

DIDASKALIA 

The Journal for Ancient Performance



Didaskalia is an electronic journal dedicated to the study of all aspects of ancient Greek and Roman performance.

DIDASKALIA

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About Didaskalia

Didaskalia (διδασκαλία) is the term used since ancient times to describe the work a playwright did to teach his chorus and actors the play. The official records of the dramatic festivals in Athens were the διδασκαλία. *Didaskalia* now furthers the scholarship of the ancient performance.

Didaskalia is an English-language, online publication about the performance of Greek and Roman drama, dance, and music. We publish peer-reviewed scholarship on performance and reviews of the professional activity of artists and scholars who work on ancient drama.

We welcome submissions on any aspect of the field. If you would like your work to be reviewed, please write to editor@didaskalia.net at least three weeks in advance of the performance date. We also seek interviews with practitioners and opinion pieces. For submission guidelines, go to didaskalia.net.

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Note

Didaskalia is an online journal. This print representation of Volume 9 is an inadequate approximation of the web publication at didaskalia.net, which includes sound, video, and live hyperlinks.

Interview: Douglass Parker

Interview by Laura Drake

Hunter College

In July, 1981, and January, 1982, Laura Drake (currently assistant professor of theatre at Hunter College CUNY), then an MFA candidate in dramatic production at the University of Texas at Austin, interviewed Douglass Parker, then a Guggenheim Fellow and Professor of Classics at the same university, in connection with her thesis production of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, which used Parker's famous translation as its text. (Characteristically accommodating of a director's aims, Parker had in fact reworked much of the text for this single production, casting the Peloponnesians' speeches into comic stage Russian to suit the concerns of the late Cold War.)

The conversations were lengthy, warm, and animated, and Parker's voice can be heard vividly as it ranged over a variety of topics, both professional and personal: ancient comedy; the theory and practice of translation; Parker's own career as translator, poet, and stage performer; his friendship and collaboration with William Arrowsmith; the importance of practical performance for the understanding of dramatic literature; and the ambitions of aging jazz trombonists. Transcripts of the interviews were included as an appendix in Drake's completed thesis of 1985. They were "rediscovered" following Parker's death in 2011, in a copy of the thesis kept among his personal papers. They are here made available to a wider audience for the first time.



Douglass Parker in the 1980s. Photo by Beverly Bardsley.

FIRST INTERVIEW

The University of Texas at Austin, July, 1981

Laura Drake: Amazingly, there doesn't seem to be any published biography of you in the major reference sources. May we begin at the beginning?

Douglass Parker: I was born in LaPorte, Indiana, on May 27, 1927. My father edited a newspaper in LaPorte, the *LaPorte Herald-Argus*. At an advanced age, he finally figured, correctly, that unless you own a small-town newspaper there is no money in it. So he quit and began selling life insurance, which he did tolerably well at, except he never really could get away from the news, so he used to broadcast over a local station at football games and things like that.

My father was the son of a Baptist minister and his mother was the daughter of a Baptist minister. These are northern Baptists, for whatever that's worth. My mother majored in French and English at Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, which is where she met my father. Eventually they worked their way to

northern Indiana, where at one point my father had held a pastorate, and so he got on the paper there.

I have one sister, six years younger than I am, who is a housewife and works as a receptionist-secretary.

I was a fat, bright kid. I went through a number of sessions with a psychiatrist at one point, and discovered I was thin and undernourished until my sister was born, when I was six, and then I got fat and with minor backslides have been fat ever since.

I got thin once in 1973, the result of a couple of massive heart attacks in '72. In fact, I had a classic myocardial infarction between acts two and three of *Antony and Cleopatra*. I was playing Enobarbus. We did it over in the Architecture Garden [at the University of Texas at Austin] and we had that business before Lepidus' party, the drunken party, but there's one point where Pompey and everybody had to get together and meet. Well, we played this upstairs, above the garden, and what it really meant was that I had to get off after talking to Antony (or was it Cleopatra?), run upstairs, go through the meeting, and then we exchange some remarks (can't remember the character I was exchanging remarks with—Carl Rubino down the hall played it). Everybody else, meanwhile, has drifted downstairs to start the party and the only way we could make it was to come in late. I would go out, run down the hall taking off my armor, come back, go through the party, and then we could break. This was the end of Act II Scene iii, I think . . . anyway, about this time I noticed the pains beginning. I had years before had chest pains and had been carrying nitro around ever since, but I'd been carrying this around too long and it didn't work. And somebody had a large coke and I drank all of that on the theory that it would help; I don't know whether it did. And then that curious logic: it is not "the show must go on," it wasn't that important. It was rather more insane. It was, "I die in Act IV anyway, I might as well make it on through." And so what the hell, I made it through that performance and one more performance, a cast party, and U.T.'s Peter Brookish production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* . . . I was pretty tired and the next day I realized I didn't want to get up. So I went into the hospital for several months. I had another heart attack a year later. I lost a lot of weight, but it always creeps back on.

DRAKE: What did you want to be when you grew up?

PARKER: I don't know. I read a lot. As I said, there is a sort of type . . . the bright, fat kid. All right. I was not arrested, but my motor development was not . . . Well, I played football in high school, although I was by no means good at it. I suppose there was a certain amount of parental pressure in this just so I wouldn't sit off and read all the time. I must have been the worst center that LaPorte High ever had, but I wasn't sent in until the difference was twenty-five points either way. On the other hand, it was a great time.

I graduated from high school in 1945 and went to the University of Michigan, only to be drafted into the Navy. It was 1945 There was V-J Day, a two-day national holiday, and I was drafted the next day.

DRAKE: What did you do in the Navy?

PARKER: I played in the band. I'm a musician, you know. That's what I do mostly now. I play in a jazz band, trumpet and trombone.

At the end of the war, I went to Great Lakes and through boot camp. This must have been August, September, October of 1945, and I had a deal worked out. I was going to sing in the Bluejacket Choir. It was very good: you worked in the library, sang on Sundays, no trouble, I'd be a hundred miles from home. I had a girl who'd gone off to college at Indiana but still, no problem. And unfortunately, the Navy

works in mysterious ways and before that could get confirmed, the whole bunch of us got shipped out and I spent my naval career in Memphis. And in Memphis, Tennessee, I played in a band. The trombone can do a lot for you in this world. It is a little cumbersome to carry, and I think I prefer playing the trumpet, but anyhow I'm a trombonist at heart. There's a metaphysical difference but there's no point in going into it.

Anyway, I played in a band and I booked movies and I worked for the welfare and recreation department. And occasionally we'd put on a show, and I found I could play a good drunk.

DRAKE: You seem to have had both interest and talent in the performing arts. How did you end up in classics?

PARKER: Maybe because it was odd, maybe because the classes were small. It was something I was good at. At about age 19 I hadn't considered being an actor. Acting was something I liked to do, but in LaPorte, Indiana, there aren't that many theaters that you can hang around. I liked to watch it and be in it.

