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**A BOOK OF CONVERSATIONS: TRAUMA, REPRESENTATION, AND
RECONSTRUCTION IN LEWIS CARROLL'S *ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN
WONDERLAND***

by

Rachel Telfer

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Abstract

For over 150 years, critics and readers have struggled to understand the meaning of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Through Alice, Carroll asserts that a focus on conversations in Wonderland will illuminate the use, or value, of his novel. The conversations between Alice and other characters reveal that Alice experiences a breakdown of her reality that mirrors the symptoms of trauma. Thus, looking through Alice's deconstructive process through the lens of trauma can provide insight into the value of Carroll's novel. Yet the novel does not describe a known source of trauma. Instead of emphasizing the traumatic event itself, Carroll focuses on the deconstructive and reconstructive process a victim experiences as they face the effects of trauma. Within the safe distance of the novel, readers can fall down the rabbit hole and enter Wonderland, a place where they can play with the boundaries of reality, explore how language represents a deconstructed reality and influences the reconstruction of reality, and prepare to face the small and large traumas of life.

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A Book of Conversations: Trauma, Representation, and Reconstruction in Lewis Carroll's

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Lewis Carroll's introductory poem in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) describes an idyllic afternoon during which three little girls, Imperious Prima, Secunda, and Tertia, beg for a story full of nonsense and imagination from a "weary" narrator (6). From the interplay between the three listeners and the narrator "grew the tale of Wonderland" (6). The poem reveals a key foundation for the entire novel: the interaction between a listener and a teller. This foundation is continued within the first page of the novel as Alice asks the question, "What is the use of a book without pictures or conversations?" (9). Through Alice's question, Carroll emphasizes the importance of the listener-teller interaction, or conversations, to generate a story. Only after three listeners beg for a story from the weary narrator is a story born. Only after Alice's question regarding conversations does a rabbit appear, leading her to the adventures that would fill a novel. "Conversations" propel the creation of a story.

Yet Alice asserts that she is not satisfied with the creation of just any story; unlike her sister's boring, hard-to-connect-with book, she wants a story placed in between the fantasy of "Childhood's dreams" and the reality of "Memory's mystic band" (6), a story that engages the imagination while exploring reality's everyday experiences. Alice, as a representative of readers, wants exactly what Carroll provides, a book full of both pictures and conversations. However, Carroll does not let Alice nor his readers sit idly by the river, merely reading a story. Through Alice's voice, he provides a question to answer while reading: as a book full of conversations and pictures, what is the use, or value, of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*? Maybe it is merely a "childish story" plucked from the fantastical "far-off" land, as Disney seems to think, with its light, imaginative cartoon depiction of Carroll's story

(6). Maybe it is only a silly, nonsensical children's book that grew from a conversation "on a river" between three girls and a weary narrator for readers to enjoy (xix). Yet if Carroll's novel was a mere playful fantastical story, it would not have inspired over 150 years of conversations within both the academic and non-academic world. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* intrigues readers because it enables them to playfully engage with the harsh, cold, and destructive side of reality through the interactions between listeners and tellers. Readers join the conversations between Alice and the Mad-Hatter, the Cheshire Cat, the Queen of Hearts, and other characters, questioning their own reality and safely exploring the limitations of language and representation. Through Alice, Carroll pushes the boundaries of his readers' realities.

The argument that Carroll breaks the framework of reality is nothing new. In an article from 1988, literary critic Linda Shires proposes that through fantasy, parody, and nonsense, many Victorian authors "explode and transgress the frame of 'the real'," placing the reader in a "realm of non-signification where nothing is stable" and "definite meaning or absolute reality is impossible to attain" (267). Other more current literary critics also explore different ways that Carroll pushes boundaries, including how he uses both "words and images" to "create textual power" (Howard 15), how he uses dreams to reveal psychological process (Schatz 93), how he "distorts" the perception of identity (Conkan 84), community (Erikson 83), and sense of self (Abbas, Sameera, & Rubina 1), and how he plays with "the concept of meaning...and nonsense" (Blocher 1425). Although much of this literary criticism finds meaning through interpreting pieces of Wonderland, many neglect to answer Carroll's most important question: What is the value of his book of conversations and pictures? Is it delightful to analyze and interpret, but essentially a novel in which "definite meaning" or "absolute reality" is impossible to find? The curiosity of Carroll's readers as they engage with the nonsensical Wonderland shows that *Alice's*

Adventures in Wonderland is indeed more than a silly but entertaining children's novel. Yet perhaps focusing on the analyses of literary critics alone is not enough to fully define the value of Carroll's novel.

TRAUMA IN WONDERLAND

The field of trauma theory and research is a crucial addition to the work of literary critics. It illuminates the potential meaning and value behind Carroll's attempts to break the framework of reality. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) defines trauma as the "exposure to actual threatened death, serious injury or sexual violation" ("Posttraumatic Stress"). The DSM-5, a manual referred to by clinical psychologists and researchers to assess and diagnose mental disorders, explains that a victim of trauma experiences four clusters of delayed behavioral symptoms. First, a victim repeatedly re-experiences the traumatic event through memories, dreams, or flashbacks. Second, a victim seeks to avoid the memories, thoughts, feelings or external reminders that cause a victim to experience symptoms of trauma even when there is no threat present. Third, a victim experiences negative changes in both cognitions and moods, like "a persistent and distorted sense of blame of self or others,...estrangement from others,...markedly diminished interest in activities, [and] an inability to remember key aspects of the event." Finally, a victim becomes hyper-alert and aroused into a fight-or-flight mode. Self-destructive, reckless, or aggressive behaviors, hypervigilance, disturbances in sleep, and/or other related issues often accompany a victim's state of hyperarousal ("Posttraumatic Stress"). Whether a trauma is directly experienced, witnessed, or repeatedly heard about, it can cause clinically significant impairment in a victim's social, cognitive, emotional, and physiological functioning. Simply put, trauma interferes with and ultimately destroys a person's sense of self and world.

These explanations of the effects of trauma, diagnosed as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), reveal that the experience of trauma is not an event, but a process. Thus, “attempting to understand [trauma’s] surprising impact,” or focusing on the way a traumatic event is received, assimilated, and expressed can be as important or even more important than defining the traumatic event itself (Caruth, “Introduction” 4). Although the DSM-5 accurately explains a victim’s external responses which helps psychologists diagnose their patients, it has limitations in terms of depicting a PTSD victim’s internal experiences. In order to effectively understand this internal deconstructive process, a more inclusive perspective on trauma is needed. Trauma theorists, psychologists, and researchers need Lewis Carroll to characterize what the DSM-5 cannot: the internal breakdown of a person’s reality. Alternatively, literary critics need the angle of trauma research to better define the purpose behind and value of Carroll’s work.

