

The Fantastic, (Dis)Orientation, and (Dis)Belief

Laura Feldt's Fantasy Theory in Wonderland

Kristian Klippenstein, University of Alberta

Abstract

This article expands Laura Feldt's modified fantasy theory as presented in *The Fantastic in Religious Narrative from Exodus to Elisha*. For Feldt, the function of the fantastic in the Hebrew Bible is to induce both characters' and readers' belief in YHWH. She argues that the characters' disorientation is a byproduct of being confronted by the fantastic and signals disbelief. In this article I suggest that Feldt's linking of disorientation and disbelief in relation to the fantastic is an oversimplification. I apply Feldt's theory to Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to suggest that disorientation—in both religious and non-religious fantastic stories—is actually a sign of acknowledging (and therefore believing in) the fantastic. This belief-as-acknowledgement, which Feldt undervalues, is in fact necessary to perpetuate the narrative and thereby allow the fantastic to function, whatever its goals may be.

Key words

Laura Feldt; Exodus; Alice's Adventures in Wonderland; Lewis Carroll; fantasy

Laura Feldt's *The Fantastic in Religious Narrative from Exodus to Elisha* claims that fantastic instances in literature—particularly religious narratives—are “sites of ambiguity, uncertainty, and mutability” (2012, 1).¹ Feldt applies a modified fantasy theory—borrowed from critical literary theory—to certain texts in the Hebrew Bible in order to highlight both the disorienting nature of the fantastic and the role of the fantastic in creating identity and meaning. By applying fantasy theory to the Exodus narrative (Exodus 1-18) Feldt concludes that, contrary to the text's stated purpose of eliciting belief in YHWH, the characters in the Exodus story are often “disoriented, confused, [and] bewildered” as the result of their fantastical encounters (142). Feldt attributes this disorientation to the lack of distance—literary, cultural, and temporal—to the fantastic; put another way, in the Exodus story proximity to the fantastic causes disorientation as well as disbelief (161, 165).

In this article I examine the relationship between (dis)orientation—that is, disorientation and orientation—and (dis)belief—that is, belief and disbelief—in

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fantastic narratives.² Specifically, I apply Feldt's fantasy theory to Lewis Carroll's 1865 novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (hereafter *Wonderland*)³ in order to suggest that disorientation as a response to the fantastic need not always result in or signal disbelief. Instead, I claim that Alice, *Wonderland*'s protagonist, experiences disorientation primarily because of her *belief* in the fantastic world of Wonderland. Only her final denial of Wonderland itself leads to total disbelief and banishes her disorienting surroundings. As J.R.R. Tolkien puts it, "the moment disbelief [in the fantastic] arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed" (2008, 52).

Examining *Wonderland* in this manner clarifies Feldt's conclusions concerning the nature of belief in relation to the fantastic in the Exodus narrative in an effort to improve her already-admirable work. Specifically, I suggest demarcating at least two gradations of belief that both characters and readers can experience: a primarily experiential sort of belief that involves acknowledgment via reaction to the fantastic and a more acquiescent or functional belief that involves embracing the goals of the fantastic. While belief-as-embrace (of the fantastic's goals) may lead to re-narration, as Feldt points out, belief-as-acknowledgment should not be overlooked because it in fact functions to propel the initial narrative.

In order to question Feldt's argument concerning belief, I begin by outlining her fantasy theory and its application to the Exodus narrative. Donald Rackin's contrast of "above-ground" logic and Wonderland logic is then deployed, along with Feldt's modified fantasy theory, in order to identify Alice's experiences of (dis)orientation and (dis)belief in *Wonderland* (Rackin 1991, 35).⁴ This application of theory is particularly concerned with Alice's experiences as disorienting encounters, Alice's subsequent attempts to (re)orient herself, the role of Alice's belief in Wonderland in perpetuating her experiences (and by extension the narrative itself), and the final destruction of Wonderland/disorientation through disbelief and denial. I conclude by suggesting some implications of this alternate relationship between (dis)orientation and (dis)belief for Feldt's fantasy theory and the function of the fantastic in literature.

Feldt (2012, 46) bases her fantasy theory on the "maximalist" approach to fantasy exemplified by Renate Lachmann's *Erzählte Phantastik: Zu*

² Throughout the article, "(dis)orientation" and "(dis)belief" appear as shorthand phrases to indicate "disorientation and orientation" on the one hand and "disbelief and belief" on the other hand. In each case the terms are parenthetically conflated to save space. This word play latently draws attention to both Feldt's claim that fantasy involves playing with "what we can – and cannot – do with words" as well as Carroll's incessant word play in *Wonderland* (2012, 1).

³ Originally created for Alice P. Liddell, Lewis Carroll (real name Charles L. Dodgson, 1832-1898) first presented his story to her in written form in 1864 (Haughton 1998, xxxv). Throughout this article the italicized *Wonderland* refers to Carroll's text (with page numbers following the 1998 Penguin Classics edition), while the normal type-faced *Wonderland* refers to the dream-world in which Alice has her adventures. My application of Feldt's theory to *Wonderland* is in many ways a re-application. Initially applied to secular literature, Feldt's borrowed and modified theory is here re-applied to secular literature. This re-application underscores Feldt's necessary alterations and emphases when applying the theory to religious belief and sacred texts.

⁴ Note that Rackin's work cited here is based on his 1966 article "Alice's Journey to the End of Night."

Phantasiegeschichte und Semantik phantastischer Texte (2002). This maximalist approach sees fantasy as a mode rather than a genre, releasing it from any particular historical period and therefore identifying fantasy as “an element which may form part of any kind of literature and be articulated in historically variable ways” (Feldt 2012, 46).⁵ Fantasy for Feldt, as for Lachmann, must contain “fantastic strategies that verbalize phantasms, an emphasis on mutability ... an irreducible or sustained ambiguity in relation to the phantasms verbalized, and a withdrawal of cognitive guarantees” (49). Thus, fantasy theory is concerned with the role that fantastic elements of literature play in narrative and, moreover, the way fantastic literary structures foster belief in the reader’s mind (5; also Mendlesohn 2008, xiv). In Feldt’s work the emphasis on belief is two-fold. Not only does the fantastic foster belief in the sense of convincing the reader (at least temporarily) of a world that operates differently than the reader’s own (as is the case in Farah Mendlesohn’s notion of science fiction), but also in the sense of inducing belief in a deity – in the case of the Exodus narrative, belief in YHWH (Feldt 2012, 160; Mendlesohn 2008, xiv).

Feldt applies fantasy theory to the Exodus narrative by describing the literary devices most frequently used to achieve fantastic effects,⁶ identifying and categorizing instances of these devices in Exodus 1-18, noting the effect of the fantastic on both characters and readers, and observing the function of the fantastic in the narrative. An important set of observations in Feldt’s work on Exodus concerns the relationship between proximity, (dis)orientation and (dis)belief. She maintains that, while the purpose of the text—and of fantastic occurrences—is to induce belief, the fantastic events do not create a nation of believers but rather “instigate a discourse of doubt, fear, ambiguity, and uncertainty” amongst the characters (2012, 78).