DRAKE: So when you were 19?

PARKER: I was in the Navy, and I was spending my time booking movies and playing in the band and reading a lot; and it appeared to me that the only real prophesy that I've ever had was that playing the trombone was a very uncertain way to make a living. So, I'd better do something else. I'd had one year of college—oh, the big things, of course: doctor (then I saw my sister's tonsils being removed and that cured me of that), lawyer . . . Anyhow, I went off to Michigan and you have to put something down on your application when they ask what you're going to be, so I said "pre-law." The reason I said pre-law is that you can take anything. And I wanted to take everything.

Anyhow, I think I finally got into the classics because I took German. We used to go at seven o'clock in the morning. We had this high school teacher who'd gotten a certificate in German (this was in 1943), and she wanted to teach German. So her third year Latin class met at seven o'clock in the morning, and for that whole year we learned German. Then I went off to Michigan and I found myself answering to the question, "what language are you going to take?" "German." On the basis of Muriel Russell's jamming German in Latin class for a year, I found myself taking a second-year college German class. I had a term, I went into the Navy, and when I came back I added Latin (I'd had Latin in high school and liked it). So I took some Latin and I took some more German, I took some French. My father had had a year of Greek in college and he was always saying two words from Xenophon meaning, "from thence he or they went on," generally referring to an army. This sounded interesting so I took Greek. Then one day I turned around and I was taking languages and liking it very much, and if you're taking Greek, Latin, French and German, nine times out of ten you become a classicist: there's nothing else to do. And that's where it was.

I edited *The Gargoyle*, the college humor magazine at Michigan. We used to have lovely times burying the dirty jokes so many levels down that the censors wouldn't possibly get it. I hung around with poets because . . . There is a writer of light bedroom comedies, nothing sleazy because it isn't the age for sleazy; he was popular in the teens and twenties of the century: Avery Hopwood. And Avery Hopwood left the University of Michigan an inordinate amount of money out of which they gave some of the most illustrious writing prizes. And in order to qualify for the Hopwoods, you had to take a course in English, in creative writing, so I took the course in creative writing and hung around with the people. The only difference was, they were writing fiction and I was writing poetry. And finally, in my senior year, I could be at least halfway funny without all that sophomoric nastiness of the world. And I won a Hopwood in my senior year and it was enough to buy an engagement ring for my wife.

And then I went off to graduate study in classics at Princeton. So at graduate school you forget about all that [poetry, humor] until Arrowsmith talked to me that afternoon and said, "why not do this [meaning translating Aristophanes]?" There was no time . . .

DRAKE: What about acting in graduate school?

PARKER: I didn't act again until somebody at U.C. Riverside was putting on *The Duchess of Malfi* and, "We need a doctor, can you act?" And my eyes got as big as saucers and started to turn pinwheels, and I said, "Of course, certainly." And after a while, I did judges. I was an avvocatore. In *Volpone* I played two of them. And then we did *Two Noble Kinsmen* [at the University of Texas at Austin] and I played Theseus. Again, my weight was up and somebody made reference to that heroic statue, nude unfortunately, of Balzac. Anyway, probably the greatest time and certainly the leanest I ever had was in *Epicocene*.

I love Jonson. I once had a theory: there are Shakespeareans in the world and there are Jonsonian, just as there are Menandrians in the world and there are Aristophanists. And I'm a Jonsonian and an Aristophanist. I can understand how people can be Shakespeareans and Menandrians, but that's not what I am. Playing Morose [again, at U.T. Austin] was just absolutely the most wonderful thing in the world. And then of course we stopped after that. And after a while we began radio drama and we did the various things. Of the things, *Gawain* I think works best; it's also the one that can be listened to in one sitting. Even *Beowulf* takes a while. For the rest, it's marvelous. The *Iliad* is beautiful. We got Fitzgerald, who is the translator, down here to talk, and they played his talk on KUT and started out on the *Iliad*, and for the next 42 hours it was the *Iliad*.

DRAKE: What do you want to do now?

PARKER: All I want to do now is to be able to play the trumpet the way Miles Davis did in 1956. I don't necessarily like the way he plays in 1981, but I like the way he played in '56. Even '66.

DRAKE: Is the jazz he's doing now too much like pop for you?

PARKER: No, I just don't like fusion that much. You know, it's not that I mind the heavy bass; it's just that the stuff doesn't hit somehow.

It's just what I want to be able to do. You're fifty-five years old, and what do you want to do? Well, I want to play the trumpet.

DRAKE: Why do you want to play the trumpet?

PARKER: Because I play the trombone. There's something very deep in that. I've not been able to figure out what it is.

DRAKE: If you could narrow the field down to a single literary figure who had the greatest influence on your own writing or on your thinking about writing, who would it be?

PARKER: Ezra Pound.

SECOND INTERVIEW

The University of Texas at Austin, January, 1982

DRAKE: When did you start writing poetry?

PARKER: I guess it popped up in high school and continued when I got to college. I wasn't sure quite how you did it . . . I wasn't sure. I knew there were rules and I wanted to be sure that everyone knew that I had a number of 'em handy.

DRAKE: Have you published your poetry?

PARKER: Not in books and I do it infrequently. I send things out, I have my . . . the great verse cycle; unfortunately it does best when I deliver it myself. The working title—it started in 1979 and there are thirty-one poems in it—is *Zeus in Therapy*. I did it at Liberty Lunch and I do it occasionally when I can get two English speakers trapped in a corner, but it's simply a series of what he says to the psychiatrist, who is unnamed and who never speaks, just at any given time.

DRAKE: Your dissertation, *Epicurean Imagery in Lucretius' De Rerum Natura*: does "epicurean" in this case refer to sensual delights or . . . ?

PARKER: Actually Epicurean in this case is not really delightful. It comes from an ambiguity in the word "Epicurean." Epicurus had a theory of knowledge and what I was trying to do was develop a theory based on his epistemology, which is about as philosophical as I ever got. I can figure out Epicureanism in Lucretius. But it was by no means delightful. It comes down to be fairly literal. It was just an idea. One of the things in that poem is, it's a philosophical poem. And philosophers and poets, no matter how much they protest, aren't doing the same thing. That's the big question in the Lucretius. In the classics generally, you find people you like and find reasons to work with them. Aristophanes because he's funny and dirty and so on. The Lucretius because, well, if they can figure out Lucretius . . .

