stopping short of casting Culler as godfather of a mafia of Romanticists claiming lyric as their turf, we should observe how many critics do represent the poetry most common in their period as normative for lyric.

While withstanding that first temptation, Matthews's essay, impressive in so many other respects, succumbs to a second one—the tendency to locate the most significant developments in literary and cultural studies within one's area of specialization. In his abstract, Matthews writes that "the Middle Ages [is] at the center of our understanding of modern lyric poetry." He is hardly alone: witness all the contesting claims from academics that capitalism originates in the period they study. Authors of such statements may on occasion have a case, but their motivations and evidence need to be approached with the caution, indeed suspicion, that should also be evoked by the many other types of competition in our profession.

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Reply:

I'd like to thank Heather Dubrow for recognizing in my essay a balance between historical and transhistorical approaches. However, her impression that I am skeptical of the transhistorical project in general and Jonathan Culler in particular necessitates a response. I'm not opposed to transhistorical readings if they are historical.

In the most engaging parts of *Theory of the Lyric*, Culler's readings seem personal. Broad and creative, these readings feel open to methods not defined by periodization. Instead, they seem dictated by pleasure, the same rhetorical principle Culler defends when he asks us to resist the need to submit every "language event" to interpretation (168).

As for the historical, Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins's appeal for some historical specificity regarding the lyric should not be controversial. Such approaches are not "incompatible" with a theory of the lyric, as Culler argues (3), but a way to open song to new readings based on the particular features of a period. Trying to locate the differences, as opposed to focusing on lyric continuity or similarities, results in surprising discoveries. The medieval love poem, for example, suddenly felt fresh again once the Belgian medievalist and poet Robert Guiette rediscovered its glittering surface by limiting the influences of another transhistorical project, what he called romantic. That project had universalized nineteenth-century ideas of subjective representations that may not have been present in trouvère poetry. That's one reason why, to answer Dubrow's question, the fictional performance of a "found" song, like the *Canticus Troili* or "The Willow Song," cannot threaten the creation of subjectivity in a literary text, because that subjectivity is not a given. In highly conventional poetry, it is created through the context of its singing.

Transhistorical approaches are scholarly pronouncements about history, since they are studies that extend across multiple historical fields. They work extremely well when they analyze periods with shared characteristics, like Ernst Robert Curtius's monumental *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Bollingen Foundation, 1953), which describes how classical writing practices continued into the Middle Ages and then into the era of Shakespeare and the Spanish Golden Age. My own essay is similarly transhistorical. Taking up one genre from the fifth century to the fifteenth, I hoped to show how highly conventional lyrics, whether original or "found," suddenly appeared subjective with the introduction of a narrative. The only speculative foray is found in note 7, where I list modern examples as a way to think about the prosimetrum today (310).

Transhistorical theories are flawed when they are teleological and situate the author's period as the ultimate beneficiary of the past.

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Culler's transhistorical theory is such a grab bag of random ideas, drawn from a variety of sources, that it's not surprising many scholars are shy about embracing so large a thing as *the* theory of the lyric and not *theories* of the lyric. Those of us concentrating on the Middle Ages know that many modern notions of classical poetry were either inaccessible or ignored during that period. What, for example, would medievalists do with mimesis if Aristotle's *Poetics* was unread in the period—not because medieval readers were ignorant but because they probably considered it a less interesting theory of language than Cicero's or Geoffrey of Vinsauf's? Even Dubrow, in her book *The Challenges of Orpheus*, is concerned about "[u]nnuanced transhistorical generalizations" that posit "as normative a characteristic that dominates in a given period or author" (4).

I appreciate Dubrow's concerns that my enthusiasms may have tilted toward period prejudice. But I wrote the essay in response to a trend I see in lyric theory. When Culler makes only passing references to the troubadours, whose themes and metaphors he acknowledges are the "staples of the Western lyric" (67), and then chooses to focus on Petrarch because of his importance to the Renaissance—or when Dubrow herself writes in *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and Its Counterdiscourses* (Cornell UP, 1995) that she's not sure "if indeed Petrarch should be classified among medieval writers" (42)—it's apparent that lyric theory undervalues medieval poetics.

When I read Petrarch, I don't look to the future. Instead, I read him as a poet deeply invested in medieval poetics. And when I encounter Laura, I don't see the lady of medieval song but a series of letters Petrarch selected from the lyrics of the troubadour Arnaut Daniel—like "L'aur amara" 'The Bitter Air,' the title of a canso mentioned by Culler (67)—to create his lady. Petrarch's "Laura" is less the name of a lady than an homage to Arnaut, the same poet praised by Dante, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot. Creating Laura out of Arnaut's words, Petrarch not only reaffirms a particular medieval passion for the play of letters but also, like Arnaut, peppers his Canzoniere with her "name." "Laura," for example, can be heard whenever he mentions the laurel (*lauro*)—not simply Arnaut's laurel tree (*laur*), which signals the solidity of his love, but also Petrarch's coronation in Rome as poet laureate. That crowning announced a break with the immediate past—including his own vernacular poetry—and the start of a classical revival that seems to distinguish Italian humanism from its more "medieval" manifestations. Other recurring images like the breeze (*l'aura*) and the dawn (*l'aurora*) replicate similar imagery describing Arnaut's bitter reception by his lady, while gold (*l'auro*) gathers up imagery of Arnaut's desperate laboring (*laurar*) to perfect his songs with the help of love's eloquent gilding (*daurar*). Finally, Laura's golden hair (*l'aureo crine*) not only repeats Arnaut's own description of his lady (*crin saura*) but reproduces a medieval image for rhetoric. Setting aside the sonnet, a genre he learned from Dante, Petrarch uses canzones and sestinas to announce another renaissance, that of the troubadour genres written in the same lost language Dante sought when he entered the thickets of dialects in search of a more perfect and sweeter vernacular to use as a model for the writing of poetry. Any enthusiasm for my period was really an appeal to those practicing transhistorical poetics to look seriously into this "middle" period and discover new ways of reading literature, whether in prose, verse, or both.

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