

Interviewee: ERIK HAUGAARD  
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS  
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**[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1 ]**

**MEH:** Erik, you were at Black Mountain when?

**EH:** I was there in '42-'43, and then I left for the Canadian Air Force, and I never came back except once. I've been there once, fifteen years ago. I was in Appalachian State College, and I was giving a lecture there. I was invited to give a lecture there, and one of the faculty members told me (UNINTELL). It was about this time of the year too — the campus closed, and I could go and see Jalowetz' grave. So I've been here once only since —

**MEH:** How did you hear about the college?

**EH:** I didn't hear about the college. My parents heard about it. You see, I was a bad boy, always, and left school at fifteen, which you didn't do before the War when you came from a wealthy and intellectual family and so forth. I worked on farms and so on. Then my father came to America, when the Rockefeller — got working at the Rockefeller Institute. Then in 1940, he decided that it was dangerous, and so he brought over my older brother and myself, and we came over. I think it was something like the 7th of April

we landed in New York, and the 9th of April the Germans marched into Denmark. So, some of us just actually [got out] in the nick of time. Then I went out to Palo Alto. I still didn't know what I was going to do with my life, but my father had friends out at the college there – the university there – and I went out to Palo Alto. There I bought a bicycle and bicycled up through the Rockies to Glacier Park, Montana, and then down to Livingston, Montana, where I worked on the Daubigny (PH) Ranch as a sort of part-time shepherd, you know. I wasn't really that good at it, but they were trying to teach me to be a shepherd at the same time as I was trying to build a kayak because I was going to go across the United States by bicycle and kayak. But it didn't work out, and I lost all my clothes and nearly my passport and everything like that, and the kayak. In the meantime my parents somehow had heard about Black Mountain. They were always trying to, in a way, to get me back into more civilized ways of living. Then they sent out and said, "What about this? Wouldn't this fit you?" I thought, "Yeah. It might." So, then I agreed to go to Black Mountain, and that's how I got involved in it. It was very, very nice, because actually by that time I realized that this rebellion, what would it lead to? I mean, laboring jobs and nothing else, you know. So, I was kind of glad to get here, and I enjoyed it very much.

**MEH:** You mentioned Jalo. Were you interested in music?

**EH:** No, I wasn't, but we all loved Jalowetz. I mean he was the most lovable man you could think of. I mean he was the sweetest person. He really

was. No, I studied with Bentley, Eric Bentley, and I was more into English, English literature, and also with Wunsch. I was in, in the Moliere play when we took it around. We went up, down to Chapel Hill and produced it there and I think in three high schools around, and I drove the truck with the scenery and I had a small bit part.

**MEH:** What role, I was going to ask you what role you played.

**EH:** I've forgotten, but we had these marvelous costumes. What was her name? Frances? I forget who made those costumes. They were exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art. I mean the wigs were made of cornflakes and things like that. Of course, we had no money, so it all had to be done incredibly cheap, but it was very good. And that was great fun.

**MEH:** What do you remember about Bob Wunsch as a teacher?

**EH:** He's not a great teacher. I don't think so. He was a very nice man. I always felt that he was not treated nicely. I mean there were – I mean, I am myself very heterosexual so I mean I don't really understand the gay, but I still at the same time understand the tragedy of the way they were treated, and there were people like well – like Straus and so forth – there were people, you know, who couldn't forgive this sort of thing. I think because after all he had been one of the founders, one of the people that really had – He was a very, very nice man. I wrote a play then and sent it in to a competition in – and I'd showed it to Wunsch, naturally, and it got such bad critiques in – You know, they had some professors I suppose at Chapel Hill and so forth who read it, that the director of plays in the South

— I forget his name, he was (UNINTELL) — He said, "I must read that if it's that bad." I still have the critique he then wrote. He said it's incredibly good, and, an —

