The Child Lost Beneath History in Zana Fraillon's *No Stars to Wish On* and *The Bone Sparrow*

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Abstract:
This paper discusses some of the theories proposed in my monograph *The Lost Child in Literature and Culture*. It looks at the importance of the lost child figure in disrupting established narratives of history and culture. Using Fraillon's two novels I discuss how the child is at the centre of abuses of power and also look at the author's use of alternative forms of language and communication to counter this. The article locates Fraillon's narratives within fairy-tale tropes such as a child's quest, while arguing that such tales have also embodied endemic cruelty towards children. Ancient oral folk tales are entwined in the same narrative as modern media. The EASA Conference focused on the rise of nationalism, and the connections between Europe and Australia. The figure of the lost child is sadly pervasive in both parts of the world, showing the inter-connectedness of all our stories. The practice of Child Migration, referred to in this article, is an example of how lost children have been forcibly removed from Europe to Australia as one facet of a system of control.

Keywords: lost children, refugees, Forgotten Australians, stories.

Lost children are buried within the history of Europe and Australia; they have been taken from their homes and their families, and often their countries of birth. At the beginning of Zana Fraillon's *No Stars to Wish On*, the oldest girl in the family, Amrei, has a premonition of a time when the children in the house will be taken away, "a future without children." She foresees an empty house and "barren" garden (2). The old matriarchs of the family now doubt the psychic abilities which they had previously identified in Amrei, as it seems an imagining too horrifying to be real. However, the vision is soon realised when police storm into the house one morning and take all the children away, all except Amrei.

In this article I will argue that a "future without children" is becoming realised through the systemic abuse ingrained within our society and culture. The creative works that Zana Fraillon has written follow a tradition of fairy-tales and legends, and I will discuss this during the article. For example, the image of the loss of children being a harbinger of a "barren" garden connects to legends where the loss of offspring is connected to a blight on the land (such as the story of the "Pied Piper of Hamlyn"). The banishment of children has more recently found a larger scale imaginative expression in the dystopias *Children of Men* by P. D. James and *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood which envisage a world where children are rarely born. As fertility rates decline (McKie), our world appears to be destroying children, one way or another.

My argument is that the banishment of children from society, or their incarceration, neglect or torture is fundamental to the words and actions that our world is constructed from. Ancient tales speak of this but so do our daily news and internet feeds. The two novels I will focus on are both written from the point of view of young boys who are put through traumatic experiences through the agency of the Australian government, or some institution or adjunct of official bureaucracy within that country. This is not to say the Australian branch of the

world order is different to that of other countries. Australian institutions were, of course, created and formed by the European colonisers.

There has been notable previous research on the prevalence of lost child narratives and images in Australian culture. Peter Pierce argues that these narratives date from the years of early white settlement when there were many factual and fictional tales of "babes in the bush:" children who wandered off and got lost in the new landscape. Pierce argues that these tales were particular to an anxiety felt by the new settlers who were in a completely alien environment, far from the homes they were used to (xi-xii). It must be noted that child displacement in Australia was also inflicted in a different, violent way on the indigenous population, the Stolen Generations:

> Where once the land indifferently took lost Australian children of European origin, now Aboriginal children were systematically taken away from their land. If these bodies of suffering and story can be connected, then the process of reconciliation between European and Aboriginal Australians, which can be glimpsed at times in the colonial tales of lost children, might be advanced in ways that do not allow regression to an age that once we thought of as less enlightened than this. (Pierce xiv)

It could seem that the deliberate removal of Aboriginal children was a kind of revenge for "their" land stealing the European children. Such an attitude would help to foster the resentments of the European lower classes, who could at least content themselves that they were above the indigenous population. As Pierce suggests, the two "bodies of suffering and story" are connected: the act of colonisation and, to go deeper, the abuse of the majority by a small number of people in power, is what caused all the children to be lost (Pierce xiv). When all lost children are regarded as part of a continuous story of suffering, then the root causes can be uncovered.

I have argued in *The Lost Child in Literature and Culture* that the figure of the lost child is prevalent in the history, culture and social structures of many nations. Pierce also makes the point that, from the mid-twentieth century, the loss of children in Australia was the result of human actions and not nature, either cases of child murder or abuse by individuals, or actions supported and carried out by organisations and institutions. Pierce notes that such examples of lost children in the new urban landscapes were not peculiar to Australia, and were sadly found throughout the world (xiv-xv). Creatively, there are also many works outside of Australia which feature lost child characters (Pierce xv-xvii). Geraldine Cousin notes in her analysis of British theatre productions in the period between 1990 and 2005, many of which feature lost or endangered children, the "recurrent atmosphere of anxiety, a pervasive sense of the imminence of danger" (Cousin xi). She views the society in which these plays were produced and staged as one in a constant state of anxiety:

> Newspaper headlines warn that we are under threat from an alarming number of different directions, and, though the majority of these dangers fail to materialise, the underlying feeling of anxiety persists. … It is only the outer shape of our fears that changes, however. An inner core of dread remains constant. (Cousin xi)

This constant "inner core of dread" is represented by the figure of the lost child. As I have shown in *The Lost Child in Literature and Culture*, the figure of the lost child has been around for centuries; however, it is not surprising that the figure of the lost child should seem to haunt our society increasingly. The horrors and hardships of the past are replicated now in the glare of media images and a constant soundtrack of words across twenty-four hour rolling news channels and the internet—the headlines are both always there and constantly shifting. Cousin argues that the lost children in the plays she discusses are "markers both of a private

pain and a profound uneasiness about our communal future" (xii). On a metaphorical level, I argue that the proliferation of stories featuring lost children, in books, plays, television, films, is a symptom of a deep and increasing anxiety throughout society.

