Belief, Unbelief, and Rebelief in Santa Claus: A Theory of Cyclical Belief or a Belief Cycle an Introduction

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BELIEF, UNBELIEF, AND REBELIEF IN SANTA CLAUS:

A THEORY OF CYCLICAL BELIEF OR A BELIEF CYCLE: AN INTRODUCTION

by

Steven G. Merrell

A thesis Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

English

(Folklore)

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
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2022
ABSTRACT

Belief, Unbelief, and Rebelief in Santa Claus:

A Theory of Cyclical Belief or A Belief Cycle: An Introduction

by

Steven G. Merrell, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2022

Major Professor: Dr. Jeannie Banks Thomas
Department: English

Every single person, no matter who they are; what they look or sound like; where they are or come from in space and time; their sex, gender, and/or orientation; their age or maturity; their culture; and/or their background, has one or multiple belief(s) and/or belief system(s) of some kind. Such belief(s) may be temporary, transient, fleeting, or long lasting. It/they may be superficial or deeply rooted. It/they may be (considered) or seem rational or irrational. It/they may be encouraged or discouraged, romanticized or pathologized. It/they may be conscious, subconscious, or unconscious; or such belief(s) may exist somewhere in between. It/they may also vary in degree(s). Regardless of the aforementioned designations, belief is a function of humans and the human condition. When studying belief and belief systems, it is important to frame and contextualize the culture and belief that is being examined.

Through Christmas movie case study examples depicting the widely spread popular culture belief in Santa Claus, this thesis presents (an introduction to) a formulated
theory of cyclical belief or a documentable cycle of belief consisting of the three primary points that are belief, unbelief (with the subsidiary states disbelief and misbelief), and the created, defined, and applied state rebelief. This thesis also illustrates the transition that people make due to romanticizing and authoritative pathologizing (conditioning) attitudes toward beliefs and behaviors. Although the case study examples are fictionalized, they reflect characteristics and behaviors of people in reality/the real world more specifically American popular culture.
Every single person, no matter who they are; what they look or sound like; where they are or come from in space and time; their sex, gender, and/or orientation; their age or maturity; their culture; and/or their background, has one or multiple belief(s) and/or belief system(s) of some kind. Such belief may be temporary, transient, fleeting, or long lasting. It/they may be superficial or deeply rooted. It/they may be (considered) or seem rational or irrational. It/they may be encouraged or discouraged, romanticized or pathologized. It/they may be conscious, subconscious, or unconscious; or, such belief(s) may exist somewhere in between. It/they may also vary in degree(s). Through Christmas movie case study examples depicting the widely spread belief in Santa Claus, this thesis presents an introduction to a formulated theory of cyclical belief consisting of the three primary points that are belief, unbelief (with subsidiary points disbelief and misbelief), and the created and defined rebelief and how people transition from one state to another.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to all those who believe simply for the sake of belief and believing; to those whose belief is unconditional, unadulterated, and not pathologized; to those whose belief is unaffected by skepticism, cynicism, materialism, naturalism, and/or rationalism; to all those who help unbelievers or disbelievers to find belief or to rebelieve; and to all those who believe again or rebelieve and gain wisdom.
First and foremost, I must acknowledge and thank my dear friend and mentor Marsha Forsgren (English teacher, retired) who taught me my greatest lesson(s): to look and see beyond to what is being said in a work and to not just focus on what is written; to look past and/or through the black words on the white page to the colorful messages and meanings placed within; and to analyze, interpret, and critically and freely think about materials and situations for myself: to be a free and independent thinker who creates and supports ideas without fear, that has aided me, my outlook, and my research both in my academic and scholarly pursuits and my life.

I acknowledge and thank the past and present faculty and staff of Utah State University—Uintah Basin campus as well as those departed who have helped me through my undergraduate degree and helped me acquire the skills set(s) and knowledge needed to succeed in my academic career. I especially acknowledge and thank Dr. Alan Blackstock, John Barton, and Dr. Robert King (USU Tooele campus) not only for the lessons and skills they taught me but for also recommending me to and for the Utah State University School of Graduate Studies and the Folklore and American Studies, specializing in folklore.

I acknowledge and thank the past and present faculty and staff of Utah State University Main Campus for helping me through my graduate course(s), program, and degree. I especially thank Dr. Jared Colton and Carol Hatch for their amazing support through the graduate program and process.
I acknowledge and thank my thesis committee members: Dr. Jeannie Banks Thomas, Dr. Lynne S. McNeill, and Dr. Henri Jean-Francois Dengah II for their amazing and fantastic advice on my thesis and theory. I especially thank Dr. Thomas for her dedication and support through my thesis process and for Dr. McNeill with her “folklore rocks!” attitude that helped make folklore exciting, engaging, and fun every time it became overwhelming.

Finally, I thank and acknowledge my family and friends who supported me through my graduate program every moment, time, and instances, that aspects, studies, and life became most difficult. To one and all, thank you.

Steven Merrell
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Every single person, no matter who they are; what they look or sound like; where they are or come from in space and time; their sex, gender, and/or orientation; their age or maturity; their culture; and/or their background, has one or multiple belief(s) and/or belief system(s) of some kind. Such belief may be temporary, transient, fleeting, or long lasting. It/they may be superficial or deeply rooted. It/they may be (considered) or seem rational or irrational. It/they may be encouraged or discouraged, romanticized or pathologized. It/they may be conscious, subconscious, or unconscious; or, such belief(s) may exist somewhere in between. They may also vary in degree(s). The point is that everyone has belief and everyone believes. However, belief—or rather the study of belief(s) and/or belief systems—causes countless issues for scholars for a myriad of reasons.

Belief, in itself, is elusive, evasive, and enigmatic: it is astronomical in scope. The variables that influence, impact, affect, or alter belief is beyond count or measure. Every culture, people, and society have a unique, diverse, and dynamic set of beliefs and/or belief system(s); and, even within a given culture and belief system, each individual has their own personal belief(s). Belief(s) become(s) even more perplexed, complexed, and complicated when analyzing if a person or a people truly believe(s) their belief(s) or not. For an example, the belief in Santa Claus is cultural and personal, and it becomes complicated when analyzing if a person or people truly believe(s) in such a figure. The belief in Santa Claus will be examined in greater depth further in this thesis. Still, folklorists and scholars should not define or determine what a person or people believe(s); that is up to the individual or collective to decide, determine, and define for
themselves. Still, within a structured context and set parameters, belief can be examined and analyzed; and scholars and folklorists can define what belief is, what it does, and why it is valuable and/or important.

**Observations and Research Questions**

From my observation, examination, and analysis, I noticed an interesting and intriguing phenomenon that happens as people or persons mature: as people change, many of their beliefs change as well. I noticed that there is a fluidity or continuum to beliefs and/or belief systems. I noticed that although there are various types and degrees (credence) of belief, there are three primary states that manifest and appear. I theorize that an individual’s or a collective’s belief(s) is/are connected and there are three primary states of belief that a person or a people can and do often experience and/or exhibit. People generally start at a state of belief. As they mature, they transition to a state of unbelief that I divide into disbelief and misbelief. As people continue to mature, they can transition again to a state that I term rebelief. Currently, rebelief does not exist in an official lexicon, but I define and set the term and state while applying it within my theory of belief. Upon first observation, it seems that these states of belief are linear starting at point A (Belief) transition to point B (Unbelief) and transition to point C (Rebelief) as is shown
in Figure 1. However, what I noticed is that the transitions are not linear but recursive or cyclical as shown in Figure 2.

Upon inspection of Figure 2, one notices that belief and rebelief join or connect at the same point. The flow of the cycle starts at a point of belief (point A1) and transitions to a state of unbelief (point B) that I divide into disbelief and misbelief. At this point in the cycle, one can transition to a state of rebelief (point A2) and return to a state of belief/way or level of believing that one once had or is similar to such. It should be noted that I emphasis “can” because the transition from unbelief to rebelief is not automatic; there are, however, some people who perpetually stay in a state of unbelief and do not transition in regards to certain beliefs or subjects. While inspecting the model in Figure 2, I noticed a few issues or problems arising.

One major problem present is the rate of transition i.e., an instant or total/complete transition to opposite states. Thus, I developed my theory and cycle further as shown in Figure 3.

In Figure 3, I divided the cycle into degrees of transition that include the three primary states. It should be understood that the cycle of belief is relative. I also divide the cycle with a horizontal line that I term “Axis-Fidei” that translates to “axis of belief” (trust or faith). The axis indicates if a person is positioned more on the side of belief, descending or transitioning to the side of unbelief, or reemerging or transitioning to the side of (belief) rebelief.
After observing such patterns of belief/behavior and formulating my theory/cycle of belief, I established my research questions. Numerous questions arose through my research, but the three primary questions that I ask are:

1. What is belief, unbelief, and rebelief?
2. Can I make a case for the encouragement of belief in popular culture or illustrate the states and cycle of belief, unbelief, and rebelief in pop-culture media?
   a. In particular, can I make a case for the encouragement or advocacy of a belief in Santa Claus in popular culture or illustrate the states and cycle of belief, unbelief, and rebelief of Santa Claus in popular culture media?
3. Why is rebelief or the return to belief important or what is its value?
   a. Why is (simplistic childish) belief undervalued or even pathologized (in adults)?

To explain and clarify, question 3 and 3a are similar in meaning and intent; they go hand-in-hand, but I present them as separate questions to address rebelief and belief separately even though they meet at the same point in the cycle.

**Literature Review**

Before immediately addressing the previous scholars, scholarship, and literature (of belief), it should be understood that each field of study and discipline from philosophy to psychology, sociology, anthropology, human development, religious studies, various other fields, studies belief and presents unique perspectives on the matter.
However, for the purpose of this thesis, I focus on the folkloric perspective and folkloristic literature and scholarship. It should be further noted that there are countless articles that mention belief and add to the ongoing conversation, but the literature herein presented more-or-less connects to and/or influences the topic of belief and/or my research. It should be finally noted that the following scholarship is presented chronologically rather than alphabetically or in/by order of importance.

In 1982, David J. Hufford published the article “Traditions of Disbelief” in the journal, New York Folklore.\(^1\) Within is his article, Hufford addresses the aspects of disbelief and states his thesis saying, “In this paper I shall suggest that we should *sometimes* instead take a truly external point of view when considering folk belief and folk religion, a view that is naïve as would be that of an ethnographer from, for example, the planet Mars” (italics in original) (1982, 48). By that thesis, Hufford argues that when approaching belief and disbelief, scholars should view it “as is” rather than placing preconceived judgements on it. More-or-less, Hufford addresses that folk belief is often influenced by the culture in which it is presented; so too, he argues that disbelief also has cultural traditions meaning that a certain folk group or culture influences folk disbelief.

Hufford’s work influences my study and theory of cyclical belief because one of the primary states of the cycle of belief is the state of unbelief that is divide into disbelief and misbelief. By understanding the traditions of disbelief, I can approach various subjects of belief or disbelief and analyze it according to the culture it is placed as well as their reaction to it. That is to say that this article addresses that belief scholars should understand that a disbelief may be as valid to one culture as a belief is to another culture: the tradition of disbelief is as valuable as the tradition of belief. In connection to my
research in this thesis, the “traditions of disbelief” helps in understanding cultural disbeliefs in Santa Claus as well as cultural beliefs.

In 1989, Gillian Bennett published the article “‘Belief Stories’: The Forgotten Genre” in the journal *Western Folklore*. As per the title, Bennett addresses the forgotten genre of belief stories while addressing the reasons for scholars forgetting or ignoring the genre as well as its comparison to belief legend. Bennett poses her thesis and states, “In this essay I want first to make a case for the reintroduction of this phrase as a term for a class of informal stories which 1) illustrate current community belief” (1989, 291). She continues, “2) [T]ell not only of personal experiences but also of events which have happened to other people” (Ibid.). She concludes, “[A]nd 3) are used to explore and validate the belief-traditions of a given community by showing how experience matches cultural expectations” (Ibid.). Throughout the article, Bennett analyzes a case study that was recorded by Professor Ervin Beck of Goshen College, Indiana during the 1981-1982 academic year. She shows how six teenagers share personal stories (memorates) and the belief, believability, or questions associated with such narratives.

Although Bennett’s direct argument does not directly affect my research in this thesis *per se*, the aspect of belief or believability in a story does influence it. After examining Bennett’s analysis of the case study, I am able to see how teenagers seem to organically share belief stories and find common beliefs and experiences was well as the aspect of questioning belief with peers. One part, in particular, that connects with my research and theory of belief is the aspect of belief and transition of such. For example, Bennett records one of the teens saying, “[The] trouble is most parents don’t believe you…” (italics in original) (1989, 296). This hints at the state of unbelief in regards to
authority. Bennett also presents statements that illustrate the transition from disbelief to belief: “‘I didn’t use to believe, but now…’; ‘This was the thing that made me really believe…’ Well, I’ve experienced it…” (ellipsis and italics in original) (1989, 302). This illustrates that aspect of transition via experiences. In connection with this thesis, after experiences with “Santa Claus” one can re-believe in such a figure. That will be examined and addressed further in this thesis.

In 1996, Linda Dégh published the article “What is a Belief Legend?” in the journal *Folklore.* She presents her purpose and thesis; however, it is quite extensive with all of its parts or components to fully list. Dégh, basically, addresses what Bennett presents in her article “‘Belief Stories’: The Forgotten Genre” and argues that folklore does not need to recognize “belief stories” and even “belief legends” as a genre; she argues that belief legend/story is arbitrary and states, “[B]elief is inherent in all legends” (1996, 34). She states, “[Belief is] the ideological foundation or core of the legend” (Ibid.). She argues that belief or rather believability is essential for a successful legend, story, narrative.

This article is helpful for my research not only in the analysis of my case study examples for this thesis but for the approach to folk narratives and belief such as the belief in the legendary figure, Santa Claus. It is useful in understanding that when a legend, story, or narrative is told or shown, the teller and/or listener may or may not necessarily/actually believe it (to be true), but possibility, believability, and truthfulness is present. Again, that strongly connects with the legend and belief of Santa Claus. A person may not actually believe in “Santa” but will tell, pretend, and/or perform the legend to someone (usually a child) who they are trying to convince is real or true with
what I call “faux belief.” It is also helpful in understanding aspects of belief, disbelief, and relbelief in the telling of a story or narrative from various cultures as well.

In 2000, Patrick B. Mullen published the article “Belief and American Folklore” in the Journal of American Folklore. In his article, Mullen presents a profound argument about the romanticizing and pathologizing of belief and behaviors within American culture. He clearly states his purpose and thesis saying, “This article will not attempt to cover the entire history of cultural representations of folk belief in American writing; rather, I shall concentrate on the words of representative folklorists, anthropologists, and sociologists who have studies belief from the late 19th century to the present” (2000, 119). Throughout his article, Mullen addresses the aspects of how belief and behavior were and are viewed. Essentially, Mullen says that certain beliefs and behaviors are romanticized up to a certain point within a certain culture, community, society, or folk group; such is usually associated with on young children and deemed acceptable or tolerable and even encouraged. However, if the same beliefs and behaviors are present past the certain point, then the belief and behavior is pathologized and deemed unacceptable, intolerable, and discouraged.

This article greatly influences my research because it addresses the aspect of why people transition from belief to unbelief i.e., pathologizing attitudes and (re)enforced behavioral conditioning. By understanding the aspect of pathologizing attitudes towards belief, it is easy to see why belief in things such as Santa Claus are considered childish or for little children. It is because older children do not want to get labeled, pathologized, or even chastised for such belief and behavior past the cultural point of appropriate acceptability or tolerance. Such romanticizing and pathologizing attitudes and behaviors
can be seen, documented, and/or illustrated in the case studies presented further in this thesis.

In 2007, Diane E. Goldstein, Sylvia Grider, and Jeannie Banks Thomas collaborated and produced the book *Haunting Experiences: Ghosts in Contemporary Folklore*. Throughout the text, the authors make and present important observations and claims regarding (supernatural) belief. In the introduction, readers discover the overall purpose of the work. The text reads, “*Haunting Experiences* focuses on the dynamic relationship in contemporary society between ghosts in folklore and ghosts in popular culture” (italicized title in original) (2007, 4). Throughout the text, the authors examine aspects of folk belief, popular culture, and the commodification of such belief especially in relation to the supernatural. Folklore in relation to folk belief can remain as folklore even though contemporary media: folklore can be presented as folkloresque or hypermodern folklore.

Although the whole work is influential, the “Introduction: Old Spirits in New Bottles,” “Two: Scientific Rationalism and Supernatural Experience Narratives,” “Six: The Commodification of Belief,” and “Conclusion: The ‘Spectral Turn’” are more so influential to my research of belief. Similarly, much of supernatural experiences are based on personal experiences and personal or cultural belief or what Hufford addresses as experiential or cultural source hypothesis. Often times, people cannot prove or disprove the existence of a supernatural or metaphysical existence, but skeptics often scoff and pathologize people for such beliefs. However, that does not necessarily stop people from believing such as with a belief in Santa Claus or other metaphysical beings
or things. The work also helps with the aspect of popular culture and its relationship to folklore as per my research with popular belief as presented in popular culture media.

In 2012, Sabina Magliocco published the article “Beyond Belief: Context, Rationality and Participatory Consciousness” in the journal *Western Folklore*. In the article, Magliocco presents an argument and analysis of how people can believe contradictory things simultaneously. She presents her claim, thesis, and purpose saying, “In this paper, I want to use this contrast as a jumping-off point to critique the ways folklorists and anthropologists have approach the issue of belief, and to suggest a different, and I hope, provocative set of considerations drawn from my work in a variety of cultural contexts” (2012, 7). She continues, “I am particularly interested in exploring instances in which multiple, seemingly contradictory belief systems coexist within the same individual—a situation characteristic of modernity and post-modernity” (Ibid.). Basically, she argues and presents situations where people say they believe one thing but then behave in a different way or believe and behave in different or contradictory ways to their cultural belief (system), which shows an aspect of possible conscious or unconscious belief and behavior or at least consideration of possibility/plausibility. However, one *can* have conscious acknowledgment of contrasting/contradictory belief.

This article is useful for my research in the fact that people can have contradictory beliefs, belief systems, and/or behaviors that coexist simultaneously. Connecting to a few of my case study examples (*Yes, Virginia, There is a Santa Claus* 1991 and *Miracle on 34th Street* 1994), contradictory belief can be seen in the belief in existence of God but questioning disbelief in the existence of Santa Claus on the premises of present or lacking physical/visible evidence; in a stretch, this *could* also connect to beliefs and disbeliefs
coexisting simultaneously i.e., secular and/or sacred beliefs. It can also address aspects of cultural and personal beliefs coexisting simultaneously. Belief is not an absolute; it is a continuum that changes, adapts, and/or evolves. This idea connects with Hufford’s traditions of disbelief meaning that beliefs can contradict and coexist.

In 2018, Amelia Mathews-Pett produced a Master’s Thesis at Utah State University entitled, “‘Full on Toy Story’: Exploring the Belief in Object Sentience in Western Culture.” In her thesis, Mathews-Pett argues for the acknowledgment of object sentience as a folk belief. She presents cases of children whom believe that their toys have sentience and such belief is influenced and encouraged by popular cultural works (literature) and media. She also presents cases of adults who also exhibit a belief in object sentience and resulting behavior such as talking to cars as if they or other such objects can hear and have feelings. She uses an illustration to show or prove Mullen’s argument of pathologizing attitudes: she uses a commercial depicting a lamp being discarded, which affects emotions in audience viewers, but a person walks into the commercial and addresses the audience to say that they are crazy for thinking the lamp has feelings (2018, 28). The labeling of being “crazy” effectively illustrates pathologizing attitudes towards belief.