Although *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* mirrors the deconstructive process of trauma, the story contains no traumatic event. Yet the listener-teller interactions between Alice and other characters reveal that Alice experiences a breakdown of her sense of self and reality that mirrors the symptoms of trauma. Through Alice’s loss of reality, Carroll makes a trauma victim’s subjective process almost tangible. His novel paints a clearer picture of how trauma impacts a victim. Alice’s conversations with herself and other characters portray a blurring of her subjective and objective world that leaves her feeling confused and isolated. She loses her sense of self, which disrupts her ability to express herself through language. Her resulting disjointed and nonsensical conversations reveal the disorder within her social world. These disruptions of Alice’s reality parallel the deconstruction of reality a trauma victim faces. Looking through Alice’s deconstructive process through the lens of trauma can provide insight into the value of Carroll’s novel.

As Carroll's listeners, readers participate in the creation of a story while experiencing the destruction of their reality with Alice. Carroll's emphasis on disorder and chaos could leave some readers feeling unsettled or disoriented. Perhaps his "flirtation" with nonsense pushes "language and meaning toward dangerous limits of dissolution" (Shires 267). Yet by experiencing the unsettling deconstructive process through Alice's eyes, readers can safely and playfully question the limitations of language, self-perceptions, and social communication. While readers face what they fear, a loss of self and world, Carroll simultaneously helps them accept and value the deconstructive process rather than fear it.

Not only does Carroll push the boundaries of reality, he provides a guide to regaining a sense of self, language, and world through Wonderland's many conversations. The interplay between characters reveals the way meaning is generated from a broken reality and provides readers with necessary tools to reconstruct their jarred reality. Instead of a novel of episodic conversations or isolated themes, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* both explains the process of deconstructing reality and provides the means to reconstruct reality through its many conversations. An analysis of the novel as a process rather than an event illuminates the value of this book of conversations.

THE DECONSTRUCTIVE PROCESS OF TRAUMA

Although *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* takes readers through the complete traumatic process through the perspective of Alice, Alice is not a victim of trauma; she never experiences or witnesses a traumatic event. She merely spots a White Rabbit while debating whether to make a daisy-chain by the bank with her sister and follows her curiosity down a rabbit hole. As the novel takes readers through the process of deconstruction without the need for a traumatic trigger, the idea that Alice is not a trauma victim is crucial. If Carroll included a cause for the

brokenness of Wonderland, readers would focus on the event itself more than the effects of trauma. By deemphasizing the event, Carroll provides a universal commentary on what a victim experiences *after* trauma, applicable to many different types of trauma and depths of deconstruction. He releases his readers from what typically haunts a victim, the event, enabling them to move past the moment and instead engage in the process of deconstruction and reconstruction. Yet without a traumatic event, Carroll must still break Alice's idyllic childhood reality with the overwhelming dark and broken presence of Wonderland. The transition from her world into Wonderland through the rabbit hole symbolizes the crucial beginning to the traumatic deconstructive process: the breakage of her framework of reality.

Alice's reality is her home, family, school, and childhood. The rupture in this reality is shown as she attempts to define her experience of falling down the rabbit hole with the constructs of her old life. For example, she uses "her lessons in the school-room," to estimate how far she has fallen (11). As she descends, she passes by displaced objects, the broken shards of her old reality, like "cupboards and book-shelves....maps and pictures hung upon pegs." She even distracts herself with thoughts of her dear cat Dinah or how brave those at home would think of her "after such a fall as this" (10), yet none of her attempts to use language to define reality effectively represent her experience. As an event "outside the range of human experience" (Brown 100), her fall down the rabbit hole cannot be contained within her framework of reality and instead shatters it. Thus, Alice's fall down the rabbit hole coincides with the initial shattering of reality that accompanies a traumatic event.

THE BLURRING OF OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE

The deconstruction of a trauma victim's reality blurs the line between their objective and subjective experience. This blurring begins for Alice as she falls down the rabbit hole. She

starts to feel “rather sleepy” as she talks to herself, “in a dreamy sort of way,” asking herself the same questions over and over. Cathy Caruth explains the mechanisms behind this repetitive questioning Alice manifests. In order to survive a traumatic event, the “event is not...experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (Caruth, “Introduction” 4-5). Alice’s need to repeat words represents the belated manifestation of traumatic symptoms triggered by her fall down the rabbit hole. Her subjective and objective realities are beginning to blur, and Alice becomes “possessed” by the broken images of her old reality.

Alice’s dreams also demonstrate the blurring of her objective and subjective reality. Her dream of “walking hand in hand with Dinah” (11), despite her knowledge that Dinah is a cat, shows a blurring of human and animal. This initiates Alice’s descent into Wonderland, a place full of talking animals, symbolic of a muddled line between imagination and reality. Wonderland is a dream that overtakes her current reality; she encounters humans like animals and animals like humans, compulsive language, and sheer madness. Alice’s repetitive use of language and the combination of reality and dreams illustrates for readers what the blurring of a trauma victim’s subjective and objective reality looks like.

THE LOSS OF SELF

As objective and subjective reality become almost indistinguishable, a victim loses the ability to connect with and understand the self. Similarly, the confusion that Alice faces after she falls causes her to lose her sense of self. Facing a hallway of locked doors, Alice feels hopeless, lost, and trapped within her broken reality (12). The changes in size Alice experiences in order to enter Wonderland cause her to feel afraid that she will go “out all together, like a candle” (14). She sees herself as an incomplete individual, like “there’s hardly enough of [her]

left to make *one* respectable person” (14). Like Alice, many trauma victims express “the feeling that [their] old, familiar self has gone, missing somewhere” (Brown, 104). They feel “terrified of losing self-control” as their size, or self-perception, drastically changes like Alice’s as she eats and drinks (Horowitz 191). Within this fear-inducing loss of self and the desperate attempts to find the self, Alice’s “first” goal becomes “to grow to [her] right size again” (37); Alice needs to find herself again.

However, without a reality in which to ground the self, victims are left not knowing how to find themselves again. They face the questions of identity that frequently accompany the loss of reality. For example, Alice begins to wonder “Who in the world am I?...Ah, *that’s* the great puzzle!” (18). Because traumatic events “strip away external sources of validation...the victim is left without a way to answer his own question,” leading to “identity disturbances” (Horowitz 189). Alice desperately and unsuccessfully attempts to ground herself in her old reality, comparing her characteristics to her old friends Ada and Mabel. She begins to compare her physical characteristics to others, like her own hair that “doesn’t go in ringlets at all” to Ada’s “long ringlets” (18). Next she compares her knowledge of “all sorts of things” to Mabel’s “very little” knowledge (18). As using the backdrop of others is not working, she tries to ground herself in the repetition of the multiplication tables that represent her old external environment. However, in all her attempts to externally validate her reality, Alice cannot piece herself together and is left only with the same question, “Who am I then?” (19). Her confusion, fear, change of size, and questions of identity all reveal that, as a result of her shattered reality, Alice has lost her sense of self.

