

How the Furies Got their Fury Back: Remythologizing the Matriarchy in Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman*

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Too often, myths are uninspected. We bring them out without looking at what they represent, or what they mean. Pop culture presents us with myth in the simplest sense: a world in which events occur according to story logic--not as they do happen, but as they should happen. But retelling myths is important. The act of inspecting them is important. It is not a matter of holding a myth up as a dead thing, desiccated and empty, nor is it a matter of creating self-help tomes. Instead, we have to understand that even lost and forgotten myths are compost, in which stories grow. What is important is to tell the stories anew, and to retell the old stories. They are our stories, and they should be told.

- Neil Gaiman

Myths, Neil Gaiman claims, are compost. They are the tangled, messy stuff from which greater truths are wrought, from which new things grow, and from which we learn about ourselves. Myths are the fundamental stories, the core archetypal roots and blocks of narrative, and "without our stories, we are incomplete."¹ The act of approaching and appreciating a myth is itself an act of interpretation and transformation; the act of adapting a myth is a far greater act of alchemy.

In creating and writing *The Sandman*, an epic, ten-volume, graphic myth in line with and descending from the great tragedians of ancient Athens, Gaiman sinks knee deep in mythological compost. He struggles with, apprehends, and encounters various mythological figures from endless canons - Norse, Greek, Japanese, Native American. In doing so, he dismembers and reassembles mythologies, changing stories, associations, and implications. In one volume of *The Sandman*, *The Kindly Ones*, Gaiman takes on the myth of the Erinyes, the fearsome goddesses

¹ Gaiman, Neil. "Reflections on Myth." *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art* No. 31 (1999): 76.

best known from the Aeschylean play with which the volume shares a name, *Eumenides* (usually translated as “the kindly ones”). Gaiman’s interaction with the myth dramatically alters the gender dynamics, ideologies, and implications associated with the Furies by some scholars. Froma Zeitlin and Jeanne Schroeder, for example, purport that Aeschylus’ Furies represents a paradigmatic political and social subjugation of femininity to a patriarchal regime. If examined through the lenses provided by these writers, it becomes clear that the way in which Gaiman digs through the compost of the myth of the Erinyes results in a reversal of this subjugation. By expanding the figure of the Furies to represent an all encompassing feminine force that governs the “waking” rather than the “dreaming” world and embodies unrivaled strength, Gaiman transforms the Aeschylean myth into one where the Furies are not suppressed and subordinated to the patriarchy, but rather destroy the masculine paradigm and in its place effect a cosmic unification of male and female.

An Epic in Ten Volumes

Neil Gaiman’s *The Sandman* is an epic tragedy, a graphic novel with an unusually high number of words - sometimes, lacking space, the words crawl around the edges of the pages. It spans ten distinct volumes, shifting focus and pictorial style; each volume has a plot that is both independently coherent and relies on previous stories. Its protagonist, Dream, also called Morpheus, is one of the Seven Endless beings: Destiny, Death, Dream, Destruction, Desire, Despair, and Delirium. The Endless are the physical incarnations of these concepts, each ruling over their own realm, interacting with life across all known and unknown worlds. They are immortal, but transcend gods. Gods, in Gaiman’s world, are born dreams and rely on the worship and faith of believers to sustain them. The Endless do not rely on belief to exist. They simply are.

The Sandman unfolds throughout a complex and non-linear plot, following Dream and those impacted by him. In simplest terms, over ten volumes, Dream is captured, escapes, and regains lost amulets, fights various foes, rules over his realm, the Dreaming and, in the penultimate volume, dies. This volume, *The Kindly Ones*, is the focus of this essay.

The story follows a woman named Hippolyta Hall, once a super-heroine called The Fury, and her son Daniel, conceived while she was an unwitting captive in the Dreaming. One day, Daniel is kidnapped. Lyta, distraught, blames Morpheus, who had claimed that he would come for Daniel, “the child [she] carried so long in dreams.”² Wavering on the border of sanity and delusion, believing that her son is dead, Lyta wanders through strange, half-real worlds, seeking out her ancestors, the Furies, to exact vengeance upon the Dream King. The Furies initially refuse her plea, as Morpheus did not kill or kidnap Daniel. However, they gleefully pursue him for another devastating crime; he had killed his own son. This action - not the loss of Lyta’s son - is enough to justify to the Furies their relentless pursuit of his destruction. They shred the Dreaming, destroying everything and everyone in their wake, and Dream surrenders, walking hand in hand with his sister Death to his own. Satisfied, the Kindly Ones depart. Simultaneously, Daniel (once found) transforms into the next, more human incarnation of Dream.

