Neo-Victorian Naughty Children:
Double Narratives, *Struwwelpeter*
and (Mis)Reading Misbehaviour

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Abstract:
This essay enters into a recent debate in neo-Victorian criticism, namely the problematic representation of children in literature. In my analysis of Clare Dudman's *98 Reasons for Being* (2004) and Jane Harris's *Gillespie and I* (2011), I explore the issues of voice(lessness) and (unreliable) narration in relation to neo-Victorian re-constructions of disorder, (mis)behaviour, childhood, and the figure of the naughty child. The notion of neo-Victorianism's double nature provides the point of departure for my discussion, in which I extend the idea of 'double narratives' to notions of the *Doppelgänger*, fragmented fictions and split selves, which lay bare the genre's strong connection with the Gothic. Furthermore, I illustrate how the world-famous book of children's rhymes, *Struwwelpeter* (1844), haunts both narratives to a strikingly Gothic effect.

Keywords: children, disorder, *Gillespie and I*, Gothic, Heinrich Hoffmann, misbehaviour, monstrosity, neo-Victorian, *98 Reasons for Being*, *Struwwelpeter*.

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Yet, though he feels so weak and ill,
The naughty fellow cries out still
'Not any soup for me, I say:
O take the nasty soup away;
I won't have any soup today.'
[…]
Look at him, now the fourth day's come!
He scarce outweighs a sugar-plum;
He's like a little bit of thread;
And on the fifth day he was dead.
(Dudman 2004: 235-236)

Neo-Victorian fiction is in many ways double natured. As a site that at once embraces past and present, the Victorian and the contemporary, fact

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and fiction, the neo-Victorian novel involves a double take on rewriting and often relies upon a dual vision. The neo-Victorian double narrative also testifies to the genre's strong connection with the Gothic. Although there are many examples of doubles in literary history, a recognisable shift occurred during Romanticism when, as Roger Luckhurst notes,

> the literature of the double became one of the privileged ways of exploring the mysteries of the modern self, a subjectivity marked less by rationality, order, and coherence than by dream, nightmare, and psychological multiplicity. From the Romantic era, the opening up of the vast interiors of the self seems to have made us strangers to ourselves: the double is the emblem of this self-estrangement. (Luckhurst 2006: xv)

In Luckhurst's terms, then, the double serves a potential educational function vis-à-vis the reader by facilitating a form of unsettling self-knowledge.

Implicitly, the double also links back to the evolution of individual psychology from childhood, which "came to be seen as a time of complex and unruly passions that formed, foreshadowed, and at times threatened the adult world" (Moore 2017: n.p.). Often associated with the rise of Freudian psychoanalysis – to which, of course, the child is central – late Victorian Doppelgänger narratives appear increasingly "frenzied, disordered, and dreamlike", revealing a "dynamic of condensation and displacement" (Luckhurst 2006: xxxii). Yet some of these aspects, albeit to a lesser degree, were already apparent in earlier Victorian Gothic writing, such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). Not coincidentally, various Victorian novels, ranging from Brontë's novel to Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), feature rebellious, disorderly, or 'othered' children, subdued by sometimes cruel disciplinary measures administered by adults. Today the unruly or uncanny child figure recurs as a prominent trope in neo-Victorian fiction.

Doubling remains important to neo-Victorianism in other ways also, since the textual structure of neo-Victorian novels often enacts a doubling of a precursor text. Reflecting on the neo-Victorian novel as an uncanny and spectral form, Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham point out that

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> Freud's list of psychological triggers for uncanny sensations
> include the double [...] and the familiar made strange. If we
> consider these in relation to the neo-Victorian novel, its
> uncanny nature proves clear: it often represents a "double" of
> the Victorian text mimicking its language, style and plot; it
> plays with the conscious repetition of tropes, characters, and
> historical events; it reanimates Victorian genres [...] and, in
> doing so, seemingly calls the contemporary novel's "life"
> into question; it defamiliarizes our preconceptions of
> Victorian society; and it functions as a form of revenant, a
> ghostly visitor from the past that infiltrates our present.
> (Arias and Pulham 2010: xv)

So, if the Gothic form is, in this sense, intrinsically *heimlich/unheimlich*, the inherently spectral and uncanny nature of neo-Victorian texts only confirms Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben's claim that "*neo-Victorianism is by nature quintessentially Gothic*" (Kohlke and Gutleben 2012: 4, original emphasis). Furthermore, much of the more sophisticated and stimulating postmillennial neo-Victorian fiction not only defamiliarises the Victorian (as described by Arias and Pulham), but also the *neo-Victorian*. That is, even as writers endlessly recycle by now well-known neo-Victorian forms, traits, and tropes (including the uncanny child), these seemingly defining characteristics of neo-Victorian practice are in turn disturbed and reconfigured to disrupt reader expectations. The two novels I concentrate on in this essay are good examples of this approach.

At first glance, Clare Dudman's *98 Reasons for Being* (2004) and Jane Harris's *Gillespie and I* (2011) may appear to be rather disparate works with regard to plot, tone and theme. The first is a fictional revisitation of the work of a historical German physician, Heinrich Hoffmann, and the latter consists of two parallel texts, a memoir and a personal diary, from which the reader pieces together the motives behind a series of mysterious and violent events. However, as I will illustrate, the two novels have much in common. Both display a critical reworking of popular neo-Victorian Gothic tropes, by means of which they call modern norms and practices into question, and both reflect upon continuities in processes of othering. Central to this reworking is their (re)conceptualisation of children and childhood. Moreover, Hoffmann's world-famous children's book *Struwwelpeter* (1844)

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is another, and indeed, crucial device that links Dudman's and Harris's fictions. In both novels, *Struwwelpeter* functions as a Gothic double that foreshadows the fates of several of the characters, and remains a haunting reminder of failed attempts either to instil good behaviour or to 'read' children right. Moreover, the spectre of *Struwwelpeter* evokes actual and symbolic violence, including silencing, inflicted upon children as the most vulnerable of society, frequently denied agency and self-representation. Ultimately, this essay seeks to address the practice of neo-Victorian fiction itself with a focus on self-reflection and the complexities of voicing. It may be that neo-Victorian literature does not endeavour to uncover some kind of universal truth and rather "explores the ground between writing as though there are no persisting truths [...] and writing as though there is indeed a recoverable past" (Shiller 1997: 540-541). And yet, as the venerable proverb reminds us: children and fools always speak the truth. How, then, might the genre enable (neo-)Victorian children to speak to the present?