The sociologist Chris Jenks has discussed, with reference to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and Jeremy Bentham's concept of the *panopticon*, how society controls its children. Bentham's *panopticon*, the imagined perfect prison where everybody is visible twenty-four hours a day, is realised within our society, in our institutions and in our daily activity. The child internalises the scrutiny and instruction focused on them by teachers, social workers, health visitors, and educational welfare officers. Jenks asserts we have "moved from a collective space to an individual space. The public and external experience of shame and degradation have transformed into the private and inner experience of guilt. Thus modernity's child, at school and at home, becomes its own policeman; the child learns its place!" (Jenks 82). This self-policing, and the policing of other children, has reached a new level, through technology.

Jenks refers to Postman's analysis of new technological media and its effects on children. Postman and others were already, in the early 1990s, arguing that the internet was going beyond film and television with its proliferation of images, disrupting the traditional distinction between children and adults (Postman qtd. in Jenks 118). The dominance of social media in young people's lives means there is no escape from self and peer surveillance, where there is constant pressure to conform to images of ideals imposed and policed by other children. Pressure from parents for a child to be successful academically, a prototype of a materially successful adult, added to the constant, twenty-four hour assault on the senses through technology, is contributing to teenage suicide rates, to self-harm, to increases in anxiety and depression in children. A survey by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers in the UK reported that one in five teaching staff has experience of their pupils attempting suicide (Espinoza 2016).

In the two novels by Zana Fraillon which I discuss in this article, *The Bone Sparrow* deals with the current refugees crisis, focusing on a boy refugee, Subhi, born into a holding camp in Australia and held there all 9 years of his life, while *No Stars to Wish On* is about a boy taken from his family and put into a repressive and harsh Care Home in the mid-twentieth century. In two different time periods, young people are confined and mistreated at the instigation of people in power. When one form of mistreatment is seemingly ended and condemned by the majority, it is replaced by another, perhaps focused on people from different countries or in different circumstances, but maintaining the same control by instilling fear within the young.

The experience of trauma can fracture an individual's self-identity: trauma, "especially in early life, repeated, and inflicted by relatives or caretakers, produces dissociative disorders," commonly known as multiple personality disorders (Spiegel). I argue that such individual disorder then multiplies through society, across countries and communities. A personal sense of dislocation is replicated in the physical displacement of children from their families and of people from the places they call home. This dislocation and fear has always been represented culturally, from fairy-tales to films and television, but the development of technology in recent years has increased the bombardment of images and stories of terrors inflicted on children. This trauma of the young is then used to instil fear in the adult population, to make them malleable and supportive of the "need" for further conflict and restriction, which will, in turn, lead to further destruction of innocent lives. The terrible images and stories of murdered

or injured children leave the most indelible impression on a viewer, triggering instant, strong emotional responses. The loss of those who are seen as most vulnerable, the youth who have been instilled in our minds as hope for the future and remembrance of our own past, will often provoke an immediate reaction that action must be taken and the perpetrators must be stopped by any means necessary.

Fraillon makes clear in the afterword of both novels that the narratives are taken from the real life experiences of many children, hence the tag line for *The Bone Sparrow*: "One Story. The story of millions." This novel highlights the unprecedented number of refugees across the world which the United Nations Refugee Agency says represent the highest levels of displacement on record: "70.8 million people around the world have been forced from home. Among them are nearly 25.9 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18" (UNCHR). The scale of the displacement may be unprecedented but it is a continuation of the effects and processes of colonisation begun centuries before. Australia as a modern country was obviously a product of this colonisation and Empire-building and the invasion of land resulted in a displacement of the indigenous population within the country. The Stolen Generations of Aboriginal children who were taken from their families were victims of this expansion of power. This state-led abduction of children was not only inflicted on Aboriginal children; "Forgotten Australians" is the term given to approximately half a million children who lived in 'care' in institutions or outside a home setting in Australia during the twentieth century. These were often children from the dominant nationality of the colonisers, but predominantly from poor families, who were often sent to harsh environments where physical, mental and sexual abuses were rife (see Fernandez et al. 19-21).

These children in institutional care included so-called "Child Migrants" from the mother country Britain who had been sent to the other side of the world, frequently separating them from still living parents and other family, scarring their identities. These children could be regarded as colonisers, described in rhetoric of the time as materials to populate the colonies with white stock: in 1911, the children's charity Barnardos appealed for funds to turn "Nobody's children" into "Empire Builders;" in the 1920s the Church of England Waifs and Strays Society described a party of boys sent to Canada as "more links fresh from the forge" and the Prince of Wales in 1934 declared the work of the Fairbridge farm schools, "an Imperial investment" (*History in Focus*). In actuality, the lives of many of the migrant children had more in common with refugees, separated from families and displaced in a different part of the world. A large incentive for the schemes was money—saving the cost of looking after the child in Britain in favour of a one off payment to send them abroad (Bean and Melville 5). It is important not to simply categorise the abuses suffered in this era as "of those times" and therefore distance our society from the ability to inflict suffering on the young (Lynch 120-1). The treatment of the Child Migrants and those who were Forgotten Australians is part of a historic, but still current, process of wounding, of opening holes in society that causes fractures across the world and across time.