This research is quite influential to my research because it not only draws on the aspect of Mullen’s argument of romanticizing and pathologizing attitudes but also because it shows that people believe (in) certain things but end up either hiding their belief and behavior or continuing the belief and behavior just in different ways i.e., the belief in object sentience transfers from a toy to a machine. It shows that childhood beliefs and behaviors do not just go away: it shows that people do not just “grow up” or
out of their beliefs and behaviors, exactly. Often times, people just bury or hide their beliefs until they can share it with like believers or within safe spaces. In connection with the belief in Santa Claus, people often conform and “stop” believing in Santa Claus and refrain from saying that they believe if they do. Just the statement causes pathologizing reactions. The aspect of pathologizing attitudes towards such belief in Santa are illustrated in the case study examples that will be addressed further in this thesis.

In 2020, Benjamin Gatling published the article “There Isn’t Belief, Just Believing: Rethinking Belief as a keyword for Folklore Studies” in the Journal of American Folklore. In his abstract, Gatling states, “[B]eliefs are reified and abstracted from social action; beliefs are systematized and explanatory of behavior; and beliefs are rendered as universal, cross-cultural features of social life. This article argues that reconceptualizing belief carries with it a decolonial justice imperative, and folklorists should jettison belief as a key word of the discipline” (2020, 307). Throughout his paper, he addresses aspects of belief and legends, belief and religious folklore, and belief and knowledge. Ultimately, Gatling presents cases and situations where belief is ambiguous and may not apply as a label or categorical genre and argues that the term belief should be dropped as a keyword of folklore.

Parts of Gatling’s article are quite useful to my research of belief in the sense that belief is relative and even subjective. Belief can also be used as a crutch-word or label by the etic and placed onto emic aspects, practices, or performed behaviors. This connects to Hufford’s statement, “What I know I know, what you know you only believe—to the extent that it conflicts with my knowledge” (1982, 47-48). Hufford’s statement reinforces the idea that to understand a culture and avoid ethnocentrism, one must see or understand
that culture from the emic not the etic view. Such views can connect with the cultural traditions of Christmas and Santa Claus. Not everyone believes or behaves the same. However, I also find some fault and pose some objection with Gatling’s argument and article. Throughout the work, it seems that Gatling makes slight contradictory statements. For example, he states, “I’m not arguing that beliefs don’t exist” (2020, 309) but later states, “Of course, beliefs aren’t things” (2020, 321). It does not make sense to say that belief exist but are not things. If the claims are not contradictory, they at least cause confusion and are rhetorically ineffective. It is understandable that what gets labeled as a “belief” in a culture may not actually be a “belief” within that particular culture; it becomes an etic/emic labeling debate. However, belief(s) is/are (a) thing(s). Belief(s) is/are a human function or mental conviction of something being seen or held as true. Belief is no different than any of the human functions or emotions that can be and are experienced. Even Gatling’s title is paradoxical or oxymoronic: “There Isn’t Belief, Just Believing.” There cannot be an action/predicate without a subject/object/noun to base, ground, or perform the action. His argument is understandable and even reasonable at certain points i.e., folklorists need to rethink what is labeled as belief or to be cautious when using the term, but much of folklore is based on belief. Elliott Oring addresses the aspect of belief with Linda Dégh’s argument: “Most legend scholars hold that legend has some relation to belief; more specifically that legends involve a debate about belief (Dégh 2001:97). While this may be so, the problem is that almost everything entails belief” (2012, 105). If it is “jettisoned,” much of folklore categorization would become disarrayed. Still, to be fair, his argument poses points to consider with approaching belief
and belief studies. Therefore, this article is helpful to my research although one can find objections within it.

**Scope and Methodology**

For this thesis, the scope and focus centers on the popular culture of the United States or American popular culture. I specifically chose this culture to examine for this introduction/thesis since it illustrates my theory effectively. It is also a culture that I can examine from an emic rather than from an etic perspective. As stated, or alluded to, many folklorists, such as Linda Dégh, argue that belief must be experienced from within the culture. The American popular culture also has influential impacts on the popularity/popularization of Santa Claus. As for my methodology, I trace the states of cyclical belief as they are manifest in the American popular culture, specifically within movies *about* Santa Claus; such popular culture and movies provide examples of the theory of belief especially with what I term rebelief or a return *to* belief in Santa. For an example, a scene from the case study example *Santa Who?* 2000 directed by William Dear depicts the aspect of belief and disbelief in Santa. The dialog goes:

Zach: “That’s not true. He really is Santa.”

Albright: “Zach—”

Zach: “If you take him away, there’ll be no more Christmas.”

Albright: “Will you stop with this Santa stuff. He is not Santa.”

Zach: “He is too.”

Albright: “He is not.”

Zach: “He is too.”
Albright: “He is not. He’s just a confused old man.”

[Claire intercedes and takes Albright out into the hall].

Claire: “It is not your place to yell at my son.”

Albright: “Well, someone ought to set him straight. Do you really think it’s health to let him believe that amnesia victim is really Santa Claus?”

Claire: “And who are you to tell him what to believe? You afraid believe in anything.”

Albright: “I was just telling him the truth.”

Claire: “Well, you didn’t have to rush him like that.”

Albright: “He’ll get over it. I did.”

Claire: “Oh, oh so that’s it. So, you’re taking your lousy childhood out on my child.”

Albright: “What?”

Claire: “You didn’t get over it, Peter. You’re so stuck in your past; you can’t get on with your future.”

What should be noted here is that Albright pathologizes Zach’s belief in Santa showing a state of unbelief. Zach shows a state of belief. Claire shows support of Zach’s belief and makes a profound statement that Albright is so conflicted himself that he cannot or refuses to believe in “anything.” It should also be noted that Claire argues that Albright is more-or-less crushing her son’s childhood because Albright had a negative childhood himself and without a belief in something like Santa Claus, a childhood/life can be “lousy.” However, Albright resolves his unbelief; and, by the end of the movie,
transitions to a state of rebelief. This case study will be examined again and in greater depth later in this thesis.

In preparation to build and fortify a foundation for my theory, I looked at the terms and concepts of belief, unbelief (disbelief/misbelief), rebelief, and the variously common concepts such as faith, hope, knowledge, and trust that people often synonymize, interchange, or associate with the term or concept of belief. Although, it may seem unnecessary, arbitrary, or redundant to do so, it is important to understand the base level of the concept to set and establish a foundation upon which my theory is built and supported.

After establishing a foundation of conceptual understanding, I examine various (types of) beliefs that people have. One belief or tradition that is popular with countless people in the United States as well as around the world is the belief in Santa Claus who is a major legendary figure in the study of folklore and is conservative yet dynamic.

Similar to folk tales and fairy tales that have direct/indirect messages, current pop-culture movies/shows give similar messages whether directly or indirectly. Using a statement from Tok Thompson and Greggory Schrempp, “Stories, more than anything else, give us a sense of identity” (2020, 8). Based on that statement, it is arguable that messages and even beliefs are conveyed and given to audiences that influence them on various levels. In a wider inspection or scope of popular culture and media, there are a number of children/family narratives (stories and movies) that present messages and encouragements of belief that are similar but not limited to Christmas or Santa movies. For example, the story of Peter Pan (literature, stage plays, and movies) encourages audiences to believe in fairies, especially when Tinker Bell is poisoned. Whether one
believes in fairies or not, audiences get drawn into the narrative and even emotionally feel something for the characters. In some adaptations, audiences are more-or-less directly encouraged to clap their hands and/or say “I believe in fairies” to save Tinker Bell such as in the stage play/adaptation as well as in the movie *Hook* (Spielberg, dir. 1991) and *Peter Pan* (Hogan, dir. 2003). It should be noted that the story of Peter Pan literally illustrates the aspect of romanticizing and pathologizing belief and behavior i.e., it shows that Wendy has reached a point where she is forced to leave the nursery and grow up. Another example of encouraged belief is found in DreamWorks’ *Kung Fu Panda* when Master Oogway tells Master Shifu he “needs to” believe and actually makes Shifu “promise” to believe (Osborn and Stevenson, dirs., 2008). The message of that movie is to believe in the unlikely and even in oneself. It seems that the core message in such media about belief is to look and see what is inside of others and oneself as well as in the unseen. That theme and motif is present in the Santa Claus movies case study examples. In the television show, *The Magicians* (based on book by Lev Grossman) Margo Hanson and Quintin Coldwater have an important conversation about belief and magic. Margo says, “There’s this thing about you, Q. You actually believe in magic.” Quentin, with the context of being at a school for magicians, replies, “So does everyone.” Margo responds, “No. We all know it’s real, but you believe in it. And you just love it, pure and simple” (Tapping, dir. 2016). That conversation is important because it is one thing to know something, but it seems another thing to believe (in) it. Even the acknowledgment of people/skeptics ignoring children/the innocent and their truth(s) is/are present in the cultural sensation, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. According to Albus Dumbledore, “A child’s voice, however honest and true is
meaningless to those who’ve forgotten how to listen” (Cuarón, dir. 2004). This shows or addresses the pathologizing or ignoring of beliefs by skeptics, doubters, as well as people who have “forgotten.” This connects with the case study examples that address remembering childhood and/or childhood belief in Santa Claus.

However, there are other aspects within contemporary movies that not only encourage belief but encourage childhood/childlikeness/childishness to those who have forgotten. In the movie Hook, audiences see Wendy as an old woman, and she tells the Banning family, “There is one rule that must be obeyed while you are in my house. No growing up. Stop, this very instant” (Spielberg, dir. 1991). Wendy also says to Peter Banning, “Peter, don’t you remember who you are” (Ibid.) in reference to him being Peter Pan. In the movie One Christmas, that will be analyze in more in depth later in the thesis, Ms. Cornelia Beaumont says, “Now you just relax and be a child for as long as you can be one” (Bill, dir. 1994). In Mary Poppins Returns, the Balloon Lady asks a grownup Michael Banks a very crucial question: The Balloon Lady says, “Have you forgotten what it’s like?” Michael asks, “To hold a balloon?” The Balloon Lady says, “To be a child” (Marshall, dir. 2018). This short conversation illustrates the aspect of an elder seeing the value of children and childhood aspects. The brief examples point out not only the value of childhood, childishness, childlikeness but the belief(s) associated with it. This connects to aspects of relife within the cycle.

With the previous discussion, examples/evidence, understanding, I look at pop-media, folkloresque or hypermodern folklore, in connection with the commonly held belief in Santa Claus; I look at Santa Claus pop-culture media/movies that influence belief (in Santa).
As previously alluded to and aforementioned, a documentable pattern in these movies is the motif of encouraging belief. Upon examination of such encouragement to belief, I noticed that the (believing) characters in the story (usually [a child]/children or possibly adult(s)) encourage the unbelieving or disbelieving characters to believe. I also notice that human beings are influenced by what they see, hear, or are exposed to whether directly or indirectly/subliminally. Thus, the encouragement of belief (or acknowledged value of belief) seems directed not only to the characters in the narrative but to the audience(s) as well. When the characters within the narrative are encouraging belief, the message of belief or encouragement of such is also transmitted or communicated to the viewers.

The last function of these movies is to not only tell/show a story or narrative that is usually presented as escapism but to show that they reflect the function or transition of people in society and culture i.e., my theory of people, behavior, belief, and such transitions. Even though the movies are “fiction,” fictional, or fictionalized (staged) the story and transitions that are presented reflect patterns of culture, society, people, in regards to a belief, unbelief, and rebelief: in the context of this thesis and examples, it shows the belief regarding Santa Claus.

**Goal and Objective**

The goal and objective for this thesis is to formulate and establish a new theory of cyclical belief or a belief cycle to the academy and field of folklore. I illustrate how belief appears in states and is connected in a cyclical pattern or form and transitions through states and degrees. As aforementioned, I theorize that people start at a (base) state of
belief. As they mature, they change by degrees to a state of unbelief. There is a point where they can transition, again, to a state of rebellion. I apply this theory by examining the commonly held belief in Santa Claus through the use and illustration of pop-culture movies and its influence(s) on viewers, in particular, or the American popular culture.

My theory addresses the cycle of fluidity of belief, unbelief, and rebellion. Yet, a minor objective is to address the pathologizing or outright criticizing of belief/rebelief by skeptics/skepticism, cynics/cynicism, materialists/materialism, naturalists/naturalism, and/or rationalists/rationalism as well as to address the importance of understanding the value and the encouragement of belief/rebelief that is presented in my case study examples of belief in Santa via Christmas movies. To briefly explain the previous statement, I am not saying that people must or have to believe or that all people believe in some, certain, or the same things. I address that there is value to/of belief/rebelief and believing/rebelieving that is often based or grounded without evidence or rationality. I address that such belief/rebelief and believing/rebelieving often gets criticized by skeptics. Much of the time, belief is belief: it is not found based on irrefutable facts, evidence, or scientific aspects per se, but such unsupported belief is disregarded by skeptical authority. Simply stated, although skeptics and cynics may scoff at blind belief, there is value to belief and believing ergo the aspects of rebellion or the return.
CHAPTER II: IN THE BEGINNING…

Without delaying the examination or presentation of the case study examples, it is important and even crucial to address the definitions of such vast concepts. To understand any concept and synchronize conceptual understanding and context, brief definitions are examined to set a foundation to the theory. To summarize, the definition of “belief,” as used in this thesis, is a mental conviction, proposition, persuasion, confidence of something held to be true based with or without evidence or proof. To summarize, “believe” is defined as the action of giving credit, credence, confidence, acceptance of something or someone as true based with or without evidence or proof.

In this thesis, “unbelief” is defined as the absence, lack, or rejection of belief. To summarize, “unbelieve” is defined as to discredit, disregard, not to think real or true, and not to believe. To summarize, “disbelief” is the refusal of credit, denial of belief, seeing a belief as not true, and/or rejection of belief. This should not be confused with nonbelief. To summarize, “disbelieve” is defined as not to believe, hold something to not be true, refuse credit, to deny the truth, not to believe. “Misbelief,” however, is different. To summarize, “misbelief” is defined as a wrong, false, or erroneous belief. Readers may ask, “Who gets to decide or determine what is a wrong, false or erroneous belief?” The labeling of misbelief (wrong, false, erroneous) is usually determined by the status quo or majority of a group or community and is usually enforced or upheld by an/the authority.

To examine, analyze, define, set, establish, and apply the terms “rebelief” and “rebelieve,” I build the term and definition from the root(s), “belief/believe.” Since the terms “belief” and “believe” are addressed and more-or-less defined as something held as true (or real) and to hold something as true (or real) based or grounded with or without
evidence or proof, I attach the prefix “re-” to the existing root(s). According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, the prefix “re-” is defined as, “[A] word-forming element meaning ‘back, back from, back to the original place;’ also ‘again, anew, once more…’” (“re-” n.d.). With that definition and understanding, along with the definition(s) and understanding of “belief” and ‘believe,’ I define “rebelief” (noun) as 1. An original or previous/earlier state of mental conviction of truth based or grounded with or without evidence, again. 2. Something held, regarded, credited as true or real, again. 3. That which is rebelieved; that which is believed again. I define “rebelieve” (verb) as 1. (to) believe again, again believe. 2. (to) once more believe; (to) believe once more. 3. The return to an original or previous/earlier state of belief (one once had). 4. (to) believe anew. In the application of the theory of cyclical belief, rebelief is an original or pervious/earlier state or mental conviction of belief or belief system that one once had or a thing that is again held as true based or grounded with or without evidence or proof; and the action rebelieve is the return to an original or previous/earlier state or mental conviction of belief that one once had, to again or once more hold or give credit or credence to something as true based or grounded with or without evidence. It should be noted that “rebelief/rebelieve” may consist of returning to an actual/literal belief and/or way/level of (figurative) belief that one once had.

As aforementioned, belief (along with unbelief, disbelief, and disbelief and their respective verbs or actions) often gets synonomized with other terms such as faith, hope, knowledge, and trust. The terms may seem similar, but they have subtle nuanced differences. Still, it is important to understand the terms, definitions, usages, and
applications of the concepts. However, the terms, definitions, and usages are only part of the understanding. The terms and concepts also need to be put within context.
Again, quickly and without belaboring the subject, when approaching belief, it is necessary to understand some of the aspects of belief in a given context. As Mullen states, “As a genre of folklore, belief is an impossibly unwieldy construction because it is so broad” (2000, 119). There are various levels, types, degrees, attitudes, stances, influences, and approaches to belief that it often times becomes overwhelming and even muddled, mired, mingled, and mangled in complicated/complicating complexities. With such understanding, a brief look and discussion about belief in context should be examined and understood.

Approaching Belief

Although it may seem like one can just look at something i.e., a culture, a people, a person, a performance, or behavior and determine a belief or a belief system, there is much to the contrary. When approaching (a) belief or belief system, one must be careful not to pose judgement or label it based on etic or ethnocentric views. In her text, *Folklore Rules!*, Lynne S. McNeill addresses David Hufford’s “alternative explanations” for supernatural folk belief: the cultural source hypothesis and the experiential source hypothesis (2013, 57). Such approaches or explanations are important to understand, but McNeill also gives a cautionary warning to students and scholars of belief. She says, “If you’re out in the world collecting folklore and you run into people who begin telling you stories of ghosts they’ve seen, aliens they’ve encountered, demonic possessions they’ve witnessed, or creatures they believe are living on the edges of their community, the single worst thing you can do is scoff at them” (2013, 60). McNeill gives an
interesting piece of advice when approaching belief: she basically says do not pathologize a person, a culture, and their beliefs and behaviors even if it/they does/do not match or align with one’s own. This can apply to not only the supernatural but the fanciful such as Santa Claus. If one (adults) says that they believe in Santa, people may judge them before they have given their reasoning for such belief. It should be noted, one can address beliefs and behaviors that present threat or harm to oneself or others without pathologizing such, per se. However, the addressing of or refraining from addressing such belief(s) and behavior(s) is up to the prerogative choice of the individual scholar. The mindset is or should be, do no harm or let no harm be done.

In her article, Linda Dégh makes a comment about how to approach and understand belief. She states, “Evidently, ‘belief’ cannot be collected, only conjectured [interpret or conclude based on opinion] by the culturally alien scholar. Belief is invisible, inaudible, part of local heritage hidden behind acts and narratives” (1996, 36). She continues, “It lives in the minds, not on the lips of people; it is a convention, inherited and tacitly shared by a community’s membership, composed of individuals who participate in shaping and internalizing the belief” (Ibid.). To use a metaphor, Dégh argues that beliefs are not like butterflies that can be caught in a net and pinned to a board; beliefs are living things within the minds, lives, and beings of living people. They have to be conjectured/interpreted and experienced from the people themselves. When approaching the study of belief, it is important to understand that belief cannot be dissected and put under a microscope for analysis, exactly. When approaching belief, it must be experienced or understood within the context of its living or lived performance.
This connects with various beliefs and behaviors including those associated with the belief in Santa Claus as is illustrated in the case study examples.

**Types of Belief**

Firstly, it should be understood that beliefs are not binary, meaning that people do not either believe or not. In reference to binary belief, Helge Lundholm states, “Though the above statements concerning the credulity of infants are based largely upon inference and upon more or less dim reminiscence on the part of grown-up people, there is no sufficient ground for doubting either their validity or generality…” (1936, 9). Beliefs are formed and set by degrees or credence (Ebert 2012; Eriksson 2007; and Huber 2009). People may hold on to certain beliefs and not so to others, and people change, adapt, or alter their belief(s) i.e., beliefs adapt and change as is shown or addressed in my theory of cyclical belief or the belief cycle. W.V Quine and J.S. Ullian use the metaphor of a web saying *core* beliefs are held or placed at the center of the web and non-core or non-essential beliefs are built from that center or core and stretch out to other parts of the web, and some beliefs are even placed at the very edges of the web (*The Web of Belief* 1978). To use the metaphor, as human mature and change, the web gets redesigned: the outlying strands and connections get detached or reattached or altered in some way to strengthen or reinforce/restructure the web. However, rarely do core or central beliefs get touched. The web may also have to get redesigned when damage occurs. Such damage to belief may be caused by challenges to set beliefs, acquires new knowledge, reevaluation of existing belief, or similar challenging aspects. Still, going on the metaphor, some strands of the web may grow old and brake off naturally. New strands may replace old or
broken/damaged strands and get connected to old anchors, new strands may be placed on new anchors, or old strands may never get replaced. It is all a part of the complex system of belief.