THE LOSS OF LANGUAGE

The loss of self interferes with the ability to express the self. Reality and language are intertwined, as language is the attempt to define and represent reality. When reality breaks, language breaks with it. As literary critic Shoshana Felman claims about the poetry of Paul Celan, "*the breakage of the verse enacts the breakage of the world*" (32). Soon after Alice expresses questions about her own identity, she attempts to find herself through the use of language, or a poem. Yet as she recites it, "her voice [sounds] hoarse and strange, and the words [do] not come the same as they used to do" (19). Her voice has become foreign, and she feels like a stranger to herself. She seems powerless against the dark undertones of fear and danger that change the poem and take over her language. Alice's original poem is about an innocent, "little busy Bee" who improves each day and teaches children the importance of labor and the dangers of "idle hands" (303). However, the poem becomes a story about a conniving crocodile who "cheerfully...welcomes little fishes" into his "smiling jaws" (19). What "haunts" Alice, what she has not "yet come to terms with," is manifesting itself in her language (Erickson 184). The haunting of Alice by the darkness of Wonderland, a representation of the traumatic process, peeks through this poem, illustrating that like a trauma victim, Alice has lost her power over language.

THE LOSS OF SOCIAL WORLD

When language as the bridge between the self and the world breaks, a victim's social interactions rupture. Forced into the "solitary" role of being a witness to trauma, victims often feel isolated (Felman 15). Likewise Alice's loss of language interferes with her interactions with others. Her conversations with Wonderland characters become isolating and emotionally charged. Her first interaction is a conversation that takes place in her own pool of tears, a result of Alice's feelings of powerlessness and loss. The pool symbolically surrounds and influences

her interactions with the Mouse, similar to how trauma influences a victim's social interactions. After many attempts of talking to the Mouse with no response, Alice attempts to connect with it through conversing about her cat, Dinah. Reacting to Alice's use of language, the Mouse gives "a sudden leap out of the water, and seemed to quiver all over with fright" (21). Despite her remembered knowledge that mice are afraid of cats, Alice continually brings up cats throughout their conversation, especially Dinah, a broken shard of her old reality. Ultimately, the mouse ends up "swimming away from her as hard as it could go" (22). Therefore, instead of creating connection, Alice's use of language evokes fear and eventually results in social isolation. Her conversation with the Mouse reveals the disruption trauma causes in a victim's social world.

EMERGING FROM THE RABBIT HOLE: THE NEED TO RECONSTRUCT REALITY

Overall, Alice's fall and initial interactions reveal the subjective experiences a victim faces as a result of trauma. Her fall down the rabbit hole symbolizes the shattering of reality that causes a deconstructive rippling effect. Objective and subjective reality blur, resulting in a loss of self, language, and social world. When trauma victims emerge from this rabbit hole process, they feel "a deep need to talk about it and to talk it out" (Felman 52). Essentially, victims need to somehow represent their experiences. Trauma is a "reflective process" where one links "past to present" through the use of representation and imagination (Eyerman 3). By representing experience, a victim can begin to rearrange the broken pieces of his old reality, create meaning, and work towards reconstructing a sense of self and world.

Alice emerges from the shattering of her reality and her loss of self with the need to represent her experiences using language. As she falls, she talks "aloud" even though she knows "there was no one to listen to her" (10). As she loses herself and language, representing experience becomes difficult, as "language [is] somehow incommensurate with it" (Felman

52). When she struggles to find “the right word,” she is “rather glad there *was* no one listening” (11). Thus, without the right words, a part of Alice wishes to avoid representation while the other part craves representation. Despite this internal battle, as the menacing crocodile overrules Alice’s attempt to recite the busy bee poem, she realizes that talking aloud to herself is not enough to reconstruct her reality. Realizing that her attempts to represent experience while in isolation leave her feeling powerless over language and unable to find meaning, she expresses a wish that someone “*would* put their head down” the rabbit hole (19). Within her deconstructive traumatic process, Alice’s attempts to represent her experience to herself alone do not help her reconstruct reality. Alice desperately needs a listener.

THE NEED FOR A LISTENER

Like Alice, victims of trauma often emerge from the ashes of experience with a need to tell their story. Telling their story, however, is not enough. A trauma victim needs “an empathic listener...an *addressable* other” to validate their reality (Laub 68). They need someone who can “hear the anguish of [their] memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness” (68). Without the self as an anchor, a victim struggles to generate meaning from experience. The listener plays a vital role in the “creation of knowledge” or meaning (57). Using the listener as their anchor, a victim can begin to organize the broken pieces of their reality. For this reason, Alice’s natural inclination after her fall and loss of self is to call out for a listener. In isolation, Alice would only struggle to find meaning from the brokenness. Without listener-teller interactions, her adventures would be over, and Carroll’s story would end; as Alice asserts, “What is the use of a book without pictures or conversations?” (9). Without the listener-teller interaction as a basis for Wonderland, there would be no progression, no structure, no climax, and Alice would most likely never leave Wonderland; the lack of a listener would

ultimately “annihilate the story” (Laub 68). The act of representing experience through telling is both “the process and the place wherein...the ‘knowing’ of the event is given birth to” (57). The listener-teller relationship is crucial to help a trauma victim reconstruct reality.

THE ROLE OF A LISTENER

In his essay entitled “Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening,” psychiatrist and trauma theorist Dori Laub explains the various roles a listener plays in a trauma victim’s process of reconstructing reality. A listener acts as a “blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time” (57). The act of telling becomes the act of inscribing, or engraving a record upon the listener through language. Instead of words unconsciously shining through a victim, like Alice’s crocodile poem, the act of telling makes the use of language a conscious attempt to organize experience. Without a listener, a victim is like a writer with no page or pen; he has no means to free the self from the story within. However, once a listener is present, instead of being unwillingly possessed by trauma, a victim can begin the process of regaining control through the deliberate use of representation.

The listener-teller relationship is a delicate balance of transmitting and receiving. Its goal is to “construct...a narrative,” or to create order from brokenness (Laub 69). This reconstruction of reality can only occur when a victim “can articulate and *transmit* the story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself and then take it back again, inside” (69). The teller must be able to express each broken piece and inscribe it upon the listener. Then the listener must become a medium through which the teller can reorganize those broken pieces to find meaning. Once order is found within chaos, the teller can “take [his story] back again,” as an organized, meaningful narrative.