The term "Forgotten Australians" is important to both novels as they stress the importance of remembering the past, and maintaining personal, family and communal identities in the face of institutional oppression which seeks to erase that identity. Jack, in *No Stars to Wish On*, asks the reader when the nuns will realise that he was loved and looked-after by his poor, extended family rather than a product of a depraved, neglectful family, as the nuns continually tell him and the other children. The nuns say that his family have forgotten him—similar to the way many Child Migrants were deliberately lied to about the existence of their parents or siblings (Bean and Melville 9).

Fraillon's books offer a path for reclaiming the forgotten, and re-telling the stories which define identities. She taps into beliefs that a child has an instinctively powerful imagination, and a connection with nature and the metaphysical, to offer an escape from the confinement and control of the material, constructed world. The narratives portray this escape in a partly physical way, such as going on a journey or solving puzzles, in line with mythic quests. The quests are not only physical in their journey, as both narratives involve the child protagonist/narrator undergoing a mental search to find their place in the world. The child heroes break out of their imprisonment using imagination, empathy and humour. In *No Stars to Wish On,* Jack has to strive to hold on to memories of his family and home so he can retain his identity and return to them. He is now called "Number 49" as all the children are given numbers to erase who they were. He tries to find out what happened to the boy whose place he has taken, the boy who he assumes must have escaped and gone back to his family. He will discover that the previous Number 49 had a much more tragic removal and this discovery will coincide with the knowledge that this lost boy was also called Jack. The fate of one lost child becomes continuous with another and is a repetition that could be seen as a hopeful gesture from Fraillon, the lost child living on in the body of another. Although Fraillon is trying to encourage her readers to change the world into a better place, the repetition can also signify that the lost child continues on within us and can never be erased; at the end of the novel, Jack says that "No one is ever totally forgotten," we all "leave our traces" that others can piece together (Fraillon, *No Stars* 163).

These traces of people live on in the collective memory, which has sadly accumulated many layers of tragedy. Fraillon counters this with an evocation of the positive human traits of resilience, love, ingenuity, humour and imagination. There is also a textual unconscious which we have all internalised since our childhoods, and Fraillon uses these familiar tropes and themes to convey the mental and physical struggle between freedom and repression. Fairy-tales and myths (even those modern productions which utilise the traditional oral and written stories and adapt them in new forms) make us familiar with the concept of a child or young hero using ingenuity and determination to find a way to escape from the adults controlling them. Many analysts of fairy tales argue that they are, or at least were in their formation, a means of adapting to the challenges of the external world. Jack Zipes asserts that the prevalence of a quest within nearly all fairy tales is part of the genre's role to provide guidance on "social action—to transform the world and make it more adaptable to human needs while we try to change ourselves and make ourselves fit for the world" (Zipes, *Fairy Tales* x). It is clear both from old and new tales, and the media images that surround us, that this world is one which surrounds the individual with conflict and restriction.

In Fraillon's *No Stars to Wish On,* Amrei walks for miles to try to find and free Jack and the other captured children while Jack's own search to uncover the fate of his predecessor as Number 49, and a way back to his real home, are clearly portrayed as quests. In *The Bone Sparrow*, there is a quest in a book within the book: a girl from outside the camp, Jimmie, breaks in and befriends Subhi, getting him to read her mother's story of her family and their flight from persecution. Subhi was born in the camp and has therefore known no other existence. On each birthday he measures his height against the diamonds in the fence around the camp. His views of the outside are confined to some magazine photographs and the stories, the memories, of the other refugees. In some ways, his life in captivity reminds of the boy in Emma Donaghue's novel *Room*, although Subhi's space is much larger, and he is aware that the world does exist outside, while his innocent questioning of the way that the world treats him and the other refugees shows the brutality of the system that imprisons him.

As he is a child born into the camp he can have no possible blame associated to him for his presence there. As a complete innocent he is a perfect voice to condemn what is happening. Ashcroft argues that because dominant cultures of colonialism have portrayed the colonized as like children, the "allegory of the child … enables a reading and contestation of the social text of imperialism" (Ashcroft 53). The figure of the child symbolises their struggle to realise independence and re-establish their own identities. In the context of the novels under discussion, the child figure also shows that identity is always in a process of being re-imagined: the act of creation is in constant opposition to the imposition of power.

The magic realist tone of both novels subverts the cold, hard reality of how the children are being treated. The brutality of this treatment itself shows a warped sense of humanity. As Subhi states, the "whole world has gone crazy and the bricks are falling out all over the place" (Fraillon, *The Bone Sparrow* 139). This is particularly in reaction to a few men in the camp sewing their lips together in a hunger strike in protest at their treatment and prolonged stay in the camp. Subhi's sister, Queeny, has a smuggled camera which she uses to take photographs of the men which will be sent to the media (138-9). The story then moves to Jimmie, a girl on the outside, and her father, reading the story of the protest in the newspaper. The father expresses sadness at the way the people in the refugee camp are treated but he is soon distracted by the sports pages, prompted to remark "What is the world coming to?" in reaction to a sports story rather than the humanitarian crisis taking place down the road from where he lives (142-3). In response, Jimmie goes to her room, conscious that her deceased mother would have known how to respond to the traumatic events in the camp; Jimmie has "never felt so alone" (143). Political and international issues are reflected back to the microcosm of a child's life and her feelings of loss in her family.

