

Interview with Richard Hague and Pauletta Hansel
 Strenger's Bar and Grill
 (A very loud place, an unbelievably loud place)
 Cincinnati, Ohio
 December 15, 1990
 Interviewer: Chris Green

Green: Where are you from?

Hague: Steubenville, Ohio. Way up the river, right on the border country. If you look at the Appalachian regional commission's map of the region, there are a few coal counties on the eastern side of Ohio that are part of Appalachia. They're right across the river from Weirton, West Virginia, where I worked.

Green: How did you fall in with these SAWC people?

Hague: Bad luck and bad influence.

Hansel: Lack of planning.

Hague: Lack of planning, lack of foresight, lack of wisdom. Actually Pauletta and I met, God when was it, when the Soup Bean Poets came to Cincinnati to talk and gather material, and going to workshops at Mike Henson's folk school, across from Washington Park school. And I came down and Pauletta and P. J. Laska and Bob Snyder. . .

Hansel: And Gail and Bob Baber.

Hague: So I fell in with a bad crowd.

Hansel: Mike Henson and Dick go way back.

Hague: Yeah, we were roommates most of the way through college.

Hansel: And Mike knew Bob Snyder who was direct of Antioch Appalachia, because Bob went to school here?

Hague: I think so, as an undergraduate. Mike lived down here for many years and started the Harriet Tubman, Mother Jones--well, at first it was the Heritage Room. I don't remember the exact title.

Hansel: The Frank Foster Library and the Harriet Tubman/Mother Jones Folk School, but originally, I don't know what it was called.

Hague: Originally it was to serve Appalachian kids that live around here and then it became the Harriet Tubman/Mother Jones Folk School. He was running that out of a store front, maybe five years, I guess.

Green: Was that giving people back some of their place?

Hague: It was a place for kids to gather and for older people to gather and to just touch base with folks from their places. So he ran programs, the Soup Bean Poets was one. He had readings, performance and a little library and crafts and all kinds of stuff mostly for kids. It was just a place to drop in

if you felt homesick. He was living right down the street here, Fourteenth and Main, down by Orchard Street, just within five minutes of here. So he live here for a long time.

Green: So that's where the meeting happened.

Hansel: Then I met Dick again under similar circumstances. But we really didn't get to know each other until probably about six months after that at Hindman.

Hague: That was at the first Hindman Appalachian writers' workshop, wasn't it?

Hansel: The second. Maybe the third, it was 1980.

Green: So what was the relation between the Hindman workshops and the Highlander workshops? Clear it up for me; I'm confused.

Hague: Hindman, the first year was '78 or '79, was the first year, and Mike Henson actually gave me the first brochure for the First Annual Hindman Appalachian Writers' Workshop up at Hindman. And I had that summer off so I thought I would go. So I went down to the first one, under great paranoid circumstances, I went down a day early and went down to the Hindman Hotel and sneaked a bootleg six pack in from Hazard and put it under the pillow and opened for fear that the lady that was sitting out in the lobby thinking that she'd bust me and I'd be in jail for forty or sixty years. But that was a great experience, the first year that it started. And then I guess it was the second or third one that we got together.

Hansel: But Hindman Settlement School has lots of programs, both in terms of summer workshops and weekend workshops and also programs during the school year that benefit the public schools there. And this is one of their programs. It's probably, I'm sure it was the first of its kind and its been over ten years now. But the only connection are the people and the writers.

Green: Which is all the connection that you need.

Hansel: Highlander is the Southern Appalachian Writers' Co-op meeting. The Highlander center is its own organization.

Green: So its the same goings ons?

Hansel: Well, the Hindman week is very structured. It's a program with presenters and teachers and participants who come to learn from them and from each other. But Highlander is more of an informal gathering. Without a particular agenda, or program, there's no difference between the participants and the presenters. But many of us who now make the stop at Highlander every year have really gotten to know each other through Hindman.

Hague: Given the regular SAWC group for the last four or five years that's almost a common denominator between just about everybody.

Green: So is this your tie into SAWC?

Hague: Yeah. I think it was just that network that started at Hindman. A lot of friendships were made, Hindman's a great place to make friendships because

your really living close together for a week and sharing your work and eating together and swarming together. So there was a revival of SAWC because of Hindman.

Hansel: It's true.

Hague: So we all just started getting together and going down to Highlander in the Fall and it was mostly people who had met down there at Hindman.