Feldt’s work directly relates proximity to feelings of disorientation and to a resulting disbelief: “being closer to the events results in less belief. Direct experience of the fantastic seems to lead to doubt and disorientation” (Feldt 2012, 78). The Exodus narrative fosters belief only through the temporal and literary distance created by re-narrations of the story—particularly during the Passover ritual (165). Ultimately, Feldt seeks to point out the ambiguity of the fantastic rather than to explain it away, for it is precisely this ambiguity or inability to fix meaning that provides opportunities for both the characters and the readers to reflect on the phantasms and their meaning (247). This ambiguity of meaning links the fantastic and the religious in Feldt’s argument; the religious narrative’s goal of

⁵ Feldt (2012, 45) contrasts this maximalist view with the “minimalist” view exemplified by works such as Tzvetan Todorov’s *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975). She describes the minimalist view of the fantastic as “bound to a specific genre and to specific literary-historical periods” (45). She notes that fantastic literature as a genre emerged “from the Gothic tradition” and came to a head in the mid-twentieth century, with fantasy theory gaining prominence in the 1970s (43). For a further introductory discussion to Todorov as a founding figure of fantasy theory, see Whitehead’s “On the Fantastic” (2012, 6-8). In this article, Whitehead also discusses the link between fantasy literature and the post-Enlightenment period, as does Sandner, “The Emergence and Evolution of the Fantastic” (2013).

⁶ In Feldt’s work, such devices include metamorphosis, adynaton, hyperbole, coincidence/chance, and paradox (2012, 59-62).

providing meaning can be achieved by reflection on the sites of ambiguity located in the fantastic elements of the Exodus story (3, 91).⁷

Although brief, this description of Feldt's modified fantasy theory touches on those elements of her argument that arise most frequently in *The Fantastic in Religious Narrative from Exodus to Elisha*. Feldt's work is useful for the critical study of Hebrew Bible texts; however, Carroll's *Wonderland* challenges the close relationship between disorientation and disbelief in the preceding argument, and offers an alternate and clarifying position that applies both to religious and secular fantasy.

Before beginning, I must address two potential concerns which apply to my work: the relevance of *Wonderland* to Exodus and the nature of (dis)belief itself. First, even though Feldt suggests that her arguments are applicable to other religious texts, her work pertains specifically to the Hebrew Bible (2012, 254). As such, Feldt's theory does not promise to explain every fantastic occurrence in literature. Since *Wonderland* is not a religious text, it is pertinent to wonder how a reading of *Wonderland* should affect literary theory as it pertains to the Hebrew Bible.⁸

One response to this question involves recognizing that the two texts under consideration share some common elements. Martin Gardner holds *Wonderland* and the Hebrew Bible together, noting that both—along with the works of Homer and “all other great works of fantasy”—lend themselves readily to symbolic interpretation (1970, 8). Tolkien likewise points out that, although the biblical text (or at least the Gospels) can be classified as a fairy story while *Wonderland* cannot, both texts are connected solidly to the real world. The biblical text includes fantastic elements but, for Tolkien, the story “has entered History and the primary world” (2008, 78). He suggests that *Wonderland's* “dream-frame” alerts readers that “the whole story in which [the dream-events] occur is a figment or illusion” (35). This illusory quality reminds readers that a real world—a waking-world—exists, rather than immersing them in the story-world, and by doing so breaks the spell or art of fairy stories. Thus, a reader encounters both *Wonderland* and the Bible as texts that are to be read with attention not just to the fantasy world but also to the experiences of the reader's actual world.

Moreover, both *Wonderland* and Exodus utilize primarily nature-based instances of the fantastic. Whether the text employs a pool filled of human tears (Carroll 1998, 20), a river flowing with blood (Exod. 7:20), a baby that turns into a pig (Carroll 1998, 55), or a wooden staff that turns into a snake (Exod. 4:2-4; 7:10-

⁷ Feldt's idea that humans use religion and religious texts to create meaning and order in life is not unique. Régis Debray (2004), Clifford Geertz (1973), and Roy Rappaport (1999) are just three of many scholars whose theories of religion posit that the human desire for meaning is satisfied by religious rituals and texts. See also Cranney's study of the relationship between one's belief in “God” and one's outlook on the meaningfulness of life (2013). While Cranney (2013, 640, 644) points out the challenge of handling abstract concepts, such as “God,” Feldt shows sites of abstraction to be fundamental to working out self-identity and meaning in relation to religion (2012, 106).

⁸ See, however, Ackerman's *Behind the Looking Glass* (2008, 8-12) and Woolf's *The Mystery of Lewis Carroll* (2010, 181-210) for details of Carroll's professional association with the Anglican Church.

12), both Carroll's story and Exodus instantiate the fantastic using predominantly natural elements.⁹ Additionally, both texts contain critiques of then-contemporary social systems. Exodus critiques a political system of domination and slavery that clashes with YHWH's promise to bless YHWH's chosen people by recounting a contest between YHWH and Pharaoh. *Wonderland* critiques the "sane madness" of Victorian society that permeated Carroll's Oxford life; that is, it undercuts Victorian etiquette and education by presenting a funhouse-mirror distortion of society (Rackin 1991, 65).

Here, however, the two texts diverge. Exodus goes on to posit a new vision for humanity, seeking to foster belief in YHWH and adherence to the Jewish faith. *Wonderland* does not end with the establishment of an alternate social or religious reality—in fact, upon awakening and recounting her adventures, Alice "got up and ran off" (Carroll 1998, 109) into "the setting sun" (6) without considering the social ramifications of her encounter with the fantastic. Whereas Exodus's authors send Moses to "bring [YHWH's] people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt" (Exod. 3:10), Carroll does not send Alice to deliver the playing cards from their bondage under the Queen of Hearts's wrath, much less promote an alternate social order. With such divergences, and with different intended audiences (a community of faith as opposed to young children), one could ask why it is appropriate to examine an eighteenth-century nonsense story in connection with a much older religious text. The answer to this question lies in Feldt's assertion, discussed previously, that fantasy is a mode, rather than a genre, of literature (2012, 46). This assertion allows Feldt to apply fantasy theory (a comparatively recent type of literary criticism) to the Hebrew Bible. In a similar way, this article asserts that since Exodus and *Wonderland* are both texts that utilize the fantastic, some degree of relevance exists between the way the fantastic functions in *Wonderland* and the way it functions in Exodus. While the fantastic's goal in Exodus goes a step further than *Wonderland* (arguing for a new paradigm for living, rather than merely critiquing extant social practice), the modal continuity between Exodus and *Wonderland* insists that the theoretical ramifications of one story are relevant to the other story.