This passage represents the way language becomes corrupted in the media, and in everyday speech, to obscure the reality of how people are controlled. The refugees' action in sewing up their mouths symbolises the denial of voice, of a presence, which the refugees and the Forgotten Australians face (and which children in general are faced with). When Jimmie finds a way to sneak into the camp and meets regularly with Subhi at night, she takes with her the notebook containing stories that her mother used to read to her before she died. Jimmie's ongoing trauma after the death of her mother has been compounded by her father's depression and caused a dysfunctional home life. The disruptions in her family life, combined with poor schooling which she refuses to engage with, mean she has never learnt to read. The broken family is multiplied through the economic depression in the small town where they live, where many of the adults (including Jimmie's father) lost their jobs when the local mines closed. This deprivation leads to hostility from some locals towards the refugees, including a story put around by the pupils at Jimmie's school that the children in the camp had all been given brand new bikes (43). This failure of understanding, a break down in the signifiers of the world, is symbolised by Jimmie's inability to read.

Jimmie is reduced to smelling and feeling the book, revering it as an object which signifies her mother and her heritage. When Jimmie breaks into the camp, she gets Subhi to read her mother's stories to her. At one point Jimmie actually talks directly to the book, telling it that "Subhi can read" (62); he provides her with a way to open up her memories at the same time as enlivening her present. Jimmie regards the book as a material object which, in itself, offers a connection to something essential: her mother and her descendants. Jimmie knows about written language but her direct speech to the book as an entity in itself recalls the scene in the autobiography of the eighteenth-century slave Olaudah Equiano. The young slave sees the master of his ship reading and "had a great curiosity to talk to the books, as I thought they

did; and so to learn how all things had a beginning: for that purpose I have often taken up a book, and have talked to it, when alone, in hopes it would answer me; and I have been very much concerned when I found it remained silent" (Equiano 48).

Henry Louis Gates Jr. focuses on this passage and argues that it isn't simply a child's ignorance of written language. The book does not speak to him because he is an object of his master, the same as the book:

> Only subjects can endow an object with subjectivity of their own. Objects can only reflect the subjectivity of the subject, like a mirror does …. When the master's book looks to see whose face is behind the voice that Equiano speaks, it can only see an absence, the invisibility that dwells in an unattended looking glass. (Gates Jr. 366)

Gates Jr. makes the point that in writing his narrative, Equiano "announces and preserves his newly found status as a subject. It is he who is the master of his text, a text that speaks volumes of experience and subjectivity" (366). So, by appropriating the means of communication, the symbolic order, that had excluded him the slave develops "from an absence to a presence, and indeed from an object to a subject" (Gates Jr. 366). In a similar way, Fraillon's narratives show the importance of communication and signification to claim self and communal identity, but not through conventional forms. In *The Bone Sparrow*, the refugees in the camp say that writing "does lie … all the time" when it used by the camp authorities to issue orders, such as the one proclaiming Subhi's friend Eli is an adult and has to be moved to a higher security area (57-58). In the other narrative Jack refers to the Care Homes which are actually "just jails" (*No Stars* 125). Adults only use the word 'Home' to make themselves feel better, "as if they are responsible adults who really look after kids" (Fraillon, *No Stars* 125). Like the Freudian *unheimlich*, the word 'home' is made to contain its own subverting negation. Words are made hollow and dishonest, offering the illusion of care when they are soulless and controlling. In contrast, the children in these novels find signs and symbols in inanimate objects and in the natural world, a form of language uncorrupted by adults.

The stories that Subhi reads out are in the language of folk tales but they reflect the reality of a family and community blown apart by war and forced to disperse. The stories speak about healing and they refer to the bone sparrow keepsake which Jimmie wears. This was given to Jimmie by her mother who told her "how it had protected her family for generations" (*No Stars* 23). Jimmie will pass on to Subhi that the bone sparrow is "keeping the clan safe" (116), extending the aura of protection beyond her family. Its symbolism in the stories makes it an emblem of hope, reversing the legend which those in the camp believe, that a sparrow signifies death. After reading one of the stories from Jimmie's mother's notebook, a story that mixes legend with a realistic description of soldiers invading a village, killing the old and sick, and taking the rest of the people prisoner, Subhi is given the bone sparrow to hold. He feels a heat from it that "doesn't feel bad any more. I know now for sure that Queeny was wrong about the sparrow on the bed. It didn't mean death at all. It was bringing a different message. Maybe it was keeping me safe" (*Bone The Sparrow* 116-7). Words and symbols can be re-imagined and reinterpreted to offer hope of a resurrection, an escape to freedom.

Subhi will come to write his own ending to Jimmie's stories, bringing the story to Burma, and the Rohingya people, which is the ethnicity of Subhi and his family (*Bone The Sparrow* 217-18). *The Bone Sparrow* narrative is itself a skeleton frame which can breathe and fly when invested with imagination and memory, stories and histories. The frame is that intersection of the imaginary and the factual, and also shows the intersection of people, in different eras, and

from different countries, races and religions. Jacqueline Rose refers to mythology (a mode of writing or storytelling which transcends the "local and historical conditions out of which it first emerged") belonging with the figure of the child because "myth is so often identified with what is primitive, even infantile, or is seen as a form of expression which goes back to the origins of culture and speech" (Rose, "State and Language" 88). The intersection of stories around a child figure is part of a continuum of children and narrative, through which there are power struggles between imagination and freedom and repression and control.

