ISSA Proceedings 2002 – Arguing In "Pen Of Steele And Silken Inke": Theorizing A Broader Material Base For Argumentation

I've been a hard worker all my life, but most all my work has been the kind that 'perishes with usin',' as the Bible says. That's the discouragin' thing about a woman's work . . . I've always had the name of bein' a good housekeeper, but when I'm dead and gone there ain't anybody goin' to think o' the floors I've swept, and the tables I've scrubbed, and the old clothes I've patched, and the stockin's I've darned. . . . But when one of my grandchildren or great-grandchildren sees one o' these quilts, they'll think about Aunt Jane, and, wherever I am then, I'll know I ain't forgotten.
Aunt Jane of Kentucky (Hall, 1908)

Writing in her journal toward the end of the nineteenth century, Aunt Jane of Kentucky claimed quilting as a rhetorical space where she could *leave her mark*. As Carol Mattingly (2002a) observes of nineteenth century women rhetors, "since many of the traditional tools of rhetoric were denied them, women found it necessary to consider techniques beyond masculine speakers' attention to argument and delivery" (4)**[i]**. Needlework offered women, like Aunt Jane, one such rhetorical technique (Parker, 1989).

Focusing scholarly attention on non-traditional, alternative rhetorical techniques raises at least two questions: How do those who are denied access, typically by virtue of their gender, race, ethnicity, class and sexual orientation, to dominant, ma(i)n/stream discursive spaces construct and engage in arguments? How do we as scholars devise methods for theorizing and historicizing rhetorical practices that take place in the shadows or on the margins of these spaces? Over the last ten years feminist historians of rhetoric have begun to tackle complex questions along these lines as they have tilled important new scholarly ground in their efforts to recoup neglected women rhetors and rhetoricians, and previously overlooked feminist traditions (Campbell, 1989; Glenn, 1997; Hobbs, 1997; Jarratt, 1991; Logan, 1999; Lunsford, 1995; Mattingly, 1998, 2002a; Peterson,

1995; Ratcliffe, 1996; Royster, 2000; Sutherland & Sutcliffe, 1999; Wertheimer, 1997). As Patricia Bizzell (2000) points out, over the last decade "few, if any, other areas of research in the history of rhetoric have produced such rich results of this kind as feminist research" (7).

The feminist turn in rhetoric has made a significant contribution to rhetoric scholarship by drawing attention to the need for studying a broader range of rhetorical spaces, practices and artifacts than previously treated. Richard Leo Enos (2002), for example, argues:

If we are to provide a sensitive accounting of women in the rhetorical tradition, current methods of, and perspectives on, historical research need to be reconsidered and adjusted in three respects. First, our mentality toward rhetoric must expand beyond civic, agonistic discourse to include alternative modes of expression used by women. Second, our efforts to discover primary evidence must intensify so that a more representative body of sources becomes available. This expanded body of evidence must include non-traditional sources that provide insight into the oral and literate practices of women. Third, historians of rhetoric must create methods of research and analysis that will provide a more sensitive accounting of primary material than current historical methods were designed to yield. (65)

In a similar vein, Mattingly (2002b) challenges historians to rethink what counts as rhetorical evidence; elsewhere she (2002a) notes, "one component that contributes to our understanding and appreciation of women in the history of rhetoric is evidence crucial to the effectiveness but heretofore ignored because of its insignificance for men" (4). Christine Mason Sutherland (2002) calls for more scholarship on rhetorical fora and practices other than civic and agonistic – that is, more work on *sermo* (the rhetoric of private and semi-public spaces) as a counterbalance to all that has been done on *contentio* (120). By expanding theoretical concepts of what counts as rhetoric (and, by extension, who counts in its production and circulation) feminist scholars have theorized alternative models of argumentation. For example, Foss, Foss and Griffin's (1999) invitational model of rhetoric, and, particularly, in Ryan and Natalle's (2001) "emending" of that model offers a more inclusive theory of argumentation than has been traditionally constructed. Through their concepts of *offering* and *willingness to yield*, their model of argument "demonstrates that intention means engagement in an issue rather than [only] persuasion to a belief [or social action]" (Ryan & Natalle, 70;

also see Foss & Griffin, 1992, 1995).
This essay may be understood as contributing to the feminist turn in the history of rhetoric by the broadening the material base for theorizing rhetorical practice in general, and argumentation in particular. Here, I show how arguing in "pen of steele and silken inke" both participates in, and offers an alternative to, a complex web of rhetorical spaces, practices, and artifacts. More specifically, I focus on needlework sampler making to demonstrate the ways in which embroidery may be understood as powerful discursive practice.

Embroidery is a form of meaningful mark-making – a polysemous system of writing that incorporates both semasiographic systems (sign symbols) and glottographic systems (verbal utterance symbols) to use Geoffrey Sampson's (1985) terms. Sampler making – a practice that dates back thousands of years and has been found in every region of the world – originally served as invention. Like a commonplace notebook, samplers offer a space in which to learn, practice and record the available means of persuasion via choices of embroidery stitches, threads, materials, colors, motifs and patterns (Clabburn, 1998; Humphrey, 1997; Parker, 1989); a radical disruption in the purposes, subject positions, and contexts for sampler making, beginning in the eighteenth century, displaced it as invention, rendering it instead as a demonstration of knowledge (an *end* in itself) rather than as an epistemic tool (a *means* to another end) for creating socio-cultural meaning elsewhere (Goggin, 2002). Needlework samplers thus serve as important artifacts for rhetorical study; in them, one may glimpse the traces of praxis where "society's 'workings' become visible in the purposes, imagined audiences, content, and outcomes" of these text/iles (Miller, 1998, 4).