The Sandman as Myth

Gaiman himself is preoccupied with myth, mythmaking, and gods. His works often focus on the evolution of divinities, and on their relative significance in a given situation. Consequently, many authors have approached his work by examining its mythological components. Stephen Rauch’s work, *Neil Gaiman’s The Sandman and Joseph Campbell: In Search For the Modern Myth*, encounters Gaiman’s work as a manifestation of mythological material. Rauch

² Gaiman, Neil. *The Kindly Ones*. (New York, USA: DC Comics, 1996): ch. 3, p 23.

acknowledges that in *The Sandman* Gaiman is not just an interpreter of myth, but rather rewrites it, creating new myths and new steps in the evolution of the myth.

Using Campbell's paradigms, Rauch outlines the use of classical mythological plotlines and archetypes within *The Sandman* that support the transformation and continuation of myth within the work.³ Campbell, Rauch explains, describes mythology as "the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation." Through his preoccupation with myth, classical mythological form, and storytelling, Gaiman claims Aeschylus, Euripides, Hesiod, and Homer as storytelling ancestors, casting himself as a mythmaker, a member of the echelon of artists whose role it is to translate Campbell's "inexhaustible energies of the cosmos" into appreciable language.⁴ This argument is corroborated by Timothy Evans, who states that "Gaiman's goal...is the pursuit of human universals through intertextuality."⁵ Indeed, Gaiman states that *The Sandman* attempts to create a new mythology, a modern mythology that encompasses the power of ancient and modern symbolism.⁶ In short, the strength and substance of *The Sandman* as mythological material enables the reader to encounter it as a mythology, and to view it as another in a long line of dramatic revisions and schismatic additions to the mythological canon.

Whence Came Erinyes

The myth of the Erinyes, also called the Furies, possesses a long and complicated history. The Erinyes are Chthonic goddesses of righteous vengeance - invoked or provoked when sacred binds or oaths are desecrated. They have ancient roots and are part of the group of divinities chronologically older than the more familiar Olympians. Chthonic deities are associated with the

³ Rauch, Stephen. *Neil Gaiman's The Sandman and Joseph Campbell: In Search of the Modern Myth*. (Holicong, PA: Wildside Press, 2003), 1-15.

⁴ Rauch, *Neil Gaiman's The Sandman and Joseph Campbell*, 20-24.

⁵ Evans, Timothy H. "Folklore, Intertextuality, and the Folkloresque in the Works of Neil Gaiman." *The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World*. Ed. Michael Dylan Foster. (Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2016). 67.

⁶ Gaiman. "Reflections on Myth," 78.

earth (*χθόνιος*, literally “subterranean”), femininity (as the earth, personified by Gaia, is feminine) and typically have been described as being born during or prior to the age of the Titans.⁷ The Erinyes are given different pedigrees at different times. In his *Theogony*, Hesiod describes them as the daughters of Gaia, born when the blood of the castrated Ouranos hit Gaia, the Earth (making them contemporaries with Aphrodite) (Hes. *Th.*, 176-185). Aeschylus and Vergil deem them daughters of *Nύχ*, Night, while the Orphic Hymns tell us that Persephone and Hades are their parents, linking them to a feminine deity and to the underworld.⁸

The outline of their myth is consistent: the Erinyes are goddesses (varying in number from many to three, a number made authoritative by Vergil in his *Aeneid*)⁹ who are depicted in the underworld as gaolers and purifiers of the damned dead,¹⁰ and on earth as goddesses called upon to exact vengeance or to avenge a desecration of a sacred bond.¹¹ They are often seen in the context of familial betrayal, perhaps when a parent has been wronged by their child,¹² but most famously, when a mother is wronged by her son.¹³ Victims of the Erinyes are assaulted by madness, pursued by the goddesses to the point of insanity and eventually, death.¹⁴ The most famous of these myths is the one found in Aeschylus, where Clytemnestra’s death by her son, Orestes (committed as an act of revenge for the slaughter of his father), wakens the Furies.¹⁵

However, the Furies are also associated with Demeter, a powerful goddess associated not only with the earth, but with femininity. This version of the myth guides us towards the complex and compound system of gendered dynamics associated with the Erinyes. The Erinyes, revenge,

⁷ Hesiod, and Richmond Lattimore, Trans. *The Works and Days. Theogony. The Shield of Herakles.* (Ann Arbor: U Mich Press, 1959): 176-185.