The conflict between how society attempts to constrict and mould children and their own imaginative capacity is prevalent in the narratives of both of Fraillon's texts. They present this conflict within differing means of communication, alternative forms of language and writing which challenge prescribed words used by authority. In *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* Rose argues that the emphasis on language and literature teaching for British working class children (and, by extension, the working class who were the majority of new settlers to the colonies) in the early years of the school system was directed to descriptions of the physical world and actions. This was designed for those who were intended merely as labourers and factory units (Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan* 123). Rose argues that this prescriptive use of language was a "linguistic prototype for a late nineteenth-century imperialism (increasing control of an empirically knowable world)" (*The Case of Peter Pan* 122). Children, and their use of language (their means of story-telling) were manipulated to enforce the claims of Empire: there was "a long colonial history which lines up under one banner childhood, the beginnings of language and the origins of the race" (Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan* 122). Language and childhood are therefore fundamental to an enforced social structure and an imposed form of collective psychology where they become intrinsic to a mythological sense of self, a sense that in the colonial era was bound up with notions of superiority to other races. In the context of this, Fraillon's use of imaginative forms of communication and narration by her child characters is an act of rebellion.

As Empires extended European power to so many other countries around the world, the level of control was also directed internally. Jenks discusses Foucault's analysis of the development of discipline and control in Western societies from the mid-eighteenth centuries "parallel with Rousseau's announcement of the modern child" (66-68). Jenks asserts that the "individual, whether adult or child, when rendered object itself becomes instrumental in the exercise of power" and he goes on to refer to "surveillance, in the form of child care" proliferating in its "intensity and penetration" through the agency of medical professionals, psychometric tests, examinations, social workers and schools (Jenks 68-9). If the child is controlled then there is a good chance that they will grow into an adult who is controlled.

The lost child is at the heart of our history. It is often hidden, forgotten or deliberately obscured like the Child Migrants, but the multitudes of stories do pass on through time. Together with the stories, the experiences of suffering are also communicated from one era to the next. Apart from the psychological impact of children growing up with the stresses and anxieties of their parents, some studies have found that trauma actually changes the way genes are expressed. These genes are then inherited by the children of parents who have been traumatised (Bodkin). This genetic inheritance of trauma recalls the psychoanalytical concept of the "phantom," formulated by Abraham and Torok, where a family secret becomes buried, unable to be spoken about (Rand in Abraham and Torok 174). The unsayable becomes, in subsequent generations, a "psychically mute zone" which creates an "absence" in the parent which their child is "compelled to incorporate" (Yassa 83). Abraham and Torok use the term "crypt" for the psychological burying of secrets that can lay dormant for a generation or

more, and then surface in the form of a psychological disturbance years later. Their theory "enables us to understand how the falsification, ignorance, or disregard of the past" through institutions or within the individual "is the breeding ground of the phantomatic return of shameful secrets on the level of individuals, families, the community, and possibly even entire nations" (Rand in Abraham and Torok 179). My argument is that lost children, whether figuratively in fictional representations, or in actual family and national histories, are the absence which highlights the 'falsification' which controls us.

The lost child figure in literature and culture is an absent presence like the phantom of Abraham and Torok. Bharat has identified the use of the "abiku-child" trope within African literature: the abiku-child is "born, dies, is born again and dies in a repetitive cycle" (Bharat 35). Bharat uses the example of Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* where the child hero/narrator, Azaro, "spends his life playing hide and seek with the spirit world. He becomes representative of the African for whom there was a close link between the real, palpable world and the world of spirits" (qtd. in Bharat 35). This is also symbolic of the struggle of fledgling nations that have been colonies, and the possibility that these can be rejuvenated after cycles of destruction. Bharat argues that "Okri's use of the spirit-child in his book thus fuses magic, metaphor and traditional beliefs in one protean text that is political as well as mythical" (Bharat 35-6). Azaro also voices the repetition of a form of child consciousness through time: "I had no idea whether these images belonged to this life, or to a previous one, or to one that was yet to come, or even if they were merely the host of images that invades the minds of all children" (Okri 7). This is a communal memory which is specific to children, perhaps from children who never made it to adulthood who are condemned to continually return as a revenant, haunting the present and future of the society which killed them. The lost children who are victims of oppression are obscured from history but their stories seep through.

It is in the space between memory, history and the imagination that the lost child exists. Fraillon interweaves narratives of realistic traumas, based on factual events, with familiar tropes from myths and fairy-tales, displaying the power struggles between imagination and material power. Fraillon shows how stories can provide people with a means of re-interpreting themselves or their place in the world, if, like the child heroes of these two novels, the 'reader' interacts with the narrative, even if only within their own imagination, to effect change. In *No Stars to Wish On*, Jack steals a book from the doctor who has been visiting the Home to test vaccinations on the children. He does it because he needs "evidence" (*No Stars* 139) which he will then give to police. It may be idealistic to believe that the police would act on this, against the authorities for whom they removed the children from their families, but the principle that a child should combine use of the imagination with practical actions to confront authority is clearly a lesson which Fraillon wants to convey to her young readers. In *The Bone Sparrow*, Subhi gives evidence so that the truth is known about his friend Eli's murder (221). The lost children find their place by becoming witnesses, speaking out to bring justice for the forgotten.

