Weaving the Self: The Struggle for Identity in Martine Bates's ***Marmawell*** *Trilogy*

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Résumé *: La trilogie «Marmawell» de Martine Bates s'avère des plus ambiguës en ce qui concerne la perception de la féminité qu'elle propose : elle semble, en effet, reprendre les valeurs traditionnelles tout en les déconstruisant dans une certaine mesure. À la lumière d'un examen serré des structures narratives et de l'intertexte, dont les* ***Métamorphoses*** *d'Ovide, l'auteur de l'article soutient la thèse selon laquelle le travail textuel sur la tradition littéraire produit de nouvelles formes d'identité culturelle et donne lieu à des œuvres qui ne confortent ni ne rejettent les conventions identitaires.*

Summary*: This paper begins by querying whether Martine Bates's* ***Marmawell*** *trilogy resists or reinforces traditional constructions of femininity. After suggesting that the trilogy could be read either way, the paper then analyzes the novels within a framework that uses the theoretical structures of "interpellation" and "performativity" and then examines some mythology that seems to have inspired Bates, specifically Ovid's* ***Metamorphoses****. These novels strongly suggest that new forms of identity emerge through a complex and productive engagement with the forms of the past, so that, ultimately, they cannot be seen as texts that simply adhere to or reject conventions of gender.*

> [T]hrough her limbs
> A dragging languor spread, her tender bosom
> Was wrapped in thin smooth bark, her slender arms
> Were changed to branches and her hair to leaves;
> Her feet but now so swift were anchored fast
> In numb stiff roots, her face and head became
> The crown of a green tree. . . .
>
> — Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (17)

> Over the space of three winds the man grew stiff and still, unable to move while branch after branch pushed through the flesh of his upper body and long, hard roots from his lower body. The man shrieked until his mouth became a knot and his tears turned into slow-dripping sap and his hair hung down leaves.
>
> — Martine Bates, *The Taker's Key* (53)

> Then Procne, in a flame
> Of anger uncontrolled, sweeping aside
> Her sister's tears, "This is no time for tears,
> But for the sword", she cried. . . .
> I'll gouge his wicked eyes!
> I'll pluck his tongue out, cut away those parts
> That stole your honour. . . .
>
> — Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (140)

> "Not you," said Procne. "If the dragon wanted to kill you before . . . how much more now? . . . Can you imagine his rage? You must not go in."
>
> — Martine Bates, *The Taker's Key* (148)

> In returning to the ancient myths and opening them from within to the woman's body, the woman's mind, and the woman's voice, contemporary women have felt like thieves of language staging a raid on the treasured icons of a tradition that has required woman's silence for centuries.
>
> — Patricia Klindienst Joplin, "The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours" (26)

A debt to — and a love of — "the ancient myths" is evident throughout Martine Bates's *Marmawell* trilogy,[1] and the significance of this debt is visible in her choice of central image, the weaver's loom. Through an invocation of the ancient feminine craft of weaving, Bates places her female characters within a tradition that reaches to the patriarchal origins of Western story, to women like Penelope, Arachne, and Philomela. Bates makes allusive use of myth, weaving hints of it into her contemporary fantasy writing for young adults, and, in the process, transforms the patriarchal stuff of which her trilogy is in part constructed into an exploration of the potential of young women. Bates does not carry out a simple reversal, however, writing a story that sets itself in opposition to patriarchal history, narrative, and tradition. Instead, her trilogy maintains an uneasy relationship with its literary origins, and this very uneasiness informs the texture of the narrative: Marwen, the central character in these books, is frequently torn between respect for and love of her society's traditions and ancient social order, and her desire — and potential — to transcend the limitations

