

“The loneliest spot on Earth”: Harry Mulisch’s Literary Experiment in *Criminal Case 40/61*

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Abstract. Harry Mulisch’s *Criminal Case 40/61* is often regarded as an early representative of the movement of New Journalism and as an example for what we nowadays call ‘literary non-fiction.’ In this essay, I will argue that this classification does not do justice to the complexity of the literary experiments that Mulisch is trying out in this text. In *Criminal Case 40/61* Mulisch develops a highly personal and literary way to write about Adolf Eichmann. A problem as complex as the essence of evil, he claims, can not be comprehended with the methods of journalism and history only, the Eichmann enigma calls for a *new* language. I will outline a number of techniques Mulisch used to achieve this goal. In this text, Mulisch uses an autofictional construction as well as a metaphorical way of thinking and writing that transgresses the journalistic or historicist mimetic-referential and discursive ways of writing. Central to Mulisch’s literary method are two principles: that of the invention of language and images and that of radical identification.

Keywords: literary non-fiction; New Journalism; fictionality; autofiction; Harry Mulisch; Adolf Eichmann

1. Introduction

The works of the recently deceased Dutch writer Harry Mulisch are fascinating for several reasons. Time and again Mulisch leaves the literary domain to involve himself in public affairs. In *Het seksuele bolwerk* [The sexual stronghold], for

instance, he writes extensively on psychoanalysis and in *De compositie van de wereld* [The composition of the world], he presents himself as a philosopher. Readers have often been confused by these texts. Philosophers tend not to take Mulisch's main philosophical work very seriously, leaving its discussion to literary critics. These in turn have trouble with the book as well, because in it, Mulisch is barely manifesting himself in a way that can be called 'literary.' The same inconvenience applies to the category of texts designated as the 'documentaries.' I use this term to refer to the more or less essayistic or journalistic texts that Mulisch wrote between 1961 and 1973. Shortly after his passing, these texts were reprinted in the perhaps rather too monumental collection *Opspraak* [Scandal] (2011). When we focus on these more hybrid texts, we are seeing a much more radical and critical thinker than the Mulisch we have come to know from his appearances in the mass media over the last few years.

In many of the obituaries that appeared in November of 2010 the 'documentary' *De zaak 40/61* (1962) [*Criminal case 40/61* (2005)] was mentioned as one of Mulisch's important texts. It is the only documentary that has acquired a canonical status next to Mulisch's popular novels such as *Twee vrouwen* [Two women] and *De aanslag* [The assault] and acknowledged masterpieces such as *De ontdekking van de hemel* [The discovery of heaven] (1992) and *Siegfried* (2001). The book is challenging for a number of reasons. First of all, there is the importance of the subject matter itself. In *Criminal case 40/61* Mulisch reports on the Eichmann trial that took place in Jerusalem in 1961. Witnessing this trial as an observer, Mulisch reflects extensively on his own position with regard to the Holocaust and on the effects of this horrible event on the world he lives in. Mulisch investigates to what extent the experiences of the Second World War (and specifically the experiences of Auschwitz) are connected to the political situation of his own time. This was one of the first times the young writer (34 years old at the time of the trial) appeared to be concerned with world politics and one of the first times we find him theorizing about historical experience. *Criminal Case 40/61* marks the start of Mulisch's career as a public intellectual (Heynders 2009; Melzer 2003). It is important to emphasize that the chapters of the book were articles that Mulisch first published in the Dutch weekly *Elsevier's weekblad*. To readers of his hitherto hermetic and experimental prose works, the appearance of Mulisch's newspaper articles must have come as a surprise.

It appeared as if literary writer Harry Mulisch had suddenly turned into a journalist. It is for this reason that literary historians regard Mulisch as an early representative of the movement of New Journalism, which was to flourish in the United States shortly thereafter (Johnson 1971; Van den Broek 2003). Furthermore, *Criminal Case 40/61* was to become an important source of

inspiration to many writers of what we now tend to call ‘literary nonfiction.’ In this essay, I will argue that this classification does not do justice to the complexity of the literary experiments that Mulisch is trying out in this text. It will become clear that central to this experiment are the use of fictionality and the importance of the subjectivity of the writer. Both techniques seem to be opposed to the key components of ‘literary nonfiction.’ This analysis of *Criminal Case 40/61* will make clear how Mulisch dealt with the question of how to write literature about Auschwitz.

2. “A totally different story”: Mulisch between literature and journalism

In the sixties and seventies Mulisch started to incorporate journalistic techniques in his literary publications. In the final chapter of his study *Onveranderlijk veranderlijk* [Immutable variable], Jos Buurlage compares Mulisch’s documentaries with certain characteristics of New Journalism (Buurlage 1999). He compares Norman Mailer’s *The Armies of the Night* (1968) to Mulisch’s *Bericht aan de rattenkoning* [Message to the rat king] (1966). He concludes that Mulisch makes more intense use of literary techniques: Buurlage eventually does not formulate an answer to the question whether Mulisch’s texts belong to New Journalism.¹

In the remainder of this essay, I want to show that it is hardly possible to answer this question unequivocally. This case shows that even though the writer enters the public space to play the role of a journalist, he still does something totally different there. In *Criminal Case 40/61*, Mulisch may wear the mask of the journalist, but he remains the writer who uses journalistic techniques alongside the techniques of the historian, the philosopher and the literary writer. It is striking that Mulisch scarcely has any opinions on journalism. One of the few times he says something about it is in an interview he gave in 1978. He is hesitant to give his opinion, perhaps because the two friends who are interviewed together with him are themselves journalists: Jan Blokker and Henk Hofland. Mulisch says: “I never wanted a job, and certainly not in journalism. Because I was very well aware that the language of a journalist... But that’s a totally different story” (Van Tijn 2007).²

“A totally different story.” It’s not clear what exactly Mulisch means here. In *Criminal Case 40/61*, we come across another quotation. At the end of the book he reflects on the importance that the trial has for himself. He says the following about it:

¹ Van Manen (2010) presents a detailed comparison of *De zaak 40/61* and *Armies of the Night*.

² “Ik wilde nooit een baan, en zeker niet in de journalistiek. Want ik was me er wel heel goed van bewust dat het taalgebruik van een journalist... Maar dat is een totaal ander verhaal” [Trans. Hans Verhulst and Sander Bax] (Van Tijn 2007).

What is more: I am not a lawyer or a journalist; I am a writer, the only one to have occupied himself to this extent with Eichmann. I was not invited to write this report, I offered my services myself. The Eichmann case is more about me than I know myself, and this connection goes farther than a thematic link with other work that I have written or will write: together with my work, it points to something I am looking for. (Mulisch 2005: 159)³

Mulisch presents himself here quite explicitly as a writer. In this context, he emphasizes that he is not working in commission, as a journalist would do, but that he himself chose to write about Eichmann. A second difference between the writer and the journalist refers to the relationship between the author and that which he writes about. A journalist, whether he uses narrative techniques or not, must stick to conventionally defined rules: reliability of facts, objectivity, truth. The literary writer is not obliged to obey these rules. Furthermore, his relationship to the object of research is of a different nature. Mulisch speaks of “something he seeks,” “something he is looking for.” The most important differences between the journalist and Mulisch precisely hinge on the fact that the writer has more freedom in writing on the subject. He can also use a greater variety of literary techniques, including fictionality. According to Mulisch, this makes it possible to gain a deeper insight into the phenomenon than could be attained through journalism.

So Mulisch stresses that as a writer he writes about the world differently than a journalist would do. With this ‘differently’ we rub against the concept of the autonomy of literature (Bax 2007). Literary non-fiction may employ narrative techniques and literary style, but it does not use that other important literary element of fiction (Bax 2007: 225-230). Authors of literary non-fiction repeatedly emphasize that in their books nothing is made up, that they write *non-fiction* (Ceelen en Van Bergeijk 2007). Mourits claims that we stumble across a fundamental difference here (Mourits 2008). Whereas the novelist has an enormous amount of freedom in inventing whatever world he wants to invent, the literary nonfiction writer has to stick to reality. Zuiderent points to the same problem in an essay on Westerman’s book *Ararat* (2007) (Zuiderent 2008). The core of the matter is that a writer who does not make up anything in his book, brings about a totally different literary effect.