Of course, there is contextuality that also affect beliefs as well. It seems that there are many contexts in which belief is presented; however, three main types are cultural, social or situational, and individual. Beliefs in a cultural context means that a community, people, group, or culture share a common belief in their belief system. Beliefs in a social or situational context means that a belief can happen or change within a given moment or performance depending upon the situation or circumstance. There is also individual belief which is obviously a person’s personal belief in their given situation or circumstance. An individual belief may differ from their cultural or culture’s belief as addressed by Mathews-Pett (2018) and Magliocco (2012). Individual belief is also a part of what Jay Mechling argues as “solo folklore” (“Solo Folklore” 2006), which is a folk group of one individual.

One aspect or context of belief that often appears and is discussed/debated is secular and sacred belief. This often gets muddled and mired in debate because what is sacred or secular to one person or group may not be so to another person or group and vice versa. Yes, people can believe in one thing and not the other i.e., secular and sacred belief(s) is/are based on cultural traditions, but an individual can still have a personal belief on the matter. Also, there is the aspect of a piece of folklore existing in both secular and sacred views such as a figure of Saint Nicholas: to one person, group or community, he is a sacred, saintly/religious figure; to person, group, or community another, he is a secular symbol, commercialized and/or commodified figure. Discussions
between secular and sacred can be discussed but also tends to become heated based on belief.

One, rather two, more type(s) of belief that should be understood is/are what John Ronald Reuel Tolkien called/calls primary and secondary belief (“On-Fairy Stories” 2001; Light New Fires 2017), which closely connects to Linda Dégh’s arguments of belief and believability. According to Linda Dégh, belief or rather believability is “the ideological foundation or core of the legend” (1996, 34). Again, Tolkien argues similarly in his essay “On Fairy-Stories.”17 Basically, what Tolkien says, in reference to (literary) fairy tales, holds true and connection with Dégh’s statements about belief and legends of folklore: Tolkien argues that primary belief is when a person is presented something as true and the person (literally) believes or accepts it as true; he says that secondary belief is when a person is presented something as true but knows its false yet still ends up being drawn in and suspends disbelief to believe it anyway, but once the “spell” of belief or believability is broken, secondary belief disappears (Light New Fires 2017).18 that also happens not just with literary works but with folklore ((folk) narratives) as well. Even the belief in Santa Claus relies on legend believability and the suspension of disbelief or secondary belief. The Santa Claus narrative can be so well told that even if a person does not believe in Santa, they get drawn in anyway into the world of the narrative.

Two more types of belief are literal and figurative beliefs. A literal belief is similar to Tolkien’s primary belief. It is a belief that credits something literal as being literally true or real. This can be seen in the case study examples when a person (child) literally believes in a real or literal Santa Claus. Figurative belief is a belief in something
figurative or metaphorical. This type of belief can also be seen in the case study examples where people (adults) believe in Santa Claus; but they do not believe in a literal Santa Claus. They believe in what Santa stands for such as the spirit of Christmas, generosity, benevolence, goodness, kindness, care…and the like. This can also be seen in the case study examples. As alluded to, literal belief is similar to Tolkien’s primary belief, and figurative belief can connect to his secondary belief. It should be noted that literal and figurative belief can also extend to other things beyond Santa Claus and the case study examples.

Why Believe?

When addressing the “why” or reason to believe, one can only really address that for themselves. Each individual believes, and each individual has motive(s) for their belief(s) or belief system(s) and even behavior(s) based on such belief(s) and/or belief systems(s). However, there are some aspects to why people believe or why belief happens. Philosopher David Hume regards belief as, “[A] superior force, or vivacity, or solidity, or firmness, or steadiness” (italics in original) (1878, 398). John Cottingham states, “Believing generally appears to be something that occurs involuntarily, like blushing or contracting the pupils of one’s eyes (2009, 8). It is true that belief(s) can be influenced, but the function of belief or belief itself seems to be involuntary or what Sabina Magliocco calls “emergent belief” (2012, 15) because it is a part of the human function/faculty/condition. Still, in times of intense emotion or situation, people may involuntarily believe and behave differently than they might do otherwise. Such belief and behavior can be seen in the folk proverb or adage, there are no atheists in foxholes.
This is not to say that there are “no” atheists in foxholes but is saying that when faced with something like (intense or savior) pain or death, people may involuntarily seek out, pray, or even yell/cry (out) for God and/or His help when they might not do otherwise; however, not everyone will do so. Sometimes when people do things in a situation and are later asked about it, the person may say I don’t know. It is an unconscious, involuntary reaction or response. Cottingham also addresses the aspect of risk and belief and addresses Pascal’s Wager saying, “‘What have you got to lose?’” (2009, 9). When thinking about the reason to believe, risk or consequence seems to accompany the question or thought/consideration. This also connects to Mullen’s pathologizing aspect of belief meaning that the risk may be negative criticism, discreditation, chastisement, or even reinforced conditioning. Of course, some beliefs risk nothing: nothing is lost by believing. What they gain might be dream, fancy, hope, imagination, romance or romantic notions of nature or the supernatural/metaphysical, wisdom, and the like. Of course, that also brings in aspects of peoples’ want or wish to believe.

Cottingham brings up an important point about how belief works and the want or wish to believe. He states, “In moments of personal crisis—illness, bereavement, acute anxiety—one sometimes hears people utter phrases like ‘I wish I could believe in God.’” In saying this, the unbeliever is implicitly acknowledging that religious belief might bring certain benefits—comfort, perhaps, or consolation, or a sense of security or hope” (2009, 7). The previous statement connects to Hufford’s statement about traditions of disbelief and Mullen’s romanticizing/pathologizing of belief meaning that as much as a person might think or want to believe a certain thing, their cultural traditions may interfere or contradict with it. That aspect is actually illustrated/presented in the case study examples,
particularly in *the Polar Express*. Still, belief and want are interesting parts of their function.

Similarly, to what Cottingham mentions and alludes to, Steve Volk also addresses the aspect of wanting to believe in his work, *Fringeology*. Volk points out an instance of a family patriarch whose father has passed away. It seems that the family members are firm skeptics in ghosts and the paranormal or supernatural, but Volk states, “And while his family seems to maintain an appropriate skepticism, he clearly wants to believe” (2011, 2). That “want” is not wrong. As Sabina Magliocco states, “Belief is not the opposite of reason: it is a state of conviction that is reached in different ways, with different [or no] evidence” (2012, 11-12). She acknowledges people’s phrases or comments such as, “It’s not true but I believe in it” (2012, 6) or someone (in regards to the effects of sending/passing a chain letter) says, “‘It’s not that I believe in the prayer or the threat,’ he explained. ‘It’s that in that moment, I was so fearful of your sister’s fate that I wanted to take no chances; I didn’t want to be able to reproach myself later for not having done everything in my power to ensure her full recovery’” (2012, 16). There are many people who have the idea that they know something is not “true” but they believe it anyway or that something happens so traumatic that people approach what could be called extreme levels just to cover the bases or to be safe in the face of possibility. They may not believe in it, but they are willing to try it. Again, it comes down to what is risked, what is lost or grained, and an individual’s reason(s) or motive(s) for belief or to believe. Again, this/these aspect(s) connect to the part(s) of belief in Santa Claus in the case study examples.
CHAPTER IV: CASE STUDY EXAMPLES

In approaching, examining, analyzing, and presenting the illustration and application of the theory of belief or the belief cycle, the following Santa Claus/Christmas movie case study examples are separated or divided into three thematic genres or categories that include literal, figurative, and a combination of literal and figurative belief. With each case study, I summarize the narrative and explain the major plot of the movie for those who have not seen them, and I depict how my theory of cyclical belief is illustrated or presented within them. It should be understood that the following case study examples were selected, examined, analyzed, and are presented due to their promotion and popularity. To explain, the following case study examples are highly promoted, popularized, presented, and available, especially during the holidays. They are regularly shown throughout the holiday season on television and streaming services as well as heavily stocked in stores. Such movies are sometimes also bundled in value packs to help promote exposure. And, although some of the movies may be getting a bit older and may not be as popular as newly released movies, some of the case study example movies are being considered “classics” for the holiday season.

Literal Belief

To briefly explain, this section or category addresses the overall message within the movie i.e., the theme of this movie depicts a literal belief in a literal or real Santa Claus. Although there may be minor themes weaved in the narrative, the major theme of the movies is literal.
*The Year without a Santa Claus. 1974.*

Directed by Jules Bass and Arthur Rankin Jr.

This movie or case example is a stop-motion animated (clay animation or Claymation) Christmas television special. The basic plot and premise of this movie is that Santa Claus begins to believe that the people, especially the children, of the world no longer need, care about, or believe in him. Throughout the course of the movie, Santa learns that people/children still care and believe. Even though this case example is a children’s/family cartoon, it illustrates the theory of cyclical belief well.

There are a number of characters, scenes, and examples that depict the states and cycle of belief; however, there are some that are stronger than others. One of the most prevalent illustrations is the children on a schoolyard. When asked about Santa they all exhibit the state of unbelief or disbelief. Ignatius Thistlewhite says, “[B]elieving in Santa Claus is for little kids.” This not only illustrates a disbelief in Santa Claus but also pathologizing attitudes of acceptance of such belief.

The next example of the cycle of belief is also illustrated when Santa Claus meets Ignatius Thistlewhite and his parents. This instance is important because Ignatius is a school-age child who disbelieves in Santa Claus; however, his parents believe/rebelieve. Under the name of Clous, Santa also says that he too believes in Santa Claus. In the scene, there is a conversation and musical number regarding the belief or rebelief in Santa. The dialog goes:

Santa: “You say my friends were asking you about Christmas.”

Ignatius: “Yeah. They wanted to know if we kids cared about Santa Claus and all.”

Mr. Thistlewhite: “And, uh, what’d ya tell ‘em?”
Ignatius: “Heck, I don’t believe in Santa Claus anymore. That’s kid’s stuff. Isn’t it?”

Santa: [Interior voice] “Just as I thought.”

Ignatius: “You don’t believe in Santa Claus, do you Dad?”

Mr. Thistlewhite: “Why, yes. As a matter of fact, I do.”

Ignatius: [To Santa] “How about you?”

Santa: “Me? Why, of course I do.”

At this point, there is song segment/musical number, and the song gives a powerful message of belief that is delivered not only to everyone in the scene but to the audience/viewers as well. The song/lyrics go(es):

Santa: “I believe in Santa Claus./Like I believe in love./I believe in Santa Claus/And everything he does./There’s no question in my mind/That he does exist./Just like love, I know he’s there./Waiting to be missed.”

Mr. Thistlewhite: “I believe in Santa Claus./But there was a time./I thought I had grown too old/For such a childish rhyme./He became a dream to me/’til one Christmas night./Someone stood beside my bed/With a beard of white.”

[Mr. Thistlewhite voicing Santa in his memory] “’So you’re too old for Santa Claus.’/He said with a smile./’Then you’re too old for all the things/That makes a life worthwhile./For what is happiness but dreams/And do they all come true? Look at me and tell me, son/What is real to you?’”
Santa and parents: “Just believe in Santa Claus./Like you believe in
love./Just believe in Santa Claus/And everything he does.”
Santa: “Wipe that question from your mind./Yes, he does exist.”
Santa and Mr. Thistlewhite: “Just like love, you know he’s there/Waiting
to be missed.”
Voiceover: “Just like love, you know he’s there/Waiting to be missed.”
Ignatius: [A tear falls from his eye] “I guess, if you’re not too old to still
believe. Well, I guess, maybe…” [all laugh].
The scene explains and shows that Mr. Thistlewhite believed in Santa Claus when he was
a child but eventually stopped believing which shows a transition to unbelief, until “one
Christmas night” when he (had an experience) saw Santa Claus by his bedside and
learned/was taught to believe. Because he returned to belief, it shows the transition from
unbelief to rebelief. Through this scene, Ignatius transitions from unbelief to a
questioning substate. It is not quite clear on what degree he transitions to or whether he is
above or below the Axis-Fidei after the scene; but by the end of the movie, he makes a
full transition to rebelief. By the end of the movie, the people of Southtown, USA, and
the children of the world transition to a state of belief/rebelief and give Santa a
vacation/holiday. In acknowledging his presence/existance and granting him an official
holiday as well as actually sending him gifts, this shows a literal belief/rebelief
(transition) in a literal Santa Claus.

It should also be noted, early in the movie, Mrs. Claus sings a short musical
number entitled, “Anyone Can be Santa” or “I Could be Santa Claus.” The message of
the song addresses the aspect that *anyone* can be Santa Claus. That motif or theme will be addressed in further depth later in this chapter.


This movie or case example is a full-length feature that tells the story of how one man, Scott Calvin, becomes the new Santa Claus after the old Santa falls off of Calvin’s roof. However, no one, including Calvin himself, believes what happened to him or that he is the new Santa Claus. It takes Calvin’s son, Charlie, to help not only the adults/unbelievers to believe in Santa Claus but to help his father, Santa Claus, believe in himself.

Throughout the movie, there are several instances, scenes, and characters that illustrate belief, unbelief or disbelief, and the transition to rebelief. For the sake of brevity, the main characters are examined. When audiences are introduced to the main characters, it becomes evident that Scott Calvin is divorced from his ex-wife Laura who has married Neil Miller. Because of custody/parental rights, Calvin gets holiday visitations with Charlie. Through the dialog and conversation, audiences learn that Charlie was bullied at school for believing in Santa Claus, which is a common occurrence for school-age children. Neil, who is a psychiatrist, explained to Charlie that Santa Claus is a “frame of mind” instead of an “actual person.” Thus, Charlie exhibits unbelief or disbelief in Santa Claus because of his challenge of belief and authoritative influence.

After of his personal experience of going to the North Pole, over the course of the movie, Charlie transitions to a state of rebelief and fully believes that his father is Santa Claus. He illustrates a full cycle of belief.
Calvin exhibits unbelief or disbelief in Santa Claus; however, he presents a faux or romanticized belief in Santa Claus for Charlie’s sake. Throughout a series of circumstances, Calvin ends up becoming the new Santa Claus. As he is flying to the North Pole, after delivering the rest of the Christmas presents, he says, “Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night; and in the morning, I’m getting a CAT scan,” which alludes to the aspect of altered mental state, function, faculty.

When he (and Charlie) gets to the North Pole, he engages in conversations with the elves, in particular Bernard the head elf, that addresses the aspect of belief in Santa and Christmas. The dialog goes:

Calvin: “What if I don’t wanna do this?”

Bernard: “Don’t even kid about a thing like that!”

Calvin: “Why not? What if I don’t buy into this Santa Clause thing? What if I choose not to believe it?”

Bernard: “Then there would be millions of disappointed children around the world. You see, children hold the spirit of Christmas within their hearts. You wouldn’t want to be responsible for killing the spirit of Christmas now would you, Santa?

Something to note or mention about that conversation is that children believe in Santa, but Santa must believe in the spirit of Christmas or else “kill” the belief that resides in children. It seems that one relies on the other: that reasoning extends to an authority’s belief influencing an inferior’s belief and vice versa.

Calvin has another important conversation with Judy, another elf at the North Pole, in regards to addressing belief. The dialog goes:
Judy: “Santa?”
Calvin: “Scott Calvin.”
Judy: “You look distressed.”
Calvin: “Distressed? I’m way past distressed.”
Judy: “Why’s that?”
Calvin: “I’m talking to an elf. And I stopped believing in Santa Claus a long time ago.”
Judy: “That’s not surprising. Most grownups can’t believe in magic. It just…sort of grows out of them.”
Calvin: “Look, You’re a nice little elf.”
Judy: “Thanks.”
Calvin: “But this is a dream. I mean, this is fabulous. Is that a polar bear directin’ traffic down there? I see it. But, I don’t’ believe it.”
Judy: “You’re missing the point.”
Calvin: “What is the point?”
Judy: “Seeing isn’t believing. Believing is seeing. Kids don’t have to see this place to know that it’s here. They just…know.”

This conversation is quite important to understand the aspect of the belief cycle. Judy explains that most grownups cannot or do not believe in magic because they “grow out” of it. She also addresses the aspect of believing and seeing and vice versa, which is often a materialists’ argument against unsupported, nonevidential belief. As alluded to, Calvin believed in Santa when he was a kid but stopped believing. That illustrates a transition from belief to unbelief. Over the course of the movie, Calvin transitions to rebelief and
believing in Santa Claus. Thus, he makes a full cycle of transition of belief. It should also be noted that Calvin’s belief is also metaphorical: for Santa to believe he is Santa, it is a metaphor for one to believe in oneself.

Laura and Neil also illustrate the cycle of belief. Throughout the movie, they, like many adults, exhibit the state of unbelief. In fact, Neil illustrates the skeptical view of seeing and believing to Charlie and tries to debunk the Santa narrative with logic and rationale.22 One scene depicts not only the pathologizing attitudes towards belief but their own transitions to unbelief. The dialog goes:

Neal: “Honey, the man is delusional.”
Laura: “Okay, okay. So maybe I’m having second thoughts, kind of. I just—I mean, what was so bad about Charlie believing in Santa?”
Neal: “Well, he’s a little old. Oh, come on, Laura. Don’t you remember when you stopped believing in Santa Claus?”
Laura: “I was Charlie’s age, I guess. I wrote Santa a letter every week that year. Well, okay. You know, maybe—maybe not every week. But—. Boy, I really wanted a ‘Mystery Date Game.’ Do you remember those? No. Of course, you don’t. You know, no one does. I don’t even think they make them anymore, but. Well, anyway Christmas morning came and—. Oh, I got dozens of presents. I got everything. Except, ‘Mystery Date.’”
Neal: “I was three, and it was an Oscar Mayer Wienie Whistle. Christmas came. No Wienie Whistle. And, that’s when I stopped believing.”
Laura: “You were three?”
Neal: “Yeah.”
Within that scene, audiences not only see the pathologizing attitudes of being “too old” to believe in Santa Claus but when and why Laura and Neil stop believing. Both of them wanted a certain present and did not get it for Christmas. They, therefore, drew on what I call “superficial conclusion”: since Santa did not give or bring them what they wanted, then he is not real and does not exist. It should be noted that Neil and Laura (along with other adults in the movie) more-or-less ignore Charlie and his claims that his father is Santa Claus. Over the course of the movie, Calvin is able to show them that he is Santa Claus; and by the end of the movie, both Laura and Neil make a full transition to a state of belief. In fact, when Neil tells Charlie that he was right, Charlie responds by saying, “You were just denying your inner child.” That draws on the idea that adults have an inner child that often times gets suppressed or repressed due to pathologizing or conditioning. That “inner child” motif appears in other examples as well.


This movie or case example is a full-length feature that tells the story of Santa Claus getting amnesia from hitting his head after falling from his sleigh and his journey to remembering who he is. While Peter Albright and his girlfriend, Claire, think that Santa is just an old man and try to reunite him with his family, Claire’s son, Zach, has to help everyone believe that Santa is the _real_ Santa as well as to help Santa remember who he is and to believe in himself.

