

# *“The Reluctant Pilgrim:” Questioning Belief After Historical Loss*

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In Northern British Columbia, there is a grassy hillside that overlooks Fraser Lake. It is on this hill that the Lejac Residential School once stood, though today, most physical traces have been destroyed. While the structure of the school itself is no longer, the collective memory of the school – and the students who attended – persists in the form of an annual pilgrimage to the site. Every July, close to one thousand travelers make their way there. They are seeking after traces of a former student, Rose of the Carrier First Nation, who many believe to be an Aboriginal Saint. Like her peers, Rose entered the residential school and was expected to convert to Catholicism, even though we also know that youth found many creative strategies to resist passive compliance. Unlike her peers, however, Rose chose to remain at the school after her graduation, where she tutored younger generations who entered. In 1949, at the age of thirty-three, she became increasingly weakened by

tuberculosis, the disease that had killed thousands of Aboriginal people before her in the Canadian colonizing project that John Milloy (1999) rightly names, "a national crime." By her own request, Rose's body was buried in a cemetery near the school. (Every Residential School was faced with the question of where to bury the dead). Rose's experience of the residential school is, in these ways, unremarkable even as it also depicts the massive injustice of Canada's history of education.

It was not until two years after her death that Rose of the Carrier became the legend it now is. In yet another instance of dislocation, the construction of a railway line in 1951 forced the excavation of the cemetery at Lejac. The story goes that during the excavation, the lid of Rose's coffin accidentally fell open. Rose's body, so the legend goes, looked exactly as she had the day she was buried, her clothes untouched and tidy, her skin still smooth and plump with life, as one elder relays, "no decay."<sup>1</sup> Today, the soil surrounding Rose's grave is said to carry miracles. The legend of Rose is a powerful one that raises questions about the persistence of painful histories and their preservation in memory, both individual and collective. This body of "no decay" signals the raw wounds of past trauma and the lingering force of un-claimed experiences that persist in the minds and rituals of generations afterward. On the hillside overlooking Fraser Lake, the history that was forcibly removed from the landscape seeps into the soil in the form of miracles. The pilgrims who go there believe this.

In late June 2010, I telephoned St. Andrew's Parish in Fraser Lake. An answering machine picked up my call and the crackly recording of Reverend Vincent James instructed me to leave a message at the tone. Just before the beep, however, he added a coda: If I was calling about the 2010 Rose Prince pilgrimage, this year's event would be held on the weekend of July ninth to the twelfth. Almost without thinking, I booked a plane ticket that same morning that would fly out of Toronto and into Prince George, which is just two hours driving distance east (and slightly

south) of the pilgrimage site. From there I would make the trek, by the modern convenience of a rental car, to Fraser Lake. As I thought more about the journey, I came to understand that there would be no way around my outsider status, and that my itch to travel was far from innocent: The same Imperial era that invented the Residential School coincided with the expansive itineraries of exploration travel, and the rise of modern tourism. Neither Aboriginal nor Catholic, I felt more like a tourist than a pilgrim, even as I wondered about the grey area between these positions. Indeed, Zygmunt Bauman (1996) names tourism as one of “the pilgrim’s successors” insofar as both forms suggest a human resistance to “being bound and fixed” (p. 26). In light of Bauman’s notice of this human longing for freedom, another conflict emerged on the horizon: after all, I was traveling to a place marked by a history of forced migration and detainment.

It is precisely these kinds of tensions that inform discussions of place in curriculum study. The particularities of a place contextualize knowledge: “A novelist or a historian cannot remove a story from a particular place; it would no longer be the same story” (Kincheloe & Pinar, 1991, p. 5). So too it is with curriculum. “Without such a perspective,” write Joe Kincheloe and William Pinar, “curriculum theory operates in isolation, serving to trivialize knowledge, fragmenting it into bits” (1991, p. 5). Locating curriculum “in place” returns knowledge to the particular context of its construction and that endows its significance (Burbules & Berk, 1999; Bekerman, Burbules & Silbermann-Keller, 2006; Chambers, 2008; Ellsworth, 2005; Gruenewald, 2003; Robertson & Radford, 2010; Rone, 2008). Indeed, educational theorists of place convincingly point to the risks of tearing bodies from knowledge, feet from ground, and curriculum from community. The example of the Residential School graphically illustrates such terrible risk. From the perspective of place, knowledge cannot be thought of in isolation from the places and people who put it to use, or misuse.<sup>2</sup> Precisely because

"places of learning *implicate bodies*," we are urged to consider not only how the particularities of a place shape us, but also how we, in turn, affect the routes we travel (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 6; see also Chambers, 2008). Celia Haig-Brown describes this double influence as a capacity to "inhabit border worlds," which, for her, involves an awareness of how layers of history interact with each other and that are, in turn, shaped by the footprints our researches leave behind (2008, p. 14).

Ironically, in bringing distant lives and losses into the realm of the palpable and concrete, place also brings us face-to-face with the inchoate – what Deborah Britzman (2000) calls "difficult knowledge" – that resists immediate or direct engagement. A related irony is that despite the speedy ways in which we can now glide the globe, our searches for a pure or authentic "reality" necessarily come up short. On this point, Judith Robertson and Linda Radford (2010) suggest that the pilgrim's feverish return to sites of lost objects always finds those objects on the horizon, "not quite catchable" (p. 208). This phenomenon is echoed in Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's observation that travelers to sites of memory tend to locate "truth" not in the material objects they find abroad, but "more often in what *cannot be seen*, in the invisible heart and soul of the site" (p. 168, emphasis added). In searching for the real, there is simultaneously an awareness that the object of one's desire does not as such exist. Indeed, to *not* be satisfied with the material may be one of the most powerful drives behind the pilgrimage. One of the Aboriginal organizers of the Rose pilgrimage illustrated this irony in distinguishing the Fraser Lake event from the lures of material culture: "We do not want the Rose Pilgrimage to be St. Anne de Beaupre." (At the St. Anne Basilica, objects of piety are available for purchase in the Shrine's souvenir shop.) At the grave of Rose Prince, this pilgrim reminded us, miracles are available for all through the immaterial currency of belief.

