

Dr Katarina Stenke, University of Greenwich

Invited Seminar Paper, University of Keele, 9 October, 2023

Title: "Suspend the sigh, dear Sir": subverting gender in Phillis Wheatley Peters' elegies

Abstract: This paper will explore the gender politics of voice and address in the elegies of Gambian-born poet Phillis Wheatley Peters (c. 1753-1784).

The first African-born woman to publish a poetry collection in English, Phillis Wheatley Peters is a major figure in Early-American and eighteenth-century British literary history, and her eloquent yet politic protests against the injustices of chattel slavery are key texts in the African-American canon. As such, the elegies she addressed to prominent figures within her Boston community and beyond have received ample attention from modern critics, with compelling excavations of their rhetorics, occasions, and contexts. However, scholarship on Wheatley Peters has yet to connect her elegiac strategies to the subversions of gendered voice and address which often transform her condolences into critiques. After briefly defining 'voice' and 'address' within the context of Wheatley Peters' oeuvre, this talk will introduce and discuss the most interesting of her gender-subversive, critical elegies.

Bio: [Dr Katarina Stenke](#) is a Senior Lecturer in Eighteenth-Century English Literature at the University of Greenwich, with research interests in poetry and non-fiction Anglophone prose. She has published on topics such as: subversion in eighteenth-century religious verse by women; Joseph Addison's orientalism; and garden design and statuary in James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1746).