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## Why I Write

Marina Warner

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## Why I Write

### **Abstract**

I was a bookworm as a child, because I liked entering other worlds through stories. Above all, I liked stories which imagined secret or hidden or hitherto unapprehended worlds: *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett and myths about the underworld (or the empyrean). I had an Edwardian illustrated book by a man called Guerber, *The Myths of the Greeks and Romans*, and the stories it told, about Persephone abducted while she was picking flowers to become queen of hell and Ariadne helping Theseus enter the labyrinth to kill the Minotaur and Icarus falling after his wings melted made a permanent impression on me. I also liked Enid Blyton and the children's adventures she described- passing behind a waterfall to find treasure, and I especially wanted to be a tomboy like her character George in *The Famous Five*. So I think that writing was linked with refusing the limits of my state, and with voyaging- with leaving the space of home, school and my given circumstances (a clumsy, plump girl child lacking in courage), and in many ways it still is. I do a lot of it! Search so that I can carry myself off to other worlds and inhabit them imaginatively.



Marina Warner was born in London of an Italian mother and an English father. She has written five novels including *Indigo* and *Mermaids in the Basement*. *The Lost Father* (1988) was a Regional Prize Winner of the Commonwealth Writer's Prize. She also writes history and criticism, focusing mainly on female symbolism (*Alone of All Her Sex: the Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary; Joan of Arc; Monuments and Maidens*), and her study of fairytales, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, will be published in October 1994.

Marina Warner lives in London with her husband, the artist John Dewe Mathews, and one son.

MARINA WARNER

## Why I Write

I was a bookworm as a child, because I liked entering other worlds through stories. Above all, I liked stories which imagined secret or hidden or hitherto unapprehended worlds: *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett and myths about the underworld (or the empyrean). I had an Edwardian illustrated book by a man called Guerber, *The Myths of the Greeks and Romans*, and the stories it told, about Persephone abducted while she was picking flowers to become queen of hell and Ariadne helping Theseus enter the labyrinth to kill the Minotaur and Icarus falling after his wings melted made a permanent impression on me. I also liked Enid Blyton and the children's adventures she described – passing behind a waterfall to find treasure, and I especially wanted to be a tomboy like her character George in the *Famous Five*. So I think that writing was linked with refusing the limits of my state, and with voyaging – with leaving the space of home, school and my given circumstances (a clumsy, plump girl child lacking in courage), and in many ways it still is. I do a lot of research so that I can carry myself off to other worlds and inhabit them imaginatively.

But the other worlds are also alternatives, possibilities, strategies of redress. Both in the historical studies I've written and in the fiction, I go on the attack – sometimes of what I cherish – to redraw its limits and its promises. I am now finishing a study of fairy tales, and the reason I was attracted to them, not only as an avid reader of them since childhood, but as a critical writer, lies with their utopian defiance – their 'heroic optimism', in Angela Carter's phrase. The Czech dissidents' maxim used to be 'Live as if the freedoms you want are yours already'; in a way, writing is one way of living the freedoms you want.