A second argument for relating Exodus and *Wonderland* posits a commonality between the two texts that goes beyond content, focusing on how belief works rather than what a person or character believes. My augmentation of Feldt's theory is primarily concerned with the mechanisms, not the contents, of belief, as well as how those mechanisms affect narrative. Scholars studying epistemology or the philosophy of mind sometimes refer to beliefs as "propositional" in nature: some thing—an object or an idea, perhaps—confronts a subject, and that confrontation constitutes a proposition that the subject can believe or disbelieve (Moser 1989, 14). Certainly the cognitive propositions

⁹ Lecerle suggests that "the reader of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is in the position of an explorer: the landscape is strikingly new, new plants swim into his ken, and a new species is encountered at every turn, each more exotic than the one before" (1994, 202). One should not overstate the unfamiliarity of Wonderland's inhabitants, though; as Armit notes, "there is a strange uncanniness [in their connection with the readers' familiar world] to these narratives" (2005, 50).

presented to Moses when he happens upon a burning bush while tending sheep in Horeb (Exod. 3:1-2) are different than the propositions presented to Alice when she happens upon a grinning Cheshire Cat in the woods (Carroll 1998, 56), and different content leads to different beliefs (Rowlands 2003, 102). My adaptation of Feldt's theory depends, however, on the way that accepting or rejecting propositions—whatever their content—affects the narrative's ability to sustain itself.

Suggesting that different propositional content renders moments of belief incomparable both overlooks the similar mechanisms or behaviors at work in moments of belief and contributes to establishing what some scholars refer to as “ghetto[s]” of knowledge (Doniger 2000, 65; Sullivan 2000, 123). While it is tenuous to over-analyze the apparent cognitive processes of fictional characters, there is little in either text to suggest that the structure or mechanisms of (dis)believing utilized by the characters differs greatly. Whatever the similarities or differences between the propositional content of the fantastic in Exodus and *Wonderland*, the cognitive processes of (dis)believing are the same.

The second potential concern I must address deals with the complicated concept of belief. Feldt offers no succinct definition of what she means by (dis)belief, and it is possible to wonder whether my belief-as-acknowledgment really constitutes belief at all. Using *Wonderland*, I suggest that apprehending and responding to instances of the fantastic signals belief in the fantastic. In opposition, one could argue that observation and reaction are not the same things as belief—seeing is not always believing.¹⁰ Yet I would point such critics to Andy Egan's work on belief and perception (2008). Egan links belief with action, arguing that people who act intentionally do so in a manner that takes their beliefs as true (2008, 50). Reaction does not require that one's beliefs are true—thus belief in the deities of Exodus or the dream of *Wonderland* can merit responsive action independent of verification. More importantly, Egan argues that the mechanical elements of belief—being presented with a proposition, evaluating its veracity, and acting accordingly—can be moved around: sometimes people are confronted with a proposition, act in such a manner that belies belief, and only later evaluate the truth of that proposition (2008, 56-7).¹¹ Belief-as-acknowledgment—that is, perception followed by response—is certainly a form of belief, even if later evaluation leads to disbelief.

To augment Feldt's fantasy theory, one further piece of methodological framework needs to be brought to bear on *Wonderland*. Specifically, Donald Rackin's (1991) contrast between above-ground logic and Wonderland logic needs to be deployed in order to frame Alice's experiences of disorientation and her attempts at orientation. Rackin's essay “*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland: An Underground Journey to the End of Night*” contrasts the “above-ground world's

¹⁰ Lopez Jr. (1998, 21), for instance, notes that Max Müller differentiated belief from related concepts such as sight and knowledge.

¹¹ Egan suggests reacting to a wild animal attack as one example of an instance in which humans act based on belief of a proposition without waiting to evaluate its truthfulness (2008, 58). See Schulz (2011), however, for a discussion of the difference between acting on belief and acting on reflex.

accepted, more or less ‘official’ grounds of meaning and order” with the satirical response of Wonderland’s disorder (1991, 35). The distinction between above-ground and underground logic in Rackin’s work has three levels of meaning. First, Carroll titled the earliest manuscript of Alice’s adventures *Alice’s Adventures Under Ground* (Haughton 1998, xxxvii). Second, the story literally takes place under the ground—Alice follows the White Rabbit down the rabbit-hole, falling towards what she guesses to be “somewhere near the centre of the earth” (Carroll 1998, 10-11). And third, Rackin posits that Wonderland’s disorder subverts or undermines the world of Alice and her readers (1991, 35-6).¹²

Rackin suggests that above-ground logic is comprised of “the usual modes of thought: ordinary math and logic ... basic social and linguistic conventions ... [and] the fundamental framework of conscious predication—orderly time and space” (1991, 36-7). Throughout his essay Rackin reveals how these facets of above-ground logic are rendered meaningless in the face of Wonderland’s illogic and disorder. While Rackin presents this contrast in order to argue that *Wonderland* both affirms and subverts society’s order, I utilize this distinction to underscore Alice’s (dis)orientation and (dis)belief in the *Wonderland* narrative. The following analysis of *Wonderland* examines the fantastic creatures and events of the narrative in light of Feldt’s categories of (dis)orientation and (dis)belief as well as Rackin’s distinction between logics. Rather than identify every instance of the five literary devices Feldt suggests indicate the fantastic, I group representative events under the headings of disorientation, orientation, belief, and disbelief. I take this approach because the goal of this article is to explore the connection between (dis)orientation and (dis)belief, not prove that *Wonderland* contains fantastic events.

As Feldt explains, “the fantastic events [in narrative] are staged as emotionally and cognitively disorienting experiences” (2012, 161). Alice’s experiences in Wonderland are certainly disorienting. The location and population of Wonderland is fantastic—Wonderland is a world that exists under ground and is inhabited by all manner of creatures, including an extinct Dodo, a mythical Gryphon, and sapient (or at least sentient) playing cards. While the location and inhabitants of Wonderland are disorienting to Alice—and to above-ground readers—I focus on disorientation as a result of the rules or logic by which Wonderland operates. Familiar concepts such as physical space and time—both of which operate (above-ground) according to usually-predictable rules—are turned on their heads in Wonderland. While this logical upheaval by itself is disorienting enough, Alice’s problems are compounded by the fact that Wonderland offers no formal logic to replace the above-ground rules that it effaces. “[W]e’re all mad

¹² In this way, *Wonderland* fulfills what Jakober identifies as the ability of “speculative fiction” to create social change (2008, 27-31). That is, *Wonderland* grants a fresh perspective on certain events by lifting them out of their familiar context and by questioning routine social logic and patterns (Jakober 2008, 29-30). This function of fantasy literature figures prominently in Rackin’s understanding of the function of the fantastic in *Wonderland*. Although the fantasy elements of Exodus 1-18 do not function in precisely the same way, social change is a dominant theme and goal in the Exodus 1-18 narrative as well.

here,” says Cheshire Cat, and it’s true—Wonderland’s logic consistently and insistently follows the illogic of madness (Carroll 1998, 57).¹³

Alice’s frequent changes in size represent one disorienting motif that pervades the first half of the narrative (see Meier 2009, 119-20). She changes size eleven times in *Wonderland*, ranging from three inches tall to such a height that a pigeon strikes her in the face during its flight (Carroll 1998, 46-7). Her Wonderland journey from the rabbit-hole to the Duchess’s house is punctuated by changes of her physical state, and these changes are invariably accompanied by feelings of curiosity (14, 16), fright or alarm (19-20, 46-7), and discomfort (32). Admittedly, the success of Alice’s plan to escape the White Rabbit’s house by eating rocks/cakes in order to shrink (itself a succumbing to the Wonderland logic that eating or drinking will result in a drastic and immediate change of state) initially causes her to feel “delighted” (36). When speaking to the Caterpillar after her escape, however, Alice confesses “three inches is such a wretched height to be” (46). Interestingly, when Alice—using the Caterpillar’s advice that “one side [of the mushroom] will make you grow taller, and the other side will make you grow shorter” —finally gains the means with which to control her height and returns to her normal size, this reversion is not cause for relief and in fact “felt quite strange” (46, 48). Ironically, Alice immediately shrinks herself again to visit the Duchess’s house and continues to regulate (or rather deregulate) her size in order to interact with Wonderland’s creatures for the remainder of the narrative (49).