In this paper, I offer a reading of the pilgrimage to Rose of the Carrier's grave as a compelling example of how both material landscapes

and the immaterial, imperial wishfulness and transcultural reparation come together in the “need to believe” at sites of history’s lost objects. Two seemingly contradictory dimensions to belief concern me here: First, is Sigmund Freud’s (1927) sense of belief as “illusion” that defends the ego against the anxieties that follow from loss (p. 39). Second, I turn to Julia Kristeva (2009) for whom belief is not solely a defense but a condition needed to testify to experiences that reside beyond the perceptible limits of what can be immediately known. This pre-religious need appeals to belief because it asks others to “take our word for it” despite what can be indicated in more certain terms.<sup>3</sup> Kristeva will make from her critique of Freud a complex of belief: the very same condition the ego uses to defend against losses of humanity and history is also needed to give meaning to – and represent – the core of what is lost. Before turning to the example of Rose, I consider in the next section how belief frames my reading of it. The following questions matter to this inquiry: Why think of belief as a statement of and for history? How might belief orient us toward – and away from – the difficult realities of the traumatic past? Can we think of the pilgrimage – and the beliefs that drive it – as a form of history curriculum?

### A Psychoanalytic Account of Belief: On Illusion, Need and Learning to Speak

In his “The Future of an Illusion,” Freud offers a critique of religion that finds its girth in an ancient philosophical claim: belief is rooted in illusion quite apart from knowledge.<sup>4</sup> As he writes, “we call a belief an illusion when a wish-fulfillment is a prominent factor in its motivation” (1927, p. 39). The height of Freud’s objection is that belief is at bottom driven by what we wish the world to be, not as it actually is. In his words, belief “comprises a system of wishful illusions together with a disavowal of reality, such as we find in an isolated form...in a state of

blissful, hallucinatory confusion" (1927, p. 43). Freud (1927) further links this wishful state to the Oedipal relationship that is both life-giving and threatening, where the ego "attaches itself to objects that promise to satisfy [its] needs" (p. 130). But this passionate attachment is also ambivalent: moving as quickly from the realm of pleasure to the inevitable frustrations that accompany the prohibition against desire. In such moments, we encounter the radical vulnerability of the human condition. We learn that we cannot have all we want, and that substitute satisfactions depend on others. For Freud, this fact of dependency produces a conflict: We ascribe to others the power to protect us from the anxiety that accompanies feeling vulnerable, but it is this relation that recreates the very condition of powerlessness we hope to get a handle on. Freud casts this complex into two statements, which for him, are the grounds of religious belief: In the first, Freud writes, "the motif of yearning for the father is identical with the need for protection against the consequences of human powerlessness" (p. 130). That is, we invest in another ("the father") to protect us from vulnerability. In the second statement, Freud notes a complex of fear and protection that he understands to underlie the belief in God: the ego resolves the problem of vulnerability by giving power away: "creating for himself gods of whom he is afraid...and to whom he nevertheless assigns his protection" (p. 130).

There is something paradoxical, and regressive, about belief as Freud constructs it. The believer represses instinct (and fear) that becomes invested in the illusion of an all-knowing father. Of course, Freud explained a range of psychological processes on precisely this logic: that is, the repression of instinct sat at the bottom of even the most rational processes. But what concerned Freud about religion in particular was the way its doctrines tended to work against critical faculties of thought, investigation and judgment. In short, Freud worried that the ambivalent grounds of being – and the inevitable doubts of contemplation and

thought – were exchanged for the false certainty of belief. Freud's critique of religion is far too complex and wide-ranging for these basic points do it justice. But suffice it to say here that one of Freud's chief objections pointed to the regressive features of religious belief: he saw it as a wishful retreat from encountering the magnitude of uncertainty that constitutes human reality.<sup>5</sup> Freud thus emphasized the value of constructing understanding and making psychological significance from the uncertainties, flaws and misgivings of human existence, which he saw as our best hope for solace.

Freud's skeptical views on religion sparked much debate in psychoanalytic discussions. One of those debates is documented in his correspondence with his friend Romain Rolland, who thought that Freud's emphasis on regression and wishfulness had missed something important about religion.<sup>6</sup> What Freud missed was an analysis of the "oceanic feeling," a term that Rolland had developed through his study of Eastern Mysticism. By this term (and while too complicated to do it justice here) Rolland meant to give language to a peculiar feeling – particularly discernable in literature – of limitlessness or restlessness associated with being in relation to a world beyond the small orbit of the ego. Rolland penned his thoughts on Freud's omission in a letter to Freud on December 5, 1927. It would take Freud two years to respond, perhaps an indication of the anxiety – or at least restlessness – the concept roused in him. On July 14, 1929, Freud finally addressed his much-esteemed friend: "Your letter...containing your remarks about a feeling you describe as 'oceanic' has left me no peace" (p. 388). What was giving Freud "no peace" was the seemingly tranquility of his friend's concept, which, akin to his critique of religion, worked on the false promise of being's continuity and that defended against more difficult human drives that disrupted those seams: aggression, destruction, and death.<sup>7</sup> And yet, in these early paper disagreements, it would seem that something of a commonality had been missed: both Freud and Rolland

were interested in describing a stark sense of being born into a world beyond one's immediate control or perceptible grasp.<sup>8</sup>

Freud would return to Rolland's question about feelings "oceanic" in the opening pages of his *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), published three years after the 1927 essay that drew his friend's initial comments. In this work, Freud credits the concept "oceanic" to an anonymous friend, a gesture intended as a "hint" to Rolland (1929, p. 388). And then Freud goes one step further, perhaps taking a leap of faith, trying out the idea of the oceanic on his own (non-religious) terms. In a typical Freudian move, he turns to literature:

If I have understood my friend correctly, what he has in mind is the same as the consolation that an original and rather eccentric writer offers his hero before his freely chosen death: "We cannot fall out of this world."<sup>9</sup> It is a feeling, then, of being indissolubly bound up with and belonging to the whole of the world outside oneself. (1930, p. 4)

The belief that "we cannot fall out of this world" enables us to tolerate – to find meaning in life – in light of the fact of our inevitable death.<sup>10</sup> The language of illusion and wish is here supplemented with the notion of creativity and memory. We may need to believe that our creative capacities – such as in literature, in learning and in love – will matter after our existence, a self after self, a symbolic form of life after death.