³ “Bovendien ben ik noch jurist noch journalist, ik ben een schrijver, de enige die zich in deze mate met Eichmann heeft beziggehouden. Ik ben niet uitgenodigd voor deze reportage, ik heb mijzelf aangeboden, de zaak Eichmann heeft meer met mij te maken dan ik zelf weet; en deze relatie gaat verder dan een thematisch verband met ander werk, dat ik heb geschreven of nog zal schrijven: mét mijn werk wijst zij naar iets, dat ik zoek” (Mulisch 1962: 181).

Literary non-fiction is not about creating a world, but about representing a world and reflecting on that world. Tom Wolfe claims that New Journalism came into existence at a moment when traditional literature was unable to represent the complex reality of the changing society in the sixties (Wolfe 1973). Wolfe emphasizes the importance of documentation and he invokes the names of writers from the realist (pre-modernist) tradition (Balzac, Dickens, Gogol, Tolstoy) to show that every great novel has an element of representation, documentation and journalism in it (Wolfe 1973: 26-27). It is remarkable that Tom Wolfe should proclaim an innovative literary movement in 1973, but use the more or less old-fashioned nineteenth century realist tradition as a source of inspiration (Bax 2007: 360-379). “My argument is that the genius of any writer – again, in fiction or in nonfiction – will be severely handicapped if he cannot master, or if he abandons, the techniques of realism. The psychological, moral, philosophical, emotional, poetic, visionary [...] power of Dickens, Dostoyevsky, Joyce, Mann, Faulkner, is made possible only by the fact that they first wired their work into the main circuit, which is realism” (Wolfe 1973: 49). Although Wolfe mentions Dostoevsky and Mann, two authors that thoroughly influenced Mulisch’s authorship, the label realism does not seem to apply to Mulisch’s literary work at all, nor to his conception of literature. In the “Manifests” Mulisch publishes in his *Voer voor Psychologen* [Food for Psychologists] (1960), Mulisch opposes the idea that the writer simply reproduces his life experiences on paper. The writer has his most intense experiences while writing: writing literature is an existential activity that will eventually change the writer. The writer does not merely create a fictional world with characters, he creates a world that changes himself. That is why Mulisch says in the first manifesto that writing is something “that happens: on the paper, in the writing. It is reality” (Mulisch 1960: 75). Literature is not a representation of reality, but a reality in itself. Mulisch thus opposes the idea that a novel simply depicts reality. The sixteenth manifesto is consistent with this view. There Mulisch speaks of “the mystical image of the white paper” (Mulisch 1960: 79). There he states that “it is the paper that does the writing” (Mulisch 1960: 79). If we use M.H. Abrams’ terminology, Mulisch’s conception of literature should be labeled as autonomist or objectivist rather than mimetic (Abrams 1953). The author creates a new world in which the experiences of reality are absorbed and transformed. In their recent work on Willem Frederik Hermans, Frans Ruiter and Wilbert Smulders regard the autonomist view of literature as being based on the assumption that modern literature wants to express ‘a truth’ without mirroring reality (Ruiter en Smulders 2010). They emphasize the importance of this thesis, which underlies the much-cited study by Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*. In the course of the nineteenth century, literature loses its mirror function and becomes

a 'lamp.' Literature loses its faith in its ability to represent reality as closely as possible. It realizes that it is itself the subject that creates a reality. At that point in time, the problem of the *detour* comes to light: literature responds to society only indirectly, as an autonomous object.

Ruiter and Smulders find that the essence of literary form is "its game element" or "the 'as if'-character of literature" (Ruiter en Smulders 2010: 17). In fiction, it is possible to create without rules. Therefore, in modern times literature (gradually) becomes "the social domain [...] in which a game can be played with reality using the imagination, a game that leaves out of the equation all kinds of values from other social areas" (Ruiter en Smulders 2010: 17). In the mirror of imagination man can live the freedom that in social life encounters moral and legal boundaries.

From the perspective of the autonomy of literature, literature has a separate status because it is the domain of freedom: writers have the freedom to create a world (for themselves). Writers of literary non-fiction do not have this freedom: the world they describe ought to be a true reflection of events that occurred in the extra-literary reality. These writers can perhaps borrow techniques from the literary writer, but they can never make use of the same freedom of creation. The possibility of using narrative and stylistic techniques may be liberating for a journalist, but for a writer who is going to do journalistic work, it must initially feel like a limitation.

This is what Harry Mulisch must have experienced when in 1961 he traveled to Jerusalem in order to report on the Eichmann trial. He laid down the experiences he gained during this trial in a complex, hybrid text that contains elements of journalism, essays, philosophy and literature at the same time. This text started off a period in his work in which he repeatedly emphasized that the literary writer had to be concerned with current events. *Criminal Case 40/61* thus marks a decisive turning point in Mulisch's career as a writer. On the one hand, he felt as a writer he had to give up some of the freedoms that of the autonomy of literature, on the other, however, he (in *Criminal Case 40/61*) is constantly oscillating between reporting facts and interpretations and doing something totally different: writing literature.

3. "A stranger in Babylon": Journalism in *Criminal Case 40/61*

The book *Criminal Case 40/61* contains twelve articles that were published in *Elsevier's Magazine* between March and September 1961, along with two longer pieces in which Mulisch keeps a diary of his stay in Jerusalem. The diary

passages in particular contain a lot of fragments we would easily consider to be journalistic. Mulisch reflects on this change in his writing style. On one of the first nights of the trial he has to report to the Netherlands by telegraph, but he cannot deal with the experienced journalists. "At home at summits and in revolutions, most appeared to be at ease in the shouting and pushing, but for a simple writer this was awful. Used to taking his manuscripts comfortably through the sun to his publisher, who welcomes him with a glass of sherry, he now had to push Poles and Brazilians aside and hit his fist on the table to get Israeli operators to work" (Mulisch 2005: 36). This 'sherry-drinking' writer initially does not feel at ease in the journalistic chaos, but nevertheless he joins the game voluntarily and enthusiastically. It is especially in the diary passages that Mulisch narrates his development as a 'reporter.' He described his first few days in the building where the trial is held.

Then I can see the madhouse in full operation. Reporters and military personnel are running in and out the building, girls are carrying cases with orange juice, workers are hoisting incomprehensible machines up into the windows. Inside, too, they are still putting in the finishing touches. A post office has already been furnished. In the press room, which looks like a classroom for four hundred students, TV sets are being installed, on which the trial will be shown uninterruptedly. I am walking around like a stranger in Babylon. (Mulisch 2005: 33)⁴

At the beginning of the text, the writer presents himself as a 'foreigner' who does not quite fit into the scene where he finds himself. Yet, in the passages that follow, he presents a comprehensive report of the trial. He behaves like other journalists. He speaks with colleagues about the progress of the trial and he occasionally manages to speak to main actors (such as Eichmann's assistant solicitor and prosecutor Hausner). In June, he seems to feel completely fine: "I am quickly becoming a real reporter: I can now even offer a world premiere. As one will see in a moment, it may even be called a cosmic premiere. I have succeeded in obtaining a half-hour access to Eichmann's autobiography, which he wrote during his time in prison" (Mulisch 2005: 133).

Unlike the average journalist, Mulisch reserves a lot of room in his diaries for controversial observations, such as political and philosophical interpretations and for autobiographical accounts of his experiences alongside the trial. These

⁴ "Dan is het gekkenhuis in volle werking zichtbaar. Journalisten en militairen hollen het gebouw in en uit, meisjes sjouwen met kisten sinaasappelsap, arbeiders hijsen onbegrijpelijke machines de ramen in. Ook binnen wordt overal nog getimmerd. Post-, telegraaf- en telefoonkantoor zijn al ingericht; in de perszaal, die er uitziet als een schoolklas voor vierhonderd leerlingen, worden televisietoestellen geïnstalleerd, waarop het proces onafgebroken zichtbaar zal zijn. Ik loop rond als een vreemdeling in Babylon" (Mulisch 1962: 37).

diary passages create the picture of a writer teetering between his old identity as a writer and his 'new' identity as a reporter. This development doesn't take place overnight. Mulisch shows this by doing what we expect from a writer: he reports on his wonder from a distance.

In 1961, Mulisch describes his development as a journalist somewhat hesitantly; four years later, he presents it as the most natural thing in the world. When he learned that Eichmann was arrested, he immediately knew that he wanted to report on the trial. "That's it! That same day I stood on the steps of *Het Parool*. But the editor-in-chief didn't want to receive me until the following week. Ten minutes later I was in the office of the editor-in-chief of *De Volkskrant*. He had just contracted someone else to cover the process in Israel, but he took the phone and called *Elseviers Weekblad*, where half an hour later the case was settled within five minutes" (Mulisch 1966: 26).

