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## Rape and Revenge in Graphic Detail: Neil Gaiman's "Calliope," in *The Sandman* Comic Series

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Neil Gaiman's ability to weave fantasy, fairytales, folktales, mythology, canonical literature, and Gothic horror into his creative medium has played a significant role in elevating graphic literature as a subject for scholarly discourses.<sup>i</sup> *The Sandman* series is often recognized as Gaiman's most influential contribution to graphic literature. As an epic series, spanning seventy-five issues from 1989 to 1996, *The Sandman* tales center on the figure of Dream/Oneiros/Morpheus, the personification of the unconscious, ruler of dreams and nightmares, and all that is kept hidden from waking consciousness (Sanders 18). In this regard, Gaiman's protagonist embodies the psychological fascination within the Gothic tradition, with the monstrosities that dwell deep within the human psyche. As part of Gaiman's extended fantasy discourse of *The Sandman* series, the story "Calliope" stands out as one of Gaiman's most overtly feminist polemics. In this tale of rape and revenge, Gaiman provides a powerful critique of male-driven economies of power and privilege through his depiction of sexual violence. Specifically, Gaiman challenges the conventional view of male mastery by illustrating the dualities of masculine creativity and failure, strength and weakness, virility and impotence, phallus and lack, as the conflicts that characterize the men of his story. In this way, Gaiman illustrates the impotence of the male perpetrators, Richard Madoc and Erasmus Fry, who violently exploit the muse Calliope by raping her and stealing her creativity to fulfill their selfish ambitions of fame and fortune.

Although Oneiros's role within this narrative is minimal (he appears in one scene with Madoc, and one with Calliope), his impact on Calliope's life is profound. He supports Calliope's liberation from her sexual enslavement, empathizing with her abject condition of forced imprisonment, and in the end, serves justice by punishing Madoc's crime of violent exploitation. In this way, Oneiros's masculine subjectivity is set in contrast to the selfish malevolence of both Madoc and Fry, where his empathetic understanding of a female Other becomes the source of Calliope's revenge and liberation. Oneiros's significance as a model of masculinity is considerable when viewed within the larger cultural context of graphic literature. When understood as a genre that is primarily produced by and targeted at boys or men, the depictions of non-hegemonic masculinity, such as that represented through Gaiman's character of Oneiros, can be seen as a significant contribution to re-shaping masculinity apart from hegemonic constructions of violence, dominance, and oppression.<sup>ii</sup> As Jeffrey A. Brown states, the comic book is "one of Western culture's most rudimentary and instructional forms" that provides its "young readers a model of gender behaviour" (25). Most notably, traditional and conventional comic book superheroes are characterized by their depiction of masculinity as a "hyper-masculine ideal" (25). The figure of Superman exemplifies this ideal, as his alter-ego Clark Kent, a weak and socially inept man, is transformed into the strong and sexually desirable "man of steel" (31).

When viewed within this generic convention, Gaiman's figure of Oneiros stands out as a non-hegemonic model of masculinity. Physically, Oneiros differs from the hyper-masculine model, appearing pale, gaunt, and tall with unkempt, scraggly black hair. Indeed, his appearance bears little resemblance to the typical over-muscled superhero archetype. If conventional comic book masculinity is defined in opposition to feminine qualities, as Brown suggests it is, then Oneiros also drastically differs from other male comic heroes. While he is stoic and often portrayed as emotionally indifferent within the "Calliope" tale, Oneiros is undeniably feminist. Indeed, it is Oneiros's ability to empathize with the abject female rape victim that inspires his revenge on Madoc.