**MEH:** Was it Paul Green, by any chance?

**EH:** No.

**MEH:** There's another person whose name I can't remember right now, but I would love to have a copy of that.

**EH:** He was very, very — He was — at that time — was a big shot, so that was a great thing, actually, to get such a praise. Well, I've had it since. I mean I never published my poetry because I find it — Not that it's so private, but it's, I don't know, it's too much — But I like writing poetry. And so Max Beerbohm said I was the best English poet alive, as far as he was concerned, and Pound had — the only things I've had published was published because Ezra Pound insisted on it being published. So, maybe someday I'll do something. I just keep a big box that I throw them all into as I write them. But it is more or less a private thing. But then I came back after the War, and then I went to the New School for Social Research and that was nice. Two years, you know, because you got it on the G.I. Bill of Rights. One of my good friends there was Jimmy Baldwin. He was going to the New School for Social Research. I've had Go Tell It On The Mountain in manuscript. I mean, he was actually — at the time he was an elevator boy. We didn't have any money and so forth, you know. It's very funny to think how, how important a man Jimmy became. Then later on — I

met him later on, and this I find was very interesting, that when we were together – and we saw each other nearly every day – we never discussed race. I mean it was too stupid to discuss, you know. I mean this was – And that wasn't something on purpose. It just — It wasn't interesting, you know. We discussed literature. We discussed many things, but never, never, never that. But then I came back — well, I think one of my books had gotten a prize — ten or fifteen years later when he had become very famous and had just written The Fire Next Time, I think it was called, and I met him again. Then he had become so activated into this – so they insisted on me becoming white and I never thought of myself as, you know, I'm Erik, I'm not — I don't want to be categorized as belonging to a particular group. So, it wasn't very successful. I mean, I don't want to sit and discuss it. It's too – I find any kind of racism too, too disgusting to discuss. It wasn't so successful in a way seeing him again.

**MEH:** So, back to Black Mountain. What about Bentley. You studied with him.

**EH:** I studied with Bentley, and I've seen Eric since. He was all right. I mean, yes, he was all right. I don't think he's quite the genius he thought he was. The funny part of it was, you see, that I had found – At the New School I also found my future wife, and she had been assistant to Piscator and then assistant to Bertholt Brecht. She came to Brecht's place one time, and said, "Oh look, look, here's a book, The Playwright as a Thinker [SIC]. And think about all the things, these wonderful things he's saying about you." Brecht looked at her and said, "I personally think that Mr. Bentley is

an idiot and I'm not interested in what he has to say, good or bad."

(LAUGHS) Which was very funny, because I mean having known — I mean Eric used to come down to my — every evening in my room in the Studies, and we would have chocolate – hot chocolate – and sit and discuss. I mean he was – I don't know what he is now. I mean he was only seven years older than us. I mean he was (UNINTELL) almost as much a youngster, so he wasn't quite, quite like — I mean, I wouldn't have invited Wunsch or I wouldn't have invited Emmanuel [SIC] Babcock or any of these other people, but with Eric you had this sort of comradeish, completely — we didn't treat him very serious. And Frances de Graaff, who I was very fond of. She was terribly nice. She is terribly nice. I just got a letter from her, and she seems to be — She's 91 now, but –

**MEH:** I talked with her about a year ago.

**EH:** Yeah. And she's not 91 in the head, which is a good thing. But Black Mountain has — It should have changed me. I mean I never returned to sort of working on the land and — I suppose I ((over the barriers) ??), you know, and I was very lucky because the first ten years of our marriage we lived in Spain and Italy and so forth, and didn't really do anything. I had, already had a little money, and then when that money ran out, I wrote my first book. And it was very successful. It didn't win the prize of the Herald Tribune but it was runner-up, you know.

**MEH:** Now which one was that?

**EH:** Huh?

**MEH:** Which book was that?

**EH:** That was Hakon of Rogen's Saga . It was my first. You see, it was my first book, and I think actually he was the Librarian of Congress, who — Havilland — who was one of the judges, and she became later on a good friend, and I spoke at the Library of Congress and that was really very funny. I was up to the Anders (?), and I was invited to one of these, you know, I think they have six lectures a year or something like that. I remember I asked how long should it be, and they sent me the last speaker's, and that was Gore Vidal (UNINTELL) speeches, so I came right after Gore Vidal (LAUGHS). But that day all hell broke loose. You had two feet of snow in Washington. And here's this enormous auditorium, and I think about fifty or sixty people thought, you know, that much of me that they came anyway. But the Library of Congress printed the speech and so forth. My connection then with America has been sort of going back and — I like Europe. I feel like a European.