Mulisch writes this at the beginning of *Message to the Rat King*. It presents a totally different writer than the one we have come to know from the passages from *Criminal Case 40/61* quoted earlier. The first-person narrator from this later 'documentary' is an observing, detached writer who is trying to become a reporter, sometimes reluctantly, while the first-person narrator in *Message to the Rat King* wants to emphasize how quickly he reacted to the latest news and how easily he moved in circles of newspaper editors. Although both first-person narrators may be regarded as representations of the committed writer Harry Mulisch, there is quite a bit of difference between the two.

It is important to reflect on who is speaking in these documentary texts. Because it is a journalistic essay or text, we tend to easily equate the first-person narrator with the author Harry Mulisch. But as we have seen above, we should keep the subtle differences between the texts in mind. Buurlage (1999) has shown that the author of the 'documentaries' uses several narrative techniques that the novelist has at his disposal. In these texts, Buurlage distinguishes several constructed narrators and characters: "Mulisch has created a picaresque Mulisch, of whom no assessment can be made with certainty how close it is to the author. The picaro contributes to the destabilization: how seriously should the reader take his remarks?" (Buurlage 1999: 120).

Buurlage is right in emphasizing the constructed nature of the narrative voice in these 'documentaries,' he also rightly notes that Mulisch makes extensive use of literary techniques in these texts. Mulisch's compositions are 'labyrinthic,' they give the readers a lot more freedom to find their way into the book. Another main difference is that he interprets the actual events in a broader philosophical or cultural-historical context. According to Buurlage, these texts are written to create so much confusion in the reader that he starts reflecting on his own

conventional and fixed worldview. In observing this, however, Buurlage fails to do justice to the fact that in these texts a narrator is speaking who wants to make real and relevant statements (observations) about the current events he is describing. I regard Mulisch’s use of narrative techniques as an essential part of what the author wants to get across to us. In this case, I would prefer to speak of a first-person narrator called Harry Mulisch, which we can regard as a fictional construction by the author Mulisch (Heynders 2010). These autofictional passages can be read as reflections of the author on his own authorship, particularly on his new role as a public writer.

4. “I can only speak in images”: Writing about Eichmann

Rather than calling Mulisch a picaresque writer, I would like to speak of ‘chameleonesque authorship.’ In the various chapters of *Criminal Case 40/61*, Mulisch continuously uses different registers. The text can be considered as an amalgam of various genres, in which news reports, history, essays, philosophy and poetic theory are intertwined.⁵ I will illustrate this with a brief analysis of the opening pages of the book. Mulisch starts with the “The Verdict and the Execution,” a chapter in which he places the Eichmann trial in the wider context of “a lonely man, face to face with his destruction” (Mulisch 2005: 9). He starts off by describing the trial as a meeting: “we people [...] meet [...] the most merciless image of the existence of reality” (Mulisch 2005: 9). In this introduction, Mulisch combines a number of motifs such as destruction, reality and death that we also find in previous books like *Het stenen bruidsbed* (1959) [*The Stone Bridal Bed* (1962)] and *Tanchelijn* (1960). This makes clear that Eichmann represents something this writer recognizes as a problem that he wants to approach in a literary way.

Who is it that is speaking to us in the first few pages of this ‘documentary’? It is certainly not a journalist. For that to be the case, this text is colored too much by subjective interpretation. The voice of this first-person narrator resembles that of the first-person narrator of *Voer voor psychologen*. In these first few pages, we meet a writer who uses all kinds of literary techniques to paint a picture of Eichmann. Quite illustrative of the freedom he allows himself is the often criticized second chapter, in which Mulisch makes use of a rather kitschy trope: he cuts a photo of Eichmann’s head in half, thus creating ‘two Eichmanns’ (emerging when each half is combined with its mirror-image). These two characters are subsequently contrasted as ‘the killer’ and ‘his conscience.’

⁵ For a convincing defense of this position, see Van Manen (2010).

That is why I believe we will be getting closer to the truth if we see the *witness* in figure 3. Figure 3 is the face that sees what the man in figure 2 does. Figure 2 is the slick, unmoved, merciless face of the killer; figure 3 is the face that observes the killing, filled with horror. Or: if figure 2 is Eichmann, then figure 3 is the face of the world watching him at work. Returning to Eichmann's real face: the right-hand side is the part on which his crimes have had an effect, the side of the heart; the left-hand side is the part that committed the crimes. (Mulisch 2005: 14)⁶

Undoubtedly, the author is aware of the scientific inaccuracy of this 'psychological' analysis of Eichmann. He uses this little mind game as a literary image that shows the reader what is central to his interpretation of this man: Eichmann once was an ordinary man, but in the course of the war he became totally dehumanized. And it is this change that is the mystery that Mulisch wants to resolve. In the brutal killer, the man he once was is in some way still present. In this sense, rather similar to Norman Corinth, the main character in *The Stone Bridal Bed*, Mulisch regards Eichmann as a man who carries his war trauma as a wound in his face. Here, at the beginning of his account of the Eichmann Trial, Mulisch approaches the defendant in exactly the same way he approaches the characters in his novels.

In the third chapter, we hear a different voice: Mulisch presents himself as an apparently objective historian or biographer. However, at the same time he points out the inadequacy of the method he is employing here. The third chapter is called "Biography of a German." Mulisch uses historicizing descriptions alongside passages in which he interprets Eichmann's deeds. At one point, he asks why Eichmann was devoted to Judaism in his youth. He proposes a few complex answers to this question, but hastens to add: "I know I am being vague and mysterious – but speaking more clearly here would be more deceitful" (Mulisch 2005: 18). Later he wonders whether the mass murders resulted from Eichmann's desire:

Will we get one step, one tiny step, closer to the truth by saying that he *wanted* something like this? Not exactly this, but something like this: a blood wedding with Jewry, which in any case meant his own extermination, a piece of disgusting excrement – I beg your pardon, but I can only speak in images. What made Eichmann tick was at most an image, not an idea.

⁶ "Daarom geloof ik dat wij dichter bij de waarheid komen, wanneer wij in afbeelding 3 de *getuige* zien. Afbeelding 3 is het gezicht dat ziet, wat de man van afbeelding 2 doet. Afbeelding 2 is het gladde, onbewogen meedogenloze gezicht van de moordenaar, afbeelding 3 is het gezicht dat er vertrokken van afschuw naar kijkt. Of anders gezegd: als afbeelding 2 Eichmann zou zijn, dan is afbeelding 3 het gezicht van de wereld, die hem aan het werk ziet. Om terug te keren tot Eichmanns werkelijke gezicht: de rechterhelft [afbeelding 3 – S.B.] is het deel, waar zijn daden uitwerking op hem hebben gehad, de kant van het hart, de linkerhelft is het deel, dat ze bedreven heeft" (Mulisch 1962: 17).

Even at that, an image that will remain in the darkness forever because it is darkness." (Mulisch 2005: 19)⁷

If I were to paraphrase these two passages, it might run something like (they would come down to something like): we can speak clearly on matters that are clear (such as the known facts of Eichmann's biography), but we need another, more complex language to speak of the things that puzzle us (the motives and mental development of Eichmann). The journalist or historian, who gives a clear answer, is deceiving himself if he thinks he has got at the truth of the matter. To penetrate more deeply into the problem of Eichmann, another language is needed. In this book, Mulisch is looking for that language, looking for a way to understand what cannot be understood. The second quotation makes clear that the language that is needed will have to be a literary language (a language of images), which digs deeper than the language of the historian or journalistic description. Mulisch uses a number of key concepts, "not this but something like this," "no idea, but a picture." From these observations, we can deduce that the literary language that Mulisch refers to is not mimetic, but metaphorical, and thus indirect and inadequate. He states that it is an image "that will stay in the darkness for ever." The truth about Eichmann cannot simply be described; the writer can only show its incomprehensibility.

The first three chapters of *Criminal Case 40/61* show why it is essential that Mulisch looked into this matter as a writer and not as a journalist or a historian. In order to understand Eichmann it is necessary for the writer to be experimental and open. Mulisch's account of the Eichmann trial – as so many of Mulisch's texts – is a literary experiment. The author identifies completely with that which he is writing about and is constantly looking for a writing style that does justice to the complexity of it. While journalist and historians write down their commentary after things have happened, literary writers have the freedom to let the text happen while they are writing. This not only holds for Mulisch's novels, it also holds for his seemingly journalistic texts. In the course of writing the experimental *Criminal Case 40/61*, Mulisch finds out that the only way to understand Eichmann is by radical identification.

