

THE TRAGIC AORIST*

The tragic or ‘instantaneous’ aorist usually has a paragraph to itself in the grammar books, as a distinct but not especially important use of the aorist. It is most common in Athenian drama of the second half of the fifth century, although there are possible examples in Homer and some learned revivals later. The present article offers an entirely new account of these aorists, and entails a new interpretation of the tone of some 75 lines of tragedy and comedy.

TRADITIONAL EXPLANATIONS

The fullest and most influential discussion of the tragic aorist is that of Kühner and Gerth.¹ They distinguish three types, of which the common feature (in their view) is that a statement relating to the present is expressed as if it had already happened or begun:

(a) The aorist is used in dialogue, especially in lively exchanges, to express a (present) judgement on something said by someone else. The implication is that the judgement was already formed while the other person was speaking. This is especially characteristic of excited speakers. Kühner–Gerth’s examples are: *ὠνοσάμην* (H. *Il.* 17.173), *ξυνήκα* (e.g. A. *Cho.* 887), *ἦνεσα* (e.g. E. *I.T.* 1023) *ἐπήνεσα* (e.g. S. *Aj.* 536), *προσηκάμην* (E. *El.* 622), *ἐδεξάμην* (e.g. S. *El.* 668).

(b) Also in dialogue, the aorist is used to express feelings aroused by what the other person was saying. This is essentially an ingressive aorist: the outbreak of emotion is contemporary with the words of the other person. Kühner–Gerth’s examples are: *ἦσθην* (e.g. S. *Phil.* 1314), *ἐγέλασα* (e.g. Ar. *Eq.* 696), *ἔκλαυσα* (E. *Su.* 1160), *ἀπέπνυσα* (e.g. E. *Hec.* 1276), *ῥμωξα* (e.g. E. *El.* 248), *κατώκτιρα* (E. *I.A.* 469), *κατεδάκρυσα* (E. *Hel.* 673).

(c) The aorist is also used with verbs of saying, ordering, advising, and swearing, even when they relate to the present. It is more forceful than the perfect (e.g. E. *Med.* 354), implying that what belongs to the past cannot be changed (‘ich habe hiermit . . .’). Kühner–Gerth’s examples are: *παρήνεσα* (S. *Phil.* 1434), *ἐπήνεσα* (S. *El.* 1322), *εἶπον* (e.g. E. *Med.* 272; but cf. 34 below), *ὑπεῖπον* (E. *Su.* 1171; but cf. n. 37 below), *ἀπώμοσα* (e.g. S. *Phil.* 1289), *κατώμοσα* (E. *Or.* 1517).

There are three main objections to this account:

(i) Kühner–Gerth’s categories (a) and (b) are basically similar, in that they relate the aorist to a postulated judgement or emotion which is prior to the utterance of the verb. Category (c) is different, in that these aorists do not refer back to anything that might actually have happened before the utterance of the verb. The asymmetry is

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Complete tragedies are cited from the latest Oxford Classical Text. Fragments of Euripides are cited from A. Nauck (ed.), *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*² (Leipzig, 1889). Other tragic fragments are cited from B. Snell *et al.* (edd.), *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (Göttingen, 1971–). Aristophanes is cited from the editions of A. H. Sommerstein (Warminster, 1980–). Standard commentaries are cited in the form ‘Fraenkel on A. *Ag.* 123’, or by author’s name alone if it is clear which passage is in question.

¹ R. Kühner and B. Gerth, *Ausführliche Grammatik der griechischen Sprache*³, 2 vols (Hanover and Leipzig, 1898–1904), vol. I, pp. 163–5. The standard commentaries on Greek drama add little or nothing to Kühner–Gerth’s discussion.

especially striking in the case of ἤνεσα and its compounds, which appear in categories (a) and (c) with different explanations.

(ii) Many of Kühner–Gerth's aorists in categories (a) and (b) occur in contexts where there is no particular evidence that the judgements or emotions expressed are especially impulsive or immediate. Some even occur in the middle of speeches, where there is no question of an 'instantaneous' reaction to the words of anyone else.

Furthermore, aorists of this type are especially common in tragedy, and thus belong to a particularly elevated style.² If they really expressed excitability or impulsiveness, one would expect them to be especially common in less formal kinds of dialogue (e.g. in comedy). Even in tragedy, they occur predominantly in more formal or elevated contexts. There is also a tendency to the formulaic, with frequent recurrence of a small number of words (e.g. [ἐπ]ἤνεσα, ἀπέπτυσσα, ὤμωξα, ἦσθην).

The same objection applies to an explanation formulated in terms of aspect rather than of tense. Moorhouse, for example, argues that the tragic aorist

may best be explained as arising from the punctual aspect, and as bringing to the fore the instantaneous nature of the occurrence: hence it is suitable for a sudden feeling, or act of comprehension, especially as expressed in quick repartee. The substitution of a present tense (with its durative emphasis) in such cases would be inappropriate aspectually. So far as the time of the occurrence is concerned, it should be taken as contemporary; an attempt to refer all examples to the past, even the most immediate, cannot succeed.³

This explanation dispenses with Kühner–Gerth's postulation of specific past events for these aorists to refer back to, but it fails equally to account for cases where the feeling (etc.) is not sudden.

(iii) The explanatory power of Kühner–Gerth's category (c) depends on these aorists being more forceful and authoritative than the equivalent presents. Monro argued, somewhat similarly, that the aorist is used 'because the stress is on the nature of the action as something completed, though the completion is in present time'.⁴ Completeness (Monro thinks) would not equally be expressed by the present, with its implication of ongoing process. Investigation does, however, reveal that such aorists are actually less forceful than the equivalent presents, so that the aorist cannot itself be contributing anything in the way of force or authority.⁵

TRAGIC AORISTS AS PERFORMATIVES

Tragic aorists are invariably performative. They do not describe anything, but actually do something.⁶ Performative verbs in English can typically be accompanied

² W. W. Goodwin, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses of the Greek Verb* (corrected impression; London, 1912), §60 alleged that the instantaneous aorist is colloquial. Denniston (on E. *El.* 215), however, observed that it is almost confined to tragedy, and entirely absent from the dialogue prose of Plato and Xenophon.

³ A. C. Moorhouse, *The Syntax of Sophocles* (Mnemosyne Suppl. 75; Leiden, 1982), p. 195.

⁴ D. B. Monro, *A Grammar of the Homeric Dialect*² (Oxford, 1891), §78. Cf. E. Schwyzler, *Griechische Grammatik* (Munich, 1939–53), vol. II, pp. 281f., 285f.; J. Humbert, *Syntaxe Grecque* (Paris, 1945), §187; K. L. McKay, *BICS* 12 (1965), 5f.

⁵ N. E. Collinge, 'Thoughts on the pragmatics of Ancient Greek', *PCPS* n.s. 34 (1988), 1–13, at 5, relates the instantaneous aorist to a Greek avoidance of 'non-verifiable speech acts', and a consequent suspicion of performatives like 'Thank you'. He thus argues that evaluatory reactions and formal statements (i.e. all three of Kühner–Gerth's categories) are expressed as reports of historical events (e.g. 'I approved'). In fact, the present is normally used in these cases, even in tragedy (e.g. *ἐπαίνω* for 'thank you').

⁶ The basic discussion of performatives is J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things with Words* (Oxford,

by the word 'hereby'. Examples are: 'I apologize', 'I promise', 'I swear'. All tragic aorists, it will be argued, are first-person verbs of this type. Possible counterexamples will be considered below, in the section 'Not Tragic Aorists'. Verbs which are not performative, such as *πείθομαι* ('I believe'), are never used in the tragic aorist. Utterance of the word *πείθομαι* does not constitute the action of belief; it makes a statement about the speaker's beliefs which could be true or false.⁷

Verbs that occur in the tragic aorist normally have a corresponding first-person present which is also performative (e.g. *ᾠμοσα* ~ *ᾠμνυμι*, *ἐδεξάμην* ~ *δέχομαι*, *ἐπήνεσα* ~ *ἐπαινῶ*). All other tragic aorists have a corresponding gesture or exclamation which is essentially equivalent to a present performative. The tragic aorist *ἀπέπτυσσα* corresponds to the act of spitting (when that act expresses rejection or disgust), the tragic aorist *ᾤμωξα* to a groan (*οἶμοι*). Thus *ἀπέπτυσσα* : spitting :: *ἐπήνεσα* : *ἐπαινῶ*.

It will be argued that the function of the tragic aorist is to distance the speaker from the full force of the present performative. *ἐπήνεσα* is less forceful and direct than *ἐπαινῶ*, *ἀπέπτυσσα* than the act of spitting. It is striking that the tragic aorist is confined specifically to performative verbs. There is no reason in principle why it should not be employed as a distancing device with other types of verb, but it does have obvious advantages for performative verbs in particular. A potential optative, for example, would not only reduce the force of a performative verb but also reduce its performativity. *ᾤμόσαιμι* 'ἄν could hardly be considered to accomplish an oath at all, even one of reduced force. A tragic aorist (e.g. *ᾠμοσα*) distances the speaker from the performance (e.g. the oath), without reducing its actuality.

Tragic aorists will be divided into two broad categories. This is mainly for convenience of exposition, and the similarities are more significant than the differences. In one type ('notional actions'), the aorist replaces an action or expression (e.g. spitting, groaning, laughing). In the other type ('polite aorists'), the distancing effect of the tragic aorist makes an expression less forceful and thus more polite.

NOTIONAL ACTIONS

Abomination

ἀπέπτυσσα (lit. 'I spat out') is common in Euripides, and virtually confined to him. The 'present' equivalent of this aorist is not the descriptive first-person present *ἀποπτύω* ('I am spitting'; cf. Theocr. 27.5), but the actual act of spitting. Spitting onstage would be well below the social and stylistic level of tragedy, though no doubt possible offstage (cf. S. *Ant.* 1232). Utterance of the word *ἀπέπτυσσα*, on the other hand, conveys the essential force of the act of spitting, while at the same time being acceptable in tragic dialogue.

(1) Hippolytus rejects the Nurse's implication that Phaedra is a *φίλος* of his (E. *Hipp.* 613 f.):

1962). Austin's views, which themselves evolved, were developed and systematized in J. R. Searle, *Speech Acts* (Cambridge, 1969). The term 'performative' is problematic, but is adequate for present purposes to characterize a particular type of verb. The literature on 'speech acts' is now vast; a lucid survey is S. C. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 226–83.

