Linda Newbery on Writing Historical Fiction and on her Neo-Victorian Novel *Set in Stone*

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Abstract:
Linda Newbery, an acclaimed writer of historical fiction for children and (young) adults, won the 2006 Costa Children's Book Award for her neo-Victorian novel *Set in Stone* (2006). In this interview, Linda Newbery answers questions regarding *Set in Stone*, as well as more general questions on writing historical fiction. She elaborates on topics such as intertextual relations and inspirations, research before writing a historical novel, narrative voice and her twenty-first century position as an author. She furthermore answers questions regarding *Polly's March* (2004) and *Until We Win* (2017), which are both set at the beginning of the twentieth century shortly before the outbreak of WWI and focus on the suffragette movement.

Keywords: historical fiction, Linda Newbery, neo-Victorian fiction, *Set in Stone*, Young-Adult fiction.

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Linda Newbery's YA (Young Adult) neo-Victorian novel *Set in Stone* won the Costa Children's Book Award in 2006. In this "[neo-]Victorian Gothic mystery" (Costa Book Awards 2007: n.p.), she addresses the powerless position of girls and women in a patriarchal Victorian society and explores incest as well as child sexual abuse and its traumatic repercussions. These thematic foci resonate with those of "[t]he neo-Victorian" more generally, which, "after all, demonstrates a prurient penchant for revelling in indecency and salaciousness, as well as exposing past iniquities" (Kohlke 2008: 5), and make her novel a relevant contribution to the field. The fact that Newbery's novel is marketed at YA readers deserves particular attention, because it seems that, in recent years, neo-Victorian literature for this target audience has increasingly gained popularity and critical acclaim. For instance, Frances Hardinge's YA *The Lie Tree* (2015) won the prestigious Costa Book of the Year Award and is only the second children's/YA novel to have won the prize since it was first awarded in

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1971. In this respect, Newbery's award-winning *Set in Stone*, published almost ten years prior to Hardinge's novel, can be regarded as a comparatively early contribution to the field of neo-Victorian YA literature, which has grown exponentially ever since.

Set in Stone's thematic focus on child sexual abuse is particularly appropriate to the text's setting in the nineteenth century, in which the age of consent was only gradually raised, with incest not recognised as a criminal offence until the passage of the Punishment of Incest Act in 1908. The main story of *Set in Stone* takes place in 1898, a time when the age of consent had already been raised to 16 with the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885. In the course of the story, the governess Charlotte Agnew and the art tutor Samuel Goodwin uncover that Juliana, the eldest daughter of the Farrow family, has been sexually abused and impregnated by her father Ernest Farrow. Even though Charlotte finds out "that Juliana must have been barely seventeen at the time of the child's conception" (Newbery 2007: 152), the suicide letter by Juliana's mother suggests that the sexual assaults started much earlier: "*She [Juliana] told me that my husband – not once but many times over the last year – has visited her at night in her bedroom*" (Newbery 2007: 267, original italics) to abuse her. Both Juliana and her sister Marianne, who apparently witnessed the sexual abuse of her elder sister, are left deeply traumatised. Like other neo-Victorian novels, *Set in Stone* thus addresses and explores various concerns (sexual abuse, victimisation, incest and trauma) that, despite mounting social and legal attention paid to children and child protection over the course of the intervening twentieth century, still remain topical today.

Despite the success of *Set in Stone*, this text remains Linda Newbery's only novel-length neo-Victorian publication to date. However, her neo-Victorian children's story *Mr Darwin and the Ape Boy* (2004), illustrated by Dave Hopkins and currently out of print, addresses disability in the context of Charles Darwin's theories on human evolution. While some of her novels are set in the twenty-first century, many of her numerous other children's fictions and YA novels feature historical settings in the twentieth century, frequently during the two World Wars. Her novel *The Shell House* (2002), for instance, which juxtaposes two time levels, being set during WWI as well as in the present, was shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal in 2002 as well as for the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize. *Sisterland* (2003), set both during WWII and the present, was also

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shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal in the year of its publication. Her novels written for middle-grade readers have been equally successful, with several of her novels being nominated for the Carnegie Medal, including *The Brockenspectre* (2014), *The Treasure House* (2012), *At the Firefly Gate* (2004), and *The Sandfather* (2009). Meanwhile her novel *Catcall* (2006) is the Silver Medal Winner of the Nestlé Children's Book Prize (for readers between 9 and 11 years), as well as having been shortlisted for both the Lincolnshire Young People's Book Award and the Calderdale Book of the Year Award.

