

From Munsch's *The Paper Bag Princess* to Funke's *Igraine, the Brave*

When Robert Munsch published *The Paper Bag Princess* in 1980, young readers and feminist critics alike thrilled to his reversal of the quest romance. Far from being a damsel in distress after her castle is attacked by a fire-breathing dragon, Elizabeth, the titular princess, wearing only a paper bag, rescues her kidnapped fiancé Prince Ronald from the dragon's clutches. Aghast at her dishevelment, Ronald declares, "Come back and rescue me when you're dressed like a real princess" (21). In an epiphany for both Elizabeth and young readers, restrictive gender conventions informing chivalric quest narratives are exposed as bad romance. Elizabeth responds, "You look like a nice guy, Ronald, but you are a bum" (23), as she rides off into the future on her own.

Building from the work of Nel Noddings on relational ethics and "care" and Lee Edelman's discussion of the queer potential of adventure fiction, my project opens with discussion of how *The Paper Bag Princess* plays with chivalric tradition and the genre of the quest, highlighting the possibility of a princess saving herself from more than one kind of disaster. I extend this consideration through analysis of Cornelia Funke's 2007 fantasy for middle readers, *Igraine the Brave* (trans. from the German by Anthea Bell). Twelve-year-old Igraine is the daughter of magicians, but she longs to be a knight. When a misspoken spell transforms her parents into pigs and her family's castle is besieged by evil Osmund the Greedy, who seeks to steal her parents' magic books, Igraine sets off on a quest in search of the one ingredient needed for a reversal tonic. When she returns, she and her brother outwit the villain and free their parents. Funke's revisions—in gender and genre—fuel Igraine's search for identity, agency and a return to familial stability. Igraine succeeds because she builds relationships— with neighbors, a special horse, a giant, a knight who will later train her, the magic books themselves, etc.—that run in contradistinction to top-down power structures of traditional chivalry. She is fearless in hitting the road, traveling alone and confronting dangers because she feels she has a right to do so. In effect, readers are introduced to relational ethics through the responsibility of care that Igraine extends not only to those she loves, but also to those she judges to be honorable and just. The trajectory from *The Paper Bag Princess* to *Igraine the Brave* marks an important re-imagining of adventures for girls, adventures that offer girls futures far beyond the stereotype of the princess waiting in the tower or the bildungsroman's choice between marriage and death.