⁷ Cf. E. *Ion* 1607, where the tragic aorist *ἐδεξάμεσθα* is closely followed by the present *πείθομαι*.

Τρ. ὦ παῖ, τί δράσεις; σοὺς φίλους διεργάσῃ;
 Ιπ. ἀπέπτυσ' οὐδείς ἄδικος ἐστί μοι φίλος.

Barrett comments: 'the speaker, in voicing a sudden emotion, thinks of the moment (just past) of the access of that emotion, and so uses the aorist'. His translation ('pah!'), however, implies that ἀπέπτυσ' is a verbal equivalent of the act of spitting rather than a description of his reaction as the Nurse spoke.⁸ Cf. (2) E. fr. 727 (from *Telephus*); (3) Ar. *Pax* 528, a parody of (2).

(4) Hecuba rejects Polymestor's prophecy of Cassandra's death (E. *Hec.* 1276): ἀπέπτυσ' αὐτῷ ταῦτα σοὶ δίδωμ' ἔχειν. There are many parallels for the practice of spitting in order to avert an evil omen (e.g. A. fr. 354).⁹ Hecuba rejects the ill-omened prophecy, and tries to turn it back on Polymestor himself. The important thing is her actual utterance of the word ἀπέπτυσ', not her immediate feelings as Polymestor spoke. The word is adequately performative for this essentially conversational context, but not as forceful as the actual act of spitting would have been. Cf. (5) E. *I.T.* 1161; (6) E. *Hel.* 664; (7) E. *I.A.* 873f.

(8) Andromache repudiates the faithless widow (E. *Tro.* 667 f.):

ἀπέπτυσ' αὐτὴν ἣτις ἄνδρα τὸν πάρος
 καινοῖσι λέκτροις ἀποβαλοῦσ' ἄλλον φιλεῖ.

These lines come from the middle of a speech, and express a strong and settled opinion on a general issue rather than a sudden access of emotion a moment before. Cf. (9) E. *I.A.* 509f.; (10) E. fr. 533 (*Meleager*).¹⁰

A possible example of a tragic aorist of ἀποπτύω in the third person occurs in Cassandra's vision of the Erinyes in the house of Atreus (A. *Ag.* 1191–3):

ὑμνοῦσι δ' ὕμνον δώμασιν προσήμηναι
 πρῶταρχον ἄτην, ἐν μέρει δ' ἀπέπτυσαν
 εὐνὰς ἀδελφοῦ τῷ πατοῦντι δυσμενεῖς.

Denniston and Page translate 'expressed their loathing for a brother's bed', but the use of the present in ὑμνοῦσι and other verbs in the passage shows that ἀπέπτυσαν must also refer to the present. Fraenkel thus relates it to the 'instantaneous' ἀπέπτυσσα, and it could be argued that if ἀπέπτυσσα means 'I reject', then ἀπέπτυσαν can mean 'they reject'. In fact, however, the present of ἀποπτύω is normally used in the second and third persons when the reference is to the present (e.g. Hes. *Op.* 726; A. *Eum.* 303; E. fr. 414). It is thus more likely that ἀπέπτυσαν here is not 'instantaneous', but rather has elements both of gnomic and of punctual aorist: the Erinyes' expressions of disgust are regular but discrete. Comparable is οὐδὲ Μουσαῶν

⁸ Cf. the review of Barrett by J. W. Fitton, *Pegasus* 8 (1967), 17–43, at 18: 'Why should a person under the stress of emotion become unusually meticulous about timing the access of his emotion? . . . The verb does not refer to a thought, it performs a rejection—"pah!" . . . The aorist is non-temporal.' Fitton rightly stresses the performative nature of the verb, although his own explanation of the aorist is different from that being proposed here. 'Pah!' is also insufficiently dignified as a rendering of ἀπέπτυσσα, which can govern an object in a coherent sentence.

⁹ Cf. Gow on Theocr. 6.39.

¹⁰ ἀπέπτυσσα (A. *P.V.* 1070) is descriptive rather than performative, and is thus not 'instantaneous' (pace Griffiths ad loc.). The aorist is preterite, on a par with ἔμαθον (1068), explaining the Chorus' present behaviour in terms of qualities evinced by them in the past. ἀπέπτυσαν (E. *H.F.* 560) is also preterite (pace Bond ad loc.), on a par with ἔσχεν (556) and ἔσπανίζομεν (558).

χοροί νιν ἀπεστύγησαν (S. O.C. 692), where the aorist (on a par with five presents) suggests 'not at any moment . . .'.¹¹

Lament

ᾤμωξα as a tragic aorist occurs five times in Euripides, and nowhere else. The 'present' equivalent of this aorist is not the descriptive first-person present οἰμώζω ('I am lamenting'; cf. A. Cho. 1014), but the exclamation οἶμοι. The tragic aorist ᾤμωξα allows the speaker to express recognition that something is lamentable in a less direct manner than by actually groaning.

(11) Medea contemplates the murder of her children (E. Med. 791–3):

ᾤμωξα δ' οἶον ἔργον ἔστ' ἐργαστέον
τοῦντεῦθεν ἡμῖν· τέκνα γὰρ κατακτενῶ
τᾶμ'· οὐτις ἔστιν ὅστις ἐξαιρήσεται.

The aorist comes in the middle of a speech, not as an 'instantaneous' response to anything that has just been said or done.¹² Medea speaks in heroic mode, minimizing the emotional cost of her revenge. Emotion breaks through in the next scene when she actually sees the children (οἶμοι, 899).

(12) Hippolytus reacts with an anguished οἶμοι (E. Hipp. 1401) to the discovery that Aphrodite was responsible for his fate, but with a more restrained ᾤμωξα to the information that she has also ruined Theseus (1405).

(13) In her long stichomythia with the unrecognized Orestes, Electra explains why she is living so far from the town (E. El. 247f.):

Ηλ. ἐγημάμεσθ', ᾧ ξεῖνε, θανάσιμον γάμον.
Ορ. ᾤμωξ' ἀδελφὸν σόν. Μυκηναίων τίνι;

Cropp comments on 'the formality, reserve and politeness of [Orestes'] assumed *persona*',¹³ and the assumption of that *persona* is especially marked here. Stronger emotion breaks through later with οἶμοι (290), when Electra hints at the maltreatment of Agamemnon's corpse.

(14) The Chorus hears Clytaemestra's death cries (E. El. 1167f.):

Κλ. ἰὼ μοί μοι.
Χο. ᾤμωξα καγὼ πρὸς τέκνων χειρουμένης.

The Chorus' pity for Clytaemestra is qualified by the belief that what she suffered was just.

(15) Orestes responds to Iphigenia's account of her false wedding (E. I.T. 861f.):

Ιφ. φεύ φεύ χερνίβων ἐκέ<νων>. οἶμοι>.
Ορ. ᾤμωξα καγὼ τόλμαν ἦν ἔτλη πατήρ.

Jackson's supplement, printed by Diggle, would suit the present argument, but there is in any case a clear contrast in this section between Orestes' iambics and Iphigenia's agitated dochmiacs (cf. 71). Orestes himself reacted with a more immediate οἶμοι

¹¹ Cf. Moorhouse (n. 3), p. 197. See also the aorists discussed in n. 72.

¹² Cf. 8–10; Denniston on E. El. 248.

¹³ M. J. Cropp (ed.), *Euripides: Electra* (Warminster, 1988), p. xxxiv.

when Iphigenia mentioned Agamemnon actually putting the sword to her throat (855).

Derision

(16) Trygaeus responds to Hierocles' oracular reference to the Spartans (Ar. *Pax* 1066):

Τρ. αἰβοῖβοι. Ιε. τί γελᾷς; Τρ. ἤσθην χαροποῖσι πιθήκοις.

If this were the only example of ἤσθην in this kind of context, it would be tempting to take it as a preterite referring back to αἰβοῖβοι. Sommerstein thus translates 'I liked those "fierce-eyed monkeys".'

The other examples in Aristophanes (17–21), however, suggest that ἤσθην is a verbal equivalent of laughter rather than a report of it.¹⁴ The distancing effect of the aorist converts amusement pure and simple into derision. The speaker can thus express the view that something is risible without actually laughing. In English, one does not say 'What a joke!' or 'Ha! Ha!' if one is genuinely amused. Trygaeus has in fact laughed, but apparently in an ostentatiously derisive way (αἰβοῖ normally expresses disgust). Actual laughter would be inappropriate in some of the other cases (especially 18, 22). Compare ἀπέπτυσσα (1–10) and ὤμωξα (11–15), where the aorist is a less immediate equivalent of the gesture or exclamation. Thus ἤσθην : laughter :: ὤμωξα : οἶμοι.

(17) Strepsiades responds to the Student's anecdote about gecko-droppings landing on Socrates (Ar. *Nub.* 174): ἤσθην γαλεώτῃ καταχέσαντι Σωκράτους. Dover explains ἤσθην as a preterite: 'Strepsiades has guffawed, and now says why. . . . The aorist often puts into words a movement or noise already made.' The guffaw is superfluous to this expression of amused contempt ('How ludicrous—a gecko shitting on Socrates!').

(18) Strepsiades responds to the First Creditor's oath by Zeus and the gods (Ar. *Nub.* 1240f.): θαυμασίως ἤσθην "θεοῖς", / καὶ Ζεὺς γελοῖος ὀμνύμενος τοῖς εἰδόσιν. The aorist has the illocutionary force of expressing contempt for the oath ('I regard "the gods" as a joke'), equivalent to the adjective γελοῖος in the next line.¹⁵ Cf. (19) Ar. *Av.* 570.

(20) Peisetaerus comments aside on the Priest's pompous prayer, parodying the regular Athenian addition of the Chians to prayers for benefits for themselves (Ar. *Av.* 880): Χίοισιν ἤσθην πανταχοῦ προσκειμένοις. 'It's a bit of a joke, the way the Chians get tagged on everywhere.' The obedient Chians may have been regarded in Athens with a touch of condescension, not incompatible with appreciation of their loyalty.¹⁶

(21) The Sausage-Seller responds to threats from Paphlagon (Ar. *Eq.* 696f.):

*ἤσθην ἀπειλαῖς· ἐγέλασα ψολοκομπίαις·
ἀπεπνδάρισα μόθωνα· περιεκόκκασα.¹⁷*

The aorists are hardly reporting what the Sausage-Seller has actually been doing.