The beginnings of Linda Newbery's career as a writer can be traced back to her childhood, when she was only eight years old and extremely fond of an abridged and illustrated version of Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877). She remembers that she read Sewell's story on her own and that it has influenced her deeply: "From then on", she writes on her website, "I was a secret writer – filling exercise books with stories which I hid in my wardrobe" (Newbery n.d.: n.p.). Despite her early interest in stories and her childhood writing exercises, it took some time before she submitted a longer text for publication. Her first novel, *Run with the Hare*, targeting a YA readership, that, similar to *Black Beauty*, thematically revolves around animal welfare and rights, was published in 1988: her writing career was about to begin. Since then, she has become a prolific writer, whose texts address a wide range of topics: among them, for instance, the suffragette movement in *Polly's March* (2004) and *Until We Win* (2017) and mental health issues in *The Damage Done* (2001).

The following interview, in which Linda Newbery answers questions concerning *Set in Stone* as well as questions regarding writing historical fiction more generally, was conducted in two parts via email in 2016 and 2018.

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Burkhard: What attracted you to the Victorian era when writing *Set in Stone*? Was there anything particularly intriguing about it for you?

Newbery: *Set in Stone* grew from a writing exercise I did with students in a workshop, during which I began writing my own story opening without

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thinking about it much. In about fifteen minutes I wrote what turned into the first pages of *Set in Stone* – a lone traveller, on foot, approaching a remote house in moonlight. Everything else sprang from that. Unusually for me, I'd started in first person – I usually favour third – but found that I liked it, and had immediately started using Victorian diction. The next spur was shortly afterwards, in Tate Britain, where I saw relief carvings by Eric Gill.[1] So it wasn't so much a decision – more that promising ingredients started to come together. That's how I usually begin a book.

Burkhard: How much research do you conduct before writing a historical novel (either for children or adult readers)? Do you, at some point, develop a 'feel' for the particular historical period you are writing about? Or are you more interested in parallels and continuities between different historical periods?

Newbery: It's very important to develop a 'feel' for the period, by immersing myself in fiction, non-fiction, memoirs, art histories and suchlike, and visiting places where possible (for instance I went to Blackwells near Windermere as a fine example of an Arts and Crafts house of the exact period of *Set in Stone).* And of course parallels and continuities are important, such as the women's movement in the early twentieth century and now. In *Until We Win,* Lizzy dislikes fox-hunting, which I knew would chime with the feelings of many readers as well as with my own; and there's a sort of #MeToo moment, set against her mother's assumption that she should be grateful for whatever male attentions she's offered.

Burkhard: Your novel *Set in Stone* bears an interesting title, which indirectly refers to the stone carvings that are central to the story. The cover of the Definitions edition (2007), however, focuses more strongly on painting and implicitly refers to Samuel Godwin's occupation as art tutor at Fourwinds.[2] Painting as an occupation and (female) accomplishment is, of course, often referred to in Victorian novels, whereas stonemasonry is a less common topic. Why have you decided to include both painting and stonemasonry in your novel? Is there anything that you find particularly intriguing about stone carvings?

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Newbery: Sometimes the themes and meanings in a novel emerge through the writing, rather than in advance. I first thought of making a stone-carver central to the story because of the caryatid photograph I sent you – I wondered who had carved it, whether the face was real or imagined, etc., and what skill it would take to carve so beautifully. Then, in Tate Britain, I saw the work of Eric Gill (who I'd always liked) and began to explore his work more thoroughly, especially his Four Winds. (He actually post-dates Gideon Waring in my novel, but I had in mind a style for Gideon that approaches Eric Gill's).