⁷ "Komen wij de waarheid misschien een stapje, een heel klein stapje nader door te zeggen, dat hij iets als dit heeft *gewild*? Niet dit, maar iets als dit: een bloedbruiloft met het jodendom die in elk geval zijn eigen vernietiging inhield, een walgelijk exkrement – ik vraag exkuus, ik kan alleen in beelden spreken: ook wat Eichmann dreef, was hoogstens een beeld, geen gedachte. En dan nog een beeld, dat voorgoed in het duister zal blijven, omdat het duisternis is" (Mulisch 1962: 21).

5. "A revelation in a world of machines": Mulisch's analysis of Eichmann

In the chapters "The Horror and Its Depiction" and "The Horror and Its Origin," "The Order as Fate" and "The Ideal of Psycho-Technology" Mulisch elaborates on this method of radical identification. The four chapters can be read as an analysis of Eichmann in four steps. Central to these chapters is the connection between the artist and the mass murderer (Hitler, Eichmann). In "The Horror and Its Depiction," Mulisch posits the thesis that the horror has already been represented by artists before it actually occurred. Mulisch describes a literary tradition that had already sketched the images of the evil to come. This tradition starts with De Sade, or Goethe's *Faust*, then moves through German Romanticism (especially E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*), Lautreamont, Nietzsche (the first victim of the Nazis), Baudelaire, Heinrich Mann and André Breton. The first thing Mulisch does is to declare his solidarity with these writers: "I am their colleague. Writing something and doing something makes exactly all the difference in the world. [...] It is important to know how the portrayers of an artistically destroyed world relate to a world destroyer" (Mulisch 2005: 91).

Mulisch firmly speaks of it making "all the difference in the world." But we can ask ourselves how sure he really is about that. By bringing the artist so directly in touch with the ultimate destroyer, he is taking the risk of coinciding with this destroyer. How does an artistically destroyed world relate to the factually destroyed world? To justify this difference, Mulisch brings the autonomy of literature to mind, which I discussed earlier. *Writing* something is completely different from *doing* something. *Writing* is indirect, reflective and therefore a beacon against the violence in reality; *doing* on the other hand, is direct, aggressive and dangerous. Thanks to his talent, the literary writer can permit himself to represent evil. When a man has no artistic talent, like Hitler, this will lead to catastrophe. "So it boils down to this: Hitler's world was depicted before its arrival by 'opponents.' Since they had depicted it, they were in a position to be opponents. Their talent saved them. Less gifted brothers such as Hitler himself could only rid themselves of their nostalgia through actual destruction" (Mulisch 2005: 92).

Mulisch wants to find out what the artists were actually portraying. They were writing to resist something they feared. In the German film *Das Cabinet des Doktor Caligari* (1920), based on the aforementioned *Der Sandmann*, scientist Dr. Caligari hypnotizes the medium Cesare to make him carry out a great many murders. In the fictitious person of Dr. Caligari, Mulisch sees a picture of Hitler,

in Cesare he sees the portrait of Himmler, but Eichmann is missing.⁸ Himmler was a hypnotized believer of the Nazi Ideology. Eichmann, on the other hand:

He was not particularly interested in Hitler. He just obeyed. The medium must believe in the hypnotizer, but Eichmann was a medium without belief or hypnosis. Himmler believed in Hitler, but Eichmann believed in 'the order.' Himmler would not have believed in anyone else, but Eichmann would have obeyed any other person easily as well. When no more orders came, he immediately changed into a 'peaceable citizen,' as Servatius so rightly remarked.

He represents the difference between the artist and the murderer. And if I said earlier objects of art foreshadow future events, then I will say now that Eichmann did not foreshadow anything, because he is not *what* the artists wrote *about*, but *why* they wrote: the new element they felt was approaching and about which they worried, and that enabled the celluloid Caligari finally to become a true Hitler – a symbol of 'progress.' (Mulisch 2005: 93)⁹

This quotation summarizes the first step in Mulisch's interpretation of Eichmann. First, he states that we should not see Eichmann as the faithful disciple of Hitler. He was not brainwashed by Hitler, but rather was someone who would have followed any leader blindly. This is evident from the fact that he stopped committing crimes as soon as the order ceased to exist. Mulisch concludes from this that he was not captivated by the doctrine of National Socialism. People like Himmler get carried away by a political ideology: they have such a strong belief in their leader that they lose their common sense. This is dangerous, but it can be fought against. People like Eichmann, on the other hand, are not carried away by adoration but slavishly follow the leader, without taking responsibility for their own actions. This is what Mulisch sees as the new element that romantic artists felt was approaching.

A well-trained literary historian will have no difficulty showing the inadequacies in Mulisch's literary-historical account. But that does not diminish the power of the image he uses. Neither does it detract from what Mulisch wants

⁸ See also Kracauer (1947).

⁹ "Hij interesseerde zich niet erg voor Hitler. Hij gehoorzaamde alleen. Het medium moet geloof hebben in de hypnotiseur, maar Eichmann was een medium zonder geloof of hypnose. Himmler geloofde in Hitler, maar Eichmann alleen aan het bevel. Himmler zou in niemand anders geloofd hebben, maar Eichmann zou ook ieder ander hebben gehoorzaamd. Toen er geen bevelen meer kwamen, veranderde hij op slag in een 'vreedzaam burger,' zoals Servatius zeer juist heeft opgemerkt.

Hij is het verschil tussen de kunstenaar en de moordenaar. En als ik gezegd heb, dat kunstwerken de schaduwen zijn die komende gebeurtenissen vooruitwerpen, dan zeg ik nu, dat Eichmann geen schaduw geworpen heeft, omdat hij niet is waarover de kunstenaars schreven, maar waarom zij schreven: het nieuwe element, dat zij verontrust voelden naderen, en dat de papieren Caligari als een werkelijke Hitler pas mogelijk maakte – het symbool van de 'vooruitgang'" (Mulisch 1962: 105).

to communicate through this image: that he himself, here, at this place in the text, formulates a crucial insight. Relating Hitler and Eichmann to Hoffmann's literary work, helps him understand how people can be turned into machines. It is the metaphor he uses that makes him arrive at this conclusion. He compares the triad of Hitler, Himmler and Eichmann to Caligari and Cesare, but finds the third character missing (which he will encounter later on in the text).

It is important to notice that Mulisch uses a literary text as a metaphor here. By reading the text as a representation of the future reality, Mulisch becomes aware of a possible order of that reality. It goes without saying that this method of interpretation would not fit the objectivist journalist or the scientific historian. It is one of the techniques that only a literary writer can allow himself to use. Writing *Criminal Case 40/61*, Mulisch discovers the phenomenon of the human machine, which will be central to the literary oeuvre he would produce in the years to come. The detour of E.T.A. Hoffmann mainly serves to illustrate how literary narratives construct meaning from complex situations in reality. This meaning cannot be logical or analytical, but it can be regarded as metaphorical or post-logical (Mulisch 1980).

Before Mulisch continues his analysis of Eichmann, he takes an intermediate step in the chapter "The Horror and Its Origins." Hitler founded his delusions on elements of German culture (in particular on Nietzsche and Wagner). This again brings to mind the relationship between the artist and the politician. Mulisch concludes that Hitler did not steal the ideas of Nietzsche, but only appropriated the image of the *Übermensch*. Hitler's passion was not the result of years of study, but rather derived from "a mystical revelation. He did not read or think. He knew" (Mulisch 2005: 111). In the remainder of the chapter, Mulisch reads Hitler's *Mein Kampf* from the perspective of the mythical schemas Joseph Campbell explained in his study *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). Mulisch shows how Hitler described his own life as that of the traditional mythical hero. In Hitler the idea awakens that he is a mythical hero with a divine mission.

In "The Order as Fate" Mulisch resumes his analysis of Eichmann. He distinguishes three categories of mass murderers. The first category consist of people like Hitler himself: the leader with a 'divine' mission. The second category consists of hypnotized believers, such as Himmler. Eichmann belongs to a third, even more frightening, category. Eichmann did not believe in the Nazi mythology and was in fact fascinated by Judaism. Eichmann's actions, therefore, did not spring from faith but from a belief in 'The Order.' "Eichmann followed the priest's orders, which he knew to be false. He would never have given such orders himself, he says (no doubt truthfully), but since he was in a position of receiving them, he had to obey them" (Mulisch 2005: 111).