However, there is the counter force within narrative that seeks to impose a position, a point of view, and encloses the reader. This conflict between the imaginary and the prescriptive is present, for example, in the genre of fairy tale. Bruno Bettleheim's well known analysis of fairy and folk tales argues that a 'true' example of the genre is one which enables the child who listens or reads to pursue their own internal quest (5). Bettleheim sees the role of such tales as enabling internal growth within the child. The tale known commonly in English-speaking versions as "Little Red Riding Hood," exemplifies, for Bettleheim, the distinction

between the original aims of such tales (in his view) and the imposition by later writers of a moralising and restrictive narrative (167). The original oral folk tale on which "Little Red Riding Hood" was based symbolised a girl's transition to womanhood and also narrated her overcoming the wolf (or werewolf) through her own cunning and resourcefulness. This was changed significantly by Charles Perrault in the first known literary version of the tale in the eighteenth century. Whereas the original peasant girl is "forthright, brave, and shrewd," Perrault wrote Little Red Riding Hood as "pretty, spoiled, gullible, and helpless" (Zipes, *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* 9). Her faults lead her to be consumed by the wolf, punished for her deviance from the prescribed route and behaviour. This new fate was given to the girl in line with new codes of socialisation that were developing in Perrault's time (Zipes, *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* 9). Bettleheim complains that Perrault's tale "is not—and was not intended by Perrault to be—a fairy tale, but a cautionary story which deliberately threatens the child with its anxiety-inducing ending" (167). Bettleheim goes on from this to assert that it "seems that many adults think it better to scare children into good behaviour than to relieve their anxieties as a true fairy tale does" (Bettleheim 167). Jack Zipes argues that Perrault introduces "a new child, the helpless girl, who subconsciously contributed to her own rape" (*The Trials and Tribulations* 10). The literary version "contributed to an image of Little Red Riding Hood which was to make her life more difficult than it had ever been" (Zipes, *The Trials and Tribulations* 10). If these words were put into a different context, it could be referring to the way an abuser, perhaps an abusive parent, or even a repressive society, has forced a resourceful, spirited girl to become a victim.

The fairy tale has always existed as both a means of transmitting the social codes and prohibitions of a society at the same time as questioning authority (Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* xi). Like the figure of the child, the tale has become an ambiguous site used as, or considered to be, a means of either positive transformation or negative manipulation and control. The novelist Janet Frame asks in her posthumously published novel *Towards Another Summer*, "why so many stories are of boys and girls who set out with a message or to make a journey and never deliver the message or reach the end of the journey because they are seized by wolves" (Frame 160). She identifies an abiding message that her young self internalised, like many boys and girls over the years: people, individually or collectively, will try to prevent the child from fulfilling their quest. Zipes asserts in his introduction to Grimms' original collection that their tales "frequently depict the disputes that young protagonists have with their parents; children brutally treated and abandoned; … young women persecuted; sibling rivalry; exploitation and oppression of young people; dangerous predators" but also "Death punishing greedy people and rewarding a virtuous boy" (Zipes in Grimm and Grimm xxxv). Although children do often achieve something positive at the end of many tales, I argue that the stories normalise children's subjection to neglect and even torture; suffering is portrayed as a necessary rite of passage.

Marina Warner refers to the "unspeakable—unbelievable—acts" which are "spoken of" in fairy and folk tales and are now "echoed, week by week, in the news" (79). When reports of child torture, imprisonment and rape are heard on our television and computer screens, "then fairy tales can be recognized as witnesses to every aspect of human nature. They also act to alert us—or hope to" (Warner 79). Warner argues that the function of fairy tales in the past was to say the 'unsayable' in a way which "encode[d] them cryptically for the younger generation to absorb" (80). In the current age, children as well as adults can watch the horrors "unfold in the media" but "recognition and familiarity with the possibility does not seem to have sharpened sensitivity or produced change, only increased a general fear for children's

safety" (Warner 80). The imaginary has become the real and the barrage of images of the horrors inflicted on children seems only to increase the propensity to 'lose' children in our society, even if it is only because the anxiety of children and parents means more children are kept away from the world to protect them.

Fraillon's novels equate forgetting in history with silence in language: the hidden needs to be acknowledged and given voice. Subhi needs stories because he doesn't have any memories of the world outside the camp. He needs to hear the stories of other refugees to stand in place of memory, to stop him 'getting squished down to nothing' (*The Bone Sparrow* 152). There is a constant struggle to retain, or develop, a sense of self amid the detention centre's confinement. The life in the camp enforces the isolation which most refugees experienced before they were forced to leave the country they grew up in. Subhi's family are Rohingya, expelled from Burma. As is mentioned in the text of *The Bone Sparrow*, and by Fraillon in her Afterword, the Rohingya have for decades been told they don't exist as a people (36). Although their situation has only recently exploded into the public notice in Europe, the tragedies shown on our television screens are centuries old. The refugees in the camp in general describe themselves as "invisible" because many in the outside world are ignorant of their existence, or their true plight, and the authorities enforce this with censorship. Subhi's sister, Queenie, takes photographs of the camp to send "Outside" so people "will remember us," because the authorities have "dumped" them in a remote place so "everyone forgets us" and the refugees "don't even exist" (*The Bone Sparrow*106). The Rohingya, and refugees from all places, are so often denied agency or a dignified existence, placed in a limbo between countries, apart from the rest of humanity.