¹⁴ Cf. 43 below for the rather different use of ἤσθην at S. *Phil.* 1314.

¹⁵ For the exaggerated emphasis of θαυμασίως, see P. T. Stevens, *Colloquial Expressions in Euripides* (*Hermes Einzelschriften* 38; Wiesbaden, 1976), p. 14.

¹⁶ Cf. Eupolis fr. 246 K-A (*Poleis*, c. 422 B.C.); Hornblower on Thuc. 4.129.2.

¹⁷ Sommerstein's text (variants do not affect the point at issue here).

The words stand for the deeds. The point is not so much that he is amused by Paphlagon as that he regards him with contempt. An expression like 'I regard your threats as a joke' need not be preceded by actual laughter. The examples from Lucian below (22–4) suggest that it may be an accident that this is the only surviving fifth-century use of *ἐγέλασα* in this idiom. The verbs in line 697 are extravagantly incongruous with the superior tone of the tragic aorist (cf. 32).

(22) Simylus and Polystratus converse in the Underworld (Lucian, *D. Mort.* 19.2):

Σιμ. ἐτυράννησας, ὦ Πολύστρατε, μετ' ἐμέ;
 Πολ. οὐκ, ἀλλ' ἐραστὰς εἶχον μυρίου.
 Σιμ. ἐγέλασα ἐραστὰς σὺ τηλικούτος ὢν, ὀδόντας τέτταρας ἔχων;

ἐγέλασα is correctly translated by Macleod (Loeb) as 'You make me laugh.' Kühner–Gerth offer 'ich brach in Lachen aus, als ich dein Wort hörte' (i.164f.), but immediacy of amusement is hardly the point here. Lucian's use of the tragic aorist seems to be a learned echo of the fifth-century idiom. Cf. (23) *D. Deor.* 18.2 and (24) *Symp.* 9.

Oaths

The tragic aorist is common with *ὄμνυμι* and compounds. Some scholars think that the aorist in these oaths expresses impulsiveness or haste, somewhat in terms of Kühner–Gerth's category (b). Moorhouse thus explains *ἀπώμοσ'* (25): 'Neoptolemus takes the oath with alacrity, after his good faith has been questioned', and apparently includes it with examples of aorist showing 'a sudden feeling, or act of comprehension . . . or other mental reaction to what has preceded'.¹⁸ This interpretation fits some examples well enough (25, 27, 29), but cannot account for other aorist oaths which are obviously not impulsive or hasty (26, 28, 30, 35).

Kühner–Gerth themselves include aorist oaths in their category (c), and believe that the aorist makes the verb more forceful and definitive ('ich habe hiermit . . .'). The main objection to this is that performative verbs of swearing occur in drama in both the present and the aorist, and it is the present which seems to be the more forceful, the tense used in the most serious and formal oaths.¹⁹ A good example of a full and formal oath is Aegeus' promise that he will never surrender Medea to her enemies (*E. Med.* 752–5):

Αι. ὄμνυμι Γαῖαν φῶς τε λαμπρὸν Ἥλιον
 θεοὺς τε πάντας ἔμμενέιν ἃ σου κλύω.
 Μη. ἀρκεῖ τί δ' ὄρκῳ τῷδε μὴ ὑμμένων πάθοις;
 Αι. ἃ τοῖσι δυσσεβοῦσι γίγνεται βροτῶν.

Aegeus swears by an impressive list of gods, and prescribes a penalty for himself should he break his oath. The most solemn and explicit oaths in Greek drama are in this form, with the performative verb in the present tense (cf. *S. Trach.* 1188; *E. Hipp.* 713, 1026; *I.A.* 473; fr. 487; *Ar. Av.* 445). So also in prose, as at the beginning of the Hippocratic oath: *ὄμνυμι Ἀπόλλωνα ἱητρὸν καὶ Ἀσκληπιὸν καὶ Ὑγίαν καὶ Πανάκειαν καὶ θεοὺς πάντας καὶ πάσας* . . . (cf. *Xen. An.* 6.6.17; *Dem. Contra Zen.* 31; *Pl. Phdr.* 236d10).

¹⁸ Moorhouse (n. 3), pp. 195f. Dale describes *κατώμοσα* (*E. Hel.* 835) as 'impulsive aor.'.

¹⁹ It is, of course, possible to swear a formal oath without a performative verb of swearing (e.g. *E. I.T.* 735–52; *Ion* 1528–31).

A formal oath in the present tense is a performative of an especially strong kind. The speaker is committed 'on the record' to the most emphatic possible type of assertion. An oath with the tragic aorist distances the speaker somewhat from what is being said: the oath is indeed accomplished, but less forcefully than by the present. Thus *ᾠμοσα* : *ᾠμνυμι* :: *ᾠμωξα* : *οἶμοι*.

A formal oath in the present tense is normally conclusive (e.g. *E. Med.* 756; *Hipp.* 715, 1036f.; *Ar. Av.* 448–50). The hearer may not be convinced by such an oath, as Theseus is not convinced by Hippolytus' oath (*E. Hipp.* 1038–40), but there is no stronger statement for which (s)he can ask. It can even be regarded as offensive to the gods to disbelieve what someone has said under oath (*S. O.T.* 646f., 652). An aorist oath, by contrast, can be met by a request for further confirmation.

(25) Neoptolemus has offered to return Philoctetes his bow (*S. Phil.* 1288–92):

Φι. πῶς εἶπας; ἄρα δεύτερον δολούμεθα;
 Νε. ἀπώμοσ' ἀγνὸν Ζητὸς ὑψίστου σέβας.
 Φι. ᾧ φίλτατ' εἰπὼν, εἰ λέγεις ἐτήτυμα,
 Νε. τοῦργον παρέσται φανερόν. ἀλλὰ δεξίαν
 πρότεινε χεῖρα, καὶ κράτει τῶν σῶν ὅπλων.

Neoptolemus' oath is solemnly phrased, but is in practice no more than an emphatic denial of Philoctetes' suspicions, an elevated tragic version of the everyday οὐ μὰ Δία.²⁰ A formal oath would actually be superfluous, since Neoptolemus is in a position to convince Philoctetes by returning the bow immediately.

(26) Polyneices addresses Jocasta (*E. Pho.* 433f.): θεοὺς δ' ἐπώμοσ' ὥς ἀκουσίως / τοῖς φιλτάτοις ἐκοῦσιν ἡράμην δόρυ. The oath is little more than conversational emphasis ('By God, I don't want to do this!'), a tragic equivalent of the everyday νὴ τοὺς θεούς.

(27) Menelaus has asked Helen what will happen if Theonoe refuses to help them. The stichomythia then continues (*E. Hel.* 833–40):

Ελ. θανῇ: γαμοῦμαι δ' ἢ τάλαιν' ἐγὼ βία.
 Με. προδοτὶς ἂν εἴης: τὴν βίαν σκήψας' ἔχεις.
 Ελ. ἀλλ' ἀγνὸν ὄρκον σὸν κάρα κατώμοσα . . .
 Με. τί φῆς; θανείσθαι; κοῦποτ' ἀλλάξεις λέχη;
 Ελ. ταῦτ' ὧ ξίφει γε κείσομαι δέ σου πέλας.
 Με. ἐπὶ τοῖσδε τοῖνυν δεξιᾷς ἐμῆς θίγε.
 Ελ. ψαύω, θανόντος σου τόδ' ἐκλείψειν φάος.
 Με. κἀγὼ στερηθεῖς σου τελευτήσῃν βίον.

What is the content of Helen's oath in 835? Menelaus supposes that she is swearing to die with him, and she cannot (or at least does not) deny it. In 833, however, she had envisaged surviving him.²¹ He is thus wrong to take 835 as the beginning of a formal oath to die with him. It is more likely that Helen is merely repudiating the unjust accusation in 834 (cf. μὰ Δί', ἀλλ' . . . at *Ar. Ran.* 174). Her oath is thus a conversational denial, just like Neoptolemus' (25), which Menelaus treats as the

²⁰ Banal formulae like οὐ μὰ Δία are not dignified enough for tragedy (*E. An.* 934 is the rule-proving exception). They can, however, be brought up to the level of tragedy by expansion and elaboration, e.g. Clytaemestra's μὰ τὴν ἀνασσαν Ἀργεῖαν θεάν (*E. I.A.* 739). Cf. K. J. Dover, *Greek and the Greeks* (Oxford, 1987), p. 48.

²¹ Kannicht (on 834) implausibly suggests that γαμοῦμαι (833) is not the alternative to rescue, but the premise of Helen's decision to die with Menelaus. It would invite misunderstanding for her to use unadorned futures to convey this idea.

beginning of a formal oath. Helen then finds herself committed to his interpretation of her words.

(28) Amphitryo calls witnesses to Heracles' courage (E. *H.F.* 177–80):

Διὸς κεραυνὸν ἡρόμην τέθριππά τε
ἐν οἷς βεβηκὼς τοῖσι γῆς βλαστήμασιν
Γίγασι πλευροῖς πτήν' ἐναρμόσας βέλη
τὸν καλλίνικον μετὰ θεῶν ἐκώμασεν.

Witnesses are called upon in two different sets of circumstances: to observe an event (e.g. a crime), and to testify to it later (e.g. at a trial). The normal performative tense for calling witnesses to observe something is the present: *μαρτύρομαι* (e.g. E. *Pho.* 626; Ar. *Ach.* 926; *Nub.* 1222, 1297; *Vesp.* 1436; *Ran.* 528; Pl. *Phil.* 12b1) or *μάρτυρας καλῶ* (e.g. E. *Pho.* 491). The present is also used to call on the gods to observe something, often with the effect of an oath (e.g. S. *Trach.* 1248; E. *Med.* 619; *Hipp.* 1451; *H.F.* 858).