of such traditions. As Marwen negotiates this tension over the course of the three novels, the reader sees her develop into a somewhat surprising — and potentially troubling — model for powerful womanhood who never quite resolves that pull between the attractions of a traditional social structure and the desire for a new social order which transcends the past. For young adult readers, particularly young women, this tension poses a significant interpretive challenge. At first, the trilogy asks readers to admire the intelligence, resourcefulness, and strength of will that Marwen brings to her quest for identity and self-fulfilment in the face of a society that is, in the main, hostile to her. However, when Marwen is approaching the height of her success, the text then asks readers to admire her as she relinquishes everything she has struggled to achieve. In the end, Marwen is a woman silenced, and her fate seems, in some respects, continuous with the patriarchal tradition that Patricia Klindienst Joplin describes in my epigraph. How *should* we read such a conclusion? Two possibilities interest me in this paper. One is to take the view that what initially looks like a challenge to traditional representations and constructions of femininity is, ultimately, no challenge at all. The other is to see in these novels the strong suggestion that, in order to claim a powerful and independent female identity within contemporary culture, one must, of necessity, engage the patriarchal past in a (perhaps) uncomfortable but potentially productive relationship. In this view, to turn away from the past is to annihilate the present.

The books are set in the kingdom of Ve, where an order of women called Oldwives have access to "the magic," a spiritual force upon which the fabric of life and culture entirely depends. In addition to being workers of spells vital to everyday life in Ve, the Oldwives also use their magic to weave tapestries at the birth of every child. Each person in the kingdom owns the tapestry woven at her birth, guarding it carefully since it contains symbols that will guide her throughout life. Further, the entire cosmos is understood to be a vast tapestry into which everything is woven and through which all things connect. Any person born without a tapestry is considered soulless, "an empty shell with no purpose" (*DT* 43). At the opening of the first novel, *The Dragon's Tapestry*, seventeen-year-old Marwen is such a person. She has neither parents nor tapestry and has survived only because the village Oldwife, Grondil, adopted and raised her. Virtually all other people despise and fear Marwen, not only because she is soulless but because she possesses a profound gift for the magic, which is considered dangerous in the hands of a person with no soul. Despite Marwen's abject status, Grondil has made her an apprentice Oldwife, and Marwen's connection to the magic gives her life a shape that it would otherwise lack: "magic . . . was her friend, a guide for one who had no tapestry, a soul for one who had no soul" (*DT* 18). Over the course of the novel, the outcast Marwen gains confidence and power in the face of a social structure that would prefer to see her eradicated, and in this development we see some

of the tension mentioned earlier between a respect for tradition and a desire to transcend tradition. Marwen struggles with a sense of insecurity and frustration arising out of, on the one hand, confidence in her own abilities and, on the other, her belief in a social order that insists on discounting her. Readers might wonder why Marwen clings to a society that is overwhelmingly hostile to her, and a simple answer to this question is that, bad as her situation may be, it is nevertheless all she has. Were she outside culture, she would have no definition at all.

It is helpful to structure an inquiry of this kind through the theoretical model of "interpellation," both as Louis Althusser conceived it and as Judith Butler develops it. In Althusser's scene of interpellation, only one person on a street full of people turns in response to a police officer's hail. In turning, the individual understands him- or herself to be the subject named by the hail and accepts the ideological terms represented by the officer, thus confirming him- or herself as a subject bound by and within ideology.[2] Butler observes that "we might object that the [interpellating] 'call' arrives severally and in implicit and unspoken ways, that the scene is never quite as dyadic as Althusser claims" (*The Psychic Life* 106). Althusser's single call might thus be said to actually consist of an accumulation, or chain, of spoken or implied calls. Throughout an individual's life, this chain of interpellating calls regulates and reinforces the terms of an original call, constantly re-subjecting the subject. This accumulation of calls begins early, as Butler makes clear in *Bodies that Matter*:

> Consider the medical interpellation which (the recent emergence of the sonogram notwithstanding) shifts an infant from an "it" to a "she" or a "he," and in that naming the girl is "girled". . . . But that "girling" of the girl does not end there; on the contrary, that founding interpellation is reiterated by various authorities and throughout various intervals of time to reenforce or contest this naturalized effect. The naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm. (7-8)

In the kingdom of Ve, we might call the tapestry woven at birth a person's first interpellation: it contains symbols that define one's place in the social order, thus constituting one as a social subject. The tapestry also participates in the subsequent chain of calls that reinforce that initial subjectivation: "Some said the symbols woven into it predicted one's destiny, others said they guided agency. But all believed that each symbol was to be carefully understood and followed" (*DT* 6). At death, an Oldwife "interprets" the tapestry, and each person is expected to have fulfilled the terms set out by it.