As I wrote the book I realised that at its heart is the question of what people want to leave behind them – how they want to make a mark on the future. For Samuel, as a young man, he wants to achieve fame as a painter – though in maturity he changes his mind about fame and notoriety. Ernest Farrow has built a beautiful house – but also he wants to live on through his descendants, and especially wants a son. What I found interesting about stone-carving is that it is largely anonymous, yet highly skilled and dedicated work, so I wanted to set Gideon and his work against the more obvious ambitions of the other two. (Gideon's words to Samuel in Chapter 27 sum up a lot of this.[3]) Gideon takes pride in his work and sees it lasting into the future, but has no drive for personal or worldly success. Working in stone is also humbling, because of the time-scale – working a material that is 150 million years old, in the case of Portland stone, and following traditions dating back to medieval and even Roman times. The skills and techniques, and even the tools, have hardly changed (apart from electric cutters and grinders, of course). And the work can't be hurried or skimped.

This interests me so much that in my new current work in progress, set in the eighties and the present, one of the characters is a female stone-carver who specialises in letter-cutting and has set up her own workshop.

Burkhard: It has been argued that *The Woman in White* (1860) was one of the precursor texts to *Set in Stone* (see Cox 2014: 138). How would you describe the intertextual dialogue between your novel and Wilkie Collins's text or the Victorian era and its literary productions more generally? Have you also been influenced and/or inspired by neo-Victorian novels or audio-visual adaptations?

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Newbery: The influence of *The Woman in White* is evident, I think, in the opening episode where Samuel sees Marianne wandering by the gates of Fourwinds. But I was actually more influenced by Collins's *No Name* (1862) – a wonderful novel, in my view, which deserves to be ranked alongside *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* (1868) – and in particular its use of letters to carry the plot forward and to skip over periods of time. Also, by the situation of the sisters in *No Name* when, because of their father's sudden death, they are left dispossessed. This influenced the two sisters in my novel who know that they would never be believed, when their father is so respectable, plausible and authoritative. I was interested by the 'sensation novel' rather than by the Gothic, although there are Gothic elements in my book: the deceptions and betrayals and misdeeds in the story all come about through human agency, not from anything supernatural. The only hint of the supernatural is in Marianne's intuition about the sculpture in the lake.

Burkhard: In the clip on *Set in Stone* that was shown at the Costa Book of the Year Awards ceremony in February 2007, you said that power plays an important role in your novel and that the female characters essentially have none and are completely helpless (see Costa Book Awards 2007: n.p.). Their position, as inferior to and dependent on men, is often already (in)directly addressed in Victorian novels featuring female middle-class characters. It has, however, been argued by critics that "neo-Victorian fiction's representation of the Victorian past is also the lens through which a variety of *present* concerns are examined" (Carroll 2010: 180, original emphasis) and that "neo-Victorian texts will one day be read for the insights they afford into twentieth- and twenty-first-century cultural history and socio-political concerns" (Kohlke 2008: 13). When you wrote *Set in Stone* were there also contemporary events that influenced your depiction of women as well as your decision to address sexual abuse in your novel?

Newbery: Well, I suppose so. I was thinking that Juliana, as well as Constance, know that they simply wouldn't be believed if they related what had happened. An influential man like Ernest Farrow would easily be able to dismiss any claims of abuse as female hysteria or delusion.

Contemporary events – well, as I write this, the report on the [Jimmy] Savile enquiry has just been released ... Victims feeling ashamed

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and even guilty for their own abuse is possibly a feature of every age, though things have changed/are changing in recent years as it begins to come to light just how prevalent child/sexual abuse has been in various contexts.

Burkhard: Most of the plot of *Set in Stone* is set in the late nineteenth century. However, the prologue, the epilogue and also the fictional *Times* article at the end are set in the twentieth century, the former two in 1920, the latter in 1941. Why did you choose to frame your story by these dates? Do they have a special significance either politically or socially?

Newbery: I was interested in Arts and Crafts architecture and decor, which was what made me decide to set the main part of the book in 1898 – so that Fourwinds, a beautiful architect-designed house, would be state of the art (with electricity!) and *new*. That meant that the First World War wouldn't be far off, though I didn't think of either the coda involving Thomas being shell-shocked or of Samuel's obituary until I neared the end of the novel. Also, of course, both coda and obituary allowed me to skip forward and reveal what had happened to the characters after the main part of the story.

