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Gower's Confessio Amantis*

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The ambitions of this essay lie within a precarious realm where an attempt is made to explore the effects of intermingling premodern poetry and postmodern linguistic theory. In initiating a dialogue between these two, I knowingly create a situation where pitfalls are as likely as potential successes; where Lee Patterson's "vexed question of anachronism" (Patterson 43), arises and where Alastair Minnis' assertion that concepts from modern literary theory "have no historical validity as far as medieval literature is concerned" (Minnis 1), potentially problematizes such an undertaking. A pairing of this kind must proceed cautiously to avoid predetermining interpretation to fit a particular theoretical model (Strohm xiii). Although Minnis interprets the practice of employing "modern" literary theory in discussions of medieval texts as a "tacit admission of defeat" (Minnis 1), Paul Strohm vouches for the mediated applicability of such theories as he rightly notes that the purpose of theory is to provoke a text into "unpremeditated articulation," into the utterance of what it somehow contains but neither intends nor is able to say (Strohm xiii). The text, then, remains the central object of study, with appropriately invoked theory enjoying a role of augmentation and supplementalization, enriching the reading through the unveiling of its unstated knowledge and opinions (Strohm xiii).

This essay intends to create a dialogue of such a kind. By exploring two premodern versions of the tale of Medea through the lens of J. L. Austin's speech act theory, I attempt to tease out the "unpremeditated articulations" latent within those texts. Austin's theory engages in an attempt to undermine the dichotomy

between language and action by positing the idea of a certain type of linguistic utterance, commonly known as a performative, where a speaker can perform deeds of potentially far-reaching consequence by simply articulating words; to *say* something, then, is to *do* something. This theory holds potentially significant implications when applied to a literary text, as what is true of ordinary discourse, in this regard, is also true of mimetic or “literary” discourse.^[1] In order to fully understand both forms the audience must correctly register what the speaker is doing in uttering the words s/he speaks. The study of speech acts in literature, then, is an examination of the economics and dynamics of action, as the appropriation of performative utterances within a literary work becomes an appropriation of the power to perform action.

Literary works involving the figure of Medea, both in classical and medieval representations, reward close attention to their speech acts as speech becomes the characteristic source of Medea’s power (Newlands 206). In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the myth of Medea questions issues of power as his interpretation presents a woman who is given ample narrative space to speak freely, illuminating the potential dangers associated with those freedoms. In the stories surrounding the figure of Medea, Ovid explores the social and moral ambiguities that involve a woman who chooses to speak and act independently (Newlands 207), and as Medea depicts speech as a catalyst of power, her relationship with language becomes integral to her utilization of the power she is given within Ovid’s tale.

Over fourteen hundred years later the English poet John Gower re-tells Ovid’s tale, but with a slightly different approach.^[2] In Book V of the *Confessio Amantis* Gower’s narrator, Genius, has a specific didactic aim. In keeping with the moral structure of the narrative poem Genius intends to portray perjury; the sin of swearing “an oth which is noght soth” (5. 4224). To accomplish this, Genius portrays Medea as an ideal figure to be perjured – an innocent, disempowered, and modest lover. There is, however, a discrepancy in what Genius “intends” and what he actually does, as Medea emerges from the façade of the disempowered

ingénue to become a figure of power. Medea's apparent impotence, developed to create the image of a helpless and naïve woman, is linked to the way Genius takes away the narrative space for her to speak in an attempt to control our reception of her through a subverted space of direct discourse. Her speech is consistently muted, (or mutated), in order to keep her potential prowess at bay, although latent in her portrayal is power; the power to save the "lif and honour" (5.3452), of her lover, the power to metamorphose, and the power to kill, an ability that is not fully recognized until the final scene.

In the *Metamorphoses* Medea's power is dependent on her unusual relationship with the gods. She is able to access this supernatural power by evoking help from the gods via language. To help Jason win the fleece, Medea "*Carmen auxiliare canit secretasque aduocat artes*" [sang a reveling chant and summoned her secret skills] (7.137-8), typifying the forms of speech acts she employs to access her power. Austin describes these forms of speech act utterances as *illocutionary acts*, wherein words can be used to perform various types of actions — requesting, commanding, pleading, inviting, and daring are all examples of performative illocutionary acts. Specific rules govern these acts: namely that the utterance is spoken by an appropriate authority in the appropriate circumstance (Austin 139). In the Bible, the very creation of the universe was brought about by spoken words. God (an appropriate authority), said: "Let there be light"; and there was light (Genesis 1:3). Performative utterances are also used to execute supernatural deeds like driving away evil spirits (exorcism), encouraging sympathetic forces (baptism and funeral rites), bringing good or bad fortune (blessings or curses), and influencing such things as the weather, crops, fertility, and the outcome of battles (Traugott and Pratt 228). Medea's rejuvenation of Jason's father Aeson, both in the *Metamorphoses* and in the *Confessio Amantis*, are significant scenes in each author's treatment of Medea's ability to perform supernatural deeds with words, and it is to this scene which we now turn.