⁸ Taylor, Thomas. *Hymns and Initiations.* (Frome: Prometheus Trust, 2003). Hymns 29, 70.

⁹ Virgil, and Robert Fagles. *The Aeneid.* (New York: Viking, 2006)

¹⁰ Plato, and R. D. Archer-Hind. Trans. *The Phaedo of Plato.* (New York: Arno Press, 1973): 107d.

¹¹ Taylor, Thomas. *Hymns and Initiations.* (Frome: Prometheus Trust, 2003). Hymns 69-70.

¹² Homer, and Robert Fagles, Trans. *The Iliad.* (New York, NY, U.S.A.: Viking, 1990): XV.200-5

¹³ Aeschylus, and Peter Meineck, Trans. *Oresteia.* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub., 1998).

¹⁴ Brown, A. L. "The Erinyes in the Oresteia: Real Life, the Supernatural, the Stage." *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 103 (1983). 14.

¹⁵ Aeschylus, *Eumenides.*

and death are here all linked to womanhood, particularly fertility, but also to the earth, to the waking, walking, Chthonic world.¹⁶

Gaiman's version of the myth deliberately utilizes the Erinyes' associations with femininity and savage justice. Aeschylus' account of the Erinyes also takes advantage of these associations, but to specific ends. According to Zeitlin and Schroeder, Aeschylus uses the myth to establish a strong antagonistic dichotomy between the Olympian and the Chthonic as well as between the dichotomies Symbolic/Real and Masculine/Feminine.¹⁷ The story is a culmination of the *Oresteia*, a trilogy recounting of the downfall and absolution of the house of Atreus. Orestes has murdered his mother for killing his father, Agamemnon (in retribution for Agamemnon's own sacrifice of their daughter).¹⁸ The death of his mother at his hands sets the Erinyes after him, intent to drive him to complete dissolution and death. Apollo intervenes, demanding that Orestes be put on fair trial in Athens. The jury is tied and Athena casts the final lot for innocence. She explicitly sides with men, saying "I was born of no mother, and I defer to the male, in all things with all my heart" (Aesch. *Eum.* 736), prioritizing the apparent justice of the matricide over the wrong done by betraying a sacred familial bond. The Erinyes are enraged and feel cheated, demanding his death at their hands. Athena ameliorates the situation by giving the Furies a new domain in Athens, under the new epithet, the Eumenides: "the Kindly Ones." Aeschylus' Erinyes begin as wretched, blood thirsty creatures, who simultaneously indicate and stimulate madness in Orestes; they transform into tamed women.¹⁹

¹⁶ Johnston, Sarah Iles. "Purging the Polis: Erinyes, Eumenides, and Semnai Theai." *Restless Dead: Encounters between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece*. (Berkeley: U of California, 1999): 270-280.

¹⁷ Zeitlin, Froma I. "The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," in *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature*. (Chicago: U of Chicago, 1996); Schroeder, Jeanne Lorraine. "The Eumenides' Return: The Founding of Law Through the Repression of the Feminine." in *The Triumph of Venus: The Erotics of the Market*. (Berkeley: U of California), 278

¹⁸ Aeschylus, *Oresteia*

¹⁹ Brown. "The Erinyes in the *Oresteia*," 30.

Mythic Matriarchs

Aeschylus' *Eumenides* has endured, its mythological status and ideological implications worming their way into Gaiman's modern retelling of the myth. Froma Zeitlin in particular examines the dynamics, metaphors, and progression of events within Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in terms of gendered ideology and society.²⁰ Aeschylus' trilogy, she claims, demonstrates social evolution as a movement from "matriarchy" (represented by the ancient, regressive, and primitive Erinyes) to "patriarchy" (associated with Orestes and his patron, Apollo).²¹ Orestes establishes the prioritization of the male over the female by excising his mother from his creation and placing the responsibility entirely in the hands of his father. The two crimes of the *Oresteia* - matricide and murder of a husband - are then compared by Athena, who proclaims them unequal because of her belief that men and fathers are more important and noble than women and mothers, thereby absolving Orestes.²² His absolution is revealed as a political maneuver when one considers that the Aeschylean Erinyes represent the terrifying, primordial female principle, "championing a justice that is blind, archaic, barbaric, and regressive, a justice that is to be superseded by the new institution of the law court."²³ The female principle is transformed, rendered inert, and involved as a supporting role in the new system of law, gender ideology, and justice. The Erinyes represent the allegedly overthrown and primitive female principle of power, and their fury with Orestes and Apollo is in the name of this denigration of female power.²⁴

This ideology is manifested throughout *Eumenides*. The first description of the Furies describes them as

²⁰ Zeitlin. "The Dynamics of Misogyny."