For the person without a tapestry, the founding interpellation is simple: one is soulless. Without a tapestry, one is without guidance about how to live or what to achieve, and one is denied employment, since the tapestry's symbols define and validate a calling. The life of a soulless one is

meaningless, and the person is beneath notice. Further, as Butler puts it above, the "founding interpellation [in this case of soullessness] is reiterated by various authorities and throughout various intervals of time" and sets "a boundary." Thus, Marwen finds herself always being reminded that she exists outside normal social structures. At the same time, however, she is defined — and can define herself — only in relation to them. Again, Butler is helpful:

> This "I," which is produced through the accumulation and convergence of such "calls," cannot extract itself from the historicity of that chain or raise itself up and confront that chain as if it were an object opposed to me, which is not me, but only what others have made of me; for that . . . mesh of interpellating calls . . . is not only violating, but enabling as well. . . . The "I" who would oppose its construction is always in some sense drawing from that construction to articulate its opposition; further, the "I" draws what is called its "agency" in part through being implicated in the very relations of power that it seeks to oppose. [However, t]o be *implicated* in the relations of power, indeed, enabled by the relations of power that the "I" opposes, is not, as a consequence, to be reducible to their existing forms. (*Bodies that Matter* 122-23)

If we read Marwen, then, as an interpellated subject, she cannot simply turn her back on the set of calls that have produced her *as* a subject. To do so, were it possible, would be to annihilate her self. She can struggle against those calls — and does so with increasing success as the trilogy progresses, becoming less "reducible to the . . . existing forms" of the "relations of power" in which she is implicated — but she can never do away with them entirely, as we shall see.

One effect of being interpellated as soulless is that Marwen has no recognized voice. Thus, early in *The Dragon's Tapestry*, having cast a spell, she wants to take credit for its effects but cannot: "Marwen wanted to cry out, 'I did it! It was me, my magic.' But she could not. She was voiceless, soulless" (17). Here, at the outset of the first book, Marwen copes with her culturally imposed emptiness and voicelessness by filling herself with a specific kind of language: "Greedily she read and memorized a few spells and enchantments that went beyond her level of learning. . . . But Marwen could not stop herself. The words filled her up and gave her shape, and the empty places felt less empty" (17). This early emphasis on language develops throughout the trilogy, with the kinship between ordinary speech and magic spells becoming increasingly explicit. Etymologically, "spell" refers to talk and to storytelling, rather than to magic, and the elision in these novels between speech and spell-casting foregrounds the power that inheres in words themselves — and, therefore, in women, since in Ve it is women, particularly the Oldwives, who know and tell stories, who keep the lore, and who are the chief practitioners of magic. Thus, their roles as

wordsmiths and as spellsmiths are intimately connected, and this connection extends to their function as weavers: throughout the books, both spells and stories are "woven" and are frequently woven together. Weaving is magic, it is speech, it is storytelling.

As a weaver of spells, Marwen participates in this web of power, despite the efforts of others to exclude her from it, and by the end of *The Taker's Key* she achieves a level of success and acceptance virtually unimaginable at the opening of the first book. For much of *The Taker's Key*, however, she still struggles for credibility, despite having (re)gained her tapestry and having become both Oldwife and the Wizard of Ve. The chain of calls which defined her in the first book continues to be invoked:

> "But I have heard that her tapestry is a fiction. . . . That she got it from the ashes of a dead fire." . . .
>
> "I know her to be impertinent . . ."
>
> ". . . braggarty . . ."
>
> ". . . selfish . . ."
>
> ". . . soulless!" (*TK* 69, 70)

Many of her sister Oldwives are reluctant to accept her as one of their order and refuse to believe that she is the Wizard. However, they are forced into an alliance with her because of a powerful threat to themselves and to Ve.