1.   Revisiting Disorder and Hoffmann's Didactics in Verse

98 Reasons for Being is set in the mid-nineteenth century Germany on the outskirts of Frankfurt am Main.[1] The narrative builds on a re-vision of the life of the historical Doctor Heinrich Hoffmann, who dedicated his life, from the age of forty-two, to the treatment of psychiatric patients at the Frankfurt lunatic asylum. As Johannes Thome and Kerrin A. Jacobs have pointed out, Hoffmann

> undertook major efforts to improve the conditions of psychiatric patients by introducing novel medical treatment; he [...] rejected the notion of psychiatric patients being criminal or obsessed [and] tried to alter public opinion on the mentally ill. (Thome and Jacobs 2004: 304)

Moreover, recent investigation points to Hoffmann as the first to describe Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, now commonly known as ADHD, a condition which tends to be thought of, at least in the popular imagination, as a contemporary disorder. However, as Thome and Jacobs observe, while Hoffmann provided an astonishingly clear symptomatology of ADHD as early as in 1846, "not[ing] all the details which today would lead to a clear diagnosis", the physician and practitioner failed to understand the disorder

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as such, reading it rather as "misbehaviour" (Thome and Jacobs 2004: 305). In doing so, Hoffmann disrupted the notion of childhood innocence, "which was the prevailing concept of his time", and constructed instead "a rather forward-thinking children's psychology", which anticipated the later work of Sigmund Freud, who would praise Hoffmann for his insights (Thome and Jacobs 2004: 305).

Dudman had previously fictionalised the story of a historical figure, winning a writer's award from the Arts Council of England for her novel, *One Day the Ice Will Reveal All Its Dead* (2003), in which she revives the late nineteenth-century, German geologist Alfred Wegener, the first scientist to propose the idea of continental drift. In his lifetime, Wegener was laughed at by his peers and considered half-mad, yet scientists and experts in the field now acknowledge his theories. Despite today's scientific *and* popular interest in continental drift as directly related to significant environmental and climatic changes (as Wegener argued), the scientific pioneer himself remains virtually unknown by the broader public: "Dudman sets out to right that historic wrong" by restoring the voice of Wegener himself in this 'imaginary memoir'" (Barcott 2004: 18).

Dudman, herself a trained scientist, continues her renegotiations of historic wrongs in revisiting the life of Hoffmann who, like Wegener, was a pioneer in his profession. *98 Reasons for Being* allows the reader to peer behind the walls of Hoffmann's mental hospital, granting us access to his lifework and to the patients who, the novel suggests, were *his* reasons for being. Despite his innovative methods and revolutionary discoveries in the field of psychiatry, however, Hoffmann has gone down in history, above all, for authoring *Struwwelpeter*, a collection of illustrated cautionary tales in rhyming couplets, written for his oldest son Carl Philipp. Hoffman's book, known in English as *Shockheaded Peter*, was an immediate success. In less than a year after its publication in Germany, it was translated into several different languages and sold worldwide. Hoffmann lived to see the 176th edition, although he had never intended to publish the rhymes. The work has remained in print for 170 years and, as Barbara Smith Chalou observes, has been repeatedly "parodied" as well as "inspir[ing] a host of imitations and spin-offs including decks of cards, children's games, and posters" (Smith Chalou 2007: 1). In Smith Chalou's view, "[t]he unprecedented commercial success of the *Struwwelpeter* stories, coupled with their endurance and

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lasting appeal, have distinguished this collection of stories as perhaps one of the most significant children's books of our time" (Smith Chalou 2007: 1).

At one level, *98 Reasons for Being* sets out to provide a more rounded depiction of Hoffmann and his lifework. As the author herself explains in an interview, writing the novel involved

> a lot of research. [...] I read lots of papers of the time and many books. I also visited Frankfurt several times and examined things [...] some of Hoffmann's memoirs, a biography and his casebook [and] from these small number [sic] of facts of how Hoffmann lived and worked I expended [sic] this into fiction. (Dudman qtd. in Wonham 2006: n.p.)

However, in its aim to bring forth the individual rather than the collective narrative, the novel introduces us not only to the doctor but also, very significantly, to his patients. By prioritising "subjectivity in examinations of madness rather than the dryly objectifying aims of diagnosis and classification", as Charley Baker et al. suggest, fictionalised perspectives "on the historical development of psychiatry as a medical discipline" thus come to reveal the "human imperative for self-narration [...] the need to construct and tell our own stories and [...] for these stories to be heard and acknowledged" (Baker et al. 2010: 70-71). Significantly, it is through his relationship with his patients that we come to see Hofmann beyond his role as a doctor and practicing psychiatrist, namely as a husband and father, and as a man with personal problems, frustrations and flaws. This re-presentation returns us to Hoffmann the children's book author and to *Struwwelpeter*.

