



The Letterpress Project

An Interview With Victoria Bennett

Q1. What are your earliest memories of books and reading? For example, did you have a favourite or inspirational book?

I loved reading from a very early age and always had my head in a book - I was one of those children who would walk with a book in front of my nose! My earliest memories of books is sitting on the floor with my dad's antiquarian books surrounding me. I remember leading through the gold leafed pages and the smell of the leather and paper and dust. I must have been about 3 and I was hooked!

Q2. What inspired you to become an author / illustrator?

I am really interested in how we use poetry and stories to tell our personal narratives. In my own writing, I am often trying to make sense of what it is to be human but I also find inspiration in random threads - maybe just something I see on the train, or a word pops into my head. I love wandering around the internet too, finding threads to follow.

Q3. For you, what makes a successful book or illustration?

I like to believe in the character and the storyteller. It depends what mood I am in as well — sometimes, I love historical novels, sometimes I really enjoy mysteries. Mostly, I am drawn in by a combination of beautiful storytelling, characters I can inhabit, and a sense that I am on a journey of some kind. The very best books are the ones that live beyond the final page, the ones I feel heartbroken to leave.

Q4. Do you have a specific audience in mind when you write your books / plan your illustrations?

I write from the heart and hope that it reaches the same place in others. I have written a lot of poetry and some narrative non-fiction and recently started to explore writing for children.

Q5. What future do you think the physical book has? For example, do you think the electronic book will replace the physical book?

I love books! I think I fell in love with the romance of old books long before I could read or write. There is something very special about holding a book, and over time and many moves, it becomes a bit of a love-hate relationship of packing and transporting and unpacking bookshelves. I find it really hard to get rid of physical books too. I am always been advised to get a Kindle, but I still pack my suitcase with books!

Q6. Are you a book collector? Is there a special book you'd love to own?

Yes! I have quite a few antiquarian books that I have collected over the years, as well as a number of bookshelves of classic penguins. I also have several shelves of textbooks and reference books for my writing, and a room of study books for our home-schooling. I also confess to having an increasingly large pile of "books to read" on my desk (and below my desk, and on the windowsill...). Last time I was in a second-hand bookshop in Wigtown, I found four books to buy. My son said to me "Mummy, it's ok to get those if you are going to read them and not just put them on the pile, because you have enough books to read!"...whoops! I have a dream that I will take a year out just to read...

Actually, there is something I would love to own but it isn't a book. My mum was a fashion artist for Vogue Magazine (London) back in the late 1940's and early 50's when she was a young woman, and before she'd had her six children! She moved around the world a lot and so her sketches and copies were lost. Sadly, she died in 2015 from mesothelioma. I would love to own a copy of the editions she illustrated. I did write to Vogue to ask if I could see their archives but didn't get a reply. That would be something I would like to own.