The Oldwives, including Marwen, notice that their power to weave spells is disappearing. Further, the web of magic that hides Ve from the unmagical outside world is breaking down; passing ships have seen the kingdom, and so invasion seems imminent. One Oldwife remarks, "there are tears in the fabric of the magic. And not, I tell you, tears only, but the fabric is worn through, ripped clean" (*TK* 38). If the magic disappears, Ve faces destruction. The source of this problem is Perdoneg, a dragon imprisoned by Marwen at the end of *The Dragon's Tapestry*. He has found a way to send a magic from his prison that steals spells and then destroys them. Each time Marwen or any of the Oldwives casts a spell, Perdoneg snatches it. The elision between speech and spell-casting is now at its most explicit, since the power of the spell lies in its speaking — in its expression as words — but, paradoxically, it is only when that power is invoked that Perdoneg can acquire and destroy it. Only when the women express themselves can they be silenced; for example, Marwen works some magic and, "Even as she did it, she felt the dragon stealing that spell, and she *knew she could not speak it again*" (*TK* 121; emphasis added). Perdoneg's ambition is to destroy the Wizard who imprisoned him — Marwen — and to then rule over Ve. To achieve this ambition, he is using an ancient tool of patriarchy: he consolidates masculine power by silencing women, by stealing and destroying their words, their power of expression. We might say that he interrupts their ability to produce themselves through discourse, a suggestion which,

in turn, suggests the possibility that *The Taker's Key* is exploring questions of performativity.

The terms under which J.L. Austin identifies certain kinds of speech as "performative" seem readily applicable to the way spells function in the *Marmawell* trilogy. Performatives, in Austin's formulation, are utterances which "do not 'describe' or 'report'" an existing state of being; rather, "the uttering of the [performative] sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action" (5). Here are some of the examples Austin gives: saying "I do" at a wedding, or "I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*," or, in a will, "I give and bequeath my watch to my brother" (5). In each case, the utterance brings about the state of being to which it refers. Interestingly, each of these examples also has a ritual/ceremonial or legal quality to it; as Austin puts it, "There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances" (14). That is, we have a ritual utterance which follows a recognized formula in order to produce a specific effect.[3] In this respect, then, we can regard spells as performatives. They are repeatable linguistic formulae which bring into being the state to which they refer. Marwen says, "Dur! Moshe! Ip!" and the person or creature at whom she directs this formula becomes a type of lizard called an ip (*DT* 39; *TK* 169).

Butler's development of performativity in *Gender Trouble* bears directly on what I have identified as Perdoneg's interruption of the Oldwives' ability to produce themselves through discourse. Butler argues that what we understand to be gender identity — a male or female gendered "core" which is integral to the self — is actually produced through reiterated actions that people perform within a culturally-sanctioned framework:

> Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. . . . Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. . . . [This] constitute[s] the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (33, 140)

A subject's sense of her- or himself as a gendered being, then, proceeds not from something intrinsic to the person but from endlessly iterated gendered actions sanctioned by a power structure within which the subject willingly, if unknowingly, participates. These performative acts create in the subject the illusion that she or he has a natural, gendered core. As in Butler's theory of performativity, where one becomes gendered through repeated normative acts, the Oldwives produce for themselves the condition of *being* Oldwives through their ability to not only speak spells but to do so repeatedly. Without this ability, there is, arguably, nothing about them that could

be said to be intrinsically or naturally "Oldwife." "I am not what I once was," an Oldwife remarks suggestively when commenting on the loss of her powers (*TK* 37).

