



PHOTO: LARS NORDMO

SYNNØVE DES BOUVRIE is Professor emerita of Ancient Culture and Literature at the University of Tromsø, Norway. She has published extensively on Greek mythology and religion, the Greek theatre and gender in antiquity. She is the author of *Women in Greek Tragedy: An Anthropological Approach*, and editor of the two-volume *Myth and Symbol: Symbolic Phenomena in Ancient Greek Culture*.

“Although others have long sought to understand Greek tragedy by considering its connections and similarities to ritual, no one has pursued this line of inquiry so thoroughly, so thoughtfully, and with such enlightening results as Synnøve des Bouvrie. Going far beyond earlier studies, Professor des Bouvrie stresses the capacity of rituals like the Greater Dionysia not just to renew, repair or restore, but to more actively create a social, political and moral order that was constantly threatened by class conflict, gender hierarchy, factional rivalry and its own contradictions. In this volume, she combines a close reading of Euripides’ texts, attention to their context and the sentiments they evoked, and a thorough knowledge of anthropological theory to show the workings of tragedy and the work these tragedies accomplished. The result is a deeply insightful and highly innovative work.”

—Bruce Lincoln, Caroline E. Haskell Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of the History of Religions in the Divinity School of the University of Chicago

“Seldom has the daunting and immense task of setting Greek drama to its historical and cultural context been so successfully and intelligently accomplished as in the present monograph. Carefully weaving a reconstruction of the prevailing political and social tensions together with an authoritative reading of Euripides’ tragedies, Professor des Bouvrie masterfully demonstrates how powerfully drama transferred its problematizing of intellectual currents, moral values, policies and human conduct from the theatre stage (and its specific ritual context) to the *polis* at large—and this during a part of the fifth century BC that can rightly be characterized as Athens’ most uncertain hour. Drawing on a considerable body of knowledge from social anthropology, the book also offers an original methodology with which to study Greek tragedy. This work is a major scholarly achievement.”

—Vincent Gabrielsen, Professor of Ancient History at the University of Copenhagen.

ISBN 978 87 635 4595 2



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TRAGIC WORKINGS IN EURIPIDES’ DRAMA

The Anthropology of the Genre



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MUSEUM TUSCULANUM PRESS

Tragic Workings in Euripides’ Drama offers a substantially new theory and method for understanding Attic tragedy. Starting from anthropological insights and drawing on Aristotle’s theory of the specific ‘tragic’ reactions of ‘shock and horror’ as well as his propositions on the ‘tragic’ violation of fundamental social values, Synnøve des Bouvrie argues that the participating community in fifth-century Greece—for instance at the Dionysia, the Athenian dramatic festival—assembled as a collective body engaging in a program of ‘prescribed sentiments.’ She identifies this program as a ‘tragic process’ that mobilized the audience into revitalizing their institutional order, the unquestionable values sustaining the *oikos* and preserving the *polis*.

Des Bouvrie’s novel, not to say revolutionary, and explicitly anthropological approach consists in focusing primarily on the ‘tragic workings’ of Attic tragedy. While Euripides is singled out, with astute readings of *Heraclidae*, *Andromache*, *Hecuba*, *Heracles*, *Troades*, *Iphigenia in Tauris* and *Iphigenia at Aulis* on offer, the author’s earlier work on other Greek tragedians suggests that these features were operating in the genre as such.

For students and scholars interested in ancient Greek tragedy, this volume constitutes a remarkable contribution. It will significantly further studies of the tragic genre and stimulate new debate.