Even though Alice learns to adapt her physical state as necessary, her changes in size indicate an ongoing disorientation in *Wonderland*. When asked by the Pigeon what she is, she can reply “I—I’m a little girl” only “rather doubtfully, as she remembered the number of changes she had gone through, that day” (Carroll 1998, 48). The Pigeon’s query and Alice’s answer raise the frighteningly disorienting question of identity: *who* and *what* is Alice? This erosion of a stable identity is a symptom of the disorientation Alice experiences when confronted with the fantastic in Wonderland.

One further comment regarding size and disorientation concerns Alice’s decisions, after meeting the Caterpillar, to adapt her height as necessary. On one level the narrative requires her changes in size—to enter certain spaces, for instance. On another level, however, her changes reflect an embrace of Wonderland’s illogic. Before visiting the Duchess’s house (“a little house... about four feet high”), she realizes that her (newly-regained) above-ground height will appear disorienting and fantastic to its inhabitants: “it’ll never do to come upon them *this* size: why, I should frighten them out of their wits” (Carroll 1998, 49; original italics). Ironically, Alice sets aside above-ground logic (her normal height, and the fact that people do not rapidly shrink or grow) and accepts Wonderland conventions in order to appear un-fantastic to the Wonderland creatures, perpetuating her own disorientation in the process.

Wonderland’s play with the concept of time further disorients Alice. The above-ground concept of time is uprooted most clearly during “The Mad Tea

¹³ See Patten for a discussion of the complicated mix of logic and madness that the Cheshire Cat speaks during its encounter with Alice (2009, 192-194).

Party,” wherein she meets the Mad Hatter, the March Hare, and the Dormouse. The encounter between Alice and these three tea drinkers begins with a series of riddles and impossible questions but quickly turns to the issue of time (Carroll 1998, 60).¹⁴ The Hatter explains that not only does his watch count days instead of minutes, but his watch – and indeed time itself—has stopped and therefore “it’s always six o’clock [that is, tea time]” (62, 64). It is worth noting that this subversion of time occurs immediately after Alice tries to explain the concepts of time and space to the Duchess. To anticipate a later section of this article, when confronted by the bedlam in the Duchess’s house Alice attempts to orient herself—and the household—using the above-ground logic of hours and days (54). The Mad Tea Party, however, renders these above-ground categories meaningless.¹⁵ One could also say that the disorienting effect of time works in precisely the opposite fashion that the disorienting effect of physical space works in *Wonderland*. Alice is frightened and confused because physical size in *Wonderland* changes both unexpectedly and rapidly, but she is likewise disoriented because time in *Wonderland* does not change at all. The multiple—and opposite—ways that the fantastic in *Wonderland* befuddles Alice’s above-ground sensibilities reveals what is perhaps the most confusing aspect of *Wonderland*’s fantasy: in *Wonderland* there are no rules.

Alice encounters two nonsensical games during her visit to *Wonderland*, one—a Caucus-race—near the beginning of her adventure and the other—the Queen of Hearts’s croquet match—near the end of her journey. These two games epitomize *Wonderland*’s rule-less (or unruly) state. The Caucus-race defies definition;¹⁶ when Alice asks what one is the Dodo replies “the best way to explain it is to do it” (Carroll 1998, 26). The race does not officially begin and each contestant does as he or she pleases, running around a circular (“the exact shape doesn’t matter”) course until the Dodo decides that the race has ended (Carroll 1998, 26). Since the party established no objective (except to dry the party from their earlier swim in the Pool of Alice’s Tears) and adopted no set of rules, their question to the Dodo “‘who has won?’ ... [cannot] be answered without a great deal of thought” (26).

¹⁴ The Hatter’s riddle unsettled readers as well as Alice. The 1896 preface to a revised version of *Wonderland* included some suggestions by Carroll as to what the answer to the riddle could be, on account of readers’ frequent enquiries (Gardner 1970, 95).

¹⁵ Or, as per Ackerman, the Mad Tea Party reveals both the relative and absolute natures of time. Ackerman suggests that relative time (which is quantifiable, and seen in the White Rabbit’s hurried “Oh dear! I shall be too late!”) and absolute time (which is not quantifiable, and seen in Alice’s timeless fall down the rabbit-hole) are both exemplified in *Wonderland* (2008, 55). At the Mad Tea Party, time has a relative “o’clock” quantity but also has no meaningful beginning or end, and therefore is also absolute. In any case, the Party’s frozenness in time disorients Alice. For another discussion of the Mad Tea Party and the relative nature of time, see Westmoreland’s “Wishing It Were Some Other Time” (2010).

¹⁶ The Dodo’s inability to define a Caucus-race stems from a pun concerning the word “race,” which is part of a larger pun concerning the term “dry.” Before the race a Mouse recites a history of England to the bedraggled party in an attempt to dry them, claiming that it is “the driest thing I know” (Carroll 1998, 25). This confusion of meanings results in an inability to provide a clear definition (see also Rackin 1991, 43-5). Armitt notes that “words consistently deny us security [in the text, and in *Wonderland*]” and instead serve to disorient both Alice and the reader (1996, 154).

The Queen's croquet match is similarly lawless, and the lack of rules is ironic. In part this lawlessness is ironic because croquet (as an actual game, as opposed to a Caucus-race) does have rules above-ground, but more so because the King and Queen of Hearts's realm is the site of two of the clearest instances of Wonderland "law": the Queen's perennial sentence "Off with his[/her] head!" and the Knave's trial. Although the Queen's passing of sentence is undermined both by the King—who secretly pardons those the Queen has sentenced to death—and by the Gryphon—who explains "it's all her fancy, that: they never executes nobody"—it is perhaps the closest Wonderland gets to a predictable (yet meaningless) law or rule (Carroll 1998, 81-2).

Despite the presence of the law-giving (or at least law-enforcing) Queen and King at the croquet match, the game fares little better than the Caucus-race. While the basic framework of above-ground croquet appears intact, flamingos, hedgehogs, and playing cards replace the usual mallets, balls, and arches (Carroll 1998, 73). The use of living creatures and anthropomorphized objects in the game creates chaos—the hedgehogs and playing cards abandon their game-piece duties as balls and arches to continue their other Wonderland roles (73, 81). To make matters worse, "the players all played at once, without waiting for turns, quarreling all the while" (74). Even the Queen's attempt to impose law on the player—by sentencing them to execution, thus removing them from the field of play—only discombobulates the game further (81). Alice becomes so ill at ease that she complains to Cheshire Cat "they don't seem to have any rules in particular: at least, if there are, nobody attends to them" (74-5).