My perpetual, "I'll-never-finish-it-but" project is a translation of the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnos. Nonnos died about 450 AD and wrote an epic in forty-eight books on everything the god Dionysus ever did and he had the funniest sense of language that anybody ever had. I have a whole thing I do on improvisation, although I usually think of it as musical improvisation: it's where the river meets the road. This is where they stick you up in front of a crowd and say "do something" and you gotta do it. That's where it's important. That's why I love playing in the band. Anyhow, the connection is, I've got a paper I've been working on. It's an idea for a book. It has some record of improvisation from antiquity. This was not musical improvisation, it was verbal. In the 2nd century AD your movie stars were rhetoricians: Lucian, Apuleius, people who went around and talked. And the great point is, improvisation. Somebody says, "Talk about . . .," you ask the audience what they want you to talk about and then you do it. And we've got some of the choicest bits of Nonnos preserved and also a statement of his on the whole process and why it's really not fair to judge him on this, and this just before he goes and blows the roof off.

DRAKE: Have you ever translated tragedy?

PARKER: I started to translate the *Persians* and I got . . . I don't do well with tragedy and I just blew it off. The reference to my translation of the *Persians* was put in the introduction to the *Wasps* more as a sort of pious hope. I was trying to make Aeschylus sound like Gerard Manley Hopkins, and it came out, I think, absolutely incomprehensible. The Greek is strange, and I decided I'd make it stranger but it didn't work.

What I did—and it was very good, though people say it doesn't sound like him—I did one tragedy, and it was wild. It was put on once. And that's the *Thyestes* of Seneca. Old blood and gore, and that was fun. And I have seen it once, done by a madman at Cornell in 1971. He did it on Halloween, which was a good idea. What intrigues me was that he was working on his doctorate in theater history and working on Ibsen, and of all the things in the world, he comes up and does this, and his company did it beautifully. I translated it with as much rhetoric as I could muster. I had read Ted Hughes' translation—well, version of somebody else's translation of Seneca's *Oedipus* and thought, "Jesus!" That made me stop for three years. I thought, well, he's done it; and then began thinking, that's not what I want to do. I wanted to do something else. Then I did two comedies by Terence, the *Eunuch* and the *Phormio*.

DRAKE: Has anyone ever produced these?

PARKER: Yeah. They don't come out so often. The *Eunuch* does pretty well; the *Phormio* could stand some revision. We taped it once here. The taping did not come off well, but I suddenly saw how the end ought to go and so I rewrote the end for the taping and it's beautiful. The only trouble is, it sounds as though Terence were the funniest Plautus you ever heard. I just said well, what the hell, let it all hang out. It has some of the greatest lines I ever wrote and I almost wish Terence had. I had a friend at U.C. Riverside who put on a performance of *Mandragola* and . . . Let me say one other thing about the friend. He majored in drama at the University of Tennessee. He may still be in the literature. He did a volume some years back of interviews with various dramatic coaches, Strasberg and people like that. Bob Hethmon was his name. But he put on the *Mandragola*, and at one point when the monk is coming out and making one of his beautiful soliloquies, of course referring to the young wife's getting pregnant by the Baron, "Nothing can come from nothing" was one of the lines. In the audience was one of my colleagues who was finishing his dissertation on Renaissance skepticism in *King Lear*, and he heard "Nothing can come from nothing," which is a line from Lucretius and skeptical as all hell, and he ran up and grabbed Hethmon and he said, "What's the Italian for that, Bob?" and Bob, who still had a Tennessee drawl, said, "Wuhl, I jes' put thet in m'self." So there went a beautiful theory . . . It would have been lovely if Machiavelli had said it.

DRAKE: You mentioned in our last interview that your first encounter with William Arrowsmith was in graduate school at Princeton.

PARKER: I went there in '49. In the Fall of 1951, Bill Arrowsmith, a Rhodes scholar who'd graduated from Princeton in '48, came back from Oxford. They had a sort of system during those years. I don't know if it was cheap labor or what, but people who had bachelor's degrees in English would be brought back and the university would put them on as instructors for awhile. So he was teaching. We were together at Princeton that fall and I showed him some poetry that I'd written and along in the spring of 1952. I had finished my dissertation and was sitting there, "there" being the library at Princeton, and we were just talking about what the hell was going to happen, and Bill said, "How would you like to translate Aristophanes?" He was one of the founders of the *Hudson Review*, a little magazine that published poetry, and had translated by this time, I think, the *Bacchae*. I know he was working on the *Bacchae* then, and perhaps the *Cyclops* of Euripides for the Chicago series. And I thought, hell, it might be a good idea: fun. And so I got a job as an instructor at Yale, my wife and I moved up to New Haven that fall and Arrowsmith decided that he would continue in the profession and so dropped being an instructor and did graduate work and wrote a dissertation. I was at New Haven for three years (1952–55). He left Princeton in '53 and came up to Wesleyan, which wasn't too far away from New Haven, and taught there for a year, '53 to '54. And then eventually, in the fall of '54, he went out to the University of California at Riverside, where they had just opened a new liberal-arts campus. And a year later it sounded like the New Jerusalem and I went out. And the New Jerusalem had cutworms, but it was a good place to be.

Arrowsmith was there the year before I got there and the first year I was there, and then he went off on a fellowship to Italy and extended it for a year. When he got back to the country he didn't go to California, he came here [to the University of Texas at Austin]. All this time, I should've been, and well, I started out translating. Well, the first play I translated was the play I knew best and liked best, which was the *Acharnians*. So I started out on that.

My theory at the time was what I thought [Richmond] Lattimore had been doing. His theory was, that if you translated as closely as you could the Greek into "good English," whatever that is, and got it so that there were five beats in the line and hacked it out for the next . . . , you would have a good translation. It didn't take me too long to realize that that was just impossible. You know, that's no way to do anything. Well, the solution came a long time later, but I'd keep hacking at it and then it just seemed to be so bloody much I'd just let it go.

So I got out to California in '55 and Arrowsmith was there, and he was good at hassling, and then he went to Italy and he'd keep writing back, "How is the *Acharnians*?" I got through it in a horrible version which I think I threw away, but, you know, I just . . . I was going to do this thing, and I think by the time I got through with it I had some inkling of what to do but I really didn't know what it was.

In the Summer of 1957, somebody thought they'd like to do the *Lysistrata*, so I started that and got a little way into it but not much, and in, well, going on into the late '50's Arrowsmith came back from Italy and said....he'd gone over there to write a book on Euripides, but what he was doing was translating Aristophanes, and he'd made his way about halfway through the *Plutus*, which I don't think he ever finished, and had done the *Birds*. And he said, "Look, I see how we ought to do this thing." And I said, "Hey, fine." By this time I was working somewhat on the *Lysistrata* and had gotten pretty well through it, but it was pretty bloody awful, and had started on the *Wasps*, which in a way I like better than whatever else I did but I don't think anybody else does. There were just . . . things. But anyway, I came down here. In the bad old days, Texas was full of boondoggles, and one of the boondoggles was, You Can Get Money For Anybody To Do Anything. The money was in this case just to get my plane fare from California to Austin and back again. I came down here to look at a new acquisition by the library, so I did that and spent the rest of the time talking to Arrowsmith about how to translate Aristophanes.