Hansel: I would say the biggest common denominator, at least originally was Jim Webb. He more than any of us had both the history, in terms of being one of the founders of SAWC, and then he also kept that as a dream throughout periods when it was less alive than it is now.

Hague: He's always kind of been the center of it, or the vortex.

Hansel: He always has to be the center of attention. (laughs).

Hague: Yeah, that's right. He's one of the original wild men.

Green: So what were you the original of?

Hague: I don't know.

Green: Did you begin taking Mecas down to eastern Kentucky more and more often then?

Hague: I've been to every Hindman workshop except three and there've been eleven or twelve now. Had my birthday there for nine years.

Hansel: You turned thirty there.

Hague: I turned thirty there, and I turned forty there. That's right. So it must of been 1977. No I didn't turn thirty there, it must of been '78. I turned thirty on Mount Adams. I don't know what happened there. When I went down the first time, I definitely felt a stranger. I hadn't come from deep in the mountains. But you know many of the traditions in my place and in my family seemed to match up. And I was certainly, absolutely, welcomed in, it just seemed like a good relationship from the very beginning.

I'm kind of a border guy: you know, I'm not a mountaineer in the strictest sense--I'm a border guy. But there was enough natural culture in Steubenville and southern Ohio where I spend a lot of time, south eastern Ohio, really in the hills where my family's had a piece a ground for a long time. Sixteen acres in the boonies, in the middle of Wayne National forest. So I did a lot of ridge running and a lot of exploring when I was in my early thirties. Fit right in.

Of course, Gurney kept calling me, Jim Quinliuan, and Bob Collins-- the Ohio mob, college chums, or the Ohio Mafia or something. You know, he does things like that to stir the pot up and see what happens. But it worked out.

I had probably come to some awareness of where I was from and it was at least a border Appalachian region when I was in college. My master's thesis was a group of poems about the history of Steubenville, as a frontier settlement, as a place the Indian wars were fought, as a place where many of the same Scotch-Irish and English people settled, and a river town on top of it. So that linked me to a lot of the details of the central Appalachian culture.

I had already started to think that way and had started to write about those things. So it just seemed like a good piece of luck to get in on it.

Green: So how did Jim manage to drag you into this particular vortex of Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel.

Hague: We shared swarping abilities, well not abilities, no one has the ability to swarp like Ski King¹, but desire to swarp. We have to tell the truth here, one of the bonds is swarping. The outrageous and illicit behavior which is characteristic of the lawlessness of independent people.

Hansel: Do you know that Dick is the discoverer of swarping?

Hague: I am simply the uncoverer, the subsublibrarian of swarp.

Hansel: Of the only scholarly essay on swarping.

Hague: No, there's two. There was a precedent in the forties. Someone made a futile attempt at the definitive article of the origins and meanings of swarp in the 1940's. But I think I probably surpassed them because I got rid of my staff infection² long enough to write a truly inspired article. To discover in my blearly haze in the Knott County Public Library this manuscript that would have otherwise perhaps perished folded into a copy of the Minutes of the Dwarf Philological Society.

Hansel: That was it.

Hague: Written, I presume as some sort of attack on local politics in Eastern Kentucky in Knott county, but I didn't want to get involved in that. So I just sent it in to Jerry Wayne Williamson at Appalachian Journal and he immediately recognized the value. He saw that there were footnotes that needed to be written and were of great interest, so he published the whole kit and kobuttle. It's made it into the dictionary of modern southern American English. Yes, indeed.

Green: So is this a mysterious word that just came out of nowhere?

Hague: No, it came from old Norse, from SWARTHHA, which means to trip or to swerve. And of course not very far to extending that meaning to someone who is under the influence of various substance might do. But James Still might say that its just the sound like your shoelaces banging together as you walk or your corduroy rubbing together as you walk-- "swarp, swarp, swarp, swarp". But if your shoelaces flap together that much it means that you are a sorry varlet because you can't stop and tie your shoe laces. So it suggest the original meanings of swerve. You try and lean over and tie your shoes and fall down.

1. Other wise known as Jim Webb. He is so called because of an horrible elongated joke about his water skinng abilties. To sworp is to imbibe heavily of intoxicants.

2. Staff Infection: what happens to scholars who take on positions of authority.

Hansel: After this scholarly find I took the word back to my parents to see if they had come across it and in fact they had. They remembered it as being more along the line of cutting around.