1. The Rhetoricity of Samplers and Sampler Making
In the course of researching the history of sampler making, I stumbled upon a sampler stitched in *circa* 1830 by Elizabeth Parker of Ashburnham, East Sussex, England (see Browne, & Wearden, 1999, 108). (See Figure 1.) Until quite recently, this piece had for nearly fifty years remained folded and virtually ignored in a textile drawer in the back storeroom of the Victoria and Albert Museum**(ii)**.

Figure 1. Elizabeth Parker's Sampler circa 1830. Courtesy Victoria and Albert Picture Library Ref. T.6-1956
Figure 2. Charlotte Eleanor Cullum's Marking Sampler, 1874. Courtesy Witney Antiques, Witney, England.

At first glance, this text/ile appears to be an ordinary plain-stitch sampler, a domestic and domesticating exercise undertaken particularly, though not exclusively, by young women (especially in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) to equip them with skills for positions that would enable them to avoid potentially horrific circumstances – an escape well captured by Geraldine Clifford's (1982) title "Marry, Stitch, Die or Do Worse," a piece in which she examines the limited options for nineteenth-century women. One of the most common plain-stitch exercises was the marking sampler on which young needleworkers would practice stitching various styles of alphabetic letters and numbers that could be used to mark household and personal items. Moreover, this work could serve and, in fact, did circulate as a material CV.

A typical, though beautifully rendered, marking sampler was stitched by Charlotte Eleanor Cullum at the Bristol Orphanage in 1874 when she was sixteen. (See Figure 2.)

This is one of a number of known marking samplers of fine quality that come from the Bristol Orphanage Schools where boys as well as girls were required to learn how to sew and knit**(iii)**. The top half of the sampler is devoted to different styles of lettering in both upper and lower cases as well as different styles of numbers. The bottom half consists of small decorative motifs (including several versions of a royal crown; a cow, and a bible) as well as a variety of borders and corner patterns all of which could be used to mark or decorate domestic or personal textiles wrought elsewhere. As was typical, this marking sampler was rendered in red silk, for red was a common color for marking household linens. Cullum's piece is a fine example of a material CV; and it must have worked well because in the

following year on June 23, 1875 she was able to secure a position in the household of William Brodie, Esq. of Eastbourne (*Samplers: All Creatures*, 1994, 33).

In addition to marking samplers, it was not unusual for nineteenth-century needleworkers to stitch long passages. In fact, one of the distinguishing features of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English and American samplers is the dominance of text over motif. A commonplace exercise was the stitching of brief hymns, proverbs, psalms and other sections from the Bible and other moral texts**(iv)**. More elaborate samplers tackled projects such as the one stitched by Anne Jennings *circa* 1790. (See Figure 3.) As Jennings indicates in the bottom right-hand corner, she wrought her sampler "under the direction of Mistress Parker at the Orphan School near Calcutta, East Bengal."

Figure 3. Anne Jennings Sampler, circa 1790. Courtesy Witney Antiques, Witney, England.

In three columns, Jennings painstakingly stitched moral verses advocating moderation in all things, followed by a series of eleven verses in the second column, and thirteen verses in the third. At the top of the middle panel, Jennings embroidered two views of the Orphan School that was opened for the children of the British Military who occupied the area. These threadwork pictures are a signifier of the known samplers stitched under Mistress Parker's guidance. One of

the most ambitious projects under this teacher's direction, however, is a series of six samplers wrought by six young students who divided the longest chapter in the Bible, the 119th Psalm with its 176 verses, each taking a section to stitch. This arduous task took them over five months, beginning February 14 and ending June 23, 1797 (Huish, 1990, 35).

However, sampler makers not only copied verses; they also at times recorded important events in their own words. For example, in her sampler (now held at the Museum of London) dated June 28, 1694, Mary Minshull recorded:
THERe WAS AN EARTHQUAK
ON THE 8 OF SEPTeMBeR 1692
BUT NO HURT THO IT
CAUSED MOST PART OF ENGLAND TO
TREMBLe

Through her silken text, Minshull serves as eyewitness to and historical recorder of this noteworthy event. Her first-hand account contributes additional material evidence to support the newspaper accounts of that day.
Nearly 300 years later, Teré Tammar wrought a sampler to narrate the story of the devastating hurricane Emily that struck England in the early hours on Friday, October 16, 1987. (See Figure 4.)