And so I arrived back home in January of 1959 and everything was fine, except Jesus Christ, it just had to be done over. But at least there wasn't this [sustained pressure gesture]. You know it was sort of a glorious feeling of freedom. You do it, you be funny, and let the chips fall where they may. [Slight pause]. It's not really that way. You have to be very careful. Everything is important, but my great failing about it was to overdo it. The idea was to try to get, what did Jonson say, "language such as men do use" and at the same time make it eloquent. So I got back and started out again.

I used to . . . Oh, Lord! Maybe the pressure . . . I was getting near the end of my assistant professorship, my marriage was in a rough period, and I used to work through the day. My wife would go to bed—we had a four-bedroom house but we had three kids and us—and my wife would go to bed and I would set up a card table and put a typewriter on it and start banging away at the typewriter until I fell asleep. This is still the late '50's, early '60's, and Dexedrine was not considered a harmful drug, and so, you know, I'd go along fine. I was great. I would sleep from 5 a.m. until 7, and get up and go through the day, and everything would be fine except by about Thursday I'd fall on my face. But it began to work out, and I began to get really obsessed, which is, I think, the only way to do something. You get so you think like that. I'd stand around at cocktail parties thinking up dirty jokes, and then I'd think, "Is this what my mother, my mother and father, raised their boy to do?" And, you know, "That's foul. How can I make it fouler?" And then wonder who I could tell about it. But eventually, it must have been 1960, I finished the

Acharnians and I had the *Wasps* pretty well done, and all this time the *Lysistrata* is sort of hanging fire. There were some things I'd done originally that would still stand up because they were lyrics. On lyrics, I finally decided early on you've got to make poems out of them or it doesn't work, and it being a comedy, they've got to rhyme. Tragedy can go on free verse or whatever you want, but comedy has to have form so you can kick the hell out of it. So I had a fellowship at the Center for Hellenic Studies in D.C. in 1961–62 and I still had the introduction to do for the *Wasps*, and so I did this, and all the time, whenever I had nothing else to do and couldn't really talk myself out of it, I would go back to the *Lysistrata*. And at times I'd get going and then, going straight through, the first two hundred lines went fine, and then there's the lovely bit where . . . I loved the Oath. What I loved about the Oath was, you wrote one line, you wrote two. And then suddenly I realized I hated the Oath, because I decided that in order for it to sound like an Oath it had to rhyme. I was going along like crazy. The first scene was forming itself, everything was clear in my head—this must be about 1962 or something and I was back in California—but everything was out of the way, and I'd go back . . . nothing. I got up to that damned Oath, in a week I was up there, and then suddenly, for the next six weeks, I could not write a line. I'd look at it, and the problem is, oh Lord, things like: "But remain to his advances icily pure," which had to rhyme with something, and it just stopped me dead. And then some things would work and some things wouldn't work and finally by the end of 1963 I had done it. I didn't like the end, I still don't like the end, but I was literally so sick of that play, I hated it so much, that I could not do anything else. I had done an ending at one time, I realized what I wanted, but the will was gone. I could not stand it anymore. I got it off and wrote an introduction that was such a downer that they cut the hell out of it. Anyway, by the beginning of 1964, in fact, it might even be scheduled down in the library as, "copyright 1963, published in 1964," or something like that; simply, they were waiting for my introduction. Anyway, it was off and it was done, and Aristophanes was done and I wasn't going to do anything else.

Along that spring, there came a letter from a Hungarian refugee who was a director at U.C. Davis. His name was (and is) Robi Sarlos, and he said that he had seen the announcement of what I'd done in the Michigan catalog, and that he wanted to put it on in the fall. Now, that threw me. I'd seen Bill's [William Arrowsmith's] *Clouds* put on by Washington, by Catholic University in Washington—talk about cutting! And that isn't a "dirty" play, although they did some interesting things. But the thought of it being put on was intriguing. Well, that was in the bad old days of California, and the bad old days in California were like the bad old days in Texas. The gimmick was that it was all one big university and you could—I was on a statewide committee and we used to hold meetings at a different campus every other month, and you could fly to these meetings, and out of some fund or other our fare would be paid. (Eventually a friend of mine on another committee was killed, going from the airport somewhere near UCLA. The helicopter crashed into the Disneyland parking lot.) Anyway, I got money and flew up to Davis where they were putting it on, and they were about three weeks into rehearsal and I was thinking, my God, they learned the lines! I'd forgotten them by this time. This was in the fall of '64 and so I talked to him about this other ending, due to the fact that they had this thrust stage and they wanted to get everybody off, and if they put down the lights in that crazy place people would fall into the trap and off the sides and everything. So, we had them gradually peel off, leaving *Lysistrata* and the Commissioner, and never mind the relationship between them, it plays and no point to argue about that. It was right after the '64 elections, and the line that goes, "Cold water diplomacy, pah!" got into trouble because everybody thought I had said, "Goldwater diplomacy, pah!" and we got these weird reviews one time: "the introduction of modern politics in the last scene seemed suddenly out of place," and, *modern politics?* Bill [Arrowsmith] gets more political than I ever got, although I don't suppose his *Knights* will ever come out in the fashion where *Demos* looks suspiciously like Eisenhower.

So we went along and in '66, being the bad old days, I got another year off and we went to England. I did the *Ecclesiazousae*, or most of it, and finished that and came back, and we were going ahead with the