The fantastic world of Wonderland, with its unnatural and unexpected changes of physical state, disconcerting stagnation of time, and lack of meaningful order or rules disorients Alice. The world she encounters in *Wonderland* is thoroughly different—at least in her eyes—from the above-ground world that she lives in, and she reveals her disorientation in the face of such difference with feelings of fear, anger, and dis-ease. She bravely (or perhaps childishly), however, tries to re-orient herself, most prominently through the use of the above-ground logic and school lessons she has been taught. Unfortunately, each attempt is met with failure.

In her initial descent down the rabbit-hole, Alice tries to re-orient herself spatially using latitude and longitude, distance, and geography (Carroll 1998, 10-11). She tries to reassure herself with these ordering principles, despite the fact that "Alice had not the slightest idea what Latitude was, or Longitude either" (11). Here, as elsewhere in the text, she reveals her assumption that the world and everything in it is explainable (using above-ground logic) if only one employs the right categories.¹⁷ Upon reaching the end of her fall, she becomes so disoriented that her identity as an individual is threatened; she tries to orient herself by reciting "all the things [she] used to know"—multiplication tables, geography, and Isaac Watts' "Against Idleness and Mischief" (18; see also Gardner 1970, 38). Both during her fall and after her landing Alice's attempts to remember her above-

¹⁷ See Rackin (1991, 38). Brown (2010, 83-90) argues that Alice's reasoning using above-ground logic is not always reasonable, implying that Wonderland's illogic is not the only mechanism which deflects her attempts at orientation.

ground self fail; she speaks of what she does not know, makes logical mistakes, and invents nonsensical rhymes that parody her school recitations.

Alice's use of facts and recitations as techniques for orientation appear elsewhere in the text as well. She incorrectly explains the rotation of the earth to the Duchess (who "never could abide figures"), uses the above-ground calendar to tell the Hatter which day it is ("Two days wrong!" sigh[s] the Hatter"), and wrongfully recites a lesson to the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle (who deems her recitation "uncommon nonsense") (Carroll 1998, 54, 62, 91-3). The scene of this last exchange sheds some light on the humorous, illogical, and downright wrong ways Alice's above-ground lessons and logic come out when she airs them in Wonderland.

When Alice first meets the Mock Turtle, readers are treated to a linguistic mix-up in which the Mock Turtle describes its experiences as a young turtle at school (Carroll 1998, 83-6). The Mock Turtle's school life is based on a series of puns that (distortedly) mirror above-ground school experiences: the Mock Turtle's courses of "Reeling and Writhing Mystery [And] Seaography" sound much like the Reading, Writing, History, and Geography taught in above-ground schools (85; see Gardner 1970, 129). The obvious parallels in this wordplay reveal what is the matter with Alice's continually failing above-ground logical recitations. Just as her above-ground logic has been slightly "off" in Wonderland, so too is Wonderland's conception of what above-ground learning and logic consists of. The familiar logical structures that would serve to orient Alice are almost within grasp, but Wonderland's fantasy twists their meaning just enough to frustrate her and humor readers.

Alice's other attempts to orient herself in response to the fantastic follow a similar invocation of above-ground categories with similarly disastrous results. For instance, she tries to use proper above-ground manners when addressing both the Mouse in the Pool of Tears and the Duchess (Carroll 1998, 21, 52). By the time Alice reaches the Queen's croquet-ground near the end of the story, however, she has given up on proper manners—when the playing cards all bow before the Queen and King of Hearts Alice refuses to follow suit (70). This foreshadowing of her eventual confrontation with the Queen of Hearts at the Knave's trial shows that Alice has begun to exchange her disorientation and belief (that a Wonderland Duchess should be treated in the same fashion as an English Duchess, for instance) for orientation and disbelief—her interlocutors are "only a pack of cards, after all" (71).

At a more fundamental level, Alice tries to orient herself as an individual with a stable identity. Admittedly, her attempts to come to terms with herself *as a self* are more robust in *Through the Looking-Glass*.¹⁸ Furthermore, as has already been pointed out, any semblance of a stable identity—at least for Alice—in Wonderland is impossible; her physical form changes so often that she has difficulty asserting her most basic identity as a little girl to the Pigeon. These changes signal to the reader that Alice may be unable to recapture her identity—and in doing so reorient herself—while within the Wonderland dream.

¹⁸ See Rackin (1991, 71).

Nevertheless, one of Alice's earliest attempts to orient herself in *Wonderland* consists of a series of musings regarding her own unique identity. After her first shrinking experience, she reflects on the silliness of her above-ground practice of "pretending to be two people" (Carroll 1998, 14). Ostensibly she rejects her self's ability to be two people because "there's hardly enough of me left [after shrinking] to make *one* respectable person" (14). Yet slightly later in the text she affirms the self's individuality, deciding that one self is distinct from all other selves—"I'm sure I can't be Mabel ... *she's* she, and *I'm* I" (18; original italics). Alone and physically unstable in Wonderland, she worries "if I'm not the same [that is, in the same state as when she woke up that morning], the next question is 'Who in the world am I?' Ah, that's the great puzzle" (17-18).

Despite Alice's attempts to orient herself using above-ground logic regarding knowledge, manners, and identity, she remains disoriented throughout *Wonderland*. When the Caterpillar asks her, "Who are *you*?" she can only respond "I—I hardly know, Sir, just at present—at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then" (Carroll 1998, 40-1; original italics). When Alice encounters the Cheshire Cat, she first indicates that she does not know which direction to go—"would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"—and then indicates that she does not even know where her destination lies (56). In the face of the fantastic, Alice's above-ground attempts at orientation ultimately fail, leaving her uncertain of her identity, position, and destination.

Having looked at expressions of (dis)orientation in *Wonderland*, it is possible to move on to the other portion of Feldt's equation that is of interest: (dis)belief. In examining *Wonderland*, Rackin notes two denials on Alice's part that are related to (dis)belief. First, Rackin contends that Alice denies the illogical nature of Wonderland: "she soberly, tenaciously, childishly refuses to accept chaos completely for what it is" (1991, 37). This first denial takes place throughout the narrative, spanning Alice's initial fall down the rabbit-hole through to the Queen's croquet match. Rackin contrasts Alice's first denial with a second, noting that she finally denies Wonderland as illogical (1991, 60). This second denial begins at the croquet match and reaches its climax at the Knave's trial. In relation to Feldt's fantasy theory, these two denials can be relabeled—the first as belief, and the second as disbelief. That is, Alice's refusal to identify the fantastic chaos of Wonderland as illogical nonsense in which she cannot exist indicates a perpetuated belief that the Wonderland world functions in accordance with certain logical frameworks that Alice can understand. At the end of the story, Alice's overt denial of Wonderland on account of its chaotic nonsense indicates disbelief—a disbelief that ends her disorientation.

It appears odd to suggest that Alice believes in Wonderland less and less as she travels towards the Queen's croquet ground. In terms of narrative progression, it makes more sense to suggest that the initial disbelief of encountering a new (and fantastic) world within a rabbit-hole gives way to belief, signaled by Alice's increasing competence and confidence as the story proceeds. One must recall, though, that this increasing confidence is accompanied by Alice's growing unwillingness to believe that Wonderland's state of existence can support her own

identity as an above-ground self. As the dream unfolds, Alice increasingly rejects Wonderland, moving from naïve acceptance of its absurdity to angrily prioritizing her own above-ground logic at the expense of Wonderland's fantastic inhabitants. Alice does become increasingly cognizant of what Wonderland's fantasy rules entail, but she rejects the fantastic to ever greater degrees as she goes, growing less disoriented—and less believing—in the process.