Hague: And I have a source also, there was a woman in my English department who grew up in West Virginia and I said, "Carolyn, you ever hear of 'swarp' or 'swarping around'?" And it was the same thing, that's what boys do at night when they're drinking. And so Ski King is the modern day embodiment of that old Norse ecstasy. He looks like a Norseman at times. Those Norsemen were favorites for intermarrying you know, sometimes less or more. He's one of those Norsemen who found himself on the Irish Shores.

Green: And whoosh, over the seas.

Hague: That's another connection now that you mention it. Ski King grew up not far from where I grew up too, he grew up in Shadyside, Ohio. I don't know if he grew up there, but he was there during high school. My grandmother lived there, or had some relations there at least. So once we discovered that that was another bond.

Green: A good connection there.

Hague: He claims, as Hemingway claims to have slept with Mata Hari which was impossible (she was dead by the time he was just a child), likewise to have played baseball against the Niekro brothers. Phil and Joe Niekro. Well, they're a little older than he is. Not by much but he likes to tell that story.

Hansel: I think that another real connection is that many of us are Ohio and River Valley people: Jim in terms of how he grew up. And Renee¹ and I grew up in mountains but because of the interest of our parents found ourselves on the border.

Hague: In terms of culture, because of the level of education and academic spirit that you grew up in.

Hansel: My mother is a New Yorker and my father is from West Virginia and he grew up in both areas.

Hague: Mike Henson is in that situation. I've been thinking about this whole notion of being on the edge, the border, and the connection with theories in Physics and Cosmology and stuff with Chaos. And one of these guys who was the founder of this new science called chaos has this quote that you would not be surprised to find in Appalachian literature. "At the Boundary Life Blossoms" has to do with ecology for instance, if you know about the edge effect with ecology, for instance. The edge effect says that wherever you have two environments, biological environments, that wherever they meet there is always a greater abundance of life and mix at the edge than there is deep in one environment or deep in the other. And this hunch that I had is that this quality of being border people increases the richness of our experience, of Appalachia

1. Renee Stamper, Pauletta Hansel's older sister.

and of American culture. There is a richness there that is different from the complete submergence into a culture.

Green: Well, you can see yourself against different screens.

Hague: I think you always do, and I think that that's a wonderful thing. This edge effect, this boundary where life flourishes, that is a quote from the chaos scientist. I think its true, I like that kind of organic metaphor: we have two environments and at the boundary at them we have a richness of both of them. I'll have to do a paper sometime, when I get staff infection again, on that notion.

There are certainly historical groups that have investigated circumstances like that: Child and Scott's Ballads, Minstrelry of the Scottish Border. That border country is always a rich literary place isn't it? I think this is the first time I've articulated for myself how we're all kind of border people in one way or another . . .

Hansel: Many of us.

Hague: Many of us; like Gail, no.

Hansel: And Peggy no. In fact Peggy gets real frustrated with the kind of border writing that we get. Not arguments but discussions.

Green: What do you mean by border writing exactly?

Hansel: Well, like Lee Smith for example. She's an Appalachian writer who writes a lot about culture but always with a certain distance. And her character's distance is more economic, which is of course a border in itself. And she gets frustrated most of the time that the writing that gets published. . .

Hague: That becomes commercially successful. . .

Hansel: is that way, I have to think about this, is written with this distance.

Green: To make it acceptable to people outside?

Hague: That's a tricky question.

Hansel: I think that it may have to do with what we're discussing now and that many of the people who are writing are people who did not allow themselves to be enmeshed in one culture or another and I think we are struggling with that. And so there is a certain distance when you write about your own experience.

Hague: Or perhaps a more sophisticated, or more urbane or main stream point of view. But of course that has happened a lot, Faulkner was certainly a sophisticated and urbane intellect and Joyce who was a border person intellectually, he grew up in Irish-Catholicism and at the age of ten or twelve simply rejected it but stayed in it as a writer all of his life but was always at a geographical distance from it. But my god, he is a regionalist in the strictest sense, he is always writing about the neighborhood, literally, that he grew up in, but with a tremendously different view, there is an aesthetic distance.

Green: What about yours?

Hague: Mine? I think it still has that distance. I think I'm several voices alternating. Sometimes I'm right out of folk culture I think¹, dealing with folklore themes and dialogue and things like that and other times much more removed from that immediately, but the landscapes are pretty much always the same. They're always the landscapes I grew up in, but the persona behind them is sometimes distanced from the core culture or root culture or what ever you call it. That's an interesting thing--what do you call it?

