**How to Identify a Christ Figure**

A “Christ Figure” is a character who possesses qualities or experiences events similar to those of Jesus Christ, as he is portrayed in the New Testament. Sometimes, the term martyr or the phrase “martyr archetype” is used as an alternative to “Christ figure,” but this alternative term removes much of the Christian context. It is necessary to be able to identify a “Christ Figure” because, most times, an author does not employ a character in this manner accidentally—rather, the author is trying to say something deeper about the character’s personality, relationship to other characters, and relationship to the overall themes. Frankly, being able to identify such an archetype is one more way to be literate in the ways of literature.

Essentially, the way to recognize a Christ figure in literature, is to find a number of parallels between Jesus Christ and the character. Below are some possible attributes you might find in a character that make him or her “Christ-like.”

**Ideas surrounding birth:**

* The character is born in a unique manner. Perhaps to a woman named Mary, or some version of Mary like Maria. The mother is considered very virtuous or self-sacrificing.
* The character has a divine or royal father.
* The character has a name with the initials J.C., or may be named Christopher.
* There is little known about the character’s childhood—generally until the character is in his or her 30’s. Or the character only lives until s/he is in their 30’s (specifically 33).
* The character is only there temporarily; is considered away from home.

**Ideas surrounding qualities:**

* The character is misunderstood by many; is considered to be crazy or odd.
* The character is sensitive or sympathetic to people, often times people who are poor, desperate or hungry.
* The character often sees the “truth” that no body else can.
* The character is surrounded in or associated with light.

**Ideas surrounding actions:**

* The character performs “miracles” such as curing the sick, feeding the hungry.
* The character is celibate.
* The character possesses a dual identity: generally one of the common man, and one greater identity.
* The character is persecuted or punished for his or her ideals, which generally are connected with love or truth.
* The character represents hope to other characters.
* The character converses with the Devil, or other evil force. This evil force tries to tempt the character away from his or her ideals.
* The character is betrayed by those close to him or her; is denied by others who know him.
* The character has a “cross to bear,” whether this is a physical item that resembles a cross, or is an emotional or psychological issue that the character must “put up with.”
* Characters around him will utter “Jesus,” “Christ,” “Jesus Christ,” “My God!” or “Oh God,” around the character. Ideas surrounding appearance:
* The character receives injuries on the forehead, the palms of the hands and feet, or the breast.
* The character appears poor: tattered clothes, barefoot
* The character is portrayed with arms spread (essentially, like a cross)

**Ideas surrounding death:**

* The character dies in a way associated with his or her ideals.
* The character dies unjustly.
* The character is reborn, or returns from death—either physically or emotionally

If you want to practice identifying Christ figures, consider the characters from the following movies:

-- Superman -- E.T.

-- James Cole from *12 Monkeys* -- John Coffey from *The Green Mile*

-- Andy from *The Shawshank Redemption* -- John Connor from *Terminator 2*

-- Neo from *The Matrix*