At the beginning of the story, we learn that Hoffmann accepts to treat a traumatised, young woman, Hannah, who has been rejected by other doctors because she is Jewish (I have not found any evidence that suggests she was in fact a real-life patient in the asylum). Hannah becomes Hoffmann's favourite patient, perhaps due to the complexity of her disorder that urges Hoffmann to seek new forms of treatment. While the racial aspect is important to Dudman's creation of the character of Hannah as other, the author's renegotiations of her perceived monstrosity are arguably more interesting for their focus upon the mechanisms of othering, which the novel implies are intrinsically related to voicelessness. From the reader's

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perspective, the doctor's monologues offer an opening into his blurry and fragmented dialogues with his patient, and we bear witness to the powerful workings of the so-called 'talking cure'.[2] That is, it is precisely Hoffmann's increasingly personal accounts that awaken Hannah's dormant memories. Alongside the doctor's talking, we are let into the girl's inner thoughts and impressions, which are initially chaotic, fragmented, almost unintelligible. Hannah herself frequently wonders: "*Am I talking now or thinking? It is difficult to tell* [...] *Am I still talking? Maybe I am*" (Dudman 2004: 161-162, original italics). As time goes by, Hannah's memories and traumas gradually find less abstract forms of expression until, eventually, she is able to literally *speak* in a language that others can hear and understand. Although Hannah's words are first audible only to herself (and the reader), the novel provides Hannah with a voice, allowing the young woman to recount the tragic events leading to her disorder. As the fragments come together, Hannah's story is revealed. We learn she fell in love with the 'wrong' man, and became alienated from the Jewish community and her own family. After giving birth alone in the woods to a premature baby girl who died, she attempted to drown herself. Hannah's recall helps not only the reader (and Hoffmann) to make sense of her fragmented narrative and self – which are analogous in this case – but also aids Hannah herself. For example, it is not until she shares her traumatic experience with Hoffman that she even realises that she has given birth.[3] The novel, in effect, stresses not only the need for self-narration, but also the importance of dialogue for that self-narration to take place.

Many examples of twenty-first-century neo-Victorian novels are concerned with (medical) misreadings of women and their bodies. The "female insane", as Nadine Muller has observed, has become a key trope in neo-Victorian fiction in the new millennium, which "has become known for its almost obligatory illustrations of [...] female madness" and explorations of "the power relations and manipulative narratives of the [medical] discipline" (Muller 2009: 1). Misreading indeed proves a crucial issue in relation to Hannah, yet Dudman's novel does more than criticise "the ways in which medicine, particularly in the area of mental health, can overwrite women's bodies and the stories they tell" (Muller 2009: 3); the text also explores the intrinsic relationship between voice(lessness), norm(alcy) and (dis)order. The pathologisation of Hannah, the disorder itself and its cure, wholly depend upon her (in)ability to think and express herself in coherent

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language. In this sense, the fragmented story and the fissured female merge. In order to put the pieces together to form a whole, Dudman provides the 'female insane' not only with a voice, but also with a dialogic textual context. Consequently, the digging out of Hannah's story by means of dialogue works here as an analogy for the neo-Victorian project of recuperating the forgotten memories and silenced narratives of the past.

While Hannah's and Hoffmann's parallel stories provide one entrance into the double narrative of *98 Reasons for Being*, the novel's incorporation of several of the short tales from *Struwwelpeter* offers another. The illustrated rhymes, including 'Johnny Head-In-Air', 'Fidgety Philip', 'Cruel Frederick', and 'Harriet and the Matches', underscore events at the asylum and in Hoffman's family sphere. I opened this article with an epigraph from 'Augustus Who Would Not Have Any Soup', which in Dudman's novel appears immediately after the passing of another of Hoffmann's patients, Grete Richter, who dies from anorexia. Like Augustus who "make[s] himself so pale and thin" (Dudman 2004: 235), Grete gradually becomes weaker and thinner until "the ulna and radius bones of her forearm are clearly outlined; when [Hoffmann] pinches her skin there is just that – skin, no flesh at all" (Dudman 2004: 196). The woman finally starves herself to death. The rhyme thus works as a clear analogue to and summing up of the sad development of Grete's eating disorder. Similarly, 'The Story of the Inky Boys' – about a group of naughty boys who tease "[t]he woolly-headed black-a-moor" (Dudman 2004: 138) and end up being severely punished for their racist behaviour – follows Hoffmann's personal remembrance of how he became aware of the degree and effects of segregation existing in his society. In the rhyme the boys learn their lesson the hard way: they are disciplined by being dipped into ink, until they resemble their erstwhile black victim, who "enjoys the fun" of seeing them humiliated:

> They have been made as black as crows,
> Quite black all over, eyes and nose,
> And legs, and arms, and heads, and toes.
> And trowsers, pinafores, and toys, –
> The silly little inky boys!
> Because they set up such a roar,
> And teas'd the harmless black-a-moor. (Dudman 2004: 139)

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The naughty boys' reputations are literally forever blackened. To Hoffmann, the painful memory of the consequences of racial and religious discrimination is equally lasting. During his university studies, the young doctor witnesses the humiliating treatment of a Jewish, fellow colleague, which triggers a painful awareness of the prevailing antisemitism in his society. This experience becomes the starting point for making religious antidiscrimination his cause: "When I spoke of revolution it is that [sic] I meant. All faiths should have equal rights […] I petitioned the council, I set up a citizen association to help craftsmen and scholars find accommodation whatever their religion" (Dudman 2004: 136). Hoffmann never gave up on his vision of religious equality and he fought for it with all the means he had. Indeed, the young doctor was a man who truly wanted to change things: "I have always been a revolutionary", he tells Hannah, "I could see so many things that were wrong" (Dudman 2004: 143). And Hoffmann strongly believed that he could make a difference. At one point, he reflects: "it is the little things we do to each other that hurt us the most. Words, gestures, expressions that ridicule or ostracise […] [t]hey hurt forever, they are little sores that will not heal" (Dudman 2004: 135). However, little things also have the power to bring about positive changes. Hoffmann knew that. Being highly educated himself, he understood the value of education. Like the story about the disrespectful boys, which teaches children a moral lesson about respect for other people, Hoffmann's didactic verses were aimed at instructing, if implicitly, his young readers to become more egalitarian and compassionate citizens and develop their social (or Christian) conscience.

While a few of the *Struwwelpeter* rhymes quoted in *98 Reasons for Being* connect more ambiguously with the events in the narrative, most of them link directly to the personal account of Hoffmann, and come to work as expressions of his inner thoughts and preoccupations. Perhaps the most obvious is 'The Story of Fidgety Philip', which reflects Hoffmann's anxiety about his son Carl Philipp who, like the boy described in the tale, is perceived as a "naughty, restless child / growing still more rude and wild" (Dudman 2004: 115). Via creative displacement, the story depicts an everyday situation in the Hoffmann household:

> Thus Papa bade Phil behave;
> And mamma look'd very grave.