In Book VII of the *Metamorphoses* Jason is the first to connect Medea's power to her use of performative utterances. When he asks Medea to use her powers to

restore his father to a youthful state he refers to the virtually omnipotent force of her “chants”:

*‘o cui debere salutem
confiteor, coniunx, quamquam mihi cuncta dedisti
excessitque fidem meritorum summa tourum,
si tamen hoc possunt (quid enim non carmina possunt?)
deme meis annis et demptos adde parenti.’ (7.164-7)*

[“Oh wife, to whom I acknowledge I owe my safety, although you have given everything to me and the total of your services have gone beyond belief, even so if they can do this (for what can your chants not do?) strip from my years, and add what you have stripped to my father.”]

Moved by Jason’s “*pietate*” (7.169), Medea decides to renew Aeson. In stark contrast to a night in which all is silent and “*nullo cummurmure*” (7.186, 7), Medea calls for the magical chariot pulled by dragons with a soliloquy in which she attests to the power of her speech:

*concussaue sisto,
stanita concutio cantu freta, nubile pello
nubilaque induco, uentos abigoque uocoque,
uipereas rumpo uerbis et carmine fauces. (7.200-203)*

[with my incantations I settle the seas when they are shaken and agitate them when they are still, I disperse clouds and bring clouds back, I both drive away and beckon the winds, with words and chant I break the snake's throat.]

A similar scene occurs in Book V of the *Confessio Amantis*, but here, on the surface, there is no sense that Medea is powerful in and of herself. She pleads for help, calling for the “Dragouns” (5.3989), through which she will consent to Jason's request, but here her powers are minimalized as her magic is merely a dramatic spectacle, illustrated “for the novellerie” (5.3955). Here, Medea does not offer a soliloquy attesting to her verbal prowess as we see in Ovid. Though she “tok hir speche on honde” (5.3976), seemingly signifying a control of language, that control is undercut when she subsequently utters inarticulate sounds as she begins to “clepe and calle” (5.3977). Then, in a call for help in which we are reminded of her dependence on a higher source of power, she cries to “Echates,” saying:

“Helpeth at this nede,
and as ye maden me to spede,
whan Jason cam the Flees to seche,
so help me nou, I you beseche.” (5.3983-6)

In sharp contrast to Ovid's portrayal of this scene, Medea fails to demonstrate a command of performative utterances; she has, up to this point, failed *todo* anything with language as she combines incoherent noises with desperate cries for help. Ovid's Medea has already shown her ability to control nature with her incantations, while Genius' has only admitted her dependence on the “goddesse of sorcerie” (5.3982). We may well recognize though, that latent in this scene is an awareness, not only of Medea's ability to beckon the magical chariot, but also an allusion to her previous role in enabling Jason to win the fleece. Here, despite her inability to speak forcefully, is an underlying sense that she is nevertheless successful in attaining what she desires.

In contrast to Genius' subversion, Ovid's Medea continues to use her vocal powers as she performs Aeson's rejuvenation. In addition to pouring a mixture of honey, milk, and the blood of a black ram into two ditches, she:

Uerba simul fudit terrenaque numina ciuit. (7.248)

[at the same time poured out words and summoned the gods of earth]

Then, completing the process by draining and subsequently refilling Aeson's body with her "*sucis*" (7.287), Medea successfully transfigures Aeson to youthfulness. So extraordinary this act, that even Liber noted the impressiveness of this "*miracula monstri*" (7.294), as he looked down from above. As Ruth Morse notes, it is worth reminding ourselves that this is the first time we have seen the figure of Medea with the power to actually metamorphose someone. Her power is not physical strength, nor a gift beyond normal human ability; it is her ability to dictate external events through speech (Morse 118). The potion she mixes is only powerful because it is combined with the authority of the gods; an authority which she accesses through language. In a similar scene immediately following Aeson's renewal, the murder of Aeetes, Ovid reminds us of the relationship between Medea's power and her use of speech by mentioning her "*cantus magicaeque potentia linguae*" (7.330).