Burkhard: In your epilogue, which is set in 1920, you give glimpses at the lives of the main characters and which paths they have chosen for their lives. In this context, you also disclose what happens to Thomas, the child resulting from the sexual abuse of Juliana by her father. Why was it important for you to include his fate? Why can he not be the heir to Fourwinds that Ernest Farrow wanted him to be?

Newbery: This was something I hadn't worked out at the start, but through the writing it came to me as the perfect way to end. Ernest Farrow has gone to extreme lengths to provide himself with a son to inherit Fourwinds. He does have a son, and the son does inherit, but with this twist. I liked the irony of things working out just as Ernest Farrow wanted, yet not. Also, though this isn't explained, it gives Thomas a kind of protection against knowing the irregularity of his conception. He is quite happy. This also gave me the chance to show Marianne presiding over the Fourwinds community as an artist in her own right, and to provide that continuity. If Thomas had

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been killed in the war, the house would have passed to a more distant relative, or been sold.

Burkhard: Marianne is totally obsessed with the idea of finding the missing West Wind and putting it in its proper place on the west wall of Fourwinds. Why is she so keen on finding and putting the wind on the wall and what does the West Wind stand for?

Newbery: Well, she's seen the work in progress, *and* either the stone itself (the one that ends up in the lake) or a drawing of it. She is aware of the injustice to Gideon Waring and respects him as an artist. I think she has made a kind of superstition of the wind carving, as you suggest – that while the west wall is blank, the wounds imposed by her father are still open and raw. But I wanted her feelings to be confused and inarticulate – she even expresses resentment that her father didn't turn his attentions to her.

Burkhard: Once the West Wind carving is recovered from the bottom of the lake, it becomes apparent that Gideon Waring delivered the carving as promised but decided to carve the distorted face of Mr Farrow into the stone. This, of course, is a deliberate choice that prompted Ernest Farrow to plunge the stone carving into the lake in the first place. Is Ernest Farrow's face on the carving only meant to represent his true face to himself or is there even more to it?

Newbery: Gideon Waring is an honest man and felt compelled to keep his side of the bargain, in this twisted way. Rendering Mr Farrow's true nature in a stone carving would, he knew, give Ernest Farrow a problem – how to hide or dispose of it. It had to go into the lake, but it has a brooding presence there which I wanted to hint at in Samuel's swimming episode. And it refers to the *Set in Stone* of the title: Ernest Farrow's sinfulness has been carved indelibly.[4]

Burkhard: Your story is told using Samuel Godwin and Charlotte Agnew, the girls' governess, as homodiegetic narrators. Samuel and Charlotte are very interesting choices for the alternating perspectives informing *Set in Stone*. Why have you chosen two characters to narrate the story and why in particular these two? You could also have given one voice or even both

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narrative voices to Marianne and/or Juliana. Why have you not given them a voice?

Newbery: Actually, it never even occurred to me to have Marianne or Juliana as narrators. (The interspersing of letters inspired by Collins's *No Name* does in a way introduce other narrators.) Samuel and Charlotte are both in similar positions – closely involved with the family, but in terms of status they are not quite servants, not quite family. I wanted to have clear differences between them: e.g., there are differences in punctuation style, which probably no one but myself would ever notice. Samuel is quite gullible/romantic, and will believe whatever he's told, at first especially; he could easily be drawn into Mr Farrow's plans. Charlotte is much less forthcoming, and has secrets from everyone, even the reader. She thinks she understands everything, yet doesn't.

Burkhard: From the start of her occupation at Fourwinds, Charlotte was aware of her familial relation to Marianne and Juliana.[5] And yet, it takes her quite some time to discover what has happened to both of them, i.e., that Marianne's condition is more than "'a malaise of adolescence'" and that Juliana is not just "convalescing from illness" (Newbery 2007: 19, 30) but that her indisposition has been caused by being sexually abused, giving birth to a son and having him taken away from her. Why does Charlotte's finding out the truth take so long, in particular when both girls are extremely dear to her?