From this point of view, the 'order' is something of a higher power, it is something abstract which Mulisch calls fate. In 1944, Eichmann continued with the deportation of Jews, even though Himmler had ordered him to stop. He did this, Mulisch argues, because Himmler's command betrayed Hitler's original order: "it's there. It's always there. If not Adolf Hitler but Albert Schweitzer had been the Reich's chancellor in those years, and if Eichmann had received an order to transport all sick blacks to modern hospitals, then he would have carried out that order without fail – with the same pleasure in his own promptness as with the work he was now leaving behind. He is less a criminal than he is someone who is capable of anything" (Mulisch 2005: 111-112).

The order is fate; it is eternal. Until Hitler's death, Eichmann was true to his highest command. After Hitler's death, he pulled out to once again become a peaceful citizen, obeying the social commands of the democratic world. Mulisch traces the existence of fate back to the Bible, by referring to Exodus 3:14 where God says "I am who I am." Fate is justified because it is there (by the mere fact that it is there). At the same time, it should be seen as detached from the religious sphere existing between God and believer, as between Hitler and Himmler, characterized by a certain warmth. Between a man and a word there is no warmth. Behind this mystical identification with the Order is where technology hides.

Technology is the last step in Mulisch's analysis of the Eichmann figure (in the chapter "The Ideal of Psycho-Technology"). If Eichmann is like a 'medium without hypnosis,' he actually is a machine. Mulisch returns to *Der Sandmann*: it turns out he *does* find a representative of Eichmann in literary history. In Hoffmann's novel, we find the automatic doll Olympia: she does not believe in the ideas of her creator Coppélius, but she obeys him because she has to. Eichmann is part of a long tradition of automated people and human-like robots: the iron man of Francis Bacon, the artificial man of Albertus Magnus, the homunculus in *Faust* and the Golem from Psalm 139. In their works, Goethe and Nietzsche warned against this approaching machine. The danger of technology lies not in the emergence of the machines, but in the emergence of new, altered, people. It is the danger that technology suddenly turns ordinary people into murderers. Mulisch tells us to "keep one eye in the mirror": "This extremely useful, absolutely uncorrupted, highly dangerous man is the precise opposite of a 'rebel.' He is precisely the opposite of a man who wants to be bad. He is a machine that is good for anything. He is the right man in the right place. He is the ideal of psycho-technology. Millions like him are roaming the world" (Mulisch 2005: 132; 119).

From the perspective of the journalist or the historian, there is a lot to be said about Mulisch's analysis. Critics pointed at the fact that his argumentations are sometimes self-contradictory. If fate is eternal, then how can Eichmann obey the

laws of democracy later on? Huib Drion's critique in *Tirade* is illustrative in this respect (Drion 1966). Drion starts by strongly criticizing Mulisch's way of turning evil into literature. He observes that to him certain passages look like "still lives of millions of murdered Jews" (Drion 1966: 33). He subsequently deals with the analysis of Eichmann. With regard to Eichmann continuing the deportations when Himmler forbade him to do so, Drion is not convinced by Mulisch's aforementioned argument: why would Eichmann slavishly obey Hitler and not slavishly obey Himmler? Is there not some belief involved there too?

Drion's interpretation of Eichmann is as that of the artist of the organization, to whom it did not matter what he had to organize, as long as he could perform perfectly. That is why he could not follow orders that went against the art of his own organizational work. This is a clever argument, because Drion places Eichmann on the side of the artists while Mulisch portrays him as the opposite of the artist. Mulisch posits that there is an essential difference between the action and the word, Drion on the other hand suggests that there is no fundamental difference between them. An artist ignoring legal and ethical standards is relatively harmless. He who applies his organizational skills to human behavior becomes as dangerous as Eichmann.

Renate Rubinstein also opposes the interpretation of Eichmann as a robot (Rubinstein 1962). She appreciates the authenticity of the book and the thorough documentation. For her, there are two types of text in *Criminal Case 40/61*. On the one hand, there is the modern, sober Mulisch who is writing a documentary; on the other hand, there is a "too enigmatic and sometimes manic visionary," who emerges in the more philosophical passages (Rubinstein 1962). Thus she sees the story of the two halves of Eichmann's face as "nonsense for women's magazines." Rubinstein argues that Mulisch fell for the image that the Eichmann defense created: that of the common man who was simply following orders. For a 'romantic rebel' like Harry Mulisch this would be a logical choice. A real criminal he would have admired, the ordinary citizen is what he hates the most.

In their reviews, Drion and Rubinstein approach Mulisch's texts as if it were a journalistic text. Although their responses are appropriate and relevant when it comes to factual mistakes and faulty reasoning, their criticism does not touch the heart of Mulisch's argument. The representation of Eichmann may not be scientifically correct, but it is questionable to assume that what Mulisch was aiming for was indeed to paint an adequate picture of Eichmann. In a sense, the writer Mulisch uses Eichmann as a character that gives rise to a philosophical reflection on the historicity and the real and present danger of evil. Rubinstein and Drion's reactions do not take this reflection into account. Thus these two reviews illustrate once again that we should not consider *Criminal Case 40/61*

as a journalistic book. Those who want to understand what and how this book communicates about Adolf Eichmann, the Holocaust and its implications, must take into account the complex techniques Mulisch employs, not to conceal or to impose esthetics, but to create a literary and hybrid way of communicating.

6. "The mystery of reality"

Looking at Eichmann, Mulisch was witnessing something that disturbed him greatly: technology is able to dehumanize people and turn them into machines. For the first time, Mulisch seems to realize that the 'horror' is not a historical phenomenon that is finished (like his war crimes were for character Norman Corinth in *The Stone Bridal Bed*. If the war were a closed chapter, we would be reading a book about a specific megalomaniacal figure (presenting himself as godlike and recognized as such by his brainwashed followers). With the disappearance of the Leader, the whole movement would disappear. But Mulisch realizes that technology changed something essential in the essence of human beings. The Holocaust is not a closed chapter, but a major shift in European history.

I mean that thus far the ideologues and believers have determined, in a more or less human fight, what kind of society there will be; the Eichmanns obeyed whoever was the boss then: Hitler, Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt. But things may change in the sense (quite a few signs are pointing in that direction) that there will be fewer and fewer ideologues and believers, until only the Eichmanns are left in a world of machines. And so the chances are great for the man with the 'revelation,' who will always be there, to gain absolutely unimaginable power, both for better and for worse. (Mulisch 2005: 120)¹⁰

At the end of the book, in the penultimate chapter, Mulisch summarizes what he has learned in the course of the process. He has developed a new view of modern man. Modern man is like "the smallest man," thriving thanks to the great technology. Today, Mulisch states, we have a bomb that can destroy the world in one second. This underscores the danger of "this small man with his great technology" in the Cold War period.

¹⁰ "Ik bedoel, dat tot dusver de ideologen en de gelovigen in min of meer menselijke strijd hebben bepaald, welke maatschappij er zal zijn; de Eichmanns gehoorzaamden wie juist boven was: Hitler, Churchill, Stalin of Roosevelt. Maar de dingen konden wel eens in die zin veranderen (waar niet weinig tekenen op wijzen), dat er steeds minder christenen, kommunisten, socialisten en nazi's zullen komen, steeds minder ideologen en gelovigen, tot er alleen nog maar Eichmanns bestaan in een wereld van machines, - waardoor de kansen van de man met de 'openbaring,' die er steeds zal zijn, tot in het volstrekte onvoorstelbare zullen stijgen, zowel ten goede als ten kwade" (Mulisch 1962: 135).

Man is not a given, but a possibility – for everything. That is of course also his greatness, but that is not our topic. Our topic is the other side of his greatness. Thus Eichmann will not yet again become something great, not an ‘Anti-Christ’ or a ‘Genghis Khan,’ but exactly the opposite of ‘greatness’: smallness. Eichmann *as the smallest human being* – with that portrait we are getting closest to the likeness. And he was able to be so small because the technology was so great: the railways, the administration, the gas chambers, the crematoriums.