Amphitryon calls witnesses, not to observe what is happening, but to testify to the truth of what he says (176). Orators do not actually use performative verbs for calling witnesses to testify, but formulations like *καί μοι ἀνάβητε τούτων μάρτυρες* (Lys. 1.29) or *μάρτυρας παρέξομαι* (Lys. 3.20). The performative present, if it were to be used, would be very forceful ('I hereby call upon . . .'). Amphitryon's witnesses are Zeus' thunderbolt, the centaurs, and Mt Dirphys. None of these is likely to be very articulate on his behalf, and his appeal to them is purely figurative.²² The aorist *ἡρόμην* is thus unlikely to be especially forceful, as suggested by Bond's translation 'I hereby ask Zeus' thunderbolt.' Amphitryon does not even pretend to summon the centaurs or Mt Dirphys, saying merely 'go and ask . . .' (183, 185). *ἡρόμην* thus seems to function in much the same way as the 'conversational' aorist oaths discussed above (25–7).

(29) Orestes has questioned the Phrygian's motives in agreeing that Helen deserved to be killed (E. *Or.* 1516–18):

Ορ. ὁμοσον (εἰ δὲ μή, κτενῶ σε) μὴ λέγειν ἐμὴν χάριν.
Φρ. τὴν ἐμὴν ψυχὴν κατώμοσ', ἣν ἂν εὐορκοίμ' ἐγώ.

The Phrygian's oath is perjured: his hasty and exaggerated agreement (1513) shows that he was indeed saying what he thought Orestes wanted to hear. He evidently does succeed in swearing an oath, as instructed by Orestes, but the aorist distances him from the full force of the performative present.²³ The aorist permits a form of words that is acceptable as an oath, but falls short of the maximum emphasis and commitment (cf. Xanthias' use of the conversational *νῆ τὸν Δία* in reply to Dionysus' *κατόμοσον* at Ar. *Ran.* 304–7). The reason is not that the oath is merely conversational (as in 25–8), but that even the Phrygian tries to minimize the grossness of his perjury. His oath is comparable to other tragic aorists which are non-committal (31, 37, 38, 42, 48) or insincere (30, 49, 52, 55, 70).

²² There are appeals to mute witnesses at *Hipp.* 976–80, 1074f., but both use indirect formulations which avoid the absurdity of the performative present in such a context (cf. E. *I.A.* 365).

²³ West (on 1517) comments: 'the aorist answers Orestes' *omason*, marking the oath as something conclusive'. This oath is not, however, especially conclusive. Nor is there any reason to suppose that an aorist indicative might be expected after an aorist imperative in such contexts: (present) *δμνυμι* answers (present) *δμνυ* at S. *Trach.* 1185/1188 and E. *Med.* 746/752, but (aorist) *κατόμοσον* at Ar. *An.* 444/445.

(30) The aorist ἀπώμοσ' (E. *Cyc.* 266) dilutes another perjured oath in Silenus' rebuttal of Odysseus' denunciation of him to the Cyclops. This elaborate oath begins resoundingly, but soon 'sinks into bathos' (Seaford).

(31) Helen swears that she will commit suicide if the rumour of Menelaus' death is true (E. *Hel.* 348–50):

σέ γὰρ ἐκάλεσα, σέ δὲ κατόμοσα
τὸν ὑδρόεντι δόνακι χλωρόν
Εὐρώταν . . .²⁴

Dale (on 330) writes of 'the common aor. of a decision just now taken', but there is nothing especially impulsive about this oath. Kannicht (on 330) translates 'dich habe ich hiermit angerufen, bei dir habe ich hiermit geschworen', but this lyric expression of despair is hardly more formal and definitive than the oaths with the present ὀμνυμι mentioned above. Helen has a propensity for the tragic aorist (cf. 27, 42), and tentativeness or insincerity may be implied (cf. 29, and the other passages cited there).

(32) The Chorus' ἐπηπείλησα καὶ κατώμοσα (Ar. *Av.* 630) is rendered 'I give due warning and solemnly swear' by Dunbar, and these aorists do indeed look as though they could belong in Kühner–Gerth's category (c). The pompous tone may, however, derive from evocation of the tragic idiom rather than from the aorist as such. The tragic aorist evokes tragedy elsewhere in Aristophanes (3, 36, 59).

POLITE AORISTS

The distancing effect of the tragic aorist is often used to make a verb more polite than it would have been in the present. It is in some ways comparable to the 'attitudinal past' in English, used to make verbs expressing volition or mental state more tentative or polite (e.g. 'I wondered if you could help me', 'Did you want to see me?').²⁵ This is no more than a rough analogy, adduced purely for the purpose of illustration. The tragic aorist resembles the attitudinal past in exploiting tenses for the purpose of social distancing. It differs from it in being confined to performative verbs, which do not take the attitudinal past in English. The stylistic register of the two devices is also very different, in that the tragic aorist belongs to a high literary style.

Politeness has been helpfully analysed as a universal human phenomenon by Brown and Levinson. They argue that all competent human beings have 'face', which comprises the want not to be imposed upon or impeded ('negative face') and the want to be approved of, admired, etc. ('positive face').²⁶ The specific details of social interaction differ widely in different cultures, but Brown and Levinson argue that a variety of actions are intrinsically face-threatening. Actions which threaten the face of the

²⁴ S. fr. 957 has an oath by the Eurotas. For oaths by rivers generally, see Pfeiffer on Callimachus fr. 7.33f.; West on Hes. *Th.* 400.

²⁵ Cf. P. Brown and S. C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*² (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 118f., 204; S. Chalker and E. Weiner, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar* (Oxford, 1994), s.v. 'social distancing'; R. Quirk *et al.*, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (London and New York, 1985), 4.16; 4.37: 'such forms enable us to avoid the impoliteness which might well result from expressing one's attitude too directly'.

²⁶ Brown and Levinson (n. 25) derive their concept of 'face' in particular from E. Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face to Face Behavior* (New York, 1967).

hearer include orders, requests, advice, offers, promises, criticism, and disagreement. Actions which threaten the face of the speaker include thanks, excuses, acceptance of offers, unwilling promises or offers, apologies, and admissions of guilt.²⁷

A person may nevertheless need to perform a face-threatening act, and 'politeness' is the attempt to minimize the face threat involved in such an act. The threat does not have to be very substantial in order to have an effect on the language used, especially in formal contexts. Politeness tends to be oriented to a pessimistic estimate of any given offence (the 'virtual offence'), and thus to have an inbuilt element of exaggeration.²⁸ One may thus say, for example, 'I am terribly sorry to bother you' even when the probable inconvenience to the hearer is quite small. The hearer may correspondingly be offended if the apology is oriented to the actual inconvenience rather than to this exaggerated view of it.

Greek, like other languages, has a wide variety of devices to mitigate face-threatening utterances. One such device, common in tragedy, is to use a potential optative rather than an imperative for a command.²⁹ Manipulation of tense, as mentioned above, is another. The future (e.g. *βουλήσομαι*, *αἰτήσομαι*) can thus be used in Greek for polite requests (e.g. *S. O.C.* 1289; *E. Alc.* 164; *Med.* 259; *Hclld.* 475).³⁰ The imperfect *ἐβουλόμην* (without *ἄν*) is sometimes used to distance the speaker from an unfulfilled present wish.³¹ Drama is a rich source of politeness phenomena, especially in cultures where evidence is otherwise in short supply.³² It may be an accident of our evidence for Greek politeness that there is hardly a trace of the tragic aorist before about 450 B.C., and that it occurs almost exclusively in drama.³³

Greetings and orders

(33) Odysseus addresses Silenus (*E. Cyc.* 101): *χαίρειν προσεῖπα πρῶτα τὸν γεραίτατον*. Hailing strangers, or others whose goodwill may be in doubt, is to threaten their negative face by impinging upon them without their consent. The face-threat is exacerbated by use of second-person singular pronouns, which emphasize the immediacy of the contact between speaker and addressee.³⁴ Third-person greetings like this one are thus more polite (cf. *S. Trach.* 227; *E. El.* 552; *Ion* 401f.; *Ar. Nub.* 1145; *Av.* 1378, 1581; *Alexis* fr. 172.5f. K-A). The tragic aorist, less

²⁷ Brown and Levinson (n. 25), pp. 65–8 give a useful classification of face-threatening acts ('FTAs').

²⁸ Brown and Levinson (n. 25), pp. 1f., 33, 51, n. 7 adopt the concept of the 'virtual offence' from E. Goffman, *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order* (New York, 1971), pp. 108f.

²⁹ Cf. Kühner–Gerth (n. 1), vol. I, pp. 233f.; Goodwin (n. 2), §237; Fraenkel on *A. Ag.* 1049.

³⁰ Cf. Kühner–Gerth (n. 1), vol. I, pp. 172f.; H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, MA, 1920), §1913.

³¹ Cf. Kühner–Gerth (n. 1), vol. I, pp. 205f.; Goodwin (n. 2), §425; Smyth (n. 30), §1782.

³² Cf. R. Brown and A. Gilman, 'Politeness theory and Shakespeare's four major tragedies', *Language in Society* 18 (1989), 159–212; M. Sifianou, *Politeness Phenomena in England and Greece: A Cross-cultural Perspective* (Oxford, 1992); A. Lardinois, *CP* 92 (1997), 230, n. 79.

³³ Fraenkel (on *A. Ag.* 838) comments on another polite usage: 'the restrained form of expression . . . reflects the urbanity of Attic society'. Cf. K. Lammermann, 'Von der attischen Urbanität und ihrer Auswirkung in der Sprache' (diss. Göttingen, 1935); A. M. Dale, *E. Alc.* ed., pp. xxiii f. On the 'stylized-elevated' language of tragedy, see M. S. Silk, 'Tragic language: the Greek tragedians and Shakespeare', in M. S. Silk (ed.), *Tragedy and the Tragic: Greek Theatre and Beyond* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 458–96.

³⁴ Cf. Brown and Levinson (n. 25), p. 203.

direct than the present, makes Odysseus' greeting even more polite.³⁵ The tragic idiom itself contributes to his comical solemnity (cf. 32).

(34) Creon's first words after his entrance (E. *Med.* 271–3):

σὲ τὴν σκυθρωπὸν καὶ πόσει θυμουμένην,
Μήδεις', ἀνείπον τῆσδε γῆς ἕξω περᾶν
φυνάδα . . .