When Gaiman begins his narrative, he establishes the transaction between two men as the basic unit of exchange in a male-driven economy of power and prestige. Men's relationships with other men, or what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick refers to as "homosociality," relies on the "the use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men" (25-6). This exchange between men occurs between Madoc, and his literary mentor, Erasmus Fry. Madoc and Fry complete their transaction: the exchange of Calliope, the Muse who has been imprisoned by Fry for over sixty years. Madoc provides Fry with a bezoar and in exchange, he is given possession of Fry's longtime Muse. This commodification and trafficking of a woman reinforces the homosocial bonding of men within a patriarchal economy. Both Madoc and Fry are cemented in their relation to one another, each filling the other's void by providing him with what he needs (either the bezoar or the Muse). All the while, Calliope is demeaned in her treatment as an object of currency that is passed between them. This degradation of Calliope is reinforced when Fry states, "They say one ought to woo her kind, but I must say I found force most efficacious" (Gaiman "Calliope" 15). The implication is that he has repeatedly raped Calliope in order to achieve "the fame and the glory" of his successful writing career and is now passing her onto Madoc, so that he may achieve similar aims by committing acts of sexual violence (15).

Gaiman's engagement with feminist politics centers on the female Muse, her story being a potential counter-narrative to that of male dominance and mastery. As we learn early on, it is Madoc's torturous writer's block and the crisis of his masculine identity that drive him to violate Calliope. As Steve Erickson states in his introduction to Gaiman's story, Madoc has become "so impotent in his art . . . [that] he "enslave[s] his muse, devouring her for his inspiration when he isn't ravaging her for his pleasure" (Introduction ii). As critic Philip Edward Phillips notes in his analysis of the Muse tradition, invocations of the Muse are more than just a literary convention: "In a sense, an invocation is an admission of need and incompleteness. The poet invokes the Muse to receive a 'voice' outside of himself, a voice that fills the lungs or moves the pen to write inspired poetry" (8). The conflation of male literary genius with masculine virility and its inverse of masculine "need and incompleteness" with sexual impotence is deeply rooted in literature. As Sandra Gilbert explains, in the male literary imagination "male sexuality . . . is not just analogically but actually the essence of literary power" (490); in this way, a male writer's failures to create become a sign of his emasculation and sterility. Madoc's failure as an artist is the impetus to his transformation from a seemingly ordinary man who

struggles to fulfill his ambitions to a sadistic rapist who imprisons and tortures Calliope for his own perverse satisfaction.

The men's inner corruption is reflected in the environment and atmosphere of Fry's mansion, which is reminiscent of the Gothic castles in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, with its dark, shadowy corridors and menacing atmosphere. This external space reflects the sickness, depravity, and disorder of Fry's disturbed psyche. Indeed, there is a doubling of the two men: Fry is Madoc's monstrous double, who mirrors his ambition, perversion, and malevolence. Yet unlike Madoc's handsome, confident exterior, Fry's appearance is frightening, pathetic and old. Fry's monstrosity is both physical, in his evil grin, frozen eyes, and long, claw-like fingernails, and perceived through his overt misogyny. Despite these physical markers, he is still pitiable, living in isolation and pathetically concerned with his own fame, as evidenced in his request that Madoc persuade his publisher to bring one of his old novels back into print (Gaiman "Calliope" 17). Years later, it will be revealed that Fry kills himself, after "begging" and failing to get his publishers to bring his book back into print (25). Fry's fatal choice of poisoning himself is a glimpse at the Faustian outcome Madoc too will experience in the aftermath of his ruthless rise in fame.

Once inside Fry's secluded mansion, we are given the first glimpse of Calliope's character in a full-page illustration of her naked body, shadowed in darkness. As specified by Gaiman in his original script included as a prologue in *The Sandman: Dream Country*, Calliope's appearance is meant to be both beautiful and vulnerable (Gaiman Script 10). Unlike some graphic literature, Gaiman's depiction of female nudity is not supposed to "look titillating" but rather illustrate "the vulnerability of nakedness" such as that of "famine victims, or concentration camp victims" (10). Indeed, her nudity is evidence that she has been mistreated by Fry. In spite of her vulnerable, emaciated exterior and abject position, Gaiman does not erase Calliope's strength and dissidence. She defies Fry's authority by sarcastically questioning his actions: "What would you do with me now, Erasmus?" she asks when he enters her room with Madoc "Am I now to perform for your amusement?" (Gaiman "Calliope" 17). This questioning illustrates how Calliope's dissidence has not been completely erased by her forced imprisonment and repeated sexual assault. She retains her voice in defiance of her violator's attempt to appropriate all of her powers for himself: "He may have her spirit, but he doesn't have her soul" (Gaiman Script 11).