A reciprocal relationship exists between Medea and her apparent source of power. In an essay which furthers Austin's speech act theory, Mary Louise Pratt states that speech acts are dependent upon certain conditions called *appropriateness conditions* or *felicity conditions*, and that illocutionary acts can only be executed when these conditions are satisfied. The conditions needed to perform illocutionary acts do not merely regulate the acts, but also create the possibility of or define the activity of these acts (Searle 224-5).^[3] Illocutionary acts have no existence apart from these conditions as the performance of an illocutionary act is constituted by its being acted in accordance with the associated conditions. These conditions establish rules which users of the language assume to be in force in their verbal dealings; they form part of the knowledge which

speakers of the language share and on which they rely in order to use language correctly and effectively, both in producing and understanding utterances (Pratt 81).^[4] The felicity conditions associated with the illocutionary act of making an arrest, for example, involve an appropriate figure (a police officer) uttering the appropriate words (“You are under arrest.”) in an appropriate circumstance while under the assumption that the act will be carried out.

For Medea, these implications run deep. Although Ovid portrays the gods as Medea’s source of power, it is still Medea who performs the supernatural deeds through illocutionary acts, thus making her a proper authority to perform such acts; Medea inherits the power of the gods with all the authoritative capabilities of making commands of supernatural influence under the assumption that they will be carried out. The reciprocal nature exists, then, as Medea receives her power from the gods and simultaneously acquires, at least in part, her own magical authority equal to that of the gods. At one point, Medea simultaneously credits the gods, and her magic spells (“*carminibus*,” 7.148), for helping Jason win the fleece. If Medea did not hold such a commanding status, her orders would violate one of the felicity conditions of an illocutionary act, rendering her utterances useless and eliminating her ability to perform supernatural deeds. The same would occur if a petrol station attendant, or a construction worker, or an eight year old child dressed in a police officer costume uttered “You are under arrest.” You would not be placed under arrest as the figure uttering the presumed illocutionary act would not be an appropriate authority.

The concept of a “command” also illuminates Medea’s status as a figure of power and authority. Ovid uses “*iubeo*” (7.205), which can mean to “command” or to “order” and bears tremendous weight in classifying Medea’s status in the *Metamorphoses* through felicity conditions. In further explication of performative utterances Austin sub-divides illocutionary acts into five categories: verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives, and expositives (151). Illocutionary acts outlined in the exercitive category are most pertinent to the Medea myth as they are used primarily for the purpose of getting others to do things. This category can

be differentiated even further into two distinct subgroups: pleading and commanding. Though both are exercitives, they differ according to the relationship they assume between the speaker and the addressee. Commanding has a felicity condition that the speaker is in a position of authority over the addressee; with pleading, it is the addressee who is the authority (Traugott and Pratt 230). G. M. Green further elucidates the differences between the two as she points out that commands are distinct from pleas as the giver of the command believes that s/he has the authority to control the intentional behavior of the recipient and expects to be obeyed. With pleas, however, the speaking party makes their request from a position of subordinancy where the granting of the request lies solely on the prerogatives of the addressee (120). Thus, when Medea “commands” the seas to shake and the mountains to quake (“*iubeoque tremescere montes,*” 7.205), she is asserting her role as the authority figure, outlined by the felicity condition, in which her power is demonstrated through the fulfillment of the act.

With regard to placement of authority, Genius uses the converse of commanding, the exercitive form of pleading, to establish the relationship between Medea and the gods in his rendering of the myth. At the beginning of Aeson’s rejuvenation Medea prepares her sacrifice as she:

cride and preide forth withal
 To Pluto the god infernal,
 And to the queene Proserpine.
 And so sche soghte out al the line
 Of hem that longen to the craft,
 Behinde was no name laft,
 And preide hem alle, as sche wel couthe,
 To grante Eson his ferste youthe. (5.4051-8)

Here, as in Ovid's telling of the myth, Medea accesses the power of the gods, but in Genius' version her pleading with the gods for assistance takes the place of Ovid's "*iubeo*" (7.205). Aeson's youthfulness is not restored through Medea's commands, but only through her requests do the gods perform the act for her. Medea's authoritative status is undermined through this categorical reversal of the exercitive illocutionary act as the authority becomes the deities who have the power capable of performing the rejuvenation act.

