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Oral history interview with Fritz Eichenberg, 1979 May 14-December 7

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Contact Information
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington. D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Fritz Eichenberg on May 14 and December 7, 1979, and January 22, 1980. The interview took place in Peace Dale, Rhode Island, and was conducted by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The original audio recording was partially transcribed in the 1990s. In 2019, the full audio was transcribed and reconciled with the partial transcript; it replaces a version which was published to this website. The Archives of American Art has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

ROBERT BROWN: We've already interviewed you, particularly about your earlier career in Europe and your involvement in WPA in New York. Perhaps we can pick up your story after the WPA days. For one thing, I know you began teaching at the New School for Social Research in New York in the mid '30s; continued into the mid '40s. Could you comment a bit about that and perhaps some other aspects of your career as it began developing in America in the late '30s.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: My work at the time was made very difficult because of the Depression. I had a small family to take care of and I had to find some kind of employment. Which was almost impossible because I was a stranger in this country. And when the WPA disappeared, or evaporated—which was around 1940, I would think —

ROBERT BROWN: About then.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: By that time I had made contact with Alvin Johnson who was then kind of my patron saint—the head of the New School and the University in Exile. He was very much interested in me. He tried to put things in my way, like my connection with The Nation at the time for which I did cartoons for about a year and a half. It was a great chance for me but I wasn't too well informed about what was going on in this country. I concentrated on international issues more than domestic ones. My teaching experience was really based on my three or four years at the New School. I gave lectures on subjects which interested me. For instance, the history of the cartoon, the history of satirical caricatures, and so on. Which still interest me as much as they did at the time. And that led me into all kinds of other things which then became incorporated, I would say, in my work with publishers. By that time George Macy of Limited Editions Club commissioned me to do *Crime and Punishment*. That was my first major book.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this the first of your Russian—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: The first of the Russian novelists, yes. I had done this as a student before in Leipzig. But this was, to me, a kind of acid test whether I had grown up enough to handle it adequately so that Dostoyevsky would have approved of it.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this his choice? *Crime and Punishment*. Or yours?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: His choice.

ROBERT BROWN: But you felt you were quite interested in the Russian novel?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes. Because all the problems that I had seen and lived through were somewhat the same problems as the Russian novelists were treating.

ROBERT BROWN: For example.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: The starved student, Raskolnikov, who takes the law into his own hands and commits a murder; feels himself like a little Napoleon fighting an issue which was much too big for him and paying a very heavy price for it—being sent into exile. But in the end there was redemption, always, and that attracted me very greatly to the Russian novelists. It's not an unrelieved account of human suffering. It's always, in the end, an effort to show that, through human suffering, one becomes purified in a way and that redemption in the end is the hope for which you are praying; for which you're working. I think I have not lost this kind of attitude or this kind of an interest in, let's say, heavy psychological literature. The more difficult it is psychologically, the more I'm interested in it. And so, from *Crime and Punishment* it led to Tolstoy and Turgenev and to Pushkin.

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you think this is? That more involved psychologically a situation is, or a novel, or a piece of literature, the more interested you are? Is this again a fact that your own life—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, it solves, also, my own problems. Some people have to take it to a psychiatrist or a psychoanalyst. I was able to use art as a kind of purifier, or as a kind of a safety valve for my own problems. Because to leave your so-called "native country" and come into a completely new civilization and adjust yourself to it—raise children here—presents a problem which is not insurmountable. But it's psychologically difficult. You don't want to be a rebel in your new country. You want to show your gratitude, in a way. You also try to do your share to improve conditions wherever they can be improved by your knowledge, or by your work, or by your contribution to society. And, I think, through my work, I could reach people, which has always been very important to me. I couldn't work without an "echo" of some sort. I couldn't work in an ivory tower. So, one book followed another and I became known as "the man who does all these morbid things." At the time they were called morbid. And I think we have come a long way because, now when people see my work, they understand it so much better than did 40 or 50 years ago.

ROBERT BROWN: What do they see in it now, do you think?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: They see what I saw in the beginning: the redemption through suffering. You don't necessarily look for suffering but it's built in. Man is a very fragile being. He does his best to corrupt the environment in which he lives. We have now the problems of pollution and nuclear energy and we have gone through a disastrous war. We lost more than the war. We lost our integrity and our standing in the world to a large degree. Whatever I could do as a kind of conciliator coming from the other side I tried to do. That's one of the reasons why I was picked out to go to the Soviet Union for the State Department, at the time. I met thousands of Russians and shook hands with them. They saw my work and they saw I understood "the Russian soul," as they said. The same when I went to Southeast Asia. I made so many friends there through my work. So I knew I was not too far off when I selected to be a not too popular artist in the beginning. Most people then would say my work was "grim," "unrelieved," "morbid." Now they say, "This is life, this is the way life actually is, you have to deal not only with life. You have to deal with poverty, disease, corruption, pollution, death." And death has become very popular now.

ROBERT BROWN: But back in the thirties people tended to put their head in the sand, right?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you develop new ways of presentation when you began illustrating these Russian novels?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No.

ROBERT BROWN: Could you give briefly an idea—how did you try to project something? Could we pick perhaps a particular scene, or a mood in, say, *Crime and Punishment* that you illustrated?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, whether it's *Crime and Punishment*, or whether it's *Fathers and Sons*, or *The Brothers Karamazov*, or whether it's *Raw Youth*, whether it's Dostoyevsky, it's always the same kind of problem: it's the clash of generations, usually. The rebelling of the young person. In *Raw Youth* you have it. In *Fathers and Sons* you have it. In *Crime and Punishment* you have it. How can he better the condition of mankind—not to make more money, or to get a better position, but do do something for mankind which will in the end help you too to overcome your psychological problems? Because these were all intellectuals, as Dostoyevsky himself was: a man who was severely ill all his life. He was an epileptic. He overcame these things by pouring all his anxieties and his insights he gained through extreme suffering into his novels.

ROBERT BROWN: How did you express this in your illustrations? Could you summarize how?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Because of empathy I have with these authors.

ROBERT BROWN: But what graphic techniques or devices or representations of the figure and emotions did you hit upon?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, by chance I hit upon wood engraving as the best medium. Or lithography.

ROBERT BROWN: Why those?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Any medium where I could work from dark into light, or from black into white, with all the gradations—which is also symbolic procedure: a process which makes it possible for you to create life out of a void. As you face the blank woodblock or the darkened surface of a lithographic stone, you create life out of it by throwing with your first touch of the graver—the first touch of your etching needle, or razor blade. You create a source of life that spreads over the whole scene and picks out the main actors and the main emphasis on the

certain interrelationship, usually, between two human beings. When you look at my work, you find Raskolnikov and the pawnbroker, let's say, or Raskolnikov and Sonia, the prostitute who became his redemption in the end. It's always a kind of a dialogue between two people as you have when you read the novel, too. When you read Dostoyevsky you have a dialogue between the two individuals—you and the author. No matter what. If you read the Bible you have the same kind of thing. To bring this out in my work, to make the dialogue clear so that it becomes a kind of a touchstone for the effectiveness of my representation. Does it unmistakably carry my message and the message of the author, or doesn't it? Somehow, without manipulation it comes to me naturally. Over the years I have paid very little attention to it. But now that I am getting old I see all these reactions coming back. I get letters from people I will never see, from all over the world—as you know when you look at my correspondence—who have seen my work and have been touched by it—moved by it—and have learned to love that particular literature in which I'm also interested. And since I have been lucky enough to be commissioned to do the imagery accompanying the works of great writers, it makes me a kind of a mediator—a kind of interpreter—a visual interpreter—and has helped many people to read Dostoyevsky who've never read Dostoyevsky before. Or the Brontes. *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* are probably the most popular books I have done. Wherever I go people say, "I grew up with Heathcliff, you know, under the tree" and "I grew up with Jane Eyre." Hundreds of people, after I give talks, come up to me and they always mention *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*. Some mention Dostoyevsky but the majority (which is natural) would prefer to read an English author to a Russian one.

ROBERT BROWN: So, by the end of the Depression you were well into your career of illustrating.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes. Then I attracted the attention of institutions of higher learning, so to speak. I was approached by Pratt Institute. At first I didn't want to teach full-time. Then they coaxed me to at least try it. So I spent a day at Pratt, one day a week. They said, "Well, next year maybe you'll take on two days," which I did. I commuted from Westchester to Brooklyn for years, you know. And then I became more and more involved. And then my friend, who was the head of the department, retired and he had groomed me to take over, because he said, "If you leave, the whole thing you have built up with the students will collapse." I had, meanwhile, started the Pratt Graphics Center and I had started Pratt ADLIB Press. I had a marvelous relationship with my students and I had built up the graphics department—which didn't exist before I got there—into something quite formidable.

ROBERT BROWN: What was your approach to teaching, in general?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: My approach to teaching is, again, the dialogue—the eye- to-eye approach. I could really catch a class of forty by giving lectures. You know you have to follow up with each student. You see him or her separately in your office and you begin to understand their own problems. Where do they come from? What kind of problems do they have to overcome? Are they really suited for the kind of career they're embarking on or could they do something else better? Could they become writers or dancers or actors or actresses? Many of them did. And this only comes out if you have a heart-to-heart talk. Then it's fairly easy to run a class because they all know you privately. It's hard work and it takes time, and it takes interest in humanity in general. And this is what I always had.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you attempt to get them to do? Those that seemed to have a gift for graphic arts? The technical part—was that a very major—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, the technical part to me has always been secondary—important enough but secondary. The first part was that they recognize the world in which they live. If it was Brooklyn, I said, "Go out and bring me back something that you have experienced—where you were born, you must be familiar with your surroundings. Come back with a report on Brooklyn." If they came from Connecticut, I said, "What did you see on your way from Connecticut to Pratt? Have you been affected by social or economic conditions? Are you interested in something special? Are you interested in sports, or in criminology, or in the theater, or in modern art?" I asked them always, "What do you read? Have you gone to the theater? What kind of playwrights do you like? What kind of poetry do you read? Are you interested in dance? Are you interested in movies or in photography?" I tried, really with all my strength, to develop the individual.

ROBERT BROWN: You started this early on, in your relationships?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you find in most cases this loosened them up? They began to—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes. And most of them made the grade somehow. Some became art directors, which was not in my program; some became cartoonists, which was not in my program; some became book artists; some are very successful illustrators of children's books now. Anita and Arnold Lobel just got the Caldecott Medal, or some such thing. And they still work together—they got married while they were in my class—on their children's books. She either writes the texts and he draws the illustrations, or she does her text and illustrations, or he

does his text and illustrations—which I think is a marvelous indication of how this has worked out.

ROBERT BROWN: But these people developed their whimsy or outlook on things—you helped them transfer this to their work.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes. I insisted on one thing: that they learn how to draw and become actively engaged in graphic arts. Printmaking was an important part of the program. I started the print laboratory, so to speak, and got a building for the presses that we needed.

ROBERT BROWN: Pratt at that point didn't have too much emphasis on the visual arts?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Painting, mostly; painting and sculpture. That was not too developed either but they had nothing in graphics. They had an advertising department with which I had nothing to do; interior design, industrial design, and so on. The art department was concentrated on painting and sculpture. And I started the first graphics program. It started with a bang, really, because the students were waiting for it. And now, you know, every institution has an art department with a graphics workshop attached to it.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. Much of your work, and what you've said so far you did with your students was sort of interpreting, or taking a story or writing a story and then projecting it through graphics. What about prints for their own sake?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes, also.

ROBERT BROWN: A good deal of that?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes. A good deal of that too. But I never tried to cram things down people's throats. If they didn't feel like working with books, I didn't force them. They could do prints as many as they wanted to. If they were interested in medical illustration, for instance, I got a person to come in to lecture and start a program of medical illustration. I invited a mime group, for instance, to perform for the students, because they were silent, very much like illustration. You should be able to determine, if you see a mime group, what they're trying to convey without words. It's pretty much what you do in art. It either is convincing or it isn't. And so we had Etienne Decou, who was the teacher of Marcel Marceau. I heard he was in New York and he gave a series of eight lectures and I made a book out of it together with the students. They learned a tremendous lot out of watching acting. And actors come in too, because I'm interested in the dialogue. And I had short stories. I had them read the short stories and then they enacted them whether it was Faulkner or Dreiser or whoever. Also, it's a great help to see—if you have an idea and let's say you want to illustrate Kafka: to reenact a scene which shows man against man, you know—the anonymous let's say prisoner in Kafka's *The Trial* up against the law, the law which doesn't explain anything. How does a person deal with these problems? An actor can act it out, you know. And the students usually cannot because they've not been trained for this kind of thing.

ROBERT BROWN: And having seen these actors, it enabled them to begin projecting into their own graphic work.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Right. They sketched while they performed, you know. These were usually young actors and there was a kind of immediate communication between them and the students.

ROBERT BROWN: You were a teacher, then, and in the mid-fifties became head of the department.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Did this involve a lot of administrative work?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you enjoy that?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, I did not. I insisted on an assistant chairman, which they have never done again. In the first place there isn't any money in the budget for this. But it relieved me of administrative work. I could really run the department without getting too deeply involved in the budgetary things. Of course I could hire faculty then without anyone breathing down my neck. I had more or less complete freedom to do what I wanted, because it was a new approach. Pratt got a lot of credit for it, so they let me do what I wanted to do.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean they got credit for the success of your teaching.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: But you also founded the Graphic Arts Center, too, in 1956 or so.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And that was sort of a Manhattan outlet—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I wanted to get Pratt out of Brooklyn.

ROBERT BROWN: Why is that?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Because Brooklyn is a very provincial place. In trying to raise funds, which I also had to do for my own department, I found that if you say Harvard or Yale or Princeton, you can always get funds. You can always get successful alumni who come across, you know. But if you say Brooklyn, no. The Brooklyn Dodgers at the time, you know, were called "The Bums." It has a kind of connotation of the Bedford- Stuyvesant section—the lower classes so to speak. Very difficult to raise money for Pratt Institute. And so I thought that if, in the first place, I get a workshop going in Manhattan, I can attract people from all over the world, from practically every continent. And I succeeded in that. Whereas, no one would go to Brooklyn. [laughing] They would come to Manhattan, and they did come there.

ROBERT BROWN: This is a workshop for what, people to produce editions or for teaching or—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No. It was a workshop which was open to anyone who proved to be a legitimate artist and wanted to make prints. It was not an undergraduate nor a graduate program. I insisted on independence, so that I could take a student who came from Argentina or from India—we had lots of Indian students—or Chinese, Japanese. I could take them on at the drop of a hat if they showed me their portfolios. I knew their names. We attracted a lot of very prominent artists, too, established in their countries. Like Ikeda, for instance, in Japan, and David Hockney from England, who did some prints in our place. Archipenko was still living then; he did prints there. We had "old" masters and "young" masters and we had completely unknown people working side by side and no questions asked. The main thing was that they produce art in any graphic techniques that they choose.

ROBERT BROWN: How did this relate to your teaching program generally?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I divided my time between Brooklyn and Manhattan. When I became chairman here, at the University of Rhode Island, I was still, I was still on the Pratt Payroll. Once a week, Thursday and Friday, I was by contract obliged to go to the Center and run the Center, which I did for another five years.

ROBERT BROWN: What did "running the Center" mean, and what did you do at the Pratt Graphic Arts Center?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Everything! For instance, I had a program of inviting prominent artists and printers from all over the world. Some came from Germany, some came from England, some came from Holland to teach there for three months or for a full semester or for two semesters in their particular field. It worked beautifully. They profited by our experience when they went back to their own countries. We had people from India, from Ahmadabad, who went back to Ahmadabad and taught there at the University of Baroda. We had others who didn't want to go back. One of the Indians that I brought over from Calcutta is now an associate professor at Lehman College and is very happy. He has a Spanish wife and is very successful—does very good work. He learned the ropes in our place.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you, in your time at Pratt, bring in some notable colleagues as well to fill out various other aspects of your program?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Oh, yes. We had a marvelous faculty here. Richard Lindner.

ROBERT BROWN: How did you happen to find him?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: He found me somehow. He wanted to teach. He worked then for *Harper's Bazaar* and for some very fancy Conde Nast publications. He wanted to paint and he wanted to have time for his own work without being tied in with commercial work. I must have met him somewhere and he asked me could he teach. Well, he started pretty much the way I taught at the New School—with no experience in teaching. It was his first job. I said, "O.k. I'll try it out. Here's a class. Come in tomorrow and teach. If it works, it works; if it doesn't work, too bad." And he was an immediate success.

