Protestant, and xenophobic feelings in France. Maurras developed the specious argument that the restoration of the monarchy in France would reduce the influence of Jews, Protestants and foreigners in France. Although many people in France did join the Action française, an organisation created to support Maurras' pro-monarchist position, many French Catholics were appalled by the intolerance of Maurras and his followers, who expressed clear contempt for religious minorities in France.

Maurice realised that French voters would never approve the destruction of their republican form of government. Maurras understood that force would be required to impose a non-democratic government in France. Maurras felt that it was morally justifiable to use force to overthrow a government which he considered to be unjust. Maurice Weyembergh points out the exquisite irony that both Maurras and Lenin, who agreed on nothing else, had no qualms justifying the use of violence against an established government. Maurras' wish was granted when the Nazis invaded France in June 1940 and destroyed the Third Republic, for which Maurras had an irrational hatred. Although Maurras claimed to be a monarchist and not a fascist, he praised enthusiastically the collaboration of Pétain and Laval. Maurras even presented the grotesque argument that the military defeat of France at the hands of the Nazis gave the French an opportunity to create a new France in which partisan concerns would yield to the higher ideal of what Maurras called 'national interest'. The speciousness of Maurras's theory was abundantly obvious to French Resistants. At his trial in 1945, Maurras remained supremely arrogant. He would not admit to himself or to his judges that he might have been wrong.

In this excellent book, Maurice Weyembergh described very well the extraordinary transformation of Charles Maurras from a conservative political thinker into an apologist for anti-Semitism and fascism. Although his works have been largely and understandably forgotten since his death, Maurice Weyembergh has argued quite eloquently that Charles Maurras was an important and dangerous writer during the four long years of the Nazi Occupation of France.

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The Medieval Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives, A.C. Spearing (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), x + 321 pp., £40.00/$59.95 H.B.

In this book, the author ranges widely through mediaeval literature, focusing on passages from works by Ovid, Marie de France, Chrétien de Troyes, Thomas Chestre, Geoffrey Chaucer, John Lydgate, Gavin Douglas, William Dunbar, John Skelton, and on a number of anonymous texts. By surveying so many texts, Spearing establishes that the problematics of looking and listening are central to early love narratives.

The length (282 pp., exclusive of notes, 14 chapters) and scope of this study forbid a chapter-by-chapter summary, yet the major threads of the argument bear recapitulation. In brief, Spearing proposes that looking and, secondarily, listening constitute 'the [narrative] means by which [the] private experience' of love 'is brought into the public

sphere' (p. 1). On one level, this means that the narratives often picture secret observers who attempt to publicise usually illicit loves. In this analysis, Spearing, drawing on the suggestive medieval volume of *A History of Private Life*[1] explores how poets distinguish between public and private spaces. On another level, Spearing argues that many narratives place the reader in the position of the secret observer: the reader, like the poet, becomes another 'voyeur' looking or listening in on lovers' private moments. On reading love narratives with Spearing, then, one stands last in a line of voyeurs, implicated in the narrative violation and publication of lovers' intimacies. Spearing occasionally suggests the moral culpability involved in thus sharing the voyeur's point of view. On a more metatextual level, he asserts a close tie between looking at a sex act and reading a text, between sexuality and textuality; and he proposes that love poetry is often about the writing of poetry.

Spearing introduces his argument by rejecting a totalising theoretical framework, and by advocating a flexible reference to critical theories. The Introduction accordingly sets up two models for examining the literary theme of looking and listening: Sigmund Freud's theory of the voyeur, and John Berger's theory of the gaze. With Berger, Spearing most typically examines the visual objectification of women. From Freud, Spearing takes the idea that looking, as long as it leads to copulation, forms a 'normal' stage in sexual arousal: looking constitutes a 'perversion' when it supplants copulation or (among other cases) is 'connected with the overriding of disgust (as in the case of *voyeurs*...)' (p. 3). Whatever one thinks of psychoanalytic criticism, this seems an infelicitous way to frame a discussion of readers and writers as voyeurs. (Similarly, the psychoanalytic term scopophilia seems an unhappy label for the eroticism of reading.) In practice, Spearing labels voyeuristic any gaze (or other act) that violates physical or psychic privacy, even when sexuality is clearly not at issue (e.g., p. 130). Reference to psychoanalysis confuses rather than advances this argument.