Green: I think that everybody feels on the outside, that everybody thinks of themselves as the outsiders. But maybe not.

Hague: I don't know, that's hard to say.

Hansel: I think that people of this generation, Appalachian writers of our generation, are border people just within our place in history because culture was changing so much about the time we were growing up.

Hague: Of course, that has literary parallels too. Most of what I know about epic literature I know, for example, that one of the common denominators about the cultures which produce epic literature arises, Homer for example, is that that is a culture in transition. There has been a major uprooting or change in the traditional culture and the epics were written in part to conserve and preserve the culture that had been shaken. In Homer's time, maybe the shift in dominance from Mycenaean/Cretan based civilization to a Greek based civilization. Every time I read about epics I see that, Beowulf arises out of a period where you have the movement of Anglos and Saxons and Jutes to England, the first English poem is really a reflection and a remembrance of Danish and Scandinavian mythologies. So there is a big transition there because of all the movement in the fifth and sixth centuries.

I think that it's absolutely true that Appalachia is a region whose culture was in transition and that our transition was, perhaps, the one which was first brought to consciousness of that transition. Look at Divine Right's Trip, look at Jim Wayne Miller's The Mountain's Have Come Closer, which in many ways is an attempt to synthesis kind of a new way to begin thinking about Appalachia without ever throwing away the old ways without ever totally buying into the new ways. It's about that problem, that tension, "The Brier Sees America Coming to the Mountains", fabulous, I mean that might be the poem about this transitional period. It's not that the Brier sees it coming-- it the brier's consciousness of it. The expression of that consciousness, here's the old ways, here's the new ways, and here we are.

Green: Always on the tightrope.

Hague: It's hard to generalize about it, but it feels right.

Green: Its seems like a lot of your stuff that I've read, such as your first story in Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel, there seems to be this struggle to find out what's really on the inside, "Blades". There's one quote I want to read you, it's where Lathum's talking about cutting open frogs to see how they

1. See article for App. studies course about cultural frag. due to domination.

work. Here it is, this is one of the things I have to do, could you read this paragraph there?

Hague: "That ain't what happens, though," Latham says, studying the teeth closely. "Things ain't made for suicide. Things like this is made for making more and more. That's why I like cutting things -- to see the parts inside that's made for making." Yeah.

Green: In your work I've found image after image of tearing apart of going inside, or the dog devouring this creature, this constant explosion of this tight grip that we're trying to keep on ourselves to keep ourselves whole. We say we're whole and then give into this urge to explode outward.

Hague: That's interesting. In the context of that story, "Blades", the central character, the consciousness who is telling the story, is not able to do that and I think that it's really ambiguous. I'm not sure that I know what that story is about. I have some hunches; but the fact that the central consciousness in the story cannot see the beauty of the girls, for example, that he's always looking through a glass and it's altering the way he sees the world. Now, Lethum is kind of wild and he's sort of a Grendel figure, he's energy undisciplined. The other character in that story is energy thwarted, so I don't think either of them is a synthesis, I think both of them are extreme characters. One unable to perceive what he sees, to fully live into its beauty, which I think is an Appalachian predicament, I think it's a modern predicament. That we're distanced, the central character in that story stays away, he sees but he can't live what he sees. He's blocked somehow. And the guy who does fully let it all hang out is violent and destructive. I think that that's an essay on my part that has not ever been fully resolved. And it has to do with distancing, there is always that predicament with anybody who's trying to name his self or herself and his or her relationship to where he is; when you're under the water you can't see the surface. When you're buried in it, totally subsumed in it, you can't get the lay of the land¹, so you have to sort of withdraw and raise above somehow, but then you're cut off. So it's always the artist's predicament that on the one hand you're engaged, on the other hand you have to be disengaged. I don't know if there is any resolution to it. The tension between that engagement and disengagement is possibly part of what the interesting thing about Appalachian literature is. The engagement, the disengagement, the subserving under the culture, and for the artist for us to stand back and see the culture in some kind of perspective adds a lot of interest to a book like Jim Wayne's The Mountains Have Come Closer, to the brier. I think you see the same kind of business in James Still's stories. There is a tremendous aesthetic at work in those stories, master craft, and at the same time an intimate knowledge and details about the culture. But those stories are not life, those stories are art. They never let you forget that, even a simple scene. And I think Mike Henson in the very style of a book like Small Room with Trouble on My Mind expresses the same paradox. The style of Small Room is modernist, is innovative, is experimental, the way the book is built out of passages of oral history, passages of lyrical poetry, passages of dialect. It is a compendium of a lot of traditional style and writing about a character who is rooted to a place and is uprooted. Mike

