

Fairy Tales Subverted: Examining the roles of the Hero, Heroine, Villain, and Monster in  
Cornelia Funke's *Mirrorworld* series

Rebecca Davis

*Murray State College, OK*

The archetypes of hero, villain, and monster are well-established roles in fairy and folk tales, their characteristics set by centuries of cultural tradition. While their forms and qualities might differ from culture to culture, there is a common thread that connects them: the hero is good, the villain evil, and the monster must be destroyed. In the modern era however, a change is taking place in how retellings and adaptations of fairy tales portray these characters. Cornelia Funke's young adult *Mirrorworld* series uses the settings of familiar fairy tales to challenge the long held assumptions of these character archetypes. Such retellings suggest a change in how modern society sees these archetypes and their symbolic role in imparting a culture's values and beliefs.

Behind the enchanted mirror, readers of Funke's *Mirrorworld* encounter characters who are subversions of their traditional archetypes: a selfish hero, a villain whose actions are motivated by a desire to protect another, and a monster whose destiny is to be a protector. A comparative analysis of Jacob Reckless, Fox, Will and the Goyl, and the Dark Fairy against their respective traditional counterparts reveals Funke's subversion of traditional fairy tale archetypes in a way that reflects the modern desire for openness and dialogue between opposing sides, as well as a rejection of the strict dichotomy of good and evil that has directed the use and depiction of these archetypes for centuries. In telling what is essentially a modern fairytale, Funke adapts the genre so that it will not only allow teens and young adults to test the rules and expectations they will face as adults, but also challenges the reader as to whether or not they will accept or change the world they are given.

*Rebecca Davis (MLitt, Glasgow, 2016) is an instructor at Murray State College in Tishomingo, Oklahoma. In addition to first year writing courses, she also teaches Introduction to Folklore, Introduction to Literature, and Creative Writing. Fantasy literature, the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, fairy tales, and young adult literature form the crux of Rebecca's research interest; her master's thesis examined the subversion of the roles of hero, heroine, and villain in modern re-tellings of fairy tales.*