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Title: Phillis Wheatley Peters' crowded elegies

Abstract: This paper explores the politics of voice and address in Boston poet Phillis Wheatley Peters' elegies, reading a selection of her published and unpublished elegies, including a recently-attributed elegy from early in her career, in order to pinpoint the ways in which they subvert and fragment gendered, racialized, and class identities via a repertoire of neoclassical vocalizations and figures of address. I argue that death as elegiac occasion, with its multiple, often overlapping conventions of lyric lament and address, allows Wheatley Peter to multiply both her own rhetorical position as elegist and the implied addressees of her verse. The result is elegies that are crowded with voices, agencies and interpellated addresses, speaking composite, carefully differentiated political truths to their different readers.

