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Harry Mulisch. *Criminal Case 40/61, The Trial of Adolph Eichmann: An Eyewitness Account.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005. 178 pp. $27.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8122-3861-7.

Reviewed by Harvey Asher (Professor Emeritus History, Political Science & Geography, Drury University)
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The Mechanical Man

On May 11, 1960, Israeli agents in Argentina, following a tip from a West German official, arrested Adolph Eichmann, a hitherto obscure member of the Nazi killing machine. For eight days Eichmann was tied to a bed while his captors awaited a plane to transport their prisoner to Israel; on the second day Eichmann signed a statement indicating that he had no objection to being tried by an Israeli court. With Eichmann bound in a wheelchair, disguised, and under anesthesia, the Israelis told Argentine airport personnel that he was an incurably ill Jew who wanted to see the land of his father one more time before he died. Ironically, had his wife told police the real identity of her missing husband, the plan to smuggle him out might have failed.

The new state of Israel did not learn that Eichmann was alive and well, living in Argentina under the alias of Ricardo Klements, until some time in 1959; none of the postwar Nazi hunters, including Simon Wiesenthal, had made Eichmann's capture a priority. Immediately after the war he had been picked up by the Americans, to whom he identified himself as Adolph Eckmann, a Waffen-SS officer. With the help of the SS underground, Eichmann escaped captivity, was given a false set of identification papers, and subsequently lived in Lüneburg Heath for four years working mostly as a lumberjack. In 1950, the neo-Nazi group Odessa smuggled him to Rome, where he wandered from monastery to monastery until a Franciscan priest, well aware of Eichmann's identity, procured a refugee pass allowing him to emigrate to Buenos Aires. In 1952, he brought over his wife and children.

Eichmann's trial turned him into a worldwide household name. He became "a metonym for the entire history of the Nazi persecution of the Jews … the face of Nazi mass murder."[1] The United Nations, the U.S. State Department, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*, among other prominent entities, all opposed Israel's intrusion into Argentina to snatch Eichmann.

Among the few non-journalists covering the trial was Harry Mulisch, a well-known 33-year-old Dutch novelist, who persuaded the weekly magazine *Elseviers Weekblad* to send him to Jerusalem to report on Criminal Case 40/61, the number assigned to Eichmann's case by the District Court of Jerusalem. Perhaps Mulisch's own background had something to do with seeking the assignment. He was the son of a Jewish woman and a native Austrian; his father faced three years imprisonment after the war for serving as director of a Dutch bank that played a key role in deporting Dutch Jews and seizing their property. Fortunately for Mulisch, he remained with his father following his parents' divorce; had he lived with his mother as a half-Jew, he too might have been targeted for deportation. Not only did Karl Victor Mulisch protect his son, but he also managed to get his wife released after she was picked up for deportation. All of her relatives perished. Hence Mulisch saw firsthand what it meant to be both victim and perpetrator.

Mulisch's book contains fifteen chapters/articles, two of which, are titled "Jerusalem Diary I" and "Jerusalem Diary II." They cover, respectively, the time between April 6 and April 29, 1961, and June 19 to July 2, 1961. The other articles are cited by date of completion, not publication, to avoid confusion with the diary dates. The first article was completed on March 26, 1961, and the last on September 30, 1961. Like most reporters, Mulisch did not attend all the trial sessions–numbering nearly one hundred–that took place between April 11 and August 14, 1961, when the court adjourned. It reassembled on December 11 to render its guilty verdict on all fifteen counts of the indictment, twelve of which carried the death penalty. To all of the charges Eichmann pleaded "not guilty in the sense of the indictment," meaning that although there was no blood sticking to his hands, he certainly "would be found guilty of complicity in murder" (p. 51). On May 29, 1962, the Court of Appeals confirmed the judgment of the District Court; two days later Eichmann

was hanged, his body cremated, and his ashes scattered in the Mediterranean outside Israeli waters.