She wanted to leave an historical account of the destruction it wreaked, especially in Lewes, East Sussex where she and her family lived as well as an account of her family's reaction to it (T. Tammar, personal communication, June 21, 2001). In 44 silk lines of beige, she narrated the events of that frightening evening. Tammar, whose qualifications are in food studies, taught home economics in London and was periodically asked to substitute in needlework classes when a teacher was absent. As she explains it, she has long had an interest

Figure 4. Teré Tammar's Sampler, 1989. Courtesy Teré Tammar, Lewes, Sussex, England, private collection.

in antique samplers, and began stitching small samplers with messages for her children (e.g., "Be Good") with the help of her close friend Susan Russell who had been rigorously trained in needlework at a convent school on Guernsey. Her personal interest in sampler making lies in its discursive capacity for recording and communicating events in her life. She notes that she does not plan her design in advance but stitches "simply [to] see what happens" (Personal Communication, April 21, 2002). Tammar still lives with her family in Lewes where she and her husband run a bed and breakfast at Miller's cottage on High Street – the very cottage depicted along with her family and pets at the bottom of her sampler.

2. "As I Cannot Write": Elizabeth Parker's ca 1830 Sampler

Elizabeth Parker's sampler (see Figure 1) at first glance appears to fall within the tradition of ordinary plain-stitch samplers. However, on closer inspection, Parker's sampler is anything but ordinary or plain. In this most uncommon of common text/iles, Parker cross stitched in red silk 46 lines of excruciatingly small letters her story on a large piece of tightly-woven linen, measuring some 30" wide by 34" long (a cloth nearly triple in size from that on which Cullum stitched her marking sampler, and nearly double that of both Jennings's and Tammar's samplers). (See Appendix B for a transcription of her text.)

Parker devotes the first 20 of 46 lines to the autobiography of her then brief life of some 17 years, focusing especially on the last four years (between the ages of 13

and 17). After establishing that she was born in Ashburnham (East Sussex, England) in 1813, that her father was a laborer and her mother was a schoolteacher, she names her ten siblings. Elizabeth then tells us that in 1826, at the age of thirteen, she took a live-in position as a nursemaid to the children of the worthy Mr. and Mrs. P. Just fourteen months later in 1828, Elizabeth decided to leave that situation. She found her own position as a housemaid to "Lieu. G" in Fairlight, a small village just nine miles southeast of Ashburnham. However, she did not last long in this situation. There she was treated "with cruelty to[o] horrible to mention" and while "trying to avoid the wicked design of [her] master [she] was thrown down stairs" (line 10-11). Shortly after this horrific experience, Elizabeth took refuge with friends, and after a brief time, left them for yet another live-in position as a kitchenmaid for Col. and Lady P in Catsfield, a small village that lies just over a mile southwest of Battle (site of the famous 1066 Battle of Hastings) and almost three miles southeast of Ashburnham. There Elizabeth's "memory failed [her] and [her] reason was taken from" her (lines 11-12) – classic symptoms of what would today be diagnosed as severe depression. Sir and Lady P sent Elizabeth home and called for "Dr. W."

In these lines, Parker narrates what poet Diane Wakoski (1980) would call a *finger story***(v)** of sexual violation and physical abuse at the hands of a supposed protector – her employer Lt. G; these horrific experiences leave unnamed physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual scars that paralyze her. Her paralysis is compounded by persistent dark thoughts of suicide, thoughts weighed down by very real and potentially severe legal and religious consequences (Anderson, 1987; Bailey, 1998; MacDonald and Murphy, 1990).

The remaining 26 lines inscribe her struggle against, in her words, the "great sin of self destruction" (line 15) that becomes for her a "dreadful powerful force of temptation" (line 23) against which she fights almost daily. She prays for God's guidance and mercy but is not convinced that she is worthy of either. After suturing 46 lines, 1,722 words, 6,699 characters (averaging 146 characters per line), she stops abruptly mid-way down the cloth, in mid-line with a powerful plea: "[W]hat will become of my soul [?]" (line 46). Her question is left hanging, and it hangs in our minds – torturous and painful**(vi)**.

This piece is by any account a powerful rhetorical text. As an artifact, this most extraordinary of ordinary textiles both fits and resists the parameters of canonical genres, namely commonplace notebooks (Miller, 1998; Moss, 1996),

autobiographies (Bergland, 1994; Gilmore, 1994a; Lionnet, 1989), suicide notes (MacDonald and Murphy, 1990), religious and legal confessions (Gilmore, 1994b; Swaim, 1992), and narrative arguments (McClish and Bacon, 2002). The grapholectic marks render it a familiar text/ile. Yet in material terms it resists canonical generic placement precisely because it is cross stitched in red silk on white linen. That is, it lies outside the very narrow material boundaries typically set for canonical rhetorical texts.

As praxis, it fits more readily the parameters of argumentation. That is, stitching transformed a material surface into multiple levels of meaning, engaging conflicting purposes and audiences, and weaving multiple discourses of a particular historical moment and place. In her struggle and prayer, we witness Parker engaging in an argument against the nineteenth-century commonplaces of proper behavior circulated by the good Dr. W, by Mrs. Welham with whom she goes to live, and by church and state. She finds herself in a seesaw push/pull of resistance and compliance. She argues with herself as much as with the forces that send her teetering. In a very heightened sense, she performs the more inclusive definition of argumentation as "engagement in an issue rather than [only] persuasion to a belief [or social action]" (Ryan & Natalle, 2001, 70).

As a *practice*, then, it is undeniably a form of argumentative writing. And yet, Parker herself begins her text in silken ink with the words "As I cannot write." This enigmatic phrase offers an important starting point for exploring the complex questions: What counts as rhetoric? And who counts in the creation/transformation and circulation/performance of meaning?