²¹ Zeitlin. "The Dynamics of Misogyny," 100

²² Zeitlin. "The Dynamics of Misogyny," 100

²³ Zeitlin. "The Dynamics of Misogyny," 101

²⁴ For similar reading, see Norman O. Brown's 1953 introduction to Hesiod's *Theogony*.

[A] throng of women...No, not women, they were a hideous sight,/more like Gorgons, but worse, much worse...the creatures in there have no wings, they are dark, dank and disgusting./Their foul stench and hideous breath forced me back,/and their eyes seep a repulsive, putrid pus./They are wrapped in black dismal rags not fit for human sight. (*Eum.* 45-50)

They are fearsome, grotesque creatures that bear malevolence and horror, diametrically opposed to and inherently lesser than Olympian gods, the masculine sphere, and patriarchal symbolism.²⁵

The link between their malevolence and matriarchal womanhood is emphasized in this description. For Aeschylus, the Erinyes are “wholly identified with the primordial negative female principle.”²⁶ This fearful Chthonic power is metamorphosed by Athena, who renames them in an action that, in light of Zeitlin’s arguments, represents a deliberate subjugation of the feminine. That is to say, the Furies only become ‘Kindly’ after acquiescing to the male sphere.

Jeanne Schroeder explores this taming, arguing that the legal system that absolves Orestes is only masculine, and the Erinyes are wholly outside of this paradigm. She then explains that the feminine Erinyes are associated with tangible experience and with cold truth, stating that

only the masculine is completely circumscribed by the law. The feminine always escapes. Indeed the rule of law is a masculine fantasy erected to veil or hide the truth of feminine freedom the Furies are the real that existed before the creation of the symbolic law. The Furies are the denial of all masculine claims to power.”²⁷

Furthermore, she views the creation of the masculine and the feminine as debasements of each other; the creation of a traditional gendered binary relies on the undermining of the opposing gender.²⁸ Given that the symbolic law and legal systems are masculine, they are also inherently misogynistic and disempowering to the feminine/real sphere and its representatives: the feminine and matriarchal Furies.

²⁵ Zeitlin. “The Dynamics of Misogyny,” 111

²⁶ Zeitlin. “The Dynamics of Misogyny,” 101

²⁷ Schroeder. “The Eumenides’ Return,” 285

²⁸ Schroeder. “The Eumenides’ Return,” 309.

The patriarchal reformation of the furious and unsatisfied Furies makes them a part of unreality and of symbolic law. Apollo and Athena subsume them into a masculine and rational world (just as she herself has been subsumed into a logical world - giving herself a father when before she had none, and forsaking a mother), endowing them with the power to protect Athens and dole out justice as the Eumenides.²⁹ The Furies have no place in the symbolic, masculine world initially, and pursue Orestes not because of symbolic law, but because of a violation of the most basic, primal sort: the slaughter of his mother, and the breaking of a familial, matriarchal oath.³⁰ They are pursuing a truth, a non-symbolic reality.

The Trifold Goddess

Gaiman takes the basic framework allotted by Aeschylus and reverses the ideological effects. As in Aeschylus, the Erinyes are goddesses, fiercely feminine, and willing to dispense justice of the most primal variety, but they are not subservient to any patriarchal regime. Critically, alliances of the patriarchal with the symbolic and the matriarchal with the real, and the ensuing antagonistic dichotomy between male and female, is reaffirmed time and again in *The Kindly Ones*. In short, the dichotomy between symbols and non-symbolic reality is perpetuated in analogy through the dichotomy between dreams and waking.