While Laub's definitions are helpful in understanding the role of the listener, some confusion results from his definitions. In reference to the process of inscribing, Laub asserts that the listener is both a "participant" and a "co-owner" of the traumatic event during the act of listening (57). The role of listener seems unclear as a listener cannot physically play these two parts at the same time. Laub also argues that the listener-teller relationship is crucial to generating meaning from traumatic experience. However, not all listener-teller relationships are effective; an ineffective listener-teller interaction can prevent rather than enable the generation of meaning, also preventing the reconstruction of reality. Through the listener, the teller is able to reorganize the pieces of their broken reality. The way a listener receives the story can either help free the victim from the past, or cause a "distorted identity-formation," enclosing the victim in a past he or she repeats "compulsively as if it were fully present" (Eyerman 3). Laub neglects to fully explain the difference between a good listener who enables the reconstruction of reality and a bad listener who prevents the reconstruction of reality. In order to understand the deconstruction and reconstruction of reality, it is important to explore and articulate the differences between the listener-teller relationship's ability to enable or disable the generation of meaning. Carroll sheds light on this confusion. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, he explores the line between nonsense and meaning and the results of listener-teller interactions. Wonderland's listener-teller conversations reveal the unclear role of the listener as participant or co-owner, the definitions of nonsense and meaning, and the way each is generated.

LISTENER-TELLER CONVERSATIONS IN WONDERLAND

Before evaluating conversations in Wonderland, it is important to note that even though Alice is the protagonist of Carroll's novel, she is not the only character in need of a

listener. Wonderland is full of characters who all manifest the same subjective symptoms of lost selves, broken language, and disrupted social interactions. For example, instead of progressing towards becoming a butterfly, the Caterpillar smokes a hookah all day on a mushroom. The Mad Hatter is forever stuck in tea time. The Cheshire Cat has accepted Wonderland's broken reality as his reality, completely comfortable with the fact that "we're all mad here" (57). The Queen of Hearts spends her days threatening everyone, "Off with their heads!" (72), without a logical reason. Wonderland is essentially a traumatized world without a known cause for trauma. Characters are frozen in time, stunted and possessed by repetition and broken language; all vacillate between the role of listener and teller as they attempt to reconstruct their realities through the use of language.

THE CO-OWNER LISTENER: ALICE

The Mouse expresses a need to tell Alice the "history" behind its fear of "cats and dogs" as they leave the pool of tears (23). As Alice listens to the Mouse's "long and sad tale" (27), she gets so caught up in the meaning of the words "tale" versus "tail" that as the Mouse is speaking, "her idea of the tale" physically shapes the story into a literal tail (28). This results in the Mouse feeling invalidated, because she is "not attending" to the story (29). As Laub explains, the ideal listener is one who can act as a "blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time" (57). Alice, however, brings a full rather than blank page to the conversation, placing her own meaning upon the Mouse's experience.

It seems that rather than acting as a "participant," Alice is a "co-owner" listener, who takes control over the story, forming the Mouse's words into a tail. Alice later continues to misinterpret and change other words like "not" versus "knot" (29). The Mouse eventually labels Alice's words as insulting "nonsense," as they do not accurately represent the reality the Mouse

wishes to represent (29). Thus, instead of generating meaning, the listener-teller interaction creates what the Mouse deems as “nonsense” while Alice approaches the act of listening as a co-owner, forming the story herself and replacing the intended meaning of the Mouse’s words with her own (29). Alice’s co-owner approach to listening prevents her from providing a blank page upon which the Mouse can inscribe its story, and their listener-teller interaction creates nonsense rather than meaning.

THE APATHETIC LISTENER: THE CATERPILLAR

Another listener-teller relationship dynamic that creates nonsense rather than meaning is a listener who lacks empathy. The Caterpillar places Alice as the teller immediately when it asks her the question, “Who are *you*?” (40). Although this question gives Alice the opportunity to express herself, she did not feel it was “an encouraging opening for a conversation” (40). The Caterpillar had never established a common, safe ground before asking this deep question of the soul. She struggles to answer without a grounded sense of self. Instead of being patient and understanding with her struggle to find words, the Caterpillar demands Alice to “Explain [her]self!” (41). Alice’s further attempt to receive reassurances are only met with a lack of empathy; for example, “you see,” is met with “I don’t see,” and “wo’n’t you?” is met with “Not a bit” (41). Alice ends up feeling “irritated” and eventually turns away (41). Because the Caterpillar is not acting as the “empathic listener,” the interaction does not generate meaning for Alice nor help her regain a sense of self (Laub 68).

In this uncomfortable interaction, Alice does get the chance for the first time to define her experience, and although the Caterpillar is impatient, he is a “participant” listener who asks her questions and gives her the opportunity to tell her story. Although she feels angry at the way it constantly “contradicted” her (45), it eventually gives her the mushroom, the means to find her

right size again. In guiding her to define the size she wishes to be, the Caterpillar not only acts as a “participant” but a “co-owner” listener. As Alice and the Caterpillar learn to communicate, the Caterpillar begins to take an empathetic role, reassuring her that she will “get used to” the easily offended creatures of Wonderland (46). It even answers a question she says to herself, “as if she had asked it aloud,” showing a deeper connection was made between the two characters (46). Throughout this listener-teller interaction, Caterpillar seems to shift from participant to co-owner as it takes more of an active role in providing Alice with the way to find her right size, an important step to reconstructing her reality. Ultimately, Alice finds her “usual height” (49), revealing that the listener-teller interaction helped Alice reconstruct a part of her reality.

THE PARTICIPANT LISTENER: THE CHESHIRE CAT

Later at a time of confusion, Alice meets the “good-natured” Cheshire Cat who takes the role of participant-listener too far (56). Alice expresses her question of “which way [she] ought to go from here” (56). Instead of inserting his own opinion to generate an answer like a co-owner listener would, he responds, “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to” (56). This response respects the autonomy and desires of the individual. However, because Alice does not yet have the knowledge of Wonderland to form an opinion, it would be helpful if the Cheshire Cat, a Wonderland native, would provide an opinion about the decision. In this case, a shift from a mere listening participant to a co-owner contributor would actually help rather than inhibit Alice. Their conversation shows that while in some cases, a co-owner listener can stifle meaning, at times, a co-owner listener who provides his own interpretation on reality can contribute to the production of meaning from experience. Nevertheless, Alice answers, “I don’t much care,” and the Cheshire Cat replies, “Then it doesn’t matter” (56). Alice does not know how to define her “*somewhere*” and needs a co-owner listener to help her move forward.

When the Cheshire Cat finally takes the role of a co-owner listener and provides some options, his definitions of reality unsettle Alice. He labels both of Alice's destination options as mad, and when Alice declares she does not want to be around mad people, he asserts "Oh, you ca'n't help that...we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad" (57). The Cheshire Cat has made his deconstructed reality the norm by defining himself and everyone else as mad. Alice now feels trapped in a world of madness which compels her to question the Cat's perspective that broken Wonderland is normal. His explanations are linguistically structured as logic but result in nonsense. For example, he argues that because he does not grow when he is angry or wag his tail when pleased like a dog does, he must be mad. Underlying this assertion is the belief that people's differences make them mad. These illogical attempts to explain reality only leave Alice feeling dissatisfied. The Cat does not understand Alice's dissatisfaction; without a knowledge of Wonderland's brokenness, the Cat lacks the motive to reconstruct reality at all. Thus, although he acts as both a participant and co-owner, he lacks the important goal that drives conversations: the need to define current reality and reconstruct its brokenness. Without a clear listener-teller purpose, the conversation is not effective in generating meaning or reconstructing reality.

