is contrastingly sinless and successful and represents Christ" (634).

However, I wish to modify Kaske's statement somewhat because while Redcrosse becomes a Christ-Knight-like figure on the third day of the battle, he still maintains his identity as Redcrosse/Saint George. He quite obviously shares many unmistakable connections with Christ on the third day of the battle, and all of the faults and problems that plagued Redcrosse on the first two days of the battle are notably absent. In comparison to the previous two days, the third day of the battle is surprisingly short. Redcrosse rises up from the tree in stanza 52 and kills the dragon a stanza later. Redcrosse is not wounded nor does he receive any wounds, and his first and only blow kills the dragon (Kaske 630). The dragon (representing the sin of concupiscence) cannot even touch him on the third day, and Redcrosse is able to defeat it without being affected by it.

Redcrosse kills the dragon without incurring any harm, stabbing the dragon through the mouth as it rushes upon him. The dragon's furious momentum appears to aid Redcrosse's blow by sending the dragon rushing forward into the blade, and the lines "The weapon bright / Taking aduantage of his open iaw" (11.53.5-6) indicate that Redcrosse's weapon acts independently as it severs the dragon's mouth (King 137). Hamilton suggests that the weapon could be Redcrosse's spear (147), however, 11.22.3 clearly states that the dragon broke this spear. More importantly, Ephesians 6 does not mention a spear as one of the weapons of the Christian warrior. Redcrosse kills the dragon with the sword, the "sword of the Spirit," and the sword appears to act independently. On the third day of the battle, Redcrosse appears as the idealized Christian warrior and a Christ-Knight-like figure, and this appearance allows the armor of God he

wears to reach its fullest effectiveness. It protects him from any injury, and it kills his foe. Redcrosse wields the weapons, but stanzas 52-53 do not offer a detailed account of his human actions; the third day focuses on the dragon's defeat, not Redcrosse's knightly deeds.

In the last two lines of Canto 11, Una hurries to Redcrosse's side with words of thanks, "Then God she praysd, and thankt her faithfull knight/That had atchieude so great a conquest by his might" (55.8-9). The "his" is deliberately ambiguous and can refer to God or Redcrosse (Hamilton 147). The "his" can also be seen as referring to God and Redcrosse together. On the third day of the battle, Redcrosse appears as a Christ-like figure, retaining his identity as Redcrosse at the same time that he clearly imitates Christ. Redcrosse has conquered the dragon in his human body, representing the incarnate Christ and his work in the physical world, but Redcrosse has ultimately succeeded because of supernatural, not earthly powers. In effect, as a Christ-Knight-like figure, Redcrosse's human body functions as the physical means through which divine power interacted with the natural world. When Redcrosse fights in his own power on the first day, he is overcome and grace saves him, both by allowing him to fall into the well and restoring him once he has fallen. On the second day of the battle, he attempts to emulate Christ but he is not a Christ-Knight figure during that time and he falls again under the tree of life. One the third day, Redcrosse rises up as a Christ-Knight-like figure and is able to defeat the dragon through the exercise of his inner spiritual source. This source acts upon his body, guiding the sword of the spirit, but the sword appears to also be guided by a spiritual source that amplifies Redcrosse's physical actions.

Redcrosse appears at the end of Canto 11 as a symbolic Christ-Knight figure, but specifically as a new development of the figure; he has become a Man-Christ-Knight figure. He is man taking on the nature and actions of Christ, and he symbolizes how both the individual Christian and the corporate Christian are to function in the physical world. He is a Protestant figure with undertones of Catholicism, therefore neatly avoiding both a works-based faith and a faith without works, and presenting a lifestyle that requires works under the operation of grace.

Redcrosse is an effective capstone as the third Christ-Knight figure of this thesis. The *Ancrene Riwle* offers an Old Testament type image of God interacting with mankind, and the story ends without a sure salvation or definite closure. In *Piers Plowman* is a picture of Christ interacting with humanity in New Testament terminology. Both of these medieval texts focus on the relationship between God and humanity, and *The Faerie Queene* provides a culmination of that relationship by depicting a man becoming like Christ and taking on the actions and characteristics of Christ. Redcrosse as a Christ-figure is able to overthrow the Devil, restore Eden, and live life in the world as a proper Christian knight. He remains Redcrosse while becoming like Christ, and his actions of conquering and restoring are parallel to events prophesied in Revelations, thus both completing the development of man and God's interaction and following the Biblical chronological patterns I have discovered between the three texts.

Spenser's Redcrosse also stands as one of the last examples of the Christ-Knight figure before the disappearance of knighthood, the decline of the chivalric code, and changes within the religious climate gradually made the concept of Christ as a warrior

knight a much less relevant and useful metaphor. The basic purpose of the Christ-Knight figure (to allegorize how Christ's work brought about spiritual salvation for mankind) remained the same, and the focus of all three Christ-Knights in this thesis was on saving a person or people from certain (allegorically spiritual) death. However, Redcrosse's unmistakably individualistic character stands in marked contrast to the more generic "mighty king" of the *Ancrene Riwle*, and a multitude of other differences abound between these two characters who share a common purpose and identification.

