

C.W. MARSHALL The Furies, Wonder Woman, and Dream: tragic mythmaking in DC Comics

The physical appearance of the Erinyes in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* re-invented their conception and visual presentation for the Athenian mind. So powerful was Aeschylus' story that the Furies thereafter are functionally removed from narrative: however active they may be in the ancient world, in later myth they exist as remote threats or literary tropes, but not active agents. Indeed, it is only in the 1990s that the Furies are again presented as developed characters in Western literature. That happens in comics.

The penultimate story arc in Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*, "The Kindly Ones" (issues 57-69), presents the central character Dream, the incarnation of storytelling and imagination, as being pursued by the Furies. The Furies maintain many of their Aeschylean features, but as their pursuit of Dream is made personal, their inescapability becomes reinforced in the alternating visions of reality and madness the story provides. In assimilating the Furies with other tri-form Greek goddesses, Gaiman, in his syncretism, reinforces the extent of the Furies' power. The scope of the *Sandman* narrative is such that both Dream and the Furies exist at a level of reality above other mythologies (the Norse gods and the faeries from *Midsummer Night's Dream* are also characters), so that the reader is presented with a painfully real hero whose status as tragic victim seems avoidable, but, as with Orestes, is an inescapable result of the choices he makes.

The same intersection of mythical narrative and comics form is seen in Greg Rucka's *The Hiketeia* (2002). In it, Wonder Woman accepts the supplication of a young girl who flees Batman. The Greek obligation ritual allows the reader to see Diana adhering to an ideal that is as all-encompassing as Batman's monomaniacal quest for Justice. But the supplication also evokes the Furies, whose presence is the result of Diana's choice to protect the girl. By tying *hiketeia* violations to the Furies' revenge, Rucka allows new insights into the enactment of supplication on the Greek stage (e.g., Batman at one point behaves like Odysseus does in Euripides' *Hecuba*). Inevitably, as myth develops, it forces retrospective re-assessment of previous versions.

The Furies appear in other comics, directly or indirectly. There have been superheroes called the Fury (introduced in *Wonder Woman* 300 and *Young All-Stars* 1) who draw power from their Greek namesakes; the Female Furies are an elite squadron serving the supervillain Darkseid (first appearing in *Mister Miracle* 6). My interest in this paper, however, is to examine the Furies in DC Comics from two angles. First, what *narrative* developments do we see in the treatment of the Furies in DC Comics? Secondly, what opportunities does the *form* of comics provide to enable this narrative development? The fact that both key texts emerged from a producer of mainstream superhero comics is surprising, but narrative and form intersect in the creation of a modern myth that Aeschylus would have understood.