This small man with his great technology is the one we are fighting. With the arrival of the H-bomb, man has become even smaller – it looks like soon there will be nothing left for him to destroy. Here lies the difficulty of our fight against nuclear weapons. We are this technology ourselves, or better: it is what we exactly *no longer* are ourselves; is our shortcoming, and it is great at our expense. If we fight it in its murderous manifestations, we are fighting ourselves in the first place [...], and not C or K, who just happen to be sitting at the controls here or there. (Mulisch 2005: 161-162)¹¹

Mulisch broadens his interpretation of Eichmann as “the smallest human being” to cultural criticism of his own times. We cannot fail to notice that he starts using the first-person plural here. Using “we,” Mulisch points at himself and the rest of contemporary modern human beings. He is not speaking as the detached literary writer who is contemplating the events, but rather speaks as someone who underscores his solidarity with humanity. We have to fight something in the years to come: the technology that made possible the atomic bomb. From 1962 onwards, Mulisch will keep emphasizing this danger. Mulisch’s fear of nuclear destruction can be regarded as the driving force behind his later manifestations as a committed writer.¹² Visiting the trial, Mulisch was looking for something. At the end of the text he seems to have found it: his new identity as a socially engaged writer.

¹¹ “De mens is geen gegevenheid, maar een mogelijkheid – tot alles. Dat is natuurlijk ook zijn grootheid, maar die is niet ons onderwerp. Ons onderwerp is de keerzijde van zijn grootheid. Daarmee wordt Eichmann niet tóch weer iets groots, niet een ‘Antichrist’ of ‘Djenghiz Khan,’ maar het tegendeel nu juist van ‘grootheid’: kleinheid. Eichmann als de kleinste mens – met dat portret komen wij het dichtst bij de gelijkenis. En hij kon zo klein zijn omdat de techniek zo groot was: de spoorwegen, de administratie, de gaskamers, de krematoria.

Deze kleinste mens met zijn grote techniek is het, die wij bestrijden. Met de komst van H-bom is de mens nog kleiner geworden, – het gaat er op lijken, dat er binnenkort niets meer aan hem te vernietigen zal zijn. Hier schuilt de moeilijkheid van ons gevecht tegen de atoomwapens. Deze techniek zijn wij zelf, of beter: zij is wat wij juist *niet* meer zelf zijn, zij is ons tekort, zij is groot ten koste van ons. Als wij haar in haar moorddadige uitingen bestrijden, bestrijden wij in eerste plaats onszelf [...] en niet C of K, die hier of daar toevallig aan de knop zitten” (Mulisch 1962: 183-184).

¹² Two essays/lectures are illustrative in this respect: “Het ‘neen’” [The ‘no’] (Mulisch 1967: 239-248) en “Een geldig recept?” [A valid recipe?] (Mulisch 1978: 35-45).

In the final chapters of the book Mulisch reflects on his own position. He begins the chapter "On Feelings of Guilt, Guilt, and Reality" with a digression on the relation between literature and law. Although the process was theatrical in all respects, it was not a work of art, for the result is very real: "But, of course, it is exactly the opposite of a work of art – although it is happening here on a stage. For it is not without obligations; it is binding and cannot be changed. It is not the expression of one human being, it is a work of reality forming the basis of man" (Mulisch 2005: 144).

The word 'reality' refers to the society that condemns Eichmann. It is not the individual (judge Landau) who condemns him; the place where he sits is one that represents society, that represents "us." That is the reason why law is binding and immutable. The judge is not a sovereign individual, but represents an institution that the democratic state founded to make the final judgment. The work of art, by contrast, is free and mutable. The difference between the artist and the judge resembles that between the murderer (who can 'sign' his murder) and the executioner, the anonymous 'institution' that we employ to kill the convicted.

Mulisch is fascinated by the fact that this kind of legal reasoning can actually change reality (whereas literary thinking will never actually change the world). But this is exactly what the new Harry Mulisch wants to do: the committed writer Mulisch in this text is coming into being, is emerging, searching for a literature that may affect reality. Not only legal reasoning can change the world, political reasoning can do so too. The State of Israel began as an idea in the mind of Theodore Herzl, but he managed to make his thoughts become real. "Everything that happens *is* something, is irrevocable and influences world events – [...]" (Mulisch 2005: 145). Mulisch explains Herzl's success by positing that Jewish thinking is legal rather than mythical. The Jews are not so much 'in touch' with their God as 'in contract' with Him. It is this unmythical spirit that also created geniuses like Marx, Freud and Einstein, geniuses who approached unexplored areas with their minds. "The common denominator in all of these Jewish 'lawmakers' is that they penetrate with the *mind* where it was considered impossible: in those areas that were exactly part of the 'mystical' before their actions. This is mathematically opposed to the movement of Hitler's mind" (Mulisch 2005: 146). Jewish legal thinking is the absolute opposite of failed artist Hitler's artistic reasoning. It follows that his politics (by their permissiveness) were not able to change reality. Mulisch therefore concludes that his project was doomed to fail. Hitler wanted to create a world as an individual, like an artist would do, but the artistic world cannot ever exist in reality.

At this point in the text, Mulisch has minimized the distance between himself and Hitler. Like Hitler, Mulisch as an artist is fascinated by creating worlds (think

of his autonomist poetics), but like Hitler, Mulisch reflects on the inability of his created worlds to actually be sustained. In the course of writing *Criminal Case 40/61*, Mulisch positions himself closer and closer to Hitler. He compares himself to Hitler and he describes Eichmann as if he were his creation, as a character in one of his novels. Mulisch must have concluded that he had been putting himself at risk. In the final chapter, he explains why that is the only method to really understand evil.

In "On Common Sense, Christians, and Thomas Mann" Mulisch takes the analysis one last step further. The trial is over, Eichmann's lawyer Servatius has left, and Eichmann will be condemned. Mulisch wonders what the implications of the trial will be for the time in which he lives. The revelation may occur again at any moment, and what should we do to create a bulwark against barbarism. Using our common sense will certainly not be enough: modern man is simply inclined to be hypnotized. Rejecting or saying no, as famous pre-war Dutch critic Menno ter Braak would do, will not suffice either. "The thinking of his disciples in general does not extend beyond the idea that one must think; and if one researches what his followers think they would eventually place opposite totalitarian barbarism, one finds collective suicide" (Mulisch 2005: 151).

Might another revelation be a good answer? For small groups, Christian morality might have worked during the war, but Christianity was unable to prevent the horror. Mulisch comes to the conclusion that we are defenseless. Not even the 'elite conceptions' of Menno ter Braak can do anything to prevent the hypnotizing of the masses. Ter Braak had used the word 'schipperen' (being prepared to compromise) to describe the role of the intellectual in the face of mass hysteria. Mulisch criticized the concept of compromising: beautiful words that mask the fact that Ter Braak was simply opting for opportunism. This strategy has proven totally ineffective. Mulisch contrasts Ter Braak with Thomas Mann: "He [Mann] understood that one must not coolly and wisely distance oneself from the areas from which the danger is imminent, but, more precisely, one must get in contact with the domains below the belt, with the darkness, with the 'myth'" (Mulisch 2005: 153).

Mann is the only writer who was able to represent the horror afterwards. In the novel *Doktor Faustus*, Mann was able to represent the essence of Nazism. He did so by placing the evil in a tradition running from the Middle Ages through Luther and Goethe, to Nietzsche, who is the model for the protagonist of the novel. Mulisch makes clear that in *Criminal Case 40/61* he is trying to do the same. He makes contact with Hitler and Eichmann by trying to identify with them.