Orders are obviously face-threatening, and are made more so if the addressee is 'nailed' by second-person singular pronoun, name, and description.³⁶ This is the language of an angry tyrant (e.g. S. *El.* 1445–7; *Ant.* 441f.) or of a god addressing a human (e.g. E. *Hi.* 1283f.; *Ba.* 912–17). The rudeness of Creon's opening words is mitigated by the distancing effect of the aorist (cf. 72–4), and this combination of superficial brusqueness with polite diffidence is very much in keeping with his character (cf. 348f.).

The present is the usual performative tense in orders: ἀπαυδῶ (S. *Phil.* 1293; E. *An.* 579; *Su.* 467; Ar. *Ran.* 369); ἀπειννέπω (E. *Med.* 813); προυννέπω (A. *Eum.* 852); προφωνῶ (S. *Aj.* 1089); λέγω (E. *Tro.* 1047); κελεύω (E. *An.* 577); ἐννέπω (S. *O.T.* 350). Creon himself uses the present προυννέπω when he takes his final and definitive stand (351).³⁷

(35) The Chorus invokes Epaphos (E. *Pho.* 676–80):

καὶ σέ, τὸν προμάτορος
Ἰοῦς ποτ' ἔκγονον
Ἐπαφον, ὦ Διὸς γένεθλον,
†ἐκάλεσ' ἐκάλεσα βαρβάρῳ βοᾷ,
ἰῶ, βαρβάρους λιταῖς†.³⁸

Prayers systematically violate the politeness principles outlined under 33 and 34 above, no doubt because the absent deity must be nailed as explicitly as possible, and can thus be addressed in a manner that would be unacceptable if (s)he were actually present (cf. 41).

There is thus no obvious reason why the Chorus should use the polite aorist to mitigate the second-person singular pronoun with which they summon Epaphus. The present καλῶ would be entirely normal in a prayer (e.g. A. *Eum.* 116; S. *Aj.* 831; E. *Hel.* 969; Ar. *Lys.* 346), and the Chorus' language may have been influenced by a form more appropriate to polite conversation between humans (cf. 31).

(36) Dicaeopolis addresses Phales σε . . . προσείπον . . . ἄσμενος (Ar. *Ach.* 266f.). Michael Silk observes that there is 'a touch of elevation' about this, and suggests plausibly that the comic poet derives his elevated style from tragedy.³⁹ The aorist here thus evokes a tragic idiom (cf. 3, 32, 59).

³⁵ Cf. greetings like τὸν ἔωνα χαίρειν (Pl. *Ion* 530a1; cf. Men. *Dys.* 401; Theocr. 14.1) in which the main verb, implicitly a verb of ordering, is omitted altogether.

³⁶ Cf. Brown and Levinson (n. 25), p. 191. Μήδεις', ἀνείπον (272) is Harrison's convincing emendation of codd. μῆδειαν εἶπον.

³⁷ Two possible examples of tragic aorist with verbs of command are evidently corrupt. L has ὑπεῖπον at E. *Su.* 1171, but Reiske's ὑπειπεῖν (read by Collard and Diggle) is plausible on other grounds. εἶπον at Ar. *Eccl.* 255 is difficult (contrast the futures in 250, 256), and Brunck's ἀν εἶποιμι' is tempting. A third possible example, εἶπον at E. fr. 233 (*Archelaus*) lacks context to clarify whether it is preterite or 'polite' tragic aorist.

³⁸ Diggle obelizes on metrical grounds, while Mastronarde prints a somewhat different colometry. Bothe deleted ἐκάλεσ'.

³⁹ M. Silk, 'Aristophanes as a lyric poet', in J. Henderson (ed.), *Aristophanes: Essays in*

Acceptance

The usual performative in accepting something is, not surprisingly, the present *δέχομαι*: a gift (Ar. *Ach.* 199; Xen. *Cyr.* 1.4.10; 4.5.51, 5.1.1), an honour (Ar. *Av.* 1276; Aesch. *In Ctes.* 211), an alliance or other bond of friendship (Xen. *Hell.* 4.1.39; *Cyr.* 6.1.49, 8.4.25; Men. *Dys.* 748), a suppliant (Xen. *Cyr.* 4.6.8), an oath (Ar. *Ran.* 589), a challenge (Dem. *Contra Pant.* 42), a password (Xen. *An.* 1.8.17). Euripides twice uses the present for the formal acceptance of physical objects (*Alc.* 376; *I.T.* 793).

These examples make clear that the present performative *δέχομαι* is very emphatic. Formal acceptance of anything is intrinsically face-threatening to the speaker, who is explicitly committed to a debt or to a future course of action. Less obviously, it can also threaten the face of the hearer, by putting on record that (s)he has made a particular offer and implying that rejection was an option for the speaker. Explicit recognition of the mutual commitment implied by the act of acceptance may well be necessary, as in the examples cited above. On the other hand, its face-threatening elements can be mitigated by techniques of polite indirectness.⁴⁰

(37) The opening exchange between the Paedagogus and Clytaemestra (S. *El.* 666–9):

- Πα. ὦ χαῖρ', ἀνασσα. σοὶ φέρων ἤκω λόγους
 ἡδεῖς φίλου παρ' ἀνδρὸς Αἰγίσθω θ' ὁμοῦ.
 Κλ. ἐδεξάμην τὸ ῥηθέν· εἰδέναι δέ σου
 πρῶτιστα χρήζω τίς σ' ἀπέστειλεν βροτῶν.

Sophocles alludes to the practice of exploiting an utterance as an omen by imposing upon it a meaning of one's own, different from that intended by the speaker.⁴¹ This is achieved by pronouncing a formula of acceptance, which makes the utterance irrevocable in the desired sense. No doubt the present *δέχομαι* was the usual performative on such occasions (cf. *δέκομαι τὸν οἰωνόν*, Hdt. 9.91.2).⁴² The aorist seems to be making the performative less, rather than more, emphatic. Clytaemestra is not literally accepting an omen here. She interprets the Paedagogus' words in exactly the sense which he intended, and she would need to be insanely superstitious to treat a routine greeting of this kind as a real omen.

It is also unlikely that the aorist expresses excitement or impulsiveness, as suggested by Jebb's parallels (S. *Aj.* 693; *Ant.* 1307, etc.), and by the exclamation mark in Lloyd-Jones' Loeb translation 'I accept the omen!' The tone of these opening exchanges (660–72) is elevated and courteous. Clytaemestra is engaging in polite conversation with a stranger of inferior social status, and has been given no reason as yet for undue excitement.

She uses a formula for accepting an omen in order to express her appreciation of the Paedagogus' greeting (cf. E. *I.A.* 607f.). Expressions of thanks typically employ polite indirectness, especially (as here) when the full implications of what is being accepted are not clear (cf. 38, 42, 48).

Interpretation, YCS 26 (1980), 99–151, at 134, n. 109, citing P. Rau, *Paratragodia: Untersuchung einer komischen Form des Aristophanes* (Zetemata 45; Munich, 1967), pp. 144–8.

⁴⁰ Cf. Brown and Levinson (n. 25), pp. 67f., 219.

⁴¹ Cf. Latin 'accipio'; Fraenkel on A. *Ag.* 1653.

⁴² *ἐδεξάμην* occurs at S. fr. 208.3 (*Eurypylus*) in a context of omens (*φήμη* occurs in the previous line, *κόραξ ἐπάδ[ει]* in the next), but too little survives for conclusions about style to be possible.

(38) Orestes questions the Old Man about revenge on Aegisthus (E. *El.* 620–2):

Ορ. ἐσθλὸν τι μὴνύσεις, αἰσθοίμην δ' ἐγώ.
 Πρ. Αἴγισθον εἶδον, ἥνιχ' εἶρπον ἐνθάδε.
 Ορ. προσηκάμην τὸ ῥηθέν. ἐν ποίοις τόποις;

Orestes ostensibly hopes for a good omen (cf. LSJ s.v. ἐσθλός II.3) in the Old Man's response and then accepts it: 'Or. speaks in superstitious formulae, as if consulting a seer or prophet.'⁴³ But there is no question of the literal acceptance of omens here: Orestes is not imposing an unexpected meaning on the Old Man's words, but politely exploiting the formula in order to express a favourable response to them.

(39) E. *Pho.* 858: another formula for accepting an omen (οἰωνὸν ἐθέμην) used to pay a compliment.

(40) Ion finally admits that Xuthus is his father (E. *Ion* 561):

Ἴων χαίρέ μοι, πάτερ. Ξο. φίλον γε φθέγμ' ἐδεξάμην τόδε.

Xuthus is undeniably excited, but the other examples of tragic aorists of verbs of acceptance (in none of which is the speaker particularly excited) show that the aorist itself does not contribute to the expression of that excitement. The parallels suggest that the aorist makes his acceptance of Ion's reluctant greeting less direct and emphatic (and therefore more polite) than the present would have been (cf. 41, 50).⁴⁴ The aorist is not only a distancing device in itself, but also a conventional acknowledgement of the face-threat.

(41) Ion responds to Athena's *deus ex machina* speech (E. *Ion* 1606f.): οὐκ ἀπιστία / σοὺς λόγους ἐδεξάμειθα.⁴⁵ 'I accept' (present) would have threatened Athena's face by putting on record that she had made an offer and implying that Ion could have refused it. The aorist acknowledges the problematic nature even of the act of acceptance (cf. 40, 50). More politeness is required when, as here, there is a disparity in power between the individuals concerned.⁴⁶

(42) Helen accepts the Chorus' suggestion that Theonoe be consulted about whether Menelaus is still alive (E. *Hel.* 330): φίλαι, λόγους ἐδεξάμην. Helen's acceptance is polite, but also extremely reluctant: 'Helen is so afraid of what she will hear that she cannot bring herself to enter for 50 lines' (Dale on 335ff.).⁴⁷

(43) Neoptolemus replies to Philoctetes' praise (S. *Phil.* 1314): ᾗσθην πατέρα τὸν ἄμὸν ἐλλογούντ' σε / αὐτόν τ' ἔμ'. The acceptance of a compliment is socially problematic, potentially threatening the face both of the speaker and of the hearer, and is thus an area where polite indirectness is common.⁴⁸ The context here suggests formality ('Thank you for the compliment'), rather than immediacy. The tone could hardly be more different from ecstatic outbursts like ἔφριξ' ἔρωτι (S. *Aj.* 693), to which this passage is sometimes compared.⁴⁹ The aorist ᾗσθην distances Neoptolemus

⁴³ Cropp ad loc. For δέχομαι in accepting an oracular pronouncement, cf. Hdt. 1.63.1.