Although it might be read in a number of ways, the phrase "As I cannot write" may be best understood to signal a self-imposed silence – a metaphorical cutting off of her tongue and hands. It calls to mind the mythical story of Philomela. The most well known version of this myth comes from Book 6 of Ovid's (trans. 1955) *Metamorphosis*. In that telling, after Philomela's brother-in-law Tereus the Thracian king rapes her, Philomela vows to tell anyone who will listen to her what Tereus had done: "What punishment you will pay me, late or soon!/Now that I have no shame, I will proclaim it./ Given the chance, I will go where people are,/Tell everybody" (147). Locating the power to speak solely in the tongue, Tereus cuts it out, believing he has cut off her power at its source. Yet, as Aristotle (trans. 1932) in his discussion of various kinds of proofs in the *Poetics* points out, demonstration and proof can be manifested in many ways other than by the speech of the tongue; wounds, for example, themselves are a proof (XVI.4).

In his discussion of other kinds of rhetorical proofs, Aristotle points to Sophicles's use of the myth of Philomela in a now lost play *Tereus* in which Sophicles calls Philomela's embroidered story "the voice of the shuttle" (XVI.4). Philomela used the voice in her needle – an alternative way to secure discursive power by stitching her account of the violent assault on a robe so her sister Procne and others could learn of it. Procne was thus able to bear witness to the story because of the rhetorical power of Philomela's threadwork.

In Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, Marcus Andronicus alludes to this myth when he first sees his niece Lavinia who has herself been sexually defiled, her tongue cut out and her hands cut off:
But sure some Tereus hath deflowered thee,
And lest though shouldst detect him, cut thy tongue. . . .
Fair Philomela, she but lost her tongue,
And in a tedious sampler sew'd her mind:
But, lovely niece, that means is cut from thee;
A craftier Tereus, cousin, hast though met,
And he hath cut those pretty fingers off
That could have better sew'd than Philomel[a]" (II.4, 930)

Sampler making was thus not an option for Lavinia since her hands also were cut off; instead, she snatches a copy of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* from her nephew, young Lucius, and turns to the "tragic tale of Philomela" (IV.i, 935); at her uncle Marcus's urging to reveal the names of the vile creatures who so brutally attacked her, Lavinia places a stick in mouth, and guides it with her stumps to scratch out in the dirt beneath her feet the names of those responsible for the horrors done to her (IV.i, 934-35). By analogy, Elizabeth Parker, who will not "speak" and claims cannot "write," can be understood as metaphorically denied both "tongue" and "hand" but nevertheless succeeds in stitching her mind into a "tedious sampler." Where she departs from both Philomela and Lavinia is in the nature of her argument. Both Philomela and Lavinia seek action; thus, they engage in a more traditional mode of argumentation – persuasion directed at a public audience toward a specific end. By contrast, Parker turns inward. She engages not in *contentio* but in *sermo* – a private engagement to puzzle through her own personal struggles. For reasons especially particular to her social positioning as a nineteenth century lower class English women, she does not seek to bring to light or justice the monster who is the source of her pain**(vii)**.

Her decision to opt for silence – not telling friends, family, employers or her doctor what had happened to her – suggests that she was trying to abide by one of the long-standing injunctions to women to be chaste, silent and obedient. This tri-fold mandate was meant to close off and thus control all female orifices: chastity kept closed the vagina; silence the mouth; and obedience the eyes downcast. For Elizabeth, the first and last gendered moral laws were, to her mind, already broken. First, having been brutally attacked and sexually assaulted by the vile Lt. G, her chastity had been taken, so she can no longer abide by the first moral mandate. Of the three, this one carried the most severe consequences for women of her day. As Mattingly (2002a) points out, "because of strict nineteenth-century conventions regarding women's purity, no charges more readily threatened nineteenth-century women than those of immorality and immodesty" (68). Second, she blames herself repeatedly for disobeying her parents by leaving the situation they had approved, and by taking a position she herself found. In her words, "above all I have felt the stings of a guilty Conscience for the great Disobedience to my parents in not taking their advice" (line 20). Downcast eyes were a signifier of obedience, sustaining the hegemonic power structure "that helped keep gendered and class hierarchies in place" (Mattingly, 2002a, 137). It is perhaps an effort to try to redeem herself in the area of obedience that she engages in an arduous task of cross stitching during which her eyes must be kept downcast to focus attention on the work at hand.

Silence, then, is the only one of the three moral mandates fully available to her. As with the other two commandments, she would have been discursively surrounded by and immersed in this one. Indeed, among the most common aphorisms to appear on samplers of her day was: "Cato doth say to Old and to Young the First step to Virtue is Bridle the tongue" (Ring, 1983, 71, 250). Yet, Parker abides by a silence of a certain kind; that is, she does not "speak" and she does not "write" in the conventional sense of those terms. But given the devastation she suffered on physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual levels, she cannot remain completely silent. She must, like the nineteenth-century hymnist Fanny J. Crosby, speak. In her hymn "Redeemed," Crosby makes clear the urge to speak: "I think of my blessed Redeemer,/I think of Him all the day long;/I sing, for I cannot be silent" (qtd. in Hobbs, 1997, 114). Perhaps through her sampler, Parker may be understood as saying, "I stitch, for I cannot be silent." However it is read, Parker's sampler serves as a discursive space in which to cope with debilitating struggles – a space in which to speak what she cannot "speak"

and write what she cannot "write" elsewhere. Understanding this material space as a powerful rhetorical space helps us to rethink what counts as rhetorical praxis and artifact, and who counts in its production, performance and circulation.