Newbery: I think what has happened is so shocking that it simply would not occur to Charlotte to suspect that Ernest Farrow had sexually abused his own daughter. There are plenty of red herrings, too, to make her suspect that Gideon was the father, even when she realises that Juliana gave birth to a child.

Burkhard: After all that has happened and after the truth has finally been uncovered, Samuel proposes to Juliana, who courteously declines to marry him. Why is Juliana unable to accept Samuel's marriage proposal, especially considering that he knows about her past and her child and, nevertheless, wants to marry her?

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Newbery: Well, I liked that. In the position she's in, she decides for herself, rather than falling in with her father's plan, or what seems expedient. Ernest Farrow had tried to control her actions even after his death, through the stipulations in his will. By that time, she suspects that Samuel might be becoming close to Charlotte, whom of course he does marry. Juliana rejects any possibility of him marrying her from a sense of duty. I felt that the obituary for Samuel was a good way of moving forward in time and briefly indicating what happened to various characters – so Juliana did find a fulfilling role for herself. I didn't want to abandon her at the end – she had to be more than a victim.

Burkhard: When you write historical fiction, you adopt a historical voice or even multiple historical voices. To what extent does your position in the twenty-first century play into the (re-)construction of these voices? How authentic and true to the period you are writing about can or should they be? Conversely, to what extent do you feel that some degree of presentism is unavoidable when writing about the past, so that the very notion of 'authenticity' is called into question?

Newbery: This is difficult to say. How authentic is any kind of narrative, really? For example, dialogue is very rarely rendered exactly as spoken; it would be very irritating for the reader if it included hesitations, repetitions, interruptions and all the things that constitute conversation. With *Set in Stone* I wanted the dialogue to *sound* authentically Victorian – in its rhythms as well as its diction and mannerisms – without being over-wordy and off-putting. It's a balance between readability and authenticity that always has to be struck in one way or another.

Burkhard: In her article 'Perverse Nostalgia: Child Sex Abuse as Trauma Commodity in Neo-Victorian Fiction', Marie-Luise Kohlke argues that "the neo-Victorian facilitates a symbolic righting/writing of wrong" (Kohlke 2018: 184). Is this idea also manifest in your own writing? Do you have any ethical intentions in mind when you write historical fiction?

Newbery: I don't think I began with any ethical intention (possibly that would be the enemy of fiction?), but as the story progressed I felt strongly that Juliana ought to be *heard* and understood, and also – in spite of her

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awful situation – in a position to make a decision, and not simply to accept what's provided for her. Hence her robust dismissal of Samuel when he proposes marriage. I couldn't say that there's any kind of 'righting of wrong' as there is no way to do that – beyond the fact that Ernest Farrow has met his fate. There is no way in which Juliana can fully recover from what's happened to her or shrug off the shame, even though it isn't her fault at all. I don't think I could have written such a story with her as the central viewpoint character – or would have wanted to.

Burkhard: Kohlke also argues that there are ethical risks associated with commodifying child trauma, especially sex abuse, for neo-Victorian consumption (see Kohlke 2018: 188-190). Did you encounter similar concerns when writing *Set in Stone*? What specific strategies do you employ when deciding on how to represent difficult and disturbing subject matter, especially to young-adult readers?

Newbery: I don't think I have any strategies at all – beyond what I've just said in my answer to the previous question. Again this wasn't exactly a rational decision – I went where the story took me, with some misgivings about representing incest in a story for young adult readers. Several of my young adult novels have been influenced by the work of Aidan Chambers – *The Toll Bridge* (1992)*, Postcards from No Man's Land* (1999) and other titles – which in my view are at the upper end of young adult or teenage fiction. The problem with YA is that it covers such a wide span – from readers of 11 or so up to adult. Chambers' novels make no compromise in subject matter or treatment and expect their readers to be intelligent and alert – I'd have loved them when I was 17 or so (and love them now). I think in my novels *The Shell House*, *Sisterland* and *Set in Stone* I was imagining a similar kind of readership – i.e., people not quite adult but who are accustomed to adult subjects and concerns. Commercially, that's disastrous, as I have come to realise. Aidan Chambers, although he has an international reputation, has never been widely read. *Set in Stone* was a controversial winner of the Costa Children's Prize, because it can hardly be described as a children's book – perhaps it shouldn't have won!