⁴⁴ The present δεχόμεθα at Ar. *Av.* 646 is unlikely to be 'the polite response' (Dunbar ad loc.) to Tereus' χαίρετον. Peisetaerus and Euelpides are consistently offensive to him, and their acceptance, rather than reciprocation, of his greeting may express an undisguised sense of superiority (cf. Eupolis, *Demoi* fr. 131.2 K-A).

⁴⁵ ἐδεξάμειθα Musgrave; δεξόμεσθα L.

⁴⁶ Cf. Brown and Levinson (n. 25), pp. 74–84.

⁴⁷ ἐδεξάμην (A. *Pers.* 684f.) must be preterite: Darius (as Broadhead observes) accepted the libations (which are γάποτοι, 621) before he appeared at the tomb. The verb thus cannot be performative ('I hereby . . .').

⁴⁸ Cf. Brown and Levinson (n. 25), pp. 39, 68.

⁴⁹ E.g. by Moorhouse (n. 3), p. 195.

from his expression of gratification at what Philoctetes has said. Contrast the different implications of the distancing effect of the aorist in the Aristophanic examples of ἡσθην (16–21).

(44) Peisetaerus accepts the Chorus' song in his honour (Ar. *Av.* 1743f.): ἐχάρην ὕμνοις, ἐχάρην ὦδαίς, / ἄγαμαι δὲ λόγων. The tragic aorist contributes to the elevated tone, no doubt primarily by evoking tragedy (cf. 32). Peisetaerus apes the gracious language which he imagines a god should use in such circumstances.

Similarly, ἄγαμαι (lit. 'I am full of admiration for') often occurs in polite conversation as an expression of thanks or appreciation ('I am awfully grateful', 'I am tremendously impressed').⁵⁰ Its rather extravagant tone is appropriate to contexts of refusal or criticism, where the speaker expresses exaggerated appreciation of what is acceptable in an otherwise rejected utterance ('It's terribly kind of you, but . . .'; cf. 49; Hdt. 8.144.3, 9.79.1; Pl. *Smp.* 199c6; *Prot.* 335d7; *Leg.* 631a3).⁵¹ Such exaggeration is not called for here, and the joke may be that Peisetaerus employs an inappropriately strong expression of thanks in his attempt to sound grand.

The other occurrence of ἄγαμαι in Aristophanes is Dicaeopolis' ἄγαμαι καρδίας (*Ach.* 488), in a paratragic context and shortly after the tragic aorist ἐπήμεσα (485; cf. 59). The tragic aorist of ἄγαμαι occurs in Callimachus (cf. 60).

Thanks and approval

The presents αἰνῶ and ἐπαινῶ are normal performatives for grateful acceptance (equivalent to 'Thank you for . . .' or 'I appreciate . . .'), as well as for expressions of approval of other kinds. αἰνῶ is mostly confined to verse, while ἐπαινῶ appears in both prose and verse. 'The Greeks' habit in accepting an offer, service etc. was to confer praise and not thanks.'⁵² Both words are commonly used in the tragic aorist in tragedy to express thanks, and (less often) to express approval more generally. The usual explanation stresses the immediacy of response expressed by the 'instantaneous' aorist.⁵³ This view is refuted by the occurrence of these aorists in speeches and choral odes, as well as in dialogue where there is little or no evidence of immediacy.

The act of thanking is socially problematic, and thus hedged about in many cultures with devices to mitigate the threat to the speaker's face in accepting a debt.⁵⁴ The distancing effect of the tragic aorist serves this purpose in tragedy. The (more direct) present (ἐπ)αινῶ tends to be used when considerations of face are overridden by the need to express approval emphatically.⁵⁵ The present is thus common in contexts of refusal or criticism, when the speaker expresses exaggerated appreciation of the hearer's intentions (A. *P.V.* 340; S. *Phil.* 889; E. *Alc.* 1093; *Hi.* 483; *H.F.* 275; *Tro.* 890; *Pho.* 1683; *I.A.* 506). The expression of approval is strengthened in order to counterbalance the face-threat to the hearer ('Thank you so much for your kind offer, but . . .'; cf. 44, 49). Other examples of the present are hypocritically effusive (E. *Med.*

⁵⁰ In Cephisodorus fr. 3 K-A, ἄγαμαι is evidently a pompous way of saying 'please' (cf. Latin 'amabo').

⁵¹ Cf. Lammermann (n. 33), pp. 34f.

⁵² J. H. Quincey, 'Greek expressions of thanks', *JHS* 86 (1966), 133–58, at 157. Quincey cites a variety of indirect phrases based on this, e.g. ἐπήμεναι ('he thanked') at [Dem.] 49. 25. Cf. Xen. *Smp.* 1.7; S. *Aj.* 1381f., 1401; *El.* 1044; E. *Alc.* 1036, 1109; *Su.* 388.

⁵³ Denniston (on E. *El.* 215) paraphrases: 'the instant you spoke, I approved your words'.

⁵⁴ See Brown and Levinson (n. 25), pp. 67, 189, 190, 210, 247.

⁵⁵ The distinction does not apply to Aeschylus, where the present αἰνῶ is quite formal (*Su.* 710; *Eum.* 1021), and the instantaneous aorist of αἰνῶ and compounds does not occur.

884; *Ba.* 944, 1193; *Rh.* 648), intimate (*E. Pho.* 614; *Or.* 786; *I.A.* 824), or condescending (*E. Med.* 908; *I.T.* 1486; *Hel.* 1232; *Rh.* 191). The aorist, by contrast, distances the speaker from the expression of approval.

(45) Ajax thanks Tecmessa for keeping their son out of his way while he was mad (*S. Aj.* 536): ἐπῆνεσ' ἔργον καὶ πρόνοιαν ἦν ἔθου. Ajax' tone is stiffly formal, in marked contrast to Tecmessa's more directly emotional language (e.g. 527–9). The aorist distances him somewhat from his acknowledgement of the face-threatening obligations incurred by his madness.

(46) Heracles thanks Theseus for his generous refusal to be deterred by fear of pollution (*E. H.F.* 1235): ἐπῆνεσ'. εὖ δράσας δέ σ' οὐκ ἀναίνομαι.⁵⁶ Heracles resembles Ajax (45) and Athena (47) in being a proud individual of high status who is placed in the unaccustomed position of having to acknowledge a debt.

(47) Athena expresses appreciation of Poseidon's friendly response (*E. Tro.* 53): ἐπῆνεσ' ὀργὰς ἡπίους. The beginning of this dialogue (48–64) is an excellent example of the face-saving function of politeness. Athena requests permission to address Poseidon (48–50), thus respecting his 'negative face' (cf. 33), and tries to minimize the loss of face to herself involved in her surprising request for his help.

(48) Andromache responds to Talthybius' hesitation in communicating his news (*E. Tro.* 718): ἐπῆνεσ' αἰδῶ, πλὴν ἐὰν λέγῃς κακά. She is addressing an enemy herald, and the tone of her reply is polite but cautious (cf. 37, 38, 42).

(49) Iphigenia rejects Orestes' over-enthusiastic proposal to kill Thoas (*E. I.T.* 1023): οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην· τὸ δὲ πρόθυμον ἦνεσα. Praise of the interlocutor's intentions is formulaic in polite rejection (cf. *Ar. Ran.* 508; *Xen. An.* 7.7.52). 'Such qualities as *προθυμία* were always acceptable, even when the favours which they prompted were being declined.'⁵⁷ The more effusive present (*ἐπαινώ*) is normally used in such contexts in tragedy, as mentioned above, precisely in order to counterbalance the loss of face to the hearer involved in a rejection. In this case, however, Iphigenia distances herself even from expressing approval of Orestes' intentions.

(50) Orestes accepts Apollo's order to marry Hermione (*E. Or.* 1671f.):

ἰδοῦ, μεθίμ' Ἑρμιόνην ἀπὸ σφαγῆς,
καὶ λέκτρ' ἐπῆνεσ', ἥνικ' ἂν διδῶ πατήρ.

Acceptance normally threatens the face of the speaker, but occasionally its implication that refusal was a possibility can threaten the face of the hearer, especially when the hearer is of vastly superior status (cf. 40, 41).

(51) Hecuba's *προσηυξάμην* (*E. Tro.* 887) in her prayer to Zeus seems best explained as a respectful expression of thanks (cf. 40, 50). She regards Menelaus' decision to kill Helen as evidence of the justice of Zeus, and the context requires an expression of thanks. (*προσεύχομαι* by itself can mean 'offer a prayer of thanks' (cf. *A. Pers.* 498; *E. El.* 415, 764f.).⁵⁸ For tragic aorist in prayers, cf. 31, 35.

(52) Agamemnon thanks the Messenger for the news that Iphigenia and Clytaemestra have arrived (*E. I.A.* 440): ἐπῆνεσ', ἀλλὰ στεῖχε δωμάτων ἔσω.

⁵⁶ This line is elucidated by Quincey (n. 52), p. 153.

⁵⁷ Quincey (n. 52), p. 155.

⁵⁸ LSJ give 'address in prayer' for *προσεύχομαι* + accusative, comparing *Ar. Pl.* 958; but *προσεύχομαι* there means 'pray to', and *προσενέπω* is usual for 'address in prayer' (cf. Fraenkel on *A. Ag.* 162). *ἐπηρεξάμην* (*E. Su.* 8) is clearly preterite: the preceding seven lines give the actual content of Aethra's prayer, and she now explains why she made it.

Agamemnon does not really welcome this news at all, but his outward politeness conceals his distress (cf. 29, and the other passages cited there).

(53) Agamemnon responds to Iphigenia's determination to cheer him up (E. *I.A.* 655): *παπαῖ· τὸ σιγᾶν οὐ σθένω, σέ δ' ἤνεσα*. Agamemnon's knowledge of the real reason for Iphigenia's arrival has led him to adopt a reserved tone towards her, in marked contrast to her expressions of love.

(54) Athena responds to Creusa's changed attitude to Apollo (E. *Ion* 1614): *ἤνεσ' οὔνεκ' εὐλογεῖς θεὸν*. Athena's task as *deus ex machina* has been unusually delicate. Her words amount to a face-threatening admission of gratitude ('Thank you for your co-operation'). Contrast present *αἰνῶ* (E. *I.T.* 1486), in a less face-threatening context.