ROBERT BROWN: What did he do? Did he lecture?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, he had a class which he called "Creative Expression," which covers a multitude of sins, you know—he could do anything. And the students—he had a marvelous way with students. He took them out to Broadway. You know, if you are foreign-born, you're much more interested in the exotic side of New York than one who was born there, who takes these things for granted. To him Broadway was the most exciting place; it shows in his work, in his paintings. So he took the students on trips to Battery Place and to Broadway and to the "lower depths," I would say. And they came back with fantastic work. This is how he built up a class.

He taught for two days, for three days—the same way I began. And then he became all of a sudden the great success that he was. By that time he was sixty years old. And Claudia Ekstrom gave him his first big show. He left the department and, boom!—he couldn't produce enough painting. And he said, "I can't teach three days, anymore. Two days." And then a year later, "I can't teach two days. One day." And then he said, "I'm too busy. Could I have the students come to my studio?" I said, "I'm awfully sorry; then everyone else would do the same thing." And this is how we parted. But we stayed friends till the end.

ROBERT BROWN: You parted in a friendly way.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You understood that he'd gone off—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes. Well, he was too big for us then, you know. And we still had people like Calvin Albert, who is a good sculptor. And Stephen Green taught for us, and Fred Castellone, Alexander Brooks—

ROBERT BROWN: Were these all pretty good teachers?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Excellent teachers. I had a marvelous faculty. They really taught—you see, I was there from morning till night. And if a chairman really watches his flock, they can't escape. They couldn't just say, "I teach" and stay for an hour and then return to the studio. They really stayed for three hours, till the class was finished. And I had faculty meetings every week to keep track of things.

ROBERT BROWN: What were they like? Did you just sort of stir around ideas? You weren't really strict with them, or, did you seem to be vigilant?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I guess so, yes. [laughs] Because I was raised as a person where duty plays an important part in what you're doing. You take on a commitment, you see it through. They noticed very quickly that they couldn't get away with—as they do here. I see this at other institutions. Sometimes they take on teaching because it gives them time to do their own work and they spend as little time in the classroom as they can. And they don't treat the individual students as individuals. Which I think is an easy "solution" of the teaching profession. Unless you take an interest in the individual—you can't do "mass teaching," especially in the arts. It's not a matter you can do by TV or a loudspeaker to a class of one thousand. You just can't do it like in Madison or in Berkeley, or wherever, where you have fifty thousand students. What do you do?

ROBERT BROWN: You have to have follow through. You have to discuss with them their work. You have to have immediate contacts.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Oh yes, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: What did this do to your own work? You were there every day of the week, from morning to night.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I sometimes wonder how I did it, really.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you able to be productive in the fifties and sixties?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes. I practically did a book a year.

ROBERT BROWN: You did several children's books, I know, during that time.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes, in the beginning, before Pratt. Most of my serious work I did after 1938. 1937 I did *Crime and Punishment*. And then my childrens' books kind of dwindled.

ROBERT BROWN: But you were able to do that much work even when you were chairing the department at Pratt? 1956-66.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes. And I started with *Artist's Proof*. I had a full editorial job—

ROBERT BROWN: That started, when? In the 1950s?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Nineteen sixty-one. And I carried that through until '72. Eleven years.

ROBERT BROWN: You were the chief person there?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes. I'd started it so I had to see it through. Yesterday I went through my files because I knew you were coming. The book, *The Art of the Print*, which I started in 1965—it's a pile this high of material—

which I did also while I was chairman of the department, and did my other work. I'm a restless person, you know. If I can't work I feel very unhappy. And that may be the only rational explanation why I could do such an enormous amount of work. I ran the ADLIB Press, too. We published about four publications a year. *Artist's Proof* was another independent arm of Pratt.

ROBERT BROWN: *Artist's Proof* was set up for what purpose? What did you have in mind?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: To promote printmaking.

ROBERT BROWN: Through articles? Illustrations?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes. And, again, I always tried to keep it as international as possible. My correspondence was with people everywhere -people I met in Russia, in India, Ceylon. A friend of mine spent some time in Baffin Bay and started the Eskimo graphics workshop—the first one in the Arctic. I had work from Africa, from New Guinea, and so on. I went deliberately out to make contacts in countries where I knew there was a beginning interest in the graphic arts. *Artist's Proof* went all over the world, actually, and we had a circulation of about three thousand which was not so bad. We were almost self-supporting. We had a few thousand dollars deficit each year. And I insisted on the best printer possible: American Gravure Company. People everywhere still stop me and ask, "Where's *Artist's Proof*? Why didn't you continue?" Well, it just became too expensive.

ROBERT BROWN: And it ended—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: It ended in '72 when I was here, teaching at Rhode Island.

ROBERT BROWN: Now the ADLIB Press—what was its function?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: It was entirely centered on the students. I picked them in their junior year and has a team of twelve. Each one had to pick his own subject matter, his own graphic medium; had to set the type; had to convey a certain message. I was the editor—or art director I should say—of the whole thing. But it was actually run by the students. We produced about twelve issues. In order to raise money for it (because Pratt never had any money for anything) I published four "keepsakes" a year. Sometimes I asked an artist like Munakata to do a woodcut for met. Since he also taught a semester at the Pratt Center I knew him well enough. He gave me a woodcut which he made especially for me. For me he wrote an essay on the woodcut. I published it in a limited edition and sent it out to a group of about one hundred subscribers I had, who paid about $20 apiece for four original works of art; usually booklets of some sort—some very interesting things. And with two thousand dollars I could cover my deficit. That was a thing I couldn't turn over to any assistant, you know. I had to do it myself. And since my name by that time was quite well known, I had an easier time to raise money for such things.

ROBERT BROWN: As you look back on it, was teaching and being involved at Pratt, generally speaking, a good thing for your own career?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I felt it was more a debt I paid off to this country. Because I'm very fond of America as a country that has welcomed so many people from different parts of the world without asking questions. You had to live on your merits. Whatever you do—sometimes they doubt it in the beginning, but if you don't really do it for your own sake, if you do it as I did in this case for generation after generation of young Americans, it convinces people it's worth supporting. And I always had the support of the administration in everything I did if I could raise my own money. [laughing] As long as it didn't cost them anything I could do really what I wanted.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, in the fifties or so—could we go through some of the things you illustrated at that time?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Any that you'd like to highlight and particularly bring out?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: In the '50s—

ROBERT BROWN: You came to the University of Rhode Island in about 1966.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: Could you say something about why you came and what you found here? Were you trying to do what you did at Pratt?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Dr. Horn was president of Pratt Institute. We became friends there mainly because he admired my work very much and what I did at Pratt and he helped me a great deal to establish the graphics department as a kind of internationally recognized thing. And he thought, when he became president of the University of Rhode Island, we could put this kind of thing in the smallest state of the union. Perhaps this is

where I couldn't judge the situation properly, because I'd never been here it was my first acquaintance. I saw the University. I gave some talks there. I got familiar with the faculty—they were happy that I was coming from New York, and so on. But what I found was that the faculty, with academic freedom intact, would insist on staying where they are in their own field. And they were all more or less on the avant-garde kick, let's say—abstract, non-representational. The students came from small potato farmers—Portuguese, Irish, Italian—didn't know much about art. It's not a very intellectual atmosphere—originally a land-grant college. Now it's a state university. What I wanted to do with the students was to give them a basis on which they could build up their own creative abilities, no matter (as I did at Pratt)—no matter in what field. But for that they would have to get a decent education in drawing and painting and sculpture and so on—build on the knowledge of the world in which they live—on the human body, on nature, on landscape—

[Audio Break.]

FRITZ EICHENBERG: —on what is typical for Providence. The ocean is right nearby—fantastic experiences. No! The faculty wanted to go on with their own kick, which is something only the very sophisticated could understand. Let's say one put up a kind of a gallows— two 2x4s hitched together and hung a rope over it. This was a "new art form." Can you imagine that you would get a boy here from a rural community who wants to become an artist—what can he do with it? This kind of thing—I use it as an example—is what made my work there impossible, actually.

ROBERT BROWN: They wouldn't take these unsophisticated people and lead them to it, perhaps, eventually—a more sophisticated stage?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: So you found no preparation for what you wanted to give them?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No. And then when they leave the school after four years, they have actually wasted four years on experimentation with a highly advanced sophisticated mind who knows enough about what's going on at the Whitney Museum, or the Museum of Modern Art, or the Guggenheim—that works and all this kind of thing, high fashion you know, but completely useless for the young unsophisticated student. I fought this and I tried to introduce graphics as a medium for pulling things together. The faculty didn't like that. So I feel that I largely wasted my time here. But I found Peace Dale a good place to live in. [laughing] At least it had a blessing on the personal basis.

ROBERT BROWN: You found the place a sort of oasis, where you could get away from—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: And this is more or less a time when you were able to begin doing things on your own more than in the past—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: —and not so dependent on commissions.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: It has increased, let's say, my productivity considerably. No doubt about it. And the fact that I can travel a great deal, I can get to New York and Boston and Providence very easily. I have been in demand as a speaker really more than ever before. And I had exhibitions in Boston and New York, so I have the best of the two worlds, actually—the metropolitan as well as the provincial.

ROBERT BROWN: In a way, although the University of Rhode Island experience was not a good one, coming here—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Has worked out very well, yes. [Laughs.] And I wouldn't think of moving away from here. But it has also taught me a lesson. When I was asked to University of Wisconsin (Wisconsin is also a kind of a very large Rhode Island in many ways) the way I'm received there because of my work proves to me that I have not wasted my time—that I'm much more understood now than I ever was before and that there is a need for an emotional response. People want to respond emotionally. I find that in every discussion that I have after my talks, that people have lived through a kind of a frigid period in art. They have accepted abstractions and Abstract Expressionism and Earthworks [Earth Art] and Op-Art because they didn't want to look foolish. But what they really need is an emotional outlet. And that comes through in this young generation very much. My son or my daughter, you see how they live. They go back to a time almost Victorian in this approach to life. You know, the more ornate and decorative things are, the more they feel secure in a time which is already gone. I don't know whether this is a stable or healthy attitude. But it shows the need, I feel, for the heart to be engaged, too, not only the brains and the hand. So many more people are taking up papermaking, for instance. And so many

more private presses have opened up. What the outcome of it will be is too early to tell. People go back to carpentry all over the country. The most sophisticated people I know [he laughs] have taken up carpentry. Strange. And my work has very much more appeal also because people admire the craftsmanship of it. "How do you do this?" you know. "How can you do this with a simple piece of wood and your little engraving tool?" The emotion that it conveys is mixed with an admiration for the technical proficiency.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you mind that?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Not at all, no. But it's a strange recognition. I'd never given that any thought, you know. I always worked the way I wanted to. I've never compromised knowingly with my own desire. In the choice of subject matter, in the choice of medium, I've always followed my own instincts or own intuition. I probably never gave much thought whether I would be as popular now at the age of 77 or what—you know, as I am now. It's not based on the fact that I'm old. It's based on the fact that my work is reaching certain recesses in people's emotional life. Sounds stupid, but that's the way it is.

ROBERT BROWN: Which you found were dried up for about 20 years, so that people weren't into abstraction, obviously.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes. You know, when you went to the Museum of Modern Art 20 years ago and you looked at the work of, let's say, Andy Warhol or [Robert] Rauschenberg or whoever it was, or [Ad] Reinhardt—black on black, or white on white, where you saw nothing but the "emperor's new clothes," you know. And if you listened to people's conversations, you always found them shaking, being very puzzled. Sometimes a guard comes up and explains to them [they laugh] and he's also getting a little tired of it. You always had the feeling of anemia, somehow, in art. And when they stand in front of a [Paul] Gauguin or a [Vincent] Van Gogh and so on, life came rushing back. Art is an emotional thing just as religion is an emotional thing. If it isn't, it becomes cut and dry and it dies, you know? Okay.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: This is a second interview with Fritz Eichenberg in Peace Dale, Rhode Island, December 7, 1979.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: Mr. Eichenberg, in this taping we were going to talk about people who've been particular friends of yours. And, secondly, you wanted to discuss with me work, particularly as an illustrator, that you consider to have been high points of your long career. One of the earliest of these in this country that we have talked about was your involvement, through Dorothy Day, in doing illustrations for the *Catholic Worker*, which you began doing, you said, about 1940. How did this come about? How did you get to know her?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, it might give the wrong idea if you say I started my career with Dorothy Day, because it certainly was a sideline of my—I wouldn't say more serious work, but the work with which I was able to make a living. I had partly financed it through my teaching jobs.

ROBERT BROWN: I didn't mean to suggest—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Dorothy Day was, from a personal point of view, perhaps the most important influence in my life. But, let's say from an artistic point of view or from the point of view of an illustrator, she was not of any great influence. Because what I did for her was more or less addressed, as she often said, to those people who could not read—to the illiterate. She said she had seen clippings of my work in the hovels of coal miners and so on, people in all parts of the world; people who could not read the *Catholic Worker* but they understood my very simple images of saints and portraits of people important in the Catholic worker movement.

ROBERT BROWN: So it did have an effect on your way of illustrating? You simplified—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, it did not. I would say I had to re-trace my steps, rather. The work I did for her I did to please her and to help her cause, but not to develop my artistry or my knowledge of illustration.

ROBERT BROWN: I see. You went back to an earlier stage in your development.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes. I tried to be simple. Sometimes simplistic. I very often did images of saints—Saint Vincent de Paul, of whom I'd never heard of before. I studied up on them. I learned something, and I tried to make these drawings as simple as I could so that people would understand them right off the bat, you know. They open the paper and there's a picture of Peter Maurin, let's say. [R.Brown asks for the spelling of the name. F.Eichenberg responds that it is given the French pronunciation.] They might not be able to read—I did hundreds of little things for her continuously and I always encouraged her to call me up when she needed something.

Yesterday I got a letter from Dan Mauk, who's now managing editor of the paper, asking me to do a portrait of Stanley Vishnevsky who just died (an old friend of Dorothy Day's). He actually lived in the House of Hospitality—a man of education, of Russian origin; a big jolly fellow who has just died of a stroke. They want to have a memorial issue devoted to him; so, Dan sends me some snapshots because I didn't know the man well. I dropped everything and did the drawing of Vishnevsky and sent it to them and just got back a letter. They were so delighted with it. I wasn't so sure it was what they wanted. I did the same with Thomas Merton a short while ago. I'd never met Thomas Merton, and it was to illustrate a long two-page article on him by Pat Jordan, a friend of mine. So they sent me photographs and so on. I tried to make them look timeless, or ageless somehow—not just to use a snapshot and translate it into my kind of technique, but to do something that makes a face sometimes look monumental. There was an anniversary for Peter Maurin. I had never met him because by the time I met Dorothy Day he had already had his first stroke and was completely incapacitated—couldn't speak—couldn't recognize people. Dorothy didn't want me to meet him in that state. So I used only one or two photographs of Peter Maurin because he was a very modest man.

ROBERT BROWN: What was it about Dorothy Day that got you involved with the—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: She stood for everything that I thought would make life on this earth better. She stood for the underdog—the oppressed, the poor, the weak—the ones who were easily discarded by society as "hopeless cases." Delinquents -bums—she hated to hear that word. There are no "bums" in her vocabulary. They are the unfortunate people who have been discarded by society. And people might say, "Well, let them work!" But she doesn't ask these questions. She sees—sizes up a person. She sees they need help and she helps. Whether they are Jewish or Christian or Mohammedan—it doesn't make a difference. There are no questions asked. That I like so much.

ROBERT BROWN: How did you happen to meet her?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I met her at a conference on religious publishing in Pendle Hill which is a Quaker study center in Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia—Wallingford.

ROBERT BROWN: This was in the 1930s?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: That was around 1940, I would say. I was sitting next to her and I just fell in love with her as a person. She's really great. She makes you feel at ease and I could talk to her like to an old friend. In the course of the round table there, we talked about the *Catholic Worker*—publishing, you know. She knew I had illustrated books and she said, "You know, I have trouble finding Catholic artists to work for me because we have no money." That didn't sound so good to me! She should find a lot of artists to work for her but she can't. So she said, "Would you work for me?" And I said immediately, "Yes." And so the next week she called me up and we got together. I gave talks there very often.

ROBERT BROWN: You right away were so impressed by her.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Oh, yes. Of course I had heard about her. She's considered, I would say [laughing] a "para-saint" now. Everyone is sure that one day she will be canonized. She deserves it. If you believe in the standard thing, she's certainly entitled to. But she hates to hear about it. Everybody says this on her: that she's a saint. She hates that. She doesn't want to hear that. She just does what her faith commands her to do. She's under direct orders, you know, to do what she does.