series. [Arrowsmith] got Tim Reynolds to do the *Peace*. Tim was a mad poet, tremendously brilliant, and the most undisciplined person I've ever known in my life. He translated the *Peace*, and if you think Demos looking like Eisenhower was something, Plemos, the God of War, had his hair slicked back and wore granny glasses and was a dead ringer for Robert McNamara, who was Secretary of Defense then. Anyway, that was so bad that [The University of] Michigan [Press] had suddenly gotten around to readers on their staff who screamed, "A good Johnsonian liberal!" or something like that. This was the beginning of '67 and they said, "We can't print that," and Arrowsmith said, "You can't do that, I'm the editor of this series and you're abrogating my rights as editor." One thing led to another, and Michigan pulled out of the series. The prior right to it was held by the reprint house, the New American Library, and then [Arrowsmith] had to go out and hunt up a hardback publisher. Well, editors, particularly at places like NAL [New American Library], change, and change with frequency, and so eventually the whole thing went to hell. The last development that I've heard since then . . . let's see: I did four: *Acharnians*, *Wasps*, *Lysistrata*, and *Ecclesiazousae*; Arrowsmith did two: the *Clouds* and the *Birds*; Lattimore did one: *Frogs*, which is really in another mode, you can tell, which is fine for him. I don't think it works as well for comedy, but his translations of tragedies are absolutely marvelous. Tim Reynolds and the *Peace* sort of brought everything effectively to a stop. I saw Arrowsmith last year and the thought was, I had started doing the *Plutus*, which isn't riotous, but I thought a play about economics might do as well now as a play about sex did in the '60's. I was really the beneficiary of a lot of things simply because people being sexually liberated and "how better to be sexually liberated" fit the *Lysistrata*. And so the thought was that Bill [Arrowsmith] would finish the *Knights* and I would do the *Plutus*. Bill used to do the *Knights* in coffee houses. Did you know that there were coffee houses in Austin? In the late '50's there were coffee houses in Austin. And Arrowsmith and Bob Sonkowsky, who was on the Classics faculty and was a good actor and has a glorious voice—one of the big organs—Arrowsmith and Sonkowsky used to go around and do readings of the prologue of the *Knights* for the very good reason that that was all that Bill had finished. So he would do the *Knights* and clean up the *Thesmo*, because the *Thesmo*—if I get far away from the text at times, and I have been known to do this, the *Thesmo* goes . . . well, the trolleys don't run there anymore. So I would do the *Plutus*, which I'd started on, and the *Peace*, which I'd really wanted to do. And that would finish out the set. Eleven. There's one other one in there. Guy Davenport, who's a good translator—a better poet than he is a translator, funny man—translated the twelfth. The twelfth play was going to be the *Dyskolos* (*The Boor*) of Menander. In the late '60's, '66-'67 it came in, and they were going to do it, and then they didn't do it. And there's a translation out by Carol Moulton that the New American Library published that must be connected with the situation somehow. I think Eric Segal had something to do with getting it taken out, but I haven't heard anything more about it. So, that's it at this moment. Arrowsmith is now at Emory in Atlanta and he teaches there half a year and he teaches wherever he wants half a year.

On the other hand, when I got here, I started acting again, as I told you. I'd done some at Riverside. That was because we had a small student body and we needed live people to do the roles. And then along in the early '70's we began doing the productions here at U.T. —the requisite nuts in the English and Classics departments—culminating in the radio drama series for KUT in '79.

DRAKE: Let's talk a little about the *Lysistrata* and theories of translation. How much of your translation is Aristophanes' text and how much your own poetry?

PARKER: Look, you stick yourself back here [indicating his office] behind a million books, and you look around you, and you find that a surprising number of them speak to you, but some of 'em reach out and grab you by the throat and say, "I'm not going to let you go." That does it. And partly, it was Arrowsmith, feeling that it ought to be done. He used to write me, and I'd send off pages and the blood was all over them. It was . . . I finally figured out that this was the hardest thing in the world that I knew how to do.

But I would send agony, agony going through the post, and it would come back. I remember, I would have built somebody up: I have a line that's kind of a touchstone from the *Acharnians* simply because I remember it for the way things ought to go. It doesn't go like this except in the Greek. The dirt-poor Megarian who wants to sell his two daughters comes to market, and when he first comes onstage, it comes out in English, "Emporium of Athens, highest hope and deepest desire of all my people, I want to take this opportunity to wish you-all a heartfelt howdy-do." And of course that comes from a slightly smaller thing in the Greek.

It's what it makes you do. And finally, sometimes it makes you do too much; and when I once translated five lines of Greek into fifty-six lines of English, I got back a very choleric note from Arrowsmith saying, "Don't do that," and he said it rather more violently. I don't know. You have to expand to a certain extent. Actually, there's a system which is not the best in the world, but there is one. English rhetoric takes a little more space to work in than Greek rhetoric. We've had a lot more time to fool around with it [English rhetoric]. And also, your audience doesn't know everything that the Greek audience did, so you have to euclure them into thinking they did. So you bootleg in bits of information without having it sound like Sheridan in *The Critic* (the play within the play): two Englishmen are talking, and one says, "Elizabeth, you know, is Britain's noble queen," and then the protatic character looks and says, "She is." And somebody asks, "Why, if he knows all this, does he go on telling him?" And the answer is, "Well, what the deuce, the audience has to find out somehow." The audience has to find out, but you can't let them know they're finding out. You have to sort of bury it in there and make people talk. Anyhow, you have to get in this much rhetoric here, and that has to balance somehow with something else, and fifty-six lines for five is ridiculous. But one time I had a huge parabasis where sixty lines of Greek went into two hundred, and that had to be, shall we say, chopped severely.

I'm in love with sound. And about the *Lysistrata*, the woman who played her at Davis, during the third week of rehearsal . . . Remember the line that goes something like, "to the couch for scutching and plucking"? Well, she turned to someone in the audience (she didn't know I was there) and said, "Well, here go the tongue-twisters." I hadn't thought of it that way, but I love consonant clusters. I love assonance. One thing. At Cornell, they got a professor over from the Speech Department and she worked—thing was, they were doing two big productions and this was a minor one—and she worked like a slave with those kids, and by the end of the rehearsal period, they could enunciate English, which helped a great deal. Otherwise they would have been totally incomprehensible.

In Aristophanes, when people say, for instance, the Megarian greeting, it's funny. The problem with tragedy, say, *Thyestes*, is that it's balanced on a knife's edge, and if you let it go over, well. It's like any good Jacobean play, where the language is so wild that if anybody says it wrong the whole house is going to dissolve in laughter. It's going to go crazy. And sometimes, you can't keep it from doing that. I don't know if there's any way to cut the laugh at the end of the *Revenger's Tragedy*. That's just impossible to cut. It's where Spurio finds that the Duke his father is dead and has a horribly scarred face, which they seemed to like in Jacobean melodrama, and everybody for four acts has been talking in this riotous polysyllabic English, and Spurio comes over and he looks at his father and he says, "what, old Dad, dead?" At the time I saw it in Cambridge [Gr. Britain], the whole house went up. There is absolutely no way—you try to imagine breaking up the text, but the playwright surely meant it, because Tourneur or whoever wrote the play has too good an ear to perpetrate something like that and not mean it.

About translation, there are two quotes I like by Thelonious Monk. The first is, "The cats I like are the cats who take chances", and the other is, "Sometimes I play a tune I've never heard before." On the other hand, with the translation of Aristophanes, sometimes I call it "the riskless risk," because after all, I ain't the author. The author died somewhere around the time 388 BC. Me? I don't use it, I think, to promote

political ideas. I'm not apolitical but I'm not your terribly political animal, although I got my linguistic politics. But when I think about it, there is quite a lot that I don't send off because I didn't follow a certain risk. That's putting *me* out there. The risks have been different. One of the risks is getting up in front of an audience and trying to blow the roof off.

DRAKE: Since you mentioned politics in connection with Aristophanes, what do you think about a recent theory of Aristophanic theatre being closely allied to the Epic Theatre of Brecht? I didn't get that myself from your text. I thought Aristophanes was maybe more like Ionesco.

PARKER: Well, let's see: it was during the daytime so the lights were on—I suppose that's sort of like Epic Theatre. Is it that it's political? Is that what they're driving at?