Of course, we have already seen something of this process in Marwen. The voiceless, soulless girl has no place in the "natural" order — is nothing and means nothing (*DT* 17), is "an empty shell with no purpose" (*DT* 43) — but takes on a particular shape, a particular kind of identity and meaning through her acquisition and use of repeatable, discursive formulae: "Greedily she read and memorized . . . spells and enchantments. . . . The words filled her up and gave her shape" (*DT* 17). Further, at first she needs to invoke this identity and shape, but over time and with use it becomes naturalized: "The magic was rushing through her body like wind in a tunnel, roaring in her ears, demanding to be used. For the first time the magic had come to her unsought and unbidden" (*DT* 57).[4]

Through an encounter with the three sister gods (Bates's version of the Greek Fates), Marwen learns that the dragon is fated to acquire all her power. Further, when she does battle with Perdoneg, she will lose. There is a remote chance that she can defeat him, but it is a gamble that, even if it works, will still result in the loss of her power. This chance lies in the fact that, according to Perdoneg's fate, he must *steal* her magic; she may be able to thwart this fate by willingly *giving* him her power. Marwen is understandably devastated by the idea of voluntarily giving up the spells through which she has been transformed from a cipher into someone with shape, meaning, and identity: "How could she give up her magic? She was nothing without it — no one. It was all she had to offer each waking day. Without it she was soulless" (*TK* 104). In Butlerian terms, we could say that she is forced into the uncomfortable knowledge that her "identity [has been] tenuously constituted in time" and is now proving to be little more than an "illusion of an abiding . . . self" (*Gender Trouble* 140). Marwen has a hard choice. If she refuses to give up her magic, Perdoneg will steal it, destroy her, and rule over Ve (if the kingdom survives). If she willingly gives her magic to Perdoneg, she *might* survive, and Ve *may* be preserved. Either way, she loses her power. She chooses, of course, to relinquish her magic. In the episode in which she does so, face to face with Perdoneg in the place of his imprisonment, she is slowly emptied of words in a painful and exhausting process of self-abasement. Marwen can make fewer and fewer utterances, until she is silenced completely, empty of both spells and *spiel*, and experiencing a kind of death: "Marwen could not speak. There was not a single spell in her mouth, and the heart of magic inside her no longer beat" (*TK* 170).

A novel that looked as if it were going to celebrate women's voices, as if it might model for young women an ideal of struggling against culturally-imposed female silence, seems to have ended in a patriarchal victory: the voice of a powerful woman is destroyed. In this, Marwen resembles

some of the women found in the mythology from which Bates takes inspiration, a mythology whose stories are "the treasured icons of a tradition that has required woman's silence for centuries" (Joplin 26). Indeed, Ovid's account of "Tereus, Procne and Philomela" in the *Metamorphoses* threads its way through the Marmawell trilogy. It is frequently present just beneath Bates's text and very occasionally announces itself explicitly. (One of Marwen's companion Oldwives in *The Taker's Key* is called Procne, for example.) The story is fairly simple: Athens is besieged by the Thracian army. To make peace, Pandion, King of Athens, offers his daughter Procne in marriage to Tereus, King of Thrace. After five years of marriage, Procne wishes to see her sister Philomela and convinces Tereus to bring her from Athens. Tereus is so taken with Philomela's beauty that, having returned to Thrace, he rapes her in a remote cabin. When she threatens to speak of his misdeed, he cuts out her tongue and leaves her imprisoned and under guard in the cabin. Returning to Procne, he tells her that Philomela is dead. In the meantime, Philomela, although unable to speak, weaves a tapestry that reveals Tereus's crime and has the tapestry conveyed to Procne. Procne interprets it,[5] rescues Philomela and, in revenge, butchers her son and serves him to Tereus at a banquet. When Tereus learns that he is eating his child, he pursues the two women in order to kill them. They metamorphose into birds, as does Tereus (Ovid 134-42).