THE BROKEN LISTENER: THE MAD HATTER

Because a listener must be a place upon which a trauma victim can try on different constructions of identities and realities, he must be grounded in the self. If neither the listener nor the teller have the self as an anchor for reality, only nonsense will result from the interaction. The Mad Hatter is a perfect example of a character that lacks a grounded sense of self. He seems to lack a connection with the social world, including both a way to interact with others and the knowledge of social norms. When Alice approaches the table, he only stares at her for a while, then finally remarks, "Your hair wants cutting," offending her (60). He asks

riddles with no answers, sees time as a “him” (63), and always thinks it is six o’clock. His remarks leave Alice puzzled, as they “have no sort of meaning...yet [are] certainly English” (62). Whether he is playing the role of listener or teller, his interaction with Alice only seems to create nonsense, and Alice eventually leaves the table “in great disgust” (67). The Hatter’s incongruent social behavior and meaningless use of language reflect his lack of a grounded sense of self. In order to effectively help the teller generate meaning from a broken reality, the listener must live within an intact reality, not a reality forever frozen in tea-time.

THE ADAPTIVE LISTENER: ALICE

Once Alice becomes the Mad Hatter’s listener, she uses effective questions and validating comments to help him figure out the cause of his strange behavior. He reveals that when singing a song for the Queen of Hearts, she yells “He’s murdering the time. Off with his head!” (64). This experience parallels trauma, because the Queen invalidates his voice and threatens his life. The Hatter becomes haunted by time, a representation of his traumatic moment, and starts to live in a world where “it’s always tea-time” (64). At first, Alice only plays the role of the participant listener, validating his feelings through exclamations like, “How dreadfully savage!” (64). Using a simple question, “Is that the reason so many tea-things are put out here?” (64), she shifts from participant to co-owner as she helps the Mad Hatter put the pieces together between his past and his current behavior. Their interaction enables the reconstruction of a piece of the Mad Hatter’s reality, as he realizes, “Yes, that’s it” (64). By moving from a validating participant listener to a co-owner of defining reality, Alice enables the Hatter to discover meaning, a cause and effect connection between his past and behavior, and define a part of his broken reality. As a result of Alice’s listening, the Hatter takes a step towards better understanding himself and his world.

This small moment of an effective listener-teller interaction is only possible because Alice has found her "usual height" by this point in her adventures (48). Originally Alice, trapped in her ever-changing perceptions of self and size, was not an effective listener. With a regained sense of self, she can act as a blank page upon which the Hatter can inscribe his story, reorganize the pieces, and receive his story back, gaining a building block of meaning in order to eventually reconstruct his reality. Alice learns from her experiences with co-owner, apathetic, and participant listeners and creates a moment of effective listener-teller conversation with the Mad Hatter. By balancing empathetic, participant, and co-owner listening, Alice is able to sustain a small moment of meaning productivity and help the Hatter define a piece of his reality.

WONDERLAND CONVERSATIONS: THE LISTENER-TELLER INTERACTION

As Carroll reveals in his introductory poem, Wonderland conversations are the foundation for Alice's adventures and add valuable insights to topics like trauma, representation, and the listener-teller relationship. After the traumatic breakdown of reality, the use of language to represent experience and generate meaning is essential to reconstruct a sense of self and world. Through nonsense and meaning, Carroll illustrates what enables or prevents a character from reconstructing reality. Evaluating his characters' attempts to represent the reality of Wonderland through language reveals how to facilitate or impede productive listener-teller interactions; a productive interaction produces meaning, an accurate representation of reality, while an unproductive interaction produces nonsense, or an inaccurate representation of reality. Wonderland interactions contribute to the conversation about trauma and listener-teller relationships by furthering Laub's incomplete definition of the role and goal of the listener.

Part of the process of generating meaning relies upon the role of the listener. While Laub describes the listener as both a participant and co-owner, the Wonderland conversations

illuminate how listeners effectively and ineffectively navigate these shifting roles and thus generate meaning or nonsense. Alice's conversation with the Mouse reveals that a co-owner listener who controls the telling of the story with her interpretation before acting as a participant listener results in an unproductive interaction. If a listener takes the role of co-owner too soon, he may enter the moment of telling with a full rather than blank page and influence the way the story is inscribed; this may result in a reconstructed reality that does not accurately represent the victim's experiences. On the other end of the scale, the participant listener, the Cheshire Cat, and his "all mad" definition of reality does not provide the input necessary for Alice to create meaning within Wonderland. Yet no matter the role the listener fulfills, a lack of empathy like the Caterpillar displays through his off-putting questions and impatient answers also prevents meaning by interfering with the connection between listener and teller. Even worse, a listener without a grounded sense of self like the Mad Hatter produces pure nonsense. All of these characters' attempts to represent the broken reality of Wonderland through the listener-teller relationship are ultimately rendered unproductive as they ineffectively navigate the different roles of the listener.

Yet despite their lack of productivity, Carroll still emphasizes the importance of Wonderland conversations. Perhaps against the backdrop of these unproductive interactions shines Alice's small moment of productive listening. Alice enters the conversation with the Mad Hatter as a participant listener who validates feelings and allows the story to be inscribed upon herself. In an opportune moment, she shifts to the role of co-owner as she uses her interpretation of his story to help him connect his reality with his past. A productive interaction leads to an understanding of reality. Although this positive interaction is short-lived, it reveals that the listener enables the production of meaning by effectively navigating his roles as a listener.

Therefore, Wonderland conversations clarify Laub's definition of the listener-teller interaction. Carroll's first pages assert that conversations are the foundation of his story. Their tension drives his story. Despite their inability to produce meaning for the characters, they generate meaning for Carroll's listeners. Readers discover the function and goal of the listener-teller interaction and learn how to produce meaning rather than nonsense. Carroll pushes the boundaries of reality by providing readers with an opportunity to explore the use of language to represent experience. Although much is gained from evaluating the deconstructive process, it is equally important to assess whether or not Alice is able to create meaning from her broken reality. Conversations are not only meant to represent experience; their ultimate goal is to enable the reconstruction of reality. In order to define the value of Carroll's Wonderland conversations, it is important not only to understand the listener-teller relationship's role in the deconstructive process, but also to evaluate whether or not those conversations enable Alice to regain her reality.