**MEH:** That's where you grew up. How old were you when you came here?

**EH:** Seventeen.

**MEH:** When you left Black Mountain, what did you do?

**EH:** I went into the Canadian Air Force. I went up to Harvard. My father was at Harvard then. And I got very friendly with Professor Henry Wordsworth Longfellow Dana, who was a very old man, and he was a very, very sweet old man. I was translating Longfellow into English, because Longfellow could write Danish, and they had all the letters he wrote to Hans Christian

Andersen in Danish, you see. These letters weren't that interesting. They were really just, you know, but I guess Longfellow was proud of his Danish. So, that's what I was doing there. Old Professor Dana used to take me out to parties, and I went out to a party and I think I had quite a bit too much to drink. At least I declared I wanted to fight for my country and all sort of things like that. Then the next morning I came down to the Museum, where Professor Dana lived — it's in Longfellow House. And he said, "What, did you like the man?" and I said "Ja, that was fine." And he said, "Well, you're going off to visit him on Sunday." I said, "Am I?" Yeah, that was Ellsworth Levelle, Air Vice Marshal of the Canadian Air Force that he was sending me to, and on Monday I guess you're going to be in the Canadian Air Force. So, on that weekend I went up to Toronto and saw Sir Ellsworth, and then on Monday morning he marched me down into a recruiting office. I think I'm the only one — You should have seen the face of the lieutenant who was inside the recruiting office when he got the Air Vice Marshal coming in. So, that's why I got into it, really by chance. Otherwise, I might have gone back to Black Mountain. I mean, you know, it was the summer of '43 then. But then I never went, I didn't go back. So —

**MEH:** Do you think Black Mountain has, did it have any influence on your life?

**EH:** Oh I think — As I said, it was a turning point. Anything that's a turning point has. And it made, I did really — I mean I wrote that play and so forth. I did write more seriously and considered myself — I wanted to be an author and so in that respect, I took — I think here I decided my



profession, so to speak. Before I'd always wanted to be a farmer and so on. I really found out what I really wanted to be was an author. So, I think it was very important. And in that Eric was important. And Wunsch. Well, I studied a little architecture, too, for a while. I've always had this attitude toward education that it isn't for any particular purpose except to make you educated. I mean not educated for anything. Paul Radin was here at that time, and I took anthropology with him, and he was great fun. He was a wonderful, wonderful character actually, and he loved company so he always had any amount in for coffee. So, it was very happy. I was never really unhappy here. I had a very good friend in McLaughlin. I don't know whether he's dead or not, you know, but I liked him very, very much, and — You know, it was really one — I didn't have any trauma of any kind while I was here, and I was quite at peace.

**MEH:** You felt at home in the community?

**EH:** What?

**MEH:** You felt at home.

**EH:** Yeah, yeah, I felt it very much. No, so it's meant a lot to me, in that respect. As I say, any turning point like that is important.

**MEH:** In your work, your published work, is not poetry but prose?

**EH:** It's all, it's all been historical novels for older children, and well The New York Times said I wrote for children from ten to seventy, and I always had — that was The Untold Tale, which is one of the books I like best almost. It's — The Untold Tale because it's the one where the hero dies and the