Medea's potential power is, apparently, weakened even further as Genius reduces Medea's role in the renewal process in a seemingly chaotic scene involving Medea flailing arbitrarily and making the noises of barnyard animals. He points out that:

Ther was no beste which goth oute
 More wylde than sche semeth ther:
 Aboute hir schuldres hyng hir her,
 As thogh sche were oute of hir mynde
 And torned in an other kynde. (5.4080-4)

Genius then shows Medea circling Aeson's body with sulfur, fire, and water, and doing many other things "noght written in this stede" (5.4096). He does mention, though, that after encircling Aeson three times:

Sche made many a wonder soun,
 Somtime lich unto the cock,
 Somtime unto the Laverock,
 Somtime kacleth as a Hen,
 Somtime spekth as don the men:
 And riht so as hir jargoun strangeth,

In sondri wise hir forme changeth,

Sche semeth faie and no woman. (5.4098-4105)

Here, attention to commanding and pleading exercitives can be discarded as Genius attempts to diminish Medea's voice to irrational and illogical vocalizations. He transforms what in Ovid are commanding illocutionary acts, into, what appears to be, inarticulate nonsense. Not only is she incapable of managing authoritative supernatural power via language, she is incapable of speech itself. If, as Newlands suggests, Medea reveals speech as the distinguishing source of female power in the *Metamorphoses*, then Genius, in drawing from Ovid, lessens Medea's source of power, leaving her a mere intermediary for the Gods to work through. Thus, in characterizing Medea as a "merville," that is "herde nevere man" (5.4114), she is portrayed as a mere spectacle, interesting not through her connection with the power of the gods, but through her association with the absurd.

This portrayal, however, may be more complex than it initially seems. Genius' Medea is an unsettling character, evading simple characterization. Although speech is taken away from her through mutation, underlying this subversion is a sense that Medea is a destabilizing force, operating outside of conventional logical bounds, and yet still powerful, as indeed the rejuvenation is successful. The noises she makes are not those of random barnyard animals, but those of birds, and birds in medieval literature are powerful symbols; they are symbols of rebirth and resurrection, they are symbols of Christ (Cirlot 36), and just as Christ holds the power to resurrect, so too does Medea exhibit the power to perform her own renewal, despite her lack of speech.^[5]

This, moreover, is not the first time Gower portrays humans acting like animals. We may well remind ourselves of his *Vox Clamantis*, a Latin verse complaint aimed against the social troubles of his day in which he describes the London riots associated with the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. Bruce Harbert points

out that Gower strongly disapproved of the rebels, who seemingly lost their use of reason, subsequently embodying animalistic characteristics (84):

qui fuerant hominess prius innatae rationis

brutorum species irrationis habent. (1.177-8)

[Those who had previously been men, with the gift of innate reason, now have the appearance of irrational beasts.]

He then goes on to depict the crowd as a host of wild asses, bulls, dogs, foxes, boars, cats, flies, frogs, and birds. Just as the rebels threatened the civil norms of Gower's day, the figure of a powerful woman also threatens to usurp patriarchal prerogatives essential to Jason's male-centered quest. By turning the rebels, and Medea, into the apparent likenesses of irrational beasts, Gower seemingly undermines the weight of their narrative presence by turning their potentially dangerous acts into ridiculous scenes of chaotic passion, but in doing so, he simultaneously illuminates their incendiary social position; that Genius has to ostensibly portray Medea as an unreasoning animal demonstrates his subliminal recognition that she is, in fact, still quite powerful.

While Ovid is willing to portray the power, and potential troubles, associated with a woman who speaks and acts freely in a patriarchal culture, Genius is not; he strays noticeably from Ovid in his presentation of Medea, yet still fails to successfully minimize her authoritative presence in the tale. As with the Rebels in the *Vox Clamantis*, the attempt to undermine Medea demonstrates the potential gravity of her authoritative presence. Ruth Morse points out that the voyage of the *Argo* is the first secular adventure; the first time a prince sets off in search of honors which validate his status upon his return (Morse 10). Jason, then, is our first knight errant. In the middle of Jason's stories, however, are Medea's, and, as Morse continues, these stories do not conform to successful models of patriarchal legitimation (Morse 10). Anxieties over filial loyalty, inheritance, power, and ultimately over the place of the skillful intelligence of women, are central to the Medea myth (Morse 11), and by giving Medea space to speak in the narrative, by

giving her an awareness of her own power and an amoral discrepancy in her use of those powers, Ovid allows those anxieties to persist, while Genius only masks them through Medea's apparently absurd antics. From the first inner dialogue where she demonstrates a self-awareness of her own ability to betray her father's kingdom ("*prodamne ego regna parentis*" 7.38), to her murder of Pelias, to the final scene where she effectively destroys Jason's patriarchal lineage, the Medea of the *Metamorphoses* acts unscrupulously and independently as she disrupts socio-political establishments.