Yet Mulisch does not deduce (believe) that literature itself can be a bulwark against the threat: perhaps we can invent something against hypnosis, but what do we do with the machine of man, with Eichmann? In the chapter "A Consideration in Warsaw," Mulisch considers the place of Eichmann in history. Ultimately, thinking about history always serves to (better) understand the present:

Eichmann has finally become history. What am I talking about then? People are threatening each other with a destruction that would trivialize the Holocaust, turn it into a memory from the good old days. And no American or Russian will refuse the order to drop bombs on the weak flesh of entire peoples – just as Eichmann did not refuse. What can we hold against Eichmann, now that we are even threatening the unborn, and we have waged that war against our offspring for sixteen years already. But that is no longer called a 'war,' but a *curse*. Here it is, a man cursing himself, his own children's children. This shows hatred so fundamental that we must still be afraid of having overestimated man. The Russians say whatever they want to, the Americans say whatever they want to, everybody says whatever they want to. When the irreversible happens, it is not 'they' who did it, but always we: *we people*. When we think about ourselves, we stare into a sewer into which Dante would not have ascended, not even led by a thousand poets. (Mulisch 2005: 158)¹³

Mulisch reflects on the fact that some critics blamed him for writing too sympathetically about Eichmann. To explain this personal involvement, he refers to Dennis de Rougemont and Thomas Mann. His engaged tone may possibly be painful to people's ears, but it is the only way to write about Eichmann. I started my discussion with a short quotation from a passage from *Criminal Case 40/61*, which I would now like to quote in full:

It is the tone of those for whom Auschwitz did not come as a surprise, of those who were right. It is the right tone. What is more: I am not a lawyer or a journalist; I am a writer, the only one to have occupied himself to this extent with Eichmann. I was not invited to write this report, I offered my

¹³ "Eichmann is definitief geschiedenis geworden. Waar praat ik nog over? Mensen bedreigen mensen met een vernietiging, waarnaast de jodenmoord een bagatel zal worden, een herinnering uit de goede oude tijd. En geen Amerikaan of Rus die, komt het bevel, zal weigeren de bommen in het zachte vlees van hele volkeren te werpen – zo min als Eichmann weigerde. Wat hebben wij eigenlijk over Eichmann te beweren? Wij, die zelfs de ongeborenen bedreigen: en die oorlog tegen ons nageslacht is al zestien jaar aan de gang! Maar zoiets heet geen 'oorlog' meer, dat heet een *vervloeking*. Hier vervloekt de mens zichzelf, zijn eigen kindskinderen, hieruit spreekt een haat zo fundamenteel, dat wij wel moeten vrezen, de mens nog altijd overschat te hebben. De Russen kunnen zeggen wat zij willen, de Amerikanen kunnen zeggen wat zij willen, iedereen kan zeggen wat hij wil. Als het onherroepelijke gebeurt, hebben niet 'zij' het gedaan, maar altijd wij: *wij mensen*. Als wij aan onszelf denken, staren wij in een cloaca, waarin Dante nog niets aan de hand van duizend dichters zou zijn afgedaald" (Mulisch 1962: 179-80).

services myself. The Eichmann case is more about me than I know myself, and this connection goes farther than a thematic link with other work that I have written or will write: together with my work, it points to something I am looking for. Of course I can say: Eichmann is my father. But that is annoying. I will leave that to others. I could also say: he is me. But that is too nice. I can also say: in the trial, the mystery of reality reveals itself. But I have already said that. Now I would like to say: he is one of the two or three people who have changed me. (Mulisch 2005: 159)¹⁴

In this extended version, Mulisch presents some insights on the connection between Eichmann and his father and between Eichmann and himself. The conclusion is that Eichmann has changed him – we as readers have just witnessed that transformation process. Writing *Criminal Case 40/61* was an experiment in which the author put himself at risk. He tried to identify with Eichmann, but gradually learned that he appeared to be closer to Hitler. This may have cured him from free indignation, but also from carelessness. He sees him and others in a brighter light, he has become vigilant. He sees all lapsing transitions between Eichmann and himself, and between the dead and the living. In other words, good and evil are no longer clearly defined: “This is where speechlessness begins” (Mulisch 2005: 159).

7. “This is where speechlessness begins”: Literary representation of the Holocaust

With the concept of ‘speechlessness,’ we arrive at the parts of the book that I have left undiscussed. The text allowed me to do this, but I could only do so by focusing on the essay-like passages. At the beginning of my analysis, I was able to discuss Mulisch’s reflections on being a reporter by paying attention to the passages in the diary sections. I had to disregard two chapters and a great many passages from the diary sections. In the latter case, we can think of the numerous digressions about Jerusalem and its environment, which create the impression of

¹⁴ “Het is de toon van hen, voor wie Auschwitz niet als een verrassing is gekomen, van hen, die gelijk hadden. Het is de goede toon. Bovendien ben ik noch jurist noch journalist, ik ben een schrijver, de enige die zich in deze mate met Eichmann heeft beziggehouden. Ik ben niet uitgenodigd voor deze reportage, ik heb mijzelf aangeboden, de zaak Eichmann heeft meer met mij te maken dan ik zelf weet; en deze relatie gaat verder dan een thematisch verband met ander werk, dat ik heb geschreven of nog zal schrijven: mét mijn werk wijst zij naar iets, dat ik zoek. Ik kan natuurlijk zeggen: Eichmann is mijn vader. Maar dat is vervelend, dat moeten anderen maar zeggen. Ik zou ook kunnen zeggen: ik ben het zelf. Maar dat is te fraai. Ik kan ook zeggen: in het proces openbaart zich het mysterie der werkelijkheid. Maar dat heb ik al gezegd. Ik zou nu willen zeggen: hij hoort tot de twee of drie mensen, die mij veranderd hebben” (Mulisch 1962: 181).

being there just for embellishment. The two chapters ("A Ruin in Berlin" and "A Museum in Oswiecim") reveal that there is more going on. In all these cases, the descriptions of locations command attention: Jerusalem, Berlin and Auschwitz. In these passages, the reporter, the philosopher and the historian are absent. Here, we find a narrator who most closely resembles the literary writer. In several scenes we meet the writer, who is present at these places where so many historical dimensions come together. He tries to make contact with the past from the present. The sites he visits carry the echoes of the events that happened there.

While the reasoning and philosophizing Mulisch encounters speechlessness, the literary writer starts to speak. We no longer read a descriptive or cultural critical essay, but we are engaged with a literary writer who shows us images and who articulates his experiences. The images he shows us aim to represent the speechlessness and darkness that are so central to the essayistic parts of the book. In "A Ruin in Berlin" (the sixth chapter, placed after the first "Jerusalem Diary"), Mulisch visits Berlin to look for traces of Eichmann. What he describes there can be considered an image of the speechlessness, the ruin, literally a "no man's land": "Set somewhat to the back, in no-man's-land, in the Niederkirchnerstraße, once the Prinz Albrechtstraße, lie the remainders of the former Gestapo headquarters, which used to be a school for industrial art. The entire building collapsed into the basement, in which thousands had been tortured to death, from the unknown teacher to the Wehrmacht generals and high-ranking SA leaders on the 'Night of the Long Knives'" (Mulisch 2005: 76-77).

Not long thereafter, Mulisch describes a scene from a few weeks earlier. One day the author was called up by a couple who want to get to know him. Later he realizes that they must have been Nazis, who felt sympathetic towards his reports on the Eichmann trial. It is in this chapter that Mulisch realizes for the first time how dangerous his experiment is. This may be because he is walking around in the city where Eichmann committed his crimes. There is something very dangerous about Mulisch having to identify with Eichmann. The next quote may serve as an illustration in this respect.

At the height of the Göbbels Ministry I come to a standstill. Just as I try to hover back, which is difficult due to the strong head wind, a light gray ball rolls through the gutter. I look up to see who threw it, and in the distance, near the Brandenburg Gate, I see Eichmann approaching. He is looking at me, and I look at the ball at my feet. I cannot make myself throw the ball back. I squat and wait. My friends have also fallen silent. When Eichmann picks up the ball and returns, without saying a word, I say, 'I am sorry

I did not throw back the ball.' For a moment he looks around, silently, and then he walks on. (Mulisch 2005: 77)¹⁵

Later on, Mulisch visits Eichmann's former headquarters. At that point, he finds himself standing in the same place from where Eichmann dispatched his orders. In some kind of way, he has followed in Eichmann's footsteps. In this passage, the lines between fiction and reality get blurred. Mulisch describes how difficult it is for him to enter the headquarters; he does not tell us how he has actually arrived there. We might as well conclude from that that he arrived there not in reality, but in fiction. "Grinding my teeth I go outside again, and I take up a position on the other side. Never before was I so sure I was going to get in! I am sweating, thinking up evil tricks... And here, at this instant, I will unfortunately have to enshroud my report in darkness. We will continue half an hour later: I am in the hall of the former Amt IV B4, Eichmann's headquarters" (Mulisch 2005: 83).