story that is just briefly told. And The New York Times said, "Haugaard is the Bergman of children's literature." And loving Bergman's films, I thought that was wonderful. That was one of the nicest critiques. But I've been treated very kindly. I've won the Boston Globe and — I've won so many prizes. And The Little Fishes, which was then the book that won the Boston, won the Book Award and the Herald Tribune award — And that was very funny, the Herald Tribune award, I got, and that was the day it folded. It's — in the last day of the Herald Tribune is a whole page about me and so on (UNINTELL). So, I always say, tell people that it was, it went broke because of me. I think I got 200 dollars and that was just enough to break the camel's back. I don't know. But it's coming out this year in China. It's been in ten languages by now — The Little Fishes — and it's coming in Chinese, and being republished in Japan. You see, I have about seven or eight books in Japanese. It won a prize in Japan which I like very much. You don't get anything as an author for the prize, but the state buys one copy for every library in Japan, which — and there are a lot of libraries so in a way both the publisher and the author gets a prize because I mean (OVERTALK) you don't get money.

**MEH:** And the library?

**EH:** And the library gets a prize, you know. So I really, I'm always, when I've talked to people in charge of anything I, you know when I can influence, I say, "Well, if you're going to have a prize, why not have that?" Because I think the publishers, it's good when the publishers get something too.

**MEH:** Then they're more willing to publish other books.

**EH:** Obviously. So that's one — Then I won the Danish Ministry of Culture prize, which was a little more (UNINTELL). For Children's Literature you're talking very small money, you know. But I've been able to make a living off it.

**MEH:** Also your translations.

**EH:** What?

**MEH:** And also your translations.

**EH:** Oh yeah. Oh, the Andersen has, you know, that — I really couldn't have lived without it, you know. I think I've earned at least half a million or something like that by it. I mean it's still in print now, in its nineteenth edition, and the same in England, and I don't think it will go out of print. It seems to be selling, you know, five or six thousand copies at least every year, and that's enough to — It's worthwhile to keep it in print. And I just, just do a smaller one of Inchelina, which is Thumbelina, but I translate it as "Inchelina," because that's the correct translation. It's called "Trommelisa" (PH) in English — in Danish — and a "tromme" is an inch. It's not a thumb, you know. And "inch" in Danish is "tromme" and this is "trommeltrot," "trommelfinger," and this is an inch. And that's where we get it from, but it is "inch" and it doesn't make any sense if you say it's Thumbelina and she's as big as a thumb, because she can't sleep in a walnut shell then. So I call it — But now, they just say, "Oh, no, we've got to have it back to Thumbelina," so I had to find out a way of rewriting it so they could call it

Thumbelina and yet at the same time saying it wasn't as big as a thumb, you know. That she was only half the size of a thumb. I forget what I solved it that way. But it is a strange thing, with, you know, my family. My ancestor there is Ursted (PH), who is a discoverer of electromagnetism and so forth, a great scientist, and the mentor of Andersen. And so I've heard a lot about Andersen from my Aunt Ursted when I was a child, you know. I even know some old people that had known Andersen as children themselves, and so Andersen was always — But I never thought of translating him. If it wasn't for Wuls Helvickers (PH) — I came across, and I read him that evening a story, I just translated it from Danish, I forget which one it was, and he was so impressed that he got Doubleday involved. Again, I mean, my success is obviously in spite of me, because I said, "Well I'll do it for" — I figured it would take two years. So I said "I'll do it for fifty thousand," which twenty-five years ago was a lot more money than it is today. And they wouldn't give it to me. So, the man who came from Doubleday was — he was a North Korean, who was in charge, editor of children's books at Doubleday. Well, he said, "I tell you what, I'll get you twelve and a half percent instead, and be happy and take that. It's much better." And he did. I mean I, I earned — Otherwise I would never have gotten any more than the fifty thousand and they could have sat and made all that money. So, it was really chance, and it's very lucky to have something like that happen, because actually — for a writer — if you give him a lot of money, he's maybe foolish and buys a sailboat or go out and

spend it all. Whereas, for years and years I got between ten and twenty thousand, which meant I just could live and write my own thing and be free, you know, which is a wonderful thing. That is one that was a very lucky point in my life.