1. See Paulo Friere's ideas of praxis, critical reflection, decision and action.

Henson's Small Room With Trouble on My Mind and Ransacked have always challenged me to try and figure out what the relationship between style and matter is. Style and substance, because we have stories about relatively unsophisticated people written in a very sophisticated way. Interesting, but it's the paradox again. The immersion and the distancing.

Green: I've recently read Small Room and got absolutely sucked into it, and it seems like the main character is suffering the same enstrangement and reaches periods of total abstraction from the life that he is living, the struggle to find it and then ultimately the surrender to not being able to find it.

Hague: And his anger against technology represented by his anger against medical stuff. Yeah. But I really do think that there is an interesting disjuncture between subject and style. Not that it is a flaw, it's part of the interest and challenge of the book but again I've haven't written about it or thought it through in that way. You got to do it that way--I'm convinced you don't know what the hell you mean until you write it.

Green: How many drafts do you go through when your working on stuff?

Hague: An average of 8-10 drafts, some many more, some maybe not so many. But I'm not a spontaneous worker. After a certain point when it starts to come then I get very attentive to try and help whatever it is to come in as rich and textured a way. I try to listen to it to find out what it wants to say and then help it say it, I mean, that's not a short process. It's not a first, I may sit three hours working on one poem, doing multiple drafts, listening to it.

Jim Wayne has that poem called "Poetry Workshop" when he says think of your poem as a creek and there has been a lot of rain in the head waters and so the beginning of a draft is filled with trash--clorox bottle and beer cans and car doors-- and then after that, he says, you try to help clear it out, you get the trash out of it and help it run clear. That doesn't happen spontaneously.

Green: Let's take your story "Blades" and you're able to take the one most appropriate place for it that it could possibly go, where would it be-- is it inside Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel or is it some place else?

Hague: No, I think this is where it wanted to be, wherever that is. I know where it's set, it's set in the hills of southeastern Ohio, that's where it's set. It's set in a place and that's Appalachia. And Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel seems to me to be the place where it ought to appear. Sure, I'd love it to appear some place where it would get a bunch of bucks for it, but that's not. . .I'm very loyal in terms of where I publish. Places in Ohio, places where I'm from.

Green: Makes sense to me. In the third Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel you published "Mr. Washington"--did you send them a bunch of other poems, how did they edit that?

Hague: No, what I sent got published.

Hansel: You edited this one, didn't you?

Hague: That's right, and the set-up on the editing, very characteristic of

SAWC, very characteristic of all us, is that Jim asked me if I would help edit and I said Yeah certainly. I was at Highlander I think. And then I went down to Lexington to meet with Gurney because Gurney had said let's get together and talk about the next issue. So I went down and we went to a saloon next to his house, place I'd been before, I can't remember the name of it. And basically what he wanted to do was bang the Lance Olsen interview up against me, and I expressed my objections. I said, "Gurney, goddammit, who in the hell are we publishing this for, you know?" But as Gurney does, he's eloquent and he advocates positions that are always interesting and well-founded, so we just had a real interesting talk about who Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel's audience was.

Green: Who was it? Who is it?

Hague: I don't know we determined it, at this time, for me I always think very concretely and immediately about audience and I always have a pretty clear idea who I'm writing for and it's usually all of us-- the swarppers, Jim Wayne and Gurney, people who I know are reading this stuff at the edges, the younger people. But I know the old timers look at it too. I guess it was as much a discussion of what the purpose of Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel was as the audience. And I don't think we resolved anything, we had a lot of beers and we talked and the Olsen interview wound up in the magazine. And I'm not sorry that it did. I'm intrigued by it, I think the person coming up to it on the book stand (it's in book stores in Cincinnati I got a bunch of issues there) I think they'll have an interesting surprise when they whip open the book and find a discussion of Postmodernism in Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel. That's good.