Calliope's trauma is more complex than just the violation of her physical body. As Laura Tanner explains in *Intimate Violence*, "physical violence functions as a means of claiming the victim not only as body but as speaking subject" (5). In this way, violation of bodily integrity also assaults the victim at the level of language, often inhibiting self-expression and "censoring" the speaking subject. Gaiman demonstrates this process of stealing body and voice by having his violator appropriate Calliope's creative expression through the act of raping her. When Madoc brings Calliope back to his house, "his first action was to rape her" (Gaiman "Calliope" 18). We are told that she "choked back tears like a child" when he violates her: an image that conveys her pain and vulnerability as well as the disturbing brutality of Madoc's unconscionable act of sexual violation (18). The violent act is justified

in Madoc's mind: "She's not even human, he told himself" (18). His self-justifying reasoning is placed in doubt when Madoc feels a twinge of guilt after the rape: "It occurred to him momentarily that the old man might have cheated him: given him a real girl. That he, Rick Madoc, might possibly have done something wrong, even criminal" (18). Yet once the creative inspiration starts flowing, and Madoc begins writing at last, he feels justified in his actions. The fact that he feels entitled to rape a woman because "she's not even human" reflects an ideology of female sexual objectification (18). By raping her, Madoc effectively steals Calliope's voice, claiming her creativity as his own.

This motif of appropriation is a central part of representations of rape. The victim-violator relationship in representations of rape often involves "a violator who appropriates the victim's subjectivity as an extension of his own power, . . . usurp[ing] the victim's body, forcing it to assume the configurations of the violator's decree" (Tanner 3). This act of appropriation is literally represented in Gaiman's story as the stealing and burning of Calliope's scroll, the deed to soul, her forced imprisonment, and her repeated rape by two men. Yet sexual violence in Gaiman's narrative is meant to signify more than just the violator's desire for power and mastery over the victim; set within the context of the literary world, Calliope's rape is representative of the systematic degradation, exclusion, and appropriation of women's creativity under patriarchy.

The extent of Madoc's appropriation of Calliope's creative powers is shown through a two-page visual montage of his career successes ranging from the years 1987-1990, while Calliope is in his possession. During this time, he has fully embraced his role as Calliope's "master," telling her, "you're my possession, until I tell you that you're free. Don't forget it. You're my *personal* muse, sweetheart" (Gaiman "Calliope" 21). Within this space of time, Madoc achieves fame, prestige, and accolades as author and artist, eventually expanding his career in the fields of poetry, playwriting, and film directing. As he is shown climbing the career ladder, Madoc's egotism and hypocrisy are evident. When at the book launch for his novel *And My Love She Gave Me Light*, Madoc is praised by a crowd of adoring fans. Madoc is pictured beside a young female fan, who praises him for his representation of strong female characters. To this compliment, Madoc replies that he "regard[s] [him]self as a feminist writer" (22). The hypocrisy of his self-proclaimed feminism reveals not only his ruthless possession of Calliope's creativity, but also his deceitful exploitation of the female voice within literary discourse. His appropriation of the feminist label also highlights the performative façade of his public persona.

The elevation of his status as a writer also enables Madoc to expand his sexual conquests. As Gaiman describes in his script, at the height of his success, Madoc is pictured as escorting a "beautiful, young woman . . . He's resting one hand on her bottom, possessively and just a little offensively. She's obviously hero-worshipping him" (Gaiman Script 21). Indeed, the young lady is flattering him, noting how he is now being considered "the greatest epic poet since Byron" (Gaiman "Calliope" 22). The association made between Madoc and Byron suggests more than a continuation of a masculine literary tradition; the fact that Madoc shares certain characteristics with the Byronic hero<sup>iii</sup> also reinforces Gaiman's complex critique of masculine entitlement and 'womanizing.' Helene Moglen discusses the

psychological disposition of the archetypal Byronic hero as a figure who “need[s] to prove his masculinity by sexual conquest” and who “fears impotence and . . . loathes the aggression he must summon in himself as a defense against the sexual threat he imagines” (128). Madoc shares much with the Byronic hero in his fears of inadequacy and defensive need to prove his masculinity through sexual conquest. Gaiman’s depiction of Rick Madoc is clearly meant to invoke this vision of the Byronic hero in the perverse pleasure Madoc derives from exploiting Calliope for his own selfish gain. She remains imprisoned in a relationship of exploitation, where Madoc’s wealth, power, prestige, and creativity are all derived from her forced subjugation.