There are several examples, scenes, and characters that exhibit states or aspects of belief within this movie, but the focus of analysis centers on the main characters. At the beginning of the movie, audiences are introduced to a young boy named Peter Albright
who has been left at an orphanage by his father. They see him writing a letter to Santa Claus that reads, “Dear Santa, you are the greatest. All I want is a happy Christmas with a family who loves me. Love, Peter Albright.” Young Albright exhibits a state of (childlike) belief in Santa; but when he learns that his father is not coming for him and watches Sister Greta put his letter into the fire (because of her cultural tradition), Albright transitions to a state of unbelief because of disappointment and challenge to belief. Audiences learn that that is the Christmas when he stops believing in Santa.

Twenty-five years later, Albright ends up meeting Santa Claus who has gotten amnesia from landing on Albright’s car and hitting his head after falling from his sleigh on a pre-Christmas ride. Over the course of the movie, Albright has his beliefs challenged not only by Santa but by his girlfriend’s son, Zach. Something that is important to note is Santa’s conversation with Albright about children and their belief.

Santa: “It seems like it’s such a fun time.”

Albright: “Well it can be, I guess.”

Santa: “What is so special about this time?”

Albright: “You’re asking the wrong guy.”

Passerby: “Merry Christmas, Santa.”

Santa: “Everyone seems so friendly.”

Albright: “Because of what you’re wearing, Nick.”

Santa: “So happy.”

Albright: “Well not everyone” [referring to people arguing on the sidewalk.]

Santa and Albright talk about families, commitments, and children.

Santa: “You don’t like children?”
Albright: “No I like them fine at someone else’s house.”
Santa: “Their no different from you and me. They’re just like us; it’s just that
they’re smaller. But, they’re wiser.”
Albright: “Wiser?”
Santa: “They see things we no longer see.”
Albright: “How do you know so much about kids?”
Santa: “I don’t know. But it sounds good, doesn’t it?”

It is compelling how an elderly figure speaks of the wisdom of children and how it is not
noticed by authoritative adults/grownups: the conversation illustrates childlike belief and
seeing things like Santa Claus is a wisdom or even ability that children (can) have but
many adults/skeptics forget or ignore. Seeing and believing or believing and seeing is a
common motif or theme that plays in many of the examples.

Another statement that is important addresses remember the past/inner selves and
beliefs. Santa says to Albright, “Maybe we both need to remember who we used to be.”
This alludes to the idea of returning to something (a state, belief, self, knowledge) that
one once used to be or have. Eventually, by the end of the movie, Albright has his
skeptical beliefs challenged when he reads the letter he wrote to Santa when he was a
child at the orphanage: the letter he watched Sister Gretta place in the fire. It is found in
the sleigh which causes Albright to consider that Santa is the real Santa. Over the course
of the movie, he makes a full transition from belief, to unbelief, to rebelief. Audiences
can even watch and see when Albright has his revolution after reading his letter and
passes over the Axis-Fidei. At one point, Albright tells Zach that he/you (Zach) was right
and he/I (Albright) was wrong.
As stated, Claire’s son, Zach, is a major influence in the movie. Regarding the basis and reality of Santa, Zach exhibits the state of belief throughout the movie. No matter how many of the adults or authorities try to tell him that Santa is not the real Santa, Zach argues that he is. The person Zach argues with the most, as previously shown, is Albright; and their conversations illustrate their states of belief/unbelief. Zach even says, “You wouldn’t recognize the real Santa if you saw him come right down your chimney.” Albright says, “For God’s sake Zach, there isn’t any real—proof that he’s Santa.” As they look at Santa and the group of children that freely gathers around him, they see a picturesque scene of “Santa Claus,” and Zach says, “What more proof do you need?” That depicts the simplistic reasoning and rationale of many children. Again, this conversation shows Zach’s belief and Albright’s unbelief/disbelief as well as his pathologizing attitudes towards belief.

Throughout the movie, Claire does not really exhibit a belief or disbelief in Santa Claus. Like most adults, she disbelieves that Santa is the real Santa, but it seems that she believes in the goodness of Santa Claus and of people. She is also supportive of her son’s belief in Santa Claus. However, after seeing the magic of Santa, she seems to transition and truly believe Santa is the real Santa Claus.

Santa himself is an interesting character and example of belief because he knows that he is Santa Claus but cannot remember that he is, and he has to rediscover that people believe in him; and to an extent, he learns to believe in himself. In this instance, unlike The Santa Clause, Santa does not believe he is Santa because he has amnesia rather than self-denial. However, over the course of the movie while interacting with the children of the city and Zach and Albright in particular, he regains his memory and
transitions from doubt/unbelief that people do not believe and appreciate Santa/him to a belief that they do. Audiences can see the moment when Santa regains his memory and has a revelation as he passes over the Axis-Fidei. Also, similarly to the previous case example, *The Santa Clause*, the aspect of Santa regaining his memory and remembering/believing/knowing that he is Santa Claus is a metaphor for belief in oneself.


This movie or case example is a full-length animated feature that is based on Chris Van Allsburg’s 1985 same titled children’s book. It is the story of a boy who no longer believes in Santa Claus but ends up having an experiential adventure on a magical train ride to the North Pole and learns to believe along with way.

This entire movie and plot are based on the premise of belief, and the entire case example or movie is an illustration of the cycle of belief. Although there are several instances and characters that illustrate the states of belief and the belief cycle, the focus is centered on the main character who is credited and named “Hero Boy.”

At the beginning of the movie, Hero Boy exhibits unbelief or disbelief in Santa Claus. Rather, it is arguable that he is not in a full-state of unbelief/disbelief but is questioning his beliefs with rationale and logic and is under the Axis-Fidei. Through a conversation between Hero Boy’s little sister, Sarah, and their dad, audiences learn that Hero Boy used to fully believe in Santa Claus (like most children) but is doubting, and it might be the last Christmas that he believes in Santa before the magic or spirit of Christmas is gone. Audiences also learn that the parents present a faux or romanticized belief for Sarah’s sake as well as for Hero Boy.
Over the course of the movie and the adventure on the Polar Express, Hero Boy makes slow transitions from unbelief or a substates/sub-degrees of unbelief to degree degrees above the Axis-Fidei to rebelief. During the train ride to the North Pole, Hero Boy meets a hobo, who turns out to be a ghost riding on the train. Their conversation addresses interesting aspects about belief and the questions Hero Boy has. The dialog goes:

Hero Boy: “What about Santa?”
Hobo: “Santa?”
Hero Boy: “Isn’t he the king of the North Pole?”
Hobo: [Pulls a Santa hat from his coat] “You mean this guy? Ho, ho, ho, ho…. What exactly is your persuasion of the big man since you brought him up?”
Hero Boy: “Well, I—I want to believe. But—.”
Hobo: “But, you don’t wanna be bamboozled. You don’t wanna be led down the primrose path. You don’t wanna be conned or duped, have the wool pulled over your eyes. Hoodwinked. You don’t wanna be taken for a ride, railroaded.” [The hobo extinguishes his fire]. “Seeing is believing. Am I right?”
Hero Boy: “What about this train?”
Hobo: “Well, what about it?”
HeroBoy: “We’re all really are going to the North Pole, aren’t we?
Hobo: “Aren’t we?”
Hero Boy: “Are you saying that this is all just a dream?”
Hobo: “You said it kid. Not me. So, let’s go find that girl. One other thing. Do you believe in ghosts?” [Hero Boy shakes his head]. “Interesting.”
That conversation gives important clues to Hero Boy’s placement in the cycle of belief. It is obvious that he is questioning and “wants” to believe, but he does not want to be criticized or pathologized. It also addresses the seeing/believing motif as well as aspects of the paranormal and supernatural. That conversation corresponds with a later conversation that Hero Boy has with the conductor. The dialog goes:

Conductor: “Year ago, on my first Christmas Eve run, I was up on the roof making my rounds when I slipped on the ice myself. I reached out for a hand iron, but it broke off. I slid and fell, and yet, I did not fall off this train.”

Hero Girl: “Someone saved you?”

Conductor: “Or something.” [He looks at the Hero Boy]

Hero Girl: “An angel.”

Conductor: “Maybe.”

Hero Boy: “Wait. Wait. What did he look like? Did you see him?”

Conductor: “No sir. But sometimes seeing is believing. And sometimes the most real things in the world are the things we can’t see.”

To note, Hero Girl is another child who is on the train who exhibits the state of belief and does not transition over the course of the movie. The conversation addresses the aspect that the hobo addressed i.e., seeing and believing: believing and seeing.

That conversation also connects to a short scene where the Hero Boy walks through a train-car full of broken toys on the way back to his own passenger-car. Towards the end of the aisle, Hero Boy passes a marionette puppet being operated by the hobo on the roof that says, “You are just like me, my friend. A scrooge! Ebenezer Scrooge. North Pole, Santa Claus, this train…it’s all a bunch of humbug. A bout of
indigestion. Oh, yeah, I know what you are. You’re a doubter. A doubter. You don’t believe. You’re a doubter. You don’t believe.” That scares the boy for obvious reasons, but it also fully addresses that Hero Boy may end up like Scrooge i.e., a doubter, disbeliever, or skeptic. Over the next scenes, the boy transitions above the Axis-Fidei but not quite to the full state of rebelief/belief.

Eventually, the train gets to the North Pole, and Hero Boy waits to hear the sound of the sleigh bells. As they are brought out by the elves, he can seem them moving, but he cannot hear them. As he watches, he noticed that one bell comes untied and flies through the air and lands at his feet. He picks it up, shakes it next to his hear but only hears air passing through an empty/hollow bell/shell. He says, “Okay. Okay. I believe. I believe. I believe.” The boy shakes the bell again and can hear it ring. He then hears a voice behind him ask, “What was that you said?” The boy turns around and sees Santa Claus. The boy says, “I believe…I believe…I believe…that this is yours” and hands Santa the bell. That is an important moment in regards to the cycle of belief because unless he truly believed or rebelieved, he could not hear the bell.

After the boy gets picked to receive the first gift of Christmas, he asks Santa for the bell from the sleigh; however, it falls out of a hole in the boy’s pocket. When he discovers that he lost the bell, he sinks into sadness and even despair. However, when he opens up his presents the next morning, Santa has returned the bell to the boy. When he shakes the bell, he can still hear it ring that again shows his full transition in the cycle of belief.

Something that is important to note is that when the parents ring the bell, they cannot hear anything. The dialog goes:
Mom: “Oh, what a beautiful bell. Who’s it from?”

Boy: “Santa.”

Mom: “Santa? Really?” [Shakes the bell but cannot hear it ring]. “Oh, that’s too bad.”

Dad: “What’s this?” [Shakes the bell but also cannot hear it ring]. “Broken. Sorry about that, sport.”

At those comments, Hero Boy looks at them because they say that they believe, but they cannot hear the bell which shows their exhibition of (faux) unbelief/disbelief or not full/true belief in Santa and/or Christmas spirit/the spirit of Christmas.

Hero Boy’s voiceover narration makes a last comment before the end of the movie, which also illustrates(addresses the transition of children from belief to unbelief. He says, “At one time, most of my friends could hear the bell. But as years passed, it fell silent for all of them. Even Sarah found, one Christmas, that she could no longer hear its sweet sound. Though I’ve grown old, the bell still rings for me. As it does for all who truly believe.” The bell is a test for true belief in Santa Claus and shows that when children stop believing and can no longer hear the bell is when they have transition from belief to unbelief, but it also shows that whoever (like Hero Boy) can hear the bell either believe or have returned to belief or transition to rebelife and rebelieve.

At the end of the move as the credits roll, there is a song entitled “Believe” that gives messages of the transition of belief. The song goes:

    Children sleeping/Snow is softly falling/Dreams are calling/Likes bells in the distance/We were dreamers/Not so long ago/But one by one/We all had to grow up/When it seems the magic slipped away/We find it all again
on Christmas Day/Believe in what your heart is saying/Hear the melody
that's playing/There's no time to waste/There's so much to
celebrate/Believe in what you feel inside/And give your dreams the wings
to fly/You have everything you need/If you just believe/If you just
believe/If you just believe/If you just believe. 24

It addresses how children believe but “one by one” all “grow up.” But, no matter
how old someone gets or how much a person matures, the magic or
(re)enchantment can be found on Christmas Day. Even though people mature and
transition from belief to unbelief, one day a year, people can transition or suspend
disbelief and rebelieve in Santa, magic, and to just be childlike/childish.

Get Santa. 2015. Directed by Christopher Smith.

This movie or case example is a full-length feature where Santa gets arrested and
seeks the help of a man by the name of Steve Anderson who saw Santa when he was a
child. Anderson no longer believes in Santa, but his son, Tom, does. Anderson and Tom
have to help get Santa out of prison before it is too late and Christmas gets cancelled. In
the process of helping Santa, Tom helps his father believe again or rebelieve while also
building a bond between father and son.

Like the previous examples, this movie has a number of examples, scenes, and
characters that depict and illustrate the cycle of belief, but the primary illustration is with
the main character Steve Anderson; however, it takes the help of his son, Tom, to help
him rebelieve. At the beginning of the movie, audiences discover that Anderson and his
ex-wife, Alison, are divorced, and Alison is living with a man named Tony. This sets up a
difficult dynamic for their son, Tom who lives with his mother and Tony. Audiences watch as Tom writes a letter to Santa and puts it in the unlit fireplace. This illustrates that Tom exhibits a state of childhood belief not only in Santa but a cultural tradition. As he runs back up the stairs, the letter magically flies up the chimney and flies on the wind to find Santa.

Later that night, Tom hears a sound outside and goes to investigate. He goes into the garage and sees a man dressed as Santa Claus. Instead of avoiding the stranger, Tom engages a conversation. The dialog goes:

Tom: “Are you the real Santa?”
Santa: “Why, yes.”
Tom: “Shouldn’t you be in Lapland? Sorting out everyone’s toys?”
Santa: “Sorting out toys, working out flight paths, feeding reindeer, loading, stowing, sticking, labeling, cladding, packing, ribboning, wrapping, and that’s before I even think about turning the Northern Lights on.”

This shows a trusting belief of a child towards a stranger and his word without any proof.

In the next scene, audiences see Anderson sitting at home, and he gets a phone call from Tom saying that Santa needs help. Over the course of the scene, audiences see Tom’s belief in Santa and Anderson’s disbelief in Santa. However, they see his understandable misbelief (based on dramatic irony i.e., audiences know the stranger is Santa) that Santa is a stranger; or, to use a colloquial phrase, “a creeper” trying to mess with his son, Tom.

Eventually, Santa gets arrested for trying to get his reindeer out from an animal shelter/pound. Over the next couple of scenes, Anderson gets to spend a day with Tom,
but Tom gives Anderson an ultimatum to go see and help Santa or he will go back home.

The dialog goes:

Anderson: “I’m sorry about last night. So, do you want to go and see Father Christmas? What do you say we swing by Harrod’s?”

Tom: “Santa’s in prison.”

Anderson: “What? No, no. We can’t go see that old fruitcake from last night.”

Tom: “He’s not a fruitcake.”

Anderson: “Well, he’s definitely a few fries short of a happy meal.”

Tom: “He’s Santa.”

Anderson: “Look, Tom, I can’t get us into prison. To go and see him. It’s not possible. I’m sorry.”

[Tom starts getting out of the van].

Anderson: “No, wait, wait, wait, there might be a way.”

Tom gets back into the van. Immediately, audiences see Anderson and Tom at the prison, and Anderson bribes the guard to see Santa. They sit at a table and wait for him. The conversation in the scene is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it shows the skeptical and even sarcastic attitude of Anderson toward Santa, but it also shows the unwavering belief of Tom. Tom does not require proof or evidence that Santa is who he says he is. He trusts whole heartily. It illustrates pathologizing attitudes about Santa being crazy and possibly on drugs or needing medication. It also illustrates the pathologizing expectation of grownups to stop believing in Santa i.e., Anderson’s statement, “I’m thirty.” However, Santa also explains that Anderson was “once seven” and says, “Deep in your heart, you know who I am.” Even though through the conversation Santa stirs up
Anderson’s repressed emotions from his childhood that no one else would know, Anderson continues to think that Santa is “a nut bag.” However, audiences can see an instant response in Anderson when Santa talks about his past. It does not necessarily constitute a transition of belief, but a wearing down or softening of disbelief. At that point, Anderson exhibits unbelief and disbelief in Santa Claus, but he is persuaded to go with Tom and look for the sleigh.

Over the course of scenes and the movie, Tom and Anderson find the reindeer and eventually find Dasher who leads them to the sleigh. After they find the sleigh, they end up going to “Lapland” and into “Elf City” through a set of slides and shoots at a place/structure called “Hermes’ Tower.” When they end up in the forest on the edge of Elf City and meet Santa’s elves who show them the overlook to the village, Anderson says, “I never thought it was real, not even when I was a boy.” That statement is important because it shows that even when children believe in Santa Claus, they might not believe all of the narrative completely.

Over the course of the adventure with Tom, Anderson slowly transitions from unbelief, passes over the Axis-Fidei and exhibits rebelief. Eventually, the elves hitch up the last (retired) reindeer to the old sleigh, and Anderson and Tom go to rescue Santa from prison. After a number of scenes, Santa breaks out of prison and all of the characters (Santa, Tom, Anderson, Alison, Tony) meet up, Anderson tells Alison that Santa is the real Santa; thus, it illustrates his transition to rebelief.

In the last scene of the movie, Santa talks to Tom and says, “About your letter, you asked me to stop your dad from letting you down. That’s not the sort of wish I can grant.” Tom says, “But, my wish was granted.” Santa responds, “But not because of me,
it was because of you. Sometimes adults aren’t quite as grown up as you’d hope. But what children teach them is love.” This statement is important because it illustrates how children can teach adults not only to believe but to love, trust, have faith, and hope. Also, in the last scene, the police arrive to arrest Anderson and Santa, but Santa makes a final statement about belief and Anderson in particular. He says, “Let it be known for the record that Steve and Thomas Anderson have saved Christmas for the world entire. You can’t take that away from them, even if you can take away their freedom. Don’t worry. Sometimes adults find it hard to accept the magic of Christmas. But, when they experience it with their own eyes, even the coldest hearts warm.” That statement addresses aspects that because adults rely on their senses to understand and believe in things, when they see/experience something, they can change; when adults see something, they can believe or rebelieve in it. After seeing Santa fly away, the police decide not to arrest Anderson, and they appear overcome with the Christmas spirit.

**Figurative Belief**

To briefly explain, this section of the case study examples examines the presented overall theme of figurative belief within the movies. Although there may be slight aspects of a possible literal belief, the overarching theme or message is a figurative or even metaphorical belief in Santa Claus meaning that although they present the topic of belief in Santa Claus, the focus is more on the essence of Santa rather than the person or personification, *per se.*
Yes, Virginia, There is a Santa Claus. 1991. Directed by Charles Jarrott.

This movie or case example is a full-length television special that is based on the 1897 newspaper editorial in the New York Sun addressed to eight-year-old Virginia O’Hanlon in response to her letter regarding Santa Claus. The movie also presents the story of Francis P. Church, the author of the news editorial. Although the movie is based on the historical news editorial, some of the names and events were fictionalized. The movie presents varying aspects of cyclical belief. As alluded to, the movie presents two main story lines or plots, O’Hanlon’s story and Church’s story. The two main characters, Virginia O’Hanlon and Church, help each other to understand who Santa Claus is, his existence, and his reality.

Although there are a number of scenes and characters that illustrate the cycle of belief in this movie, the main characters illustrate the states and cycle of belief directly. When audiences first see Virginia O’Hanlon, she is playing jump-rope with her friends. This scene depicts a common occurrence of school-age children. While the girls are playing, two older girls mock and pathologize Virginia’s (and her friend Maria’s) belief in Santa Claus. The dialog goes:

Julie: “[E]verybody knows there’s no such thing as Santa Claus.”