It is important to understand that the Erinyes in Gaiman's work are just a single aspect of the trifold goddess, a character that appears throughout myth and throughout *The Sandman* in different guises. In rendering them this way, he complicates the figure of the Erinyes significantly. His Furies are not only Erinyes (their number taken from Vergil and Orphic hymns), but also the fates, and the tri-fold goddess in all her incarnations of the Crone, the Mother, the Maiden (sometimes corresponding to Hecate, Demeter, and Persephone, and other times to

²⁹ Schroeder. "The Eumenides' Return,," 302

³⁰ Schroeder. "The Eumenides' Return," 278

Hecate Demeter and Diana, and so on). The tri-fold goddess encompasses all divine female trinities and, while always drawn as a maiden, a mother, and an ancient woman, their portrayal changes to depict whichever aspect is in focus (fig. 1). As the Erinyes, the tri-fold goddess is depicted as merciless, with battle armor, scorpions, blood, and weapons (fig. 2), distinguishing her from Aeschylus' Furies, who were depicted as hook nosed, short haired, gruesome, semi-women as the Erinyes, and femininely graceful divinities as the Eumenides (fig. 3).³¹ By associating the Erinyes with a theoretically endless number of female divinities - including Chthonic figures - and delineating them as battle-ready, Gaiman presents them as clear and empowered representatives of femininity, matriarchy, and Chthonic power.

Dream, the protagonist of the entire series, is the King of Dreams, the acting monarch of the most symbolic realm. He is also unequivocally masculine, given male epithets (King, Lord), depicted with harsh, angular lines, lacking any feminine curves, and seeks out feminine lovers who praise his masculinity, as seen in figure 4. He is also, crucially, the father of Orpheus in Gaiman's retelling. Traditionally, Orpheus is the son of Apollo, the very same representative of the patriarchal and symbolic field in *Eumenides*, and the de facto enemy of the Erinyes. This identification of Morpheus, Lord of Dreams, and Apollo only serves to reinforce the association between Dream and symbolism/patriarchy, as well as the polarization between Dream and the Kindly Ones. Emphasizing the parallels further, it is because of the filicide of that same son, shared mythologically with Apollo, that the Furies ultimately prosecute Dream.

The Dreaming, the world of Dreams over which Morpheus rules, is a perfect manifestation of symbols. Dreams are the creations of minds, never literal, representative instead of fears, hopes, ideas; they are the worlds that will never be, books never written, journeys contemplated

³¹ Maxwell-Stuart, P. G. "The Appearance of Aeschylus' Erinyes." *Greece & Rome* 20.01 (1973): 81-84.

and not yet taken taken. It is also “somewhat of a boy’s club,”³² both generally lacking and inhospitable to significant female characters. The only major characters living in the Dreaming that are not explicitly identified as male or patriarchal are Eve, the first woman, born of Adam’s rib, who lives on the very border of the Dreaming, and Nuala, a fairy servant given to Morpheus as a gift. Women, in the world of Dreams, are liminal creatures, not quite present, and consistently without a voice.

Outside the Dreaming, however, women are consistently associated with tangible experience and with wakefulness. Lyta Hall, even as she searches through what seems to be a Dream-like realm for the Kindly Ones, is nevertheless bound to the waking world. Her story is depicted twice and side-by-side, first from her perspective, then from an objective viewer’s (figs. 5, 6). In her eyes, as we see on the top frame of figure 5 and the right side of figure 6, she wanders through a lush world, encountering various Chthonic triads from the Gorgons to the three-headed she-snake that betrayed Eve. Simultaneously, the reader is shown that Lyta is wandering through the dull, grey streets of a city, growing increasingly ragged, speaking to snakes, to cats, to homeless women and to herself, in a storefront window (fig. 6). The more time she spends searching, the more she resembles traditional representations of the Furies. Figure 7 depicts Lyta’s transformation into a Chthonic body: snakes writhe in her hair, her face becomes gaunt and sinisterly shadowed, her hands, clawed, she yearns aloud for vengeance.³³ Finally, Lyta finds herself confronted by her own reflection, clean-cut, beautiful, in the guise of the Fury, her superheroine alter-ego and a one-time member of the Justice League. Lyta, covering her eyes, bedraggled and be-clawed, is told by her alter-ego that

³² Gaiman, *The Kindly Ones*, ch. 4, p 22

³³ Maxwell-Stuart, P. G. "The Appearance of Aeschylus' Erinyes." 81-84.

Of course I'm not crazy. I'm one of the good guys. I am the Fury. My feet are planted firmly on the ground. This is probably some super-villain's mind-control ray experiment...Resist, Lyta! Resist! (fig. 8).

Even in her search for the Furies, supernatural creatures of Vengeance, she binds herself to waking, to groundedness, to sanity and to non-symbolic reality.