Burkhard: Neo-Victorian novels display a keen interest in women and female identity, and the images of women are varied and multifaceted.

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Indeed, as Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn observe, "multiple studies in essay or book form have attended to issues of gender and sexuality in the representation of female characters and feminist self-construction", while the "engagement with neo-Victorian masculinity has been sparse" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2015: 98). In your opinion, could or should the same degree of attention be paid to male characters, not just by critics but also by writers, to achieve a greater appreciation of the diversity of masculinity, male roles, and their literary representations?

Newbery: That's a very interesting point. Neo-Victorian fiction does seem to attract women writers, and there's certainly a lot of interest in female characters at present and for the foreseeable future – I'm sure because authors feel that their roles and potential and secret lives have traditionally been under-explored, though with notable exceptions of course. But it's just as important that *all* characters should be rounded individuals, not types – the interest in females shouldn't be at the expense of males. I have recently read Sarah Perry's *The Essex Serpent* (2016), in which the male characters are certainly as well-drawn and full of interest as her heroine Cora.

Burkhard: You, Ann Turnbull and Adèle Geras collaborated on 'The Historical House: No. 6, Chelsea Walk' series, which re-imagines the occupants of No. 6, Chelsea Walk at different times in history (see https://usborne.com/browse-books/catalogue/series/1/2329/6-chelsea-walk/). Can you tell me more about this project and how it came into being?

Newbery: I suggested to editor Megan Larkin, then newly in post at Usborne Children's Books, that she publish a series of short novels with girl characters set at different periods in the past. It was Megan's idea to link the stories by having them all take place in the same house – which was a clever idea. I knew at once that I'd like to write about the Votes for Women campaign, and we thought of asking Ann and Adèle to contribute what started off as a three-book series. Later we each wrote a second book, for which I bagged 1969 and the moon landing.

Burkhard: *Polly's March*, which is your first novel in 'The Historical House' series, was first published in 2004 and then republished in 2018, most likely to engage in the centenary celebrations of the women's vote. In

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this context, the original title was changed to *Girls for the Vote*. Why has the title been changed? Were you involved in this decision?

Newbery: It was a decision taken by Usborne to relaunch the books under a different series title and individual titles, and yes, to coincide with the centenary of the first women's vote (and other significant anniversaries for the other titles). Adèle, Ann and I weren't involved in the initial relaunch decision but we have been consulted about individual titles, though told that each must begin with *Girls.* The new title for *Andie's Moon* (2007, now *Girls on the Up* [2019]) was the most difficult and it's not a title I'm particularly pleased with, but it had to fit with the others.

Burkhard: *Polly's March* and *Until We Win* are both about children/young adults who are introduced to suffragettes and the suffragette movement at the beginning of the twentieth century shortly before the outbreak of WWI. The young protagonists in these novels display a high degree of agency and are deeply affected by the cause as well as by the idea of (female) emancipation. Is their agency linked to the ideas promoted by the suffragette movement or would you endow a child protagonist growing up in the nineteenth century with a similar degree of empowerment and agency? Would the depiction differ if you wrote a novel targeting an adult readership rather than a child readership?

Newbery: I wanted both characters, Polly and Lizzie, to be influenced by the events going on around them – to be slowly drawn in. In both cases they're aware that the adults closest to them won't approve, and that they will be in trouble if found out (Polly from her strict father; Lizzy from her employer or her brother's Hunt employers who wield such influence locally). In both cases the actions they take part in are, I hope, realistic. Whether or not I'd give a nineteenth-century protagonist a similar outlook and experience would depend entirely on the circumstances. If writing for adults I would undoubtedly have shown characters taking part in more extreme actions – Polly's participation in a march, against her father's instructions, would seem very tame, given reader knowledge of actual events.