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> But fidgety Phil,
> He won't sit still;
> He wriggles
> And giggles,
> And then, I declare,
> Swings backwards and forwards
> And tilts up his chair
> Just like any rocking horse; –
> 'Philip! I am getting cross!'
> (Dudman 2004: 115)

Recently, critics have argued that *Struwwelpeter*'s success is rooted in the special dynamics of the book: "From the antithesis of a moralizing, fear-instilling text and a series of exaggerated illustrations, a synthesis of conflicting reactions emerges – a synthesis of indignation and delight, of fear and laughter" (Parrot 2010: 329). Oscillating between humour and horror, the simultaneously frightening and funny vein of the tales provokes at once a sense of disgust and pleasure.[4] Significantly, the grotesque "tension" (Parrot 2010: 329), which haunts the children's book, is transported into Dudman's novel. The effect is strikingly Gothic. The light tone and rhythm of the couplets make readers feel entertained, if momentarily, yet our smiles fade when we give a second thought to what we are actually reading: girls are burning to ashes and boys are being brutally punished. All amusement ends the moment we understand that the seemingly merry verses are in fact foreshadowing the grim fates of Hoffman's patients and his beloved son.

Medical discourse appears frequently in neo-Victorian fiction, proving a perfect fit for the Gothic because, to borrow the words of Anna Mundow, the "road of [medical] inquiry and experimentation […] is strewn with accidents, failures and horrors", given that "science, unlike faith, must learn from its mistakes" (Mundow 2005: 1). In Hoffmann's narrative, the intersection of medical discourse and the rhyming couplets originally written for his three-year-old son creates more than a grotesque tension: it lays the ground for the novel's uncanny atmosphere. Similarly to the most spine-chilling fictions of evil children, monstrous (living) dolls and killer clowns, the apparently innocent, if bizarre, children's rhymes of *Struwwelpeter*, when read alongside the fictionalised troubling events at the

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asylum and in Hoffman's home, evoke a familiarity that clashes with their out-of-placeness. This uncanny effect triggers a disturbing, even frightening atmosphere that plays a central role in the narrative.

The two central cases in the novel are Carl Philipp's apparent ADHD and Hannah's post-traumatic stress disorder. But the reader also becomes acquainted with an elderly patient suffering from creeping paralysis, as Multiple Sclerosis was known then, and we learn about the anorexic, obsessive-compulsive Grete and the transgendered Josef(ine). In effect, *98 Reasons for Being* teaches us that the existence of OCD, Multiple Sclerosis, anorexia, ADHD, (postpartum) trauma and depression and transgender are not symptomatic only of modern lifestyles, ideals and norms. We may have a more sophisticated knowledge about, as well as potentially more effective treatments for, the pathologies and psychological disorders presented in the novel. However, although transgender individuals and people who struggle with depression or other mental health conditions are no longer grouped together under the category of 'madness', or hidden away behind the walls of mental asylums, they are still all too often metaphorically if not physically isolated and incarcerated, still surrounded by taboos, myths and stigmatisation.[5] The majority (if not all) the disorders found in Dudman's novel continue to be misunderstood – not only at a societal level but also in a more aesthetic sense, as cultural (and literary) representation and visibility of disease, mental illness and non-normative sexuality remain marginalised. In reminding us of their existence in the nineteenth century, I would argue *98 Reasons for Being* simultaneously redirects our gaze towards present suffering. The novel, in this sense, underlines the continued need for re-negotiations of otherness.

Since the late twentieth century, numerous varieties of revisionist approaches, including fictional writing, have provided transforming insights into literary and cultural manifestations of medicine and their implications for the most vulnerable of society, including ethnic minorities, women and children. Several studies have shown how gendered, sexual(ised) and deviant bodies are still very much a cultural construction that relies on "dominant discursive and iconographic representations of medicine, illness and disease" (Lupton 2003: 3). Many recent inquiries into cultural translations of medical discourse on bodies, nature and health have confirmed that the intertextuality between medical(ised) and cultural discourses – as in the nineteenth century – continues to maintain and

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perpetuate instances of perceived deviance and monstrosity. This gives rise to fundamentally problematic and often polemic issues surrounding society's needed 're-education' about corporeality and identity politics; questions that need to be addressed, yet are hard to negotiate effectively, both on account of their complexities and their implication in current controversies. We might think here of the vexed conflicting definitions of a 'child' and 'children's rights' within UK law in relation to (criminal) responsibility and punishment (see Sharp 2016), not least the ongoing debates about outlawing parental smacking and other 'reasonable' corporeal chastisement.

Female Gothic writing has always lent itself readily to this difficult task of negotiating painful subjects and still does to this day, including in the neo-Victorian novel. Complex and problematic queries provide a driving force of this fiction, where current issues find a safe *and* effective mode of articulation, all the more so for the reader unsettlement they produce. As one clear example of this, Dudman strategically distances the present in order to more efficiently confront it, inviting readers to re-think the way we perceive and respond to otherness today.

2.   Between the Lines: Split Subjectivities and Monstrous Minors

Dudman (dis)places an array of pathological and culturally constructed sexual monstrosities into the nineteenth-century historical context, at the same time rendering them thoroughly recognisable to present-day readers. Through the patients' behaviours, symptoms and traits, readers are invited to reconsider their own responses from a double perspective. Before engaging further with *98 Reasons for Being*, I shall turn to Jane Harris's *Gillespie and I*, which similarly plays on double perspectives and reveals itself to be a double narrative in more than one sense.