I was rereading it before you came and I thought-- this guy is crazy as all post-modernists are, but he deserves to be heard and we're a welcoming group. Nobody gets turned away if they want to mess with us. And as I was talking with Gurney, to answer your question about how we go about editing it, Gurney says why don't you get a bunch of them Ohio boys up there, especially if they got poems about the river, landscapes associated with the river, because Gurney was doing river stuff at that time. That was his thing. And so I said, listen you're talking to the right guy, so I hunted up a bunch of guys who I know and suggested to Bob Baber and Jim Webb as I saw what was coming in that we solicit some women here, because it was pretty male-dominated. I don't think it should do that, I've talked to a few people like Allison Thorpe about it. But that was it-- it was very free and easy: if you've got any people who have river poems, send them on down. Most of the things I sent were taken, I'm sure it was that way for everybody. Bob Henry Baber sent some stuff for it.

Green: So you didn't actually do the final production on it? You were the focal point for a bunch of energy and effort and then you threw it on down there.

Hague: I really think that it was explicitly stated that whatever the editors sent in, whatever they selected from their submissions that they got would go. So there were maybe two or three letter exchanged saying, "Yeah, I'll go with that, how about you with this?" So I got a package from Bob Henry, from Jim and I sent them a packet of materials. It is very informal as SAWC is, it was edited with all the informality.

Green: Did you meet any new people through editing it?

Hague: I don't remember. A lot of other familiar names, but that is just how things happen, you know?

Green: Did you all get together to decide the order they were going in?

Hague: I think Jim and Bob and Gurney decided that. Who were the official editors that time?

Hansel: You and Bob and Gurney, Jim was the managing editor. But you know, it is kind of a bringing together of experience. Just looking at the names here, I see a lot of folks you brought in-- Jo Ann and Rick Stansberger; Baber-- Paul Curry Steel, Snyder, Barret; Gurney-- Lyon and Olsen. But I also see Jim's influence here-- Davis, Collins.

Hague: It looks to me like the ordering principle was that you got three different editors flying around out here in three different boundary places and let's see what they bring together.

Green: So what about the fourth Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel?

Hague: I don't have any word at all, and that's characteristic. We communicate at Hindman and at Highlander and that's about how it all gets done.

Green: When does Hindman go on?

Hague: Usually in the first week of August.

Green: Well, those just right next to each other then.

Hague: Highlander is in October/ November.

Hansel: Summer and fall. You don't see a whole lot happening in the winter because of roads.

Hague: Yeah, it's just too tough to travel. I'll tell you another thing that this whole network of folks has done, there has been several regional meeting of SAWC and many of the people that you see were involved in one of those regional meetings. It was in this issue that Pine Mountain became the official voice of SAWC, this third issue. We talked about that at Highlander and Jim just said well we'll just officially make the voice of the Southern Appalachian Writers' Co-op. And those regional meetings, they've been fun to have; we've had a couple up here, they had one in Johnson City that Jo Carson and Pat Arnow organized. . .

Hansel: Whitesburg.

Hague: And Whitesburg. So those have been fun.

Green: How has your conception of the magazine changed through the issues?

Hague: Oh, I don't think it has in any kind of aesthetic way, its just become a much more expensive and how do we put that?

Hansel: Here's the difference.

Green: The staple versus the perfect bound!

Hague: This is ditto or memo and this is printed and perfect bound. So that's just financial circumstances.

Green: Maybe it's time to go back to the stapling.

Hansel: Well, I think a reason to go back to the stapling would be that's what you can get done.

Green: I remember when I first ran across the magazine, I kept waiting for an other issue to come out, and waiting and waiting.

Hague: Yeah.

Hansel: I hope you weren't holding your breath.

Hague: Well, I think the infrequency of production says something about how informal and how really unhassled really, if we get it together it gets together. It's us that gets together somehow.

Green: And there it is.

Hague: Did Jim say anything about money for Pine Mountain?

Hansel: That he didn't have any.

Hague: Yeah, I knew that this was really going to shoot the wad. The brotherly grant there.

Green: When I was talking to him he was talking about just getting the money back, just getting it paid off. But he said there would be a next one no matter what.

Hague: Even if you have to do one like this. (holding up issue #1).

Hansel: Plus that just not being published doesn't mean that the individual voices have been stanchd. I think a lot of what Jim is doing these days is in radio. He's finding a way to follow through in some of the things he believes in, some of the principles of SAWC in what he's doing with radio. And Gurney and film.

Hague: If you look at it I think there are a lot of ways that the word gets out, in teaching, radio, film, and also publishing in places other than here but in places that still connect with the region. If you look down the table of contents here you got some people who are meeting people every year, bringing the news to them--Gurney, Jim Wayne, and Jim. Whole bunch of people.