Criminal Case 40/61 covers a wide range of topics, including Mulisch's travels throughout Israel, a country where "one can learn the meaning of courage from desperation" (p. 31). Mulisch's observations on this and other subjects here reveal a dated book, not surprising given its publication during the Cold War and the infancy of the new state of Israel, which to Mulisch has "the atmosphere of a communist country, but without the pressures that poison life there. In short, this is the most agreeable atmosphere imaginable, currently probably to be found elsewhere only in Cuba" (p. 44). Other articles describe his journeys to pre-Wall Berlin in search of traces of Eichmann, and to the Auschwitz killing site. Mulisch also ponders the broader meaning of the trial, deeming it "the greatest public lesson in world history" (p. 35). He addresses Dutch complicity in the Holocaust, as well as the pre-Nazi European literary, cinematic, and artistic images depicting Hitler's world of horrors before its arrival in the flesh.

Whatever the constraints imposed on Mulisch by the immediacy of events, deadlines he had to meet, and selective use of limited written sources, his reportage is usually interesting, frequently penetrating, and always beautifully written. His descriptions of Eichmann in the courtroom's glass cage alone are worth the price of admission. "Eichmann's cold, grubby eyes do not leave the prosecutors for a second, hour after hour. Sometimes they sort of shoot sideways in a sudden tic. Then he shudders for a moment, and sucks his cheeks in, which makes him pull his mouth to the left" (p. 37). Mulisch's renditions of Eichmann's linguistic labyrinths are also priceless. They consist of "parentheses lining up with the next parenthesis, a fourth parenthesis with an 'on the one hand' with a reference to earlier statements, then back to the third parenthesis. He would love to summarize world history since 1933 in one sentence" (p. 127).

Mulisch confesses he is "less concerned with what Eichmann has done than with who he is" (p. 111). Often he categorizes Eichmann's essence both aphoristically (one of his pretrial books was titled *The Book of Aphorisms*) and more straightforwardly. Some examples of the former: "Eichmann committed the crime because he embodied his own reality" (p. 4). And Eichmann "did not know what he was doing when he transported his victims by the hundreds of thousands to the gas chambers; in a sense he did not know that he was doing something" (p. 4). More tellingly: "If they had put an empty SS uniform in the cage, with an SS hat hovering above it, they could have had a defendant of greater reality" (p. 41).

There was nothing in Eichmann's upbringing, Mulisch informs the reader, to predict the career he more or less stumbled into. The high school dropout eventually found employment in Vienna with American Vacuum Oil. Nothing indicated that he especially hated Jews; at most, he acquired the run-of-the-mill anti-Semitism typical of the city's inhabitants. Fired from his job because of poor performance, he entered the SS in 1932 encouraged by a family friend, Ernst Kaltenbrunner, who later became chief of the Head Office for Reich Security (RSHA). Bored by his work, in 1934 he successfully applied for a position in Himmler's SD (Security Service), where he commanded subdivision IV B 4, responsible for Jewish Affairs. He briefly studied Hebrew with a rabbi and acquired a smattering of Yiddish. He paid a 1937 visit to Palestine, likely to negotiate with the Hagannah about increasing Jewish emigration there, but he and a colleague were expelled by British authorities after two days. Later in Argentina, he said, "Had I been a Jew, I would have been a fanatical Zionist" (p. 22).

Like much of what Eichmann says here, in later interviews, and at the trial, his comments must be taken with a grain of salt. Indeed, Mulisch asserts that Eichmann did not believe in anything but "the order," which he worshiped as a mystical, superhuman power that had to be obeyed no matter where it came from. In a memoir written while awaiting trial, Eichmann writes that he would even have killed his father if he had received the order to do so. Mulisch agrees with Eichmann's self-assessment, "Whatever they might have ordered me to do, I would have obeyed" (p. 111). That the nonfanatic Eichmann sent millions to the offertory of a heresy he did not believe in makes him, for Mulisch, even guiltier than true-believer murderers like Hitler and Himmler who can (in vain) use their beliefs as an excuse.

In a key chapter, "The Ideal of Psych-Technology," Mulisch labels Eichmann "the symbol of progress," the embodiment of human machines that obey their impulses without the capability of examining their natures, while providing the prototype for modern equivalents. Today's mechanical men (or Eichmann clones) exist in all countries with no exceptions, including Israel. Millions of them roam the earth, willing to do anything because their societies order it, but often going unnoticed for years, "because no wars were lost or because no inhumane orders were given" (p. 117). The numerous examples of genocide and ethnic cleansing in the past few decades have shown what these automatons will do when pro-

vided an opportunity. Concludes Mulisch ominously, "We do not have to be wary of criminals; we must continue being wary of ordinary people. We must keep one eye on the mirror" (p. 117).