Virginia: “That’s not true.”

Maria: “Virginia’s right.”

Girl: “Well, how would you know? Have you ever seen him? What’s he look like, Virginia? I mean in real life? Ever see him?”

Julie: “Sure she has. We all have. There’s that one on the street corner last year, ringing a bell, and asking for money.”
Maria: “Virginia means the real Santa Claus. The one who eats the cookies and milk we leave him.”

Julie: “Your parents do that.”

Girl: “Julie’s right.”

Maria: “No she’s not. Of course, there’s a real Santa Claus. And of course, Virginia hasn’t seen him in real life.”

Julie: “Well how can you believe in something you can’t even see?”

Virginia: “I believe in God even though I can’t see him.”

That conversation, again, illustrates a common occurrence where older children pathologize younger children and their childlike beliefs. Virginia and Maria exhibit the state of belief within the cycle, and the older girls exhibit a state of unbelief. Something that is quite important to note is Virginia’s last statement because it brings in an aspect of secular and sacred belief based or grounded on visible proof or the lack thereof. Because of the mocking attitudes from the older girls, Virginia asks her father if Santa Claus is real. He advises her to ask or consult *The Sun* newspaper and says, “If you see it in *The Sun*, it’s so.” Virginia takes her father’s advice.

After a number of senses, audiences are introduced to Francis P. Church who exhibits a state of unbelief. He not only exhibits disbelief in Santa Claus but exhibits disbelief in the goodness of the world. Audiences learn that he lost his wife and child the year before and has taken up drinking to numb his pain. After a number of scenes, the chief editor and printer of the paper, Edward P. Mitchell receives Virginia’s letter and assigns Church to answer it. The conversation between the two is quite profound. The dialog goes:
Mitchell: “This might be the toughest assignment I’ve ever given you.”

Church: “Big?”

Mitchell: “Very big.”

Church: “Important?”

Mitchell: “Very important.”

Church: “Is this dangerous?”

Mitchell: “Could be.”

Church: “You mean you don’t know?”

Mitchell: “I know you’re the man to do this job.” [He hands Church a piece of paper].

Church reads the letter, and the audience can see what is written. The letter reads, “Dear Editor, I’m eight years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says ‘If you see it in the Sun, it’s so.’ Please tell me the truth. Is there a Santa Claus?” And, it is signed Virginia O’Hanlon. The dialog continues:

Church: “Is this your idea of a joke?”

Mitchell: “No, it’s my idea of an assignment.”

Church: “I write editorials, remember. That’s what I get paid for.”

Mitchell: “I know what you get paid for. This is going to be an editorial.”

Church: “Mitch, you said it yourself. Crime, corruption, controversy, that’s what I write.”

Mitchell: “Not this time. Besides this is controversial.”

Church: “Why don’t you give it to that female reporter you hired?”

Mitchell: “Because I want to give it to you.”
Church: “I don’t know anything about this.”

Mitchell: “Oh, Frank even you were a kid once.”

Church: “Yeah, it took me a lot of year to get over it.”

Mitchell: “Nobody ever gets over it. Frank, if you can answer this question, then you’ll have answered a lot of other questions as well.”

Church: “You just may not like my answer.”

Mitchell: “I’ll take that risk. Frank, maybe, just maybe, when all of your other editorials have been forgotten, when all the issues of today are resolved. A hundred years from now when there are new issues to be considered. Some kid will still be asking this same question. And you Frank P. Church will have already written the answer.”

Church: “And you, Edward P. Mitchell will print what I write?”

Mitchell: “You write it, Francis; I’ll print it.”

That conversation is quite important because Church says that he does not know how to answer the questions because he is not a kid, but Mitchell says that he was a kid once. Church responds that it took him a long time to “get over it” and grow up. That statement/conversation mirrors the same aspect of “growing up” and “getting over” childhood as presented in the case study example Santa Who? (2000). Again, this shows that Church exhibits a state of unbelief. After a number of scenes, Church looks inside of himself and at the world around him and is able to see the goodness that is present. He sees the spirit of generosity and care that people show to each other, especially around Christmas time/the holiday season. He finds his answer.
In the last scene, Virginia’s father is reading the paper and reads on the front page the answer to Virginia’s letter. It goes:

O’Hanlon: “Is there a Santa Claus? We take pleasure in answering at once and thus prominently the communication below expressing at the same time our great gratification that its faithful author is numbered among friends of The Sun. Dear Editor, I’m eight years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says, if you see it in the Sun, it’s so. Please, tell me the truth. Is there a Santa Claus?” And, it’s signed Virginia O’Hanlon.”

Virginia: “Papa, what does it say?”

O’Hanlon: “Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men’s or children’s, are little. In this great universe of ours, man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge. Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus. It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The external light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished. Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get
your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that’s no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world.

[Church’s voiceover] You tear apart the baby’s rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else as real and abiding. No Santa Claus! Thank God! he lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, [O’Hanlon’s voice] he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.”

For over a hundred years, that same letter has been read to countless children. It addresses not only the belief in Santa Claus, but it addresses belief as a whole. It addresses the simplicity or innocence of childlike belief as well as the unseen and effects of skepticism.

Within the last scenes of the movie, audiences see the transition of Church from unbelief to rebelief. He does not necessarily rebelieve in Santa Claus the same (way) as children, but he believes in the goodness and generosity of Santa Claus. Audiences also see the validation and affirmation of Virginia’s belief in response to the answer to her
question. Virginia does not necessarily transition to a state of unbelief within the cycle exactly, but she does start to question her beliefs and searches for an answer when she finds it in the *Sun*.


This movie or case example is based on Truman Capote’s 1983 same titled short story. It depicts the narrative of a young man/child/boy, Buddy, who leaves his cousin’s home in Alabama to go and live with his father in New Orleans, Louisiana. Buddy’s beliefs are challenged when he moves away, and such challenges cause turmoil in his life. Over the course of the movie, several of the characters in the story have to evaluate what they believe.

Although there are a number of characters in this story, the primary or main character, Buddy, fully illustrates the cycle of belief. However, other characters illustrate the states of belief as well. In the beginning of the movie, Buddy has been living with his cousin in Alabama and has been sheltered for his entire life but goes to live with his father in New Orleans. Because he has been sheltered, his beliefs are challenged. Things are not what he thought they were or would be like, especially with his father.

Eventually, Buddy befriends a boy named Toby who directly challenges Buddy’s belief in Santa Claus. The dialog goes:

Buddy: “Santa’s real, you know. He’s as real as you and me.”

Toby: “Nah.”

Buddy: “How come you think he’s not?”
Toby: “Because I asked for a radio two years in a row, a big one with flashing lights and dials and get clear to St. Louis, and I didn’t get it.”

Buddy: “Maybe he had a good reason for not bringing it to you.”

Toby: “It’s a good reason alright. He don’t exist.”

In that conversation, Buddy exhibits the state of belief where Toby exhibits the state of unbelief. It is also important to note that Toby uses the classic argument of “superficial conclusion” of not getting what he wanted as proof that Santa is not real and does not exist.

Buddy’s beliefs are challenged further when he finds “Santa’s” gifts hidden under his father’s bed. The dialog goes:

Toby: “Do you get it now?”

Buddy: “I saw him wrapping these yesterday.”

Toby: “I tried to tell you. There is no Santa Claus. They all lie. They just don’t think we’ll ever find out. Better pick those up before he finds out you’ve been looking in there.”

Buddy: “I hate him. I hate him.”

Buddy transitions from belief to unbelief; however, because his beliefs (not only about Santa Claus but most of what he has been told and believes) has been challenges so strongly, he ends up not knowing what to believe or whom to trust. He gets so frustrated/upset and runs out of the house and into the middle of the street during a rainstorm. As he is running away in a frantic panic/frenzy, he almost gets hit by a car owned by the city’s socialite, Ms. Cornelia Beaumont. Because he is wet from the rain,
she takes him to her mansion to dry off and warm up but ends up teaching him a lesson about belief. The dialog goes:

Ms. Cornelia: “I never had any children of my own. Frankly, I don’t much care for them. Are you alright? Do you want something?”

Buddy: “I don’t want any more lies.”

Ms. Cornelia: “So, it’s the truth you’re after. A highly overrated commodity if you ask me. Is there a particular truth you’re looking for?”

Buddy: “Does it snow in New Orleans?”

Ms. Cornelia: “Almost never.”

Buddy: “What about Santa?”

Ms. Cornelia: “Santa Claus? You mean is there or isn’t there one?”

Buddy: “My friend Toby says there’s not.”

Ms. Cornelia: “Of course, there’s a Santa Claus! It’s just, well it’s just that no single someone could do all that he has to do. So, the task has been spread among us all. That’s why everybody’s Santa Claus. I am, you are, your father is, even this Toby of yours is.”

Buddy: “That’s confusing.”

Ms. Cornelia: “Yes, life is confusing. That’s the nature of it. Life is confusing, but we muddle through. Now you just relax and be a child for as long as you can be one. Count the stars. Think of the quietest things like snow, snow, snow falling through the stars.”

That conversation is important to illustrate an aspect of belief. It should be noted that Ms. Cornelia does not believe in Santa Claus per se or at least the stereotypical
personified Santa, but she believes in the essence and spirit of Santa Claus/Christmas and says that everyone is Santa Claus, which will be discussed in further depth later in the thesis. Ms. Cornelia’s niece, Ms. Emily Beaumont, also explains the aspect of belief and lies. The dialog goes:

Emily: “People lie. That a fact of life. They usually don’t mean any harm by it. They’re just trying to protect themselves.”

Buddy: “From what?”

Emily: “From getting hurt. Sometimes we have to deceive ourselves just to get from day to day. The truth is often more than we can bear. So, we make ourselves believe. We tell ourselves we’re still pretty. There’s still a chance for us. That someone loves us. And we hope against hope that believing strongly enough will make it true.”

That conversation, along with what Ms. Cornelia told him, helps Buddy to understand how to see or understand what people say in respect to belief. It also illustrates that beliefs give people something to dream about or look forward to. Buddy slowly starts to make a transition from his confused unbelief state to a state of rebelief. Buddy’s father also helps him understand aspects of childlike belief and magic. He says:

It’s been too many years, Buddy. You’re not the son I expected, but then I’m not the father you deserve. The truth is, Buddy, we’re all born with a pocket full of magic. I used mine early. Tossed it around until there was none left. There’s no one to blame but myself. So, if I had one thing to tell you, don’t waste your magic, Buddy. Treasure it. Make it last. It’ll take you to places you never dreamed of.”
What Buddy’s father is saying is people/children believe with a childlike simplicity while they can and before the world makes them grow up. By the end of the movie, Buddy makes a full cycle of transition from belief to unbelief, to rebelief and learns to trust what people say and tell him.

One final aspect of the cycle of belief is shown towards the end of the movie when Ms. Emily gives Buddy a radio for Christmas. He remembers what Ms. Cornelia said about everybody being Santa Claus. He gives/gifts his radio to Toby as a Christmas present. When Toby sees it, he exclaims that “Santa” brought him a radio that illustrates that even Toby makes a full transition to rebelief, and Buddy gets to be Santa Claus himself.

**Combination of Literal and Figurative Beliefs**

To explain, this section or category examines and addresses the theme of a combined belief or a combination of literal and figurative beliefs. The following case examples present both literal and figurative beliefs from different points of view. Unlike the previous sections and categories that had an overarching theme of literal or figurative, the following present an overarching theme of both.

**Miracle on 34th Street. 1947.** Directed by George Seaton.

This movie or case example is a full-length feature that presents the story of Kriss Kringle (sic; as spelled and credited in the movie) (Santa Claus) and the skeptical attitudes towards his identity. He claims to be the real Santa Claus, but that challenges rationality and logic; therefore, people think that he is crazy. Over the course of the
movie, audiences see how Kringle works to turn skeptical people into believers while also having his own sanity questioned.

There are so many examples of belief in this movie; it is difficult to encompasses it all. However, by looking at the overview of the characters and their states of belief, the cycle of belief is illustrated. Kriss Kringle/Santa Claus knows and believes that he is the real Santa Claus and presents himself as such. It is fair to say that Kringle exhibits belief throughout the movie even though his belief is more self-awareness/knowledge; but, even so, when he is asked if he believes himself to be Santa Claus, and he answers, “Yes, of course.” However, most importantly, he understands what he (Santa Claus) means and represents. It can be argued that Kringle’s self-awareness and knowledge of his identity is metaphorical or figurative for knowing and believing in oneself.

Fred Gailey exhibits the state of belief and does not really change through the movie. However, his belief in Santa Claus is figurative meaning that he believes in what Santa Claus or Kringle stands for. He believes in the goodness of people and trusts in their good nature. He teaches Mrs. Doris Walker how to trust against common sense. He does, however, present an aspect of faux belief or romanticized belief to Susan Walker for the sake of childhood belief. However, Susan is not the typical child per se.

Susan exhibits the state of unbelief that is influenced and enforced by the authority of her mother. She even tries to test Kringle with the “superficial conclusion” of granting her Christmas wish. However, over the course of the movie, Susan slowly transitions from a state of unbelief to belief. Audiences can see her transition by degrees and pass over the Axis-Fidei. She does have a minor setback when she does not see or find her gift under the tree, but she corrects the transition when her wish is granted. It is
difficult to say if Susan ever originally believed in Santa Claus or if she was raised to
disbelief, so she may transition from unbelief to belief instead of rebelief. By the end of
the movie, Susan literally believes in a real Santa Claus; in fact, she believes that Kriss
Kringle is the real Santa.

Mrs. Walker, Susan’s mother, exhibits a state of unbelief, and audiences learn that
she disbelieves because she has been emotionally hurt by her previous beliefs especially
her belief in the goodness of people: she was emotionally hurt by her ex-husband and
decided to stop believing in such things like goodness, decency, and hope before she gets
hurt again. She raised Susan with the same attitude of disbelief. Over the course of the
movie, Mrs. Walker slowly transitions from unbelief to rebelief as can be seen when she
signs Susan’s letter to Santa: She writes at the bottom, “I believe in you, too.” Like with
Susan’s transition, audiences can see Mrs. Walker transitioning by degrees and
eventually pass over the Axis-Fidei. She ends up believing in Kringle and that he is Santa
Claus; however, her belief is figurative meaning that she believes in the essence and
nature of Santa Claus rather than a literal Santa, *per se*. Still, by the end of the movie, she
has made a complete cycle of belief.

As mentioned, a part of this movie is that Santa Claus goes on trial to determine is
competence and if he should be committed. The argument is made that anyone who
believes themselves to be Santa Claus is mentally unstable. However, during the trial, a
number of witnesses state under a sworn oath that they believe in Santa Claus and that
they believe Kringle is the real Santa. Eventually, it is ruled that Kringle is sane, that he is
Santa Claus, and the case is dismissed.
However, not everyone makes a transition from unbelief to belief. One character that does not change is Mr. Sawyer, a psychiatrist who examined Kringle. Even though Kringle passes all of the competency tests, Sawyer still thinks he is delusional. He says that anyone who enjoys playing Santa Claus has a “guilt complex.” He exhibits a state of unbelief and stays in a state of unbelief throughout the entire movie. This shows that not everyone transitions from unbelief to belief even when others do.


This case example is quite similar to the 1947 version; however, there were changes to some aspects of the movie, but the story line and plot are quite similar if not the same. This movie, like the 1947 version, tell the story of Kriss Kringle (sic; as spelled and credited in the movie) (Santa Claus) and his journey to help to unbelievers find belief not only that he is Santa Claus but in the goodness of people while having his own identity and sanity questioned.

Again, this movie, like the previous example and version, has so many aspects of belief that it is difficult to examine and present them all. But, the cycle of belief is evident in characters, their beliefs, and their behaviors. Kriss Kringle exhibits a state of belief or knowledge of being the real Santa Claus. Throughout the movie, he stays in the state of belief and does not transition. There is one part before his hearing when he questions himself and his actions, but this is not an actual transition. It is more of a reflection or evaluation of his recent behavior of striking a man to defend the innocence of children. As argued with the 1947 version, Kringle’s knowledge or self-awareness can be a metaphor for belief or believing in oneself.
Brian Bedford exhibits a state of belief; however, he does not literally believe in Santa Claus, but he believes in what Santa Claus or Kriss Kringle represents and stands up for. He even has to remind Kringle of what he (Santa) represents. He believes in the honesty and goodness of people. He trusts and hopes. Similar to Mr. Gailey in the 1947 version, he helps Mrs. Dorey Walker to believe in the decency and goodness of people. He also exhibits a faux or romanticized belief for Susan’s sake. However, again, Susan is not the typical child with typical childlike beliefs.

Susan Walker exhibits a state of unbelief that is influenced and enforced by her mother. She even uses the classic “superficial conclusion” to test Kringle to see if he is the real Santa Claus and can grant her Christmas wish. However, over the course of the movie, Susan interacts with Kringle who challenges her disbelief and helps her slowly question and transition. Throughout the movie, degree by degree, Susan transitions from unbelief to a state of belief and audiences can see as she passes over the Axis-Fidei. However, it is difficult to say if she transitions to a state of belief because it is not clear whether she previously believed in Santa Claus or if she was raised to disbelieve before she believed. Still, she transitions to the same point. By the end of the movie, Susan exhibits a state of literal belief in Santa Claus and believes that Kringle is the real Santa.

Mrs. Walker also exhibits the state of unbelief. Audiences learn that Mrs. Walker previously believed in things such as Santa Claus and the goodness of people, but she was emotionally hurt when she was let down by her beliefs or rather who and what she believed in. She also puts that aspect onto Susan. However, over the course of the movie, Mrs. Walker slowly transition from unbelief to belief and makes a full cycle of belief. Like with Susan, audiences can see the point when Mrs. Walker passes over the
Axis-Fidei. It should be noted that her belief is not a literal belief like Susan’s. She believes in Kringle, but her belief is a figurative belief meaning that she believes in what Santa or Kringle stands for rather than literally believing in a literal Santa Claus. It should also be noted that one major influence that helps Mrs. Walker transition or question her beliefs or rather unbelief/disbelief is a conversation she has with Kringle. The dialog goes:

Mrs. Walker: “Just be yourself. Don’t even thing about the camera. You’ll be just fine.”

Santa: Right: I must confess, I don’t quite know why they’re making such a fuss about me.”

Mrs. Walker: “Well, this is the holiday season, and you’re Santa Claus, right?”

Santa: “To many, yes. But, to others, I’m just an old man with a white beard.”

Mrs. Walker: “Yes, but you’re still the symbol of the season.”

Santa: “You think I’m a fraud, don’t you?”

Mrs. Walker: “I think fraud is a bit too strong of a word.”

Santa: “But you don’t believe in me.”

Mrs. Walker: “I believe that Christmas is for children. “

Santa: “Well, your daughter doesn’t believe in me either.”

Mrs. Walker: “I don’t think that there’s any harm in not believing in a figure that many do acknowledge to be a fiction.”

Santa: “Oh, but there is. I’m not just a whimsical figure who wears a charming suit and affects a jolly demeanor, you know. I’m a symbol. I’m a symbol of the human ability to suppress the selfish and hateful tendencies that rule a major part
of our lives. If you can’t believe. If you can’t accept anything on faith, then you’re doomed for a life dominated by doubt. I like you very much Mrs. Walker. You’re a fine woman. And, you know, I think you’ll make an excellent test case for me—you and your daughter. If I can make you believe, then there’d be some hope for me. If I can’t, well, I’m finished.”

That quote is quite influential in the idea that Santa is more than a man in red suit; he is an essence that can be found in people.