Joplin's compelling reading of Philomela and other weaving women in Greek and Roman myth, "The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours,"[6] offers insight into this tale that we can take back to the *Marmawell* trilogy. Joplin sees the woman's "safe, feminine, domestic craft" (26) of weaving elevated into a tool that resists the effects of male violence. Philomela, in attempting to speak of masculine powers of violation, is silenced by a patriarchal culture that seeks to suppress and forget her because of the threat she represents if her voice is heard. Imprisoned, she is "the violated woman musing over her loom until she discovers its hidden power" (27) to communicate. The loom becomes "an instrument that binds and connects [and] . . . re-members or mends what violence would tear apart" (51). However, in the patriarchal tale, such resistance fails and the women themselves fall into the cycle of violence, murdering the child. Reparation cannot occur:

> the three are turned into birds. But paradoxically, this changes nothing. Metamorphosis preserves the distance necessary to the structure of dominance and submission: in the final tableau all movement is frozen. Tereus will never catch the sisters, but neither will the women ever cease their flight. (45)

In some respects, Marwen's experiences parallel Philomela's. For example, both she and her cousin/half-brother Maug are children of the previous Wizard. This leads Maug, in *The Prism Moon*, to assert that he, not Marwen,

is the Wizard's heir. In doing so he seems also to be asserting a patriarchal right of succession: he is the Wizard's *son*, and we learn elsewhere in the trilogy that previous Wizards have, with only one exception, been male and are generally *expected* to be male (*DT* 99; *PM* 81; *PM* 85; *TK* 35). In the course of imposing his patriarchal "rights," Maug, like Tereus, feels a powerful and incestuous lust for a woman of his own family. Having imprisoned the woman, both men commit acts of rape, although Maug's is symbolic: he cuts off Marwen's long braid — "the sign of purity, of the virgin" (*PM* 15) — in a moment of combined violence and lust.[7] Both men prevent the woman from communicating; in Maug's case he uses magic both to stop Marwen from speaking (*PM* 61, 65) and to give her the appearance of being a hag so that her friends will not recognize her if they find her in prison (*PM* 137). In the face of these assaults, Marwen, like Philomela, finds in the loom the power to resist the effects of male violence. Maug's tapestry is lost and a replacement must be woven by an Oldwife. He commands Marwen to make the new tapestry and to include the symbol of the Wizard's staff as evidence of his vocation. Marwen replies:

> "I remember no staff in your tapestry."
> "Then put it in!" Maug screamed. (*PM* 124)

In prison, she weaves the tapestry, but without the staff. Like Philomela, she weaves a story[8] that refuses complicity with the falsehoods and crimes through which the men extend and consolidate their power.

In addition to this Maug episode, I have already discussed another parallel with Ovid's tale: in Perdoneg's prison, Marwen submits to a "rape" of her powers and is left voiceless. However, there is an important difference between the ancient myth and Bates's narrative. That difference lies in "the *refusal* to return violence for violence" (Joplin 52). Philomela and Procne both respond violently and together become a patriarchal "scapegoat for male violence" (Joplin 53). Marwen, by contrast, returns creation for violence, as Philomela *initially* did in her work at the loom. So, although she never speaks again, Marwen's story does not end with her silencing. Indeed, she emerges in the final pages of the trilogy as a figure of extraordinary power.

As I suggested in my opening, Bates's engagement with an ancient literary tradition is in many respects a productive engagement. However, Bates's raid on the treasured icons of that tradition is a selective raid. The presence in her text of patriarchal stories suggests — indeed, establishes — a continuity with them, but in incorporating them into her own myth-world of Ve she also leaves a great deal behind. For example, in Ve the masculine and patriarchal seems always already insufficient or in error. We have seen two examples of it when in error (Maug and Perdoneg's attempts to assert their violent and virtually insane authority), and its insufficiency is appar-

ent in Marwen's lover and eventual husband, Prince Camlach. Camlach's failings are sometimes presented in a witty and slightly mischievous manner; for example, when he and Marwen first meet, the "maiden," in a reversal of fairy tale stereotypes, rescues the prince from imprisonment. However, a more significant example of his inadequacy comes in *The Taker's Key*. When magic has ceased to hide the kingdom, Camlach leads a military force as a defence against invading ships. However, Ve does not possess a significant army or navy, having had no need of them when the kingdom was surrounded by a web of magic. Camlach's actions seem little more than a futile display of masculine bravado, something to do while he waits for Marwen to fight his kingdom's battles:

> The small fishing boats of Ve could not possibly last long against the larger sailing vessels of the people from the bottom of the earth. . . . [Marwen] knew . . . that [Camlach] . . . would be waiting for her to restore the magic so that once again Ve could be hidden. He would be telling his men to have faith in the young Wizard. (*TK* 83-84)

Despite Camlach's status as patriarchal heir to the throne of his kingdom, there is actually very little he can do in defence of Ve. Here, stereotypical tools of male power are impotent.

But as much as the *Marmawell* trilogy values "female" activities and qualities, these too are shown to be insufficient. The Oldwives are incapable of retaining their magic in the face of the dragon, as is Marwen, whose eventual success emerges from the iconoclastic combination in her of both Oldwife and Wizard. That is to say, the continuity of the culture relies on both an adherence to old forms (here, both Oldwife/female and Wizard/male are vital) *and* on a reworking and resignifying of those old forms in new ways.

What, then, is the nature of Marwen's success? As she and the Oldwives travel to meet Perdoneg, she discovers in herself a strange power that no one has ever seen before. The women are sharing stories and lore along the way, and whenever Marwen tells a story, a physical remnant, seemingly produced by her words, shows up. For example, although they travel through a desert where there is no water or food, one of her stories brings snow, which melts and provides water, and another produces baskets of things to eat. These are small acts of creation which bring physical matter into being. As an Oldwife, she should possess a magic of illusion, but this can produce only the appearance of things, not the things themselves. As a Wizard, on the other hand, she should have a magic that can change one kind of matter into another but that cannot *create* matter. Marwen's new power seems a combination of the two. Through it, objects appear, but they are not illusions, nor are they formed out of existing matter. This is significant because, throughout *The Taker's Key*, Marwen has been searching for the "Key" of the novel's title. It seems to exist only in myth and in story, but

it is said to give its possessor the magic that was used, at the beginning of time, to create all of Ve. Marwen's new power looks like a small version of this magic of creation.

However, as we have seen, she must give *all* her powers, including this one, to Perdoneg if she hopes to thwart him, and this brings us back to that devastating moment when, having given up all her spells, Marwen is utterly silenced. What is not at first clear, however — and, to a large degree, is only implicit in the text — is that she is following a strategy in giving up her magic. Having established that Perdoneg is not aware of her new power, she saves it until the end. Finally, she has only one word left in her mouth, one final story to tell, and it is "Key." As she tells this story, she loses the last of her powers — her unique creating magic. Because Ve depends entirely on magic and because the Oldwives have long since lost *their* power, it seems that, in this instant, the kingdom is destroyed; that is, Perdoneg has acquired and broken all the magic. But also in this instant, Marwen's new power, now lost, has put into her hand the mythic Key that codes the universe, and Ve is instantly rewoven; the fabric of the magic, earlier "worn through, ripped clean" (*TK* 38), is restored. It is the power of story that achieves this, the power to remember and retell the lore but also the power to take the threads of story and reweave them, to rework and resignify them in ways previously unimagined.