To support the argument that Alice moves from belief to disbelief despite growing more mobile and functional as *Wonderland* progresses, it is important to examine the Caterpillar's advice. As already mentioned, the Caterpillar teaches Alice how to adjust her size by eating pieces of mushroom (Carroll 1998, 46). This practical advice corresponds with Alice's growing ability to act in accordance with Wonderland's illogic. The Caterpillar's other piece of advice, to "keep your temper," is less obvious although no less important (41). The Caterpillar echoes an admonition Alice earlier overheard the Crab tell its daughter—namely, "let this be a lesson to you never to lose *your* temper" [original italics]—that is of deadly importance in *Wonderland* (29). As the reader learns at the end of the story, losing one's temper in Wonderland can destroy the entire dream-world. The Queen of Hearts's incessant tantrum-induced death sentences also alert the reader that the loss of one's temper in Wonderland can have fatal consequences.¹⁹ These consequences do not affect the temperamental character, but rather the fantastic world they exist within. Just as the Queen's temper threatens to erode her court, so too does Alice's temper threaten to erode her belief that the fantasy of Wonderland constitutes a habitable reality for her above-ground self.

As long as Alice keeps her temper, Wonderland continues to exist, and this signaled belief in the fantastic perpetuates her disorientation throughout her journey. Unlike the Alice of *Through the Looking-Glass* who argues and debates with various interlocutors on her way to becoming a queen, at first *Wonderland's* Alice accepts and tries to understand Wonderland's illogic, preferring curiosity and deference to anger. This observation is not to say that she fails to find Wonderland fantastic—she repeatedly labels her adventures and encounters "curious," "queer," or "absurd."²⁰ Rather, it is to say that she tries to act within Wonderland's (unconventional) convention of physical and social rules. After falling down the rabbit-hole, Alice judges her desire to "shut up like a telescope" to be perhaps possible, because "so many out-of-the-way things had happened lately, that she had begun to think that very few things indeed were really impossible" (Carroll 1998, 13). Her acceptance of the absurd or extraordinary reveals that she starts her journey from a standpoint of accepting—and believing in—the possibilities afforded by the fantastic. In fact, rather than experiencing the initial fall down the

¹⁹ Gardner draws attention to the fact that the first death-related joke in *Wonderland* occurs extremely early in the text and is followed by many more, as well as points to William Empson's earlier work connecting death (as well as sexuality and spirituality) with growing into adulthood in the Alice stories (1970, 27).

²⁰ Instances in which Alice uses these three descriptors to describe her encounters with the fantastic appear as follows: "curious" (Carroll 1998, 14, 16, 32, 59, 68-69, 73-74, 85, 89, 109), "queer" (17, 21, 31, 58), and "absurd" (27, 55). Note that additional instances of these adjectives exist in the text when used by the narrator, or by Alice herself to describe above-ground events.

rabbit-hole as unbelievable, she nearly falls asleep again, threatening the apparent drudgery of an endless falling dream with—ironically—a second dream (11).

Alice's changing definition of what can and cannot be believed continues throughout the narrative. When she meets the Mouse (the second of Wonderland's creatures that she encounters) she wonders "would it be of any use, now ... to speak to this mouse?", eventually deciding in the affirmative because "everything is so out-of-the-way down here, that I should think very likely it can talk" (Carroll 1998, 21). Later in the story Alice "was not much surprised" when the grinning Cheshire Cat vanishes before her eyes, as "she was getting so well used to queer things happening" (58).

Besides this acclimation to the fantastic that leads to Alice's acquiescence of the bizarre in *Wonderland*, she twice identifies her presence in Wonderland as akin to a story or a fairy tale. When she first arrives in Wonderland and finds a vial (containing shrinking liquid) that says "DRINK ME," she is wisely skeptical of the vial's advice (Carroll 1998, 13). The narrator explains "Alice was not going to do *that* [unquestioningly drink the vial] in a hurry ... For she had read several nice little stories about children who had got burnt, and eaten up by wild beasts, and other unpleasant things, all because they *would* not remember the simple rules their friends had taught them" (13; original italics). In this passage Alice—who has not yet met any of the wild beasts or unpleasant things that live in Wonderland—situates herself within the nice little stories that she has heard above-ground. After getting stuck in the White Rabbit's house, Alice laments "I almost wish I hadn't gone down that rabbit-hole ... When I used to read fairy tales, I fancied that kind of thing never happened, and now here I am in the middle of one" (32-3). Alice's admission here reveals that not only does she characterize her Wonderland adventure as a fairy tale, she also expresses belief in such fairy tales. Whoever and whatever she is and may have become in Wonderland, she is certain that she exists as a self and likewise is certain that Wonderland, as the setting for her being, exists.

Throughout her journey in Wonderland, Alice denies the illogical nature of her surroundings and interlocutors by viewing Wonderland as a fairy tale that is as real as herself. As the narrative's trial scene indicates, she has only to lose her temper and name Wonderland's illogic for what it is to send the whole dream experience crashing down around her (Carroll 1998, 108-9). Yet, time and again, Alice perpetuates her Wonderland experience by suppressing her anger and believing the underground world to be as real as herself. Although she is disoriented, frightened, and exasperated, she continues to believe Wonderland (literally, she believes *in* Wonderland). She does not verbally deny that babies can transmogrify into pigs, that cats can disappear and reappear at will, or that tea parties can continue indefinitely (or infinitely). These occurrences are bizarre to her above-ground sensibilities, to be sure, but this bizarreness is preceded not by disbelief and anger—which would discombobulate the dream—but rather by acknowledgement and belief. In this way *Wonderland* links disorientation with belief.

Before turning back to Feldt's fantasy theory as applied to the Exodus narrative, one last stage of *Wonderland* must be dealt with: Alice's final denial of Wonderland at the Knave's trial. As Rackin explains, Alice's denial is a "rejection of mad sanity in favor of the sane madness of ordinary experience" (1991, 65). Before Alice arrives at the croquet ground her verbal attempts to deny the mad sanity of Wonderland are limited to the Dormouse's story at the Mad Tea Party. In this episode the Hare, Hatter, and Alice ask the Dormouse to tell them a story (Carroll 1998, 64-5). The Dormouse does so, inventing a nonsensical tale of three sisters who live at the bottom of a well and making reference to treacle whenever possible. Alice continually interrupts the Dormouse, asking questions that reveal the thoroughly illogical nature of the story and express her disbelief that it could possibly be true or affect her life (65-7).