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Burkhard: You won the 2006 Costa Children's Book Award for *Set in Stone*, but to date it remains your only novel-length neo-Victorian publication. Instead you have gone on to publish a substantial number of historical novels set in the twentieth century. Why did you leave the nineteenth century behind and refocus on later periods in your writing? Can we expect or hope for more neo-Victorian novels in the future?

Newbery: In fact most of my twentieth-century historical novels (*Some Other War* [1990] and sequence; *The Shell House; Sisterland*) pre-dated *Set in Stone.* And I think of *Set in Stone* as a one-off, which I greatly enjoyed writing. What I wanted was to include several of the typical elements of the sensation novel, ingredients which many readers would find familiar (remote country house, attractive widowed owner, beautiful daughters, sleepwalking, besotted young artist, buttoned-up governess, a mysterious disappearance) in a story that wouldn't seem like a pastiche but would be quite serious. I don't imagine I will do anything like it again, especially as I'm now writing adult fiction set in the present.

Burkhard: In that case, I very much hope – as no doubt will many of this journal's readers – that perhaps one day you will also write a neo-Victorian adult novel.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Linda Newbery for taking the time – twice – to answer my numerous questions.

Notes

1. Examples can be viewed on the Tate website: see, e.g., 'Crucifixion' (1910) at https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/gill-crucifixion-n03563, 'Ecstasy' (1910-11) at https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/eric-gill-1168, and 'The East Wind (1929) at https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/gill-the-east-wind-n04487.
2. The cover I am referring to in my question can be found at: www.penguin.co.uk/books/1002862/set-in-stone/9781909531550.html (accessed 1 October 2018).

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3. In particular the beginning of chapter 27 offers a rich commentary on stone carving as an occupation, when Gideon Waring relates his career path: "I was given the opportunity to work as apprentice to a fashionable sculptor, and my ambition was first to follow and then to surpass him. After several years of this, working on elaborate statuary for rich patrons, many of them with more money than appreciation, I took what many would regard as a backward step, and became instead a stonemason, cutting letters for gravestones, sometimes memorial tablets, heraldic work and the like. To handle stone is to handle the stuff of life and death, and of time and change, and the mysteries of the Earth itself; there is something humbling and moving and immensely satisfying in it. And thus I preferred to earn my living" (Newbery 2007: 248-249). The issues addressed in this short excerpt – commemoration, aesthetics, durability and art for art's sake – foreground the significance of the material dimension in the Victorian era while implying that material remnants cover a huge spectrum, including those whose artists might not have achieved fame and recognition.
4. In A.S. Byatt's *The Children's Book* (2009), the pots made by the potter Benedict Fludd similarly evidence his perverted incestuous desire for both of his daughters, Imogen and Pomona, which reaches back to a time when they were children. As much becomes apparent when the housekeeper Elsie finds the key to the locked pantry and discovers a number of vases: "The pots were obscene chimaeras, half vessels, half human. They had a purity and clarity of line, and were contorted into every shape of human sexual display and congress" (Byatt 2010: 279). She then comes to realise that "[s]ome of them [the figures on the pots] had Imogen's long face and drooping shoulders: some of them were plump Pomona. The males were faceless fantasms. Elsie crunched towards them over the destruction of other versions, and saw that the wavering arms and legs, the open mouths and clutching hands were not all the same age, went back years, into childishness" (Byatt 2010: 279). At this point, it might even be speculated whether Eric Gill's work, and in particular his sculptures, might also have served as an inspiration for the plastic art in *The Children's Book*. For instance, Gill's 'Ecstasy', one of his erotic sculptures, displays a male and female body interlocked during sexual intercourse, which is an image that is evocative of Benedict Fludd's vases.
5. As it turns out, Charlotte knew that she is the half-sister of Juliana and Marianne when she accepted her position as a governess in the Farrow household. Her mother Violet was employed as a maidservant when the Farrow family still lived in Belgravia and was in love with Ernest, who was

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nineteen at the time. To avoid anyone noticing that she was pregnant, she left her employment and never told Ernest about the child. Charlotte was hence born out of wedlock and the fact that her mother gave birth was concealed (see Newbery 2007: 291).

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