DRAKE: Well, I think it centers around the whole idea of what theater is supposed to do, what is the worth of theater in society. For instance, Cedric Whitman said,

Far from having any interest in inculcating any values, political or moral, [Aristophanes] created, as any poet ought, a myth of his own time. Aristophanic comedy is a powerful refractor of that society, more concerned with spiritual wholeness than with political or economic details." [From Cedric Whitman: *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero* pp. 2-3.]

I was wondering what you might think about that. The book that the quote is taken from came out the same year that your translation of the *Lysistrata* did.

PARKER: My God, that's right. [Long silence]. There's a story about T. S. Eliot in the '50's on himself addressing a seminar at the University of Chicago, and they were talking about *Prufrock*, and they would ask him, "What did you mean by . . . ?" and he'd look at them, and look sort of puzzled, and they'd say, "What about those lines, 'I grow old, I grow old, I wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled'?" and while he was pausing to think of a response, somebody else said, "I have always thought it meant that when you get old, you shrink," and Eliot's reply was, "You know, that's very good." And, I don't know. My first reaction to Whitman was, "Jeez, that's nice, I wish I'd said that." I don't know what it means, but I wish I'd said it.

DRAKE: I guess he was kind of leading into his theory of the comic hero, the individual as microcosm, the comic hero as the universe of the play . . .

PARKER: Yeah. The only trouble I have with that is that he sometimes takes the wrong character as the comic hero.

I find it hard as hell to talk about Aristophanes. I can talk about a play of Aristophanes', and I guess there was a time I could talk about Aristophanes, because I had to. I of course spend a lot of time on structural stuff, saying a play is built this way, and you do various things, and form is very important because . . . So you can beat the hell out of it with a stick, and it is absolutely essential that it be funny. And of course it has a message, but it seems to be more a part of the genre than anything else. I mean, you have to have a message because comedy has to have a message.

DRAKE: Right. It seems to be one of the conventions, like slapstick or knockabout farce.

PARKER: Yeah. I doubt if I can come out writing this, but I might as well say it to you. I don't know. It seems to be the thing to say today. I haven't talked much about saying things about Aristophanes. I like what he made me do, which is stupid, but, well not stupid, but it's nothing to build a theory of antiquity

on. He was . . . You can argue about him politically: you can call him a rock-ribbed conservative who happened to be for peace, or maybe he wasn't a rock-ribbed conservative.

DRAKE: Well he was certainly a political satirist.

PARKER: Oh yeah, sure, a satirist. But I think he loved Euripides. You can just imagine the audience saying "What's he gonna get him on this year?"

There's a line in the *Ecclesiazousae*—it's the scene where the young man, distressingly at the phallic stage, is being dragged back and forth by the three ugliest women in the world. And at one point he stops and says, "Why waste money on bucket hooks? Just get a little old lady and let 'er down in the well and up comes the bucket, gripped in a vise." And that's the sort of crazy detail you find in Aristophanes. It just stops everything dead and still the scene goes back and forth and back and forth. I haven't seen it much since it's not the most put-on play in the world, and a lot of it doesn't hang together and you wish he'd done something with the ending, and things like that. But still, a lot of it's funny. He's got a lot of chutzpah, the self-confidence that says, I can drop this and put it in the corner for awhile, and then go back and pick it up and it's still going to work. This is sort of marvelous. I think Jonson can do this, and well, Shakespeare can certainly do this, I suppose. Your basic great playwright can do it. Even your basically pretty good playwright can do it. Plautus can do it.

I had a class the other day where we were talking about this. This play was from the *Pseudolus* and it comes after one of the great scenes: the Whoremaster has been talking to the girls, saying, "It's my birthday and so I want you to put out particularly," and then he goes through why, X and Y, and the girl I always want to call Appassionata Von Climax but isn't turns and says, "Why should we particularly when all you want is money, money, money?" and then back and forth because today is his birthday, etc., and then everybody goes offstage and there's this little boy who comes on and says, "It's not much fun being a boy slave in a whorehouse, especially if you're not an attractive boy slave," and he does five minutes on this, and the only thing you can think is that everybody else is off changing madly because they have to come on as somebody else. Here's where I find myself—and then you go back to the play. And everybody is sort of wondering, what does this have to do with the price of anything? And, it's sort of poignant, but if you throw it out of the play it won't make any difference. That's one of the nice things about Old Comedy, about Aristophanic comedy.

DRAKE: What about early critical influences regarding literature?

PARKER: I grew up or was educated at the time of the New Criticism, when Cleanth Brooks and people were telling you how to read things. And unity was very important: there was a place for everything and everything in its place, and everything had to work, like "Where? Why? What?" And then you find Aristophanes and you suddenly realize the play could be a half hour long. It could be twenty minutes shorter in text, and frequently it is shorter because people cut the dirty lines. And it's not going to make much difference. It's infinitely extensible, and when you get into New Comedy, into Terence, it took me a long time to appreciate what he did. You're like a slalom racer, you've got to go through all the gates in the right order, and there are lots of gates because you've got a terrific amount of information to feed people and you can't add much more.

DRAKE: Plot becomes much more crucial.

PARKER: Yeah. You chuck out an Aristophanic scene and it's not going to be a terrible loss, and you could probably put one in.

DRAKE: Is the song that the chorus sings, after the key to the play (and you apparently agree with that, that the "bug-in-the-eye" scene is the key to the "civilizing force of love"), is that song a parabasis? Does it serve as one? It is clear in his other plays but not in the *Lysistrata*.

PARKER: There isn't a parabasis in the *Lysistrata*, except, no, the thing that serves as a parabasis is right before the paratragic scene, when Lysistrata comes out speaking Old High Euripides, right before this when the two choruses are still fighting and they "strip for action." That is the parabasis. The only trouble with the parabasis is that it lacks the parabasis proper, that is, the argument. Something happened during the teens of the 5th century, where you had a lot of people talking like crazy to the audience. He picks it up again in the *Frogs* and there's sort of one in the *Birds*, but for the most part it's gone. Whatever it was that led the author to say, in the form of the chorus, "We've got something to say to you. The author is very annoyed with the way you treated his play last year," or, "The author is overjoyed with the way you treated his play last year and hopes that you'll possess the same good sense that you did then."

DRAKE: The commercial.

PARKER: Yeah. But you don't do it, and you certainly don't do it by the time you get to the iambic scenes. There's sort of a quasi-one in the *Thesmophoria*, but they're still speaking as women in the play and they don't get out of it and talk about the playwright.

DRAKE: In the *Thesmophoria* it sounds more like agitprop than it does like playwright-to-audience.

PARKER: Yeah. They're still doing their business. They're pulling back from the action a little, but not back and out, which was what they used to do, which is sort of a pity. I suppose that's what they mean by Brechtian. He's always telling you, "This is a play," as if you didn't know.