ROBERT BROWN: Why were you at this conference on religious publishing?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I was a Quaker then, in 1940. I gave lectures at Pendle Hill—as I gave talks at the *Catholic Worker* and in so many other places—where I tried to combine the mission of an artist with the mission of a man who believes in mankind and believes that there is that of God in every man, as the Quakers always proclaim.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you treat in terms of what the artist did with that belief?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, anything that I have done in my work. That's a big sentence now if I say "everything"—maybe almost everything that I've done, I could do with a clean conscience that I did my best to bring people together, to make people understand each other. That is my main objective in life. And, no matter with whom I am—whether it's a poor man or a rich man or a Catholic or Protestant—doesn't make any difference. I have friends who come from India. I have friends all over the world. We never discuss racial or denominational differences. We try to find out where we can get together. And in all my travels I found that art is the one medium that immediately brings people together. Because it's visual the language barrier is wiped out. If I show a picture of Gandhi, I don't have to talk about his philosophy. He appeals to Western philosophy and political—

ROBERT BROWN: A very likeness of him, you mean—to try to express him, what he means to you.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes. And, somehow, I get emotionally involved in what I'm doing. The Gandhi face that I have cut on wood—and I did the same with Abe Lincoln—is prompted by the love I have for these people. Otherwise, I couldn't do it. And some of the vibrations—sounds kind of mystical—you know, make these things common property. I have been asked by so many organizations—editors have asked me (I could show you hundreds of letters)—could they use the Gandhi on the cover of their next issue. Whether it is the Mennonites, or the Quakers, or the Catholics, or whoever it is, my work has been used in so many denominational publications which normally would oppose each other. I cut across the "party lines."

ROBERT BROWN: That was very pleasing to you as well, then?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: For the *Catholic Worker* you mentioned that you did portraits occasionally. Specifically, would it be a parable from the Bible, or something from current events, or—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Sometimes they used work which I had already done—like the Bible engravings which are in this book here. Noah's Ark, Jonah under the tree, the Garden of Eden, and so on. And I told Dorothy from the very beginning, whenever she wants the use of my work, she can use [it]. She doesn't even have to ask me. But she does ask me. And now—well, you know—with copyright you have to be a little more careful. I just threw my bread upon the water and see it coming back to me somehow in the form of real satisfaction that my work touched people. Sometimes she asked me to illustrate a certain event that happened in the life of the *Catholic Worker*.

ROBERT BROWN: And these are examples.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, then she published—she is actually a born journalist. She comes from a journalist family in the Middle West. Her father was a sports writer. She love to write. She kept a column going in the *Catholic Worker* called "On Pilgrimage," that was published in paperback, and so on. Harper's published it. And, finally, she came out with her autobiography called, *The Long Loneliness*. Which, I think, is a quotation from her favorite saint—Saint Theresa of Avila. Her lone battle, you know—

ROBERT BROWN: This is 1952.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: It was 1952.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you adapt to her—you would read her text very carefully?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes. I knew it so well because I had read the "On Pilgrimage" column.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you try to convey in these illustrations?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: On the cover I showed a woman (who could be called Mary or by any other name) expecting the Savior and an angel hovering over her whispering into her ear that the great miracle is going to happen. I showed, in the back, the three crosses—Calvary, the way to Calvary, and so on—and a thistle in the foreground as you see here. And here, the spirit ascending to Heaven. I did several chapter headings also in engraving.

ROBERT BROWN: These are fairly simple, clearly separated headings, aren't they?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Right. I never have any discussions about these things, really. People accept them as valid statements of an artist who has a certain belief and tries to express it in this work.

ROBERT BROWN: In this, were you simplifying from what you were doing for other purposes by this time? You mentioned when you started work—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Not so much in this batch because this was a book as opposed to the paper, which is expendable in its own way. The *Catholic Worker*, as you can see here, printed the stuff. The paper after a while will fall apart and the Worker has to be preserved in some form or shape. I think I showed it in here—this, for instance, an engraving which I did for the *Catholic Worker*—a pieta.

ROBERT BROWN: Very simple. Very strongly drawn.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes. You can't mistake it for anything. You can't say it's an "abstraction" kind of depiction of a mother mourning for her dead son, her crucified son. It could be a scene in Vietnam, or it could be five thousand years ago in Etruria, or somewhere.

ROBERT BROWN: Are most of your illustrations for the *Catholic Worker* wood engravings or are some drawings?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Most of them were wood engravings.

ROBERT BROWN: Lithographs, any of them?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Most of them were scratchboard drawings. There are some in here. "The Black Crucifixion." At a time when the racial question was not very much discussed—before "Black Power" came. I did this before 1963. I didn't know who was going to use it because it's not a very popular conception of a Crucifixion—a black man being crucified and a black mother mourning him.

ROBERT BROWN: So, as you say, although the illustrations you did for the *Catholic Worker* were not in the mainstream of your career, nevertheless, they have been a very important and continuing aspect of it.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I think it's important for an artist—[laughs] not just to make a living. To me it's not the most important part of life. Anyhow, to draw a salary every month is not in the cards for an artist. If you teach, it's slightly different. You get a salary and you begin to do things—at least in my case—which have to be subsidized by yourself. With my salary as a chairman of a department at Pratt, or URI [University of Rhode Island], wherever it was, I was able to do things for nothing for lots of organizations who could not pay and from which I wouldn't expect or accept any pay. For example: Fellowship of Reconciliation. In fact, very often I have sent my drawings that they wanted plus a check—which is, [laughing] quite unique, I guess. I still do this with the *Catholic Worker* because I consider it a real privilege to be able to support them.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you meet a number of other people through the—well, the Quakers through the Pendle Hill conference, or—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Oh, so many, yes. I must say that the *Catholic Worker* to me has always been a kind of a frustrating experience when I went back to Pendle Hill or when I gave talks to Quaker groups or when I went to a meeting—I belonged to Scarsdale Meeting in Westchester, New York for twenty years or so. They did not always compare favorably with the *Catholic Worker*. Their unconditional pacifism. They did not compromise any of their principles, which Quakers sometimes do because they're also practical people—and sometimes very good business people. Well, people at the *Catholic Worker* didn't have a penny for themselves but they had their principles aside from the dogma of the Catholic Church. They had their principles which sometimes put them in conflict with the Catholic Church.

ROBERT BROWN: Really? Were there examples with Dorothy Day and the hierarchy?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes. For instance, Archbishop or Cardinal Spellman at the time broke the strike of the gravediggers—I don't know whether you remember that—

ROBERT BROWN: No.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: —and the *Catholic Worker* picketed the scabs who broke the strike or tried to break the strike at Spellman's order. So from that moment on, Spellman didn't have much good to say of Dorothy Day. Whereas, LaGuardia was a great admirer of hers and supported her with his own private money—a gift, would send a check, and saw that she was not harassed, because very often the housing authorities were pushed by the merchants of the lower East Side, who thought it was bad business to have a soup line or bread line in front of their little shops. And LaGuardia always protected her, he saw the value of her; and I admired him for it. It was not a popular thing to do. She had friends all over the world, you know. Abbe Pierre, the great French Resistance fighter, who was also a priest. I heard him talk there. She had fascinating speakers. W.H. Auden, the poet, was a friend of hers.

ROBERT BROWN: During the Second World War you also did work as an illustrator for commercial publishers. This kept you going? For example, in 1943 you did *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*. Was this comfortable work? Or, did you throw yourself into it as well as compared to, say, the work with the Quakers?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, there was no conflict there. I've always been a great reader and I've always been tremendously interested in good literature. I had a very spotty and short education in the German gymnasium. Literature was not favored by the administration there. We were taught languages very well, mathematics, chemistry to a point, but as far as literature was concerned, always neglected. I acquired these things by myself, by reading constantly, going to lending libraries when I was a little boy. I read Nietzsche before I understood him. So that my literary tastes somehow got me in touch with the great Russian writers—Dostoyevsky, whom I read when I was a teenager; Tolstoy, Turgenev, and so on. And when I had a chance to illustrate them there was absolutely no conflict of any kind. I welcomed that. To me this was a chance to move into the life of a great writer to inquire why he wrote.

ROBERT BROWN: Did the same apply to the Brontes? How did that opportunity come about? I think you told me Wuthering Heights became your best seller. But how did the opportunity to illustrate it come about?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Harry Abrams, who just died at the age of seventy-four, was then art director of the Book-of-the-Month Club. He got in touch with me—I've forgot the motivation. Maybe I did something else for him in advertising, but I don't remember. He asked me would I illustrate *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, which the Book-of-the-Month Club was publishing as a bonus book coming out in seven hundred, fifty thousand copies, first printing. To me it was a great challenge. I didn't know much about the Bronte sisters but I informed myself very quickly. My interest still, 35 years later (this was 1943), very lively. I read as much as I can about the Bronte sisters—biographies about Bramwell and so on.

ROBERT BROWN: What was it that captivated you about them?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, what always captivates me is the struggle against odds that people put up. When you think how they were raised in this little parsonage in Lancashire, hardly getting out of that environment and writing these two gripping novels which have become classics—not in their lifetimes but after they had died and they all died very young. I think Charlotte was the last to die and she was thirty seven by that time. Two of her sisters died at the age of eight and nine in the parsonage—the same kind of parsonage that Charlotte describes in *Jane Eyre*. So it was a first-hand experience that came through in *Jane Eyre*, certainly. In *Wuthering Heights*, it must have been—that was Emily Bronte—it must have been the very suppressed urge to live a full and passionate life that got her to write that book. And it came through to me as it does to millions of people all over the world. It's been translated into practically every civilized language. And it was written by a very inexperienced little girl, so to speak! And she died at the age of thirty two or so.

ROBERT BROWN: Could we look at some of your illustrations for those books, to get a more concrete idea—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: This is the scene: *Heathcliff under The Tree* in *Wuthering Heights* which I used as the frontispiece, which has really captured the imagination of millions of people. Wherever I go, even now, when I give talks—at Newport the other day, or in Wisconsin, or in Mississippi, there's always a group of people coming up with the two books that they picked up somewhere. And it's always *Heathcliff under The Tree* that they say, "This is the one that I love most." People that I've never met before, that I will never meet again. It's to me a great satisfaction.

ROBERT BROWN: Even to the form of Heathcliff, which it seems to me is echoed in the branches and in the roots—what were you trying to convey?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: The turbulence of the man expressed not only in the wind that blows through the trees, but is expressed in the swirling clouds behind him. [Phone Rings.]

[Audio Break.]

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I explained this the other day in Newport where I gave a talk to the Art Association people. I said, "The most important thing in work is the dialogue. There has to be a relationship between the elements I show in each illustration." People can say, "Well, where's the dialogue here? There's no other person. "There's a dialogue between nature in the form of the clouds rushing by, the turbulence in the branches whipped by the wind, in the way he leans against the tree as if he's trying to find support from it. When you look through the rest of my work—and that's not planned. It comes almost intuitively. You see in the other series of illustrations for *Wuthering Heights* a man facing the wild dogs at the reception he gets at Heathcliff's grange. There's a dialogue going on between those dumb and ferocious animals and the man who tells the story. The next one—Cathy and the narrator of the dream—Cathy is trying to get into the house. She wants to see her beloved Heathcliff. Well, the dialogue, if it's not convincing, if you don't see the face of Cathy, the desperation in her face and the reluctance of the narrator of the story to accept her, to let her in, you lose the essence of the story.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, the figure of the narrator in this scene—how did you conceive him to be? He's extremely disturbed.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes. He's asleep but very much aware—he's dreaming—very much aware of what's going on. You are left, when you read the story, with the impression it could be a dream. It could be reality. The British, especially, are enamored of ghosts, you know. And ghosts sometimes they can touch. I just read a story by Isak Dinesen in *Gothic Tales* where the ghost of a brother sits between his two sisters who are about eighty years old. And they talk to him about the past and he's drinking coffee. Where does reality actually begin?

ROBERT BROWN: But how did you choose this form in depicting the narrator whether he's dreaming or awake?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, this is the marvelous thing about being an illustrator of my connotation—that you have a tremendous opportunity to create life, to create a person, to create a character, to create a situation. You are the director of a scene, let's say. In a film or on the stage it would be the same kind of thing. Here I'm all alone with a little woodblock with my imagination and with a book. Between the three of us we solve the problem of making it touching, convincing in the spirit of the writer. This is to me very important, that I don't

violate any of the writer's intentions.

ROBERT BROWN: That means to be accurate or not—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: To be within the spirit of the story. The costumes and the accoutrements are of secondary importance. They're important but not overwhelmingly, as far as I'm concerned. I'm trying here to show them in the costume of their time but it could be also in modern costume. Essentially what I'm trying to do is to create the tension that exists in this case here between three people. Or here the ghostly image of Cathy floating around the desperate Heathcliff who is digging down to reach her body in her grave. You either get it or you don't. And not all of my work is that successful, you know. Sometimes it falls flat, it's not always possible to catch what you want. But in those examples that I show, I naturally try to show the successful conclusion or creation of a scene that corresponds to the spirit of the book.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this your first job with Harry Abrams?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: How was he to work with?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, I have apparently the capacity to make friends very easily and we became friends and we have worked together. In fact, when he died just a few weeks ago, we had a book planned on Edgar Allen Poe, to use illustrations which I had done before in a larger format; to be used as posters, for instance. [1:33:42] And I just got a letter from him a few days before he died. And I still hope his son who is now head of the firm, Abbeville Press, would continue the project and I would work with him.

ROBERT BROWN: Now these are illustrations for Jane Eyre, which follow about the same time. How did you choose to interpret it?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, it very much touched everyone, still is, by the dismal conditions in England at the time as far as the underprivileged were concerned, the orphans were treated like so many cattle, really. Very rigidly regimented life under the supervision of some sour, old teachers or principals. And this is the gist of the story of how Jane Eyre tries to free herself in her later life from these slavish conditions imposed upon, and becomes a human being. Falls in love with Mr. Lancaster, a wealthy landowner who has a deep secret hidden somewhere, a mad wife, who he has locked up somewhere, which prompts her—Jane—to leave him, and then turn to him later after he has been blighted in a fire. I think that the whole book has become now, a symbol how early women's liberation started in England. Certainly—

ROBERT BROWN: Now in this—in these illustrations, there seems to be rather more than in *Withering Heights,* trappings of an era, because those were important images in the book itself, were they?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Mm, no.

ROBERT BROWN: The poor house, the orphanage, the furnishings—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, but there's obviously a human element—

ROBERT BROWN: Exactly. But I'm just saying that they're—sure.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I mean, here you have Mr. the principal of the orphanage, a clergyman, humiliating the little orphan girl, Jane Eyre, who's standing on a chair before him, and he tells her what a great sinner she is. And that her soul is going to be lost. And here, she is incarcerated in a room, because of some kind of a fictitious misdeed, and she has to deal again—it's a relationship between the human being and its environment—or her environment.

ROBERT BROWN: She's so small, and the room's furnishings are so big.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, not only big but also sinister.

ROBERT BROWN: There's a great deal of black.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And you found the line engraving, the wood engraving was a superb for conveying—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: To me it is, yeah. To me, it is *the* medium really—

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FRITZ EICHENBERG: —wood engraving has been with me now for half a century, and it—I can't say that I'm just trying to be loyal to a tradition. Really, every time I start a new woodblock, it's exciting to me. It hasn't lost its flavor over all these years, and that in itself, I think, is proof that it is my medium. I have made as much out of it as anyone can, I would say. People call me, now, the most famous wood engraver in our age or something—of the century, as some people have said.

ROBERT BROWN: What is there about it, do you think, that, as a medium can do—so let's take this picture of Reverend Brocklehurst and the small Jane Eyre. What is it that that medium of wood engraving can convey that you couldn't get from, say, copperplate engraving?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, in the first place—yeah. In the first place, it has a more dramatic impact because of the three-dimensional quality that you can get into almost any object that you do, whether it's the little bowls on the tables of the orphans having breakfast, or whether it is to show the older [ph] smokes that come from the burned porch. You can—you make wispy kind of skies, things which seem to dissolve on the woodblock, and you can make very solid forms. [00:02:07] As you can see here, in the case of Heathcliff under the tree, something that has such strength, because the graver is able to move around an object and form it in its three-dimensionality. I can make the wind blow the overcoat of Heathcliff, and you almost see it move. It's a medium which is liable to endow an object with an inner life, with an action, which you could not produce just with pen and ink on paper.