The connection between women and waking is shown not only symbolically in Lyta's journey, but is also stated by three women in a nursing home. These women are the mouthpieces of the Erinyes, and are depicted in figure 9 with shapes and shadows mirroring those inked for the Furies. Discussing the hostile dichotomy between men and women, they tell a young girl that

Women are about waking. As mothers, we wake them from nothingness to existence. As maidens we wake them to the joy and misery of adulthood, wake them to the worlds of lust and responsibility. And then, when their time is up, it's always **us** has to wash them for the last time, and lay them out for the wake (fig. 8).³⁴

This statement is followed by a invective that "Acts of revenge are sanctified," a statement that serve to reinforce the connection between women, waking, and revenge.³⁵

The Kindly Ones are the natural antonym to Dream; they are to reality and Chthonism as Dream is to symbology and Olypianism. However, unlike in Aeschylus' myth, the Kindly Ones turn not on the female representative of masculinity, but on the embodiment of the masculine paradigm himself. Incentivized to attack by Lyta, the Kindly Ones pursue not only Dream, but all that he represents, structures, and rules; they systematically destroy the Dreaming, shaking its very core (fig. 10). In a clear inversion of the movements made by Aeschylus in *Eumenides*, there is no trial for the accused, no system of justice laid out to quell bloodthirsty and primal feminine justice, no female divinity compelled to rule in favor of Morpheus, in favor of an intangible paradigm. The only adjudication that holds weight is that of the Furies, who explicitly do not care

³⁴ Gaiman. *The Kindly Ones*, ch. 6, p. 16

³⁵ Gaiman. *The Kindly Ones*, ch. 6, p. 19

about theoretical moral systems, explaining that “worse than beginnings, morals. I’ve got no time for them. No time at all” (fig. 16).³⁶

Their strength, self-awareness, and unstoppable agency manifest repeatedly - from their preferred appellation to the rhetoric they voice. During her deranged, mournful supplication to the Erinyes, Lyta mistakenly refers to them as Furies (her own super-heroic pseudonym). She is contradicted, told “not the Furies. That’s such a nasty name. It’s one of the things they [men] call women to put them in their place” (fig. 14).³⁷ Instead, the Erinyes wish to be called the Kindly Ones, a term which seems ludicrous. They are not kindly, and they are not the Goddesses tamed by Athena’s decision to envelop them in acceptable and patriarchal womanhood. Nevertheless, they wish to be called the Kindly Ones, and their power is so recognized that all beings acquiesce.³⁸ In placing the decision to refer to the Erinyes as Kindly Ones in the hands of the Erinyes themselves, Gaiman takes them out of the domain of patriarchal influence, and under their own sovereignty. Furthermore, he reverses associations made with Furies and Kindly Ones; Lyta, called the Fury, is part of the Justice League, a system of symbolic law - as Aeschylus’ Eumenides are made to be, while the amoral Kindly Ones pay no heed to any such system. They are in control of themselves and everything they do; Morpheus himself acknowledges this, knows that “the ladies have power to avenge blood crimes...the ladies are renowned for their relentlessness.”³⁹ He knows that he can stop neither them nor their victory.

The three women and Lyta move swiftly through the Dreaming, slaughtering the dreams they encounter, reaping them, laying waste to the entire realm. The art in this section is unique.

³⁶ Gaiman, *The Kindly Ones*, ch. 13, p. 24

³⁷ Gaiman, *The Kindly Ones*, ch. 7, p. 21.

³⁸ Gaiman, *The Kindly Ones*, ch. 10, p. 16.

³⁹ Gaiman, *The Kindly Ones*, ch. 11, p. 7.

The reader is not a bystander, watching the Furies kill symbols from afar. Instead, as depicted in figure 11, the massacre is drawn in the first-person, through the eyes of the Kindly Ones. Every death at their hands is also at ours. We see the fear in the eyes of each character, the resignation, the panic. We see what could be our own shadows, truly the shadows of the Furies, looming darkly over every doomed character (fig. 12), or we stare at Morpheus as he tries to confront the Furies, looking tiny on a crag, with lightning cracking all around him (fig. 14). No longer are the Kindly Ones subsumed by the patriarchy; rather, we, the readers, are subsumed into their encompassing feminine being by Gaiman's choice to have us see through their perspective.