DRAKE: There's a bit of agitprop feeling to the song I was speaking of, the one after the bug-in-the-eye scene. At least I got more of a sense of that than that it was put there so everybody backstage could change. You mentioned in a lecture that you had become sort of stuck with the form of the song, that you'd thought up the first verse and then had to do the whole rest of it in the same meter.

PARKER: Yeah. The trouble was, the first verse demanded an explanation, and so that went in and was fine, form seemed more important than matter, at least to the point where I couldn't cut it down any more. Oh, I suppose I could have, you can do anything. I could have had somebody step forward and say, "Ladies and gentlemen, for an adequate understanding of what is going on, let us understand that frequently, in plays of this sort . . ." You do what you can get away with.

DRAKE: I need to talk to you about disparate time frames, Aristophanes' and our own. I think I need to justify why I came to you in a mad frenzy and said, "What if the Spartans were Russians?" and I even said I'd do it, I'd duplicate the meter, the rhyme scheme, anything. And then of course you said you'd do it, and it came right off the top of your head whereas for me it would have been a terrific struggle. I think what I was trying to get at with the Whitman quote was that the details of the conflict aren't as crucial as the unity of the main character in action. The main character is an archetype and all the others are types, almost as if they were subpersonalities. So if the antiwar theme was merely an easily accepted convention for Aristophanes' audience, why not telescope this into the 20th century for our audience, and let Greece stand for Western Civilization, and let the socialistic oligarchy become Russia rather than Sparta, with the imperialist democracy as the United States and its allies?

PARKER: Well, of course I had written it in American Mountain dialect, but I love to do Russian. I disagreed with your one-world theory at first, but it came off pretty well at the end and, as I say, I don't like the ending I wrote anyway, and anything somebody can do to get it off with a flourish is okay.

I'm not too sure if the play is all that cosmopolitan, but then I guess it depends on what you do for an ending, and I really like the ending. What is the song?

DRAKE: The Russian folkdance "Korobushka," to which you wrote the lyrics for the "Sonk of Peeg."

PARKER: It's nice to have the melody beforehand, which I don't usually do. One time I went through the *Wasps* and I had in my head the "Overture to the Merry Wives of Windsor" by Nicolai. I had to throw it out, it was absolutely awful. But oh, it was fun.

DRAKE: Your stuff sings so well on its own. And speaking of music and language, of course you don't usually write in the music when you translate, just as you don't write in the spectacle, or very much of it. How much do you think the text will bear? How much needs to be message units and how much can afford to go into music, into pure sound?

PARKER: You try to do it at the same time, and sometimes it do and sometimes it don't. "No balls at all" for example only occurs once in the Greek. But it seemed logical that it should occur twice, in one half of the chorus and then in the other half.

I like the song, too; if it wasn't there, it oughta be, and so sometimes it goes in. Arrowsmith once said—here, I think, when he was teaching a course on Euripides . . . Somebody asked, "Why does Pentheus say that?" and his reply was very simple: "Well, when I wrote that, I meant . . ." and the class had to point out to him that Euripides had written the line and that was what they were asking about. Why do people say what they say when they say it? I found Terence terribly hard because the dialogue's like this [indicates tight]. I'd hate to be translating Noel Coward into Latin or something.

DRAKE: Aristotle rates spectacle the least important dramatic element in tragedy, but here we're talking about comedy. This has to be funny, you've got to have some spectacle. There are so many obvious times when the text calls for the production to be quite spectacular.

PARKER: Yeah, I think so. But hell, it was the late '50's. I didn't know how they were going to do the Kinesias/Myrrhine scene. Maybe she could bring a small tent onstage, maybe they'd put it in complete blackness . . .

DRAKE: That scene is a very funny scene without any stage representation at all. It reads funny. The set-ups are so clear.

There's something childlike about the quality of Aristophanes' humor, it's all so innocent, really, there's nothing dirty or prurient about it. I thought the text called for really whole-hog use of phalloi for the young men.

PARKER: The large size helped. If you'd cut them down two-thirds, you'd have run into trouble.

DRAKE: No doubt about it. We had to be grotesque or we ran the risk of being taken seriously. In an earlier reading, I toyed with the idea of doing production in antebellum costume, having the soldiers' swords stand for the phalloi, having them become utterly clumsy with them during the required

moments . . .

PARKER: Something like night-sticks can work, too. This was what they used at Davis. And they held them like that, and it took about ten seconds to establish the convention, and everybody knew what was going on.

DRAKE: As I understand it, the chorus were not supposed to have phalloi.

PARKER: No. I get quite insistent on that. I suppose the reason I stressed it in that play is that I wanted to be sure that it was a chorus of old people, old women and old men, and not people who got together as nubile and erect in the next scene. It's this against which the whole thing is played. I saw a production in Athens which was done up on a hill, a sort of theater they'd gotten together for tourists. It was being done in modern Greek, and *Lysistrata* was played by an eminent tragic actress. It was interesting. What they'd done was to take the prologue, and then take the entrance of the chorus, then the conflict of the chorus (which usually occurs after the *agon*) was attached to the *parodos*, so that you had about forty minutes of wonderful chorus, and then you returned to this cold, austere Commissioner. This was in about the Spring of '66 and the colonels had just taken over or were about to take over, but they got fairly embarrassed by this. So it wasn't played phallic at all. All the men were behind huge and fairly authentic shields. But the play itself seemed, not like an insult, but an interruption, because the chorus was so much more interesting. They were funny, and they were active, and they didn't have to worry about the phallic problem, and they didn't have to be dignified, and oh, it was nice.

DRAKE: I looked at a lot of translations during the preparation of this production, and everybody seems to end theirs in a kind of quiet little peaceful ballad, too, and I was wondering if that was textual.

PARKER: There's something funny about the ending. It's not really a peaceful ballad: you have the business of the Spartans shouting out a prayer to Athene, which is pretty remarkable in itself. It does lack "How do we get this off the stage?" One wonders exactly what they would say? I suppose they could just march out.

DRAKE: That's what I saw, obviously. It fits the text and it fits a theory of moving many bodies around the stage during the 5th century.

I mentioned earlier that you appeared to agree that the key to the play occurs in the bug-in-the-eye scene between the two semichoruses. This was based upon my discovery of a note you had written to yourself after viewing a rehearsal at Lubbock, in which you said, "It's not animal sex, not rut. The 'thole' of the play is the bug-in-the-eye scene." That had been my gut reaction to the play after the first reading, too. But I am wondering what you meant exactly by "sex as the civilizing force of love."