THE SIX STEPS OF RECONSTRUCTION:

Trauma research can serve as a lens through which to evaluate whether or not Alice effectively begins to reconstruct her reality. Although there are numerous studies that emphasize the importance of re-telling traumatic experience in the post-traumatic healing process, research is "not always explicit about the exact therapeutic processes" that enable reconstruction (Kaminer 482). To address this knowledge gap, psychologist Debra Kaminer compares peer-reviewed trauma journal articles and books, discovering six therapeutic processes that facilitate recovery from trauma. In the re-telling process, a victim must "physically and verbally [express] strong emotions while mentally re-living...an early traumatic experience" to experience an "emotional release" (484). Then, the expression of the traumatic event must be formed into a

coherent and verbal narrative to facilitate reconstruction. By expressing their experience in a safe environment, victims become habituated to the anxiety associated with the trauma and regain control over the self and the use of language. This expression of their story is not enough; an "empathic and acknowledging witness" must also receive and validate the victim's representation (488). Through the resulting listener-teller interaction, the representation of traumatic experience shifts from a merely coherent narrative to a meaningful narrative. By finding meaning within their traumatic experience, victims are able to identify the value or purpose of their trauma and complete the process of reconstruction. This process varies depending on the situation, but all six steps must occur in order to form a meaningful reality from a fragmented experience. Evaluating Alice's experiences using Kaminer's six steps of reconstruction provides answers to the question of whether or not Alice is able to reconstruct her reality and why.

EMOTIONAL CATHARSIS, LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATION, AND HABITUATION TO ANXIETY

Alice experiences emotional catharsis immediately following her fall down the rabbit hole, the symbol of a traumatic breaking of reality. Her "sudden change" in size and inability to reach the key causes her to repeatedly re-live the feelings associated with her fall (20). Releasing her emotions through a "burst of tears," she eventually becomes completely submerged in her own pool of tears. Literally swimming in her own emotions, she later is able to leave the pool and dry off, or experience an "emotional release" (Kaminer 484), and completes step one of the reconstruction process.

After experiencing emotional catharsis, a victim must form a coherent narrative with the fragments of their "emotionally charged memories," (Kaminer 485). Alice's conversations with

the Mouse, Caterpillar, Cheshire Cat, Mad Hatter, and other characters become pieces of her developing narrative, helping her to define and organize her “affects, cognitions, behaviors, and sensory experiences” (485). As she gathers a fragmented Wonderland, she essentially forms a linguistic representation, otherwise known as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Carroll's novel organizes the fragments of “sensory memories” or experiences into “narrative linguistic memories” (486) and fulfills Kaminer's second step of reconstruction.

As Alice gathers linguistic representations through conversation, she is exposed to characters that trigger reactions of anxiety and fear. Every character expresses a different aspect of Wonderland's broken world, and Alice is therefore repeatedly exposed to a reality that parallels a traumatic reality. At first, her changing size and interactions with nonsensical Wonderland characters produce reactions like crying, fear, and timidity (20). However, after repeatedly being exposed to the anxiety her interactions provoke, she expresses a confidence that she will “manage better this time” the necessary changes in size in order to enter the “beautiful garden” (68). Alice's “physiological anxiety associated with that [feared] stimulus is reduced” (Kaminer 486) through the process of habituation, completing the third step of reconstruction.

THE RESULTS OF THE RECONSTRUCTION PROCESS

As Alice completes the first three steps of the reconstruction process, she should manifest changes in her sense of self, command over language, connections with others, and ability to distinguish between subjective and objective reality. Alice regaining her “usual height” could reflect Alice regaining her sense of self (49). As far as her ability to communicate her sense of self and connect with others, Alice does experience some changes throughout the course of the story. While her initial conversations reveal a struggle to control her use of language and connect with others, she eventually develops an ability to better define nonsense and meaning

and to express herself to other characters. Towards the end of the novel, Alice stands up to the “crimson” and “wild beast,” the Queen of Hearts, by shouting “Nonsense!” After the Queen yells, “Off with her head!” (72). Other characters run “to Alice for protection” and the King and Queen later approach her to resolve an argument (72, 76). Her bold use of language and assertion of self place her as an authority figure in Wonderland. Her newfound authority could suggest a regaining of self, command over language, and ability to connect with other people.

However, Alice’s social interactions after leaving the garden complicate the issue. Before the garden, in the majority of her listener-teller interactions, Alice plays the role of listener rather than teller. Her attempts to tell stories only seem to isolate Alice as Wonderland characters react negatively. On the other hand, after leaving the garden, the Gryphon and Mock Turtle beg her to tell them “some of *her* adventures” (91). For the first time, Wonderland characters place Alice as the teller. She hesitatingly begins, concerned about being “a different person then,” but gains courage as she continues (91). Alice telling her story could suggest that she has regained a command over language. Yet the Gryphon eventually interrupts her story by demanding her to recite a poem. Similarly to earlier in the novel, her “words came very queer indeed” and she places her “face in her hands, wondering if anything would *ever* happen in a natural way again” (91-92). Although Alice thinks she is a “different person,” now, she realizes that she still has not fully regained her power over language. Her questioning of whether or not anything normal will happen again reveals that Alice wonders if she will ever fully regain her reality. Her “queer” poem reveals that despite her powerful display of authority in the garden, Alice’s process of reconstruction remains incomplete.

Alice’s final moment in Wonderland, a trial, offers further evidence that Alice does not reconstruct her reality by the end of her adventures. The Queen’s brash and passionate language

begins to overtake Alice; Alice calls characters “Stupid things!” and forcefully takes away Bill’s squeaky pencil (96). Her dramatic and uncontrollable changes in size also return; Alice begins to “grow larger again” as she watches the Mad Hatter being interrogated as a witness (98). The trial continues to become more oppressive as the King dismisses the Hatter as “a very poor *speaker*” and a cheering guinea-pig is “suppressed” as the officers of the court throw it in a “large canvas bag,” tie it up at the mouth, and sit on it (99). Alice reacts with surprising gladness and relief to this display of violence, illustrating that she still accepts the broken, violent Wonderland as her reality.

Yet Alice ultimately deems Wonderland characters as “nothing but a pack of cards!” (108) and leaves Wonderland. This could show a separating of the subjective and objective worlds that Wonderland blurred. Alice’s departure could represent her rejecting Wonderland as her reality. Nonetheless, instead of leaving as a triumphant hero, in control of her reactions, Alice leaves “half of fright and half of anger” as the Queen threatens her and a pack of cards attacks her (108). Her exit is more an escape, a reaction, than a choice. Furthermore, she later returns to Wonderland in Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass*. Thus, her exit from and later return to Wonderland suggests that Alice never completely reconstructs her reality.