The Kindly Ones are given agency as uncontrollable, imperturbable feminine beings. We not only literally see from their perspective along with them, but also, like Morpheus, we recognize and submit to their inimitable will, made more ominous by flashes of lightning signifying their violent presence and by the sense of omnipotence the first person perspective lends (fig. 12). Again, we see that the viewer shares a perspective with the looming Eumenides, and Morpheus seems small, perched on the top of a crag, surrounded by the Kindly Ones and by the strength of their presence (figs. 12, 13, 14). They have already announce themselves as immune to anything he could do to them, stating that, "We have no nightmares. Gods fear us, Demons fear us. We have hounded kings and angels. We have taken vengeance on worlds and on universes. We are the Kindly Ones. We are the Eumenides."⁴⁰ He can do nothing; they are stronger than he is. Their task, vengeance for his filicide, is their one priority. As they themselves say, they "will do what we shall do. Eh, Dreamer? We will do what we must."⁴¹ The completion of their task is inevitable, and they tell Morpheus that fighting against them is pointless. If he tried to fight, "nothing would change, Dream-King. How will you fight us? You cannot even touch us.

⁴⁰ Gaiman, *The Kindly Ones*, ch. 10, p. 16.

⁴¹ Gaiman, *The Kindly Ones*: Ch. 12, p 18.

Take your stand. We care not. We will continue to rip apart your world, bit by bit, shred by shred.”⁴²

The inherent femininity of Lyta and the Furies gives them power that is both impossible and unnecessary to repress. Over and over, they are drawn as looming presences, unremitting and unquestionably female, asserting their power over Morpheus and the Dreaming. Gaiman, in making the Furies’ power and agency so evident, emphasizes how distinct they are from Aeschylus’. Not only have the Furies destroyed the Dreaming (metaphorically, the patriarchy), but they have also transformed Lyta, whose history as the beautiful and justice-seeking superheroine casts a striking juxtaposition to the bloody, clawed, amoral Kindly One that she has become. Lyta, once the captive of Dreams - of the patriarchy, forsakes her status as a protector of justice analogous to Aeschylus’ Eumenides, and instead destroys her previous cage, tears it out at the roots, and becomes a true Fury (fig. 17). More than this, in destroying the Dreaming, the Furies and Lyta force Morpheus, the representative of the patriarchy, to abdicate his throne, his actions, and his life. The child Daniel takes his place, assuming the mantle and aspect of Dream of the Endless. Victory is categorically theirs. The Kindly Ones are controlled by no one, made kindly by no man or woman, and they are subject to no system that is not their own.

The consequences of this victory are immeasurable. Their vendetta is outside the bounds of any civilized legal system, particularly any devised and recorded by the patriarchy-enforcing Aeschylus. They seek to punish Dream for murdering his son, a crime he was compelled to commit by that same son; Orpheus had begged to die.⁴³ The actions of the Furies are, in this way, unaccountable, seemingly unintelligible. However, they neither care for nor are bound to morals; Morpheus’s death has nothing to do with systems of law or morality. However, it accomplishes

⁴² Gaiman, *The Kindly Ones*: Ch. 12, p 18.

⁴³ Gaiman, Neil. *The Sandman: Brief Lives*. (New York: DC Comics, 1994).

not just necessary and sacred revenge for a desecrated blood-oath, but also the brief and meaningful destruction of the masculine paradigm, the perfect symbolic world.

With Dream's death, and their victory, the Kindly Ones herald a new era, an era where the masculine dominion of Dream is infiltrated by reality and by matriarchy and femininity. The new Dream, lord of the Dreaming, is of their lineage, the son of the daughters of the Furies: Daniel, Lyta's lost child. He is tied by blood, the very connection most sacred to the Furies, to the Kindly Ones - the pure embodiment of women, femininity, and Chthonic matriarchal prowess. Not only is Daniel connected to women, but he is also drawn androgynously. In figure 18, we see that he is inked with curved lines, rounded cheeks, soft whites and clear planes, all in contrast to unforgiving and harsh black lines Morpheus' gaunt face, muscles, and robe. The Dreaming is therefore imbued with Chthonic femininity, lashing together symbolism and patriarchy with reality and matriarchy, undermining the patriarchy itself. This unification of masculine and feminine ameliorates any debasement of femininity by the establishment of a separate and superior masculinity. The victory is won not just for the Furies, but for all women in Gaiman's story, who - previously limited by the bounds of gender - are uplifted by the dissolution of boundaries within the masculine, symbolic paradigm of Dream.⁴⁴

That the Furies never give in to patriarchal power, never wane in the face of a symbolic masculinity upends the myth. The Erinyes are no longer representative of a toppled matriarchy; instead, they suggest a reinstatement of a perhaps forgotten feminine power. Gaiman's treatment of gender communicates an ideology antithetical to Aeschylus'. By inverting the ending of the *Eumenides*, making the Furies the totalizing incarnation of feminine deities, and giving them agency over their names, femininity, and behavior, Gaiman undoes the patriarchal work accomplished by Aeschylus. In re-imbuing them with power, and in updating the goddesses of

⁴⁴ Schroeder. "The Eumenides' Return," 312

vengeance for a modern era, he places them among compatriots of third wave Feminism. Their power is treated as though it were always dominant, their agency claimed, and their voices and functions are established as distinct from patriarchy.