3. Rethinking What Counts as and Who Counts in Rhetorical Praxis and Text

Of course, turning to a material practice such as needlework requires a defamiliarization of the familiar – a challenge to and deconstruction of the gendered notion that this is "woman's work." And herein lies a paradox. There is, of course, nothing inherent in the practice that makes this work more suitable to women than to men – though some have argued that very point by suggesting women have more delicate fingers and thus can stitch more finely. Prior to the seventeenth century, needlework was not associated with one sex, being equally practiced by men and women. Beginning in the seventeenth century, however, it was constructed as "women's work" (Coffin, 1996, 114; Parker, 1989, 128; Roche, 1994, 252-53) – a gendered construct that became galvanized by the nineteenth century. Over this time, *the sayings of the father*, especially biblical references, became retrospective warrants for constructing sewing as the proper concern of the female and as the appropriate practice of the domestic sphere despite a long, continuous history of men up to this very day engaging in all kinds of needle arts including embroidery. "Women's work" as an ideological construct became, as historian Merry Wiesner (1986) reminds us, "an epithet for the boring, mundane, domestic tasks beneath the dignity of a man" (205). This is especially true of needlework. Yet the sexual politics of stitchery are more complex. As Peter Stallybrass (1999) observes: "The gendering of cloth, and of attitudes toward it, has itself been materially inscribed by the social relations through which, outside the capitalist marketplace where the male weaver and male tailor became increasingly the norm, women have been both materially and ideologically associated with the making, repairing, and cleaning of clothes" (35). In other words, within the world of the needle as elsewhere – men were understood to create, women to mend and tidy up. This sexualized perspective – which in real practice was actually much more complicated – was buttressed by "a new rhetoric of exclusion that developed in the eighteenth century and which gradually grew louder as the nineteenth century progressed. The rhetoric praised feminine qualities in male creators . . . but claimed females could not – should not – create" (Battersby, 1989, 3).

The paradox of the gendering of material practices and spaces is that in closing

off certain available means and spaces for discourse others are opened. As McClish and Bacon (2002) observe, "the connection of language to power means that the mediating role of language is always a defining factor in shaping the discourse of the oppressed. The control that the privileged exert over language means that the marginalized rhetors may have a paradoxical relationship with discourse, but they can negotiate this tension and craft powerful arguments' (32). In other words, "forces that may seem to be in opposition become defining tensions that shape innovative discourse" (33). In Parker's sampler, we witness her crafting innovative (in the sense of transforming) discourses as she engages in the painful interdynamic negotiations between her experience and the social expectations that define her role in society. Her praxis and her piece ought to encourage historians to turn their scholarly gaze toward all sorts of material practices that have taken place in the shadows – hidden, that is, in plain view**(viii)**.

4. Conclusion: "When This You See, Remember Me"

As the epigraph that opens this essay suggests, historically, many women (and men, though their work is far less known) have claimed needlework as a powerful rhetorical space. And they continue to do so. Some are like feminist artist Elaine Reichek who creates contemporary needlework samplers both to pay homage to those of previous eras and at the same time to deconstruct the ideology under which these early pieces were stitched (Cotter, 1999). Others are like Aunt Jane of Kentucky who take up the needle because as Jane notes in her journal, "I reckon everybody wants to leave somethin' behind that'll last after they're dead and gone. It don't look like it's worth while to live unless you can do that" (Hall, 1908; qtd. in Banks, 1995, 106). Nearly a century after Aunt Jane and nearly two centuries after Elizabeth Parker, Molly Finnegan (1999) in an educational broadcast titled "The Fabric of Our Lives: Quilt Making," explained: "I quilt because I don't want my history, my story to die. Quilting gives me a voice when I can't write or speak" (Rief, 1999). Pens of steel and silken ink have served needlework-rhetors for untold ages, and as Finnegan's explanation demonstrates, they continue to function as significant semiotic tools. For historians of rhetoric, these semiotic fabrics are important for recouping neglected rhetorical practices, artifacts and traditions in order to weave fuller accounts of the multiple ways meaning is constructed, performed and circulated.

Many sampler makers seemed keenly aware of the value of needlework for

leaving a discursive legacy. Indeed, among the most common phrases that appear on many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century samplers is “When this you see, Remember me.” In Parker’s sampler, she expresses far less optimism. She fingerwrites: “But ah the dead forgotten lie. Their memory and their name is gone. They are alike unknowing and unknown” (lines 37-38). Too bad she so little faith in her own discursive work. For in having stitched her story in silken ink, she reminds us of Sappho who in one of her fragments exclaimed: “Someone, I tell you will remember us” (trans. 1984). As Cheryl Glenn (1997) points out of Sappho’s work: “A surviving scrap of Sappho’s verse assures us that she knew she would not ‘be forgotten’ – despite the passage of time and the willful attempts to silence the voices of all women” (174-75). Similarly, Elizabeth Parker’s surviving scrap assures us (though it didn’t assure her) that she too will not be forgotten – but only if we look for and agree that this is a rhetoric and a person whose story is worth telling.