The novel opens in Bloomsbury in 1933 as the ageing Harriet Baxter begins writing her book on "Ned Gillespie: artist, innovator, and forgotten genius; [her] dear friend and soul mate" (Harris 2011: xiii). However, what follows is less Ned's story than a Gothic tale of scandal, bribery, violent crime and mentally disturbed children. When Ned's youngest daughter, Rose, is kidnapped from a park near her family's home in Glasgow in 1888, Harriet, who is in her mid-thirties at this point, is arrested and tried as the mastermind behind the abduction. The girl is never found and Harriet goes free thanks to a lack of proof. The trial, unsurprisingly, ends Harriet's

friendship with the Gillespies. By the time of the verdict, the Gillespie family has been destroyed: the parents are on the verge of divorce, and the older daughter, the nine-year-old Sibyl, has had a nervous breakdown after the loss of her sister, subsequently being confined to a mental hospital. Alongside Ned's memoir, Harriet is writing her personal diary, in which she speculates about what became of the little girl. The novel thus shifts between the dramatic events in late nineteenth-century Glasgow and those taking place forty-five years later, in Harriet's everyday life. Significantly, rather than two stories, the novel offers us a complex double narrative, because the things happening in Harriet's present not only "parallel those that her memoir explores", but also cast uncanny shadows back over the past (Burnside 2011: n.p.).

The portrayal of Harriet Baxter strongly echoes the trope of the double in such fictions as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' (1892) and James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). From her seeing herself through her stepfather's eyes to her uncontrollable "nervous laugh", which comes back to haunt Harriet (Harris 2011: 187, 336), the reader repeatedly glimpses clues to the narrator's dissociative identity disorder, getting the feeling that she is also *unconsciously* living a double life. It is, however, in relation to the Gillespies' eldest daughter, Sibyl, that Harriet's illness assumes its most terrifying – and Gothic - shape. Miriam Burstein observes that

> [i]f Harriet gaslights Sibyl, as the reader soon comes to suspect, then the signs of Sibyl's supposed insanity, which manifest themselves in wildly destructive behaviours, sexual caricatures, attempts to harm others, and general vandalism, do double duty as equally troubling manifestations of Harriet's own repressed potential for murderous violence. (Burstein 2014: n.p.)

The novel, in this sense, works doubly to re-construct, even if only between the lines, the story of Harriet herself. By intertwining Victorian and present-day ideals of childhood innocence, discourses on incest, psychology, and popular imaginings of evil children, the narrative creates a highly ambiguous and uncanny portrayal of the nine-year-old Sibyl, while also

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repeatedly reminding us that the girl's voice is, at all times, filtered through that of Harriet. The reader contemplates Sibyl through a lens that ultimately functions as a "Gothic mirror" – borrowing Kohlke's term (Kohlke 2011: 145) – which reflects the narrator and protagonist herself.

One of the central purposes of the neo-Victorian novel is to interrogate and re-present issues of otherness. However, as has recently been pointed out, in neo-Victorian fiction (as well as in contemporary literature more broadly) the child as Other remains underrepresented. Revision/re-vision proves problematic because the child's agency, or voice, is too obviously a construct, a projection of the adult writer (Dinter 2012: 63). Along similar lines Kohlke observes that "[t]he child trope proves highly ambiguous in terms of its re-inscribed lack of agency, its appropriated or muted voice, its staging of symbolic re-violation, and its manipulation for and embodiment of adult desires" (Kohlke 2011: 119). Yet, precisely because of its political implications and involvement in complex power relations, the literary representation of children offers avenues for fascinating analysis. This is certainly the case with *Gillespie and I* and *98 Reasons for Being*, which in different ways come to participate in the current critical debate surrounding the problematic representation (or even silencing) of children in literature, culture and history.

Gillespie and I addresses the issue as part of its central narrative device, the unreliable narrator. In making the reader see Sibyl as precisely a projection of the adult writer/narrator, the novel redirects our focus from the child-construct to the child-constructor. Harris's narrative thus offers a way to represent and decode the girl that challenges not only the construction of the child, but also the very question of children's representability. Furthermore, the author draws on present-day psychological symptomatology – also evident in her depiction of Harriet's (incestuous) relation to her stepfather – and thus allows the reader to view another dimension of Sibyl, which helps us decipher the girl's language although we never hear her unmediated voice. The characters in the novel belong to an era before the rise of child psychology, for as Sally Shuttleworth points out, studies of child development were not established until the very end of the nineteenth century (Shuttleworth 2003: 86). And, as Helen Small observes, although the earlier Victorian period "saw some of the most detailed and serious fictional explorations of the child's mind", it was an era equally marked by "silence, uncertainty, and confusion from science" on the same

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issue (Small 2003: 6). The contemporary reader's knowledge makes evident the fictional Harriet's appropriation and muting of Sibyl. Scenes such as the one when the little girl testifies in court – evidently triggering an extreme fit of anxiety – underline how "ill-equipped and ill-disposed" the nineteenth-century cultural, legal and medical institutions were "to listen to [children]" (Small and Tate 2003: 7). However, if from a present-day perspective the repeated violations of Sibyl prove particularly nightmarish, they arguably do so because they simultaneously raise disconcerting questions about *our own time's* disposition and (in)ability to listen to, read, and engage with the child on its own terms.

Sandra Dinter has argued that to employ "the child as a feminist voice in a neo-Victorian novel is particularly effective because it hints at the fact that the legal and practical status of the child was often barely different from that of grown up females" (Dinter 2012: 73). In line with Susanne Becker's reading of "the contradictory texture of gothic feminism" (Becker 1999: 52), *Gillespie and I*'s take on the feminist voice is highly ambiguous. The novel interrogates the processes and mechanisms of othering through the Harriet-Sibyl dynamic, yet in terms of feminist renegotiations of voice, status and otherness it proves paradoxical, given that female power – in this case Harriet's – is asserted at the expense of that of another female character (Sybil), still more vulnerable than herself. That is, the girl's voice is clearly *overruled* by the woman's. The issue of otherness is further complicated by the fact that *both* Sibyl and Harriet are other(ed), consequently preventing any straightforward (feminist) interpretation of the perpetrator/victim binary.