The terms of this debate between psychoanalysis and religion have recently re-surfaced in Julia Kristeva's book, *This Incredible Need to Believe* (2009). Echoing Rolland, she begins with a disagreement with Freud. Kristeva re-iterates the idea that belief is neither an illusion nor neurosis, but a condition of surviving the fact of finite existence (and here we can see her agreement with Rolland). As Kristeva (2009) writes: "Whether I belong to a religion, whether I be agnostic or atheist, when I say 'I believe,' I mean 'I hold as true'....It is a matter of truth...that I hold for



vital, absolute, indisputable, a truth that keeps me, makes me exist" (p. 3). Loosening the congealed relation between belief and religion, Kristeva takes as her model of belief the figure of the adolescent. The adolescent is a model of belief in her desperate search for a "jubilant certainty of belonging to the world" that does not exist *per say*, but that is needed to feel as if one exists (p. 10). For Kristeva, then, the adolescent need to believe is a reprieve of the "oceanic feeling" – that feeling of something larger than me – which the adolescent uses, at one level, in the service of survival: to "not fall out of this world." The adolescent, like the believer, seeks belonging through the idealization of the erotic object: whether this is a person, an idea or an idol (p. 14).

Far from being herself hallucinated by belief, Kristeva seems to agree here with Freud's worries about the capacity for "blissful, hallucinatory confusion." Indeed, Kristeva is deeply aware of the human capacity for extremes: because belief is driven the passionate search for the erotic object, it can just as easily tip into urges to destroy, passions for ignorance, attacks on linking, suicide or shoulder-shrugging nihilism. Kristeva's turn to the adolescent as a metaphor of belief is, in this way, akin to Freud's turn to the infantile. Through this figure, she argues that the "need to believe" is a recurring human motif that wards off the sting of loss – what Freud called powerlessness – that marks the core of being. As Kristeva insists: "*the shadow of the ideal has fallen over the adolescent and crystallized in the need to believe*" (p. 19, her emphasis). Belief staves off, momentarily and precariously, the disappointment of life that faces us with the loss of idealization, the impossibility of absolute knowledge, perfect love and authority.

While Kristeva agrees (with Freud) that the idea of belief conducts wishful idealizations, she also points to it as an essential feature of symbolization, needed to *engage reality*: Our very first efforts in language depend on a belief that the world can persist in symbolic form in spite of the inevitable loss of material relations (such as the mother/baby dyad)

and the immediate gratifications afforded there. This is a world that exists in symbolic form and that serves as a placeholder for the actual, but is no less real for it. Belief is on these terms a condition for making language from loss, and is not far away from Jacques Derrida’s discussion of testimony as a pledge beyond concrete evidence: “For one can testify only to the unbelievable. To what can, at any rate, only be believed; to what appeals only to belief and hence to the given word, since it lies beyond the limits of proof, indication, certified acknowledgement [*le constat*], and knowledge” (1998a, p. 20). As the grounds for symbolization, belief is needed not to sustain illusion (as Freud would have it), but rather to face a truth of loss that is forcibly felt beyond the realm of “concrete evidence.”

Kristeva traces our first encounter with loss to a time of infancy. She argues that the baby’s greatest challenge is to tolerate the lack that accompanies the absence of immediate gratification at the breast. Belief is needed to survive the inevitable dissatisfactions of this relation without breakdown: it puts survival, and satisfaction, on the horizon in times of hunger, or lack. Belief is a condition the baby needs to tolerate waiting – a placeholder that tides one over until gratification comes. And yet, for Kristeva, belief is also needed to *create* satisfying substitutions – in the form of knowledge and representation – which eventually replace the early (and lost) gratifications of the first object-relation with the mother. Kristeva has this idea in mind when she notes that belief opens “another corrosive and liberating capacity: *the desire to know*” (Kristeva, 2009, p. xii). That is, in the face of loss, and *because* of it, the child begins to use questions to fill spaces of hunger, or curiosity. In short, she can ask for reasons, for what she wants, or for another possibility, even if the answers she seeks can never fully satisfy the desire that made the question in the first place. Belief, in this context, enables one to survive the frustration that is lack as well as the equally insulting limits of the signs we use to bridge the gap.<sup>11</sup> And it is here where belief comes to

matter in a very particular way, for while speech is a substitute for lack, it depends *first* on the belief that what one says can matter, and is possible at all, even in the anxious awareness that these linguistic efforts are always already subject to slippage, ambiguity and disarray.<sup>12</sup>

Kristeva's (2009) theory of speech stems from both the everyday traumas of growing up, which include "birth, separation frustration and various kinds of lacks" (p. 79) – as well as the "catastrophic suffering" that emerges from violent designs to jar language from people, and generations from each other (cited in Guberman, 1996, p. 23). Belief is, for Kristeva, needed to speak about un-named experiences that, without the distance afforded by language, would otherwise persist, "no decay," in congealed and injurious form. The power of language to transform experience depends, however, on another paradox; the power to name one's own experience is rooted, first, in the fact of dependency. One "internalizes" the discourse of another. The good news is that this internalized discourse is never an exact repetition of the other. In Kristeva's argument, *belief* is once again the grounds for creation; it is, needed to transform speech into something other than mere imitation, for it helps the speaker risk new combinations that push back and revise the words we internalize. "Endlessly, solely through the ordeal of language that *refines language* and renders it sensitive to the unutterable by questioning the very conditions of speech, including the need to believe" (Kristeva, 2009, p. xvi, emphasis added). The irony is thick here: belief is needed for speech that can question not only the stories we are told, but the very conditions of language, including belief itself. Belief is not here a matter of giving over one's critical faculties to the authority of an idealized, all-knowing other. Quite the contrary, and critically, it takes belief to ask, why (not) believe?

