Μινύη, according to the paradigm of the first declension feminine nouns, instead of that of the same declension masculine ones, of which the correct genitive of course is either the (here unmetrical) ancient form *Μινύαο* or the metrically possible recent forms Ion. *Μινύεω* and Att. *Μινύου*.

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FOR ALL THAT A WOMAN: *MEDEA* 1250, *ΔΥΣΤΥΧΗΣ Δ' ΕΓΩ ΓΥΝΗ*

In a recent edition of this journal, Howard Jacobson complained that 'these four words, coming as the end of so profoundly emotional a speech, seem remarkably flat',[1] and suggested reading instead *γονῇ*: 'Medea is ill-fated in her children (who must die and at her hands)'.

De gustibus cum non sit disputandum, there is no point in debating the alleged flatness of the words in question; nor can I argue with any certainty that Euripides' taste would have been more like my own than like Prof. Jacobson's. I will argue, however, that the word *γυνή* in this position is well prepared for and well justified by what has gone before.[2]

More than any other character in Greek literature, Medea presents herself as an archetype of oppressed femininity.[3] After raging offstage with a passion appropriate to her situation, she appears onstage composed in demeanour and clear of speech; and what she has to say is her famous indictment of woman's fate, *πάντων δ' ὅσ' ἔστ' ἔμψυχα καὶ γνώμην ἔχει / γυναῖκές ἐσμεν ἀθλιώτατον φυτόν* (230–1). The ills of which she complains are the ills of womankind, and she explicitly includes the women of Corinth as her fellow-sufferers before she goes on to complain of her own exposed position.[4] Her words are undoubtedly self-interested, designed to secure the Chorus' collaboration; but she does not take them back later. On the contrary, she demonstrates clearly, in her second interview with Jason, the submissiveness expected of a woman: 'But we women are the sort of thing we are—I will not say, "something bad"—so you should not be like us in nature' (889–90). Jason magnanimously accepts her submission, 'for you have, even though it be after a while, recognized the better

[1] H. Jacobson, '*Medea* 1250: *δυστυχὴς δ' ἐγὼ γυνή*,' *CQ* 54, n.s. (2004), 274.

[2] Euripides is not above padding out a hexameter with an otherwise otiose disyllable, generally a vocative: see, e.g., *Med.* lines 89, 227, 281, 290, 292, 816, 818. Each of these, of course, could be defended, but in any event I agree with Prof. Jacobson that this climactic line is not the one to end with a throwaway word.

[3] I would not exclude from this generalization Aristophanes' famous 'feminists', Lysistrata and Praxagora. Lysistrata does claim (Ar. *Lys.* 588) that women suffer 'more than double' from war, but she does not portray war the way Medea portrays marriage, as an institution wherein men prosper and women suffer. Praxagora in the *Ecclesiazusae* makes no claims at all of women's oppression, but only that women could solve better the common problems of the state.

[4] When at 252 she says that their situation is not the same as hers, the *ἄλλ'* with which she begins the line indicates that everything she has said for the past twenty lines is as true for every woman as it is for her. In fact, as Page points out well in his commentary to 231, her generally phrased complaints are not entirely appropriate to her own history.

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opinion, and that is the behaviour of a sensible woman' (912–13).[5] When Jason takes the children and Medea weeps, she apologizes by saying, 'A woman is feminine, and born to tears' (928). These words mean something different to Medea from what she intends them to mean to Jason.

Throughout the tragedy Medea emphasizes the solidarity of women, and the Chorus agrees. When she asks the Chorus not to reveal her (as yet unformulated) plans for revenge, she bases her request on their common feminine nature (263–6), and the Chorus agrees immediately (*δράσω τάδ'*, 267). When she sends her nurse to call Jason to the false reconciliation that will set in motion the murder of her family, she instructs the nurse to say nothing of Medea's plans, 'if you are on your masters' side and if you were born a woman' (823). Even Jason's new wife can be enlisted as an ally on the basis of her feminine nature (945).[6] Sisterhood is powerful, and Medea counts on it.

Nor is she disappointed. The Chorus agree readily that she is justified in avenging herself on her husband (267–8); more strikingly, immediately after she has determined to poison her enemies—a decision that she herself justifies by saying that 'we are women by nature, incapable for noble purposes, but very intelligent architects of all sorts of evil' (408–9)[7]—the Chorus, utterly on Medea's side, sing that now honour comes to the feminine race, for it is men, not women, who are unfaithful. The horror of Medea's decision, difficult as it is even for her, does not overcome their identification with her. When it comes to killing her children, the Chorus do indeed have another opinion, but they offer it only 'because [they] want to help [her] and to uphold the laws of humanity;' when she declines, they let the children, too, go to their death without betraying their sister.