In sum, Parker’s most extraordinary of ordinary text/iles calls attention to the power of the needle for inscribing arguments, and challenges conservative notions about what counts as argumentative space, practice and artifact and who counts as participants. Parker’s work, thus, leads us to ask: How many other material practices have yielded important discursive texts? What other neglected spaces ought we be looking at for such practices? Who might now be recognized as rhetorical participants that have previously been overlooked? Broadening the material theoretical base for rhetoric challenges us to consider new ways of thinking about the construction, performance and circulation of rhetorical arguments.

Coda

As I note toward the beginning of this essay, Elizabeth Parker’s sampler was stored neglected in a textile drawer in a back room of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London for nearly fifty years; that the Museum has it at all is a story in itself that is relevant to this essay and instructive to those of us who write histories of rhetoric. The sampler had been in the family of one Mrs. Lily Griffiths for decades prior to it being acquired by the V & A. Mrs. Griffiths first contacted the museum on October 15, 1943 to see if the museum would be interested in what she called “a monument of pains-taking labour” or if they could advise her as to where else she might send it. She received a curt note dated October 20, 1943 that made it clear the museum had little interest and could or would not

help her. Luckily for us, Mrs. Griffiths persisted; twelve years later she again sent the sampler along with a letter dated November 11, 1955 asking for help in disposing what she variously called a “piece of old hand made linen with its strange ‘confessions,’” “a self-imposed penance,” and a “Human document.” This time the museum showed a bit more interest, noting “It is undoubtedly an unusual and curious piece, though its artistic interest, with which this Museum is primarily concerned, is of course not particularly great,” and offered to purchase it if Mrs. Griffiths was “prepared to dispose of it for a fairly small sum.” She was. In January 1956, the Museum purchased the sampler for £5.00 (Nominal File: Griffiths). This story calls attention to the fragility of rhetorical artifacts, and the ways in which they, and the practices that give rise to them, are always already discursively inscribed; their preservation and availability is contingent on what prior (and current) groups deem worthy. Thus, as Mattingly (2002b) persuasively argues, “we must continue to question the stories handed down to us, and even those we have helped to create. . . . Our own acculturation and prejudices may have led us to resist many other exciting women [and I’d add rhetorical practices] in our history” (102). Mrs. Griffiths persistence made available this most uncommon of common textiles, and in the process preserved Elizabeth Parker’s story, so that we like Procne may bear witness to it. It might have been otherwise.

Appendix A
*Transcription of Text Written and Cross-Stitched by Teré Tammar on her 1989 Sampler***(ix)**

thiS following concerning eventS in the town of
LEWES IN THE COUNTY OF SUSSEX
on the night of
THE GREAT STORM
which occurred in the early hourS of
FRIDAY 16TH OCTOBER 1987

During the night there came a great wind acroSS from**
newhaven Striking the town from the South Side * * IN the
courSe of thiS night leweS SuStained much damage*great **
treeS being uprooted*buildingS and wallS caSt down**and by
GodS Grace our houSe known aS millerS on Saint anneS hill*
Suffered only the loSS of one ridge tile from the roof * (thiS
afterwardS patched by Simon hopkinS of brighton for the * *

vaSt Sum of £160.00*builderS being hard to come by after the
event)***we were Saved by the cottageS on the other Side *
of the high Street which took the full force of the gate tak—
ing off their roof and hanging tileS * gill fowler at no. 115*
later Saying the old timber houSe moved for hourS like a**
Ship at Sea * She at one moment flying in terror from the***
Shaking water cloSet***my Son dick * a bright lad of fif-*
teen year being in hiS bedroom in the attic waS very much*
afraid Since he believed the wind to be the conSequence of a*
nuclear accident**hiS SiSter lucy Slept till awoken by *♡
her pet cat alice * She with tortoiSeShell fur and half her
tail***daughter and cat came downStairS to our bed where
I trembled for the chimneyS which every minute I expected
to fall through the roof**my huSband*tony*Said not to
worry aS it waS only the duStbin lidS blown off***in the*
morning we found what garden plantS remained Shrivell-
ed by Some matter in the wind and the glaSS from the green-
houSe gone we know not where***the power lineS being♡♡
down there waS no electricity So no hot water and a limited
meal for the bed and breakfaSt viSitorS and they much be-
muSed by the eventS of the night***later the children ◊-◊
found no School held So explored the town and came back**
all of the South eaSt of england waS ravaged we had together
with our four catS come through the night without injury
aS did our neighbourS and friendS~among theSe being the◊
ganderS and the fowlerS oppoSite* miSS pinwill in Saint♡†
peterS place and nigel*miSS newall next door and the◊♁♁
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ShelleyS at bow windowS~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

the tammars at * in the pariSh of
millerS St * anneS

teré*tammar*is*my*name*and*with*my*needle*I*wrought*the*Same*
to*give*my*children*a*rememberance*
of*how*lived*through*great*events*
the*laSt*Stitch*set*in*1989*my*being*very*busy*since*this*time

(*Around the side and top borders is the following quotation from Psalm 46*)
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