ROBERT BROWN: But in other hands, sometimes doesn't wood engraving produce a rather wooden—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: That's right. That's right.

ROBERT BROWN: —stilted quality?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: True. There's the great, there's the great temptation for me to make the utmost of a medium. If it serves me well, to endow it with a life of its own. Another wood engraver would lack the inspiration to do it. I get violently interested in the author, in the scene, in the time in which he lived, in the characters of the story that he's trying to tell. Unless I have this, it would just look as wooden as some other wood engravers like to work.

ROBERT BROWN: It's a very graphic medium. [00:04:01] The transition from, say, lights to dark, are almost abrupt, aren't they? They're affected, often, by striations, aren't they? By line—linear elements that stand for gray?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No. No.

ROBERT BROWN: Dark and light?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: That would be the opposite of what I would feel. I would say gradual more than abrupt. Abrupt, I would say, if you look at the woodcuts of the German Expressionists.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, certainly.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: They are done on soft wood, and they are done with gouges, and the forms are strong. The point and counterpoint, so to speak.

ROBERT BROWN: Sure. They haven't even attempted transitions, have they?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No. No. Whereas this medium tends me to make things soft when needed, hard when needed, flowing when needed, stationary when needed. I can swing with the tide, so to speak. And as far as faces are concerned, a touch, a touch of the graver, if I don't watch very carefully what I'm doing, each face—let's say here, in the Brocklehurst scene—each face expresses a different kind of mood or emotion. I can regulate this with great delicacy by slight, very slight, and sometimes very shallow touches of the graver on the boxwood that I'm using. Another question?

ROBERT BROWN: Well, yeah. I wanted to—also at that time, a somewhat related series of stories were your illustrations you began in 1944 of Edgar Allan Poe stories. [00:06:08]

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah. Well, these blocks were somewhat even smaller, five-by-three, roughly. Again, they are slightly enlarged in the book that you are looking at here now, designed by my wife, who loves to show my smaller work in a large one, so that you can see more easily what kind of effect my technique has. I think she's right.

ROBERT BROWN: And yet it's a different effect than you would get from the smaller, original format.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah. Yes. This is the original size on one page. The lines are very fine, you know. You have to look very carefully. Here, this is enlarged to about—what would you call this? Twice the size—

ROBERT BROWN: At least.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: —of the original, at least.

ROBERT BROWN: Some of the subtleness of transition is more apparent in the smaller one than in the larger one. The larger one so pulls apart the image, by enlargement.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I don't know. I don't know. I don't think, I don't think that—see, here, she has taken just a face here, and the arm—

ROBERT BROWN: It's even further enlarged on the card.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah. Of course, they look awful, but they have a kind of a poster effect, which seems to stop people.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, it certainly would. No, I'm not saying one way or another about the quality. I'm just saying the effect. It looks very obviously—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I know, but I mean, they're two schools of thought. Some people would object. [00:08:01] They would say, no, don't enlarge things. Show them the original size, because that's the way you intended them. But you also can say, okay, sometimes I show them original size, sometimes I like to blow them up slightly in order to get the whole impact of the story at a glance, which here you will sometimes, in the original size.

ROBERT BROWN: In the original size, they were all quite small. And you feel if—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Five-and-a-half by three-and-a-half.

ROBERT BROWN: And you feel that some of the impact, then, of the story was lost because they were so small?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, if you blow up anything, it's more affected. You know?

ROBERT BROWN: At the time, you were trying sort of imaginary imagery? I mean, in these Poe stories, is it—did you let your fantasy go much further than you would have, say, in the Brontë sisters?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, the stories are more fantastic. Sometimes, they are not too my—exactly to my taste, because some were written as potboilers. Some were written because he had this inclination, being a rather morbid nature, having a hard time to make ends meet, having an unhappy sex life, too, until he finally got married. He was almost finished with his life, which ended in the gutter in Baltimore, as everyone knows. In reading a collection of Poe's stories, which I had no—over which I had no control, the choice was the choice of the editor. [00:10:07]

ROBERT BROWN: Who was the person this time? Was it still the Literary Guild?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Random House. Random House. So I—my choice was a scene from each story, and I could choose whatever moment seemed to me significant within the story. So in the case of "The Assignation," for instance, I love Venice, and I used the chance here to show the Bridge of Sighs here, where the scene actually took place. But I could have chosen any other scene. This is, again, the great thrill, that I feel the vocational, professional, that an illustrator carries as a reward that you can pick and choose without anyone looking over your shoulder and saying, "What are they doing?" you know [ph].

ROBERT BROWN: This is almost always the case, you found?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: The editors were—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes, almost without exception. In fact, I can't think of any one case where a publisher rejected what I did.

ROBERT BROWN: It would have been very oppressive otherwise, wouldn't it?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: It would, yes, and I would resent it fiercely.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, certainly.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Here, for instance, there's "X-ing a Paragrab," a story of Edgar Allan Poe's, very short, and a rather insignificant story. What intrigued me here was, within the technique, the tremendous possibilities of the medium to show different textures. [00:12:08] There's a spittoon here made of brass. Looks like metal. This is the material—his trousers, his vest, his shirt. Soft folds, you know. The hair looks a little bit grows out of a scalp. There are whiffs of tobacco smoke, because he's smoking a cigar. There's a halo of light around the lamp. Countless little things. There's a piece of paper that looks like paper. There's wood that looks like wood. To do this kind of thing, to me, is a never-ending source of discovering things, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: So you just picked up the things described in this insubstantial story, and put a great many into one plate?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah. And I don't even remember what the story was. I haven't the faintest idea. It gave me a chance to do what I wanted to show at the time, and since the story was insignificant, it just evaporated.

ROBERT BROWN: How long would a plate—doing a block take?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: All the way through my work—and I have done so much, as you know—I would say an average of six days, including proofing and so on. Including making corrections.

ROBERT BROWN: You also—well, let's see—began doing a series of the Russian novels, which you'd been reading as a child. [00:14:00] Did that begin with Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*, 1949?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, it began with *Crime and Punishment*.

ROBERT BROWN: It was about the same time, '48 or '49?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No. *Crime and Punishment* was my first commission from the Limited Editions Club, 1937. That started me off on the Russian classics, because it was a very successful beginning. Publisher liked my work very much—George Macy, who died in 1956. A great innovator as far as book publishing is concerned.

ROBERT BROWN: In what ways?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, he was the first with the courage to start a limited editions book, let's say of an edition of 2,000 was his upper limit, which is not exactly limited. But the finest he could produce at a fairly reasonable price, illustrated by important artists from all over the world. He kept it going successfully until he died in '56. He started in 1929, at the bottom of the Depression. The Black Friday was the day when he started the Limited Editions Club, and he had great courage. I admired him for it. Of course, I didn't meet him then. I met him in 1936, when I was already here for three years, and I am forever grateful to him and his memory that he picked me out as one of his main illustrators and main contributors, because I did at least a dozen books for him in his lifetime, and then continuing to do books for his successor. [00:16:08]

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like as a personality?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Very authoritarian, dictatorial man. He called the shots, no doubt about it. He was a very well-read person. Columbia University was his alma mater. There wasn't a thing in literature that you couldn't discuss with him. That gave me great pleasure. He could read Latin, and translate from Latin, and so on. This type of publisher doesn't exist anymore, I'm afraid. So after my successful start with *Crime and Punishment*, which I had also illustrated as a student, with lithographs—

ROBERT BROWN: In Germany—in [inaudible] right.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: In Germany. Whenever there was another Russian coming up, he called me in. I had a chance to do *The Idiot* by Dostoevsky.

ROBERT BROWN: When did you do that? Is that shown here?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes, I have some here. I did—let's see, after *Crime and Punishment*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Tragedy of Richard III*, *Fathers and Sons* by Turgenev. All four with George Macy. *Eugene Onegin* by Pushkin. Then *The Brothers Karamazov* in 1949. That was my major work in lithography, which I also enjoyed very much. [00:18:00] It's my second most favorite medium.

ROBERT BROWN: That was your original, more or less, your early medium, too, right?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you—could we look at those, some of those examples of that, those lithographic illustrations?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah. In this book, I have very few, because this book is called *The Wood and the Graver*.

ROBERT BROWN: What is the advantage, do you think, by and large, of the wood engraving over lithography? Or is that not the reason that you—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, in the first place, you can take your little woodblock with you, and you can work in any corner of your house, or on a desert island, anywhere, which you cannot with a lithographic, because the stone weighs a lot. You need someone to etch it. You need someone to print it. With the wood engraver—with a woodblock, I am completely independent, and I am in complete control of the thing from beginning to end.

ROBERT BROWN: But with lithography, you never attempted to etch the stone yourself, or—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, you could, but you still—you need help. It's a difficult medium.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you feel it lent itself well to your illustrations of *The Brothers Karamazov*?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, because the way I did it, I began to work from a darkened woodblock—lithographic stone, excuse me. I covered the lithographic stone with tusche, lithographic tusche, and then, as out of the dark, I created the image, as I do here in the other technique of mine.

ROBERT BROWN: Wood engraving.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: But here—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: The same scene. [00:20:00]

ROBERT BROWN: So it's sort of an extraction of the—removal of the dark to—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah. Right. Well, it's, in a way, the same thing here, except here, I work with an engraving tool. Here, I work with a razor blade and etching needles to get these fine lines. It's a reduction method, really. You work on a dark surface into the light. You do that also in your wood engraving, because you have a dark surface, and you have a line you engrave, and it shows up white. They are two related approaches to two very different media.

ROBERT BROWN: How do you characterize the difference, as far as your working with them is concerned?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I still like the engraving better than the lithograph.

ROBERT BROWN: What is, to you, personally, the difference, that—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: The difference is that, here, as I said before, I control the thing from beginning to end. Here, I have to work with a printer, and sometimes—George Miller was a great man, great printer. He's died about 15 years ago. He was able to do 50 of these, of the 53 which I did, nearly perfect, as far as the acid, the biting, and the printing were concerned. He lost three. That couldn't happen to me with a woodblock, you know. I don't lose any. I control this too well. In his case, he may have used a little too much ink, and the thing closed up completely. He inked a few of these stones, and I saw them, before my eye, disappear completely. [00:22:04] Completely dark [ph], and he could never bring them up again. But the ratio of 53 to—of 50 to 3 is still a good ratio, and I don't blame him for it, because it's a difficult medium.

ROBERT BROWN: But there is, to get back—the medium of lithography has that soft quality to it that permits that kind of—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: That's right, it is—

ROBERT BROWN: Which wood engraving does not.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: It is softer, and maybe that's why I like it less, because I like the strength of the line. I like the contrast between black and white. Here, there's a kind of an almost mystical, dream-like atmosphere in it, almost like a phantom.

ROBERT BROWN: In the lithograph?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: In the lithograph. Christ leaving the cell where he has been incarcerated by the Grand Inquisitor in this great story in *The Brothers Karamazov*. For this kind of thing, of course, the medium is almost ideal, because it shows the presence of Christ. His face that stays with the inquisitor. At the same time, you see

him released, walking up the stairs, out of the dungeon.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, they're all one here, whereas in the wood engraving version, there's almost three parts, aren't there?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: That's right, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Even though, compositionally, they overlap and they're interwoven, in effect, you're looking at—your eye is bouncing through it a little bit more. It's a little more separated, isn't it? And yet it has a strength of structure that is—well, this, as you said, is dream-like, a lithograph. Any strong skeleton to it. [00:24:00]

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Of course, this medium, the wood engraving medium, requires more discipline. I have to control every little line. Here, I can take some liberties. I can go over it with a razor blade to produce a gray here. I can go in with an etching needle. It's a much easier medium to handle than this. Although this is a larger stone, and this is a fairly small block, five-and-three-quarters by three-and-three-quarters. It's a tiny block, really. But I'm able to get in all the elements that I need, that I have in here.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, you did quite a change from this rather serious illustration when you began doing some children's book illustration, perhaps the best known of which is, in 1952, the *Ape in a Cape*.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: *Ape in a Cape*.

ROBERT BROWN: How did you come up with that for a title, and what is the subject?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: And *Dancing in the Moon*. Yeah. My son, who was then five years old, just entering school, I believe, and I was working—I had just finished the *Brothers Karamazov*, and I wanted to have some kind of relief from the very heavy burden of living with the Karamazovs for 13 months, which it took to finish the book, with 50-odd lithographs. So I began to work in the monotype medium, which is—shall I describe it? [00:26:05]

ROBERT BROWN: Sure, and particularly, as you use it—used it.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: The monotype, as the name indicates, it's a one-shot proposition. You can paint on a piece of glass with printing ink, or with oil paint, or even with gouache, and put a piece of paper on top of it, and rub it, rub the back, and you come up with an image. It's a rather primitive technique. But it allows you tremendous freedom, and you can work with great speed. You can use any color you want, and it somehow frees you of the necessity of discipline, which I have to observe in my [inaudible].

ROBERT BROWN: And then, from those pullings of the monotype, then the publisher took it and—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, it's not that easy. A friend of mine—I did a number of animals, because I like to do animals anyhow. A publisher friend of mine, Margaret Mackleberry [ph], who was then children's book editor of Harcourt Brace, she came in and she said, "Oh, you work in color. How beautiful. Everyone wants me to work in color, because I have done so much black-and-white. What is this?" I said, "It's a series of animals." She said, "Let's do a book together." I said, "What kind of book?" "Let's do an ABC." So I started with an ape, and I ended with a zoo, Z for zoo, because there is no animal that I could think of that starts with a Z. [00:28:00] I did the 24 letters of the alphabet—how many there are. I had tremendous amount of fun doing it, and my son watched me while I was doing it, because it is a technique very much like finger painting, as they do in kindergarten. You can make the design into the paint by using a stick, or using your thumb or your fingers, or any kind of brush or pointed object. So when I was finished with these 24, she accepted it as a children's book, and I wanted a very simple—was for the smallest children, just learning how to read. I made the verses to go with it. This little thing here is the frontispiece, or the dedication page, to Timmy—

ROBERT BROWN: Your son.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: —and his friends. My son.

ROBERT BROWN: And his friends, the animals. The fox and the hare.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes. Yes, they appear also in the book. The book became a tremendous success right off the bat.

ROBERT BROWN: This is greatly simplified imagery compared to the adult things that I've seen.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, it's for children.

ROBERT BROWN: For children. Did you look at other children's illustrators' works?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Oh, yes, I did.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you get an idea talking with—what was her name? Margaret—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Margaret Mackleberry.

ROBERT BROWN: To get an idea of what mode of—what kinds of forms, what kinds of expressions, seemed to appeal to children?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Not so much, because I was very familiar with children's books. First place, my children—I have a daughter, who was a little older than my son at the time. [00:30:04] As you know, from your own experience, you have to know about children's books, because you buy them for your children, usually. In this case, we thought of making this into a book at a reasonable price. Let's say $2.95 was then the upper limit for a book. She said, "If I reproduce these in full color, I can't—I would have to double the price. I can't do that. Camera work and so on is too expensive." So she said, "Would you do the color separations?" So I did, for these 24 pages, I did—there were three colors each, three times 24, color separations, in black on acetate. It's a kind of lithographic technique, and they look like color lithographs, actually, the book—books. Well, after I did the first, came out, it was a runner-up to the Caldecott Medal, and was successful in the beginning.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this the first time you'd had that, uh—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah. I had done a lot of children's books before, which I haven't shown you, nor talked about, because they're insignificant.

ROBERT BROWN: By the way, do these medals and prizes mean a great deal to an illustrator?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: For the publisher, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: The publisher, I know they do. They put them in their ads.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, it doesn't make any difference to me, really. I like the publisher to be happy, and the Caldecott Medal helps, you know. [00:32:00]

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you like them to be happy?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, first place, she's an old friend of mine, and her success is my success, and vice versa. But as I got awards and so on, I put them away somewhere—don't even know where they are—medals and such things, with my name on it.

ROBERT BROWN: But that's sort of recognition—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No. I have to like my work. That's the main thing. This is not an important book at all, but a very successful one. This was published in '52, and it's still in print, which is an indication that has been accepted almost as a classic. I did the follow-up, *Dancing in the Moon*, for children who want to learn numbers, from one to 24.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you come up with the idea for that story?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: What is the idea of the story, *Dancing in the Moon*?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Raccoon dancing in the moon. Verse, you know. One raccoon dancing in the moon. Then two animals, and three animals, up to 24 animals. I can't reconstruct this without taking out the book, which I have downstairs. In other words, from a success point of view, financial success, these were the most successful books I've ever done, because they're still in print, and I get a royalty, because I'm the author and illustrator.