If Harriet's victimisation of Sibyl proves highly ambiguous as to its renegotiation of female monstrosity and otherness, then Harriet's double nature further blurs an already unclear image. The novel arguably rewrites the figure of the aging, "disinterested because apparently sexless" spinster by portraying Harriet as a woman who "seeks to achieve her own pleasures by playing multiple roles**,** from servile to superior, that frustrate the conventional Victorian spinster roles of 'auntie' or 'companion'" (Burstein 2014: n.p.). According to Andrew Mangham, the Victorian "Old Maid" was in fact "a complicated, multidimensional character who seemed to confirm the era's conservative ideas on woman, while simultaneously offering new ways of thinking about gender" (Mangham 2007: 39). In psychological terms, then, the many roles played by Harriet are suggestive of her split

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subjectivity.[6] Yet, they also function, on a textual level, to show how the novel's portrayal of the narrator clashes with how she frames herself as a victim, by constructing herself precisely *according* to acceptable nineteenth-century Old-Maid discourses. Significantly, in revealing Harriet to be an unreliable narrator, the novel does more than suggest that her whole story is an attempt to clear herself of guilt (which investigations of Rose Gillespie's abduction fail to do). It further suggests that her narrative may constitute a vicarious reliving, perhaps even celebration, of her transgressive younger self. As Burstein concludes, "Harriet proves so dangerous because she performs so many stereotypical female characters [...] which take[s] the Victorian fantasy of women's 'influence' and warps it into something far more horrifying" (Burstein 2014: n.p.).

There are neither supernatural nor scientific poisons involved in Harriet Baxter's transformation from one personality to another, yet Harris's novel suggests, as does Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, that an evil potential resides in most of us that may materialise when our fascinations, ambitions and aspirations turn into obsession. Splitting is thus presented as a more mundane affair, although Harris's Gothic portrayal of it leaves us with a no less disturbing feeling. "[W]hat stands out", John Burnside writes in his review of Harris's novel, "is the way in which this narrative provokes us to think again about what we imagine, and what we hope for, and about the burdens that those hopes and imaginings impose upon those around us" (Burnside 2011 n.p.). From the 'Preface' Harriet's hopes are quite clear: "Reader", she asks, "[d]o you know: there are times when the past is so vivid in my mind that it seems more tangible to me even than my real life?" (Harris 2011: xv). What she longs for is to revisit – and thus reunite with – Ned Gillespie. In revisiting the artist, and even more in her driving Ned and his wife apart, Harriet comes to embody the Doppelgänger motif in the most Freudian fashion, as a "Störer der Liebe" (Freud qtd. in Masschelein 2011: 25), in that she literally interferes with and disturbs love. Anneleen Masschelein has explained the disturber-of-love-figure in connection with the Freudian father complex, in which the father is a love object of his son but at the same time thwarts his desire. This gives life to an uncanny form of "hatred [which] is repressed and camouflaged by excessive love for the father, but […] still expresses itself in the form of murderous thoughts and revenge fantasies, accompanied by fits of guilt and compulsive rituals" (Masschelein 2011: 25). Harriet reveals a comparable

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ambivalent desire for her love object: the Gillespies. Moreover, as the reader
eventually succeeds in piecing together the fragmented account of the
woman, we come to understand that Harriet's emotional ambivalence does
in fact originate in her own complex and uncanny feelings towards her
father.

The Doppelgänger motif is thus doubled in the novel's parallel plot:
as becomes clear, Harriet's "eternal aching sadness about Ned Gillespie"
(Harris 2011: xv), which gives her nightmares, is not the only trauma that
haunts the narrator. Considering Harriet's words and actions from a
psychoanalytic perspective not only helps us read between the lines, but also
to decipher her behavioural patterns. In effect, through her fragmented
account of her background, upbringing and education, another story
gradually unfolds: the story of her repressed damaged self. The reader
realises that there is a little girl within Harriet – her child-self – who
continues to crave for and seek out her stepfather's recognition and
affection. Haunted by scenes of her stepfather's abuses (sometimes with
incestuous undertones), Harriet's narrative emerges as a story of an
unhealthy father-daughter relationship, and a traumatised girl who, even as
an adult, keeps wanting to go back to the source of her abuse. In fact, up
until her stepfather's death, Harriet is hoping to "find some sanctuary […]
with him", only to discover that he has "chosen to dissociate himself from
[her], to feign illness", so as to avoid speaking in her defence at the trial
(Harris 2011: 593, 596). Laying bare her damaged inner self, Harriet notes:
"Of all the slights and hurts and rejections that I had suffered at his hands,
this was surely the worst. And yet, the strange thing was, I felt very little"
(Harris 2011: 596). Harriet has clearly been hurt to a degree that surpasses
pain, and the situation translates well into psychoanalytic theorisations on
intersubjectivity.

According to intersubjective theory, dynamics of destruction and
survival form part of a cyclic pattern, which underpins all relationships and
often works to uphold a balance between identification and differentiation
between the self and others. As Jessica Benjamin explains, "all negotiation
of difference involves negation, often leading to partial breakdowns"
(Benjamin 1998: 96). Elsewhere, I have analysed the dynamics of
domination and its implications for both perpetrator and victim (see Heiberg
Madsen 2013: 152) arguing that processes of destruction and survival are
vital to the (erotic) relationship as long as "the shape of the whole is [...]

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informed by mutuality" (Benjamin 1988: 82). One of the central claims of Benjamin's intersubjective theory is that the balance between the self and the other can be repeatedly destroyed and restored, and that destruction "is only catastrophic when the possibility of re-establishing the tension between negation and recognition is foreclosed, when the survival of the other is definitely over" (Benjamin 1998: 96). Harriet's strange sense of being numb, as described in the previous paragraph, is suggestive of her definite destruction.