As mentioned, a major part of this case is that Santa goes on trial to determine his competency, if he should be committed, and eventually, if he is really Santa Claus. There are a number of witness testimonies that say under a sworn oath that they believe in Santa Claus and that Kringle is the real Santa. Something that is interesting about this version that is not present in the 1947 version is the final factor that helps the judge make a ruling, per se. In the 1947 version, the “competent authority” is the United States Postal Service. In this 1994 version, the deciding factor is inspired by a similar branch of the United States’ Federal Government. Just before the judge makes his ruling, Susan gives him a Christmas card with a one-dollar bill in it. It is not a bribe but a way to remind the judge about the aspect of belief. The judge’s monologue is quite profound and goes:

Judge Harper: “Merry Christmas.” [Crumbles his verdict and tosses it aside]. “I’m not going to be needing that. The young lady who just approached the bench presented me with this Christmas card and this. It’s one-dollar bill. It’s going to be returned to her shortly. But by presenting me with this bill, she reminded me of the fact that it’s issued by the Treasury of the Untied State of America, and it’s backed by the government and the people of the Untied State of America. Upon
inspection of the article, you will see the words ‘In God We Trust.’ Now, we’re not here to prove that God exists, but we are here to prove that a being just as invisible and yet just as present exists. The federal government puts its trust in God. It does so on faith and faith alone. It’s the will of the people that guides the government. And it is and was their collective faith in a greater being that gave and gives cause to the inscription on this bill. Now, if the government of the United States can issue its currency barng a declaration of trust in God without demanding physical evidence of the existence or the nonexistence of a greater being, then the State of New York by a similar demonstration of the collective faith of its people can accept and acknowledge that Santa Claus does exist, and he exists in the person of Kriss Kringle. Case Dismissed.”

The reason that monologue is so profound is because it presents the aspect of (secular and sacred) belief on the basis of evidence or the lack thereof. It addresses that belief is often established by a collective or cultural agreement or “faith” of the people. However, not everyone will agree with the collective.

The character Victor Landbergh (the owner of a competitive store) exhibits the state of unbelief and stays in that state throughout the movie. At the end of the movie, he is talking with his hench-employees about the ruling on Santa Claus. He says, “He isn’t Santa Claus. What the hell is the matter with everybody? There is no Santa Claus!” That illustrates that not everyone transitions in the cycle of belief. Some people disbelief and stay in a constant state of unbelief.
Observed/Observable Patterns

Each of the case study examples either illustrate the patterns of the states or theory of cyclical belief, or the cycle of belief can be found within the cases. While examining the case study examples, one can see common documentable patterns emerge. In the case studies, the main character(s) seem(s) to either stay in belief, transition to a state of unbelief, or return to belief (rebelief) by the end of the movie. There are a couple of reasons for the “happy ending” or what could be called the “belief” ending. Firstly, these are what can be called “family films/movies” meaning that families usually expect positive, happy endings where most everything is resolved. It follows the classic plot structure of stories and even contains what Tolkien called catastrophe and eucatastrophe (2001). This is similar to the “fairy tale” or “escapist” ending in fairy/folk stories. Even though real life does not always end happily per se, the escapist narrative with a happy ending gives the audience something that they can experience in the escape that they do not often get in real life or reality. They also leave the audience with “happy” feelings knowing that the story worked out or was resolved.

Another pattern that emerges in these case study examples is the transitions of belief. Each character in the story has their own placement in the cycle of belief i.e., a character may be in a state of belief, unbelief (disbelief or misbelief), or even rebelief. Some characters make a full transition from belief to rebelief. Some characters start at a state of unbelief and work to belief. Some characters begin at belief and stay in belief. Some character start in a state of unbelief and stay in unbelief: just because there are connections between states of belief, that does not necessarily mean that it is universal and that everyone changes. One character in most narratives is the villain or bad
person/character. It would be out of their character to change, per se. The same goes for the hero. In stories, the hero does not usually become a villain.

Another pattern that appears is the aspect of the “inner child” inside of the adult or grownup. This motif is observable in Yes, Virginia, There is a Santa Claus when Mitchell tells Church that he was “a kid once.” It is observable in The Santa Clause when Charlie tells Neil that he was “ignoring his inner child.” It is observable in Santa Who? when Santa tells Albright that “they both need to remember who they used to be” meaning that Albright needs to look inside of himself and see what he believed when he was a child. It is observable in Get Santa when Anderson argues that he is a thirty-year-old grown man, and Santa reminds him that he was “once seven.” It is found in the lyrics “If you Just Believe” from The Polar Express when it says, “we find it all again on Christmas Day.” Basically, the aspect of the “inner child” is based on the idea that adults have a part of themselves that is childlike but often gets suppressed or repressed especially because of pathologizing conditioning.

Another pattern that appears in the movies is what I call “superficial conclusions” meaning that people, often-times children, draw “superficial conclusions” about beliefs especially regarding Santa Claus. Throughout the movies, there is the aspect that if Santa Claus does not grant a wish and bring an exact present at an exact time (Christmas) then he is not real and does not exist. This is shown in the 1947 and 1994 versions of Miracle on 34th Street with Susan’s test for Santa Claus. It is shown by Laura and Neil in The Santa Claus. It is shown by Toby in One Christmas. It can also be seen in arguments concerning proof, evidence, rationality, and logic. Throughout the movies, arguments concerning said aspects or elements are made against Santa Claus’ existence and reality.
Another pattern that appears in these tales can be called the *acting parents*. By that, I mean that there is often the parent, adult, grown up, authority figure that tells a child that they believe in Santa Claus when they actually do not i.e., they present a faux belief. They are playing or acting for the child. It is to help keep the story going and keep the *magic* alive until the child no longer participates in the story or until the parent(s)/authority decide(s) it is time to end the story and quit pretending. There is a major aspect with this pattern both in the examples and in real life. According to folklore, Santa Claus is considered a “legendary” figure: he and his narratives both oral/traditional and literary/visual (movie/shows) are placed in the genre of legendry. In folklore, there is the aspect of *ostension* i.e., performing a legend. I argue that anyone who performs (in) the legend of Santa Claus such as parents with their children is performing *ostension*. Such performance can be a legend trip consisting of parents and children going to a particular location to see Santa as part of the legend. However, I take my argument a step further because performing the legend of Santa Claus is twofold: parents are performing *ostension* when they put a gift “from Santa” under the Christmas tree, but they are performing the legend for their children. Parents can even go the extent that J.R.R. Tolkien went to for his children: Tolkien wrote letters from “Father Christmas” and addressed them to his children (2004). Thus, they are performing *ostension* for someone else. This is similar to the performance of tropes. I argue that when performing a legend for someone else such as the legend of Santa Claus, one is performing what I call “proxetic” meaning *ostension* for another. This extends from just giving gifts to others, to putting gifts marked “from Santa” under a Christmas tree at night while
children sleep, to consuming the snack and beverage left for Santa, to people dressing up and playing Santa for employment or volunteer/charity services.

One major theme or motif that is present in many of the case study examples is the broken home or family. In *The Santa Clause*, the Calvin and Laura are divorced. In *Santa Who?*, Albright is left at an orphanage, and Zach’s parents are divorced. In *Get Santa*, Anderson’s parents got divorced, and he and Alison are divorced. In *One Christmas*, Buddy’s parents are divorced. In both versions of *Miracle on 34th Street*, Mrs. Walker is divorced, and Susan does not really know her father. The aspect of the broken home or family causes issues for the situation, especially for the child involved.

The theme or common pattern that arises is children teaching or helping adults or unbelievers to believe as well as the address of the wisdom of children. To an extent one could say that the wise believer has to teach or help the skeptical unbeliever to believe. Not only is the action present visible and present, the message of such is addressed, as in the case of *Santa Who?* when Santa acknowledges that children are able to see what adults no longer can or choose to ignore. In a number of the examples, the adults/unbelievers/disbelievers/skeptics tell the believers/children that the children were right all along.

One final theme or motif that appears in the case study examples is the aspect of seeing and believing, believing and seeing. The examples make arguments that believing is seeing rather than seeing is believing. It is directly presented in *The Santa Clause; Santa Who? The Polar Express; Yes, Virginia, There is a Santa Claus; Get Santa* and it is indirectly presented in the other case study examples. Such arguments are actual
encouragements for belief as well as acknowledging the value of such sight based from belief.

**Final Thoughts**

Something that is very profound in examining and analyzing these case study examples is that they reflect persons, people, and situations of the real world even though they can be or are considered fiction or fictionalized. Even the story of Virginia O’Hanlon is about a real girl, family, and letter, but the movie was dramatized/fictionalized. What is more interesting is the wisdom that they hold. Yes, they encourage not only the characters in the narrative to believe, but the give messages to viewers and audiences both children and adults to believe, especially to believe like children. What is also interesting is the aspect of who/what Santa Claus is.

In the examples of *Miracle on 34th Street*, people think Kriss Kringle is crazy because he believes himself to be Santa Claus, a legendary figure. In the other examples, people see the real Santa Claus as just another person until they learn otherwise. However, in *The Year Without a Santa Claus*, Mrs. Claus sings that anyone can be Santa. It should also be acknowledged that when the children in *The Year Without a Santa Claus* send him presents, they are actually playing the role or being Santa for Santa himself. In *One Christmas*, Ms. Cornelia tells Buddy that everybody is Santa Claus. However, when people are asked who or what Santa Claus is, they usually explain something along the lines of the stereotypical figure i.e., overweight, jolly man, red suit, white beard, and such that looks like the Santa Claus personification that is plastered on posters and promoted by Coco-Cola at Christmas time. When people stop believing in
Santa Claus, they argue that Santa Claus is not real because they have not seen the stereotypical figure delivering gifts to them: people fall into “superficial conclusions.” If people do not get what they want, when they want it, and how they want it, they conclude that Santa is not real and/or does not exist. Still, based on the idea(s) posed in *The Year Without a Santa Claus* and *One Christmas*, as well as *Yes, Virginia, There is a Santa Claus*, a person can rebelieve in Santa Claus if they alter or adapt their perception of Santa Claus.

The figure of Santa Claus is a personification or personified figure/being of the qualities of Santa Claus or what can be called the spirit of Christmas. The case study examples express that Santa is the *embodiment* of the spirit of Christmas or Christmas spirit. As is pointed out in *Miracle on 34th Street*, 1994 version, “[Santa Claus is] a symbol. A symbol of the human ability to suppress the hateful and selfish tendencies that rule a major part of [human life].” If a person can see that Santa Claus more than the stereotypical personification, then anyone who performs the *act or function* of Santa Claus becomes Santa Claus. Even by giving a gift marked “from Santa” puts the giver in the role, function, or character of Santa. Again, that aspect connect to the children giving gifts to Santa in *The Year Without a Santa Claus* along with Buddy in *One Christmas*.

**Conclusion**

After examining the definitions, literature, and case study examples, it is fair to say that a fluid continuum or cycle of belief that includes states of belief, unbelief, and rebelief appears and does exists as a human function or faculty. However, after such research, it becomes clear why scholars have difficulties with belief. It is complicated and
complex: it is astronomical in scope. Even when one narrows their focus, it is still incredibly nuanced when examining all the intricacies involved. To explain the concepts, belief is a thing that is credited, seen, viewed, accepted; as true based on or grounded with or without evidence. The verb believe means to hold something as true. Unbelief is a thing regarded as not true or not to be believed. Unbelieve is the act of not believing. Disbelief is similar and means a lack or refuted belief. Disbelieve means to refuse or withhold belief. Misbelief is a false, erroneous, or wrong belief; and misbelieve is to believe in something falsely, erroneously, or wrongly. Rebelief is a state of belief that one can believe again whether in the same or similar thing or way they once did. Rebelieve is an act of believing again or a return to an original or previous/earlier state of belief. All of the states of belief are based, formed, framed, and/or grounded with or without evidence. The concepts get more and more complicated when put under a microscope or lens, but it is not impossible to examine.

Through the case study examples, audiences can see that there is a cycle of belief. Within the examples, there are characters such as Fred Gailey, Brian Bedford, Zach, Charlie, Tom Anderson, Virginia O’Hanlon, and others that exhibit the state of belief and do not actually transition in the cycle. There are characters such as Mrs. Sawyer and Victor Landbergh who exhibit unbelief/disbelief and do not transition in the cycle. However, there are numerous character the make their transition either from an initial state of unbelief/disbelief and transition to belief such as Susan Walker (in both versions of the case studies). There are also many characters that make full transitions to a literal belief/rebelief in a literal Santa Claus such as Hero Boy, Peter Albright, Steve Anderson, Buddy, and even Ignatius and Mr. Thistlewhite. There are also characters that make a full
transition to a figurative belief such as Mrs. Walker, Ms. Cornelia Beaumont, and
Frances P. Church. Something that is interesting to reiterate that was mentioned in the
observed/observable patterns above is the aspect that many of the believers that did not
transition and had to help the unbelievers in the examples were mostly children. This
aspect is also addressed in the examples in connection with the value of belief.

As for understanding the value of rebelief and understanding the value of belief
that often gets pathologized, one is able to see that belief give humans something personal. It gives them something to hope for or trust in (an) aspect of life. It allows a person to believe in something without the demand of evidence, proof, or justification. Rebelief seems to also give people a wisdom that is found (again) that many people seem to forget. As was pointed out in a number of the case study examples, believers/rebelievers see and understand what unbeliever/disbelieves lose sight of. One can see the wisdom and insight in Church’s letter to Virginia O’Hanlon as well as Ms. Cornelia’s advice to Buddy. As so many of the case studies explained, just because someone cannot see or hear something does not mean that it is not there. Of course, there is also the aspect of cultural tradition to consider that influences the romanticizing and pathologizing of beliefs and behaviors. Even still, people can believe and can be influenced by what they see: people can see what they believe.

As aforementioned, popular culture and people are influenced by popular media
(books/literature, music, television shows, movies, and the like). When people watch
pop-culture movies, they are presented not only with a movie or show; they are presented with messages whether directly or indirectly; regardless, they are there. Drawing from the case study examples, the message of believing in Santa Claus is promoted in such
movies. Like with a parable; if a person only wants a story, they get a story. If a person wants the message/wisdom contained within the story, they will get the message/wisdom therein contained. The messages consciously, subconsciously, or unconsciously can reach the viewers and audiences. After examining, analyzing, and studying the case study examples, it is evident that the popular culture media movies depicting Santa Claus illustrate or depict my theory of cyclical belief or a belief cycle. They depict children who believe and disbelieve. They shows adults who believe and disbelieve. They also show instances when people get stuck in the state of unbelief or disbelief. They show the transition between the states or points in the cycle. As aforementioned, this is an introduction, so there needs to be further study and application of my theory. The cycle of believe can be found or illustrated in popular culture movies that not only represent people, beliefs, and the world, but they also give messages to believe or of belief. However, it can be seen and applied in real world situations as well.

Notes

1 Other works from Hufford on the subject of belief and the supernatural include The Terror that Comes in the Night: And Experience-Centered Study of Supernatural Assault Traditions, (1982) and “Beings without Bodies: An Experience Centered Theory of the Belief in Spirits,” (1995).

2 This work is built from Dégh’s previous work and articles including “The ‘Belief Legend’ in Modern Society: Form, Function and Relationship to Other Genres” (1971), and “Legend and Belief” that she wrote with Andrew Vázsonyi (1981). She later adapted her scholarship of belief and legend in her book, Legends and Belief, (2001).

3 In this work, Dégh addresses Gillian Bennett’s work and arguments in the article “‘Belief Stories’: The Forgotten Genre.” Bennett wrote a reply (1996) to Dégh’s comments in the journal Folklore where she defends her reasonings.

4 Michael Dylan Foster and Jeffery A. Tolbert introduce the term “Folkloresque” and state, “So the term folkloresque articulates three related meanings: (1) that an item (or element of an item) is in the ‘style’ of folklore; (2) that it is connected to something beyond/before itself, to some tradition or folklore source existing outside the popular culture context; and (3) that the product itself is potentially of folkloric value, connected in some way with processes of folklore creation and transmission” (2016, 5-6).

5 In her text, Putting the Supernatural in Its Place: Folklore, the Hypermodern, and the Ethereal, Jeannie Banks Thomas addresses the term “hypermodern folklore.” She defines the phrase as, “This term
recognizes the intermingling of folk, popular, consumer, and digital cultures. I like the word *hypermodern* for its clarity—you get an immediate sense of what the word means...” (2015, 7).

6 Mathews-Pett adapted her thesis into the article “I want It to Go to a Good Home: Animism in Western Relationships with Personal Possessions” in 2019 in the journal *Performance Research*.

7 In a featurette or behind the scenes interview with Angela Lansbury who plays the Balloon Lady talks about playing such a character. She says, “You have to think in those terms. You have to believe. You have to believe in magic. You have to believe in all of the qualities, she continues, “It’s all imagination. It’s all about children’s imagination” (Creators Faire 2018).

8 In connection with *Mary Poppins Returns*, one can make the argument that the original *Mary Poppins* movie gives similar messages about the value of childhood and goodness. In the *Mary Poppins*, the title character makes a statement that men like Mr. Banks “[C]annot see past the end of their nose” (Stevenson 1964). This can connect to the aspect of unbelief and skepticism. In the movie *Saving Mr. Banks*, audiences see the background story of the *Mary Poppins* narrative and find out that the real inspiration for the character and message of the story in *Mary Poppins* is not that the nanny goes to help the children but to help the doubting, skeptical, unbelieving father/adult (Hancock 2013).

9 Such criticism by skeptics can be seen in responses in the YouTube documentary clip entitled “Fairy Folklore of County Clare” uploaded by Celtic Atlantic Tales. In the clip, audiences/viewers hear from an elderly interviewee (when talking about fairies and folk belief) who says, “If I told them, they’d just laugh at me. Do you know what I mean, they don’t believe in it” (2017 [00:03:10]). Another elderly interviewee says, “Yeah well very few believe it, sure. Yeah I suppose they’re more educated than we were, I think. Sure, we’d be listen to it all the time. Long ago, sure it was all the stories. By night we’d hear something about the fairies or something, you know?” But sure there’s none of that now, that’s all gone (2017 [00:03:21]). In the documentary clip, Irish story collector Eddie Lenihan says, “Technology may move. We may move. But these things don’t move. These things were and are and will be. The fairies, they were there, and they are there. It’s we who have changed (2017 [00:03:45]).

10 Based on claims and arguments by William James in *The Will to Believe*, beliefs can be formed, founded, held, and grounded without evidence or proof (2010).

11 It should be noted that there is a difference between disbelief and nonbelief. According to W.V. Quine and J.S. Ullian, “Disbelief is a case of belief; to believe a sentence false is to believe the negation of the sentence true. We disbelieve that there are ghosts; we believe that there are none. Nonbelief is the state of suspending judgement: neither believing the sentence true or believing it false” (1978, 12). Essentially, disbelief is to believe something is false where nonbelief is to neither believe nor disbelieve.

12 It is interesting to understand the slight differences between knowledge and belief. It seems that knowledge is based more on known and provable facts or evidence where belief may be grounded without such proof or evidence. When it comes to the aspect of belief and knowledge, there is much debate over what qualifies or designates each or both. Hufford makes an interesting statement in his article and says, “What I know I know, what you know you only believe—to the extent that it conflicts with my knowledge” (1982, 47-48). Carl Jung made an interesting statement in a documented interview when asked about believing in God: “Now? Difficult to answer. I know. I needn’t—I don’t need to believe, I know” (Templar 2021, [00:00:10]). He also addresses his belief about death and the end of life: “Well, I can’t say… You see, the word ‘belief’ is a difficult thing for me. I don’t believe. I must have a reason for a certain hypothesis. Either I know a thing, and when I know it, I don’t need to believe it. If I—I, I don’t allow myself for instance to believe a thing just for the sake of believing it. I can’t believe it. But when there are sufficient reasons to form a certain hypothesis, I shall accept it is a reason, naturally” (Ibid. [00:01:36]).