Without the deed to her soul, Calliope is powerless to help herself; her only hope is Oneiros. While Oneiros and Calliope share a past together, at this point in the series their relationship is anything but amicable, their marriage having dissolved. Given Calliope’s strained relationship with Oneiros, the reader can appreciate the full extent of her pained call for help, for “someone, anyone . . . even Oneiros” to help her escape her current imprisonment (Gaiman “Calliope” 20). For three years, Calliope endures the torture of living as Madoc’s sexual prisoner until, finally, her prayers are answered, and Oneiros appears at Madoc’s house. When Oneiros confronts Madoc and demands that he set Calliope free, Madoc denies her existence in an overt display of anger and territoriality. Then, fearing Oneiros’s wrath, Madoc admits his desperation and inadequacy as a writer: “But you don’t understand – I need her. If I didn’t have her, I wouldn’t be able to write. I wouldn’t have ideas. I can’t free her yet” (27). The bodily expression of Madoc’s character is clearly meant to invoke his feelings of guilt and shame: his downcast face, his posture of insecurity, and look of regret. Madoc then offers Oneiros money in exchange for Calliope, hoping that this gesture will be enough to placate him. Disgusted with Madoc’s cruel exploitation of Calliope’s life, Oneiros makes a speech deploring Madoc’s actions:

She has been held captive for more than sixty years. Stripped of all her possessions. Demeaned, abused, and hurt. I . . . know how she must feel. And you will not free her because “you need the ideas?” You disgust me, Richard Madoc. You want ideas? You want dreams? You want stories? Then ideas you will have. Ideas in abundance. (27)

In this speech, we learn that Oneiros has experienced imprisonment, and this has indeed changed him; where he was once cold, indifferent, even cruel in his treatment of others, Oneiros now shows that he cares and has compassion. He is able to empathize with Calliope’s degradation and abuse, having experienced a similar trauma (albeit, without experiencing sexual violation). Thus, when he curses Madoc with “[i]deas in abundance,” he is acting on Calliope’s behalf, enforcing the revenge that she is incapable of performing herself. While Oneiros, as agent of Calliope’s revenge, can be interpreted as yet another figure of masculine dominance in the story, he is a more complex character than the “superman” or “avenger” figure; he is more than a male protector who arrives to rescue a damsel in distress.

As a masculine figure, Oneiros occupies a complex subject position in relation to Calliope, the rape victim. It is clearly implied that Oneiros feels pity and compassion for Calliope’s abuse and forced

imprisonment, as he states, “I no longer hate you, Calliope. I have learned much in recent times” (33). He has gained insight by experiencing his own victimization and has now forgiven his former wife for their bitter split. In his empathy and compassion, Oneiros diverges from a patriarchal model of masculinity. He frees Calliope from Madoc, which suggests that he is unwilling to let her suffer abject cruelty at the hands of her oppressor. While Oneiros is characterized by great power, he wields this power differently than either Madoc or Fry. Oneiros’s masculinity presents a divergent path of empathy, understanding, and justice, in contrast to men like Madoc and Fry, who exploit and abuse others for personal gain.