At one point we were all talking about getting agents for any writer who is involved with SAWC. And I think it is still a good idea because the nature of the beast is very difficult, because of the geographical distance and its real hard to find somebody who would represent such a disparate group. But that was one of the things to get a consortium or something going where everybody could just submit to an agent; it's hard enough to find an agent anyway, let alone under those circumstances. So you just keep on trucking.

Green: I have some sort of queasiness when it comes to agents, I'm not sure what it is. There's just some kind of. . .it's just another go between.

Hague: It's similar to Bob Henry's situation¹, if you do want a wider voice for Appalachian writing you probably do need somebody who is connected with the literary and publishing establishment. But you've got some good regional presses, you've got Gnomon, you've got U.K., you've got the Appalachian Consortium Press which is doing good stuff, Algonquin books, many of these risen in the last ten years, these are great.

Green: So who's your favorite writer; if you had an afternoon and a book and a wooden room to sit in, who do you take with you?

Hague: The old question of if you were on a desert island. I've made hundreds of those lists. It depends on who I'm reading, who I'm in love with at the time.

Green: Who are you in love with now?

Hague: I'm reading Wuthering Heights, getting ready to teach it. That's dandy. I read Thomas Hardy all summer, boy that was wonderful. It kept reminding me of James Still, or James Still kept reminding me of Tom Hardy. That's another thing I've got to think through. It depends on the state of my soul at the time, if I'm in despair I'll always fall back on Emerson and Thearou. If I need to be reminded of what language can do I'll read James Still's stort stories, Hopkins, or Dylan Thomas. They are doing stuff with language. Somebody whose life's work has been literature and asking them who their favorite writer is is like asking someone who has fifteen kids which one is their most favorite. You might have a secret favorite but it's really not fair to say that.

Hansel: And it's not entirely accurate.

Hague: It isn't. Anything that George Ella writes, anything that Jim Wayne writes I lap up. Gurney's Kin Folks still remains a faboulous book for me, it's just wonderful. Kin Folks, sorry Gurney I'm missing up your copy write here, I've run off bunches of photocopies to teach, like "Night Ride".

Green: How do they recieve it?

Hague: They love it. It's a great series of stories about the development of a young consciouness. They recognize it--it's universal stuff. Even when it's strange they recognize it, or a particular detail. What's a slate heap or a gob pile, well it's so and so, oh, o.k.

Hansel: It's like if you drove out to where they were tearing that building down.

1. Bob Henry Baber is director of the Tri-River Arts Council in Ashland Kentucky one of whose main contributors is Ashland oil. Baber was an extreamly active anti-strip mining advocate.

Hague: Out on Dana Avenue. Right. I just had a kid the other day, a little blond eighteen year old high school senior, middle class, the whole thing, who decided that she would write about strip mining in Appalachia for a paper in her social studies class. So she asked to talk and she chatted and I brought her a bunch of stuff and she read it and we sat down to talk and she said that I was just blown away by this stuff. So it has power, I gave her some Caudill to read, some Jim Wayne poems to read, "Night Ride", and a bunch of other stuff to let her know what strip mining looks like from the inside out. It was an illumination, so this stuff has power.

Green: Are your students also as critical of their own lives, their own neighborhood, do they have the same kind of spectacles on?

Hague: I keep trying to bring it home, but I'm so belligerent about it that they can dismiss it as one of my moods. For example, last year when these girls come in with their hair teased up to here and they've had to use a hair dryer: I say, "Well, let's look at what happens when you use that hair dryer. Where did the energy come from?" "I don't know you plug it in" and we try to chase it back and then I tell them that sorrowful, sorrow maybe a little bit exaggerated but it hits it, tale of this family in Eastern Kentucky who has lived on the same piece of land for 200 years and CG&E or somebody came in there and bulldozed their pastures to get the coal out and that's where your hair dryer is coming from. And I challenge them, why don't you conserve that hill side, why don't you conserve those streams. Every time you turn that damn hair dryer on I want you to feel guilty. They look at me and say you're out of your mind. But you got to keep trying to do that, what are you doing if you're not trying to do that kind of thing?

Green: What can you do? How can you bring a child up into an atmosphere like that without pounding them into it?

Hague: I think a little pounding is probably necessary.

Hansel: Plus, you grow a garden.