ROBERT BROWN: Did this change your whole way of living, the success of this book?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, no, no.

ROBERT BROWN: You were already doing—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Not that much money.

ROBERT BROWN: Prospering a bit, were you? You were already—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, no. [00:34:00] I have never really prospered in the common sense of the word,

because I don't care enough for money. If I have enough to live on, it was always good enough for me.

ROBERT BROWN: The same time, about that same time that you did *Dancing in the Moon*, 1955, on your own, you did a number of wood engravings of stories from the Old Testament. These were just done for yourself?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, it was a year of no commissions, and this is the reason why I did it. I wanted to do something worthwhile, not necessarily something that a publisher would be interested in. I thought if I could illustrate the Bible, I could do 10 a year, and then see how they shape up. I had ordered some very beautiful boxwood, which you can't get anymore. It was absolutely flawless.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean very—it doesn't exist? This was a—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: They don't make this kind of wood anymore. They don't grow this kind of wood anymore. They don't take care of this kind of wood anymore. I mean, it still grows, but it has to be processed.

ROBERT BROWN: Is boxwood—was it deliberately cultivated for—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: It used to be, when boxwood was used in great quantities by all the popular magazines, and the Sears Roebuck catalogs, *Scribner's* weekly, *Leslie's Weekly*, before lithography came in. [00:36:06]

ROBERT BROWN: There were cultivated stands of boxwood, then.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, in Turkey, mostly. It was a big export article for tropical countries. These blocks were 12x6 in size, more or less accidental, because I'd ordered 10 blocks, 12x12, and I cut them in half. I thought it would make a good format. I began with a creation here.

ROBERT BROWN: Great deal of detail in this, isn't there?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I submitted this format because I was thinking of a—in the manner of medieval illustration, to show the succession of events as kind of a moving strip. You see all the stages of the seven days.

ROBERT BROWN: And registers from top to bottom.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Right, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: As in medieval work.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah. Here, for instance, the Garden of Eden, you have the angel with a flaming sword, you have the snake, you have Adam contemplating the apple. You have Eve, aware of the sin she has committed.

ROBERT BROWN: You have, running right up the middle of this particular one, this very patterned trunk, palm tree trunk. Why that strong patterning right there in the middle? Why the prominence?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, as I would pull the things together, there are so many details here that I need something simple.

ROBERT BROWN: And larger, right. [00:38:01]

FRITZ EICHENBERG: And black wouldn't have done it. It has to come forward. I was aware of the theatrical, melodramatical [ph] quality of a woodblock, if you handled it properly. A stage set for this event. So I did 10 of these, which are not all shown in this book. Here again, you see here Jonah, in the ship, being thrown overboard by his shipmates to pacify the Lord. Being swallowed by the whale, being spit out, and here sitting under the tree, arguing with the Lord about his fate.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you feel these were successful? Were you glad you did them?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes, I'm glad I did them. See, these are, for instance, things which we used again and again and again, for various publications. I did a little booklet for Pendle Hill, the Quaker school, called *Art and Faith*, and I used these to illustrate that pamphlet. A Catholic worker used it. In fact, the whole series are in the Wadsworth Collection in the National Gallery. They are in the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, through friends of mine who saw them—wanted them and saw them. They are in the Vatican Library. So they cut across—again, as I've said before, interdenominational. [00:39:59]

ROBERT BROWN: This was your first extensive sort of—doing something on your own, without a commission lined up?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: More or less, yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: So it was, in a way, sort of a watershed in your career? Except that you do then, fairly soon—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, I went back—

ROBERT BROWN: —began to get commissions again?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Right, yeah, true.

ROBERT BROWN: You've mentioned, in the '60s, among other things, a return to illustrating a Russian novel, Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, in 1963. That was—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I did *The Idiot* before.

ROBERT BROWN: *The Idiot*. Are those both ones that you—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, in '56.

ROBERT BROWN: You'd singled out *Resurrection*, though, as one that you felt was a high point.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: To me, more satisfactory than *The Idiot*, yeah, although *The Idiot* is a great book.

ROBERT BROWN: Can we compare your illustrations for the two of them? If you don't have them here, maybe you've got them someplace. Perhaps we could look at the books themselves.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, I have them downstairs, I suppose. Well, *Resurrection* turned out to be a well-made book, a well-printed book, which also makes a difference. Sometimes you're in the hands of a poor printer, who is able to mess up your work to an incredible degree, and you have absolutely no control over that, because it's commissioned by the publisher. There's nothing you can do about it. *Resurrection* was beautifully printed, and done by a friend of mine, Joseph Blumenthal, at the Spiral Press. It makes all the difference. [00:42:04] Now, here, again, see, a very complicated challenge that comes to you. There's a book which is based on an actual police blotter case. A prostitute, a former servant, in an aristocrat's house, seduced by the young aristocrat. Chased out, and then, from step to step, she falls into the clutches of prostitution. She's accused of murder, although she's innocent, and she is sentenced to go to Siberia. The redemption comes because the man who seduced her accompanies her and gives up his life and so on. The story, to me, is more gripping and more exciting, more significant, than *The Idiot*, although *The Idiot* is a great book. I don't want to—

ROBERT BROWN: This is very good. *The Resurrection* can be illustrated quite graphically, can't it, then? Here's the woman in the dock, in the courtroom, and you can see the two with her are very degraded people. Here, they're rather blank, but rather—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: The policemen.

ROBERT BROWN: The policemen are somewhat pompous, at least their uniforms. You use this low angle to rake across, with the woman in the middle. Then the severity, sort of restrictedness, of the architecture.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: See, here, for instance, the concentration it takes to bring out this face exactly as you want it. A little more white on her upper eyelid, and the whole thing would be spoiled. [00:44:01] You know? So you have to work with tremendous concentration. It's the same here. Every little line has to be controlled to an infinitesimal degree. It cannot be seen with your naked eye what you're doing here, for instance, and this is a large one. It's the same here. This is a—the purity of a girl's face here. Somehow, this old woman, worn down by hard labor, she's in the prison cell for some offense. Here, mother pregnant, expecting a child, and here, another one nursing. The third one brings her child right into the prison cell. Here, a kind of a tough woman who is able to deal with the situation, and one who, here, breaks down. It's a whole panorama of human suffering in a situation which is superbly described by Tolstoy.

ROBERT BROWN: And then the icon hovering overhead.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: And not simply as furnishings, but as almost an apparition.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Right, yeah. You see, this was done—

ROBERT BROWN: 1963?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: 1963. The *Friends Journal*, which is a Quaker paper, called me up the other day and said could they use this on their cover? Because they have a story inside about women's prisons. I said, "Yes, you

can." They do a very good job in reproducing and printing it. I can show it to you. It just came out a week ago. So the things are kind of proliferating. [00:46:00] Whatever I do, if it's good enough, it lasts, and it's picked up here and there without my doing anything about it.

ROBERT BROWN: You like this? You like your work to be—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I do.

ROBERT BROWN: —not only published once, but broadcast, practically?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, right. The wider the distribution, the happier it makes me.

ROBERT BROWN: You seldom, then, get much joy in simply making art that will be simply for your own enjoyment, to be kept and savored only by you?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No. My mind doesn't run that way.

ROBERT BROWN: You're not that possessive?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, no. I have a tremendous feeling for—a capacity for compassion, let's say. If I would work just for myself, I think I would shrivel up. It's not, it's not enough. We belong to a community of people. We belong to a herd of some sort. We can't exist alone. I think that I stumbled, more or less, into this from a very early stage on, and stayed with it, shows me I must have been on the right track. It's dictated not because of my cerebral [ph] capacities, but by my genes, or whatever power directs our lives.

ROBERT BROWN: If you were to look back at your youth and being in the lithography shop and all, you would have had no inkling that this would eventually be a prime direction in your whole life, would it?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, I think as early as I can remember in my school days, of course I was unhappy. [00:48:07] That was all. I was displaced—misplaced and displaced in the school, which did not take care of any emotional need that a child would have. I started to live, when I became an apprentice, in this lithographic shop. Then the war had—the First World War had ended, and one began to hope that a new world would be better than the one that was behind us. We were all half-starved and so on, but I was very happy in those days, because I felt that now I could begin to live as a human being, and be active in—through my work, to show my concern with life and my fellow men. The earliest lithographs which I did, which I showed in Newport last week, all have kind of a social concern. One shows a pimp in the street. One shows a line of flower vendors in the street. It's always the street, you know. One shows workers half-starved, taking their lunch in front of a building just being erected after the war. Everything I did, without being very conscious of it, had some kind of a direction towards social significance or social meaning. [00:50:01]

ROBERT BROWN: One other I wanted to bring up, or ask you about, you illustrated Dylan Thomas's *Child's Christmas in Wales*. When was—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: That, of course, was a long way from Dostoevsky.

ROBERT BROWN: Certainly is. Children's book, and yet not a children's books. It's both a children and an adult's tale, isn't it?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah. It's one of his most popular—Dylan Thomas's most—one of his most popular books, no doubt. But it's really a lightweight book. When you read the biography of his life, you realize he was not so far away from Dostoevsky as we like to think. He was a haunted man. He was, of course, drowning all his problems in alcohol, and he died of it deliberately.

ROBERT BROWN: But he wrote a tale like this, which is rather amusing and nostalgic, and poking fun. And you do pick this out, don't you? The uncles sleeping after the Christmas meal, the aunts.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: The aunts, and here the little Dylan.

ROBERT BROWN: And the little darling. Did you intend this for children? It's rather dark, isn't it? Somewhat—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, it's—

ROBERT BROWN: There's almost a brooding quality to it, isn't there, because of its—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, Wales, the way he describes it—Swansea, where he grew up, was a grim life. He was always thrown back and forth between the glamorous life of London and company to drink, and Swansea. [00:52:06] He always wanted to go back to Swansea, and when he was there, he always wanted to go back to

London. This is more or less a symbolic thing for Dylan Thomas, that he could not find his place in life, and he finally decided the best thing is alcohol, beer and ale and stronger things, and maybe that will finish him, he must have thought. He was a thinking person.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you commissioned to do this?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, I was commissioned by James Laughlin, the head of New Directions, who is a great man in the poetry field. In fact, he was the one who first published Dylan Thomas in this country, and Ezra Pound, and Ferlinghetti, and the whole lot of the much neglected poets. Laughlin, I don't think, supported him too well financially. I don't think he got much—that Dylan Thomas got much out of his American connection. So he began to lecture, and he came over to this country. Laughlin tried to arrange some—Gene Barrow [ph] was also, I discovered, one who worked with Dylan Thomas.

ROBERT BROWN: Gene?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Gene Barrow. The Brooklyn Museum. I don't know whether you know it.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you meet Thomas at all?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, no. He was, he was dead by the time I heard about him. [00:54:01] I did record covers for Caedmon. You know Caedmon Records? That is the same woman who's now doing my *Endangered Species*. She was then one of the founders of Caedmon. Her first success—

ROBERT BROWN: What is her name?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Barbara Holdridge. Her first contact with Dylan Thomas came when she was fresh out of Smith College. She had a thousand dollars, and a girlfriend who decided, with her, to publish records of literary importance. They heard Dylan Thomas speak, they sent in their calling card. They asked him would he mind if they take over his—the rights for America, for recording it, and he [inaudible] and so on. Two attractive young girls. [Laughs.] He was very susceptible. Anyhow, he said, "Sure, why not?" And that was the foundation, actually, of Caedmon Records. He did this beautiful record of this book, *Child's Christmas in Wales*, which Caedmon did. The most beautiful voice you can—

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, yes. Did you try to convey some of that in your illustrations to it?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah. I played the record, I don't know—

ROBERT BROWN: Many times. Over the years, are there several fellow illustrators that you've been pretty close to? You mentioned, some time ago, Theodore—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: —Rosencrofzky [ph]. Yeah, he was a man I deeply miss, very much so. [00:56:01] I had seen his books at Westerman's [ph], which was a bookstore—you probably don't remember—in New York. They were published by [inaudible] in Paris. They were simple, paper-bound books. *The Life of a Seal*, *The Life of a Squirrel*, *The Life of a Bear*. I still have those. Very inexpensive little books, lithographed in color.

ROBERT BROWN: Were these books for children?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: For children, yeah. Then he was one step ahead of the Vichy police and Hitler at the time.

ROBERT BROWN: Why, was he non-political?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I don't really know. He was born in Russia. His father was principal of a school in Riva [ph], in Lithuania. The son wanted to be an artist from the very beginning. He went to Warsaw. He worked there for the theater. He did theater sets, and his first sketches. He was a marvelous draftsman. Fantastic. Then he was in the Russian White Army. He was a lieutenant in the White Army, and they were evacuated after the Crimean broke down and the Bolsheviks began to occupy Southern Russia. He went to Turkey, from Turkey to Berlin, from Berlin to Paris, where he stayed for quite a while, until 1939, and things began to get hot. He just, by the last trip, I think, made it to New York. [00:58:04] He had met, through [inaudible] a representative of an American publisher—I think it was Simon & Schuster—who said, "If you come over, we'll give you work." I heard about him. I was active in the American Institute of Graphic Arts. I was on the board of directors at the time.

ROBERT BROWN: That was what? Was that an organization among illustrators?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, among printing industry, designers, and authors. Always the last to be mentioned. I was very active in arranging exhibitions and so on. I thought, when I heard he was coming, first, I wanted to meet him. Second, I want to help him. I arranged an exhibition at the institute, which had the headquarters in the Architectural League on 41st Street, Park Avenue at the time. Of course, he wanted to meet me, and I met

him in his—he lived with a friend of his. He had absolutely no money, not a penny. He received me with bread and salt, in the Russian fashion, which touched me very much, and we became friends almost instantly. Then his wife and child came away. Had a daughter, three years old or so—a little older—and Nina, his wife. We became very close friends. I saw him practically every week. He was very much attached to me, as I was attached to him. Wherever I went, he went. [01:00:00] When I moved to Tuckahoe, in Westchester, he moved to Bronxville, bought himself a little house. When he went on vacation to Florida, we had to come to Florida. When he went to Maine in the summer, we had to come to Maine. As his guests, he was the most generous person you could imagine. He made an awful lot of money for the Golden Books, and he became very popular in this country, Rosencrofzky. He got the Caldecott Medal, of course, and every child knew his books. But as fast as money came in, it went out. He always had a lot of dependents, and he was so generous. He liked to live high, if he could, and low if he had to, too. Fantastic man. Wonderful guy, really wonderful.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think your close friendship with him perhaps helped in your illustrations of Russian novels?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, no, no, no. He was the exact opposite of a tragic character. He was like a chipmunk. People always said that he reminded them of a chipmunk. He was always in motion, and extremely chivalrous towards women. Always well-behaved, and always gay and strumming the balalaika. He had a balalaika. Liked to drink vodka. And was so hospitable and so generous that he always had a coterie of people, Russian emigres, who couldn't make enough money to support themselves. [01:02:00] He always doled out whatever he had. Marvelous person. Then, at the age of 80 or so, he, all of a sudden, died. I miss him. Unique person. There.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: This is a third interview with Fritz Eichenberg, on January 22, 1980. Perhaps we can continue by talking of some of your recent and current work for publication or otherwise. Was it 1976 or ['7]7, published the more or less autobiographical *Wood and the Graver*? What was the reason for that? Was it your idea? Was it some publisher's?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: It's usually a mixture of both. I was then temporarily living in New York for a few days, and Clarkson Potter, who was responsible, actually, for the publication of *The Wood and the Graver*, came into my apartment, and he looked at some of the work, and he said he had known it for many years, and he always wanted to do a book with me. That's how it started. And we liked each other, which is always very important. I don't like to deal with heads of corporations, or chairmen of boards. It doesn't work. This is a very intellectual and very personal relationship that I'm trying to establish with the people with whom I work.

ROBERT BROWN: And if you don't have that, what?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: If I don't have that, it becomes an impersonal commission, so to speak. [01:04:00] Somebody asks me to write something about something, or do a wood engraving on something, it doesn't work. It has to respond to something which I want to express first. If that goes with a publisher or the person who commissions me, this is fine. If it becomes impersonal, it never succeeds, and I produce something which is, to me, worthless. In this case, Clarkson Potter came in. He's a very personable guy of about, I would say, at the time, he was 45 or so. He had established his own publishing house under the name of Clarkson N. Potter Incorporated. When he came in and looked at some of our work and remembered something I had done, he said, "Anything you do, I want to publish. Anything you haven't published yet, I would like to publish." It was more than he could fulfill, I would say. But I was somewhat turned on by his enthusiasm.