(55) Heracles compliments Admetus on his fidelity (E. *Alc.* 1095): *ἐπήνεσ' ἀλόχῳ πιστὸς οὔνεκ' εἰ φίλος*. Heracles ostensibly disapproves of Admetus' refusal to remarry, and thus distances himself from his praise here. This mixed attitude is also conveyed in his previous line, where the effusive present is combined with explicit criticism (1093): *αἰνῶ μὲν αἰνῶ· μωρίαν δ' ὀφλισκάνεις*.⁵⁹

(56) The Chorus of Phthian women is praising Peleus (E. *An.* 785):

*ταύταν ἤνεσα ταύταν καὶ †φέρομαι† βιοτάν,
μηδὲν δίκας ἔξω κράτος ἐν θαλάμοις
καὶ πόλει δύνασθαι.*

The Chorus has been praising the qualities of the high-born, and it may be with a degree of tentativeness and deference that they associate themselves with those qualities here. The conative present *φέρομαι* ('I try to win for myself'), obelized by Diggle, would be consistent with the interpretation of the aorist *ἤνεσα* being offered here. Stevens (ad loc.) recognizes the difficulty of interpreting *ἤνεσα* as 'instantaneous', but implausibly assimilates it to the gnomic aorist.

(57) A speaker in a play by Ion of Chios praises the defensive abilities of the hedgehog (*TrGF* 19F38):

*ἀλλ' ἐν τε χέρσῳ τὰς λέοντος ἤνεσα
ἢ τὰς ἐχίνου μᾶλλον οἰζυρὰς τέχνας . . .*

There is not enough context to judge the tone of this bizarre item.

(58) *ἐπήνεσα* (S. fr. 282) seems to be a formulaic expression for 'Congratulations' or 'Well done!' Cf. (59) Ar. *Ach.* 485, in a paratragic context.

(60) *ἡγασάμην* is used like *ἐπήνεσα* (58, 59) at Call. *h. Ap.* 16 (cf. 44).

(61) Ion has sympathized with Creusa for her childlessness, and she then questions him (E. *Ion* 308): *σὺ δ' εἰ τίς; ὥς σου τὴν τεκοῦσαν ὠλβισα*. This example does not involve (*ἐπ*)*αινῶ*, but the expression is similar to some others in this section. A literal *μακαρισμός* would normally be conveyed by a present performative such as *μακαρίζω* (e.g. Pind. *Nem.* 11.11; Lys. 2.81) or an exclamation of the type *ὦ τρίςμακαρ* (e.g. H. *Od.* 6.153–9; E. *Ba.* 73).⁶⁰ The irony is obvious, but Creusa intends no more than a polite compliment (cf. 39).

⁵⁹ It is unlikely that both 1093 and 1095 are genuine: Wilamowitz deleted 1093–4, while Diggle accepts Dale's deletion of 1094–5.

⁶⁰ Cf. Kannicht on E. *Hel.* 639–40. *δλβίζω* in the first-person singular for felicitation is rare and late.

Criticism

(62) Odysseus addresses Agamemnon (H. *Il.* 14.95): νῦν δέ σευ ὠνοσάμην πάγχυ φρένας, οἶον ἔειπες. (63) the line recurs in Hector's rebuke of Glaucus (H. *Il.* 17.173).⁶¹

This is the most plausible example of the tragic aorist in Homer. Kühner–Gerth place ὠνοσάμην in their category (a).⁶² There is no doubt that both Odysseus and Hector are very angry, and that both are responding to an immediately preceding speech. On the other hand, it could equally well be taken as a strong and definitive statement of Kühner–Gerth's type (c).

ὠνοσάμην is, however, also comparable to the passages from tragedy assembled below (64–9). Criticism is obviously face-threatening to the hearer, and the aorist does something to mitigate it.

(64) Hermione's Nurse remonstrates with her (E. *An.* 866–8):

ὦ παῖ, τὸ λίαν οὔτ' ἐκεῖν' ἐπῆνεσα,
 ὅτ' ἐς γυναῖκα Τρωάδ' ἐξημάρτανες,
 οὔτ' αὖ τὸ νῦν σου δεῖμ' ὃ δειμαίνεις ἄγαν.

ἐπῆνεσα may be preterite, in view of the strong contrast between then (ἐκεῖν') and now (τὸ νῦν). On the other hand, the formulaic nature of the tragic aorist of (ἐπ)αινῶ is a reason to take the reference as present. The Nurse has obvious reason to express her criticisms with at least some degree of tact. The litotes also contributes to the polite indirectness (as in 65–68).⁶³

(65) Aegeus responds to Medea's statement that Creon has exiled her (E. *Med.* 707): ἐᾷ δ' Ἰάσων; οὐδὲ ταῦτ' ἐπῆνεσα. Criticism of a third party can obviously threaten the face of the hearer, and Aegeus is tactful in criticizing Medea's husband (whatever she herself may have said about him).

(66) From Medea's opening speech (E. *Med.* 223f.):

οὐδ' ἀσπὸν ἦνεν' ὅστις αὐθαδῆς γεγώς
 πικρὸς πολίταις ἐστὶν ἀμαθίας ὕπο.

Medea affects a very tentative and deferential manner in this opening section of her speech to the Chorus. The aorist comes in the middle of a speech and expresses a settled opinion; it is not a response to an immediately preceding utterance.

(67) Eteocles comments on Oedipus' self-blinding (E. *Pho.* 764): οὐκ ἄγαν σφ' ἐπῆνεσα.⁶⁴ Eteocles' actual words are restrained, although the rhetorical function of the meiosis is to express strong criticism.

(68) Amphitryo reproaches Greece (E. *H.F.* 222f.):

οὐδ' Ἑλλάδ' ἦνεν' (οὐδ' ἀνέξομαί ποτε
 σιγῶν) κακίστην λαμβάνων ἐς παῖδ' ἐμόν . . .

⁶¹ Cf. Monro (n. 4), §78; P. Chantraine, *Grammaire homérique* (Paris, 1958–63), vol. II, p. 184.

⁶² Cf. R. Janko (on 14.95): 'ὠνοσάμην refers to Odysseus' reaction at the instant he heard the proposal'. Janko addresses the question of the meaning of νῦν δέ at 14.95, which worried some Alexandrian scholars. He paraphrases 'but as it is <you said this, and> I blame your wits'.

⁶³ οὐκ ἐπαινῶ expresses a single concept ('I disapprove'; cf. Ar. *Lys.* 71), so the aorist makes the whole expression more polite. Cf. Kühner–Gerth (n. 1), vol. II, p. 180, n. 3 (discussing οὐ φημι, etc.).

⁶⁴ This whole speech is textually problematic, and 764 is part of a passage regarded as spurious by Diggle.

The tragic aorist serves the same function as the litotes and the parenthetical dismissal of scruple, moderating (if only rhetorically) the criticism of Greece (cf. 69).

(69) These lines follow a passage of vigorous abuse of athletes (E. fr. 282.13–15):

*ἐμεμφάμην δὲ καὶ τὸν Ἑλλήνων νόμον,
οἳ τῶνδ' ἕκατι σύλλογον ποιούμενοι
τιμῶσ' ἀχρείους ἡδονὰς δαιτὸς χάριν.*

This passage cannot be an 'instantaneous' response to anything said by someone else, since it comes in the middle of a speech and expresses a considered attitude. The speaker has been uninhibited in denouncing athletes, but the aorist does something to moderate the *παρρησία* of criticizing Greek custom (cf. 68).

(70) The old portress has told Menelaus that he has landed in Egypt (E. *Hel.* 461–3):

*Με. Αἴγυπτος; ὦ δύστηνος, οἳ πέπλευκ' ἄρα.
Γρ. τί δὴ τὸ Νείλου μεμπτόν ἐστί σοι γάνος;
Με. οὐ τοῦτ' ἐμέμφθην· τὰς ἐμὰς στένω τύχας.*

ἐμέμφθην could be preterite, but the balancing *στένω* suggests that Dale and Kannicht are right to take the reference as present ('I have no complaint', Dale). *οὐ μέμφομαι* actually expresses stronger approval than English translations like 'I find no fault with' might suggest (cf. A. *Eum.* 1019f.; fr. 199.3; S. *Trach.* 470; E. *Rh.* 480; Xen. *Mem.* 3.5.20). Similarly, *οὐ μεμπτός* often implies 'outstandingly good' (e.g. E. *Med.* 958; *Ion* 1519; *Hel.* 1424; *Pho.* 425; *I.A.* 712).⁶⁵ The aorist here is more restrained and polite, even insincere, than the present would have been: Menelaus does in fact have little or no enthusiasm for Egypt (cf. 29, and the other passages cited there).

(71) Menelaus responds to an emotional outburst by Helen in the recognition duo (E. *Hel.* 636 f.):

*ὦ φιλότατα πρόσοψις, οὐκ ἐμέμφθην·
†ἔχῃ τὰ τοῦ Διὸς λέκτρα Λήδας τε.†*

Text and interpretation are problematic.⁶⁶ Kannicht translates 'ich tadele (dich) nicht', paraphrasing 'ich gönne dir, verstehe von Herzen deinen Freudenausbruch'. If *οὐ μέμφομαι* can express quite strong enthusiasm (cf. 70), there is no need to regard such a response to Helen's outburst as 'insufferable' (Dale). This remains true even with the verb in the (more restrained) aorist. Dale (on 625–97) compares other recognition duos (E. *I.T.* 827–99; *Ion* 1437–1509; *Hyps.* fr. 64.69–111) in which 'the male character performs wholly or mainly in trim[eter]s, the more emotional female wholly or mainly in lyric'. An element of restraint in Menelaus' expressions of joy is thus to be expected here.

Advice

αἰνῶ and its compounds can also express a positive attitude to something which lies in the future, and the tragic aorist thus occurs with the sense 'advise, recommend'.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Cf. Page on E. *Med.* 958; Sommerstein on A. *Eum.* 1019–20.

⁶⁶ Cf. C. W. Willink, *CQ* 39 (1989), 52f.

⁶⁷ Cf. Fraenkel on A. *Ag.* 144f. (pp. 87f.).

