

‘The Bearer-Beings’: Portable Stories in Dislocated Times

May 13-14 2016 St Anne’s College, Oxford

Convened by Marina Warner (Weidenfeld Professor of Comparative European Literature, 2016, Professor of English and Creative Writing, Birkbeck College, London, and President of the British Comparative Literature Association (BCLA)) and Prof. Matthew Reynolds, Oxford Comparative Criticism and Translation (OCCT).

The spirit’s speeches, the indefinite,

Confused illuminations and sonorities,
So much ourselves, we cannot tell apart
The idea and the bearer-being of the idea.

Wallace Stevens ‘An Ordinary Evening in New Haven’

How did stories travel? How do they move across borders of culture and language? Myths, legends and fairy tales such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the stories of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, and the cycle of *The Thousand and One Nights* have travelled by other means besides the work of skilled multilingual dragomen or the direct and faithful translations of written texts. The processes involved are mysterious, but over time certain elements besides the narrative content and the semantic expression are crucial: prosody (metre, rhyme, refrains, repetition), performance (gesture, sound effects, music, song), as well as para-linguistic elements (cries, whoops, nonsense - Hey nonny no!, Tirra lirra!). This workshop will explore such processes and other vital elements in transmission in two sessions, the first focusing on Arabic (see info here), the second featuring writer/storytellers who re-create traditional material: Alice Oswald, Philip Terry, Tamim al-Barghouti and Ben Haggarty (see here for bios). They will be joined by Marina Warner and Matthew Reynolds for practical translation and storytelling workshops, at which participants will work on ‘translations’ of selected material (further details will be supplied nearer the time).

The day’s explorations aim to build towards a programme that will support and stimulate storytelling in contemporary refugee and multicultural communities. (These themes will be further explored in ‘Stories in Transit’, a workshop at the Museo Internazionale delle Marionette G. Pasqualino in Palermo, Sicily, from September 26-28 2016. More info here.)