

Juno and Amata: Powerful Wives and Political Disorder in the *Aeneid*
M. Christine Marquis (University of Minnesota)

This paper will explore Vergil's representation of two queens, Juno and Amata, as politically active wives, and will contextualize the poet's negative portrayal of them as such within contemporary reflections on the chaos of the Late Republic that associated social and political breakdown with the dissolution of the boundaries between the gendered domains of "public" and "private" emblemized by high-profile politically influential women.

I take as a starting point A.M. Keith's argument (2000) that in the *Aeneid*, by the poet's consistent association of female characters with the outbreak of hostilities, war is "mapped onto the gender system," (69) effecting a "displacement of responsibility for murderous conflict between men onto the transgressive figure of the militant woman." (78) This paper will explore the poem's representation of one particular type of female transgression into the public domain: the political interference of the ruler's wife. I will suggest that each of these queens whose machinations instigate the war in Latium exploits the personal power that she has accrued through her history (Juno's explicit, Amata's implicit) of channeling of royal favors, that is, she exploits the *gratia* owed to her by those on whose behalf she has exercised her influence in the past. I will argue that the poet represents Juno and Amata as having their own personal supporters, even "clients," whose loyalty they are able to leverage to thwart their husbands' intentions. For example, when Juno asks Aeolus to cause a storm at sea, she offers him her most beautiful nymph in return, a transaction often described as a bribe. A more detailed look at the language of the passage suggests that this "bribe" is part of an exchange of *beneficia* between two individuals of unequal social standing, that is, between a patron and a client. Addressing him by name (this, Servius notes, is how one begins when seeking a favor (*beneficium*) from an inferior (*a minoribus*)), she prefaces her request by subtly reminding him of past favors her husband has granted him, thanks (as becomes evident) to her: *Aeole, namque tibi divum pater atque hominum rex/ et mulcere dedit fluctus et tollere vento* (1.65-6). Aeolus picks up the hint, and in response openly articulates her patronal role in obtaining his political and social status: *tu mihi quodcumque hoc regni, tu sceptrum Iovemque concilias, tu das epulis accumbere diuum, / nimborumque facis tempestatumque potentem.* (1.78-80).

The zeugma *tu sceptrum Iovemque concilias* ("you procure the scepter and Jove") is not only suggestive of her patronal relationship with Aeolus, but also of the power dynamic between Juno and Jupiter. I will argue that the poet's representation of the independent, verging on dominating nature of Juno and Amata's exercise of queenly power is in fact a means of criticizing both the domestic and political leadership and authority of their husbands. Such a method of criticizing male leadership would be in step with the "almost uniformly hostile" representation of politically active women in the political and forensic oratory of the late Republic, in which, Tom Hillard argues (1989, 166), "the projected images of 'powerful' women were aimed at damaging male credibility."