This denial in the form of probing questions is highly ironic. The Dormouse begins the story with "once upon a time," alerting both its audience and *Wonderland's* readers that the story is more than likely imagined (Carroll 1998, 65). Moreover, Alice has already shown herself quite capable of believing in fairy tales. The Dormouse's story does not satisfy Alice's above-ground sensibilities, causing her to "g[e]t up in great disgust, and wal[k] off" and re-orient herself by naming the Tea Party, and thus the Dormouse's story, as stupid in her above-ground eyes (67). Disbelief here causes Alice's disorientation in relation to the Dormouse's story to cease; it also causes the Dormouse's story to collapse but nobody seems particularly concerned (the Dormouse "fell asleep again instantly") and Wonderland is sustained (67).

Alice's denial at the Knave's trial, however, has more disastrous consequences. Here, Alice disbelieves not only the ludicrous fictional story told by a Dormouse but the very nature of Wonderland itself. In the course of the trial, she sees witnesses testify, juries examine evidence, authorities mix up judicial procedure, and justice go unserved (Carroll 1998, 95-109). Rather than trying to understand Wonderland logic or join in the illogical process, as she has done throughout the narrative, she grows increasingly frustrated and directly challenges the Queen of Hearts's authority. Initially Alice imposes above-ground logic on the trial scene, naming the various parts of the courtroom according to their above-ground counterparts (95). She quickly realizes that the Knave's trial is just one more fantastic event in her adventures, though, as a jury who are too "stupid" to remember even their own names are presented with irrelevant evidence and uncertain testimony (96).

Alice's earlier private evaluation of the Queen and King of Hearts and their courtiers—"why, they're only a pack of cards, after all. I needn't be afraid of them"—bolsters her courage in the courtroom (Carroll 1998, 71). She refuses to obey the King's rules, contradicts the Queen's verdict, questions whether anyone at the trial has any sense at all, and declares "the most important piece of evidence" to be meaningless (104-6). When the Queen insists "sentence first—verdict afterwards" the feud between herself and Alice reaches its climax (107). Alice echoes her earlier judgment of the Queen's incessant orders for beheading, losing her temper and declaring the idea of passing sentence before receiving a verdict to be "stuff and nonsense" (107). Alice has previously—and correctly—

deemed the Queen's judiciary authority to be nonsense (72). These accusations stand in sharp contrast to her other charge of nonsense in the trial scene, leveled against the Dormouse. The Dormouse admonishes Alice (who grows physically larger throughout the trial) for growing at an irregular rate, to which Alice responds "don't talk nonsense" (98). In fact, the Dormouse's complaint is quite sensible by above-ground standards and echoes Alice's earlier disorientation.

When the Queen finally shouts for Alice to be beheaded Alice responds "Who cares for *you*? ... You're nothing but a pack of cards!" (Carroll 1998, 108; original italics). This disavowal expresses Alice's disbelief in Wonderland—she refuses to believe in (much less be worried by) a fantastic world where playing cards utilize backwards judicial procedures to charge innocent victims with nursery-rhyme crimes. As she expresses her disbelief verbally for all of Wonderland to hear the whole scene implodes and she awakens from her dream, finally re-oriented above-ground (109).²¹

Applying Feldt's categories of (dis)orientation and (dis)belief to the fantasy story of *Wonderland* thus reveals a different relationship between these categories than the Exodus narrative does. In both texts proximity to the fantastic—whether disappearing cats or burning bushes—leads to doubt and disorientation, but these reactions do not necessarily indicate disbelief. In *Wonderland*, disorientation remains only so long as Alice perpetuates her dream through belief—as soon as she realizes and verbalizes the sentiment that "you're nothing but a pack of cards" her disbelief causes her disorientation to cease and the dream to vanish (Carroll 1998, 108). This observation, when turned back on the Exodus narrative, indicates that there are different types (or gradations) of belief at work in fantastic texts.

The observation that there are at least two gradations of belief in the Exodus narrative (and in *Wonderland*) sharpens Feldt's link between (dis)orientation and (dis)belief. The first gradation concerns belief as acknowledgment, the second concerns belief as an embrace. Belief as acknowledgment, in Exodus as in *Wonderland*, causes disorientation. In both texts, characters who acknowledge the presence of the fantastic react to such stimuli in some way. If the characters in either narrative did not acknowledge that something fantastic was occurring—that river water was turning to blood or their tears had created a pool that they could swim in—then they would have no reason whatsoever to feel disoriented (see Tolkien 2008, 65). If Pharaoh had refused to acknowledge that the fertility of the Israelites was hyperbolically extreme (Exod. 1:7-22), then he would have had no reason to feel threatened (Feldt 2012, 137).²² If the wandering Israelites had refused to acknowledge that the fantastic appearance of vast quantities of manna and quail in the desert was an irregular occurrence (Exod. 16:15), then they would not have been confused and uncertain (Feldt 2012,

²¹ Ackerman (2008) interprets Alice's final denial in Gnostic terms. Throughout *Wonderland* Alice has been "immers[ed] in the material body ... benumbed, asleep, intoxicated by the poison of the world" (66). When Alice gains the knowledge that the material world—Wonderland—is illusory, she is able to transcend it and wake up (67).

²² It should be noted that even though Pharaoh does not acknowledge YHWH in the way the text desires—that is, by deferring to YHWH's rule and letting the Israelites go—he does nonetheless apprehend and react to YHWH's presence mediated through Moses and Aaron (Exod. 8:8, for example).

136). If Moses had not considered the burning bush's behavior to go against his understanding of how fire and fuel interact (Exod. 3:3), then he would never have needed to "turn aside now and see this marvelous sight" (Feldt 2012, 135).

Apprehension of and reaction to something—here branded as an act of acknowledgment—serve as (at least) rudimentary signs of believing. This belief-as-acknowledgement is the sense in which disorientation belies belief, and this type of belief is present in both the Exodus and *Wonderland* narratives. In her book, Feldt refers to a 1992 article by P. Miscall, explaining that—for Miscall and for herself—"seeing or experiencing the miracles/fantastic events does not always lead to belief" (2012, 31). As the previous analysis of *Wonderland* suggests, however, precisely this experiencing and reacting to the fantastic constitutes a type of belief. Moreover, this experiential response shows that Alice's assimilating reactions—her determination to fit the illogic of *Wonderland* into above-ground categories—are indicative of belief in the fantastic rather than (primarily) attempts to de-fantasize *Wonderland*. Even though she tries to interpret *Wonderland's* fantasy in above-ground terms (and in doing so hints at the fantastic's satirical goals), this interpretation belies a serious engagement with what Alice considers real insofar as she experiences it as a self.

The second gradation of belief that applies to Exodus and *Wonderland* concerns belief as an embrace. To embrace the fantastic in narrative is not only to acknowledge its presence but also to affect sustained behavioral or cognitive change in one's perception of the world. These alterations extend beyond brief cognitive reactions. Belief-as-embrace deals with what Feldt identifies as the function of the fantastic. In Exodus, the function of the fantastic is to "create" (or demarcate) the Israelites as a nation and to induce the belief that YHWH has chosen the Israelites to be YHWH's special people (Exod. 7:7-8). In *Wonderland*, the function of the fantastic is to alert Alice and readers to the fact that the comfortable above-ground world is really a type of "sane madness" that is not far-removed from the "mad sanity" found in *Wonderland* (Rackin 1991, 65).