Genius' Medea, however, does little in this regard. While Ovid allows for a narrative filled with moral and socio-political ambiguities, Genius attempts to script a more diminutive role for Medea as his tale leans heavily toward the genre of medieval romance (Harbert 95).^[6] Instead of introducing her with a self-reflective and highly vocal soliloquy of sixty lines, as we see in Ovid (7.11-71), Genius introduces Medea in relation to the men surrounding her; her father, the king, and the "worthi kniht" (5.3343), Jason. In proper romance fashion she appears at court after being summoned by her father:

After Medea gon he bad,

Which was his dowhter, and sche cam. (5.3367-8)

She then, again, complies with the conventions of courtly conduct as she meets the knight Jason:

Welcomede him into that lond,

And softe tok him be the hond. (5.3373-4)

In much of the interaction between Medea and Jason, she fails to speak for herself as a "Mayden" acts as an intercessor between the two. Furthermore, when she does speak, between her fit of "wepinge" (5.3634), and her disparaging "swoune" (5.3647), she alludes to an exercitive-pleading speech act as she addresses Jason just before he leaves to win the fleece:

‘O, al mi worldes blisse,
 Mi trust, mi lust, mi lif, min hele,
 To be thin helpe in this querele
 I preie unto the goddess alle.’ (5.3642-5)

In a reversal of Ovid’s version, however, it is actually Jason who uses performative utterances to win the fleece as Medea teaches him to “rede hiscarecte,” and make his “sacrifise” (5.3588-9). Medea, here, is not even left with the distinction of being the only figure in the tale with a special relationship with the gods, and indeed, we may wonder if her relationship is special at all. As Jason reveals his ability to evoke the aid of the gods through the speech acts prescribed by Medea, Genius effectively weakens Medea’s unique divine relationship even further by turning the powerful act of Ovidian “*iubeo*,” into simple prayers that can be “tawht,” and subsequently “rede” (5.3692-3).

We should not be surprised then, when Genius emphasizes the apparent role (and power) reversal of Jason and Medea in relation to the *Metamorphoses* as Jason is praised as a powerful sorcerer, as well as a brave knight, at Oëtes’ court:

Of him mad every man a speche,
 Som man seide on, som man seide other;
 Bot thogh he were goddess brother
 And mihte make fyr and thunder,
 Ther mihte be nomore wonder
 Than was of him in that cite. (5.3822-7)

Even here, though, the apparent subversion of Medea’s magical capabilities is undermined; the reader is aware of her influence in enabling Jason to win the fleece as we are reminded of a previous scene where Medea says to Jason:

“I schal thi lif and honour save,

That thou the flees of gold schalt have.” (5.3452-3)

Following Jason’s praise at Oëtes’ court, Genius portrays Jason and Medea’s departure to “Grece” with decidedly little consequence as Oëtes’ attempt to catch them is encapsulated in three uneventful lines, and aside from the long scenes depicting the “novellerie” (5.3955), of Aeson’s rejuvenation, the tale ends with a condensed version of Medea’s final act of passion and, two lines later, her disappearance into Pallas’ “court above” (5.4219). Her disappearance here, though, is not banishment; it is an escape without retribution. Medea remains unscathed as she leaves behind a trail of blood, death, and abandonment.

Ovid’s tale depicts Medea’s final scene of revenge in full horror (“*sanguine natorum perfunditur impius ensis*” [Her evil sword was drenched with her children’s blood] 7.396), and through Medea’s successful escape to Athens (“*Palladias arces*” 7.399), Ovid’s moral and social ambiguities remain alive. In Genius’ tale, however, the slaying of Jason’s and Medea’s children is not recognized as an aggressive act of revenge for Medea, but as punishment for Jason’s perjury. Even here, Medea’s power is allocated to the periphery. The end of the tale is narrated with no relish for the horror, and depicts the scene in a single line with “sche bothe his sones slouh” (5.4215). The children are not mentioned in relation to Medea, but only noted as being “his” sons (Harbert 95). Here, Medea’s most forceful act is undercut by its pertinence only to Jason, and as Morse points out, thinly veiled behind this scene is an awareness that Genius has built an image of a woman who is forced into revenge because she put herself into the hands of an untrustworthy man.