13 I refrain from defining things like skepticism, doubt, delusion and like synonyms within this thesis for the sake of argument and brevity. They should be self-evident or self-explanatory. I also do not address the negation or negative aspect of the term such as trust and distrust (since again, the negated term should be self-evident or self-explanatory). However, even though faith, hope, knowledge, and trust get
synonymized with belief, there are differences in meaning and usage. To briefly explain, the consensus and common/general definition of faith is belief or trust commonly connected with religion, belief of something or someone without evidence, proposition without complete evidence, belief or credit beyond logical proof. Basically, faith is a belief that is based on someone or something (usually religious in context) without evidence or proof. It seems it differs from belief slightly because belief can be grounded or perceived or asserted as true with or without evidence or proof. Faith seems to be more based without irrefutable evidence or proof. Hope is basically defined as a desire especially for something good or a belief or opinion not based on certainty. Knowledge is essentially defined as a perception or cognizance, awareness of fact or truth, or something learned. Knowledge seems to differ from belief even though they both address as crediting things as true. It seems that belief can be based with or without evidence where knowledge seems to be based on evidence, fact, truth, or something learned or perceived. To compare faith, belief, and knowledge, it seems that faith is usually credited without evidence, belief can be credited with or without evidence, and knowledge basically credits with evidence. Finally, trust is more-or-less defined as confidence, reliance, credit, or dependance without doubt or examination. After examining the synonymized terms, it is easy to see why and how they are used interchangeably in the general vernacular. Even though there are nuances to the definitions and usages, what folklorists should examine, analyze, acknowledge, and study is how the people use the terms more than the arbitrary differences.

14 McNeill, based from Hufford’s work, basically says that cultural source hypothesis is the idea that beliefs are shaped by culture and/or cultural traditions (2013, 57-58; Hufford 1982).

15 McNeill, based from Hufford’s work, basically says that experiential source hypothesis is the idea that beliefs are shaped by (personal) experience(s) (2013, 57-58; Hufford 1982).

16 Similarly, Jeana Jorgensen addresses the approach to (folk) belief and even addresses the often-unpopular term, superstition. In her opening sentence to the chapter or section reads, “Is calling someone ‘superstitious’ an insult? If so, why?” (2021, 192). She continues, “The popular definition of superstition is as a naïve popular belief and any related behaviors, often thought to be illogical and irrational” (Ibid.); she also states, “In contrast, we define folk belief as any traditionally held belief. It’s usually a belief shared by members belonging to the same folk group, or a belief that can be demonstrated to have multiple existence and variation, coming from informal rather than institutional sources” (Ibid.). Although some folklorists do not like the term, Jorgensen makes an important point. She also states, “What superstition and folk belief have in common, and why we might use them interchangeably as folklore scholars, is: each is a belief, a practice, or procedure based on conscious or unconscious assumptions; further, they share the form ‘cause/sign, result’ where something either causes or indicates another thing” (2021, 193). Even though Jorgensen justifies her linguistic and even etymological reasoning, many folklorists dislike the term “superstition” because of the negative connotations and stigmas attached to it. Still, for a person in popular culture, folk belief and superstition might be synonymous. It should be understood that Jorgensen is not advocating for folklorists to use folk belief and superstition interchangeably exactly; she is saying that they have commonalities. She concluded, “Thus, at the end of the day, I don’t necessarily care if my students use folk belief or superstition when referring to the genre of an item. I do worry that superstition might be off-putting to some people, and imply judgment, so that’s one reason to steer clear of it” (2021, 195). She continues, “At the end of the day, we all have beliefs—and in fact, our belief may contradict one another and may not always be as based in scientific evidence as we like to think—so I think we should give ourselves and other as much grace as possible here” (Ibid.). This actually matches with Magliocco’s article (2012) about contradictory belief systems existing simultaneously. Still, there is one more aspect to consider when approaching belief.

17 Basically, Tolkien argues, “Children are capable, of course of literary belief, when the story-maker’s art is good enough to produce it. That state of mind has been called ‘willing suspension of disbelief.’ But this does not seem to me a good description of what happens. What really happens is that the story-maker proves a successful ‘sub-creator.’ He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is ‘true’: it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed” (2001, 37). He continues, “You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside. If you are obliged, by kindliness or circumstance, to stay, then disbelief
must be suspended (or stifled), otherwise listening and looking would become intolerable. But this suspension of disbelief is a substitute for the genuine thin, a subterfuge we used when condescending to games or make-believe, or when trying (more-or-less willingly) to find what virtue we can in the work of an art that has for us failed” (Ibid.). He continues further, “This suspension of disbelief may thus be a somewhat tired, shabby, or sentimental state of mind, and so lean to the ‘adult.’ I fancy it is often the state of adults in the presence of a fairy-story. They are held there and supported by sentiment (memories of childhood, or notions of what childhood ought to be like); they think they ought to like the tale. But if they really liked it, for itself, they would not have to suspend disbelief: they would believe—in this sense” (2001, 38).

18 The argument or aspect of believability and fiction is addressed by William Bascom. He says, “In these definitions the distinction between fact and fiction refers only to the beliefs of those whom tell and hear these tales, and not to our beliefs, to historical or scientific facts, or to any ultimate judgment of truth or falsehood. It may be objected that this is a subjective judgement based on the opinions of informants rather than on objective facts, but it is no more subjective than the distinction between sacred and secular, and in practice it may be even easier to establish” (1965, 7). Thus, it is arguable and reasonable to say that based on Bascom’s statement, a teller and a listener can believe in the narrative which makes it, to use Bascom’s word, “fact,” or at least believed.

19 Hume says, “I conclude that an induction which seems to me very evident, that an opinion or belief is nothing but an idea, that is different from a fiction, not in the nature, or the order of its parts, but in the manner of its being conceiv’d. But when I wou’d explain this manner, I scarce find any word that fully answers the case, but am oblig’d to have recourse to every one’s feeling, in order to give him a perfect notion of this operation of the mind” (sic) (1878, 397-398). Belief is an operation of the mind. It is an emotion. It is a function. If it is an operation of the mind, it can be conscious, subconscious, or unconscious to the believer. This also goes for unbelief and rebelief as well.

20 It should be noted that The Year Without a Santa Claus was adapted into a live action television movie in 2006. Although it basically tells a similar story of Santa thinking that the children and the world does not need him anymore, it does not exactly present the same type of message that the 1974 version depicts. Still, it cannot be counted out because it does depict a premise of children believing in Santa Claus.

21 The lyrics to Mrs. Claus’ song go: Mrs. Claus: “Who would know the difference,/if Santa Claus was me?/Yes, who would know the difference?/Just Santa Claus and me./Anyone can be Santa./Why can’t a lady like me?/I admit, I’m underfed but with a pillow from the bed./I could be Santa Claus./Oh, anyone can play Santa./I’ve fantasized it a lot./With his hat upon my head,/and his suit of Christmas red./I could be Santa Claus./And with his “ho, ho, ho” I’d be going down the chimneys with his sack./And though my curls may be showing./I’ll make sure they only see me from the back./Yes, anyone can be Santa./A tantalizing remark./Though his boots are not my size,/with a twinkle in my eyes./I could be Santa Claus./With his reindeer and his sleigh,/I’d be up, up and away./Yes! I could be Santa,/I could be Santa, I could be Santa Claus.”

22 The dialog goes:
Neal: “Charlie, it’s just not logical. How can one man, in one night, visit all the children of the world?”
Charlie: “Not everyone celebrates Christmas. And I think there’s some sort of time continuum that breaks down once Santa’s in his sleigh.”
Neal: “What about fireplaces? A lot of people don’t have them. How does Santa Visit those people?”
Charlie: “He turns into Jell-o and [slurping sound] the fireplace kind of appears and he goes down through it like this.”
Neal: “What about the reindeer? Have you ever seen a reindeer fly?”
Charlie: “Yes.”
Neal: “Well, I haven’t.”
Charlie: “Have you ever seen a million dollars?”
Neal: “No.”
Charlie: “Just because you haven’t seen it doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist.”

23 It is important that Scrooge is brought into the conversation of belief since he denies, doubts, or disbelieves what is right in front of him and while he sees “evidence” before his eyes. With the case of another Christmas story, *A Christmas Carol*, when asked of Scrooge’s belief and senses in Marley’s existence (“Why do you doubt your senses?”), Scrooge replies, “Because a little thing affects them. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato.” He makes excuses to not believe what is outside of his rationale/rationality even when presented (sight and sound) of something beyond the physical reality, realm, or world.

24 The full song lyrics are: “Children sleeping/Snow is softly falling/Dreams are calling/Like bells in the distance/We were dreamers/Not so long ago/But one by one/We all had to grow up/When it seems the magic slipped away/We find it all again on Christmas Day/Believe in what your heart is saying/Hear the melody that’s playing/There’s no time to waste/There’s so much to celebrate/Believe in what you feel inside/And give your dreams the wings to fly/You have everything you need/If you just believe/Trains move quickly/To their journey’s end/Destinations/Are where we begin again/Ships go sailing/Far across the sea/Trusting starlight/To get where they need to be/When it seems that we have lost our way/We find ourselves again on Christmas Day/Believe in what your heart is saying/Hear the melody that’s playing/There’s no time to waste/There’s so much to celebrate/Believe in what you feel inside/And give your dreams the wings to fly/You have everything you need/If you just believe/If you just believe/If you just believe/If you just believe/Just believe/Just believe” (Groban 2004).

25 The dialog goes:
Tom: “Santa’s in the garage.”
Anderson: “What?”
Tom: “He says that we’ve got to help him get home. He says he knows you.”
Anderson: “Are you in the garage with a man?”
Tom: “No, I’m in the house, Santa’s in the garage.”
Anderson: “Okay, Tom, can you put your mom on, please?”
Tom: “No, I can’t. Santa says it has to be you.”
Anderson: “Tom, listen to me. “
Tom: “He’s crashed his sleigh, lost his reindeer, and if we don’t help him--.”
Anderson: “Tom, go and get your mother, please.”
Tom: “No. I’m going back to the garage. Santa wants to show me his plan.”
Anderson: “Tom.” [Tom hangs up the phone] “Tom?”

Eventually Anderson goes to help/protect Tom.
Santa: “Steve!”
Anderson: “Who the hell are you?”
Tom: “What are you doing?”
Anderson: “Who are you?”
Santa: “You know who I am.”
Anderson: “I what?”
Santa: “You know who I am.”
Anderson: “I haven’t got a clue who you are.”
Tom: “He’s Santa!”
Anderson: “Okay, just so we’re clear, the only reason that I haven’t knocked your block off is because of him.” [Points to Tom]. “So, whatever your reason is for being here now, it better be a good one.”
Santa: “I was running in my new sleigh. I came in too low, hit a telephone wire, got thrown off, and hit my head.”

At that point, audiences hear Tony calling for Tom outside.
Tom: “He’s lost his reindeer, and if he doesn’t get to Lapland, Christmas is off.”
Santa: “All right, Tom. When your father was your age, he saw me.”
Anderson: “What are you talking about?”
Santa: “It was Christmas Eve. You saw a shooting star racing across the heavens. That was me.”
Tom: “We need to help him, Steve.”
About that time, Tony walks into the garage. Anderson tells Santa to leave and “never come back again.” This conversation helps to establish the states of belief between Tom and Anderson. Tom sees a man who looks like Santa Claus and believes he is Santa based on his word. Anderson sees the same person and believes that it is some stranger and wonders why he is alone with Tom in the garage. Audiences also learn that Anderson once believed in Santa which sets up the cycle and transition from belief to unbelief.

26 The dialog goes:

   Anderson: “I tell you what. If I—when I prove that he’s not Father Christmas, can we just forget all of this and have a nice day together, hmm?”
   Tom: “Okay.”

At the prison, Santa is brought into the visiting room wearing denim clothes.

   Santa: “Thank you for coming. This place is horrible.”
   Anderson: “Yeah, well, it’s not a holiday camp, Nick.”
   Santa: “You know my name.”
   Anderson: “I worked it out.”
   Santa: “How?”
   Anderson: “Well, I thought of Saint Nicholas. Then I abbreviated it to Saint Nick, and then I took away the ‘Saint.’”
   Santa: [laugh] “That’s exactly how I came to it.”
   Anderson: [sarcastically] “Oh, wow, what do you know?”
   Santa: “I tried other more elaborate names, but that one seemed to stick.”
   Tom: “We’ve come to rescue you.”
   Santa: “Thank goodness.”
   Anderson: “Yeah, we thought we’d free your reindeer, fly in, and pick you up.”
   Santa: “No, that wouldn’t work because the reindeer can’t actually fly. I mean, not by themselves—. Well, it’s complicated. But if you find the sleigh—I mean, provided it’s not broken—then you might be able to.”
   Anderson: “Are you on medication?” [Santa gives a strange look] “Or worse, are you not on medication?”
   Santa: “Ho, ho, ho. You still don’t believe I’m Santa.”
   Anderson: “Do you want to know why? Because I’m thirty.”
   Santa: “But once you were seven.”
   Anderson: “Yeah, and I saw a shooting star. Tell me something I don’t know.”
   Santa: “It was an exceptionally cold Christmas night. Your parents were drunk, they’d been rowing.”
   Anderson: “My parents got divorced.”
   Santa: “This was their last Christmas together. You ran out into the back garden. You were crying. You heard a noise in the skies above you. The sound of bells, sleigh bells. And that’s when you saw me. You knew it wasn’t a shooting star. That’s just what your mother told you. But you had proof. You found a gift in the garden, a gift that I had left for you. What was it? Do you remember?”
   Anderson: “Why don’t you tell me?”
   Santa: “It was the most popular gift of that year. A Rubik’s Cube. You still have it, don’t you? Not because of me, oh no. No, you kept it because that was the last family Christmas you ever had.”
   Anderson: [Seeming emotional] “How’d you know that?”
   Tom: “Because he’s Santa.”
   Santa: “Deep in your heart, you know who I am.”
   Anderson: “Deep in my heart, you’re a nut bag.”
   Santa: [chuckles] “The reindeer have been moved to a private area in Richmond Park. Go there, seek out Dasher. He knows what to do.”
   Tom: “Dasher speaks?”
   Santa: “He communicates.”
   Anderson: “Right, that’s it. I’ve had enough of this. We haven’t seen each other in a very long time.”
   Santa: “And I wouldn’t ask this if it wasn’t the most important job in the world.”
   Anderson: “Come on, we’re going.”
   Tom: “We had a deal.”
Anderson: “You want to spend our day looking for a talking reindeer?”
Tom: “Yes.”
Anderson: “Okay, then, that’s what we’ll do. Thank you.” [sarcastically].
Santa: “No, thank you. One more thing, how do I survive in this place?”
Anderson: “Um, stop pretending to be Father Christmas.”
Tom: “Steve!”
Anderson, “Go and see the barber.”
Santa: “I can’t change my look.”
Anderson: “For advice. Tell him I sent you.”

To note, Santa puts his trust and belief in Steve Anderson because he sees that Anderson still possesses some childlike qualities or at least goodness within him. When referring to Anderson and children, Santa states, “Steve saw me when he was a child. I’d given him a Rubik’s cube. He still hasn’t managed to solve it, to this day, but unlike nearly every other child in the world, he hasn’t cheated, and he hasn’t given up trying.” This can connect as a metaphor of belief meaning that unlike most children who stop trying or believing, there are those who keep trying or believing.

The 1897 news editorial reads: “We take pleasure in answering at once and thus prominently the communication below, expressing at the same time our great gratification that its faithful author is numbered among the friends of THE SUN: DEAR EDITOR: I am 8 years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says, ‘If you see it in THE SUN, it’s so.’ Please tell me the truth; is there a Santa Claus? VIRGINIA O’HANLON. 115 WEST NINETY-FIFTH STREET.” It continues, “VIRGINIA, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men’s or children’s, are little. In this great universe of ours man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge. Yes, VIRGINIA, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus. It would be as dreary as if there were no VIRGINIAS. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished. Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that’s no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world. You may tear apart the baby’s rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, VIRGINIA, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding. No Santa Claus! Thank God! he lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood” (Church 1897).

It should be noted that Miracle on 34th Street had a couple of different versions after the original movie came out. Each version added aspects to the narrative as well as the quotes/messages within each. One version was released in 1955, and the other version was released in 1973. The 1994 version is addressed in the case study examples, but it should be noted that there are more versions than just the 1947 and 1994 versions of the movie.

The dialog goes:
Gailey: “I can’t let Kriss down. He needs me, and all the rest of us need him.”
Mrs. Walker: “Look darling, he’s a nice old man, and I admire you for wanting to help him, but you’ve got to be realistic and face facts. You can’t just throw your career away because of a sentimental whim.”
Gailey: “But, I’m not throwing my career away. I promise you, if you believe in me and have faith in me everything will. . . . You don’t have any faith in me, do you?”
Mrs. Walker: “It’s not a question of faith. It’s just common sense.”
Gailey: “Faith is when common sense tells you not to. Don’t you see it’s not just Kriss that’s on trial? It’s everything he stands for. It’s kindness, joy, love, and all the other intangibles.”
Mrs. Walker: “Oh, Fred, you’re talking like a child. You’re living in a realistic world! Those lovely intangibles of yours aren’t worth much. You don’t get ahead that way.”
Gailey: “That all depends on what you call ‘getting ahead.’ Evidently, you and I have different definitions.”
Mrs. Walker: “These last few days, we’ve talked about wonderful plans. Then you go on an idealistic binge. You give up your job, throw away your security, and then you expect me to be happy about it.”
Gailey: “Yes, I guess I expected too much. Look Doris, someday, you’re going to find out that your way of facing this realistic world just doesn’t work. And when you do don’t overlook those lovely intangibles. You’ll discover they’re the only things that are worthwhile.”

31 The dialog goes:
Gailey: “He certainly is a giant, isn’t he?”
Susan: “Not really. There are no giants, Mr. Gailey.”
Gailey: “Maybe not now Susie, but in olden days there were a lot of—” [Susan shakes her head in disagreement]. “What about the giant that Jack killed?”
Susan: “Jack? Jack who?”
Gailey: “Jack and the beanstalk.”
Susan: “Jack and the beanstalk?”
Gailey: “You must have heard it, you just forgot. It’s a fairy tale.”
Susan: “Oh, one of those. I don’t know any fairy tales.”
Gailey: “Oh, your mother and father must have told you a fairy tale.”
Susan: “No. My mother thinks they’re silly. I don’t know if my father thinks they’re silly or not. I never met my father. You see, my father and mother were divorced when I was a baby.”
Gailey: [Gaily it taken aback and redraws the subject to the parade, smiles] “Well that baseball player certainly looks like a giant to me.”
Susan: “People sometimes grow very big, but that’s abnormal.”
Gailey: “I’ll bet your mother told you that too.” [Susan smiles and shakes her head in affirmation]. Within this dialog, viewers see that Susan has been raised not to believe in fairy tales and is quite an analytically-minded and skeptical child for her age. Within the same scene, the doorbell buzzes. Mrs. Walker come into the scene. She and Gailey begin their conversation in the kitchen over coffee. In the background, Susan mentions Santa Claus, and Mrs. Walker basically refers and indicates that there was an issue with the other Santa Claus at the parade that caused trouble. This introduces the topic of Santa Claus into Mrs. Walker and Gailey’s conversation.
Gailey: “I see she doesn’t believe in Santa Claus either. No Santa Claus, no fairy tales. No fantasies of any kind. Is that it?”
Mrs. Walker: “That’s right. We should be realistic and completely truthful with our children and not have them growing up believing in a lot of legends and myths like Santa Claus for example.”
Gailey: “I see.”