But where does this leave us in terms of thinking about travel, memory and history education? For the pilgrim, what purpose may belief serve? And what might the pilgrim teach us about the need for

belief in learning from loss? Freud's work, I think, makes it possible to consider belief as bound to nostalgia for an imaginary point of origin that defends against the necessary ambivalences of loss and that, particularly for non-Aboriginal pilgrims, would mean facing one's implication in this violent history. On the other hand, Kristeva's work allows for an understanding of belief as a human need that is not necessarily an escape from the difficult realities of history (and so the fact of death), but rather a condition for speaking about its disquieting and lingering impact in the present, or what remains. Belief is needed, in Kristeva's view, to persist in this radically un-homely state, lest we lose ourselves to the abyss of non-meaning, un-concern and, at the furthest extreme, the memorial death of amnesia. The dual terms of the Freud/Kristeva debates highlight in uncanny ways the conflicted terrain of belief at play on the pilgrimage to Fraser Lake, and that I turn to in the next section. As we will see, this site of historical loss is characterized by a wishful turning away from the fact of loss, even as it bears witness to the "unutterable truth" of trauma (Kristeva, 2009, p. xvi) and "the unbearable nature of its survival" in the present (Caruth, 1996, p. 7).

### "Curiositas"

Implied in my discussion thus far is a debate about what form of belief works toward creative survival and what kind works in the service of repetition, or compliance.<sup>13</sup> In the context of *Rose of the Carrier*, the beliefs that fuel the pilgrim's footsteps could be read as functioning in a wish-fulfilling way. From this vantage, we can think of the tendency to believe in the miracles of *Rose of the Carrier* as a wishful avoidance of the fact of history's irredeemable losses – those wounds that will not heal. In this wishful state, there may also be a belief in bringing about a new kind of future that, in actual fact, repeats the colonial discourse that the ritual seeks to overcome. Rose's own belief in a Christian God and

the Christian denomination of the pilgrimage may well be evidence of this conflict. That is, the belief in the miracles of Rose Prince repeats the terms of the colonial history to which it also responds. The inclination to believe is a trace of the lingering and insidious effects of colonization, where the reincarnation of eternal goodness in the image of Rose sustains the force of Christianity without the acknowledgement of religion as an instrument of violence. The wish-fulfilling quality of belief works here as a deceptive promise: to believe in the miraculous recovery of goodness risks turning away from the violent losses that constitute this colonial history as well as the pain of transforming one's relationship to such loss, however much that transformation is needed, or longed for.<sup>14</sup> In her study of the figure of Rose, Jo-Anne Fiske (1996) argues that it is understandable – or more precisely, “forgivable” – to take this position, especially in light of Rose of the Carrier's denomination-specific representation (p. 670).

On my journey to Fraser Lake, I found this position impossible to ignore. After all, one of the earliest reasons for undertaking a pilgrimage, at least in the Middle Ages, was to expiate oneself of some great crime (Sumption, 1975). In the context of the modern pilgrimage, and the Rose pilgrimage in particular, this fact turned into a terrible irony when church leaders set up outdoor confessional areas around the pilgrimage site to *offer* confession to pilgrims, including former students of Lejac. Skeptical, I wondered, whose great crime is to be expiated here? What difficult knowledge was being avoided in the name of confession? At the same time, confession was not the only reason for the pilgrimage. On my journey, for instance, one mother told me that she hoped the soil she collected from Rose's gravesite would improve her son's speech impediment. I watched another pilgrim as he asked a few boys to scoop the radiant soil, explaining that he hoped to get some relief for pains that he couldn't quite locate. Still another came to see old friends. I suppose I would count myself within a category of pilgrim known as *curiositas*

(which also dates back to the Middle Ages), and that echoes the "oceanic feeling" insofar as it references a restless curiosity about a world beyond the confines of the self, and yet that does not claim to enter into the realm of an after-world. Scorned by Christian doctrine because of its corporeal motivation (Korte, 2000, p. 26), the "curious" pilgrim, then and now, may be thus characterized by an interest in the surprising qualities of the extant world, the horizons of meaning opened through migration and the intimate relations made with strangers en route (Rudolph, 2004, pp. 5, 18).

It was a group kid pilgrims who helped me think about the idea of *curiositas* and its relation to questions of trauma, travel and working through. Perhaps themselves motivated by *curiositas*, a small group of giggling girls followed me across the grounds of the pilgrimage in my bid to find a Diet Coke. Somewhere along the way, I stopped and spoke to one survivor of the school who said that she has been attending the pilgrimage for eight years. It helped her "not get too lost" in the bad memories that came when she reflected back on her experiences in the absent school that still loomed so large. She asked where I was from. When I said "Toronto," she looked surprised. "You mean we're that big?" Together, we shared a laugh about this familiar assumption about the city as indicator of things important. I also shared my curiosity about the pilgrimage. "I'm interested in the history of the school, and about Rose," I offered. Her reply assured me that there was "a lot to learn and people will help you." Just then, another pilgrim handed me the ice cold drink I had ordered from the stand. My temporary companion ordered the same. I held "as true" her assurance of that complex balance between not knowing and asking for help. We smiled and parted ways.

I strolled further into the grounds and came across a wooden platform that was attached to a stairwell. Peering over the edge, I saw that the stairs led down to a walking path faced by a flat hill face where planks of painted white wood spelled out the endpoint of the

pilgrimage: "ROSE." Adjacent to this wooden announcement sit the train tracks. Climbing down the stairs, I remember thinking to myself that the tracks marked the former site of the cemetery where Rose was originally buried. I wondered about its exact location, but this was impossible to tell. "How old do you think I am?" someone asked. I turned around to see that the group of giggles had grown from two to three. "If I could guess?" was my weak reply. "Yea, just guess!" she was excited now, pointing to each of her friends and disclosing their ages. Clues. "I think you might be around 11 years old," I tried. "Almost!! I'm 14 but everyone thinks I'm younger." Everyone thought about that. A train clacked by. The girls asked the customary question of where I was from. "I love Toronto!" the age-guessing-initiator gushed: no, playfully mocking. They did not ask the reason for my journey. Over the course of our conversation, I learned that all three had been traveling the pilgrimage as long as they could remember.