As the book progresses, Freud and film theories come to appear more or less plausible (and occasional) window dressing, for this book is New Critical in its major theoretical assumptions (reading is a neutral activity separable from 'theory'; the fit, male[2] reader determines correct meaning; poetic traditions are autonomous) and in critical practice (especially in sensitivity to imagery and ambiguity). Indeed, Spearing epitomises the strengths and minimises the weaknesses of New Criticism. Not surprisingly, film theory, with its emphasis on the visual, suits him better than psychoanalysis does.

This study is more aptly characterised as belletristic than as scholarly. An admirably lucid prose style carries the discussion agreeably along, and one encounters on the way some excellent readings of the literature. The belletristic approach also manifests itself in minimalist references to the vast body of existing criticism, which is (with few exceptions) explicitly irrelevant to the enterprise of reading (e.g. p. 197). This repudiation of criticism sometimes leads Spearing into errors and repetitions of no longer new analysis.

Although I have some reservations about this study, Spearing undeniably offers a provocative view of relatively unstudied traditions, and invites further discussion of the intriguing question of just how we are to read the paradoxical literary publications of secret loves. The thesis is both well taken and persuasively developed: narratives often direct attention to the ways in which poet and audience violate lovers' privacy. The study also contributes suggestively to our understanding of narrative point of view, for the analysis comments insightfully on the various perspectives from which readers enter into lovers' experiences. Further, Spearing calls attention to how narratives may offer multiple and unfixed points of view, thereby subverting fixed subject positions. On the whole, this is a most engaging study by a very fine critic.

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NOTES

1. One of a series of volumes where general editors are Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby and which were originally written in French and then translated into English.
2. e.g., p. 37 *et passim*: the Ovidian narrative perspective of Actaeon utterly represses that of Diana's nymphs.

The Strategy of Letters, Mette Hjort (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 267 pp., $37.50 cloth.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) in a rare lapse of consistency defines 'deconstruction' as 'a strategy of critical analysis... directed toward exposing unquestioned metaphysical assumptions and internal contradictions in philosophical and literary language'; but then it neglects to update its definition of 'strategy' to account for its own use of the term as a metaphor for certain critical or textual practices. Derived from the Greek word for the 'office or command of a general' (*strategia*), 'strategy' would seem to imply an overall plan of military operations—including, perhaps, 'an artifice or trick designed to outwit or surprise the enemy'—in contrast to more limited, pedestrian, and localised 'tactics'. Although she does not cite the *OED*'s own (perhaps strategic) ambivalence in its definition of 'deconstruction', Mette Hjort begins her book by looking closely at the strangely ubiquitous employment of the word 'strategy' in contemporary theoretical discourse. She is concerned not only with the contradictory and insufficiently examined use of the word but also with what it implies for the loss of a sense of responsible agency—a loss of the 'moral order'—in postmodern thought. Contemporary theorists would seem to be descendents of Odysseus, who tricks Polyphemus, before destroying his eye with the fiery olive beam, by saying that his name is 'No one'. After Odysseus blinds him and Polyphemus cries out in agony to the other Cyclopses, he can only say to them that 'No one is killing me by forceful treachery'.

The tricky Odysseus would, therefore, seem to be the supreme strategist. But in his avoidance of responsible agency Odysseus, in Hjort's view, is also the prototype of postmodern antihumanism. Professor Hjort puts the problem this way:

> The skepticism that accompanies the postmodern deconstruction of the self is thus carried over into the social sphere, which is held to be fundamentally inscrutable. According to some, the opacity of the self, of others, and of all intersubjective realities would prove that all attempts at communication inevitably must fail.

Given Hjort's admirable concern for responsible agency, we have every reason to ask, 'Who are these "some" who, by carrying out a "postmodern deconstruction of the self" make the social sphere "inscrutable"? Furthermore, 'Who claims that 'all attempts at communication inevitably must fail'? If these 'some' do make such a claim, how could they succeed in making it if communication is impossible? Although Hjort devotes limited space to each of them, the inheritors of Odysseus' strategic legacy would appear to be Derrida, Bourdieu, de Man and Foucault.