ROBERT BROWN: Had you ever experienced a publisher as captivated as he seems to have been by your work?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes, it happens. It happens. I create a kind of—very often, a kind of euphoria in people. They see my work, which is very different from other artists' work, because it has a message. The message, if I may use that word, comes from the heart. It comes from my past experiences. I'm an ardent mediator. I try to stand between two warring parties, so to speak, and I try, in my work, to express the fact that mankind has to get along with each other, whatever species there are, whatever color skin they have, whatever denomination they belong to. [01:06:12] I want to be in the middle, and I want to spread the good word that it is possible, as it is the peaceable kingdom—Isaiah 11, you know—that people get along with each other as animals normally do. I've read up on this, and I've discovered that, among the thousands of species that exist, there are only six among the thousands which are trying to destroy their own kind. That's a very small percentage. In human life, this is taken for granted, you know. One is at war with the other. If you—the German proverb [inaudible]. Very famous. It means, if you don't want to be my brother, I hit you over the head. I crush your skull. This is a typical German proverb, you know, because they are not very conciliatory. The reason why I, for instance, supported the Fellowship of Reconciliation, reconciliation, to me, is a very important thing, and if I have any purpose in life, I try to express it in my work, in those terms, without forcing it down people's throats. The last thing I did for the Fellowship of Reconciliation, that's the print I'm going to give you, and I sent out to 200 of my friends, and I have

done this since 1923, which is a long time ago. [01:08:03] An original print, which expresses the sum total of my experiences in life in general, and in that one past year in particular. That I did for the Fellowship of Reconciliation as a fundraiser, so to speak. They have it on their international magazine. They had it for Christmas. I printed an edition for them, and in order to raise money, I asked people then to send in the original signed print of Fritz Eichenberg, let them pay you $50 for it, and you have some income from it.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this the intention when you did this book, *The Wood and the Graver*?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: When I did *The Wood and the Graver*, I tried—I followed Clarkson Potter, up to a point, by saying, all right, let's start with one book which is on my mind. It's a monograph of some sort, but it's also my personal testimony to what I believe in. In other words, I would start, in my student days, to prove that I haven't changed much, which is normally a great advantage, you know, that you haven't changed much, but I can't help it. This is my conviction, and I have to follow it. As a student, the first book I illustrated when I was still, let's say, in the second year of the Academy of Graphic Arts in Leipzig, was *Till Eulenspiegel*. I started *The Wood and the Graver* with that, to show that, in 1921, or whenever I did it, the book was published, by a miracle, really, during the highest time of Depression, when we had nothing to eat, and hardly anything to drink either. [01:10:17]

ROBERT BROWN: But your intention in illustrating that book—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Was to pick a character. Till Eulenspiegel was the Robin Hood of the time, when Holland was invaded by Spain, about 500 years ago. De Coster, Charles De Coster, a Flemish writer, wrote a beautiful novel, which I am still in love with, called *Thyl Ulenspiegel*, in which he more or less fictionalized the life of a man who had a fantastic sense of humor, and is known for his merry pranks to every child, and every grownup, too. *Thyl Ulenspiegel* means something to you, doesn't it? As a funny man, who pulled all kinds of funny tricks on people. But at heart, he was really a great revolutionary, because if he could, he would take from the poor—he would take—excuse me. He'd take from the rich and give to the poor. In his pranks, there's always—if you read the unadulterated Charles De Coster novel, there's always a purpose in it, in his jokes, even, in his pranks, to somehow establish equality in a society which was at war. In that case, between Holland and Spain. [01:12:02] The Duke of Alba had invaded, as you may remember, Spain, and the Dutch were up in arms, and Thyl Ulenspiegel was a Dutchman. What he did was he became a kind of guerrilla fighter, kind of an artisan, and sometimes lived by his wits. The wits—he was always close to the gallows. By his wits, he defeated the Spaniards, in a way. He saw, finally, the independence, or semi-independence, of Holland. England was interested in Holland, too, you know. But anyhow, he got—he died with a feeling—and he died a very obscure death—that he had contributed to the freedom of his beloved country, which was Holland at the time.

ROBERT BROWN: This same victory over violence runs through the things you illustrated through your career.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: It does, and that I didn't know at the time. I just—

ROBERT BROWN: As you laid all these things out for *Wood and the Graver*, this became a thread that—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: That became the—what would you call it?—the lynchpin or something for the book. I wanted—

ROBERT BROWN: So you selected deliberately things that you felt particularly well illustrated—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes. It somehow set the tone for what I, more or less, unconsciously, or subconsciously, did all my life, that whenever I picked or got an assignment for a book, I turned down quite many, even if I couldn't afford to turn things down. I wanted to express things which were part of my life, really. [01:14:06] I can't help it. That's the way I was born, apparently. I was born [inaudible] let's say. I didn't want to accept the status quo, and Thyl Ulenspiegel—the fact that I picked this up when I was a student, and could start my book *Wood and the Graver* with it, would establish the fact that I have not given up my conviction.

ROBERT BROWN: Did your parents encourage you in this questioning attitude?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: My father was dead. He died in 1916, during the war, of lack of nourishment.

ROBERT BROWN: But as a young boy, were you encouraged to question things?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No.

ROBERT BROWN: It was a very conventional upbringing?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: A very conventional upbringing. My mother was a marvelous woman. I adore her. In my memory, she was—I think of her every day. I can't help it. She died at the age of 86, in 19—must have been 1956 or around that time. She lived with me then, in Westchester here. She had never tried to have an influence on me in directing me in my first steps as far as professional life is concerned. She accepted me the way I was.

We were brought up very strictly as far as behavior was concerned. Always be nice to people. Always be polite to people. Always be human. Have a sense of humor. Help people as much as you can. Live a kind of a stringent life as far as economics are concerned. Don't show off. If you have any money, don't use it for yourself. Try to do something constructive with it, for other people. [01:16:04] And don't pay too much attention to physical comfort, because we lived through the First World War. I was a kid then. We were starved. There's no doubt about it. There was a blockade going on. As the war went on towards 1918, of course there was hardly anything you could eat that wasn't made of sawdust or some such thing. Turnips was the only thing you could get. You couldn't get meat. You couldn't get sugar. You couldn't get fat. You could get frozen potatoes, because they were all stacked along the way [inaudible] and during the winter, they all froze. So we got this dreadful kind of sweet potato, you got the dreadful turnip, and you survived. There were air raids on Cologne, because Cologne was an important junction of railroad traffic that went into France. The [inaudible] was about the only thing left standing. But that was—I mean, that came later. During that First World War, the bombing was, let's say, more or less humane.

ROBERT BROWN: *The Wood and the Graver*—what was the reaction you got to that?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, I developed, in the book, from book to book that I illustrated, from work to work which I illustrated. It has a section—the books I got in consecutive years when I came to this country. I started practically after showing what I did in 1923, or whenever it was. [01:18:04] I did *Crime and Punishment* while I was still a student. That also has significance. Why would I do Dostoevsky? Dostoevsky responds very much to my own feelings. I feel a kinship with Dostoevsky. I did *Crime and Punishment*. The starving student who has rebellious ideas, and takes the law into his own hands, and takes the consequences for it. Redemption comes in the end. He goes into exile, and he's saved by a former prostitute, and so on. *Crime and Punishment*, everyone knows. That was a book I illustrated as a student. The first book I illustrated for the Limited Editions Club with George Macy, in 1937. Also, that became, later on—it's all hindsight. While I did these things, I wasn't that conscious of it. I didn't do that with a purpose. I did it out of compulsion, and out of conviction, as you want to call it. The fact that the publisher here, without seeing what I had done before, was interested in having me do *Crime and Punishment* again, somehow set me on a course of some kind. That was George Macy, who had a great influence on my work, because he somehow—although he was a hard man to deal with.

ROBERT BROWN: Really?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Most—hmm?

ROBERT BROWN: In what way was he—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: He was an autocrat. [01:20:00] I normally don't get along with autocrats, because maybe I have something of that in myself. We liked each other very much. So I got one commission after another, and each commission he gave me, I liked. Or I said I don't, and—you know, had the choice. He built up the Limited Editions Club this way, and the Heritage Press, and I did a dozen or so books for him, and it established my reputation here. In *The Wood and the Graver*, I tried to follow this through. In other words, I showed that each book had a reason to be born, or to come into existence. It may sound rather high-flown, but I discovered, later on, there was a connection. For instance, if I did, let's say, Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*, the war had started in—or Hitler had invaded Russia. Or if I did *War and Peace*, we were involved with Russia as allies. It was intended at the time, but it so happened that the book followed these lines, almost consistently, to the present time, when—I forgot what the last book in the—I could look that up.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. But anyone can find that. So you were very pleased, in the end, that this thread had emerged that you'd seen.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah. Some kind of a consistent pattern emerged. [01:22:00]

ROBERT BROWN: What was the reaction on the part of the public, or at least—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, every—my wife designed the book.

ROBERT BROWN: She's a designer?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: She's a professional designer.

ROBERT BROWN: Of books in particular?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, of—no, not only of books. That was really a sideline of hers, but she did extremely well. She did the posters, mostly, and such things. But she did the books. She's a very conscientious worker. Part of the success is, no doubt, due to the fact that it gives you a feeling of a job well done. She designed the jacket, just an enlargement of one of my Edgar Allan Poe illustrations, and she put in the lettering just in the right spot.

In the inside, some of the drawings are enlarged, so you can watch the technique better. Sometimes I show a drawing to show how this is being done. But most of them are the actual prints. I have a section of separate prints I did also, because in between, I did these separate prints. I also have a short description of my trips to the Soviet Union for the State Department, or to Southeast Asia. Just in passing I mention it, because there's a hiatus—is that the word—in my work. Let's say for a half a year, I didn't do anything, because I published a book practically every year of my life. In this case, where people would say, what did he do in, let's say, 1963? [01:24:03] Well, I went to Russia with a team of Americans for the American Graphic Arts show in [inaudible]. That was a major interruption. I went to Southeast Asia for the Rockefeller III Fund. That took me three months of traveling. It took me another three months of getting reports ready, and making for the exchange of artists whom I met in Calcutta, or in Ceylon, wherever. It was a major job, and I enjoyed it tremendously, because I met hundreds of Asian artists, or Russian artists in Russia, and I was able to make them work in our workshop, Pratt Graphic Center. Not as an exchange, because we rarely sent our things. What should we do, send out a [inaudible] to Ceylon, where they don't have a workshop? But that I was able to persuade the Rockefeller III Fund—Porter McCray was then director—to spend thousands of dollars on getting equipment to Bandung, to the Institute of Technology, where they have a good art department, but have none of the wherewithal that we have. They don't have the paper, they don't have the ink, they don't have the presses and so on. I was able, in my reports, to get things going. To me, this was just as important as illustrating.

ROBERT BROWN: And this you did bring up, to some extent, in the book?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah. Yeah, in passing. [01:26:00]

ROBERT BROWN: Did the book, then, have—did you get quite a lot of reaction to it after this had come out?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, it had a wonderful reception. I really have never asked the publisher how many copies she printed, whether it's getting to be out of print, which is possible. I have given it to lots of institutions and friends.

ROBERT BROWN: Following that, did you then have another project right ready to do, or are those the ones you're still working on today?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, I always have too many.

ROBERT BROWN: You mentioned that you're working on, now, *The Dance of Death*, the [inaudible] which I think we've talked about a little bit, and a couple of others as well. Were these the things, then, you had—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: One of my problems is that I have always too many projects that I am planning to do. Once I got my teeth in them, I can't let go, and so it means I have to work from morning to night, which I actually do. And I work during my so-called vacation in Nantucket, same way. I've done this for the past half-century, at least. *The Dance*—T.H. White, *Once and Future King*, again, came out of my own suggestions. Limited Editions Club asked me, "What would you like to do for us?" They called me up, and I said, "I have finished *The Adventure of* [inaudible] which is a book that was written and published in 1669, and it's the story of the Thirty Years' War, fictionalized"—again, like the Coster *Ulenspiegel*. [01:28:19]

ROBERT BROWN: Quite a similar story.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Quite similar to that, yeah. It's the story of a young orphan who has been thrown into this massacre that Jacques [ph] [inaudible] has described so well in his etchings. As a young, illiterate boy, picked up by a hermit, being taught to read, then thrown into the turmoil of Thirty Years' War, becomes a partisan, and kind of a scoundrel, and takes up with girls. They usually spoil his life. He goes from one to the other. And ends up, to make a long story short, through all kinds of spiritual transformations. Turns into a kind of a holy man. He's shipwrecked on an island somewhere, and he begins a new life there after being tempted by the devil in the form of a beautiful Ethiopian girl, who is swept on land, holding onto a chest, which is full of the most wonderful things they need. But when they sit down after some doings, when they sit down, he said, "In the name of Christ, I bless this meal. Poof!" [Laughs.] The chest disappears, and the Ethiopian girls disappears. They have just been temptations of the devil. [01:30:01] Well, he settles down on the desert island, and finally, after many years, a ship comes to take him down, Dutch ship. He refused to go. And that's the end. He lives like a saint. He has erected three crosses there, with a fellow mate who dies on the island. It's a long—and he's like a Robinson Crusoe turned Christian. Or maybe Robinson Crusoe was a Christian, I don't know. That story intrigued me tremendously, because it has all the elements, from a visual point of view, that I like in my illustrations.

ROBERT BROWN: Such as?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Such as the balance between good and evil. It's very important to me. Nothing is quite good. Nothing is quite evil. But you have to strike a balance between the two, because you have it in yourself, too. You fight the devil every day, and you try to bring out the good in you, or if you are a criminal, you bring out

the worst. This is in the book. [Inaudible] was, for many years, unknown, anonymous. Worked under many pseudonyms. It was only discovered in the 19th century as [inaudible] who ended his life as kind of an innkeeper. Wrote about six books, which became—of which this one [inaudible] became a best-seller, translated into many languages. Was never really known in this country, and I always thought, for many years, to have this known here, maybe my illustrations will help. [01:32:08] The publisher said, "If you have it, that's a marvelous break for me." I got a new translation from a professor in Haverford, who I met because I gave a lecture there. Discovered he was interested in it. He could speak German. He had already started to illustrate it as a young man. I mean, one of these accidents of life. He's finished with the translation now, and the book will be published in the fall, I would say.

ROBERT BROWN: So that's been a very successful thing, in your opinion, this—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, it isn't out yet, but—

ROBERT BROWN: No, but I mean, as far as you're concerned, to this point.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: As a project, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: As a project. What about the others? *The Dance of Death*.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: *The Dance of Death*—excuse me, before *The Dance of Death* there is T.H. White, *The Once and Future King*.

ROBERT BROWN: How did you happen to pick that up? Had you illustrated his stories earlier?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No. No. He had written *The Sword in the Stone*, and I like him very much. He has been very underrated in this country. He's an Englishman, as you know. He was known, probably, because he was connected with Camelot, the King Arthur legend, and he wrote this book, which he calls *The Once and Future King*, of the whole life cycle of a young boy, very much like the [inaudible] do you have to change your—[01:34:02]

ROBERT BROWN: No, no.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: A young boy, destined for leadership, destined to be a king, starting as an illegitimate boy, with all the disadvantages. No one really considers him. He's called the wart, W-A-R-T. By some circumstances, he meets Merlin. Merlin becomes his tutor, and he's raised by Sir Ector as a ward, so to speak. All of a sudden, he's able to prove that he has the kingly stuff in him, because he discovers the Excalibur, and he's able to pull the sword out of the stone, and he becomes king of England. Then, what I consider significant, and to me, tremendously interesting, he discovers that the age of chivalry, this constant killing of knights, of each other, is really the bane of British civilization. That he wants to prove that the age of chivalry should mean that people are good to each other, that they don't kill each other. They don't take it out on the poor peasants all the time, because the knights are usually well-armed and well-protected. It's usually the peasants who have to serve in the army, whether they like it or not. They're drafted. They are chattel. He sees this fairly early, and he works towards this aim, which is not Camelot at all, you know, but it's T.H. White's conviction. [01:36:07] He works towards this end, where his final battle—he's somewhat exiled to England. He comes back to conquer England again. The final battle is between him and a young pageboy, who said he would give his life to the king. He has this—what do you call it? Arcaboos [ph].