In tracing the Christ-Knight from the *Ancrene Riwle* to *The Faerie Queene*, crossing from the thirteenth-century medieval world to the early modern sixteenth century, it is enlightening to see changes occur within the idea of the Christ-Knight figure and how influences across the centuries affected the changes upon the figure. The main forces which brought about these changes were the influences of romances as a genre, the development of the tournament system, the influences of various religious atonement theories, the emergence of the idea of the self, and changes in the cultural class structure, however there were most likely many more forces affecting changes in the concept of the Christ-Knight figure.

In roughly three and a half centuries of English literary history, the Christ-Knight figure rose before a theological backdrop, adopted elements of medieval romances, became an extremely important religious allegorical figure, and eventually passed out of prominence as the early modern period flourished. This figure is extremely relevant for any serious scholar of the medieval period for its presentation touches many aspects of

English medieval life, and it has clearly served as a useful methodological tool in the history and transmission of ideas.

The Christ-Knight figure was rooted in theological ideas, particular Old and New Testament interpretations about the roles of God and Jesus, and these ideas combined with medieval romance imagery, creating a figure which harmoniously combined the sacred and secular. This combination allowed for theological ideas to become relevant and understandable and for secular romances to become more acceptable and useful. The identity and purpose of the Christ-Knight remained consistent, yet individual presentations varied somewhat, and these variances offer information about the historical context in which they were created.

The Christ-Knight figure traces the history of a specific idea (Christ as a knight) and other ideas, particularly religious, which were prevalent in medieval thought and culture. Christ-Knight texts such as the *Ancrene Riwle, Piers Plowman,* and *The Faerie Queene* substantiate changes in these ideas, showing how individual writers interpreted the Christ-Knight figure and other ideas and transmuted these ideas and changes. As a theological vehicle in the history of ideas, the Christ-Knight figure was influenced by the pressures of various cultural and spiritual trends, and these influences manifest in individual presentations of the figure.

Epilogue

The Christ-Knight figure stands as an extremely prominent figure in medieval English writings, thought, and culture. From its twelfth-century debut in the *Ancrene Riwle* to its probable final appearance in *The Faerie Queene*, the Christ-Knight encompasses roughly three and a half centuries of English medieval and Renaissance culture. Within individual presentations of the figure is specific information about various aspects of the culture surrounding each figure, and a study of the Christ-Knight figure branches out into literature, religion, cultural studies, political issues, and many other important spheres of influence.

Spenser's Redcrosse is arguably the last appearance of the Christ-Knight figure in English literature and in a sense, Spenser exhausts the form and idea of the figure by stepping slightly beyond the form's basic purpose and presenting a human man who partially shares in the identity of Christ. Redcrosse takes on the nature and actions of Christ, and he provides both salvation and restoration for humanity; as a Christ-Knight figure, he has accomplished all that Christ is expected to do. After Spenser is a dearth of Christ-Knight figure presentations, a situation both understandable and curious. Spenser has effectively culminated the figure to such an extent that he overextends the metaphor and creates a character that is a Christ-Knight-like figure but one that does not perfectly fulfill all the requirements for the Christ-Knight figure. It seems apparent that by the time of Spenser, the idea of Christ-Knight figure was metamorphosing to such an extent that the original idea of picturing Christ as a knight was giving way to the idea of depicting the Christian warrior in the spirit, imitation, and action of Christ. It can be argued that

Redcrosse embodies this evolution of the Christ-Knight and marks the end of the idea of portraying Christ, not a man-Christ, as a knight.

In a perhaps more practical context, the Christ-Knight figure's relevancy and enormous popularity during the medieval era no doubt sprang partially out of its close connections with everyday medieval life, and it is not surprising that the decline of knighthood was parallel to the decline in the popularity of presenting Christ as a knight. In presenting his Christ-Knight figure in *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser stepped out of his surrounding early modern culture and reverted to the imagery and romances of the medieval era, thus perhaps exemplifying how the Christ-Knight figure could only survive as a medieval figure.

As a common medieval metaphor, the Christ-Knight figure deserves a prominent place among medieval literary scholarship, perhaps more exalted than the status it has already gained over the last several decades of research. Its appearance in three important medieval and Renaissance texts alone proves that it is a figure well worth exploring, and its numerous manifestations in other forms of medieval literature also support this argument.

The Christ-Knight figure's importance as an object of historical interest is another aspect of the figure that highlights its widely encompassing field of relevance and its connection with its surrounding medieval culture. The idea of the Christ-Knight figure and individual presentations of the figure borrowed ideas and forms from the surrounding medieval culture, which contributed largely to the figure's first appearance and eventual decline over four centuries of historical and cultural change. However, because the

Christ-Knight figure remained such a decidedly eminent force in medieval culture, it is entirely possible, and most likely certain, that the idea of the Christ-Knight figure in turn had a direct influence upon its surrounding cultural climate. The Christ-Knight integrated romance imagery with theological teachings, and the results undoubtedly allowed for some measure of ecclesiastical approval over such previously secular ideas as the chivalric code. Such institutions as the Knight-Templars most likely drew some of their ideas of Christian knighthood from standards found in the Christ-Knight, and there were no doubt other ideas and groups influenced by developments in the idea of the Christ-Knight figure. Had the Christ-Knight figure never emerged, it is doubtful that medieval life, culture, and religious thought would have remained exactly the same as it is recorded today.

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