The Eumenides as tamed women, metaphors for a rightfully and necessarily toppled matriarchy or sublimated reality, simply do not exist in Gaiman's paradigm. The mythic matriarchy is never overturned, the Kindly Ones are victorious and return to their resting state as the tri-fold goddess, the incarnate woman, the arbiter of bloody justice, overseer of reality and fate, spinning and cutting yarns, watching over the waking lives of beings everywhere. They are the perfect opposite to Gaiman's Dream. Women, as Gaiman says within the text, are for Waking. As in Aeschylus, the masculine world is symbolic, the feminine is non-symbolic reality. The Kindly Ones are a horrific facsimile of truth, out for sanctified vengeance, destroying Dream and his world in the process and throning their own representative in his place. The women are astounding and terrible - awesome in the purest sense of the word, and they exert their awesome power to its furthest extent. Gaiman reverses the work done by Aeschylus. In taking on the burden of myth, he reaffirms and continues a mythmaking project, reaffirms women and Chthonic matriarchy in the myth of the Erinyes, which in turn is a reassertion of the feminine into the patriarchy and the symbolic. In essence, he gives the Furies back their Fury.

Have you ever thought about what it means to be a god?
It means you give up your mortal existence to become a meme: something that lives forever in
people's minds, like the tune of a nursery rhyme.
It means that everyone gets to recreate you in their own minds. You barely have your own
identity anymore. Instead, you're a thousand aspects of what people need you to be.
And everyone wants something different from you.
Nothing is fixed, nothing is stable.

- Neil Gaiman, *American Gods*

Appendix

Figure 1: *The Sandman: Preludes and Nocturnes*, frame 4, ch. 2, pg. 19, ink on paper, 1989



Figure 2: *The Sandman: The Kindly Ones*, frames 4-6, ch. 11, pg. 21, ink on paper, 1996



Figure 3: *Red-Figure Krater*, side A, Detail: Fury. Attributed to the Policoro Painter, Apulian ca. 400-373. Terracotta H., 50.3 cm, Diam. 50.2. Photo courtesy of the Cleveland Museum of Art



Figure 4: *The Sandman: The Kindly Ones*, frame 5, ch. 13, pg. 6, ink on paper, 1996



Figure 5: *The Sandman: The Kindly Ones*, frames 1, 3, ch. 4, pg. 19, ink on paper, 1996



Figure 6: *The Sandman: The Kindly Ones*, frame 1,



Ch. 4, pg. 1, ink on paper, 1996

Figure 7: *The Sandman: The Kindly Ones*, frame 5, ch. 5, pg. 3, ink on paper, 1996



Figure 8: *The Sandman: The Kindly Ones*, frames 5, ch. 7, pg. 17, ink on paper, 1996



Figure 9: *The Sandman: The Kindly Ones*, frames 6-8, ch. 6, pg. 19, ink on paper, 1996



Figure 10: *The Sandman: The Kindly Ones*, frame , ch. 1, pg. 15, ink on paper, 1996



Figure 11: *The Sandman: The Kindly Ones*, frames 1-6, ch. 11, pg. 19, ink on paper, 1996



Figure 12: *The Sandman: The Kindly Ones*, frame 1, ch. 13, pg. 9, ink on paper, 1996



Figure 13: *The Sandman: The Kindly Ones*, frame 2, ch. 13, pg. 9, ink on paper, 1996



Figure 14: *The Sandman: The Kindly Ones*, frames 3&5, ch. 12, pg. 21, ink on paper, 1996

Figure 15: *The Sandman: The Kindly Ones*, frames 5-6, ch. 7, pg. 21, ink on paper, 1996



Figure 16: *The Sandman: The Kindly Ones*, frame 3, ch. 13, pg. 24, ink on paper, 1996



Figure 17: *The Sandman: The Kindly Ones*, frame 1, ch. 13, pg. 7, ink on paper, 1996



Figure 18: *The Sandman: The Kindly Ones*, frame 6, ch. 13, pg. 22, ink on paper, 1996



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