ROBERT BROWN: Arcabus [ph], yeah.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah. He said he would give his life for the king. He said, "Don't. Go back to your village and tell them, the Arcabus, this is nonsense. People should be—protect each other, and should be good to each other." That is the last message of the book, very much like [inaudible] where the man is stranded on the desert island, discovers the spirit is the prevailing thing. The spirit is the one that will survive. That is exactly the message of T.H. White.

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ROBERT BROWN: —it's *The Once and Future King* you had been talking about.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: What I would like to finish with, the book isn't done yet. I have done about a half-dozen large woodblocks. I've done a lot of sketches, as I usually do. Now, to get the scope of the thing—and I have to get into an entirely different civilization. Has nothing to do with Dostoevsky, and it has nothing to do with Holland, Dylan Thomas, and England, Lancashire, whatever it is. That is one of the problems, usually, that you have to dig into an entirely new set of customs, and costumes, and philosophies, and so on. It was a rough-and-tumble time way up in England, and I'm not too familiar with it. So what I'm trying to do is to combine my

research work, which I do very conscientiously, because I don't like to make mistakes there, together with my real conviction that the book is really a spiritual search. Otherwise, it would be just historical retelling of Camelot, in which I am not at all interested. I'm interested in the conversion of a man like King Arthur, according to T.H. White, who was—wasn't an Irishman, but he lived in Ireland most of the time. Rebellious kind of man. He turned the whole thing around. I don't know whether it's historically correct or not, but that doesn't interest me as much as the power of the book. [00:02:00] He was an excellent writer, and he's getting into his own now—he is dead now, and doesn't see it—to show that right becomes before might. That is really the essence of the book. When I'm finished with it, it will take me another three months, probably. The Book-of-the-Month Club will try something new. They will publish it as a book, with my work in it, produced, perhaps with my drawings, too. Mixture of drawings and woodcuts, and a portfolio of the original prints, which they sell separately, in the original size, which is about 12x14. You can't publish a book that big. And see how this goes. The publisher is very enthusiastic about it, and I don't want to deflate him. He has to find it out by himself. Now, while I was working on it, a young British publisher walked in, who was sent to me by my gallery in Boston. His name is Parsons [ph]. He asked me, "What would you like to do? I would like to have you on my list. I would like you to illustrate books. I admire your work," and so on. So after talking Dostoevsky and all kinds of things, and George Meredith—do you know who he is?

ROBERT BROWN: Very little.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Very few people do. He was an important man of the time of [inaudible] I would say pre-Victorian. [00:04:00] I had never heard him. He said, "Would you do it?" I said, "I can't tell you, because I haven't read it." So I'm reading this now, and I see it's not me. It's not for me, and it's not me any way. Beautifully written, I would say. It's called *The Igoist*—or *The Egoist*. It's a very long haul to read my way through it. I'm getting interested in the book, but not as illustration material.

ROBERT BROWN: Why not? Why do you think it won't pan out?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Because it's—the period doesn't interest me very much. The gist of it is kind of a woman's liberation. A fight against the egotism of a man, who is Sir Willoughby, nobleman, and thinks a woman should be his soulmate. Even after he dies, she should swear that she would never go get another man, this kind of thing. As a problem for our day, fine. As a pictorial thing, visual interpretation, no, absolutely not. I would not do that.

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you say absolutely not? Do you mean it couldn't be conceptualized, in your opinion?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, it could not. Not by me. It could be done by many other people. I'm not interested to waste my time on a thing which doesn't carry not only the author's message, but mine, too. They have to be married to each other, so to speak, and it doesn't work. But then I mentioned *The Beggar's Opera* by John Gay, which was written, what?

ROBERT BROWN: 1730s or '20s, yeah. [00:06:00] In the early 18th century.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: In the early—yeah, early 18th century, right. He had trouble producing it, and it became a big success, and was an unusual thing. It was a rebellious thing. It was against the establishment, very much so. It showed the corruption of the police chief then, and so on. It's the story that Brecht used for *The Threepenny Opera*. He probably—he lifted it from the original text. The book has always interested me, as *The Threepenny Opera* has. Was a sensation in postwar Germany, because it showed the liberation of the people protesting against the establishment, showing the corruption of the government and so on. The hero of the story was a very attractive, pirate-like person, Macheath Misser [ph], who was addressed as captain. A gallant man, good-looking man, wonderful with women and so on. A highwayman, really. That's how he made his living, and he died on the gallows. This is the kind of story that's close to my heart.

ROBERT BROWN: So this you're going to be undertaking, you think?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, if he follows up. He said he would send me a contract, which I haven't gotten yet, and that I will do next year, if I live that long.

ROBERT BROWN: So now you have another project, *The Dance of Death*. What was that?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: *The Dance of* Death, I am working on at the moment. I have written a long introduction to it—long—about a dozen pages—to show the publisher, who did the—*Endangered Species*, we forgot. [00:08:03]

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. Which publisher is that?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Stemmer House, in Baltimore, or near Baltimore. [Inaudible.] She, the publisher, is an old friend of mine, who was the head of Caedmon, publishing records.

ROBERT BROWN: You've mentioned them earlier.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: She has—after 20 years—she founded Caedmon with a partner. After 20 years of it, she was bought out, and she started a publishing house. I like this kind of thing. You know, I can deal with a human being, and not with a corporation.

ROBERT BROWN: Right. Someone, also, you've known well and gotten along with.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: What is her name?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Barbara Holdridge. She called me up one day and she said, "Can't we do a book together?" Because we worked a lot together at Caedmon. I did a lot of Caedmon record covers. I said, "I would love to." She said, "What do you have in mind?" I said, "I did a series of woodcuts of fables, and I wrote them myself, and I wouldn't mind to see them published as a book." So she got interested in it, and we got together, and she said, "Would be fantastic if we could use your drawings." I said, "Why not use the drawings and the prints?" She said, "Then we could show how you do your prints." So from sketch to the finished print, in three or four stages. That goes through the whole book, together with the fable, which I wrote myself. They're all satirical, and they have a twist at the end, which is not the normal La Fontaine or Aesop thing, but applied to our time. [00:10:07] The *New York Times* has used them and so on. They have gotten around, and they've seen millions of people, and this is what I like. To see there's a book—again, my wife designed it very well. Proved to be at least, as I see it now—it's just out. It was published in October, and I traveled with it some—not a great deal. I went to Washington, to the National Press Club, to autograph it, and I was in Newport. I had an exhibition of the whole thing just a few weeks—two weeks ago, all through December. People were so enthusiastic, and the schoolkids came in. I like that kind of thing. The senior high schools of Portsmouth and Middletown and Newport, 160 of them. To see them tiptoe around and look at the things on the wall—and then I gave them a talk, and then they came up to me, and they were so enchanted with it. That's, to me, very important. I don't care how many they sell, but—

ROBERT BROWN: What sort of things did you stress to these students in your talk?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: In my talk—I don't know. I always talk extemporaneously, gearing it to the people I see in front of me. I talked about—well, probably, I talked about the sorcery, or the magic, or the enchantment that an artist can practice in this work to draw people in. [00:12:11] They become my friends almost immediately. They understand what I'm driving at, or they interpret it differently. Then the public relations girl there, a volunteer woman, very intelligent, she suggested that they saw it open as kind of a competition, and one of these things, like the total disarmament, to use my text, but have a different twist at the end, and it would be a contest, and first, second, and third prize would get an original print of mine. Didn't cost them anything, and I was glad to do it. It worked out beautifully. The papers wrote long articles on it. It somehow caught the public imagination, and it pleased me very much. It's a very gratifying thing. Then, *The Dance of Death* is something which I'm doing, or I have started doing, without thinking of a publisher, because it's an unpopular subject, but very much on my mind. Has been for many years, because in Europe, you grow up with this kind of thing. There's a long tradition. In the series of *Dance of Death*, it goes back to the 13th century. To trace the history of it is something which interests me very much. Then to do my own, again, like the fables with a twist. To do a dance of death which applies to our time. [00:14:02] Nuclear waste problem. The pollution of the atmosphere. The threat of war. All these things are the same—or are now subject to the same kind of consideration that people had 600 years ago, when they faced the plague, the Black Death, or the war that lasted 400 years and swept across Europe, or the Thirty Years' War during the 17th century. That intrigues me to take themes which have an application to our day, and are grim in a way, but also have humor in a way. To bring them close to people, so that they wouldn't say, "Eh, this is awful stuff. I don't want to see it." No, they feel drawn to it, as I saw the students—they are wonderful kids. A hundred and sixty of these kids. To get them—you know, they were sitting there, fascinated, and they came up to me. They mobbed me after I was finished to get my signature, and they had little [laughs] it was fantastic. These are the great rewards, really, for what I think I should do, and I should be doing, and I will do as long as I can.

ROBERT BROWN: Have you always felt that way, that you like to have an audience that was—or at least—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, I didn't. No.

ROBERT BROWN: —as responsive—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No. I never talked before I came to this country, because I was very shy, really. I was not a good speaker.

ROBERT BROWN: But even apart from lecturing, just a reaction to what you had illustrated? [00:16:03]

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I never thought of that, really.

ROBERT BROWN: Or when you worked for the daily—not the daily—the *Catholic Worker*, you mentioned there how you got—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: It's a different thing.

ROBERT BROWN: —immediacy and response from people. Not through lectures, but people would come to you and—or write you.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah. This is—

ROBERT BROWN: Does this mean a lot to you? Or it always has meant something to you, to have had evidence of—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, but that's developed in this country. When I met Dorothy Day, I fell for her, hook, line, and sinker. She's a great woman. She's always proclaimed a saint in her lifetime. She's a very human person, and she has a great sense of humor, and she loves art. She likes me very much, and I like her very much. We had an immediate contact when I met her 30 years ago, which has never changed. It's devotion to each other. I would do anything for her. And so I worked for the Catholic Worker because—initially, because I worked for Dorothy Day. There's no money changing hands, which is the great thing.

ROBERT BROWN: Okay, so that was based on a very intimate, personal rapport? Close.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, but more than that.

ROBERT BROWN: As opposed to reaching out to an audience, or reaching out to the public.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah—no, not quite. Through Dorothy Day, I had the tremendous chance, through her, through the Catholic Worker, to reach, let's say, 100,000 people every month.

ROBERT BROWN: So that did—that has been important to you?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: It has been important to me, no doubt.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you think some of that goes back—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I want my work to go out. I don't want to be in an ivory tower. [00:18:01] I don't want to sit here and do my work for my own sake. I'm not that much of an egoist, really.

ROBERT BROWN: Does some of that go back to the '20s, when you were in journalism in Germany, do you think?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Maybe, although, at that time, I didn't think in those terms. But to be a journalist is also, as you mention it, an effort to reach an awful lot of people. Like Schanberg [ph] in this article in the *Sunday Times* magazine, about this Cambodian whom he saved, and who saved him. This kind of thing, if a journalist does it, I'm quite sure he thinks of a million people who are going to see that story. You can't help it. The compulsion that he has comes through in the article. He stays in Phnom Penh, although he knows maybe his death. He wants to get the report out. He wants to get it in the *New York Times*. These things impress me greatly. It's kind of a heroism, combined with professionalism. Wonderful dedication to something which could be great, and can, of course, be also awful and sensational. But if it's done by a good man, it's a great thing. Dorothy Day, I trust her completely. She has the same convictions that I have, though I can't reach her greatness as a woman. She has sacrificed so much to what she's doing. I was happy that she wanted my work, and I've done this for 30 years now. Whenever she needs something now, there are lots of young people there who call me up and say, "Would you—you know, would you do this? [00:20:10] Would you do this?" Thomas Merton—they had an article on Thomas Merton. "Would you do a portrait of Thomas Merton for us?" I said, "Sure I would. Just ask me and I'll do it." I'll drop everything. Money has no attraction to me anyhow. I really [inaudible] everything they needed it next week. [Laughs.] As usual, you know. I said, "I've never met Thomas Merton," so he sent me photographs or something—and they sent me a book with photographs of Thomas Merton. I don't think I did a very good job, because I didn't met the man—didn't meet the man. I said, "If you don't like it, don't use it." "No, Dorothy loved it. She—and I love it," and so on. Then they published it, of course. And the same—Stanley Vishnewski, who was one of the pillars there, just died. A very quiet man. I remember him, but he was dead and I couldn't do a portrait of him. They sent me a terrible little snapshot of him, and I tried to reconstruct the way he looked. They wanted it as a kind of homage to him. I did it, and I said, "Okay, it's not very good, but if you like it, use it." Of course they used it. They said it was fabulous, was just right, and so on. [Laughs.] So these things are, to me, great rewards, really.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you—as a young man, now, in the '20s, after you finished your education at the academy in Leipzig, you went fairly soon to Berlin, to a publishing house? [00:22:06]

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I got married. I got engaged, as one did in those days. These were the lawful days. I got engaged to a girl. We fell in love with each other. She was a student at the academy. She came from a well-to-do family, and I was nothing. I was the poverty-stricken artist who might work out or might not. Most likely not. The family was against it. We got married anyhow, and we started, really, on absolutely nothing. It also proved to me that if you love someone, if you love anything, it works. If there's no love in what you're doing, it doesn't work. Not consciously as sort of these things, but looking back, I know this is what it is. We got—I went to Berlin. I had to make a living. I had nothing. I became a journalist, because as a book illustrator, I had no reputation yet.

ROBERT BROWN: Were there any people—I was going to talk about that—any people at this time that were particularly influential on you? Your new wife was, I suppose, was she?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I always read a lot, and the people who were influential in my life were very often people that have been dead a few thousand years, like [inaudible] for instance. [Inaudible] to me was—still is—the great guide in my life, what he said in his 80 sayings. [00:24:00] One doesn't quite know exactly when he lived and died. It was 600 years B.C. That we know, and that he left these 80 sayings, which have been translated and retranslated from French into—from Chinese originally—from French into English, from English into German, and God knows what. But they have retained their power, just as—

ROBERT BROWN: Were there contemporaries of yours that were influences on you, apart from this wonderful cast of writers and thinkers that—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I don't think so. I really don't think so. I always had many friends, and very devoted friends, whom I saw quite often, but as far as my work is concerned—

ROBERT BROWN: Or your life as well.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Very few. Some are—a guidance came from some source, whether you call it God, or whether you call it providence or what. Somehow, it pulled me through all kinds of cliffs that I might have foundered on. I had a friend in school with whom I went out to live it up, you know, in my sinful period. I was 19. I lived in Cologne. I made money in the department store as a draftsman in the advertising department. I had too much money for what I needed. It was just after the war. We drank a lot, and we went to bars, and nightlife and so on. I'm glad I did it, and I'm glad it was over in a few years, but this friend of mine had a great influence on me. [00:26:03] He dragged me to these things. Later on, I would say, in my journalist days, George Zarmoni [ph], who is now the theater critic, I told you, of the—

ROBERT BROWN: —newspaper in Munich.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: —Munich [inaudible]. He was then the movie critic of [inaudible] for whom I worked. He liked me tremendously, and he took me wherever he went. He had many assignments. Raids on drug—what did the—opium dens, for instance.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, a lot of things beyond movies, then? He—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Anything. Anything. He went—he took me to all the movie premieres, and he took me to all the police raids, and he took me—when big visitors came over, like Marlene Dietrich's—Sternberg. What was his name? Josef von Sternberg.

ROBERT BROWN: Strollheim [ph], you mean?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, Sternberg. Came to Berlin, and received, of course, the red carpet treatment and so on. My friend, Zarmoni, got—I had this press card, and of course, being a movie critic, I had to come along. I had nothing to do with it, absolutely nothing. Conrad Veidt, who was a great star in those days, like Marlon Brando, I would say, did a film on Rasputin, you know, the great tempter [ph] of the tsar. I had to go to that filming with him. So Zarmoni introduced me to a lot of things which otherwise I would not have seen. [00:28:04] We were together—I was married, but he didn't pay much attention to anyone but me. Max Reinhardt, the great theater man, had a jubilee of some kind of, and all the great stars came to the opera house. They performed kind of a skit for him. Of course, I had to go with him, and I made sketches and drawings which were used for Ulshten [ph] newspapers then. Sometimes we combined these things. In that way, Zarmoni was a great catalyst, I would say, like my youthful friend in high school took me to the dens of prostitution or something, you know. At that time, I was too shy to do it on my own. I always needed someone to seduce me.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you very interested by what he did take you to?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: At the time, yes, but only for a limited time, let's say a year or two. I got fed up with it. I vomited it out, so to speak. Then I went on to the academy, and to serious studies and so on.