It is not only her feminine nature that makes other women her natural allies; it is also her feminine nature that conditions the severity of her suffering and the extremity

[5] *ἔγνως δὲ τὴν νικῶσαν, ἀλλὰ τῶι χρόνωι, / βουλήν· γυναικὸς ἔργα ταῦτα σώφρονος*. This is not the place to discuss the authenticity of 913, which is accepted by the most recent editors, but it is worth nothing that until 912 Jason has been speaking not about competing propositions, but about another marriage, and the words *ἔγνως δὲ τὴν νικῶσαν, ἀλλὰ τῶι χρόνωι* will at first have sounded like 'you have, even though it be after a while, recognized who won (and that you have lost)'. The following *βουλήν* is not quite a *παρὰ προσδοκίαν* joke, but Jason's choice of words is characteristically insensitive, making explicit exactly what Medea had claimed about a woman's options when her husband is unfaithful.

[6] There is much debate, however, as to exactly who is making this judgment and what is being said. If Jason says line 945, as some of the manuscripts have it, he apparently means, 'and I think she will persuade [her father], if she is like the other women', who know how to wheedle favours out of men; if Medea says it, as other manuscripts have it and as the scholiast seems to have understood, Jason is saying (or Medea takes him to say), 'and I think I will persuade her (to do it),' to which Medea assents, 'if she is like the other women', who are easily persuaded to do their husbands' bidding. On the first understanding the irony is Jason's, who is all too aware of Medea's ability to bend men to her wishes. On the second reading it is Medea who is speaking on more than one level, offering Jason a flattering picture of his new wife's submissiveness while actually counting on that very trait to make her behave according to Medea's plans. This reading has the advantage of offering an explanation for the odd, though not unparalleled, expression *εἴπερ γυναικῶν ἐστι τῶν ἄλλων μία*: to Jason it still means 'one of the other women' [other than herself], a logical impossibility; but on the unspoken level the 'other women' [other than Medea] are those who do their husband's bidding in all, even when he asks them to plead for their rival's children. Cf. D. Kovacs, *Euripidea* (Leiden, 1994), 172.

[7] 'This final generalization is a kind of defiant appropriation of a misogynistic stereotype (263–6n.), and the notions of competition between genders and the unfair position of women prepare for the themes of the following stasimon.' D. J. Mastronarde, *Euripides: Medea* (Cambridge, 2002), ad loc.

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of her reaction. 'For a woman is full of fright in other respects, and cowardly for purposes of battle and looking at steel;[8] but when she is mistreated in conjugal matters, there is no mind more gorily murderous' (263–6). Jason ruefully shares this opinion (569–73, cf. 909–10). In Medea, this vulnerability in sexual matters produces only violence; other women are more submissive, but either way 'a woman is feminine, and born to tears' (928).

No less feminine is her choice of method. Should she set the bridal chamber on fire? Stab them? 'Best to choose the direct path, in which we[9] are by nature the smartest, to take them by means of poison (*φαρμάκοις*)' (384–5). No Greek man would have considered drugs 'the direct path', and I am not sure that the words were not designed to arouse a bitter laugh.

As Medea sees it—or at least as she presents it—her problems are all based in the fact that she is a woman. Because she is a woman she is powerless; because she is a woman she is peculiarly vulnerable in matters of love; because she is a woman she reacts to insult with violence and with witchcraft. Her problems are not personal problems with Jason: they are structural problems inherent in her gender. For her the personal is political, and it is not hard to see why she has been so popular among feminists, no matter how much they disapprove of her murdering her children.

From beginning to end, Medea is a woman, and that fact is essential to her tragedy. The first words she uttered, when she was still offstage, were *ἰώ, δύστανος ἐγώ* (96). Her first words when she came onstage were *Κορίνθιαι γυναῖκες*, addressing herself to the women as women particularly, as indeed she would continue to treat them throughout the play. It would be stretching matters to read her final words as, 'I am unfortunate in being a woman', but it is nevertheless entirely fitting that her last words as she leaves the stage after more than 1,000 lines are *δυστυχὴς δ' ἐγὼ γυνή*. When she reappears, having achieved her vengeance, it will be in a winged chariot carried on the *μηχανή* normally used by gods and goddesses.[10] Being the daughter of Helios, she has her revenge. Had she been merely a woman, she would have remained a *δυστυχὴς γυνή*.

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[8] Quite a reversal from her oft-quoted assertion only a few lines earlier (250–1) that childbirth requires more bravery than battle. For the various ways in which one can take this line see Mastronarde on 263.

9 This is the reading of the manuscripts and the reading that was in front of the scholiast (*σοφαί*); had the plural referred to Medea alone, she would have said *σοφή* or *σοφοί* (H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, rev. G. Messing (Harvard, 1956), §1009). Many editors, including the most recent, have indeed corrected the reading to *σοφοί* on the grounds that not all women were experts in potions; but as I am trying to demonstrate, Medea throughout the play identifies herself with all women. Witchcraft was women's work in Greece, precisely because the ways that men would have considered 'the direct path' to power were closed to them.

[10] My thanks to the anonymous referee for pointing out this final irony.

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