Kühner–Gerth’s view that these aorists are especially forceful (‘ich habe hiermit . . .’) is not borne out by the equally, if not more, forceful use of the present *ἐπαινῶ* or *παραίνῶ* in tragedy and elsewhere, e.g. Dionysus’ *Αἰσχύλε, παραίνῶ σοι σιωπᾶν* (Ar. *Ran.* 1132; cf. *Pax* 253; *Thesm.* 453; S. *Phil.* 621; *O.C.* 665; E. *Hipp.* 1435; *H.F.* 854; *I.A.* 481; Thuc. 7.63.3, etc.).⁶⁸ Orders and advice are obviously face-threatening to the hearer (cf. 34), and they can be mitigated by indirect expression (e.g. E. *Held.* 1018f.; *H.F.* 847f.). In all examples of the tragic aorist the speaker is polite and respectful.

(72) Orestes cuts short Electra on hearing someone coming out of the palace (S. *El.* 1322): *σιγᾶν ἐπήνεσ’ ὥς ἐπ’ ἐξόδῳ κλύω / τῶν ἔνδοθεν χωροῦντος*.

(73) Heracles instructs Neoptolemus (S. *Phil.* 1433 f.): *καὶ σοὶ ταῦτ’, Ἀχιλλέως τέκνον, / παρήνεσ’*.⁶⁹

(74) Thetis consoles Peleus (E. *An.* 1234): *μηδέν τι λίαν δυσφορεῖν παρήνεσα*. The tragic aorist is especially appropriate to the elevated tone of *deus ex machina* scenes (cf. 41, 50, 54).⁷⁰

NOT TRAGIC AORISTS

A great many aorists in Greek drama and elsewhere have been assimilated by scholars to the tragic aorist. The main types are considered briefly below, solely with a view to distinguishing them from the tragic aorist as defined above, and with no pretence of giving an adequate account of them on their own terms.

Emotional aorists

Some aorists in Greek drama really do express emotions aroused in the recent past, corresponding to Kühner–Gerth’s category (b). The aorist is also appropriate aspectually when the reference is to a particular emotional impulse rather than to a settled attitude. These aorists are quite different from those discussed above: they are descriptive rather than performative, and the emotion expressed is sudden and intense (e.g. S. *Aj.* 693; *Ant.* 1307; *Trach.* 1044).

The aorist is thus used in expressions of pity of the type *ᾤκτιρ’ ἀκούσας* (E. *Held.* 232), where it is usually emphasized by a participle of a verb of perception that the pity is a specific emotion prompted by something in the recent past.

Verbs of understanding

συνῆκα occurs approximately twelve times in tragedy and satyr-play as a response to a previous utterance, and the aorist is often taken as instantaneous. Kühner–Gerth thus paraphrase A. *Cho.* 886f.: ‘sowie ich dein Wort vernahm, so begriff ich auch seinen Sinn’.⁷¹ This has some *prima facie* plausibility here, where Clytaemestra experiences a sudden revelation, and she responds specifically to the words immediately

⁶⁸ In this sense, Aeschylus also has *αἰνῶ* (*Su.* 179; *Cho.* 555, 715) and *ἐπαινῶ* (*Sept.* 596; *Su.* 996; *Cho.* 581).

⁶⁹ *ταῦτ’* Heath; *ταῦτ’* codd. (1433). Jebb prefers *ταῦτ’*, and argues that the verb is preterite.

⁷⁰ *παρήνεσα* (A. *Pers.* 224) is taken as instantaneous by Broadhead, but is more likely to be preterite, referring back to the advice which the chorus has been giving. Cf. *ἐπανερόμαν* (Meineke’s conjecture at 973); *ταύτην . . . ἐξέτευν’ . . . παραίνεσιν* (A. *Eum.* 707); and the rhetorical transitions common in Euripides (e.g. *Med.* 545f.; *Su.* 1213; *El.* 1276; *Pho.* 494f.).

⁷¹ Kühner–Gerth (n. 1), vol. I, pp. 163f.; cf. Garvie ad loc.

preceding (cf. *S. El.* 1479). Other passages in Aeschylus and Sophocles suggest that it is completeness, not rapidity, of understanding that is the point (*A. Su.* 467; *Ag.* 1112, 1243, 1253; *S. Aj.* 99). The aorist is resultative, stressing the achievement.⁷²

Euripides thus tends to have *συνήκα* as the conclusion of a passage of interrogation (e.g. *An.* 919). Orestes' *ξυνήκ'* (*E. El.* 260) would have concluded a rather shorter passage of stichomythic questioning (from line 254), had not Electra corrected him and prompted a revised conclusion in line 262. These parallels suggest that the aorist is also resultative, rather than immediate, in cases where the process of questioning is shorter (*E. Cyc.* 447; *El.* 644; *Or.* 433). Cf. *ἔμαθον* (*E. Hec.* 703; *Rh.* 688); *ἔσειδον* (*E. Hel.* 745).

γιννώσκω in the present means 'I recognize', 'I realize' (*E. Med.* 85; *El.* 768), so needs a past tense for 'I understand'. This has no necessary implication of instantaneity. In the second person, *ἔγνως* often means 'You understand' (*H. Il.* 20.20, 22.10; *S. Trach.* 1221; *Pl. Resp.* 497c5), becoming somewhat formulaic (= 'Exactly!') in Euripides (*An.* 883, 920; *Hec.* 688; *El.* 617; *Ion* 1115; *Hel.* 565 = *Ar. Thesm.* 911; *Pho.* 983; *Or.* 1131; *Rh.* 281). Like *συνήκα*, but unlike the tragic aorists discussed above, it is descriptive rather than performative, and can occur in the second person as well as in the first.

Verbs of speaking

Aorists of verbs of speaking, usually second-person singular, are commonly used to refer to what an interlocutor has just said. They occur in prose dialogue as well as in tragedy, often appearing in set phrases such as *καλῶς ἔλεξας, τί τοῦτ' ἔλεξας;*, *εὖ γὰρ εἶπας, πῶς εἶπας;*. Such aorists are, however, rare in comedy and tend to appear in paratragic contexts (*Ar. Eq.* 1237; *Pax* 131; *Thesm.* 902). These aorists are sometimes taken as instantaneous, but are really straightforward preterites referring to a specific utterance in the past.⁷³ Some can be interpreted as urgent in some way, but many have nothing immediate or urgent about them at all (e.g. choral responses to speeches). The present (*λέγεις, φῆς*) is equally common. A previous utterance can be treated as being in the past, as it literally is, or as part of an extended present which includes (e.g.) the entire conversation.

Verbs of motion

Verbs of motion are common in the first-person aorist in contexts where English idiom requires, not the present, but the perfect.⁷⁴ Thus Medea's *ἐξῆλθον δόμων* (*E. Med.* 214) invites a translation like 'I have come out of the house' (cf. *H. Od.* 1.182; *A. Ag.* 503f.; *E. Hipp.* 902; *An.* 150; *Hec.* 1109; *El.* 215; *I.A.* 819f.; *Men. Epi.* 936).

Similar considerations apply to metaphorical uses, e.g. the *praeteritio* at *S. Trach.* 499f.: *καὶ τὰ μὲν θεῶν / παρέβαν, καὶ ὅπως Κρονίδαν ἀπατάσεν οὐ λέγω . . .* ('I

⁷² Cf. Moorhouse (n. 3), p. 194 for other examples of such 'terminative' aorists. This type of aorist is common with verbs of loving like *φιλέω* and *στέργω*, in the sense 'came to love', 'formed an affection' (*H. Il.* 3.414f.; 5.423; *Od.* 8.480f.; Theognis 67; *S. O.T.* 1023; fr. 770; *Ar. Ran.* 229; cf. *ἤχθηρε* at *H. Il.* 20.306). Cf. Monro (n. 4), §78; Chantraine (n. 61), vol. II, p. 184.

⁷³ Moorhouse (n. 3), p. 196 distinguishes these aorists from other 'instantaneous' uses: 'In these cases it is probable that the aorist has (immediate) past reference'. Contrast Mastronarde on *E. Pho.* 983.

⁷⁴ Cf. Kühner–Gerth (n. 1), vol. I, pp. 167–9; Smyth (n. 30), §1940.

have passed over the gods, and do not speak of . . .'). Commentators take *παρέβαν* as instantaneous, but there is no convincing parallel.⁷⁵

The second-person aorist is used in the same way, e.g. *ἦλθες* (E. *Tro.* 60, 64). Thus also with the phrase *δι' ὀδύνας ἔβας*, which occurs three times in Euripides as a response to outbursts of grief (*Alc.* 874; *El.* 1210; *Pho.* 1561). Mastronarde takes *Pho.* 1561 as instantaneous, implying a translation such as Vellacott's 'You suffer indeed'. Craik's 'You have gone through agony' is preferable.

CONCLUSION

The above discussion purports, no doubt deludedly, to deal with all examples of the tragic or 'instantaneous' aorist. The grand total is 81 (passages **21, 31, 32, 35, 44** contain more than one example). There are two in Homer, none in Aeschylus, seven in Sophocles, fifty-one in Euripides, sixteen in Aristophanes, one each in Ion of Chios and Callimachus, and three in Lucian. The examples in Aristophanes seem to be parasitic on the tragic idiom, and those in Callimachus and Lucian to be learned revivals of it.

Traditional explanations of the tragic aorist are inadequate, since most examples are neither more 'instantaneous' nor more forceful than the equivalent presents. It is invariably performative, and its function is to distance the speaker from a more forceful present performative. In one type ('notional actions'), the aorist communicates something of the force of an action or expression (e.g. spitting, groaning, laughing) which the speaker does not wish actually to enact. In the other type ('polite aorists'), the effect of the tragic aorist is to make the expression less immediate and thus more polite.

The phenomenon seems to be characteristic of tragedy, although there are two possible precedents in Homer. In comedy, its function is to evoke an elevated tone, usually in paratragic contexts. It seems not to occur in fourth-century prose, and the (very few) later examples seem to be allusions to a distinctively tragic usage.

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⁷⁵ Jebb compares *ἀπώμοσ'* (S. *Phil.* 1289; cf. 25). Easterling additionally cites *ἐπέβαν* (Pind. *Nem.* 1.18), which is surely preterite, referring back to the earlier part of the ode (Race's Loeb translation has 'I have embarked').