One girl was from Winnipeg, and had come with her mother and father on a tour organized by their church group. They had made the trip collectively on a *Greyhound* bus. Another girl had driven with her mother and grandmother "for about 2 hours" in a rented van from her community on a nearby Lake. The third girl was quiet, as was I. And then I asked something else: "Did your grandmother go to the school that used to be here?" This question was met with a long silence: No answer of any kind. My mind turned over in the silence to consider that familiar methodological problem of unequal power: Who was I and what did I want from the other's story? There is embedded, as well, a question of community and of cross-culture: What, if anything, could I "know" about this collective inheritance of history? It was clear to me, in the most basic terms, that these kids didn't trust me. Or, as Kristeva might say, they didn't *believe* me. Standing on those wooden stairs, our interaction lacked the belief needed to speak of an unutterable history that could not simply be shared on demand. At the same time, these little pilgrims *did*

believe that their silence could communicate something else to me, such as changing the subject. "Is it true they shoot *Twilight* here?" one of them ventured. She followed this with an explanation that my adult status seemed to require: "It's a movie about vampires." I confessed I didn't know. They all agreed it was possible.

This little scene returns us to Kristeva's view that belief is needed – a bridge – across which to give language to what fails to easily signify, to experiences that do not neatly or simply fit within an answer. For Fiske, too, this is precisely why it is not sufficient to read the narrative of Rose of the Carrier solely as a symbol of colonial power that her followers passively accept. What gets forgotten in this reading are the ways that meaning "is also negotiated by the colonized, who seek, even as the colonizers seek, to render the others' humanity in their own terms" (Fiske, 1996, p. 665). Where Fiske describes the meanings the colonized "seek," I might add, following Kristeva, the meanings the colonized "speak." The idea here is not to erase the radically different positions of power held by the colonizer and colonized, but rather to note the struggles to assert a voice in a context that both constructed and sought to silence it.<sup>15</sup> Fiske (1996) emphasizes the transformative power of this irony in relation to the Rose pilgrimage: the historical conditions of colonial oppression that worked as "an erasure of difference" now support the Aboriginal belief in the miracles of Rose and through which pilgrims seek to transform this very history (p. 670).

What is important about this last point is that it takes seriously the post-colonial insistence on viewing colonized subjects, both Rose of the Carrier and her followers, as implicated in "transculturation:" or, reciting "given" meanings that give way to the possibility of resistance, and the generation of meanings through the co-optation of old forms. But it is also the case that Rose's iconic status is not simply evidence of Catholic conversion, however creatively pilgrims may re-cite this religious legacy: Her power may also derive force from existing Carrier



beliefs. Before encountering white culture, for instance, female prophets abound in Carrier (creation) myths: a virgin mother who gives birth to a creator hero (Estas), heroines who use medicinal powers to rescue entire villages, and girl characters who consistently represent the importance of Carrier women in the survival of culture, generation and power (Jeness, 1934). The point here is that the need to believe in the miracles of Rose may hook into an earlier need that pre-dates the Catholic form it now takes. For Fiske, Rose of the Carrier is iconic because she embodies the tensions of identity lived by Aboriginal followers who believe in her: these are tensions between Carrier beliefs and colonial beliefs (the latter often “legitimated” over the former in the name of “religion”), between empowerment and paternalism and between traditional ways of life and engaging an uncertain future of becoming and belonging.<sup>16</sup> Belief may be the condition from which to risk speaking about the elusive quality of living these tensions.

The central question that emerges here is not whether or not we can do away with belief to get mourning “right,” but rather to ask what forms of belief might allow us to tolerate the crisis of faith that loss can set into motion. Indeed, to dismiss belief as an illusion may itself be a defense against the force of loss and its psychological effects. Freud’s letter correspondence with Rolland, together with Kristeva’s contemporary discussion asks us to recognize just such a chain of psychological events: the very same condition of belief that defends against the anxiety of loss is also what enables one to venture forth into the unknown, and to tolerate the anxiety that such a journey sets into motion. Psychoanalytically, the question may be thus: What is the difference between a wishful turning away and the belief needed to encounter the losses that face us in facing history?

An example from the pilgrimage to Rose of the Carrier’s grave illustrates this key difference, and which constitutes the final turn of my paper. In a radio documentary about the pilgrimage to Lejac, producer

Betsy Trumpener focuses on the narrative of one pilgrim, Frances Rose, who becomes, both for Trumpener and for me, a touchstone for thinking through the question of belief after historical loss. Frances Rose, the "second" Rose, is introduced as the daughter of a survivor of Lejac, whose mother possibly knew the "first" Rose, though Frances isn't quite sure. As Trumpener understands it, Frances is "an almost reluctant pilgrim" because she is uncertain about the possibility of the redemptive narrative that promises healing through faith in miracles, especially through a colonial lens of Christianity. In this sense, Frances Rose offers an implicit critique of Fiske's argument discussed above, for her reticence points to the risks of repeating the colonial terms of belief that had a hand in producing the wounds that the pilgrimage looks to heal. But Frances Rose has not lost faith entirely. She translates into the radio waves a conflict invoked by her own journey: on the one hand, a desire to re-connect (or *re-legere*)<sup>17</sup> with the generation that precedes her and on the other hand, an anxiety about the irredeemable losses that this desire may forget.

Occupying this conflicted terrain, Frances Rose, this "reluctant pilgrim" yearns for the possibility of healing and raises bold questions that point to the limits of this wish:

I'm kinda shocked because it was quite emotional, and [tearful], yeah, I'm just kinda shocked, by the, the strength of the emotion behind it. And, and I'm actually, it was a little bit of a struggle when my friend Betsy asked me to come and meet her here, 'cause, I know it, like physically, physically it's a very beautiful area, but, um, my mom went to Lejac. And it was a very painful place for her to go and. I guess I'm just, um, like [addressing the Bishop] what do you think that, um, do you think that there's, can be more that can be done to bring healing to the communities, because of what was done here, because,

like, do you see more of a role of the church?

For this second Rose, the journey is not so much a planned itinerary that she follows to the endpoint of absolute Truth – whether facts or miracles. It is more a journey into a site of conflict in which to raise questions about what “more” there is to do because of “what was done,” and what it can mean to remember horror in beautiful places. If the Rose pilgrimage on the surface promises wishful absolution, for Frances Rose, it feels more like an awakening to the irreparable wounds that haunt the land.<sup>18</sup> The difference here may be a difference between belief as a wishful turning away from reality and imagining a form of reparation that can admit the impossibility of redemption.