32 The dialog goes:
Susan: “If you’re really Santa Claus, you can get it for me. And if you can’t, you’re only a nice man with a white beard, like my mother said.”
Kringle: “Now wait a minute, Susie. Just because every child can’t get his wish, that doesn’t mean there isn’t a Santa Claus.”
Susan: “That’s what I thought you’d say.”

33 The dialog goes:
Mrs. Walker: “But there are lots of presents there for you, darling.”
Susan: “Not the one I wanted. Not the one Mr. Kringle was going to get for me.”
Mrs. Walker: “What was that?”
Susan: “It doesn’t matter now. I didn’t get it. I knew it wouldn’t be here, but I thought there’d be a letter or something telling me.”

Kringle: “I don’t suppose you even want to talk to me.”

Mrs. Walker: “Something about a present.”

Kringle: “Yes, I know. I’m sorry, Susie. I tried my best, but—.”

Susan: “You couldn’t get it because you’re not Santa Claus, that’s why. You’re just a nice old man with whiskers like my mother said, and I shouldn’t have believed you.”

Mrs. Walker: “I was wrong when I told you that, Susie. You must believe in Mr. Kringle and keep right on doing it. You must have faith in him.”

Susan: “But he didn’t get me the—that doesn’t make sense, Mommy.”

Mrs. Walker: “Faith is believing in things when common sense tells you not to.”

Susan: “Huh?”

Mrs. Walker: “I mean, just because thing don’t turn out the way you want them to the first time, you’ve still got to believe in people. I found that out.”

Susan: “You mean like ‘If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again?’”

Mrs. Walker: “Yes.”

Susan: “I thought so.”

34 In the 1955 version, Mr. Sawyer expresses why belief in Santa Claus is dangerous for children. He says, “Parents and young people, it’s thrilling indeed to see so many happy, smiling faces. I know you’re all looking forward to a joyous Christmas. But as those of you in this intelligent group know, this is going to be a Christmas without Santa Claus. Such a person as Santa Claus, Saint Nicholas, or Kris Kringle does not exist. Never has existed, and never will exist.” At this point, we see Kringle, dressed as Santa Claus, looking out from the wings if the stage. He sneaks behind the scenery during Sawyer’s speech address. Sawyer continues, “This silly old man in his red suit represents the wishful dreaming of all people. He is the all-giver, the generous father. Mature adults who keep this myth alive are clinging to childish fantasies. A show, themselves afraid to face realities. People who play Santa have a strong feeling of guilt.” Because Kringle is playing behind Sawyer, the children see him and start to laugh. Sawyer says, “I see nothing to laugh at. Far from being amusing…far from being amusing…far from being amusing, this myth is actually harmful. So is stupid old men, prancing around in white whiskers keep this ridiculous myth alive.” The 1973 version of Miracle on 34th Street’s Mr. Sawyer also presents hostile arguments and attitudes about Santa Claus and argues that he (Sawyer) is a man of science and knows more than Kringle does about psychiatry and mental disorders.

35 Bedford states, “Your honor, a lot of people believe in Mr. Kringle, including millions of children. If you rule against him, you won’t destroy anyone’s belief, but you will destroy the man they believe in. Mr. Kringle is not concerned for himself. If he were, he wouldn’t be here. He is in this regrettable position because he is willing to sacrifice himself for children to create in their minds a world far better than the one we’ve made for them. If this is, as Mr. Collins suggests, a masquerade, then Mr. Kringle is eager to forfeit his freedom to preserve that masquerade, to subject himself to prosecution, to protect the children’s right to believe. If this court finds that Mr. Kringle is not who he says he is, that there is no Santa Claus, then I would ask this court to judge which is worse: a lie that draws a smile or a truth that draws a tear.”

36 The dialog goes:

Bedford: “You failed your mental exam on purpose, didn’t you?”

Kringle: “Why would I—do a thing like that?”

Bedford: “I don’t know. Maybe you’ve served people long enough. Maybe you’ve given all you have to give?”

Kringle: “No.”

Bedford: “Then why did you do it? The charges against you were dropped. The man you hit suffered no injury. You could’ve been out of here if you passed your exam.”

Kringle: “I disgraced myself.”

Bedford: “I read your transcript, Kris. You defended your honor. You stood up for the dignity of every child. That isn’t a disgrace. That’s decency.”

Kringle: “If I’m dismissed as a crazy old man, then the good name of Santa Claus is spared.”
Bedford: “That isn’t true. If not for you, there is no Santa Claus. You are him. Crazy or gone, you’re Santa Claus.”

Kringle: “Only if the children believe that. And what kind of Santa Claus were they believing in anyway? They can’t look to me anymore. Not after knowing what happened the other night.”

Bedford: “Well, think about the other night. A man was there to photograph the incident? The man you hit was the man you replaced? The cops told me this, Kriss. The cops believe in you. A lot of people do. More will when we’re finished.”

37 The dialog goes:
Mr. Bedford: “Oh, well, I think you should ask Santa Claus to give Cole’s and interest-free loan for Christmas.” [Susan laughs at his joke.] “Ya know, it might happen. I mean, Santa Claus, he does some pretty amazing things.”
Bedford: “Know what?”
Susan: “The secret?”
Bedford: “What secret?”
Susan: “Santa Claus. I’ve known for a long time. He’s not real.”
Bedford: “Says who?”
Susan: “My mom.”

38 Similar to the 1947 version, audiences see Kringle visiting (baby sitting in this case) Susan. And, he asks her what she wants for Christmas. Similar to the 1947 version, she gives Kringle a picture of a house from a magazine. She says that she wants a house and a little brother and a dad for Christmas. The dialog goes:
Susan: “If you’re really Santa Claus, you can get it for me. If you can’t, you’re just a nice man with a white beard like my mother says.”
Kringle: “Oh, Susan, just because every child doesn’t get his or her wish doesn’t mean there’s not a Santa Claus.”
Susan: “I thought you might say that.”
Kringle tries to explain that what she is asking for is quite a lot and that even Santa Claus cannot force such things to just happen.
Susan: “If Santa Claus really can make reindeer fly and go up and down people’s chimneys, and make millions of toys and go all around the world in one night, he can get somebody a house and a brother and a dad, right?”
Kringle: “Right. Right, yes, I suppose he, he could.” Kringle keeps the paper and says he’ll see what he can do.

39 The dialog goes:
Mrs. Walker: “What are you doing out of bed?”
Susan: “Something’s driving me crazy, and I can’t sleep.”
Mrs. Walker: “Well, what’s on your mind?”
Susan: “Santa Claus.”
Mrs. Walker: “Mr. Kringle? Why? What about him?”
Susan: “He talked sign language with a kid today.”
Mrs. Walker: “Oh. That was considerate of him.”
Susan: “It’s weird how he knows so much about toys and kids. He speaks Russian and Swahili.”
Mrs. Walker: “Well, he must be quite a learned man.”
Susan: “He looks exactly like every picture of Santa Claus I ever saw.”
Mrs. Walker: “Yes, I know. That’s why I chose him.”
Susan: “You’re positive he’s not the real Santa Claus?”
Mrs. Walker: “I thought that we talked about this. You understand what he is.”
Susan: “What if we’re wrong? That would be extremely rude.”
Mrs. Walker: “Well, we’re not wrong, sweetheart.”
Susan: “But all my friends believe in Santa Claus.”
Mrs. Walker: “Well most children your age do.”
Susan: “How come I don’t?”
Mrs. Walker: “Because you know the truth. And truth is one of the most important things in the world. To know the truth and always be truthful with other, and more importantly, with yourself. And believing in myths and fantasies just makes you unhappy.”

Susan: “Did you believe in Santa Claus when you were my age?”

Mrs. Walker: “Yes.”

Susan: “Were you unhappy?”

Mrs. Walker: “Well, when all the things that I believe in turned out not to be true, yes, I was unhappy.”

Susan: “Would it be okay if I thought about this some more? Do I have to not believe in Santa Claus right away?”

Mrs. Walker: “You have the right to believe whatever you want to believe. Now, I’ve told you the truth, but if I am wrong, I would be glad to admit it. I’ll tell you what. You ask Mr. Kringle for something that you would never ask me for, and if on Christmas morning you don’t’ get it, you will know once and for all the honest truth about Santa Claus.”

The dialog goes:

Bedford: “I didn’t see any harm in her saying hello to an interesting old man.”

Mrs. Walker: “Well, there is harm. I tell her there is no Santa Claus. So, you bring her down here, and she sees thousands of gullible kids, and she meets and actor—a very good actor, mind you—with a real beard and a beautiful Santa suit, sitting smack dab in the center of a child’s fantasy world. So, who does she believe? The myth or the mom?”

It should be noted that J.R.R. Tolkien’s son, John Francis Tolkien, claimed that they, the children, never “suspected that [the letters] were from [their father]” (erounico 2014; Bailey 1996).

To explain, proxetic is based off of its two parts: “proxy” and “-etic.” “Proxy” is roughly defined as someone who acts for another or is a substitute for someone or something else. The suffix “-etic” basically means “pertaining to.” So, Prox-etic is pertaining to the substitute or acting for another person i.e., ostension. “Proxetic” ostension is basically performing ostension for another person.

There is thought regarding the idea of Santa and identification. As is presented in the cases and examples of Miracle on 34th Street, Santa or Kriss Kringle was seen as disturbed, crazy, insane, or any other synonym of the word because he thought himself to be Santa Claus. It is curious to think of this concept in or with a view of current society. With so many various aspects to identity, it is curious how/if one believing themselves to be Santa Claus would be viewed currently. It might be more accepted or even romanticized. It may still be pathologized as it was depicted in the movies. More research may be needed on that idea.
References


Featuring Kurt Russell, Darby Camp, Judah Lewis. 1492 Pictures.


APPENDIX: FILMOGRAPHY
In the study of folklore, Santa Claus is recognized as a legendary figure: he and his legend(s) which are transmitted both formally and informally are placed in the genre of legend/legendry. Based on Linda Dégh arguments about legend and belief i.e., belief is the core of legends/narratives/stories, meaning that the more believable the story is, the stronger the stronger the legend can/will be. The following list of movies present narratives or elements that help fill in, explain, expand, expound, and address the legend of Santa Claus and presents those stories to the popular culture. Each move adds to the legend of Santa Claus. And, with each passing year, new items/examples can be added to the list. (It should be noted that not every movie that presents a “Santa” is included in the following list.\(^1\) For example, the movie *Bad Santa* is not listed because it does not actually deal with Santa Claus and/or belief *per se*. It depicts an inappropriate guy playing Santa Claus). Still, the movies presented/listed adds or contributes something to the legend of Santa Claus and/or deals with an aspect of belief.


*One Magical Christmas.* 1985. Dir. Phillip Borsos.\(^2\)


*All I Want for Christmas.* 1991. Dir. Robert Lieberman.\(^3\)


*The Life and Adventure of Santa Claus.* 2000. Dir. Glen Hill.

*Call Me Claus.* 2001. Dir. Peter Werner\(^4\)

Elf. 2003. Dir. Jon Favreau.\(^5\)


Fred Claus. 2007. Dir. David Dobkin.

Santa Buddies. 2009. Dir. Robert Vince.\(^6\)


Santa Paws. 2010. Robert Vince.\(^7\)


Krampus. 2015. Dir. Michael Dougherty.\(^8\)


A Boy Called Christmas. 2021. Dir. Gil Kenan.\(^9\)

Notes

\(^1\) It should be noted that the legend and narrative of Santa Claus is constantly evolving. For an example, Santa used to be pictured smoking a pipe. In current depictions, Santa is more-or-less restricted from smoking or even being pictured with a pipe. Also, in current conversations concerning gender and identity, groups have suggested that Santa become genderless, and in 2021, commercials were broadcasted of Santa being homosexual or gay. So along with his narrative evolving, the figure himself keeps evolving as well.

\(^2\) Although this movie does not directly address Santa Claus completely i.e., he is not the center of the movie but makes an appearance, this movie illustrates how a woman learns to rebelieve in people, the Christmas spirit, and even in Santa Claus. It even illustrates how much faith, trust, and believe that children put in Santa when a little girl asks Santa to “make her daddy not dead.” She believes that Santa can bring her father back to life.

\(^3\) Although this movie does not exactly focus solely on Santa Claus or fully present the cycle of belief, it does show how much belief that a child/children put in Santa Claus when a little girl asks Santa to get her divorced parents back together.

\(^4\) Call me Claus is an interesting movie in many ways. Not only does it add to the mythos of the legend of Santa Claus when the current Santa has to find a replacement as part of his terms of tenure, but his replacement is a female/woman. That puts a nontraditional spin to the dynamism of Santa Claus. The
movie also illustrates the cycle of belief. Lucy Cullins believed in Santa Claus as a little child; however, she transitions to disbelief when her Christmas wish that her father would come home from the war is not answered/granted i.e., her father is killed, and she (along with her mother) receive the news on Christmas Eve. Lucy Cullins is the last person on Santa’s list to replace him. Over the course of the movie, Santa has to convince her that he is the real Santa Claus. Eventually, Cullins transitions from unbelief to rebelief and accepts to become the next Santa. Essentially, Cullins illustrates a full cycle of belief. That also illustrates that anyone can be or become Santa Claus.

Although there can be an analysis of a cycle of belief present in the movie Elf, there is an important aspect that not only deals with the aspect of belief and believing in Santa Claus, such belief adds to the mythos of the legend of Santa Claus. Towards the end of the movie, Buddy and his family find Santa Claus in Central Park, New York City, New York. As Buddy helps Santa get the turbine engine put back on the sleigh to help it fly, Santa asks Buddy’s little brother, Michael, to open a hatch on the sleigh. Michael asks if Santa is the “real Santa.” Santa replies, “Ya never can tell, kid.” He then asks him what he wants for Christmas. Michael says, a skate board. Santa says that Michael does not want just a skate board but a “real Huff board” and shows him the list. He tells Michael to look in his bag of toys. When he pulls out the Huff skateboard the sleigh hovers off the ground, and the “Clausomiter” lights up. When Michael asks what happened, Santa replied, “You made my sleigh fly.” Michael asks, “What do you mean?” Santa says, “Well, before the turbine days, this baby used to run solely on Christmas Spirit. You believed in me. You made my sleigh fly.” Michael gets an idea to get news cameras to show that he is the real Santa and get people to believe, but Santa replies, “Christmas Spirit is about believing not seeing. If the whole world saw me, all would be lost.” Later on in the movie, Michael and Jovie get a group of New Yorkers to start singing Christmas carols, specifically, they sing “Santa Claus is Coming to Town.” This starts to encourage Christmas Spirit. Simultaneously, Buddy and Santa are trying to get the sleigh up in the air. They try to engage the turbine engine, but it gets knocked off. Santa thinks that they will never get the sleigh off the ground. However, more and more Christmas spirit grows which is indicated on the Clausomiter. The last person that has to be convinced to believe in Santa Claus and the Christmas spirit is Buddies father who is a skeptic. Once he starts singing, Santa and Buddy flight right over the crowd which causes the Clausomiter to read 100% Christmas spirit. This not only adds to the mythos of how Santa gets his sleigh to fly, but it shows an aspect of rebelief in adult unbeliever/disbelievers in the crowd.

What is interesting in this movie is that the magic of Christmas is produced by the magic icicle/crystal which is sustained by belief and Christmas Spirit. Within the movie, Santa and Santa Paws (Santa’s dog) go and see the magic icicle melting at an astonishing rate. The dialog goes:

Santa Paws: “If the great Christmas icicle continues to melt at this rate, Christmas Magic stored in the ice crystal will vanish.”
Santa: “These days, children and their pups just don’t believe like they used to. Their focus is on themselves, instead of on giving to others less fortunate.”
Santa Paws: “If they don’t understand the true meaning of Christmas, the icicle has no chance.”
Santa: “I’m afraid that’s something we just can’t teach.”

Throughout this narrative, not only does it address belief, but it has a test of true belief similar to the test in The Polar Express. In this example, the test is that one can hear animals speak if one truly believes. It also shows the cycle of belief with the character Stan Cruge. By the end of the movie, he transitions from unbelief to belief.

This narrative is similar to Santa Who? is that it tells the story of Santa forgetting who he is and whose health declines which threatens Christmas. When asked by a child if he is the real Santa, Santa replies, “I don’t know if I’m the real Santa or not.” What is really important in this narrative is Santa’s understanding of children and their belief and/or Christmas spirit. He says, “I’m just an ambassador for the Santa Cause. One of many spreading the Christmas spirit to children around the world, reminding them of what’s important.” This is important because it presents the idea that Santa, Santa’s helpers or ambassadors, all work to spread Christmas spirit. It also goes along with the idea that anyone can be Santa. There is also a statement made about the belief and spirit of Christmas in regards to children. Kate Huckle says, “Yeah, Bud, you really seem like you enjoy listening to the children.” Santa (Bud) says, “I do. Someone once told me that the spirit of Christmas is embodied in the hearts of children, untouched as yet by the fears, doubts and disappointments of the adult world.” This story also has a similar aspect as Santa
Buddies and Polar Express in that if someone has true Christmas spirit and truly believes, they can hear Santa Paws talk. It should also be noted that in this movie, the children at the orphanage sing a musical number entitled “I Do Believe in Christmas. The lyrics explain the childlike belief in the magic of Christmas and Santa Claus.

Although, the movie Krampus does not directly deal with Santa Claus, it does illustrate aspects of belief. In the beginning of the movie, Max shows and exhibits a state of belief. However, he loses his belief and wishes that Christmas did not happen which more-or-less summons Krampus. Not only does Max exhibit the state of unbelief, his grandmother, Omi, tells the story of when she also wished for Christmas to go away. She says:

Please, listen. I must tell you something, to all of you. It started with the wind. On a cold, winter night, much like this, it was almost Christmas. But this Christmas was darker, less cheerful. But, I still believed in Santa and magic and miracles and the hope that we could find joy again. But, our village had given up on miracles and on each other. They had forgotten the spirit of Christmas, the sacrifice of giving. And my family was no different. I tried to help them to believe again. But, we were no longer the loving family I remembered. They too had given up, and eventually so did I. And for the first time, I didn’t wish for a miracle. I wished for them to go away. A wish I would come to regret. And that night, in the darkness of a howling blizzard, I got my wish. I knew that Saint Nicholas was not coming this year. Instead, it was a darker more ancient spirit. The shadow of Saint Nicholas. It was Krampus. And, as he had, for thousands of years, Krampus came not to reward but to punish; not to give but to take—he and his helpers. I could only listen as they dragged my family into the underworld knowing that I would be next. But, Krampus didn’t take me that night. He left me as a reminder of what happens when hope is lost, when belief is forgotten, and when Christmas spirit dies.

This illustrates not only a state of belief/rebelief, but it shows the wisdom of belief and a cautionary warning of what happens when belief is lost or forgotten. It is important that Omi says that she tried to help her village to “believe again” because that is the exact aspect or definition of rebelief.

This movie is quite important not only because it adds more elements to the legend and narrative of Santa Claus, but it encourages belief. Nicholas, who become Santa Claus, goes in search of magic and hope that he can bring back to the kingdom. When he tries to find the land of the elves in Elfhelm, he encounters Father Topo who explains how to see the elf kingdom. He says, “To see something, you must believe in it. Really believe.” This works on the premise that believing is seeing. It is an encouragement of unconditional belief. Even if within the short trailer to the movie, the narrator says, “Long ago, nobody knew about Christmas until a boy showed the world how to believe in the impossible.”