Here also, however, despite Genius’ effort to lessen the severity of Medea’s final act, is a scene that underscores the potency of her revenge. Even though Genius attempts to subvert Medea’s most powerful act, it is here, in the final scene, that her power is most forcefully presented and most fully recognized, and only by looking back from the end of the tale do we get an image of Medea’s latent power

as it continually emerges throughout Genius' narrative. Though her space for direct discourse is consistently minimalized, Medea still remains a potent and unsettling figure, capable of saving Jason's "lif and honour" (5.3452), performing Aeson's rejuvenation, and exacting revenge in a powerful and violent manner. Medea, then, holds unique relationships with power in the two tales by Ovid and Gower. While Ovid is willing to give Medea ample narrative space to speak, unveiling all the potential dangers associated with a woman who is allowed to speak and act freely, Genius is not so disposed. In an attempt to portray a disempowered and ingenuous victim for Jason's sin of perjury, his subversion of Medea's power through the confinement of her narrative space and illocutionary presence only demonstrates the unsettling nature of Medea as she remains a powerful figure despite her lack of speech.

Endnotes

[1] Although Austin excludes speech acts from the arena of literature due to its lack of "seriousness" (22), subsequent speech act theorists such as J. Hillis Miller, Michael Hancher, and Barbara Johnson revise Austin's assertion by arguing that performative utterances in literature are spoken with the same "seriousness" within the context of their surrounding fiction as they are within the context of "real" life.

[2] Bruce Harbert notes that although Gower drew from Benoît de Sainte-Maure for the first half of his tale, the scenes involving Jason's winning of the fleece, he turned to Ovid as his direct source for Aeson's renewal (5.3927-4186 cf. Met. 7.159-293).

[3] Searle defines these conditions further, identifying them as constitutive rules, where the set of rules applied to the illocutionary act defines, as well as regulates, the employment of the act. Where regulative rules, in Searle's distinction, regulate pre-existing activities that can occur independent of the rules assigned to them, the rules associated with illocutionary acts offer a definition of the act itself,

meaning illocutionary acts cannot operate outside of their assigned rules, as the breaking of such rules would negate the existence of the act itself (224-5).

[4] For further explication of felicity conditions, see Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford 1975), especially lectures II, III, and IV.

[5] Cirlot notes that birds in the middle ages were "highly important Christian images," which came to be regarded as "allegories of resurrection" (36).

[6] Harbert notes that Gower adapts the scenes of Jason's adventure from Benoît, who also adhered to conventions of medieval romance, but Harbert mentions that "Gower still had Ovid before him" throughout his tale.

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First Response

Using speech-act theory to illuminate some of the features of Gower's construction of Medea in the *Confessio Amantis*, this essay seeks to demonstrate that while Gower's version of the narrative seems in various ways to lessen Medea's agency, it nonetheless manages to emphasize her dangerousness, and to do so in terms which recall some of the figurative language used in the *Vox Clamantis* (a complaint addressing issues of social unrest, particularly as manifested in London in 1381). The local detail of this discussion suggests

another line of approach to the matter of Gower's handling of his sources, and in its focus on the specific act of petitioning in this part of Gower's narrative, demonstrates one way of investigating a mode which is pervasive in Middle English writing.

This is a cogent and quite carefully argued essay. Its general point is an interesting one; and the comparison with Ovid is followed through in reasonable detail. The terms of reference are kept fairly narrow, presumably in order most effectively to focus the argument. I think nonetheless there might be room for a footnote with reference to other secondary material on Gower and on versions of the Medea story in Middle English (in Chaucer's LGW, for example; see also Janet Cowen, 'Women as Exempla in Fifteenth-Century Verse of the Chaucerian Tradition', in *Chaucer and 15thc. Poetry*, ed. by J. Boffey and J. Cowen (London, 1991), pp.51-65); and also for a note pointing to the pervasiveness of the petitionary mode in medieval writing (John Burrow, 'The Poets as Petitioner', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 3 (1981), 61-75, might be useful to the author).