In both scenes (the one with the ball and the one at the headquarters), Mulisch comes in almost direct contact with Eichmann. The first scene however, is the description of a dream, whereas the second scene could very well be invented by the author. The literary writer here uses his freedom as a writer to make use of fiction to take his method of identification one step further than is possible in reality. In the last chapter, "A Museum in Oswiecim," Mulisch uses the same literary technique. He describes his visit to Oswiecim, the former Auschwitz. As he travels there by train, he narrates a few moments in the history of the Holocaust. In this chapter, Mulisch plays two roles: at one time he is the travel writer, telling us about his experiences, at another he comes across as a more or less objective historian. And what he is going through parallels the fate of the deported Jews. Again Mulisch is following in the footsteps, this time of the Jews that were deported to Auschwitz. "The crematorium, with its tall, square chimney, stands in front of the entrance: the first thing to greet the prisoner. Inside, every brick of the ovens is adorned with names and dates; on one of the iron carriages used to shove the bodies into the fire lies a wreath of fresh flowers" (Mulisch 2005: 166). The alternation of present and past tense shows how Mulisch wants to connect his own experiences in the present with the horrors that occurred at the place where he is now. Thus far, he had identified himself

¹⁵ "Ter hoogte van het Goebbelsministerie kom ik tot stilstand. Juist als ik probeer terug te zweven, wat mij door een sterke tegenwind moeilijk valt, komt door de goot een lichtgrijze bal aangerold. Ik kijk wie hem gegooid heeft en zie in de verte, bij het Brandenburger Tor, Eichmann naderen. Hij kijkt naar mij, en ik kijk naar de bal voor mijn voeten; ik kan er niet toe komen, hem terug te gooien. Ik hurk neer en wacht. Ook mijn vrienden zijn stil geworden. Als Eichmann de bal oppakt en zonder een woord terugkeert, zeg ik: 'Neem mij niet kwalijk, dat ik de bal niet gegooid heb.' Hij kijkt even zwijgend om en loopt verder" (Mulisch 1962: 88).

with the slaughterers (Eichmann and Hitler), now he takes the decisive step of identifying with their victims. I quote a passage to illustrate this:

We pass a bridge across a railroad line; it is the bridge on which Himmler, on March 1, 1941, waved toward where the camp should be built – the camp of the Final Solution decided on in Wannsee. Shortly thereafter, Höss and Eichmann drove in the indicated direction to determine the definitive place. I see the place. A gigantic entrance building, with a watchtower above the gate, into which the rails disappear. Hundreds of yards to the left and to the right: barbed wire. The mechanics race in. There is not a single soul to be seen. As far as the eye can see: wooden barracks, each separated from the next by more barbed wire. To the left of the rails, which separate into three tracks, the barracks have been preserved (the women's camp); to the right much was burned down, leaving stone chimneys in long lines. The cows of the SS had the same barracks, but were provided with a concrete floor and ventilation. The mechanics drive and drive; we will not come back to the same place. At the other end of the camp I see the entrance gate blurred in the mist. It's the loneliest spot on Earth, describable only through silence. (Mulisch 2005: 169)¹⁶

To a certain extent, this is what Mulisch does in the remaining pages of his book: being silent. He describes what he sees around him: the four crematoria. Then he gives a voice to some of the real witnesses, the actual victims (Gisa Landau, Krystyna Zywulska) alternating with some of the offenders (Höss, Johan Kremer). He reports some facts about the composition of Zyklon B and lets Höss speak again. The I-narrator no longer comments on anything; he more or less functions as a camera. We can interpret this closing passage of *Criminal Case 40/61* as a verbal representation of speechlessness. Rather than speaking, he lets others speak. At the end of the text, the author can only stammer facts:

Zyklon B was supplied by the companies of Degesh and Testa, of the I.G. Farben Konzern. In the year 1943 they supplied 12,174,09 kilograms, on which the net profit was 127,985,79 reichsmark. The crematoriums were

¹⁶ "Wij passeren een brug over een spoorlijn; het is de brug waarop Himmler op 1 maart 1941 een handbeweging maakte in de richting, waar het kamp moest komen – het kamp van de Endlösung, waartoe in Wannsee was besloten. Korte tijd later reden Höss en Eichmann in de aangegeven richting om de definitieve plaats vast te stellen. Ik zie de plaats. Een reusachtig toegangsgebouw met een wachttoren boven de poort, waarin alle rails verdwijnen. Honderden meters naar links en rechts: prikkeldraad. De monteurs razen naar binnen. Er is geen sterveling te zien. Zo ver het oog reikt: houten barakken, ook onderling weer door prikkeldraad afgescheiden. Links van de rails, die zich in drie sporen splitsen, zijn de barakken behouden (het vrouwenkamp), rechts is veel verbrand, stenen schoorstenen staan in lange rijen overeind. De koeien van de SS hadden dezelfde barakken, maar dan voorzien van een cementen bodem en luchtverversing. De monteurs rijden en rijden, wij komen niet op dezelfde plaats terug. Aan het andere eind van het kamp zie ik de toegangspoort vervaagd in de nevel. Het is de eenzaamste plek op aarde, alleen door zwijgen te beschrijven" (Mulisch 1962: 191).

supplied by the company of J.A. Topf & Söhne in Wiesbaden. On January 5, 1953, this company obtained patent no. 861731 for the 'treatment and processing for the burning of corpses, cadavers, and parts thereof.'

And in the white mist the Sun of Birkenau is hanging. In the distance the locomotives are still steadily blowing their whistles. (Mulisch 2005: 171)¹⁷

At the end of the book, the intellectual reporter is dumbfounded. The only thing he can do now is enumerate facts and quotes. These facts and quotations placed together give us a horrifying picture of the incomprehensible evil of Auschwitz. In the last line, nothing is left for him but to watch (the sun) and listen (to the echoes of the locomotives). The narrator of *Criminal Case 40/61* ends up in the death camp. This means that he has penetrated into the heart of evil, he identified with the victims (because he is there), but he wasn't able to really identify with them (because he is there in 1961). The final answer to the question of Eichmann is this image he shows us. He takes the reader to the ultimate end point. The ending that was also the starting point of his research. The station where the trains arrive, the loneliest place on earth. The answer to the Eichmann enigma cannot be given in discursive language, the writer needs metaphors to give us an idea of the unimaginable.

8. Conclusion

In this report, the literary writer develops a highly personal and literary way to write about Eichmann. Above I outlined a number of techniques he used to achieve this goal. First, Mulisch makes use of an autofictional construction. Writing about Eichmann, Mulisch thinks about himself and creates himself as a writer again. The literary experiment he engages in changes his authorship and his self-image fundamentally. Second, Mulisch uses a (metaphorical) way of thinking and writing that transgresses the journalistic or historicist mimetic-referential and discursive ways of writing. A problem as complex as the essence of evil can not be comprehended with the methods of journalism and history only, the Eichmann enigma calls for a *new* language.

¹⁷ "Zyklon B werd geleverd door de firma's Degesch en Testa van het I.G. Farben Konzern. In het jaar 1943 leverden zij 12.174,09 kilo, waarop een zuivere winst werd gemaakt van 127.985,79 RM. De krematoria werden geleverd door de firma J. A. Topf & Söhne, Wiesbaden, die op 5 januari 1953 in de Bondsrepubliek het octrooi no. 861731 verwierf voor een 'Verfahren und Vorrichtung zur Verbrennung von Leichen, Kadavern un Teilen davon.' En in de witte nevel hangt de zon van Birkenau. Ver weg fluiten nog onafgebroken de lokomotieven" (Mulisch 1962: 194).

Central to Mulisch’s literary method are two principles: that of the invention of language and images (remember how Mulisch used E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Der Sandmann* as a metaphor to come to understanding) and that of the radical identification. The former principle starts from the assumption that in order to understand reality, the literary writer has to approach reality as if it were a literary text. Like the Olympia doll in the Hoffmann story, Eichmann becomes the main character in Mulisch’s text. Eichmann therefore was not only a creation of Hitler, he becomes a creation of Mulisch too.

Here we encounter the second principle. Following Thomas Mann it is central to Mulisch’s writing to take up contact with the dark side of the myth. A literary writer will only understand Eichmann if he dares to put himself at risk. To do so, the writer has to let go of the conventions of objectivity and reliability and approach the war criminal in a literary way. In the chapters in Berlin and Oswiecim, Mulisch makes himself the metaphor with which he approaches the past. He is Eichmann (by standing in his headquarters), he is not Eichmann (because he is there in 1961). He is a victim (standing in Auschwitz) and he is not a victim (because he is there in 1961, in Oswiecim). The mystery of reality that Mulisch speaks of can only be approached when a writer uses all the freedoms literature allows him to use. This literary method is in essence related to the freedom to say and write whatever you think is right. It is free, but not obligatory: it requires the writer to be willing to put himself in the game and to put himself at risk.

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