If our present-day insights into child psychology and trauma symptomatology allow us to read Sibyl apart from Harriet's narrative, which constructs her as both a naughty child and insane, then this informed, psychoanalytic perspective also complicates our reading of Harriet as evil. Earlier I argued that despite casting herself as the victim as part of a conscious strategy to exculpate herself, Harriet merely comes to reveal her unreliability as a narrator. This positions the protagonist on the side of the perpetrator in a perpetrator/victim binary. However, the vague images from Harriet's childhood and youth that emerge from the fissures in her constructed narrative form a picture of a traumatised woman, haunted by a past of violence, neglect and psychological terror. Consequently, while it may be easy to identify Harriet as Sibyl's oppressor, we cannot but see Harriet as a victim herself. Her childhood traumas, inscribed on her body and mind, become inscribed in the body of her text as she writes it, blurring the lines between perpetrators and victims. *Gillespie and I* in this sense adds another layer to its already ambiguous (re-) negotiations of otherness and power structures through the adult-child dialectic.

As noted further above, the macabre rhyming couplets of *Struwwelpeter* have a permeating Gothic effect in *98 Reasons for Being*. Curiously enough, however, Hoffmann's children's book makes for no less Gothic an element in *Gillespie and I*, although the latter text contains no biofictional traces of Hoffmann himself. The collection of cautionary tales, Harriet's Christmas present for Sibyl, serves as a spine-chilling warning to the girl, and a foreshadowing for the reader of the grim future that awaits her. In *Struwwelpeter*, children behaving badly have their mouths stitched together, their thumbs cut off; they starve, drown, burn and suffer other painful deaths. These are all the inevitable outcomes, the book warns, of children's misbehaviour. 'The Dreadful Story about Harriet and the Matches' begins with her mother and nurse warning the girl that she will be

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scolded if she touches the matches. The naughty Harriet, of course, plays
with the matches nonetheless, setting "her apron string" alight, from where
the fire rapidly spreads, until "[s]he burns all over, everywhere" as the cats
mew frantically "we told her so":

> So she was burnt with all her clothes,
> And arms and hands, and eyes and nose;
> Till she had nothing more to lose
> Except her little scarlet shoes;
> And nothing else but these was found
> Among her ashes on the ground.
> (Dudman 2004: 319-20)

Eventually we come to witness the equally horrific consequences of Sibyl's
supposed evil deeds: from starving, through severe burning, to incarceration
in a mental asylum where she (presumably) dies. If, as Smith Chalou
suggests, *Struwwelpeter* displays a "duplicitous manner of moralising"
(Smith Chalou 2007: 45), then the book's intertextual evocation in Harris's
novel serves as a powerful symbol of Harriet's double-dealing with the girl
throughout the story.

     Whereas *Struwwelpeter* appears briefly, yet uncannily, in *Gillespie
and I* as a sinister premonition of the events to come, Hoffmann's children's
book works as a constant analogue to the plot of *98 Reasons for Being*. The
rules at the asylum have a direct correlation to the societal norms and rules
addressed in *Struwwelpeter*, so the cautionary tales come to form a kind of
microcosm within the microcosm. The rhyming couplets also provide a link
to Hoffman's life outside the asylum, which is equally haunted by
Struwwelpeter as the painful reminder of the son he fails to diagnose, let
alone cure. Significantly, the narrative is as explicit in its symptomatic
descriptions of the fictionalised Carl Philipp's bad behaviour as of Hannah's
depression. Carl Philipp, we learn, is unable to "remain [...] seated at a
desk", he has "no logical ability whatever", and "[t]he boy is poorly
coordinated and undisciplined, He is rash and will not wait his turn"
(Dudman 2004: 101). Still, his doctor father fails read the symptoms and
dismisses the idea that Carl Philipp's problem could be psychological:

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> Hoffmann had stood silently, waiting for the boy to stop
> screaming his protest. The familiarity of the sound chilling
> him, he wondered whether Carl Philipp was becoming sick
> of mind; perhaps that was the cause of this change from
> docile child to intolerable youth. The cries subsided quickly
> and with them Hoffmann's fears. 'Why are you doing this,
> my son?' Hoffmann had asked at last, his voice breaking.
> 'Why can you not sit still like your brother and sister? Why
> do you always have to disturb everyone? Do you not want to
> be with us? Do you want to be sent away?' (Dudman 2004:
> 186)

Not surprisingly, Carl Philipp, like Hannah when she first begins her
treatment, is unable to provide a satisfying answer to Hoffmann's questions.
Contrary to Hannah's case though, Hoffmann never considers the talking
cure as an option for his son and never understands the boy's disorder in
terms other than childish misbehaviour. However, just like the sinister
rhymes that continually appear, so does the thought of Carl Philipp as "ill
rather than naughty":

> a thought he has been trying to ignore for the last few days
> bursts into his head so violently that he winces: perhaps Carl
> Philipp has some form of monomania too. […] Maybe his
> son's recent behaviour has been the result of some lesion of
> the brain. [...] He shakes his head. Carl Philipp was not mad,
> it is a ridiculous concept. (Dudman 2004: 250)

Shuttleworth has argued that "[t]he story of child psychology in the
nineteenth century cannot be told [...] without exploring the interconnections
between the literary and scientific fields", as the former "open up the
silences of science" (Shuttleworth 2003: 101). Dudman's novel offers a
singular approach to such interconnections by juxtaposing Hoffmann's
children's book and a fictionalised reading of his professional lifework.
Ironically, the highly educated psychiatrist and teacher, for all his specialist
knowledge, fails as would-be educator of his son. Hoffmann never manages
to transpose his paternalistic compassionate treatment of his patients to his
home, because he is unable to recognise the essential convergences between

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nineteenth-century institutional and familial regimes of disciplinarian education.