Queeny tells Subhi, in *The Bone Sparrow*, that she is "sick of being invisible" and their plan to get photos of the camp conditions out to the press will mean, "even if only a few people see," that "I'm not invisible any more" (123). Subhi remembers how new refugees arrive at the camp happy until they realise "that this here is just one big cage of invisible people who no one believes are even real" (123). Fraillon's novels offer a hope, or at least an appeal that there should be hope, that the invisible and silent will emerge from their cages. Subhi wonders whether the children who arrive and then lose their "happy" will ever "find their voices out there somewhere" (123). He, as a child born into the camp and never knowing anything else, has previously found it difficult to understand his sister's complaint about "being invisible." But his meetings with the girl from outside, Jimmie, have given him a different perspective:

> Like someone is really seeing me, really listening. I haven't felt like that before. So when Queeny asks me if I understand, I do. And I wonder if maybe that's how everyone is feeling. I wonder if maybe that's the sad angry sick that's all over the place and funking up the air.
>
> And I wish I didn't understand, because understanding doesn't fix it. Understanding just makes it worse. (*The Bone Sparrow* 124)

The introduction of an Other who connects him to the external world gives him a greater sense of self, as he sees himself through the eyes of another person; a person who gives him agency as a friend who she can confide in and who also, crucially, gives her access to her past and to alternative narratives with his ability to read her mother's notebook. Unfortunately, the awareness of his own self as a human being, and the knowledge that there is a world outside which excludes him and his family and friends, opens up a deeper understanding that he is being confined and denied his freedom as that human self. It is a negative version of the realisation of subjectivity discovered by the slave Equiano.

When there is a riot in the camp and Subhi's friend Eli is killed by the sadistic guard, Beaver, Subhi tells the reader, "If this is the real world Queenie keeps telling me about, then I don't want to be a part of it. I want to think on a story, but even my stories are gone" (*The Bone Sparrow* 198). In the world of perverse brutality, where children can be taken from loving families and put into harsh 'care' homes, or a child can be born in a refugee camp and never leave its boundaries, the established, dominant narratives have invalidated any claims to truth. In both novels, the institutions which oppress the child heroes find it easy to avoid outside scrutiny and criticism. In *No Stars to Wish On*, when the Governors inspect the Home the children are all given new clothes to wear and toys to play with. Then, as soon as they leave, everything is taken away from them (103-4). Officials either turn a blind eye to abuses or do not look sufficiently deeply. In *The Bone Sparrow* refugees are given better food when "Government people" or human rights observers arrive (84). The structured world, the world governed by official words and actions, is a world of fabrication and deceit. In such a world, the imagination is required to provide truth.

As already discussed, Fraillon's two novels show many forms of both alternative narratives and alternative ways of communicating which subvert established forms. Apart from Jimmie's book and Subhi's mother's stories, in *The Bone Sparrow*, Subhi has an imaginary friend in the form of a plastic duck. The duck is known as the "Shakespeare duck" as it is "wearing a blue jacket and under its wing is a bit of paper with writing on it that says *To quack or not to quack*" (16-17). The nice camp guard, Harvey, tells Subhi that Shakespeare "wrote plays—he's famous" (17) but Subhi doesn't know what "plays" are. As Subhi then goes on to exchange childish jokes with the duck, I argue that Fraillon is subverting the idea of a literary canon, or any form of writing or language which is given prominence over others. In *No Stars to Wish On*, Jack also loves jokes and a selection of them punctuates each chapter. He uses humour as a way of combating the nuns, making the other children laugh at them to undermine their authority (151-7). Jack believes, "if I tell enough jokes, some kids will smile, and then maybe the smiles will spread. Like a disease, only a good one … they might even infect the Nuns" (42)—an alternative transmission from child to child, positive but subversive. Comedy is a use of language which reverses established hierarchies and reveals absurdities in life. When Jack is first put in the Hole, one of three boiler rooms which the nuns use to put the children in solitary confinement as punishment, he writes jokes on the walls, near the floor as "kids here would need really good jokes to cheer them up" (79). Some children are kept in the Hole for a whole week, like one girl who, ever since, has "been stuck in her own head" and makes everyone "feel sad. And scared" (75-6).

Another subversion of "normal" communication is Jack's deafness. This is convenient for the narrative, as Jack is able to pick up some pieces of information from the nuns by lip-reading when they talk unguardedly knowing he cannot hear. The nuns also think, at first, that Jack cannot speak, so he is in a category of silence in his own world, and in the perception of those in authority. He reads and offers signs that are outside human language: he finds drawings left by the previous Number 49 and interprets these as clues to a way to escape the Home and get back to his family; he in turn draws pictures under his bed to provide clues for anyone who comes after him; he 'reads' the appearances of spiders and mice, seeing them as friends to be protected who will help him overcome the nuns. The communication with spiders recalls the 'prophecy' referred to at the beginning of the novel when Amrei finds a mark in the shape of a spider on her shoulder which the "Greats" (the old matriarchs of the family) advise means Amrei can see into the future.

Jack is continually looking for clues which he thinks have been left by the previous Number 49, clues which will enable him to find out how the boy whose clothes he wears escaped the Home and returned to his family. Tragically, Jack finds out that Number 49 did not escape. The crucial discovery comes when Jack digs down through a rubbish pile at the Home. This is described as a "timeline," like an archive, as Jack digs down through the layers of rubbish, "deep enough for a time when the real Number 49 was here" (92). Jack uncovers a single shoe with the number 49 written on it. An older girl, Charlie, who knew the original Number 49, tells Jack that she saw the Director of the Home carrying a sack early in the morning and Number 49's shoe had dropped out. The boy had become sick after being used for trials of vaccinations, a practice which took place in many institutions. The Australian Senate Community Affairs References Committee report titled *Forgotten Australians* states that children "in orphanages and Homes have been used for medical experiments for many decades" (114). The starkness of this statement is shocking enough without further details of particular cases, such as the attempt to vaccinate against herpes simplex with eighty-three babies at St Joseph's Broadmeadows between March 1946 and April 1948. In both experiments "children contracted the disease, leading to the conclusion that the vaccination was of no benefit in preventing primary herpetic infection under the conditions of the study" (Senate Community Affairs References Committee 115).