PARKER: Do you remember *Eros*, supposed to be "genteel pornography," that came out in the '60's? It's hard to believe that was twenty years ago. Well, their idea of *Lysistrata* was to throw the antiwar politics out of the play completely. And if you do that, then o.k., I guess you can have people couple a lot onstage, but then you've got no play. I mean, this other thing about the acropolis being the mount of Venus, too, well, you know it is; otherwise, it is the female genitalia, although not as wildly as it was at Lubbock, where it was like a cervical dilation; but that's certainly how it works together. And the men finally get into the citadel from which they've been shut out. This is what pulls it all together; otherwise, jokes about not being able to do something you want are stock-in-trade comedy and they're tired. I mean, the Kinesias/Myrrhine scene is funny for awhile, until you realize he hasn't changed anything. And if Kinesias does succeed, and goes to bed with her, then it has to mean something.

It's also a peculiarly moral play. It's a very moral play. There was all the business which I covered up—maybe I was trying for form a bit too much—but they are supposed to . . . There's a German film version from the '30's which I've never seen but I've heard of. When the men are locked out of the bedrooms, you immediately see them tearing down to the nearest whorehouse, which is just as wrong as it can be, because Aristophanes takes particular care to get this out. What he's talking about is married love, and he's talking about married love just as much as Aeschylus is talking about it in the *Oresteia*. If you throw the sex out, you've got a rather dull play about politics. And if you throw the politics out, you've got a rather dull play about sex. And it's everything: everything fits. There have been a lot of feminist writings on the play. I read an article recently, when I found myself in Kentucky having to talk about women and Aristophanes or something, but just a good article on this subject actually trying to disprove something which it proved: that the acropolis is the "sanctum sanctorum" which must be achieved, even as it is objectified and women are objectified, and the real key occurs when the old men and old women agree to accept the fiction of the bug in the eye.

DRAKE: That scene is so poignant from the standpoint of character. I saw that as a moment approaching realism, with plenty of characterizing detail played by the actors. That's a far cry from the symbolic action of Lysistrata or the stereotypical behavior of the other principals. The only way it seems to me to make sense is getting back to Whitman, and the Jungian bases of literary and dramatic criticism brought out in an excellent study of your whole series by Kenneth MacLeish, that yes, Aristophanic comedy is thematic, but that theme is character. The universe of the play is the main character, it's her world, and that's why it can be inclusive of so many things, such as why the men don't resort to prostitutes or each other in order to relieve their sexual tensions.

PARKER: Yeah, except for the reference to Kleisthenes—he was the house homosexual for twenty years: "You want a pathic? Don't turn your back on Kleisthenes, etc." But you know, Aristophanes says "Kleisthenes," the audience falls down, and the poor guy must have been unhappy. But you know, he's mentioned there, and the dildoes are mentioned.

DRAKE: You mentioned the article on feminism and Aristophanes. I didn't see any feminism in this play at all. I think what you mentioned about the morality of the play is significant, that it's married love he's talking about, a return to the status quo, not female supremacy as a desired goal.

PARKER: All they were trying to do in the article was trying to point out how women were treated in this period. You've got to take something absolutely objective, and what was absolutely objective in this play was Aristophanes himself. And he was certainly, it seems to me, as sympathetic a portrayer of women as you're going to find around that time, but he certainly knew . . . Well, how the hell do I know? But he certainly sounded like he knew what women sounded like. They sound like people, not like men playing women, as though he could treat them with objectivity, but to see where they're funny. I think Kleonike is very funny. She's a lush but she's funny.

DRAKE: Have you ever directed any of your own stuff?

PARKER: No. I figure that the director knows a helluva lot more about what they're doing. I know what I wanted, I knew what I wanted, and I'm frequently, when I see what directors have done, surprised as hell, though it's sometimes because I've forgotten and sometimes because it's new. But when somebody does exactly what I want because it's in the words, I know, "Yep, that's it." And sometimes you don't write it right and it comes out in various ways. For example, I wrote in the *Lysistrata*, how do women talk? In the '60's? Not that the words are different, but the pattern's different. And you can't . . . I wanted

to make them talk like women talking that fantastic near-language which is whatever it is in their own right, not like men talking like women which is something else again. But I thought of *Lysistrata*, when I was doing this, as somebody who would be president of the local garden club. And the first performance, at Davis, I saw this debate. Well, you know as well as anybody who has ever had anything to do with the play, what do you *do* there? How do you keep the audience's attention when people are talking at length about things like raucous caucuses, for God's sake? I mean it sounds good but what do they care about this forest of names that he's going to lay on? And I had this idea, *Lysistrata* and sex . . . How would she get the idea? Only if she were really interested. And Debbie, who played *Lysistrata* in that Davis production, it was just her and the Commissioner onstage, the choruses had pulled back. She started talking and there was a lot of movement at first, and then she stared this hip movement. And there were my words, but she was doing it completely differently. My God, she did everything except a Barbizon roll and throw it in his face. And, you know, it would work at City Hall.

DRAKE: You've been extremely generous and tolerant with this work in particular, especially with regard to directorial interpretation. It must take a tremendous amount of separation from your work to accept so good naturedly the modifications that directors have imposed upon it, including my own.

PARKER: Yeah, separation is part of it. The other is him [Aristophanes]. He wrote it, I didn't. One story: there was one time . . . Bill Sharp, who the last I knew was still teaching and directing at Emerson, did Arrowsmith's version of Euripides' *Heracles*, and Sharp said, "I finally had to exclude him from rehearsals, because he'd say, 'No, it doesn't go that way, it means this and that.'" And that probably did something to me. I don't know whether I made a resolution at this point or what, but by God, I will never interfere with the director. I will ask something, but hell, it's the director's play. I put it together, I see things. I don't see everything, and still I'm just grateful that they put it on. There are times when you want to shake somebody, I mean for ineptitude, not for another interpretation. If you have to do it, to say, "This doesn't work, if he does that with line two hundred how does it work with line seven hundred?" generally you can learn something from it and it's like seeing something new every time.

It was a great deal of fun to put it over in Russian. I saw a production at Lubbock where the Kinesias/Myrrhine scene was . . . I didn't know whether they were going to make it. Not because they weren't good actors, they did a very good job of it. It just made you realize, what do you do on the south plains for entertainment? One of them was going to reach orgasm before that scene was over and I didn't know which one and I, my God, I didn't know if I was going to be able to make it out of town.

I would like to see it done sometime with dancers. In that case, I would really have to do my threatened rewrite of the ending. I know what I wanted to do with the end, at least half of it. Keeping the southern dialect, to do the last song, have the Spartans do country and western. Country and western lyrics don't exactly come to me in my sleep, but I think that's what it needs and I think it would be fun.

DRAKE: It would be fun to do it with dancers, and a country and western-song would have a lot of popular appeal as well as fitting in stylistically with the Spartan dialect.

Thank you for your adaptation of the Spartans from *Mountain Men* to Russians for this production, and thank you for generously granting these interviews and sharing your personal collection of letters, reviews, and other production information on the *Lysistrata*. They will be an invaluable aid to the preparation of this thesis.