But there is more, for Frances Rose also shows the work of belief in becoming a speaking being after historical loss. Here, she speaks of the loss of her mother tongue in the language of the colonizer: a lingering trace of her mother’s residential school experience. In speaking of this loss, Frances Rose herself breaks down, and in some ways the break in her speech enacts the trauma of her mother’s forced silence. But Frances Rose is also compelled to speak at precisely this moment where words fail:

My mom was, um, came here earlier than her actual schooling would have really begun. I think she was about three or four. It was very terrifying, it was very lonely. Um, and it was made harder because she wasn’t allowed to speak her own language. Um, they were physically abused, if [pause, crying] if they talked in their native tongue. And then she said it would be scary too, because there were times when she would hear screaming in different parts of the school, not knowing what it was all about and, you know, growing up with my sisters, you know we heard about the pain.

Frances struggles with an internal conflict: while no words feel quite right, she also seems to believe in the possibility – the duty – to speak across this generational divide. There is something of a “miracle” in finding words that speak to the loss of her mother tongue. In spite of this loss, but also because of it, she risks narrating the force of this “unclaimed” history.

The documentary closes with Rose Prince’s re-definition of “a miracle” that exceeds the confines of the church. “It’s hard to believe,” Frances Rose says, “that this is the same place that caused so much, so many generations of, of hurt and pain in our First Nations communities...that there’s seagulls flying around in the air, and kids laughing and playing, and you know the sun is shining and there’s a beautiful gentle breeze.” Laughing, she adds, “That could be a miracle whether the church acknowledges it or not.” Frances Rose does not say that it is impossible to believe, but that it is “hard to believe.” For Frances Rose, and perhaps many post-memorial survivors of her generation, it may be “hard to believe” not because the history at stake is untrue, but because it implicates the self, in its very being, in a truth that disrupts the very boundaries we have to protect the ego from pain. That is, it may be “hard” to “hold for vital” the truth of trauma as the grounds of existence.

From Frances Rose’s vantage of the grassy hilltop at Lejac, belief is not simply an illusion, but needed to survive the rupture of acknowledging what is painful about the past, and contemplating the many and lingering effects of its losses in the present. The figure of the “reluctant pilgrim” may be a close cousin of the *curiositas* discussed above: both are characterized by a spirit of inquiry into a world that is larger than the self, and yet without the wishful seeking after miracles in the hereafter. Indeed, this “reluctant pilgrim” may look very much like the young woman from Winnipeg who I spoke to on the staircase leading down to Fraser Lake, the one who, in refusing my question, asked her own.

### Risking Belief: Traveling the Historical Unconscious

It is tempting to conclude this meditation with a cautionary tale that pits belief against historical thought. Indeed, there is a stubborn quality to the pilgrim's belief – what Jonathan Lear (2006) calls a “thick concept” (p. 108) – that suggests this temptation may well be warranted. As Kristeva (2009) admits, the need to believe is always, “potentially fundamentalist” (p. 14). When we follow in the footsteps of lost others, there may be a need for absolution – in Freud's words, an “illusion” – where none exists. But, as Frances Rose teaches us, it is this same need for belief that also enables one to tolerate, and even risk a relation with that which is most uncertain, and unsettles the self. This may be the fine risk of mourning, where the initial need to preserve history exactly as it was, unremittingly safe from “decay” may give way to its working over in thought and in memory. In this way, I think the figure of the “reluctant” pilgrim may be an ironic model of belief: neither a wishful turning away from reality nor an equally dismissive nihilism, but a risky relation that plunges one into the conditions of thinking itself: where it is possible to symbolize a relation to experiences that are otherwise “un-named,” yet to be spoken, yet to be history.

In a time when the Canadian government has officially sought to redress the devastating effects of the residential school in its Truth and Reconciliation Commission, news of the Rose of the Carrier pilgrimage is particularly apt, for it suggests something about the unofficial and embodied ways memory persists, working itself through very specific relations and between generations.<sup>19</sup> Tracing the footpaths of pilgrimage points to the affective and lingering presence of memory that takes shape in the restless inclination to recuperate losses that one cannot simply leave behind. It is to notice, as well, that history is not simply a matter of arriving at consciousness, but acknowledging what about history makes consciousness so fraught and so painful. I think of the silence by the

railway, and about the terrible reversal of Priests offering confession in place of taking responsibility. But I think also about the seagulls, the games, and even about movies. The question the pilgrimage left behind in me is not simply how people, students and pilgrims alike, can remember better or even more, but perhaps: is belief a kind of grief? The reluctant pilgrim offers a response to this last question, admitting as she does that to believe in traumatic history is not simply miraculous but "hard." Particularly in a field organized around understanding, such that education tends to be, it is hard to speak in terms that pierce the disciplinary boundaries we typically use to ward off the uncertainties that knowledge ushers in.

To the extent that the pilgrimage reaches into the realm of history's difficult passage, I believe it offers a compelling metaphor for re-thinking history curriculum. By curriculum, I am referring, of course, not to the itinerary of Ministry documents, but rather, the history that is produced through specific contexts and relations, where historical knowledge is less a matter of what has already happened and more an uncertain possibility made in relation to another. At issue here is a course of study not as a set path or pre-given collection of representations, but the capacity to read history symptomatically, as always saying more than can be directly spoken. This kind of history happens in schools, yes, but, also outside of its official walls, such as on a grassy hill overlooking Fraser Lake, in attending, and believing in, narrative accounts of historical rupture, and that exceed "concrete evidence."

The education of history is very much about teaching critical thinking skills that the historian him/herself uses to analyze documents and piece together a plausible narrative account. But it is at the same time both more unruly and subtle than this: history is a matter of attending the paths people take – and make – off the beaten path as a sign of its affective and lingering effects. The pilgrimage may thus take educational theory on a journey that is as far off the beaten path of consciousness.

The pilgrimage, together with the beliefs that drive it, challenge educators to notice how curriculum may, at times, wishfully turn away from the difficulty of history. But it might also be occasion to face memories that cannot easily be captured in conventional terms of narration and that exceed efforts to render them “in a straightforward way” (Caruth, 1996, p. 5). After all, it is one thing to travel – or teach – on the wish that the “reality” of the past can be miraculously recovered or re-done better with proper skill or right thinking; it is another to recognize that something singularly traumatic happened and to attend its lingering and persistent effects, including the need to believe. It is precisely such a journey that I think education may itself need to risk taking, where what is at stake for curriculum is not solely knowledge, but the need to believe that it is possible to stand in relation to history’s losses that at the same time threaten to displace this very footing.