It is this type of belief that proximity to the fantastic in the Exodus narrative—and, finally, in *Wonderland*—does not necessarily elicit. Neither Alice nor the temperamental Israelite slaves embrace or understand the goals of the respective fantasies that they encounter. Moses doubts YHWH's persuasive power (Exod. 4:1, 10). Pharaoh refuses to let the Israelites go even when confronted with YHWH's supernatural abilities (e.g. Exod. 5:2).²³ The newly-liberated Israelites grumble in the desert, complaining about that which they lack rather than that which they have gained through YHWH's liberating actions (Exod. 14:11-12, 15:24, 16:2-3, 17:3). Alice runs away to play after awakening on the bank, leaving her older sister to ponder the connection between *Wonderland* as a dream-world and the above-ground world (Carroll 1998, 109-10).

Feldt focuses on this second gradation of belief when relating (dis)orientation and (dis)belief. Certainly it is important to examine the function or

²³ As Feldt notes, Pharaoh's hard-hearted refusal to let the Israelites go is not solely caused by his own lack of belief. Rather it is YHWH, at least in some portions of the text, who hardens Pharaoh's heart (2012, 96-97).

purpose of fantastic occurrences in literature. In doing so, however, she overshadows belief-as-acknowledgement—the means by which characters perpetuate the presence of the fantastic in narrative. Armitt suggests that it is not Alice’s frequent escapes from fantastic danger that makes *Wonderland* an exciting book for children; rather, it is the continuing presence of the fantastic itself that appeals to the reader (1996, 151). It is belief-as-acknowledgement that sustains the excitement of *Wonderland* and holds the reader’s attention long enough to allow the fantastic elements to function (as an implied satire of the above-ground world). Without Alice’s belief in—and disorientation caused by—the fantastic, *Wonderland*’s readers are left with two little girls sitting on a river bank with “nothing to do” but sleep or read a book, oblivious to the excitement that exists just below their feet or just on the other side of slumber (Carroll 1998, 9). In fact, Rackin notes that *Wonderland*’s text ends in the same place that it began (1991, 73). Along similar lines, Mendlesohn notes that Alice lacks a clear quest or meaningful objective set out in the text (2008, 27).²⁴ Without a more robust objective than her “long[ing] to get out of that dark hall [at the bottom of the rabbit-hole], and wander out [in the Queen’s garden],” *Wonderland*’s narrative is not impelled by a quest (Carroll 1998, 12). It is belief in and disorientation by the fantastic that propels the *Wonderland* narrative. Without belief-as-acknowledgement’s ability to sustain and perpetuate the text, belief-as-embrace has no chance to occur and the fantastic—in religious or secular literature—has no chance to function.

Ultimately Feldt conflates two degrees of belief, focusing on purpose without considering that which perpetuates or allows the presence of the fantastic (and, indeed, the narrative itself) in the first place. This second gradation of belief further addresses the earlier-mentioned dilemma of Alice’s interest in assimilating the fantastic into above-ground categories (and therefore encroaching on its very status as fantastic). Even though Alice knows fairy tales “never happe[n],” she nonetheless embraces their moral-inducing goals, assimilating their nonsense into above-ground life; in fact, Alice concludes that “there ought to be a [fairy tale] written about [her *Wonderland* experiences]” (Carroll 1998, 33). Applying above-ground logic to a believed fairy tale allows *Wonderland*’s fantasy to execute its function as a commentary on above-ground behavior.

To demonstrate how the multiple degrees of belief discussed in this article affect Feldt’s theory, I will conclude by evaluating Pharaoh’s response to the plague of insects that YHWH sends to Egypt in Exod. 8:20-32. In this fantastic occurrence YHWH tells Moses to threaten Pharaoh with “swarms of insects” if he does not let the Israelites leave Egypt (Exod. 8:20). After YHWH inflicts the plague of insects, Pharaoh—predictably, by this point—agrees to let the Israelites go but, once the insects disappear, reverses his decision and “harden[s] his heart” (Exod. 8:25-32). Feldt’s analysis of this story is minimal, but nevertheless centres on Pharaoh’s disbelief which hinders the fantastic’s purpose: the plague of insects is intended to elicit belief in YHWH’s power and result in the decision to allow the Israelites to escape their slavery in order to become an independent nation (2012,

²⁴ See Armitt (2005, 49) for a contrasting view, in which *Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* are travelogues.

160-1). Unfortunately, Pharaoh's proximity to the fantastic does not lead to belief, and he ignores his promise to Moses.

As this article suggests, however, Pharaoh does exhibit belief in Exod. 8:20-32. Specifically, he demonstrates the re-ordered pattern of belief described above in Egan's work on perception and belief. Feldt sees Pharaoh as encountering a proposition for belief (a plague of insects sent by the Israelite deity), evaluating its truthfulness (initially asking Moses to intercede and ask YHWH to remove the plague), deciding not to believe the proposition, and acting accordingly (hardening his heart). In this sequence, suggests Feldt, the disorienting encounter with the fantastic does not lead to belief, or at least shows that acknowledgment and recognition do not constitute belief (2012, 98). If the sequence is adjusted to reflect belief-as-acknowledgment, however, Pharaoh's belief comes through clearly. Pharaoh encounters a fantastic proposition which he believes, and acts accordingly, first offering Moses the right to "sacrifice to your God within the land" and later offering to free the Israelites "[so] that you may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness" in exchange for freedom from insects (Exod. 8:25, 28). It is only after Pharaoh has perceived and responded to the fantastic that he evaluates its propositional truth status, at which point he hardens his heart and refuses to let the Israelites go. Disorientation caused by a plague of insects leads to belief in Exod. 8:20-8, while Moses' interjection and the insects' disappearance constitutes an act of re-orientation that leads to disbelief in Exod. 8:29-32. Feldt is correct that proximity to the fantastic in this story does not ultimately lead to acceptance of the fantastic's goals, but my suggested gradation of belief shows that disorientation caused by a fantastic proposition signals, rather than harms, belief.

Applying Feldt's modified fantasy theory categories to Carroll's *Wonderland* reveals an alternate relationship between (dis)orientation and (dis)belief to that posited in *The Fantastic in Religious Narrative from Exodus to Elisha*. While in Feldt's study disbelief and disorientation are linked, in *Wonderland* a different relationship emerges. Alice's disorientation in an underground world where rules of any sort—including those that govern physical space and time—are absent cannot be remedied by her use of above-ground logic. Her disorientation is perpetuated by belief-as-acknowledgment, that is, by her continual recognition of Wonderland as being at least as real as herself. Until her final denial at the Knave's trial, Alice further perpetuates her disorientation by belief-as-embrace; that is, by trying to find meaning in Wonderland and trying to exist as a meaningful part of the mayhem. Thus, *Wonderland* reveals a link between disorientation and belief, a link that is only severed by denial and disbelief. This alternate relationship found in *Wonderland* does not negate the usefulness of Feldt's modified fantasy theory. It does suggest, however, that the concept of belief—in religious as well as non-religious narratives—is more nuanced than Feldt's examination of Exodus suggests. In particular, it suggests that the concept of belief is connected not only to re-narrations of narratives (wherein the fantastic can function to achieve its goals) but also to the perpetuation of the original narratives themselves.

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