GOD◊IS◊OUR◊REFUGE◊AND◊STRENGTH◊A◊VERY◊PRESENT◊HELP◊IN◊ TROUBLE◊THEREFORE

WILL◊WE◊NOT◊FEAR◊THOUGH◊THE◊EARTH◊BE◊MOVED◊AND

THOUGH◊THE◊DOWNS**(x)**◊BE◊CARRIED◊INTO◊THE◊MIDST◊OF◊THE◊SEA * * * PSALM◊FORTY◊SIX

Appendix B
*Transcription of Text Stitched on Elizabeth Parker's circa 1830 Sampler (T6-1956)****(xi)***

[1] As I cannot write I put this down simply and freely as I might speak to a person to whose intimacy and tenderness I can full intrust myself and who I know will bear with all my weaknesses [2] I was born at Ashburnham in the county of Sussex in the year 1813 of poor but pious parents my fathers occupation was a labourer for the Rt Hon the Earl of A my Mother kept the Rt Hon – [3] the Countess of A Charity School and by their ample conduct and great industry were enabled to render a comfortable living for their family which were eleven in number William Samuel Mary [4] Edmond Jesse Elizabeth Hannah Jane George Louisa Lois endeavouring to bring us up in the fear and admonition of the Lord as far as lay in their power always giving us good advice and wishing us [5] to do unto others as we would they should do unto us thus our parents pointed out the way in which we were to incounter with this world wishing us at all times to put our trust in god to [6] walk in the paths of virtue to bear up under all the trials of this life even till time with us should end But at the early age of thirteen I left my parents to go and live with Mr and Mrs P to [7] nurse the children which had I taken my Fathers and Mothers advice I might have remained in peace until this day but like many others not knowing when I was well of in fourteen months I left [8] them for which my friends greatly blamed me then I went to Fairlight housemaid to Lieu. G but there cruel usage soon made me curse my Disobedience to my parents wishing I had taken [9] there advice and never left the worthy family of P but then alas to late they treated me with cruelty to horrible to mention for trying to avoid the wicked design of my master I was thrown [10] down stairs but I very soon left them and came to my friends but being young and foolish I never told my friends what had happened to me they thinking I had had a good place and good [11] usage because I never told them to the contrary they blamed my temper Then I went to live with Col. P Catsfield kitchenmaid where I

was well of but there my memory failed me and my [12] reason was taken from me but the worthy Lady my mistress took great care of me and placed me in the care of my parents and sent for Dr. W who soon brought me to know that I was [13] wrong for coming to me one day and finding me persisting against my Mother for I had forsaken her advice to follow the works of darkness For I acknowledge being guilty of that great sin [14] of self destruction which I certainly should have done had it not been for the words of that worthy Gentleman Dr W he came to me in the year 1829 he said unto me Elizabeth I understand [15]you are guilty of saying you shall destroy yourself but never do that for Remember Elizabeth if you do when you come before that great God who is so good to you he will say unto you [16] Thou hast taken that life that I gave you Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his Angels For the impression it has made on my mind no tongue can [17] tell Depart from me ye cursed but let me never hear those words pronounced by the O Lord for surely I never felt such impressions of awe striking cold upon my breast as I felt when Dr [18] W said so to me But oh with what horror would those words pierce my heart to hear them pronounced by an offended God But my views of things have been for some time very different [19] from what they were when I first came home I have seen and felt the vanity of childhood and youth And above all I have felt the stings of a guilty Conscience for the great Disobedience [20] to my parents in not taking their advice wherewith the Lord has seen fit to visit me with this affliction but my affliction is a light affliction to what I have deserved but the Lord has [21] been very merciful unto me for he has not cut me of in my sins but he has given me this space for repentance For blessed be God my frequent schemes for destroying myself were all [22] most all defeated But Oh the dreadful powerful force of temptation for being much better I went to stay with Mrs Welham she being gone out one day and left me alone soon after [23] she was gone I thought within myself surely I am one of the most miserable objects that ever the Lord let live surely never no one had such thoughts as me against the Lord and I arose [24] from my seat to go into the bedroom and as I was going I thought within myself ah me I will retire into the remotest part of the wood and there execute my design and that [25] design was that wilful design of selfdestruction But the Lord was pleased to stop me in this mad career for seeing the Bible lay upon the shelf I took it down and opened it and the first [26] place that I found was the fourth Chapter of St Luke were it tells us how our blessed Lord was tempted of satan I read it and it seemed to give me some relief For now and not till [27] now have I been convinced of my lost and sinful state not till now