As Hannah Arendt acknowledges in the postscript to her classic *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Mulisch's analysis of Eichmann's psyche "coincides with my own on some essential points."[3] She portrays him similarly as an individual lacking any conviction other than following "the order," which for Eichmann was tantamount to obeying the law in the same way as did the respectable society around him. To do otherwise, Eichmann claimed, was to betray his country, thereby forcing him to wrestle with a bad conscience. She, too, accepts Eichmann as "terrifyingly normal," emblematic of the new type of criminal who commits his crimes under circumstances that make it well nigh impossible for him to know or feel what he does.

Yet as insightful as both authors are about what made Eichmann tick, their analyses do not tell the whole story. There is evidence that indicates that Eichmann did take initiatives: for example, the 1939 forced evacuations of Jews to the Nisko region of Poland; in deporting Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz in defiance of Himmler's orders (with the approval of Hitler) to halt the transfers for reasons of expediency; and in opposing the selection of some Jews for work, instead of immediately gassing all of them. There is even an occasion in September 1941 when Eichmann intervened to ship over twenty thousand Jews and Gypsies from the Rhineland, not to Riga or Minsk where they would certainly have been shot on the spot by the Einsatzgruppen, but instead to Lodz where Eichmann knew extermination arrangements had not yet been arranged. These Eichmann initiatives challenge the notion that he was always the calm, dutiful civil servant that Mulisch describes.

Moreover, to deny that anti-Semitism played any role in Eichmann's discharge of his duties is a bit of a stretch. Mulisch conjectures that had Albert Schweitzer been Reich Chancellor, and Eichmann received an order to transport all sick blacks to hospitals, he would have carried out the order with the same pleasure and promptness. That claim denies absolutely the impact on Eichmann of the pervasive and long-term Nazi promotion of anti-Semitism, in which Jews were designated the implacable racial enemy.

Intuitive, psychological explanations of the sort offered by Mulisch tend to downplay situational factors and group dynamics. Eichmann was ambitious (frustrated that he rose no higher than the rank of lieutenant colonel) and enjoyed the perks of his specialty: luxurious living quarters, sumptuous food and drink, mistresses, and gala parties, an ostentatious lifestyle that came in large measure because of Eichmann's position. He was rewarded by the Nazis for his success in a critical task: synchronizing arrivals and departures to the slaughterhouses, ordering roundups and arrests, and issuing directives concerning categories of Jews to be exterminated.

Recent "perpetrator research" has established the impossibility of establishing a single motive as to why the different types of perpetrators–fanatics, technocrats, and ordinary Germans–voluntarily killed their helpless victims. Social psychology and learning theory help in understanding the willingness of so many Germans to kill with no pangs of conscience. Issues include the behavior of a dominant group, cognitive dissonance, contextual twisting, and the degree of difficulty in gaining group membership.[3]

Pointing to potential Eichmanns in our midst must not obscure the difference between what they might do and what Eichmann actually did do, and the implication that his lack of base motives mitigates his actions. To Mulisch, Eichmann was a nonperson; in reality he was a horrible human being, existing in real time and space, who witnessed naked, huddled captives standing in the freezing cold because the diesel engines blowing carbon dioxide into the vans stalled; who observed mass shootings in Russia; and who had a baby's brain splatter on his coat. His reaction–stating that these methods were inhumane for the SS–implies that he would find them acceptable for less elite killing squads.

Notes

[1]. David Cesarani, *Eichmann: His Life and Crimes* (London: Heinemann, 2004), p. 1.

[2]. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1964), p. 282.

[3]. For details see the May 2005 H-German review by Claudia Koontz of Paul Gerhard, ed., *Die Täter der Shoah: Fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche (Goettingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2002), and Harvey Asher, "Ganz normale Täter: Variablen sozialpsychologischer Analysen,"* Zeitschrift für Genozidforschung_ 1-2 (2001): pp. 81-115.

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