**MEH:** And you live now in Ireland.

**EH:** I live in Ireland part — Well, right now, because my wife died fifteen years ago and nine years ago I married a Japanese professor, so I was living then in Ireland and so on, and in Tokyo in the winter, and then she decided that she got a sabbatical and decided to do an M. Phil. at Cambridge, so we came to Cambridge at Darwin College. Then she decided she wanted a Ph.D., and the university that she worked at in Tokyo wouldn't give her leave of absence, so she, she gave up her job. And now we are living there and doing a Ph.D. What we'll do once she's finished, it will be next April, I have no idea. We don't quite know what we will do, but —

**MEH:** What is her subject?

**EH:** English. English linguistics. Not literature, but linguistics. And she is — That's why I don't speak Japanese very well, because her English is perfect and so she can translate for me. When I came, she was my time-slater, when I was on NHK, the television, and I spoke at some universities and all that sort of thing, so then — and that's how we got to know each other.

**MEH:** (INAUDIBLE)

**EH:** Yeah, that's (INAUDIBLE)

**MEH:** Your brother Dan came later?

**EH:** He came earlier. And, you see, he's in that way more American, more — I mean, he was eight or something like that when he came. He came with my parents. They couldn't leave him in Denmark, and I was working on the farm and my older brother was already at university, so — My older brother was twenty-one years.

**MEH:** What did your father do? You say he was an intellectual.

**EH:** He, he was a biochemist, and always a research man. He was at the Malinquat (PH) at the laboratory up at Harvard for many years, and at different universities and so forth. He ended up retiring and living with me. Both my parents lived with me until they died, so I had them in Denmark. That was — I lived in Denmark and — It was when my mother died, we decided to go to, to England actually. Unfortunately my mother had died a year too late. They just changed the, you know, they went decimal, and all the prices went up, you know, all house prices doubled overnight, you know, when they went decimal.

**MEH:** You got out with your BMC tax. (?)

**EH:** What?

**MEH:** When they went down, everything, when they went much higher?

**EH:** Oh, doubled overnight, you know. So, when we came, I had a beautiful house in Denmark. It was built in 1735 by the king, as a school for the children, near the castle. It was an absolutely beautiful house, and I sold that so I had quite a bit of money. But I found it wasn't much money, but

then I — We decided that we just couldn't get anything for that that we liked. I have one fear. I fear debt. And also, you never know what money — You can't be in debt. I mean it wasn't debt — You have to have a salary and you have to have a certain income, and so that's hopeless to be in debt.

**MEH:** My feeling has always been, you know, from, I mean (UNINTELL), but when you go in debt you lose your freedom. Very much.

**EH:** Yes, completely. So, I had the money from the house, and I was willing to put that into another house, but I wasn't willing to be twenty thousand pounds in debt to the bank for — So, then we went to Ireland and I bought this derelict warehouse standing in the sea. And I fixed it up. We just had the four walls, you know, walls like that, you know. Stands right in the sea.

**MEH:** Stone?

**EH:** Stone. Oh, you haven't seen it.

**MEH:** Do you have a photo?

**EH:** Here you see it.

**MEH:** Oh beautiful, beautiful.

**EH:** Here is from the other side, so —

**MEH:** That's wonderful.

**EH:** That's my wife.

**MEH:** Beautiful.

**EH:** Yes, she is very beautiful. She's very beautiful, but she's very nice.

**MEH:** And obviously very smart.

**EH:** Yeah. There she is in more more Western (UNINTELL) — squirrel. She has this favorite squirrel (square?) up in the garden that she goes to visit. No, I've been very lucky in my — Well, I've been lucky in everything, actually. All through my marriage, because we have been married now nine years and my first wife, thirty-two years, and I've been very happy with my marriages.

**MEH:** It sounds like you've had a good life.

**EH:** I've had a good life. Anyway, thank you.

**MEH:** Black Mountain, was it truly important?

**EH:** Yeah, as I say it was a turning point. And from then on I thought of myself as a writer, and that — You know, you thought of yourself in an entirely different way. And I knew that's what I wanted to be.

**MEH:** I have to ask you about —

**[END OF SIDE 1;END OF TRANSCRIPT]**