have I seen what a miserable condition I have brought myself into by my sins for now do I see myself lost and undone [28] for ever undone unless the Lord does take pity of me and help me out of this miserable condition But the only object I have now in view is that of approaching death I feel assured [29] that sooner or later I must die and oh but after death I must come to judgment what can I do to be saved what can I do to be saved from the wrath of that God which my [30] sins have deserved which way can I turn oh whither must I flee to find the Lord wretch wretch that I am who shall deliver me from the body of this death that I have been [31] seeking what will become of me ah me me what will become of me when I come to die and kneel before the Lord my maker oh with what confidence can I approach the mercy [32] seat of God oh with what confidence can I approach it And with what words must I chuse to address the Lord my maker pardon mine iniquity pardon mine iniquity Oh lord for [33] It is Great. Oh how great is thy mercy oh thou most merciful Lord for thou knowest even the secret desires of me thine unworthy servant O Lord I pray the Look down with an [34] Eye of pity upon me and I pray the turn my wicked Heart Day and night have I Cried unto the Lord to turn my wicked Heart the Lord has heard my prayer the Lord has given [35] heed to my Complaint For as long as life extends extends Hopes blest dominion never ends For while the lamp holds on to burn the greatest sinner may return Life is the season [36] God has given to fly from hell to rise to Heaven the Day of grace flees fast away their is none its rapid course can stay the Living know that they must die But ah the dead [37] forgotten lie Their memory and their name is gone They are alike unknowing and unknown Their hatred and their love is lost Their envy’s buried in the dust By the will of God are [38] all things done beneath the circuit of the sun Therefore O Lord take pity on me I pray whenever my thoughts do from the stray And lead me Lord to thy blest fold that I thy [39] glory may behold Grant Lord that I soon may behold the not as my Judge to condemn and punish me but as my Father to pity and restore me For I know with the O Lord no- [40] thing is impossible thou can if thou wilt restore my bodily health And set me free from sin and misery For since my earthly Physician has said he can do no more for me in the will [41] I put my trust O blessed Jesus grant that I may never more offend the or provoke the to cast me of in thy displeasure Forgive my sins my folly cure Grant me the help I need [42] And then although I am mean and poor I shall be rich indeed Lord Jesus have mercy upon me take me O kind shepherd take me a poor wandering sinner to thy fold Thou art Lord [43] of all things death itself is put under thy feet O Lord save me lest I fall from thee never to rise again O god keep me from all evil thoughts The little hope I feel that I shall

obtain [44] mercy gives a happiness to which none of the pleasures of sin can ever be compared I never knew anything like happiness till now O that I may but be saved on the day of Judge- [45] ment God be merciful to me a sinner but Oh how can I expect mercy who went on in sin until Dr W reminded me of my wickedness For with shame I own I returned to thee O [46] God because I had nowhere else to go How can such repentance as mine be sincere what will become of my soul [. . .]

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Correspondence concerning this essay should be addressed to Maureen Daly Goggin, Department of English, Box 870302, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287-0302, USA; electronic mail may be sent to maureen.goggin@asu.edu.

NOTES

[i] This is not to say that nineteenth-century Euro-American women did not participate in public spaces or in agonistic rhetoric; indeed, as Hobbs (1997), Mattingly (1998; 2002a), Logan (1999), Peterson (1995), Royster (2000) among others clearly show, despite the historical commonplace that women were barred from public spaces, a goodly number of nineteenth-century women successfully, though not without resistance, moved into public fora. Thus, we need to treat historical commonplaces, especially those concerning marginalized individuals and groups, with some skepticism (see also Enos, 2002; Mattingly, 2002b).

[ii] Elizabeth Parker’s sampler was finally put on display in the Textile Gallery of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London in September 2001 (C. Browne, personal

communication, September 13, 2001).

[iii] George Muller, a German philanthropist and Independent Minster who came to England in 1829, founded the orphan houses of Bristol, and by 1870 had taken in over 2,050 children in four orphan houses. The children were expected to help in the running of the homes, and while the tasks were typically gendered–girls worked in the laundries and kitchens while boys worked in the gardens–both boys and girls were taught to sew and knit (Samplers: A Schoolroom Exercise, 1994, 31). Thus, despite the commonplace that samplers are women's work, there is much counter evidence to challenge that erroneous notion (see also Goggin, 2002).

[iv] Among the most common sources were hymns by Charles Wesley, Rev. John Newton, and Isaac Watts, and especially popular were verses from Watt's Divine and Moral Songs for Children.

[v] This phrase appears in her poem "Medieval Tapestry and Question" in which she writes of a needleworker: "how still she is all day,/her needle flashing in and out of the white cloth,/carrying all the purples and reds, greens/violets, and yellow in stories, /finger stories" (Wakoski, 1980, 38).

[vi] For those interested in what became of Elizabeth Parker, see Goggin (forthcoming) where I trace the history of Parker's life, and identify those whom she names in her sampler.

[vii] Of course, the irony here should escape no one. In writing about Parker's story, I am engaging in one of the very kinds of arguments that she herself would not do. On one level, I am making public her story, revealing the "cruelties to[o] horrible to mention" and on another level, I am by the very nature of scholarly argument engaging in contentio.

[viii] "Hidden in plain view" is an allusion to the title of the book by Jacqueline Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard (1999) that examines the role of African-American quilts in the underground railroad and abolitionist movement of the nineteenth century.

[ix] I have tried to reproduce as best as possible the symbols and letters stitched by Teré Tammar to evoke the spirit of her sampler text. As was typical of script text from the middle ages, a practice carried over to print, samplers makers inserted symbols at the end of lines to make the lines even. (See, for example, Lupton & Miller (1996).)

[x] In stitching the quotation from Psalm forty-six, Teré Tammar substituted the word "downs" for "hills" to reference the downs in Lewes.

[xi] I have tried to remain faithful as possible to the original, and have thus

retained original spelling and include only punctuation marks that were stitched. Line numbers are indicated in brackets.

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