What remains of LeJac



Confessions



Railway beside Fraser Lake



Pilgrimage tents and stairwell to left

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Betsy Trumpener, *The Miracles of Rose Prince* (The Current, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, October 2008). Last downloaded on 26 June 2010 from: <http://www.cbc.ca/thecurrent/2008/10/october-16-2008.html>

<sup>2</sup> David Gruenwald phrases this statement without the shield of negation: "Power and domination," he writes, "are inscribed in material spaces" (p. 6). How one moves, who can move, and where one feels authorized to go or not go are written into the crevices of a place.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald Britton (1998) concretizes the idea: "What is perceived *requires belief* to be regarded as knowledge" (p. 13, my emphasis). From the other direction, however, belief alone is not sufficient, lest it slip into Freud's wishful turning away from reality; belief thus requires material evidence, or "sensory confirmation (reality testing) in order to become knowledge" (Britton, 1998, p. 13).

<sup>4</sup> Plato famously drew this conclusion in *The Republic*, where he put forward his idea of an ideal city as one built upon knowledge – produced through argument and disputation – rather than belief. With this, Plato proposed to settle the conflict between poetry and philosophy by choosing reason, and exiling the poets from public life.

<sup>5</sup> Freud also described this process as "reality-testing," where the ego learns to channel its drive for pleasure in to satisfactions that can be



attained in actual relations, rather than mere wishes. See this earlier discussion, though not related to religion, in his essay on the "Two Principles of Mental Functioning."

<sup>6</sup> While it is often Romain Rolland and Carl Jung who are read as the imagined readers of Freud's critique of religion, Paul Roazen argues that Oskar Pfister, a pastor and practicing analyst, should also be counted in this readership. Not only were Freud and Pfister in regular letter correspondence, Roazen notes that when "the full difficulties between Freud and Jung broke out," Pfister was exceptional in his decision to "stick by Freud's side" (p. 557). He argues that Freud's 1927 critique of religion is as much a "break" from Jung as it is a marker of the tightening of Freud's circle of friends, which included Pfister. I would agree with Roazen here, adding, of course, Freud's intensified friendship with Romain Rolland.

<sup>7</sup> Incidentally, Freud had in a letter of 1923 distinguished his own writing from Rolland's on precisely these grounds: "My writings cannot be what yours are: comfort and refreshment for the reader" (Freud, 1923, p. 201).

<sup>8</sup> Oskar Pfister would second Rolland's motion in his 1928 letter of "friendly disagreement" with Freud. Here, Pfister points out that Freud's own searches after truth resembled the very same religious spirit of inquiry he also denounced: "To be frank about it," writes Pfister, "I have a strong suspicion that you do battle against religion – out of religious feeling" (1928, p. 559.) With this suggestion, Pfister, alongside Rolland, brings together Freud's scientific "struggle for truth," a spirit of inquiry into the unknown, that brought him closer to religiosity (or at least the "oceanic feeling") than he could himself acknowledge.

<sup>9</sup> Freud is referring here to Hannibal, with whom he claims a strong identification. As the ancient story goes, Hannibal was a great leader

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who opened the door of power to the people of Rome by sharing with them his skills as a warrior that they then used against him (Blatt, 1988).

<sup>10</sup> While Freud claims to find "no trace" of the "oceanic feeling" in himself (1930, p. 4), he does find evidence of the opposite feeling of "disbelief." Interestingly, Freud (1936) pens this observation in yet another exchange with Romain Rolland, a letter that is published under the title, "A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis." In it, Freud recounts an overwhelming feeling of "disbelief" as he climbed onto the base of the crumbling artifact for the very first time. Freud explains the feeling – what he calls "estrangement" – as a defense against not only the enormous "reality" before his eyes but a repressed psychical reality that is at once more elusive and powerful (p. 73). The psychical reality at stake is an Oedipal conflict of having surpassed his father who had never traveled so far. It seems to me that, in this letter, Freud is re-opening an old conversation with Rolland. While Freud decides, once again, on scientific knowledge of "Oedipal return" it is notable that the idea of belief still pre-occupies Freud in this late letter to his friend. It would seem that Freud comes close to the idea of belief through a negation: he recognizes the *refusal* to believe as defensive, even if there isn't yet, in positive terms, a "need to believe."

<sup>11</sup> Kristeva's views are close to Jacques Lacan's here (McAfee, 2004). Both believe that psychoanalysis is a process of helping patients tolerate the lack that constitutes being. But where Kristeva departs from Lacan is in her belief that language *can* in some ways reach into the unutterable, what Rolland called "the oceanic" while for Lacan, this realm (what he called "the Real") is always *outside* of our efforts to symbolize it. By contrast, Kristeva argues that the unutterable experience of loss (both ordinary and catastrophic) *can* be spoken (though always incompletely)

“without,” she argues, “simply saying it is an emptiness or blank” (as cited in Guberman, 1996, pp. 22-23).

<sup>12</sup> Indeed, this may be what Sarah Kofman (1976) had in mind in writing about an “impervious need to have my words taken up, *taken*.”

<sup>13</sup> The tension between repetition and re-citation hooks into a tension articulated in cultural and post-colonial studies on shifting conceptions of melancholia. This literature focuses on melancholia’s “structure of feeling” not simply in terms of an individualistic experience or illness, but an “extended capacity for representation” (Eng & Kazanjian, 2000, p. 4). In the face of the catastrophic losses that mark history, these theorists argue that, “avowals of and attachments to loss can produce a world of remains as a world of new representations and alternative meanings” (p. 5). But there is debate about how, and whether this psychic condition – characterized as it is by internal suffering – can be rendered as a politically and ethically productive category (Brown, 1995). For instance, Deborah Britzman argues that the tendency to idealize loss and to reenact the abandonment that loss invokes (also the melancholic’s tendency) “must be exceeded” if it is to be worked through (p. 33). Melancholia is “bound to the nostalgia for an idealized and unchanged world” where mourning is “an ethical struggle with reconstituting the self as subject to a relation that is no longer” (p. 34). A similar tension underlies the two dimensions of belief that my paper engages: on the one hand, there is the belief in the erotic object that one holds as ideal and the belief in the possibility of speaking of experiences that defy language, of finding meaning in life in the face of the fact of mortality. My own view is that these positions are mutually constituting rather than developmental. That is, the need to believe in the continuity of existence may be the condition needed to tolerate – and to acknowledge – the fragility of life, and history.

