Leah M. Thomas, PhD

Assistant Professor of English

Dept. of Languages and Literature

Virginia State University

[Lmthomas@vsu.edu](mailto:Lmthomas@vsu.edu)

ASECS 2023

**139. Roundtable: Phillis Wheatley Peters’ Poems on Various Subjects at 250 Years [Aphra Behn Society]** Megan Peiser, Oakland University, [mpeiser@oakland.edu](mailto:mpeiser@oakland.edu)

Phillis Wheatley Peters’ Transatlantic Poetics

Phillis Wheatley Peters’ poetry engages the transatlantic imagination through the ocean as a space within her poetry, a space of transcendence and of crossing. From her personae “Afric muse,” “Ethiop,” and first-person narrator, Peters explores transport and travel in the imagination and across the Atlantic, whether from her own enslavement from Africa to America, her own travel to England, or to that of others’ travel across the Atlantic. This presentation also extends from Peters’ transatlantic poetics to British abolition and print networks. While Methodist Minister George Whitefield (1714–1770) and the Countess of Huntingdon Selina Hastings (1707–1791) were not slavery abolitionists, they provided transatlantic print networks for Peters in addition to other eighteenth-century African American (e.g., James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw and John Marrant) and Native American (e.g., Samson Occum) writers. While these networks may be apparent in Peters’ paratexts to her *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* and in her elegies and odes, her transatlantic poetics perform beyond the poetic imagination to the geographic imagination as both an imaginative and geographical connection that maps not only the triangular slave trade but also a print—and possibly an abolitionist—network. Though primarily focusing on Peters’ *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, this roundtable contributionmay include or reference some of her unpublished poetry and her letters along with writings by her contemporaries to consider her legacy and contributions to literature and print culture.