



Intimate Commerce: Exchange, Gender, and Subjectivity in Greek Tragedy

Victoria Wohl

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Exchanges of women between men occur regularly in Greek tragedy—and almost always with catastrophic results. Instead of cementing bonds between men, such exchanges rend them. They allow women, who should be silent objects, to become monstrous subjects, while men often end up as lifeless corpses. But why do the tragedies always represent the transferal of women as disastrous?

Victoria Wohl offers an illuminating analysis of the exchange of women in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, and Euripides' *Alceste*. She shows how the attempts of women in these plays to become active subjects rather than passive objects of exchange inevitably fail. While these failures seem to validate male hegemony, the women's actions, however futile, blur the distinction between male subject and female object, calling into question the very nature of the tragic self. What the tragedies thus present, Wohl asserts, is not only an affirmation of Athens' reigning ideologies (including its gender hierarchy) but also the possibility of resistance to them and the imagination of alternatives.

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