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<sup>14</sup> The wish-fulfilling quality of belief risks turning away from evidence of the residential school's many failures as they are convincingly documented in John Milloy's, *A National Crime*. Wish-fulfilling beliefs proceed without regard for reality, and can, at times, be mistaken for reality. An instance of this confusion can be found in an account of an interview following the 2004 pilgrimage posted by St. Andrew's Church (downloaded on July 2, 2010 from <http://www.pgdiocese.bc.ca/events/roseprince.htm>). The interview recounts Bishop Gerald Wiesner's belief that Rose of the Carrier represents the *success* of the residential school: "We have a lot of controversy about the residential schools but Rose Prince was someone who spent almost her entire life in a residential school and was respected then and now as someone who excelled in Christian virtue throughout her life." This construction of Rose as a Christian ideal cannot tolerate the idea that the perceived "success" of the school in its religious inculcation is also its utter "failure" insofar as it signifies as *the destruction* of an entire system of belief of another. Belief, here, functions to avoid the ambiguities of "success," and how another kind of "success" may be embodied, as one pilgrim will show, as a creative re-appropriation of belief to question the church's own crimes.

<sup>15</sup> For Jacques Derrida, this conflict is *the* conundrum of post-colonial languages, and perhaps all languages insofar as their origin is always already "prosthetic." For Derrida, the conundrum is that the very language I claim as my own – the language I "have" – is at the same time "not mine" but my internalization of another (1998a, p. 2).

<sup>16</sup> I am here reminded of the tail end of my conversation with the girls at Fraser Lake, and in particular, their question of whether or not *Twilight* was filmed on the grounds of the pilgrimage. It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve in enough detail into the parallels between the legend

of Rose and that of the film to which these youth referred. But straightaway, we can note that *Twilight* begins with the very same idea of the “un-dead” in its plotline of vampires and shape-shifters. It is impossible to know what was wanted from the question uttered on the steps that summer day, but it strikes me, afterward, that *Twilight* circles around themes not unlike those of the story of Rose: this is a show about crossing cultural boundaries and about the question of conversion. For instance, Edward Cullen, the show’s vampire, falls in love with a human named Bella Swan: And, Bella, in turn, makes known her desire to be converted to a vampire. The story is even more complicated by Bella’s other pursuer: a young werewolf named Jacob Black whose clan is of Aboriginal decent. Legend is that the vampires and werewolves signed a treaty, alleging that werewolves would not disclose to the white man the whereabouts of vampires on the condition that vampires stop hunting on werewolf territory. It might be too much to squeeze the complex and layered events of colonial history into a movie screen, not the least of which is about vampires. But this young pilgrim’s startling question haunted me for weeks upon my return home, leading me down an unplanned path of still more questions: What if we were to read this pilgrim’s question about *Twilight* as a screen for the un-spoken (and un-chosen) history of Catholic conversion? Which boy – and which history – ought Bella choose? What does it mean to convert outside one’s clan? What would it mean to “shift” the colonial “shape” of history? In what ways might this love triangle offer a screen on which to work through difficult tensions of colonial subjectivity: between conversion and tradition, or between inheritance and choice, between cultural death and the simmering underworld of the un-dead?

<sup>17</sup> Here I am making reference to Jacques Derrida, who, in his chapter, “Faith and Knowledge,” traces the etymology of religion (all the while

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acknowledging what is problematic about etymology). Through this exercise, he notes "two sources" of religion: "religio," which implies a holding back or a being unscathed, safe and sound; and "re-legere," which implies a linking up with another not on the basis of understanding, but a leap of faith into the unknown (1998b, p. 16). Much like Kristeva, Derrida is trying to understand the "link" that defines religion prior to the link between man and the belief in a singular God. Derrida is attempting to "un-close," as much as possible, the circularity of belief that confirms itself – in order to open the link as wide as possible to welcome the Other in the fullest Levinasian sense of "radical alterity."

<sup>18</sup> One of the Bishops who Rose meets on her journey appears supremely moved in a similar way. And yet, I wish to submit that his response avoids the question of what historical responsibility can mean beyond his own wishes for redemption. By contrast, Frances Rose seeks to return the listener's attention to the complexities of "healing" – and the possibility of a sustained and committed relation to justice – that refuses any magical redress. Without collapsing what are very complicated relations between the colonizer and the colonized, I think there is an important distinction to be made between these positions in thinking about the return to sites of memory. Edward Said, too, makes a similar point in his study of British and French pilgrimages of the nineteenth century. At this time in history, he notes that *all* pilgrimages, both British and French, to the Orient promised travelers encounters with "eccentricities of Oriental life" that depended on unequal relations of power between European visitors and native dwellers of the land (1978, p. 166). And yet, he also notes a key difference between the British and the French pilgrim. For the British, the Orient was India, which means that his travels took him to the site of "a major colony," or more

candidly, “an actual British possession” (p. 169). The French pilgrim, by contrast, was “imbued with a sense of acute loss in the Orient,” for he set foot on land where the French, unlike the British, “had no sovereign presence” (p. 169). For a discussion of the pilgrimage in the Orient, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978). Though debates persist about the meaning of travel writing of this period, Said’s discussion enables the following questions: What, if anything, is the difference between the colonizer’s and the subaltern subject’s return to sites, such as Rose’s grave, that mark the persisting, inter-generational effects of this historical relation? Of what might this difference consist? What histories do travelers bring with them to sites of memory? For Said, the distinction between colonizer and the subaltern subject is deeply significant, for it is one thing to travel with a sense of entitlement and quite another to be confronted with a sense of displacement – of desperately seeking a home – on the journey. To return to the case that frames this section, Said gives us pause to wonder whether the Bishop’s desire for reparation has more to do with an attempt to re-find footing in the face of the lost idealism of the church, than with the sense of “acute loss” and dislocation that faces, and “kinda shocks,” Frances Rose.

<sup>19</sup> It is not without significance that the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia addressed the pilgrims of the 2010 pilgrimage.

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