In this moment, seeing Madoc unravel before her, Calliope is able to assert herself alongside Oneiros’s actions. Madoc demands that Calliope stop filling his head with nightmares, but as she explains, she is not responsible for his suffering: “You have met Oneiros, whom the Romans called the shaper of form. He was once my lover, and he was the father of my son” (28). Calliope’s past is a revelation to Madoc, who regretfully replies to her comment, “I didn’t know you’d ever had a son” (28). At this point, Calliope is able to voice her dissent: “You know nothing about me, Richard Madoc. I am real, Richard. I am more than a receptacle for your seed, or an inspiration for your tales” (28). Calliope’s self-assertion acts as both a restoration of her voice and reclamation of her body in the aftermath of her repeated rape. By announcing that “I am real,” Calliope is asserting her presence as a person who will no longer be objectified or exploited for his selfish ambitions and no longer imprisoned within the male imagination. Her liberation not only marks the breakdown of Madoc’s life, but also is a defiant statement against the patriarchal order that degrades, exploits, and appropriates the female subject as an object of homosocial exchange. As Gaiman represents, the struggle to overcome the boundaries of oppression requires both the active resistance of the female subject (Calliope) and the cooperation of men like Oneiros, who use their power to support the process of liberation.

Madoc’s downfall occurs as consequence of Oneiros’s intervention and the return of Calliope’s autonomy. As Joe Sanders explains, Oneiros “rule[s] the domain that humans enter when they leave their waking consciousness in order to approach the things they most hope for or dread” (199). Oneiros uses his powers to effectively drive Madoc into a manic frenzy, wherein his symptom of hypergraphia or obsessive drive to write, is self-destructive.<sup>iv</sup> His thoughts are uncontrollable, splintering his consciousness into a thousand disparate ideas, which eventually lead him to perform a disturbing act of self-mutilation. Artists Kelley Jones and Malcolm Jones III reinforce Madoc’s psychotic break by utilizing imagery of shattered glass and framing each panel with jagged lines. The visual effect captures the agony and torment going on inside of Madoc’s mind as his self-control and identity are shattered. Felix Garrison, the doctor and man who supplied Madoc with a bezoar earlier in the story, eventually discovers him lying on the ground beside a wall covered with smears of blood. After Garrison takes Madoc to his office, Madoc tells him that he has used his fingertips to write with his own blood all of the ideas that have overtaken his mind. Like Faust, who signs his soul away with his own blood, Madoc similarly uses his own bloody hands to pen his thoughts. His disfigured fingers, pictured as bloody, clawlike nubs not only are a visual symbol of Madoc’s descent into psychosis, but

also are reminiscent of his predecessor, Eramus Fry, who earlier in the story is portrayed with long, clawlike fingernails and who suffers a similar abject breakdown. Like his predecessor Fry, Madoc has become a monstrous man, whose obsession with fame and fortune has taken over his humanity. Not only does Madoc mutilate his hands by writing with blood instead of ink, he also ‘inscribes’ blood across his face by leaving bloody claw marks from his forehead to his chin. In this way, Oneiros’s revenge against Madoc takes the form of both mental and bodily penance for his crimes against Calliope. As well, as long as his hands remain deformed, he will no longer be able to write a thing. Indeed, in a sense, Oneiros’s revenge has “raped” Madoc’s mind, forcibly entering his unconscious and leaving him in a state of abjection. This embodied expression of Madoc’s self-destruction can also be seen as a manifestation of castration or loss of masculine power and mastery.

Forced into an abject and feminized position of victimization and powerlessness by Oneiros, Madoc must confront his fears of failure and inadequacy. Madoc loses hold of his masculine façade of power and self-control, literally de-facing himself with his claw-like fingers. Oneiros induces this traumatic episode by releasing the boundaries of Madoc’s unconscious mind, causing Madoc to experience uncontrollable self-fragmentation, a loss of identity, and a breakdown in the boundaries between reality and fantasy. The embodied expression of Madoc’s self-destruction can also be seen as a manifestation of castration from masculine power and mastery. When Madoc is forced to free Calliope, he is effectively relinquishing his claim to her creative inspiration; in this way, he is not only losing Calliope, but also his sense of entitlement and phallic mastery over her. Even after Calliope has Oneiros release Madoc from his nightmarish affliction, Madoc is filled with an emptiness that haunts him. The final page of Gaiman’s story depicts Madoc’s struggle to come to terms with his loss: “I wish I could remember . . . . It’s so hard to think . . . . She’s gone you see. And it’s all gone with her. Everything. All of them, all the dreams . . . . No . . . . I can’t remember. I’ve lost it. . . . I’ve got no idea any more” (Gaiman “Calliope” 34). Interspersed with these thoughts are blank panels, and pictures of Oneiros, disappearing from view. The effect of the stark white panels affirms the loss of Madoc’s ability to visualize and create. This mental “blankness” can be seen as a reiteration of loss, inadequacy, and castration.