The children's rhymes' uncanny effect is further enhanced by the macabre messages of the rhyming couplets. For example, Carl Philipp is eventually sent away from home, due to misbehaving, and the tale of 'Flying Robert' thus functions as an uncanny reminder of Hoffmann's lost son whose last words continue to haunt the doctor: "Out of sight, out of mind, that is what they say, is it not, Papa?" (Dudman 2004: 187). Flying Robert goes out into the rain well-knowing that "[a]ll good little girls and boys, [s]tay at home and mind their toys", only to be whisked away by "the rude wind" that catches his umbrella and bears him off into the skies to an unknown fate: "Only this one thing is plain,/ Rob was never seen again!" (Dudman 2004: 263-264). Hoffmann's children's tales, and perhaps 'Flying Robert' in particular, thus symbolise the father's frustrated attempts to reach his son. As the novel implies, despite being a pioneering communicator (as Hannah's cure and *Struwwelpeter* testify), Hoffmann fails to communicate with his own son. This is underlined by the fact that Hoffmann moves closer to disclosing the mystery around Hannah's depression and muteness at the very same time as he feels ever further removed from understanding Carl Philipp and his suffering. Lacking a diagnosis, the disorder of Hoffmann's own son, paradoxically enough, becomes the most monstrous of all. Moreover, if one of the novel's central messages is the human need for self-narration *and* dialogue, then it is further confirmed by the vanishing (metaphorically and literally) of Carl Philipp, whose voice we hear only sporadically, and who is never given the opportunity to *speak*. In effect, the boy's monstrosity ultimately confronts Hoffmann with the limits of medical knowledge and testifies to the failings of a repressive education that allows only limited scope for individuality and self-expression.

3.   Conclusion: Neo-Victorian (Mis)Readings of Children
The double permeates all the different mechanisms and levels of neo-Victorianism. As Sarah Gamble has pointed out, "[t]he function of the neo-Victorian novel may be to animate the past, but it can only do so from the perspective of the present, which will always read it as reflective of its own preoccupations" (Gamble 2009: 127). Gamble's statement underlines the neo-Victorian novel's dual engagement with revision, namely that we are likely to discover as much (or more) about ourselves as about the

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Victorians; the neo-Victorian text is, in other words, as much about now as about then, as much about us as about them. I largely agree with Gamble's analysis of the performative potential of the neo-Victorian novel, as providing a site onto which the present might unconsciously be projected and yet also be deliberately performed. However, I would suggest a modification to her notion of "the function of the neo-Victorian novel", since the re-animated past *itself* becomes a function often relied on to address present-day concerns. So, if the past always to some extent works as a backdrop for the present in neo-Victorian fiction, then the neo-Victorian mode's most powerful potential springs not, to my mind, from inescapable mirror readings or incidental projections of now onto then. Rather, the neo-Victorian novel most powerfully revises and renegotiates the past when it strategically and self-consciously distances the present in order to confront it more effectively.

98 Reasons for Being and *Gillespie and I* each returns to a monstrous figure that occupied a central place in Victorian discourses of pathology, gender and race: the child that resists or evades socialisation and normative education aimed at producing ideologically interpellated, self-disciplining subjects. As double narratives, the novels provide new perspectives not only on the past but also on the present, and in doing so, epitomise neo-Victorianism's attempt "to understand the nineteenth century as the contemporary's self's uncanny Doppelgänger" (Kohlke and Gutleben 2012: 4). The almost explosive increase in personal accounts of incest and childhood abuse in recent years, describing patterns of violence and neglect over many years and ignored by the authorities, is suggestive of a persistent contemporary failure to protect children, and of the continued problems in (mis)reading children's minds and behaviour. Undoubtedly, the most pressing contemporary issues surrounding juvenile crime include "[q]uestions of childhood responsibility, and of possible insanity" (Shuttleworth 2003: 88). Today's conceptualisations of 'the child' are far from unequivocal, and clashing depictions of children and adolescents are proliferating not least through social media. Shuttleworth gives the example of "newspaper headlines denounc[ing] child savages, whilst images of childhood innocence [...] are used to sell virtually every consumer product conceivable", going on to assert that "[s]imilar contradictions and confusions were present in Victorian attempts to interpret and control the boundaries between the adult and child state" (Shuttleworth 2003: 88). The

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two neo-Victorian double narratives analysed in this article address the often problematic cultural representation and reading of children, implicitly seeking to educate – or perhaps 'edutain' – audiences to 'read' children differently and reflect on the possible implications of continued misreadings for both familial and institutional educational contexts. At the same time, these fictions reveal a special potential for re-negotiating patterns of power, aggression and violation in their revival of what Anne Morey and Claudia Nelson term "more youthful targets of cruelty" inhabiting the (re)constructed nineteenth-century world, as well as in their staging of "a retrospective struggle for control over the materials that constitute Victorian narratives" (Morey and Nelson 2012: 2), particularly narratives of child psychology, formative development and education.

Acknowledgement

Notes:

1. I am grateful to Clare Dudman for sending me the Power Point slides from her own presentation on the novel, and for drawing my attention to the work by Baker et. al. (2010).
2. In his major work, *Treatise on the Disturbances of Mental Life* (1818), Johann Christian Heinroth (1773-1843) presented his ideas on "moral therapy", also referred to as the "talking cure", suggesting that this was for some patients all that was needed to restore their mental health.
3. Hannah uses bird imagery to conceptualise sexual intercourse, conception, pregnancy and birth.
4. For a further discussion on the aesthetic and emotional clashes in *Struwwelpeter*, see Ben Parrot (2010).

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5.   For further discussion of persisting mental health stigmas see Corrigan et al. (2002), Crisp et al. (2000), and Pettigrew and Tropp (2006).

6.   In my use of the terms split subjectivities/selves I am influenced by critical analyses of Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, and particularly Anne Stiles's essay, 'Robert Louis Stevenson's Jekyll and Hyde and the Double Brain' (2006), in which she discusses how "Stevenson incorporates the polarities of the dual-brain theory into the literary form of his famous novella" (Stiles 2006: 891). The expression 'dissociative personality disorder' might be more appropriate for a present-day context, yet I use 'split' throughout my discussion of this neo-Victorian text, which in many ways reworks Stevenson's portrayal of 'splitting'. As Stiles argues, "Stevenson combines the basic structure of the case study with a tone and subject matter more appropriate to the Gothic, so that his novella suffers from a case of split personality like that of the protagonist himself" (Stiles 2006: 819). This reading applies perfectly to Harris's novel.

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