ROBERT BROWN: No, but I meant with Zarmoni. Were you interested in that?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Oh, yes. That was life. That was the life of Berlin between 1923 and 1933.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you otherwise involved? You were a writer as well, or an illustrator?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Writer and illustrator.

ROBERT BROWN: What about the publisher himself? Did you get to know them at all, or was it too big a corporation?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Very little. [00:30:00] These were five brothers, the five brothers Ulshten. Each one had a different department. It was a huge establishment. I had, as my boss, the chief editor, or editor-in-chief, let's say, of the *Uhu* that I showed you the reprint of.

ROBERT BROWN: A magazine.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: U-H-U.

ROBERT BROWN: Which was a period—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: "Ulshten" means "oil stone"—an "owl stone," excuse me. An owl is an *uhu*. A tufted owl is called an uhu. In the encyclopedias, you'll find that. So they used that connection, owl, *ulshten*, *uhu*, for a periodical magazine that was a kind of pioneer magazine for entertainment. A monthly. I became the staff artist, and the editor of it [inaudible] became a friend of mine, somehow. He said, "What do you want to do?" That's always what happened to me, eventually, because that's the only way which they could deal with me. "What do you want to do?" I said, "I want to go to Paris and report on the great auction at the Hotel Duhal [ph]." Hotel Duhal was like Sotheby. They auctioned off Renoir, Manet, Degas. You know, great masters at the time. You could have bought them for practically—

ROBERT BROWN: This was a special auction, or you just wanted to get a story on it?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Special auction [inaudible]. I wrote the story, and I made illustrations, and I sent it back, and they published it. Was that easy, you know. I said, "I want to go to Vienna. I want to go to Scotland to report on a horse show. [00:32:00] I want to go to Vienna to report on the state [inaudible] and the doings on that. I want to go to a great culinary center in Berlin, Kempinski, and report how a great kitchen works." "Okay." You know, "Do it."

ROBERT BROWN: And then eventually, you came to America on those same auspices?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Eventually, I got fed up with Germany, shortly before Hitler, because I saw things fading away. Ulshten tried to play the game, although they were Jewish, all of them. They didn't see the sign on the wall. They tried to—my bosses tried to keep me there, and I said, "No, I'm going to Mexico, to Guatemala, because I want to study [inaudible]." I was in love with the Mexican Revolution for some reason, because of Rivera. So I said, "Will you send me over on assignment?" "No. We want to keep you here." So I got myself assignment from various newspapers, whose editors were friends of mine, and I could name about half a dozen. I got contacts from them to report from Guatemala, from Mexico, and from the Chicago World's Fair. So I went to Guatemala. I stayed on a coffee plantation for—friends of mine had made the connection. I made drawings and became friends with the family. Very much involved with the family. I stayed there for months. [00:34:00]

ROBERT BROWN: Was your family with you, your wife?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, I was alone. Oh, I couldn't have taken my wife. My daughter was two years old. She stayed in Germany, of course. She didn't know what was—what I was about, nor did I. I want to get out. And so I—are you—no. I wanted to get out. That was my main reason for it. Since I had those contracts, everything was paid for. My passage was paid for by the HAPAG, the Hamburg American line. I did an article for them, so that it didn't cost me anything. The cost of traveling in Central America was paid for by the articles I sent back. No problem. Absolutely no problem, for the financial part. Otherwise, I couldn't have done it.

ROBERT BROWN: Then you went—you did go to Chicago, though?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I went to Chicago. I made drawings. I reported on it. [Laughs.] Terrible things.

ROBERT BROWN: What was the effect, or impression, that that fair made on you, and the United States made

on you?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, I easily admire things which excite me. I saw San Antonio as the first American town. Then I traveled from Laredo to Antonio. Laredo was the border station. Laredo—I was in Mexico City. I was in Guatemala City, Mexico City. Laredo. I stayed very long in different places. San Antonio, Chicago. World's Fair. Stayed at the Stevens Hotel, and made drawings of the fair, which were absolutely silly. [00:36:00] What I considered American. For instance, how they protected display of diamonds, very precious gems. Protected it. If somebody touched the glass, some sound howled or something, or some smoke emerged, and the police came rushing in. That, I illustrated. [Laughs.] I'll never forget that.

ROBERT BROWN: That wouldn't have happened in Europe? You mean this was a different—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, no, it was American. That was American, yeah. That was what we admired in Germany, for instance. Technology. You know, the new things that were coming. Then I came to New York, and I was surrounded by friends I had never met before. The Americans were marvelous to me. I would say Americans, because I didn't know where they came from. You know, all kinds of people. I was handed around like a white elephant that had never seen something like this [inaudible]—

ROBERT BROWN: Because you were an artist, or—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, because I was an artist, and I came from Hitler. Well, not from Hitler Germany, exactly, because he was just beginning.

ROBERT BROWN: So people were very curious to know about it?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: To know what's happening.

ROBERT BROWN: What was going on.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, what's happening in Germany. I told them. They said, "Don't go back. Don't go back. You did Hitler cartoons, anti-Hitler cartoons." For the Ulshten newspapers, naturally. I was on their staff, so they used me. What I did was to try to stem the tide. But Ulshten, the high command, was scared. They didn't go along with me. After a while, whenever I presented to him, at a meeting, an anti-Hitler cartoon, they said, "We just can't do that. [00:38:07] We can't do that. We get into trouble." This prompted, also, my exit. It was 1932—or 1931. It was before Hitler came to power. No. And I pleaded with them, but they didn't—you know, their own interest as a big empire.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you think that your cartoons—what kind of effect did you think they might have if they would have published them?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: They did publish them.

ROBERT BROWN: I thought you said they didn't?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: In the beginning, they did publish them.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, but later, when they didn't?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Later, when they didn't, I said, to hell with them, you know.

ROBERT BROWN: What effect did you think those later cartoons might have had on people? Turn the tide, you thought, or no?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, no, no. I never think that what I'm doing is I'm turning a tide. I satisfy my conscience. That's about all—in a little puddle, I'm a little frog.

ROBERT BROWN: But you sensed the curtains were being drawn? You could no longer—the German people weren't going to hear about things like that?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No. The publisher was afraid they would lose circulation. Quite sure [ph], and later they were taken over by Hitler. When I left, they told me, for the *Uhu*, for instance, for our papers, the one I showed you, "I don't think we want you anymore." But I got, from other papers within the same empire, I got contracts. And I got contracts from Hamburg and from Cologne, and people for whom I had worked before, no problem, because my name was well-known. [00:40:00]

ROBERT BROWN: When you came—when did you finally come to New York? In 1938?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I came to New York, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: For good. I mean, you eventually—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No.

ROBERT BROWN: —emigrated when?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, because I had left my wife in Berlin. So I couldn't leave her there.

ROBERT BROWN: So you came back?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I came back.

ROBERT BROWN: And then you left? Is that right?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Then I left, yes. I picked her up. My little daughter was two years old. I picked her up, and she was a marvelous woman. She went along with me, although she wasn't very happy. She left all her friends there. We had lots of friends there. Marvelous people. As we have here. It's the same thing. I picked, I picked her up, and I went back on the same passport that I had, fortunately, as a journalist. I could come in and go out. I had some tough moments when I needed a stamp from the police department for some such thing.

ROBERT BROWN: They weren't letting people leave?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, if they had known who I was at that police precinct in Cologne, where I went—or Berlin, it was—I would have gotten caught, no doubt about it. But somehow, there was an angel hovering over me, and I got out, and we came to this country. We were received by friends here, by people we didn't know. Hardly knew. They gave us their apartment to live in. They rented a house on 232nd Street [inaudible] where we lived. I began in the Depression here. There was no work.

ROBERT BROWN: That's something you've talked about quite extensively already.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, right. The first things I did were New York impressions, which I did on the woodblock, for friends of my—new friends of mine, which are now so popular that I'm running out of them. [00:42:09] I have only a few left. I could get any amount of money for it. It's strange. It took me about 50 years to sell out of the edition of 200. It's a strange thing.

ROBERT BROWN: And the wheels turn.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, the wheels turn. If I had prints of the WPA that Mr. Phillips interviewed me about—you know, it's astronomical what a gallery gets for it now. I have no prints left. People always ask me, "Where are your WPA prints?" They have become—

ROBERT BROWN: They certainly have. Then in New York, you made other connections fairly soon. What was the —

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I went through the first two years, practically, on a kind of a famished level. If we hadn't had so many friends, I don't think we would have managed very well. Through some contact I got to teach at the New School for Social Research—it was known as the University in Exile—started by Dr. Alvin Johnson, who was a great man, really.

ROBERT BROWN: It just started, had it?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, it just started, and he had gotten all the endangered species among the professors. It was a great university that he started on the graduate level. On the undergraduate level, there was the New School for Social Research, which had started earlier, and I became a member of the faculty.

ROBERT BROWN: Of the undergraduate?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Of the undergraduate. [00:44:00] I taught wood engraving, or illustration. I forget what I taught. Then Alvin Johnson took an interest in me. He called me in one day and he said, "How do you make a living? We can't pay you much. Depends on how many students involved." Maybe 10 I had, and that got me about $20 a week or something. He said, "Would you do cartoons for *The Nation*?" I said of course I would. I didn't know *The Nation*. He got me in touch with the editors, Freda Kirchwey, and Joseph Wood Krutch has written many books on—wonderful people. Really humanists after my own heart. And so they said, "Of course. You want to do cartoons for us? Okay. A whole page." Every few weeks, or every week. I forgot. I did that for a year and a half. It got me—I got $20 for a cartoon. It was a lot of money, you know. Twenty dollars. Can you

imagine?

ROBERT BROWN: What were you—to illustrate articles?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, no.

ROBERT BROWN: Commentary on the times?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, political cartoons. The third thing was, when he realized, on $40 [ph] a week, it's very hard to maintain a family, he said, "Have you tried the WPA?" I said, "What is it?" So he explained to me, got me in touch—he had fantastic connections. He got me in touch with Langoschwitz [ph], who was later curator in Cincinnati of the [inaudible] museum. Gustav [ph] Langoschwitz. Wonderful guy. Marvelous guy. I just met him half a year ago, in Puerto Rico. [00:46:00] He's retired now. He said, "Sure, what do you want to do?" "I would like to do wood engravings." [Laughs.] See, that's how I got into WPA. It was another $20. So at $60 a week, that's $200 and—what? Two hundred and forty dollars a month. And we could live. Not splendidly, but—

ROBERT BROWN: What was—did you get to know Alvin Johnson fairly well?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like? Could you characterize him?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yes, I could characterize him. If he liked you, he would do anything for you. If he didn't like you, he would kill you. He was—you know who Tycho Braho was?

ROBERT BROWN: No.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: A great Danish astronomer. T-Y-C-H-O B-R-A-H-O. Tycho Braho, a very famous man. He said he's the direct descendent of Tycho Braho. I doubt it, somehow. He drank heavily. He was then a man of about, I would say, 70 years old. Always smoking a pipe. If you walked into his office, you took your life into your hands. If he was in a good mood, anything went. He did everything for me at the time. Made all the contact, picked up the telephone and so on. If he didn't like you, you were out in half a minute. He wasn't violent. He was a great man. He was working on this encyclopedia of social science, which I think he finished.

ROBERT BROWN: But he had this idea for the University in Exile. Was that—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: That was his idea.

ROBERT BROWN: So he did have a very compassionate streak in him?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Oh, yes, absolutely. I think he was a great man, great man. Unfortunately, he drank heavily. [00:48:02]

ROBERT BROWN: Impaired.

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Huh?

ROBERT BROWN: It impaired his moods, at least?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, it got [inaudible] at one time. He had a very good mind, great mind. He was a wonderful guy. Drinking, that's not my—but I don't condemn anyone for it. If he needs it, okay.

ROBERT BROWN: Was George Macy another person that became very important for you?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, and that was around this time, 1937—1936. I had finished working for the WPA, and someone got me in touch with George Macy, and he fell for me as I liked him, really, although he was very much like Alvin Johnson, except he didn't drink.

ROBERT BROWN: He could be tough, too?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Tough.

ROBERT BROWN: Very severe?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: An autocrat. They were both autocrats. What they said went. There was no backtalk. Impossible. You couldn't talk back. With George Macy—I'm also, in a way, an autocrat. If someone goes against my grain, I would just walk out. George Macy [inaudible] very early. So we got together on—he said, "Would you like to do *Crime and Punishment*?"

ROBERT BROWN: Right. You've mentioned that. So right away—well, eventually—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: I said, "I did this when I was a student." He said, "Yeah, but now you will do it differently, wouldn't you?" "Yes, I would." That, to me, was a marvelous vote of confidence. I was unknown, and that book got me launched. [00:50:00] I did other little books before, children's books. I did *Puss in Boots*, which got into the 50 Books of the Year in 1936. Before that, I did *Uncle Remus*. I didn't know Uncle Remus from Adam. I got $100 for it or something. But it was a good publisher, Peter Pope [ph] Press. That really was the first book I did. Then came *Puss in Boots* and *Dick Whittington* [inaudible] and then came George Macy. That changed my life. From then on, I was the great authority on Russian literature.

ROBERT BROWN: This has surely led, then, to your—you went to Pratt and so forth, but this early success, or reputation, you achieved it quite rapidly in this country. Actually, if you look back on it, a few years, right?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, I did everything. I worked for. I did little spots for the *New Yorker*. I did some for *Collier's*. But, you know, it didn't amount to anything. What I really need is something that comes out of my guts, and these things did not.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have any close friends among painters or sculptors at that time, and later?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Really not, no.

ROBERT BROWN: You've mentioned friends among graphic artists, but—

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah. No. I think I met a man who was a Quaker, Gilbert Kilpack, who became a very close friend of mine. He directed my reading, and I got a lot of books from him. [Inaudible.] [00:52:00] And some of the Russian philosophers who lived in Paris at the time. [Inaudible.]

ROBERT BROWN: And you eventually became a Quaker yourself?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah, in 1940, I became a Quaker. This—I did the kind of print that you see, that I have done for a long time, and have sent to my friends. I did one in 1939. It was published in *Friends Intelligencer*. The editor was a friend of mine, William Hoban [ph]. I was then very close to the Quakers, although I wasn't a Quaker myself. They published it, and Gilbert Kilpack called me up. I didn't know him. He asked, "Could I come and see you?" He wrote a story on it. Then he said, "Do you know"—and so we talked. "Do you know Leon Blan [ph]?" Never heard of him. "Do you know Amil [ph]?" Never heard of Amil. [Inaudible.] No. Not one of the names. [Inaudible.] No. The man who wrote *Curator* [ph], the *Curator*. It was a new—a kind of a spiritual opening, which I needed badly.

ROBERT BROWN: You did?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you sort of a dead end, or rather desperate spiritually?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No, I wasn't. No. But I was naive, and I wasn't too well—I read an awful lot, always, since my early childhood, but the philosophers had always escaped me.

ROBERT BROWN: You had not had any particular spiritual upbringing? This was filling a void?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: No. No. In fact, I had no one, up to the time when Gilbert Kilpack came into my life, and I was then married again. [00:54:08] My wife had died, the one that I had come over with, in 1937, in the very crucial time. I was at loose ends. I discovered Laozi [ph], for instance, at that time, the Chinese philosopher. I think that had a great influence on my thinking, and that went into my work, no doubt. But it was more or less a kind of undirected—I needed it, you know, but I had no one to tell me.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you find in the Quakers that turned you to Quakerism?

FRITZ EICHENBERG: Well, I married again in 1940, at the time, and we had kind of a mixed group of denominations. Half Jewish, half Lutheran, half Christian—or a quarter Christian, and so on. My own upbringing had been kind of wild and woolly as far as religion was concerned. I was not a religious person. I didn't want to have anything to do with religion. By race, I was considered Jewish, because my family—God knows where they came from. They had been in Germany for 400 years or so. To pull the family together when I had married again, and I lived in Westchester, Quakerism seemed to me the thing that could do it. [00:56:07] There was no steeple house. You know, what the Quakers call a steeple house. There was no priest who went around with—to get the offerings. There was no music. It was austere, and you could sense it, quietly, silently, without listening to anyone. You could listen to yourself and your connection with the deity, whatever, or whoever, it was. This is something which I thought would have been good for my family. I had a daughter, I had a son, from two

different marriages. My wife had two of her own. There was [inaudible]. I had a big family.

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