

# Enchanting Wor(l)ds: The Works of Marina Warner

Friday 11 July 2025

Centre for Comparative Literature,  
Goldsmiths, University of London

in collaboration with the  
Institute for Languages, Cultures and Societies,  
School of Advanced Study, University of London



Edmund Dulac, *Bright Liquid* (illustration from "The Little Mermaid", detail),  
from *Stories from Hans Andersen with illustrations by Edmund Dulac*  
(London, 1911), via Wikimedia Commons

## Call for Papers

**Marina Warner's** latest work, *Sanctuary: The Shelter of Stories* (working title), the publication of which will coincide with our conference, opens with a scene from a film, where a man being chased finds refuge in a cathedral. Marina Warner describes how, as he lifts the giant door knocker, it becomes a hinge between danger and safety, enveloping the suppliant in a protective halo and becoming a portal to the Church's ancient rite of, and right to, sanctuary. *Enchanting Wor(l)ds* will examine the myriad ways in which Marina Warner has dedicated her career to analysing how objects, spaces, temporalities, people, worlds and words can become enchanted: how they might be imbued with power, aura, mystery or dread.

Deriving from the Old French *encantement*, enchantment denotes a magical spell. In the account of her parents' lives, *Inventory of a Life Mislaid: An Unreliable Memoir* (2021), a pair of brogue shoes purchased by Marina Warner's English father for her young Italian mother when she first moved to the UK, becomes 'proof of membership, a swipe card, a badge which gained her entrance to a certain way of life'. Like Cinderella's glass slippers the brogues are a charmed gift, transforming its wearer. Indeed, one of the world's leading specialists in fairy tales, myths and legends, illustrated most comprehensively in *From the*

*Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers* (1994) and *Stranger Magic: Charmed States and the Arabian Nights* (2011), Marina Warner examines the vital role played by magic in imagining alternative possibilities. The enduring power of myths, legends and fairy tales to spellbind us is elaborated in *Six Myths of Our Time* (the Reith Lectures, 1994), where Marina Warner enlists angels, monsters and beasts to expose the fault lines of masculinity, maternity, childhood, race and other phenomena central to our daily lives.

Enchantment can be summoned to allay fears. In *No Go the Bogyman: Scaring, Lulling and Making Mock* (1998) the power to terrify us possessed by ogres, giants, monsters and lords of the underworld is placed under Marina Warner's clear-eyed investigation. Here, as in *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-first Century* (2006), Warner asks why ghouls and ghosts and the supernatural world of fairies, spirits, phantasms and zombies exercise such fascination, given that since the Enlightenment, Europe has presented itself as grounded in rational science, rather than in a belief.

Undeniably, postcolonial critique runs throughout much of Warner's works, the uses of the supernatural in the Caribbean appearing, for instance, in *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds* (2002), where the magical powers of transformation, metamorphosis and mutation – recurring concerns in Warner's work – symbolize the protean, fluid nature of all identity.

Nothing is intrinsically enchanting. We understand the word here both as an adjective, and as a gerund: a verb, a capacity, a desire to imbue something with a special power. As Marina Warner has examined across her career, most notably in *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (1976) and *Monuments and Maidens* (1996), the female form has been subjected to enchantment, whether it is sexualized, demonized or sanctified, perhaps more than any other entity in human history.

Throughout, Marina Warner's interest in art sustains her enquiries, and she has contributed to the exhibition catalogues of many artists including Kiki Smith, Paula Rego, and most recently Linder (collected in *Forms of Enchantment*, 2018; and *Myths, Magic and Marvels*, 2026).

Going further back into its etymology, enchantment derives from the Latin *in+cantare*, meaning to put into song. Whether in her brilliant disquisitions, elaborated over scores of monographs and articles – for the *London Review of Books*, *New York Review of Books*, *The Guardian* and, at the beginning of her career, *Vogue* – or in her novels and short stories (*In a Dark Wood*, 1977; *The Skating Party*, 1982; *The Lost Father*, 1988; *Indigo*, 1992; *The Leto Bundle*, 2001) Marina Warner enchants the page, making her prose vibrate, her words hum.

Finally, a mere glance at the numerous photographs of Marina Warner held in the National Portrait Gallery collection reveals the entrancing *mise en scène* with which she has been represented. In a portrait by Mayotte Magnus (1977), taken a few years after the publication of *The Dragon Empress: Life and Times of Tz'u-Hsi, 1835-1908, Empress Dowager of China* (1972) the model, in a smock dress embellished with appliqué, and adorned with one of her hallmark ornate necklaces, is flanked by two Chinese figurines as she leans against intricate floral wallpaper. For over five decades Marina Warner has enchanted readers and listeners with her ability both to lift the veil on sorcery and spin, and to reveal our potential wondrously to transform our world for the better.

We are delighted that Marina Warner will be 'in conversation' at the conference; and that **the keynote address will be delivered by Philip Terry**, author of many creative works including *Dante's Inferno* (2014), *tapestry* (2013, shortlisted for the Goldsmiths Prize) and *Dante's Purgatorio* (2024), and Marina Warner's long-time colleague, interlocutor and friend.

For this one-day in-person conference we welcome proposals for **20-minute papers, or poems, performances or any other form that engages with any aspect of enchanting words and worlds in Marina Warner's works.**

Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Enchantment in fairy tales, myths, legends and folklore;
- Enchantment in the visual arts;
- Sorcery, magic, witchcraft;
- Enchantment and feminism;
- Enchantment as cultural critique;
- Enchantment and the European Enlightenment;
- Postcolonial enchantment;
- Enchantment and psychoanalysis;
- Children's fiction, e.g. the *Impossible* series;
- The use of illustrations in Marina Warner's works;
- Scholarship inspired by Marina Warner.

When submitting your proposal, **please state the type of contribution you wish to make** (e.g., 20-minute formal paper, performance, creative writing contribution....) and its **title**, and send **an abstract or description of no more than 300 words** and a **100-word biography** by **15 January 2025** to: [CCL@gold.ac.uk](mailto:CCL@gold.ac.uk). Please include the words "Enchanted World(l)ds" in the subject line.

**Organisers:** Lucia Boldrini, Marie-Claude Canova-Green, Clare Finburgh Delijani, Isobel Hurst.

The conference will take place at **Senate House**, Malet Street London, WC1E 7HU.

For more information: <https://sites.gold.ac.uk/comparative-literature/enchanting-worlds-the-works-of-marina-warner/>