That this is one of many such cases indicates that the actions of those responsible for the incarceration of children, often carried out when those children had living families, cannot simply be classed as misguided attempts to improve the children's lives. The children were viewed as inferior human beings, not deserving of the rights and respect accorded to others. The actions of those regarded as 'authorities' can be classified as attempts at eugenics, or at the least an authoritarian form of population and mind control.

The previous Number 49 in *No Stars to Wish On* was at first told he was faking illness, and then refused the necessary hospital treatment. The other children were told he had run away. Charlie makes a point of telling Jack the details of his predecessor's death because, he realises, "we mustn't forget each other. Even though I didn't know the real Number 49 before, I do now, and I will never forget" (134-135). There is a need to make the hidden visible to have an effect on the world, and Jack steals the doctor's papers as 'evidence' to give to the police. The two novels I am discussing are set in different times in history, one decades ago and one in the present day, which confronts us with the knowledge that abuses of children are still happening now and form part of a pattern. It is important, at a time when there is a British inquiry into institutional child abuse, an inquiry which includes child migration to Australia and other colonies, that we do not establish a memorial which becomes a monolith gathering dust and fixes an event in the past, so that people believe that terrible actions are only possible in another time, or another place. The inquiry into institutional abuse, although important if it does uncover past crimes, may have the effect of pushing the perception of such abuse into the past, making it a historical aberration committed by people in a different era with different sensibilities. That would exclude the reality that this abuse is more widespread even than the far-reaching enquiry and is still a present and ongoing danger to children now.

It is significant that Jack digs down through the "timeline" of the rubbish pile after he has been in the Hole. This is symbolic of how a void, a gap in our world, a place of despair, can be a step to uncovering something previously hidden about the world, revisiting the established narratives of how society is constructed to create a new interpretation which reveals a deeper truth. Jack later discovers the pile was deliberately placed over the place

where the original Number 49 was buried. Symbolically, the lost child *is the void* over which the "archive" is placed, an emptiness which simultaneously gives history true meaning while also revealing the negative squandering of life and the obscuring of truth.

This scene is reminiscent of Josephine McDonagh's analysis of part of George Eliot's *Adam Bede*. In Eliot's novel, Hetty Sorrel, a milkmaid seduced and then abandoned by a squire's son, buries her new-born child in a woodpile. She later returns there, haunted by her lost child, and is arrested. Her transgressive femininity cannot be reconciled within the ideal of the progressive nation of Britain. Child murder was perceived as only possibly committed by those from "savage nations" (McDonagh 128). McDonagh argues that Eliot's vision of Britain, which "forgets" the violent uprisings and injustices which are part of its existence, is like Hetty's burial of her child in a forlorn hope that it will be found and saved. The burial is an "allegorical enactment of the process of nation-making by forgetting … it screens us from the material that it tries to forget; but paradoxically, the screen also acts as a trigger to memories of precisely the material that is repressed" (McDonagh 132). Hetty is drawn back to the body of the child but it is already gone, an absence which incriminates. Interestingly, her punishment is exile to Australia, the scene of much of the British violence which has been disavowed by Eliot's narrative.

A lost child figure within a narrative, within writing, can act as an alternative archive to disrupt established history. McDonagh's monograph on the cultural impact of child murder in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, argues that "the inclusion of child murder in a text" punctures and "deflates the even contours of meaning and narrative, and the chronology on which they depend" (11). The lost child figure bears an individual "historical memory" which "opens the possibility of counter-histories that question the authority of conventional, progressive accounts. The murder of a child ruptures the surface of the text in which it appears by obtruding a narrative of a different kind, introducing the potential for rich interpretive complexity" (McDonagh 11-12). While lost children provide a connection through time, a continuity of suffering which is its own history, each individual story is a history in itself which punctures the established narrative that humankind is progressing through time, towards an enlightened age when such trauma does not exist.

The Forgotten Generation of Australians suffered a form of burial, abandoned in institutions like tombs, their existence negated. Sadly, many children in care homes in the UK have also suffered similar experiences. The current Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse taking place in the UK is investigating widespread sexual abuse across decades, carried out in, or permitted by, a variety of institutions, including those involved in Child Migration ("Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse"). The child becomes lost in the system, lost to their families, lost as a child in the denial of their youth, lost to themselves with the damage to their identities. When children are broken into pieces, they can be made into units of production, objectified as less than human, a number like the character Jack, Number 49.

The oppression of society may be more obvious in the cases described in these novels but I would argue they also highlight a wider control. The private pain of the individual and the silent stories of the forgotten and the locked away resonate from our pasts and traumatise our future. The lost child will always be buried beneath our history; just as fairy-tales are part of a continuum which connects to the media images we are presented with today. It is a history, a story, which transcends time and geographical location; the lost child is a void within all of us. Those that wish to control the narrative, do it by controlling or destroying children. If we

are to break this control, we need to dig deep beneath the pile of rubbish and discover the signifiers and symbols which have been excluded from us.

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