

Greek tragedy



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Greek tragedy can still be reflected in many stories written today. The great Greek tragedians, like Sophocles, set certain characteristics which apply throughout all tragedies trying to replicate the classic format, like *De Aanslag* by Harry Mulisch. Certain characteristics must be present for literature to be called a classic tragedy. Normally, the position of the main character is essential. The hero is occasionally a royal or noble individual who is respected, has good intentions and has much to lose. In *De Aanslag* the 'hero', Anton, is just a child and also only acts out of good intentions and has also much to lose. Later the Anton grows up studying medicine and becomes an anesthetist, which is regarded also as a high position. The second characteristic that is normally found is the tragic flaw the hero must have, the hamartia. The hero must make a 'tragic error' in spite of his will for good intentions. This error is usually the result of the hero's tragic flaw; in ancient Greek tragedy it is normally pride. As a consequence of his tragic error the hero then is a victim of a 'catastrophe'. The hero suffers and falls from his original state of happiness. We see this occur in *De Aanslag* as well; when Anton loses his family and his happiness after the assault on his house. Final recognition, catharsis, is also an essential part of Greek tragedy. This is where both the hero and the audience realize the tragic flaw and error, this often has too late and the hero is unable to prevent or escape his catastrophe. There are also three unities of a Greek tragedy. The first is time, where the play should not take place longer than a day. The second is place, where the play should remain in a single place. Finally action, there must be only one single plot to the story and no sub-plots. Although, *De Aanslag* tries to replicate Greek Tragedy it is only able to meet the third unity of having one single plot to the story. Writers and playwrights often

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find that Greek tragedy is the best way for them to convey a message to the audience, examples of this is the Second World War recreation of Antigone by Jean Anouilh. Harry Mulisch has also used the Classic Tragedy format to transfer his message to his audience. The purpose of Greek tragedy is normally its Catharsis of the audience, the awakening and enlightenment. With this catharsis the audience becomes more aware of political issues and other critical topics. Mulisch uses Greek tragedy format for the same reasons, he wants people to become more aware of the wars around the world and effects it has on an individual like Anton. Like all Greek tragedies De Aanslag begins with a prologue. The prologue in Greek tragedy normally consisted of a monologue or dialogue by the ' chorus'. The prologue is normally beyond the world, which is depicted in the book and is also timeless. It starts with introducing the characters and the setting of the play. In Greek Tragedy the Prologue often offers lots initial information that is not offered slowly throughout the story like other formats of literature. The prologue also offered lots of insight into the characters. The prologue also offers knowledge into what will happen throughout the play. Something else that is often represented in the prologue is the setting. The prologue is used by authors to put emphasis on certain aspects of the upcoming story. With De Aanslag the Mulisch puts emphasis on the setting of the story. He thoroughly describes the houses and the order of the street of where the story takes place. He introduces the names of the houses and then goes further into the families that live within these houses. He describes the attitudes towards each other and their attitudes towards Anton, which we are immediately introduced to as the hero. De Aanslag is divided into five episodes. After the first episode describes what has happened to Anton and

his family during the Second World War, the time skips forwards 7 years where Anton is now a student. During a party, he listens to his friends talk about the war in Korea. They talk about the war in Korea. The Korean War was the first of many wars to come as a result of the Cold War. In a sense it can be said that the author is trying highlight there is still a sort of world war going on around the world by just somewhere else, not in Netherlands. In the third episode the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 is discussed. Also during the cold war, the people of Hungary were fighting against their communist Tyrant government. It was the one of the first signs of failure of communist in the Soviet Union. Though the revolution was crushed everybody around the world learnt the true colors of the Soviet Union. In the fourth episode, the Vietnam War is discussed as well. Vietnam was also being part of the Cold War highlights how there wasn't necessarily a good side on this war. During this war the United States showed its impatience and intolerance in Vietnam, which was regarded very bad throughout the whole world. It is now become clear that the world is always at war, and everyone is involved. In the final episode, the author decides to make Anton be part of a demonstration. Though the Cold War is 8 years from ending, the author decides to show that wars have always their lasting impact. In this case the result of the Cold War was the mass production of atomic weapons. It is typical for a Greek Tragedy to consist of 3-5 episodes. De Aanslag clearly follows this format. The book, in my opinion, is easier to follow like this. It has a clear chronological order, which makes easier to understand. One can argue that novel fails to meet the title of a Greek Tragedy because it misses out on some aspects. However, I think regardless whether the book follows the classic format it

still achieves the same intentions of overall enlightenment of its audience and their awareness.