Hague: Yeah, if a connection with a healthy piece of ground was a daily experience I don't think you'd ever have to make speeches. I'm making speeches to kids, when you do have a garden; they respond, "A garden? We don't even have no dirt". They don't, they've got an asphalt drive way and a concrete patio. Its a long road to pull them back down to any kind of awareness, but you got to keep doing it. Makes for great arguments and they think you're crazy, but maybe ten years from now they'll figure it out. I don't care what they say, so long as they figure it out. Kids today, at least at my school are becoming much more aware of social issues, environmental issues, are becoming much more willing to go out and work in the communities, to do volunteer stuff. So I keep encouraging that they become more conscious of what the world's like out there.

But of course, if you bring up Over-the-Rhine or Norwood, Norwood is the classic Appalachian working class city within Cincinnati where GM was and at my school if you don't raise the issue then everyone from Norwood is a grit or a hillbilly. So whenever you hear that you say, well let's stop here for a minute and ask what's a grit and what's a hillbilly. I keep doing it year after year after year but you got to do that kind of thing. But sometimes it sinks in. If you have the right kind of class in high school, you've always got two or three kids whose Grandma still lives in Kentucky or in Alabama or

Georgia or Tennessee. So once they figure out that that's a real part of the world and that when you go to grandma's to feed pigs all summer you're actually experiencing another real world within America. I think they're a little bit more willing to listen, more willing to check out what other cultures and other ways of life are or were a few years ago, its all cyclic. It changes. In another five years they'll all be back into BMWs and condos in Florida, college as a vocational school, but you just keep doing it.

Green: U.K. Library has Crossings, which is an anthology. . .

Hague: No, that's just how it's listed, but it's a chapbook. It was the first little collection and most of those show up in Ripening, and Week and Nights Down River, Possible Debris, UK has Possible Debris. And so that's it.

Green: What span of time do those works represent?

Hague: Mid 70's till now. Maybe even some of them early 70's. Yeah, some of the poems in Ripening are as old as '72 or '73. But your books don't follow your life chronologically, I've got an other book coming out in March, next year. It's a collection called Mill and Smoke Marrow, which is actually four books in one, it's called A Red Shadow of Steel Mill which is a line from James Wright because everybody in it grew up in the upper Ohio valley so they took four collections from four different writers who grew up there and some of those poems go back to my master's thesis 1972. But it's coming out in 1991.

Hansel: Who's publishing it?

Hague: Bottom Dog Press, a small press out of Bowling Green, Firelands College, Bowling Green. It should be nice, there are some new poems in it too, but it was a chance to put together a maybe little dark, little bleak view of growing up in an industrial landscape. So that's where I stand.

Green: Where do you find time to write, teach and run family?

Hague: I don't very well any more, I can't do them all as well as I used to. I don't write as much as I used to, I just don't have time. Kids are. . . I used to come home before kids and I would write for two hours a day, every day. Now, I got to sneak it in when I can in little moments of intensity after kids have gone to bed or if I get an odd hour at school when I don't have 37 other things to do. But I think I have learned to use my time better. I think Mike will say the same thing, Mike had kids long before I did-- he had to do the same thing, seize these moments of twenty or thirty minutes or an hour here or there and he'd just write more intensely than you did before.

Green: How old are your kids?

Hague: Six and three. Boys. Whole boys, boys to the tenth.

Green: Do you truck them all over to sports events?

Hague: No, no, no, no, not yet. We're not going to do that. I grew up breaking bones in the neighborhood I didn't have to be hauled any where else to do it. My sons are going to break their bones in the neighborhood. Patrick is still much too young for organized sports, but there's always a football game

or a baseball game. But we're going to try and avoid soccer-parent syndrome. But that cuts down on your time, even if they're not going around some place, they want to spend time with you, that's fine: I'm a teacher, I got a little bit more time to spend with them than most people do, I'm not going to screw that up.

Green: Do you take summer off?

Hague: Usually, last summer was the first summer in two or three years that I committed myself to something.

Hansel: And what a commitment it was.

Hague: It was a full commitment. I was gone for six weeks. I got an NEH grant to go to Oxford. Landscape and Literature, how could I pass it up? It was a real experience, but it was tough being away from the kids, you know, they resented it, took me about three days to make friends with them again. They understood. There's Michael and Jamie¹.

1. Mike Henson, author of Rampage, and A Small Room with Trouble on My Mind. He is here for his interview.