In a way, by telling Calliope’s story of rape and imprisonment, and depicting Rick Madoc’s downfall, Gaiman’s narrative is also a version of the rape-and-revenge genre. This cinematic genre began in the 1960s-70s as sexual “exploitation” films such as *Day of the Woman/I Spit on your Grave*, *Ms. 45* and *Lipstick*; more recently, feminist filmmakers have adapted the rape-and-revenge genre, eliminating the gratuitous nudity and sexual content of early films, to present a vision of female empowerment that challenges women’s social-sexual degradation under patriarchy. Films like *Thelma and Louise*, *Kill Bill*, *Monster*, and *Descent* all fall within this genre. The basic premise follows the female subject as she suffers sexual violation and often other forms of patriarchal oppression; she survives this brutality then initiates her own violent revenge against her rapists or other men, who are perceived as oppressive. The woman’s revenge enacts a form of wish-fulfillment in that her violence supposedly resolves the conflicts and abjection inherent in the victim subject-position; specifically, her revenge transforms her passive victimization into an active pursuit of retribution. Through her

violent retaliation, the female subject is empowered, often to the extent that she becomes Phallic, wielding a weapon (gun, knife, sword) in place of the phallus, and castrates (figuratively or literally) her male violator(s).

The rape-and-revenge genre can also be seen a wish-fulfillment or fantasy of the trauma survivor. As described by Judith Herman in *Trauma and Recovery*, the “revenge fantasy is one form of the wish for catharsis” (189). By taking up the role of the perpetrator, the trauma survivor “imagines she can get rid of the terror, shame and pain of the trauma by retaliating against the perpetrator” (189). The trauma victim may also imagine that revenge “is the only way to force the perpetrator to acknowledge the harm he has done to her” (189). In Herman’s understanding, this type of revenge fantasy often fails to alleviate the victims’ feelings of “helpless fury” (189). Rather, Herman sees revenge as “magical resolution” that cannot replace the long, difficult process of grieving that follows a traumatic experience (189).

Although Gaiman’s narrative depicts a version of rape-and-revenge, there are key differences in his portrayal of the gender configurations within the genre. Firstly, Gaiman depicts Calliope as merciful, not vindictive. She takes mercy on her rapist, as shown when she asks Oneiros to release Madoc from the burden of his psychological torment. Her display of compassion towards the man who has raped and imprisoned her suggests that forgiveness is as much a resolution for her as violent retaliation. Arguably, this difference does not detract from Gaiman’s representation of sexual violation or female empowerment, but rather highlights the psychological complexities of the victim subject-position. In this way, Gaiman’s portrayal of rape-and-revenge moves beyond wish-fulfillment to a more desirable resolution wherein Calliope is liberated from her physical and emotional imprisonment when she releases her resentment towards Madoc. Rape and revenge is thus re-imagined in Gaiman’s portrayal as rape, revenge, and release. Another key difference in Gaiman’s version of rape-and-revenge is that a masculine figure, Oneiros, who has also experienced his own degradation and imprisonment, acts as the vehicle of Calliope’s revenge against her rapist. This substitution of a male avenger in place of a female agent of revenge is a powerful reflection of Gaiman’s feminist sympathies in his creation of a masculine figure who can empathize and understand a part of what it means to be put in a traditionally feminine subject-position. The significance of having a male subject take up Calliope’s burden and revenge can be seen in relation to the subject position of pro-feminist men. Specifically, Oneiros acknowledges his own power and privilege within the social order, yet acts on behalf and in the best interests of those who suffer from injustice and social inequalities. Indeed, Oneiros effectively forces Madoc into taking responsibility for his unethical behaviour and misogynistic attitude by instigating his mania and loss of “phallic” mastery over Calliope. Madoc’s affliction is thus a transformative state, wherein he learns through his own abjection what it means to be victimized.