AN EMPATHIC LISTENER AND A MEANINGFUL NARRATIVE

The final steps of Kaminer’s reconstruction process reveal what Alice still needs by the end of the novel in order to regain her reality. To produce healing, a merely coherent narrative must be transformed into a meaningful narrative. “An empathic and acknowledging witness” facilitates this transformation (488). The art of empathic listening is essentially nonexistent in Wonderland. Furthermore, Alice’s realization that Wonderland is only “a curious dream” exposes that every character is a figment of Alice’s imagination. Even if Alice’s moments of

telling were perfectly received by an empathic listener, they would only consist of Alice talking to herself. Carroll gives hints about Alice's tendency of "pretending to be two people" (14). For example, at one point, she personifies and converses with her own feet (16). Within Wonderland, Alice never has a true participant listener upon which she can inscribe her story, nor does she have a co-owner listener to help her generate meaning from Wonderland. Even during her last moments in Wonderland as she dismisses the Queen's authority as "nonsense!" (106), she asserts her inability to find "an atom of meaning in" any of the evidence the Wonderland characters present in court (107). Alone, Alice can construct a coherent narrative out of conversations and various characterizations of herself, but in the end, she struggles to generate a meaningful narrative. The lack of an empathic listener stifles her reconstruction process.

Although Alice's Wonderland listeners are in fact herself, she eventually tells her story to one real listener: her sister. After Alice awakens from her "long sleep," she tells "her sister, as well as she could remember them, all these strange Adventures of hers" (109). Although the Wonderland conversations are only a dream, they are essential to assessing the only moment Alice gets to tell her story to a real listener. Because of the many Wonderland conversations, readers can recognize if Alice's sister fulfills the role of an effective listener and if she achieves the most important goal of a listener-teller interaction: the construction of meaning. Therefore, throughout his novel, Carroll prepares his readers to evaluate the only true moment of listener-teller conversation to decide whether or not the interaction facilitates reconstruction.

Against the backdrop of the imagined listener-teller interactions, Carroll emphasizes the importance of the sister's reaction to Alice's narrative. As shown by Wonderland conversations, in order for a listener to effectively receive a coherent narrative and help the teller form a

meaningful narrative, she must act as both an empathetic participant and a goal-oriented co-owner. The sister's response that it "*was* a curious dream" and her later choice to ponder over Alice's adventures show that she begins as a participant listener, taking in the story, letting it be inscribed upon herself (109). Carroll vividly describes the inscription process as the sister's world becomes "alive with the strange creatures of her little sister's dream" (109). So intense is the transference of the story that the sister "half [believes] herself in Wonderland" (110). Her blurring of worlds illustrates that Alice's sister is an effective participant listener.

Yet, the sister seems uncomfortable as the narrative of Wonderland combines with her reality. Throughout the inscription process, she repeatedly reminds herself that at any time, she can open her eyes to her "dull reality" (110). She reassures herself with a long list of how each fantastical character represents reality, like how "the rattling teacups would change to tinkling sheep-bells" and "the Queen's shrill cries" would change "to the voice of the shepherd-boy" (110). In the middle of her comparisons, she requires even more reassurance as she makes the parenthetical remark that "she knew" the difference between Wonderland and reality (110). This feeling of resistance is a common struggle of the listener. She experiences a "defensive need to deny the story's reality" as it blurs with her own (Kaminer 489). Wanting to hold onto her reality's order, the sister, like Alice when first entering Wonderland, "resists the insecurity of a lack of position" (Shires 272). As a participant listener, the sister struggles to allow Alice's reality to enter her own.

Although she struggles, Alice's sister is crucial to the story. The lack of a person upon whom a teller can inscribe her story would "annihilate the story" (Laub 68). Yet Carroll does not only want an inscribed story that entertains his readers. He wants readers to find meaning within and value from his story. Thus, Alice, as the teller, needs more than a participant listener; she

needs a co-owner listener. In order to co-own a story, a listener must overcome the fear of losing their own reality, allowing the teller's reality to blend with their own. Only then can the co-owner listener facilitate the process of "collaborative reconstruction," enabling the coherent narrative to become meaningful (Kaminer 489). Contrastingly, Alice's sister attempts to co-own the story not by letting go, but by asserting control. This produces a result similar to Alice's interaction with the Mouse: a representation that does not accurately represent the teller's experience. The sister's voice takes over Alice's story for the last few pages of Carroll's novel and Alice essentially disappears. The sister first describes Alice's story with accurate words like "frightened," "shrill," "shriek," "squeaking," "choking," "suppressed," "sob," and "miserable" (109). Overwhelmed as Wonderland interferes with her own reality, she replaces these dark images with her own image of Alice as a "grown woman," keeping "the simple and loving heart of her childhood," as she makes the "eyes" of her future children "bright and eager" with her "strange tale" (110). Although this may seem like a heartwarming ending to a fantastically imaginative children's story, the abrupt shift from authentic dark images to the forced "bright and eager" smiles of the future proves unsettling (110). The sister forms Alice's story into the tale she wishes to hear, hiding the uncomfortably dark undertones and broken reality of Wonderland underneath the fancy, bright bow of childhood. Instead of momentarily releasing control to the narrative of Wonderland, she takes over Alice's story with her own narrative structure, creating an ending that does not accurately represent Alice's experience.

FINDING VALUE: THE FINAL STEP OF THE RECONSTRUCTION PROCESS

Without an effective listener, Carroll's overall question remains unanswered. The sister may have experienced a coherent narrative, but as she never lets go of reality, she will never find the true meaning or value of Alice's adventures. The sister's inability to embrace the

deconstructive process prevents the transformation of Alice's coherent narrative into a meaningful narrative. Without the ability to find meaning in experience, a listener can never integrate a story "into their cognitive map of the world" (Kaminer 489). Consequently, does this mean that Alice is forever trapped in a meaningless Wonderland? Is Carroll's novel what the sister labels it to be, a fun story of idyllic childhood memories to delight future generations at bedtime? Although the sister struggles to let go of her reality, resulting in an insufficient representation of Alice's reality, fortunately Carroll provides and prepares one more listener: his reader.

In the final pages of his novel, Carroll mentions "all of these strange Adventures of hers that you have just been reading about" (109). By addressing his readers, or "you," Carroll provides a way that Alice's reconstructive process can continue (109). If readers can use the foundation and focus of Carroll's narrative, or Wonderland conversations, to learn how to navigate the role of the listener, they can produce meaning rather than nonsense from his novel. Readers must release control to Carroll, allowing him to take them through the deconstructive process along with Alice, letting the reality of Wonderland blend with their own, and letting his narrative be inscribed upon them. Only then can a reader leave Wonderland, not as an escape or a reaction, but as a conscious choice, a deliberate attempt to create meaning from a reality of brokenness and nonsense.