This is all very well, but Bates's narrative also has a certain pragmatism to it that resists or balances a utopic reading of this kind. After all, reworking and resignifying the old stories does not destroy them. We may argue, as I have done, that Bates's text testifies to some extent against the patriarchal elements in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. But when we finish reading her books, we are nevertheless still in possession of Ovid's work, which itself may retain much of its old power over us and over our imaginations. In this respect, its relation to Bates's text and to her readers is rather like the relation between Marwen and her chain of interpellating calls. I suggested near the beginning of this paper that, despite the increasing success with which Marwen struggles against that chain — a chain that seeks, in her early days, to isolate her and leave her voiceless — she never manages to entirely turn her back on its power over her. Here, then, at the end of her story, she is once more isolated and voiceless, although now in possession of a vast magic and surrounded by people who love her. She has gained much, but the person she has become is still subject, in some ways, to those early calls; indeed, they are a fundamental part of her identity. When faced with such an ending, in which a powerful woman is denied her voice, some readers may find themselves subscribing to one of the readings I suggested in my opening — that these novels ultimately do not pose a significant challenge to traditional representations and constructions of femininity. While such a reaction would be understandable, a great strength of this trilogy — not just for young readers or young women but for any reader —

lies in its insistence that emergent forms of identity are caught up in the forms of the past, appear through an engagement with both the enabling and violating power of those forms, and may, in the end, be haunted by constructions we thought we had left behind.

Notes

1 The three volumes of the trilogy are *The Dragon's Tapestry* (1992), *The Prism Moon* (1993), and *The Taker's Key* (1998). For clarity and concision in textual references, I will use the following acronyms in parenthetic references: *DT* for *The Dragon's Tapestry*, *PM* for *The Prism Moon*, and *TK* for *The Taker's Key*.

2 Althusser's police officer is, of course, metaphorical. People are interpellated within ideology in any number of ways, and the police officer is simply a convenient representative of whomever or whatever is understood to be authoritative.

3 Austin distinguishes between "felicitous" and "infelicitous" performatives. Felicitous ones actually produce the state they refer to while infelicitous ones do not. Thus, if "I do" is to work, it needs to spoken by unmarried people in the presence of someone qualified to carry out marriages. "I do" will be infelicitous if one or both people are already married, or if the "authority" has no recognized power to perform the ceremony (14-16). Similarly, in Ve, some people can speak spells and produce an effect while others cannot.

4 I realize that my discussion here suggests a volitional quality to Marwen's performative development of identity that is not quite consistent with Butler's theory. In simplifying Bates's narrative in order to summarize elements of it, I cannot adequately convey the extent to which Marwen's developing sense of self comes about both voluntarily and involuntarily.

5 Appropriately, the Procne of myth is an interpreter of tapestries and, by virtue of her position as an Oldwife, Bates's Procne is also. In addition, Ovid's Latin word for Philomela's tapestry-writing (*carmen*) has, in context, an additional meaning of "spell" (Kenney 412). Philomela's tapestry, then, like those of the Oldwives, is a magical document.

6 Joplin's essay, first published in *Stanford Literature Review* in 1984, was republished, with slight revisions and under the name Patricia Klindienst, on the Voice of the Shuttle website <http://www.English.ucsb.edu/faculty/ayliu/research/klindienst.html> in 1996. For ease of reference, I provide page numbers from the earlier version of the article.

7 The following excerpts are from the passage in question. There is a curious suggestion of both rape and castration in Maug's attack on Marwen's "maiden head":

> His hands fumbled with her braid, and he began to unravel it slowly. His voice had changed, softened. . . .
>
> "Did you know that I watched through the east window of your home as Grondil brushed and braided it into a polished rope of silver, and followed you behind to collect a strand that fell?" . . .
>
> Maug had entirely unraveled Marwen's hair, unbound her hair to her knees, and his hands were in it. . . .
>
> She heard him take his knife from his belt, his breath coming rapidly. He did not take his hand from her hair.
>
> His knife was dull, and he took no care as he hewed the thickness of it, slashing and cleaving. At last, with a sharp cry from Maug or herself, she could not tell, the weight of her hair was gone from her head, and Maug held it in his hands. (*PM* 135)

8 And spell. See note 4, above.

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