On its own, Gaiman graphic short story “Calliope” is a powerful narrative of one woman’s experience of rape, revenge, and liberation from sexual exploitation. However, set within the complexity of *The Sandman* series, Calliope’s story takes on a rich tapestry of allusion, intertextuality,

and social critique. By drawing from myth, archetype, and literature, Gaiman's fantasy narrative becomes a cultural critique of patriarchy by identifying the literary and cultural traditions of female objectification.<sup>v</sup> Male authorship, as portrayed through the characters of Fry and Madoc, clearly reflects a legacy of women's degradation and appropriation for the aims of masculine entitlement and ambition. Central to his critique, Gaiman depicts the downfall of powerful men: Erasmus Fry, once a successful author, is portrayed as a failure, abject, monstrous, and pathetic; Rick Madoc, who also experiences enormous career successes, ends the story in a state of emptiness and imaginative barrenness; and finally, Oneiros, the hero, who is more powerful than the gods, ends the entire series by dying at the hands of the Furies.<sup>vi</sup> Although Oneiros is depicted as cold, indifferent, and unloving throughout the series, he is able to transcend his rigid role to help others. Having experienced a feminized position of degradation, Oneiros is finally able to understand what victims go through. In this way, Gaiman's "Calliope," and more generally *The Sandman* series, promotes a form of empathic understanding in place of selfish ambition. It is this message for empathy and understanding of others that is perhaps the most fundamental feminist component of Gaiman's work.

Scholarly approaches to Gaiman's work have included analyses of his allusive material (Shakespeare, folk/fairytales, greek myth), semiotic analyses of the graphic novel (Round), hyperreality in the graphic novel genre (Round 2007), narratology and genre (Vos; Walsh), identity politics (Jódar; Sanders) as well as those who analyze Gaiman's *The Sandman* as a postmodern text (See Jódar for a discussion of *The Sandman* as an example of the postmodern breakdown of metanarratives).

<sup>ii</sup>To characterize comic books as produced for boys or adolescent males is not to say that there are not female readers or female-centred graphic literature. Rather, I mean to suggest that traditional graphic literature, specifically superhero comics, are targeted at young men. Indeed many of these comics can also be seen as demeaning, alienating or exclusive to female readers.

<sup>iii</sup>According to Peter L. Thorslev, the Byronic hero and its earlier counterpart the Romantic hero do not possess "heroic virtue" in the usual sense; instead, Byronic heroes are often "thoroughgoing rebels" who possess many dark qualities (22). Often the Byronic hero appears as "monstrous and grotesque by the addition of gratuitous acts of cruelty or sadism" (22).

<sup>iv</sup>Hypergraphia, the compulsion to write, is discussed in Alice Flaherty's *The Midnight Disease* in relation to the psychological "drive to creativity" (49) and manic episodes. Flaherty also discusses the psychology of writer's block as linked to depression and anxiety. Notably, Flaherty lists "a consuming desire for fame" (134) as one of the catalysts to writer's block, an affliction that is clearly seen in Rick Madoc.

<sup>v</sup>In *Literary Paternity*, Sandra Gilbert sees the association of masculinity with literary authority as excluding women from full participation in literary creation and from recognition of their work as the work of literary genius. Within this male-dominated literary culture, female subjectivity is excluded as "women exist only to be acted on by men, both as literary and as sensual object" (489). Gaiman's narrative of Calliope provides a literal representation of this premise in the relationship between Madoc, the male author / master / possessor, and Calliope, his female Muse / slave / possession, whom he imprisons and exploits "both as literary and as sensual object."

<sup>vi</sup>In contrast with Fry and Madoc, Oneiros's downfall is an almost Christ-like act of self-sacrifice; when he grants his son his wish to die, Oneiros seals his own fate to die for spilling family blood, a sacrilege for immortals. As a result of his merciful act, Oneiros follows the rules of blood debts and forfeits his life to the Furies. In *The Wake*, Calliope attends Oneiro's funeral, where she speaks about his acts of compassion: "I am not here to mourn. I mourned the loss of my man a long time ago. I am here to say good-bye to a stranger who once gave me a good turn. And to a man who gave my son the death he craved."

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