In short, a reader must empathize with the characters, participate in the story, and be grounded in the self while also releasing the reality of the self, in order to eventually emerge from Wonderland with meaning. As readers combine their realities with Wonderland, they challenge their forming constructs, question their definitions of nonsense and meaning, and stretch the limits of their changing realities. By interrupting readers' lives with Wonderland,

Carroll prepares them for the disorder, chaos, and nonsense inevitably contained within reality. Leaving Alice's fate ambiguous, he reveals that reconstruction, like trauma, is not an event, but an ongoing process. Thus, Carroll leaves his readers to determine the value of his book in order to encourage them to continue their own reconstruction process. Wonderland is only a part of a continuous attempt to redefine reality. With each new reader, the story's meaning changes. As readers release their control to Wonderland, Carroll also releases control to them, trusting and allowing them to find the value of his book of conversations.

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Reflective Writing:

As I reflect on the process of completing my honors capstone project, I feel a deep sense of accomplishment. Although the project was incredibly difficult and overwhelming at times, I would recommend the process to anyone for the unbelievable sense of accomplishment I feel upon completing it. I am grateful for the opportunity to complete contracts, work with professors and other mentors, and challenge myself. The process of writing this thesis has excited, frustrated, enlightened, and pushed me. Now, I have a complete thesis that represents the hard work of myself and my mentors and combines the skills, experiences, and ideas I have accumulated throughout my undergraduate education; honestly, it feels amazing! I hope that my reflective process can help motivate other honors students who are going through the same process. I also hope I can warn them of and provide solutions to the potential problems and pitfalls they may face.

Because I started the honors program later in my undergraduate career, I decided to devote every honors contract I completed to figuring out my capstone project topic and do the research necessary to explore it. Although as an English major with an emphasis in literary studies, I was familiar with the researching process, I wanted to extend my writing and researching abilities. Instead of staying in the realm of English, I decided to propose a project that would combine my English major with my Psychology minor.

During the earlier stages of my honors contracts, I was exposed to trauma theories about the deconstructive effects of trauma, the listener-teller relationship, and the ability to heal from trauma in Dr. Shane Graham's class about trauma. Around the same time, I was learning about Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in Dr. Brian McCuskey's 19th Century British Literature class. The class's emphasis on the shifts in the Victorian perspective helped me

understand literature in a way I never had before. Due to a lack of time, we read Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* fairly quickly, and for the first time, I felt dissatisfied with the meanings we discovered in class. I yearned for a deeper understanding of whacky Wonderland, and I determined to solve Carroll's puzzle of a novel. As I read, I noticed similarities between the deconstruction of reality that both Alice and trauma victims experience. My goal became to engage both disciplines in a conversation about Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to formulate a conclusion about the meaning and value of Carroll's novel.

At first I wanted to explore the use of literature in therapy, thinking I could argue the value of using Carroll's novel as a therapeutic tool. After diving into psychological research, I began to feel lost, confused, and overwhelmed. While psychology supports hypotheses with research studies, English supports an argument with a close analysis of the text. After trying for an entire semester to formulate a thesis statement about the value of literature in therapy, I soon realized, with the help of my honors committee, that I was attempting to argue in the world of English using a research method of Psychology. This was not working, and the blending of my two passions was only pushing me deeper and deeper into frustration. I wrote three different thesis drafts, and none of them felt satisfying. I couldn't find my argument. I couldn't find my voice. The writing I sent into my professors was horrible, and I knew it. As writing usually comes fairly easy to me, I was confused about why I could not produce at least one quality draft. This confusion persisted for over a semester, until I had a meeting with my faculty advisor and committee member who pulled me back into the world of English. By seeing my core arguments through the mumbo jumbo writing I had sent them and reminding me of the overall points I originally wanted to make, I could reformulate a clear argument. In the process of researching, meeting, and writing, I had lost my voice and my ideas. I couldn't write clearly because I

couldn't think clearly. After hearing my committee express my ideas to me in my own words, I was able to gain a clear foundation. From there, the writing process became more productive and less frustrating. Finally, a quarter-way through my final semester, I completed a 20 page draft I was proud of, with at least a partially formulated thesis statement and paragraphs with clear topic sentences. Each following week, I wrote 5-10 pages and revised my draft, occasionally sending drafts to my committee and meeting with my adviser. A few weeks before the Student Research Symposium, I had a complete draft and was able to present with confidence, unlike what I could have done a month previous.

I would never recommend such a fast drafting process to anyone. Strangely, I didn't procrastinate (too much), nor did I start the capstone process too late. My problem was that I never fully clarified my argument. Without a simplified argument to build from, instead of propelling me forward, the ideas from my committee and the research I was completing was muddying my mind. I lost my voice. I lost my thesis statement and my ideas. Without them, I couldn't write. Instead I spewed more and more words that only pushed me farther into confusion. Thus, my greatest advice to anyone working on a capstone project would be to simplify. Form a solid foundation of clear-cut ideas that aren't muddied by anyone else's opinion or research. Make sure that you are only arguing one idea rather than multiple ideas. After researching your topic and after meeting with your committee, constantly remind yourself of your simple foundation. As you connect your new ideas and research to your solidifying foundation, you will be able to avoid becoming as utterly lost as I was.

Despite my mistakes, frustrations, and challenges, I also experienced many triumphs. Thanks to my committee, I formed a clear argument (eventually). Although my committee was initially worried with how ambitious and challenging my idea was, I pulled it off by the end. I

found a way to effectively combine my two passions, English and Psychology, despite their extremely different approaches to research. I found a way to prove the use of literature, not only to English folks, but to other fields as well. I engaged in a current and important argument, providing a perspective that no one had tackled before. Ultimately, I produced a project that I am proud of. Despite the frustrating difficulties of completing this ambitious project, the fruits of my labors have made it all worth it. I have learned about myself as a writer, the writing process, and the value of my education in English. More importantly, this project helped me define what I have to offer to the world as an English major. Although paving my way will come with its difficulties, and at times I may lose my voice and ideas in the chaos of everyone else's, thanks to the process of this thesis, I know how to push through frustration, analyze, clarify, organize, and achieve. I learned that I should never let the difficulty of an ambitious idea keep me from moving forward, pushing through the challenge, and experiencing a great triumph. Thus, with a smile, 32 pages of my thesis capstone project, and my diploma in hand, I plunge into the rabbit hole that is the world after graduation, ready to tackle the nonsensical people, interactions, language, and norms that will push the boundaries of my reality and ultimately lead me to greater understanding of myself and the world.

Author Bio

Rachel Telfer is an English major with an emphasis in literary studies and a minor in Psychology at Utah State University. Over the course of her undergraduate career, she has written too many papers to count, interned as an undergraduate teaching fellow, and worked as a supervisor and tutor at the USU Writing Center. She received the J.C. Fannesbeck Scholarship as well as the Literary Studies Student of the Year award for 2015-2016. She intends to write books that will help people effectively cope with and appreciate emotion. She also wants to use her love of literature to teach people how to use critical thinking and literary analysis to improve their lives.