Preface

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Euripides, last of the three great Attic tragedians, captured for the sophisticated audience of his late plays the demise of a great empire and of an extraordinary genre. Although tragedy survived into the fourth century, Athens’ enjoyment of self-criticism and iconoclasm in its theatrical festivals did not. Philosophy soon challenged the intellectual role of drama in the city. Comedy, inspired by Euripides, survived by adapting itself to a growing taste for bourgeois realism and the drama of private life. Tragedy limped on, often in the form of revivals of Euripides. The poet’s art ambiguously reflects the complexities of a long transitional period.

Clearly, then, the critic of tragedy, and especially of Euripides, cannot afford to read that poet’s texts out of their social, political, and religious context or the circumstances of their dramatic production. These circumstances are hard to recapture. Euripides’ characters speak the language of Thucydides or the Sophists, and the plays’ metaphors and plot patterns reflect actual ritual performance. Yet attempts to specify the political implications of drama have rarely remained true to a reading of the plays as a whole. In this book I undertake the equally slippery task of exploring the representation of ritual in Euripides’ tragedy. I hope the result will not only be valuable to scholars and students of tragedy but also contribute to the expanding dialogue between classics and anthropology.

In order to make the text accessible to those who do not read
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Greek, I have translated all quotations and have transliterated the Greek wherever possible, indicating omega (long ο) and eta (long ε) with a macron (ο and ε). In transliterating Greek names I have used the most familiar version. All translations aim to be as literal as possible and are my own except where noted otherwise. I have confined consideration of technical problems to the notes and appendixes, aiming only to make the reader aware of their existence and nature and to summarize current critical opinion. The Greek text is cited from the Oxford Classical Text of Gilbert Murray, *Euripides Fabulae*, 3 vols. 2d ed. (Oxford 1913), with deviations indicated in the notes.

This book is a remote descendant of my dissertation (Harvard 1975), and I remain grateful to my advisers, J. H. Finley, Jr., and Cedric Whitman, for their sense of style and their generous support of a dissertation topic distant in certain respects from their own preoccupations. Christian Wolff, whose work and teaching on Euripides shaped my interest in this topic, offered pertinent criticism of the dissertation and of early drafts of this book. Michelle and Renato Rosaldo and Bridget O’Laughlin helped me to venture beyond my training as a classicist into anthropology, and Carolyn Dewald served as a stimulating listener during the initial stages of the book. Ann Bergren, Rachel Kitzinger, Piero Pucci, Froma Zeitlin, and my colleagues Helen Bacon and Lydia Lenaghan provided challenging and incisive commentary on earlier versions. Leonard Muellner and an anonymous referee gave me invaluable readings for Cornell University Press, and Ann Hawthorne served as a thoughtful copyeditor. Rick Griffiths demonstrated stamina as a critic through all stages of the book. I am also grateful for opportunities to test this material on discerning audiences at Princeton, Stanford, the University of Victoria, B.C., the University of Southern California, Cornell, Dartmouth, and Haverford. Through Stanford University and Barnard College I received two Mellon grants that aided in the completion of this manuscript. Chapters 2 and 5 incorporate in revised form material published in *Arethusa* 15 (1982): 159–80 and *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 110 (1980): 107–33, respectively. I thank these journals for their kind permission to use
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