

## **“Fairies Love Playing with Life and Death”: Natality in Cornelia Funke’s Mirrorworld Series**

Among the “refreshing” images associated with water is the idea of symbolic rebirth, a concept that plays a significant role in Hannah Arendt’s philosophy under the term “natality.” Arendt uses the term as a counterpart to the image of mortality that has underpinned centuries of philosophical thought. According to Patricia Bowen-Moore, natality for Arendt describes a common “experience of birth [that indicates] the human capacity to relate to one’s own potentiality for beginning...the capacity to *be* in a vital relation to one’s birth as an event of novelty and unprecedented potentiality for the new” (2). Arendt’s concept influenced many late-twentieth century feminist thinkers, including theologian Grace Jantzen, who uses natality as the foundation for a feminist religious symbolic that challenges what she sees as “an investment in death” inherent to the existing (masculinist) symbolic (15). Whereas Arendt considers mortality and natality to be two sides of the same coin of human existence, Jantzen argues that “[privileging] natality” (129) is vital if we are to move beyond the masculinist traditions that have undermined the well-being of women (and, I would add, children). Similarly, feminist philosopher Virginia Held identifies an emphasis on natality as one of the key steps human society can take toward elevating the ethics of care in our institutions and interpersonal relationships.

The twin poles of mortality and natality create a useful framework for examining children’s and young adult fantasies that integrate death as a central concept. In this paper, I will examine the work of Cornelia Funke, particularly the Mirrorworld series, in terms of Arendt’s, Jantzen’s, and Held’s theories of natality. When Jacob Reckless risks everything to save his brother from a fairy’s curse, he does not realize that his own life will be forfeit as a result. Before this crisis, Jacob’s “potentiality for the new” had been exemplified by his ability to survive, even thrive, in the alien world he discovered when searching for his lost father. As Jacob presses forward against seemingly impossible odds, his “natal” and mortal identities intertwine in the duality that Arendt describes; however, the gendered aspects of his quest also illuminate the benefits of prioritizing natality according to Jantzen and Held.