One would hesitate to call this bulky volume a feather in the wind, but it certainly signals something of the changed attitude to Derrida's work that has emerged among recent commentators. At last that work is beginning to receive the kind of serious philosophical attention which it has always demanded, but mostly been denied through various accidents of cultural reception history. Deconstruction was quick to catch on among American literary critics dissatisfied with the old, workaday business of merely interpreting texts and anxious to move across into adjacent disciplines, among them that of philosophy. Their aim was not so much to make criticism more 'philosophical' as to show that the texts of philosophy could be opened up to the modes of rhetorical close-reading that critics were best equipped to provide. For some, like Geoffrey Hartman, this signalled a long-overdue break with the tenets of New Critical orthodoxy, in particular the rigid boundary-lines drawn between poetry, criticism, and philosophy. Henceforth the interpreter could range freely across the disciplines, exploiting all manner of stylistic resources (including those of Continental thinkers like Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, all the more attractive for being sternly disowned by mainstream Anglo-American philosophers) without necessarily taking on board their more systematic or specialized arguments. It thus became possible to read (say) Wordsworth alongside Hegel, Marx with Victor Hugo, or Kant with Henry James, Nietzsche, and Freud, in order to demonstrate the endless intertextuality of meaning and the artificial character of all attempts to separate 'literature' from other kinds of discourse.

One further benefit - proclaimed most explicitly by Hartman - was the critic's new-found freedom of style, a chance to escape from the self-denying ordinance, the decently unselfpromoting decorum, handed down from Arnold, through Eliot, to present-day academic criticism. No longer need critics labour under the false idea that their kind of writing was a secondary kind which had better not stray onto the privileged domain of creative or poetic language. Such distinctions were held to be merely the result of an outworn habit of thinking which insisted on dividing up the disciplines along standard institutional or academic lines. If criticism could take on philosophy at its own rhetorical game then it could also make use of whatever 'poetic' tropes and devices it freely chose to exploit. Such was very largely the motivating impulse of 'literary' deconstruction in the wake of Derrida's much-publicized arrival on the North Americans.2
American scene. One of its effects was to alienate philosophers from what they saw, understandably, as a form of irrationalist or sophistical attack upon the principles of reason and truth. Hence the much-publicized exchange between Derrida and Searle on the topic of Austinian speech-act philosophy, an encounter which - as Derrida remarked - might be said never really to have taken place, since the parties were arguing at such a great distance of mutual misunderstanding.  

This impression was no doubt confirmed for many by the fact that Richard Rorty - most prominent of the few philosophers who engaged seriously with Derrida's work - likewise interpreted deconstruction as signalling the end of an outworn tradition. For Rorty, philosophy is indeed just a 'kind of writing', though one that has unfortunately failed to recognize this salient fact by treating itself as a privileged discourse of a priori concepts and truths. The great virtue of Derrida, as Rorty reads him, is to press home the liberating Nietzschean message that all philosophical ideas come down to metaphors in the end; that truth is the most tenacious and systematically misleading of these metaphors; and that therefore we had best give up the belief in philosophy as anything more than one, non-privileged, participant voice in the ongoing cultural dialogue.  

Literary critics may think (deludedly) that philosophers have a special kind of expertise which enables them to answer ultimate questions about the nature and limits of human understanding. On the contrary, Rorty declares: philosophy has no such superior vantage-point, and critics would do better just to take what they can in the way of handy notions and metaphors, without giving in to the old 'foundationalist' idea of epistemology as a source of ultimate truths, methods, or interpretative grounds. Deconstruction is thus welcome as a propaedeutic exercise for clearing away all those bad old habits of thought. But it becomes quite pointless, Rorty argues, when it takes an epistemological turn by continuing to press the same issues of meaning, reference and truth, only to conclude that these are problematical beyond anything dreamt of by philosophers in the mainstream (post-Kantian) tradition. Then deconstruction loses its liberating force and becomes just a kind of negative metaphysics, erecting its own peculiar ontology of 'difference', 'trace' and other such privileged terms.  

Gasche's book is by far the most 'philosophical' account of deconstruction yet to appear. It insists that Derrida's work must be understood as a radical critique - but also a continuation - of that German idealist line of descent that runs from Kant, through Fichte and Schelling, to Hegel and Husserlian phenomenology. Gasche is quite unyielding in his view that 'literary' deconstruction is a revisionist enterprise built on a fundamental misreading of Derrida's texts. This has come about, he argues, through the readiness of literary critics to pick up one or two salient 'themes' from Derrida's work - like the privilege attached to writing over speech - and then use them as a platform for advancing their own special interests. What they typically ignore is that further, more difficult stage in the deconstructive reading of a text which doesn't rest content with merely inverting a received opposition but goes on to reinscribe both its terms in another, wholly unfamiliar economy of sense. Such is the error that Rorty makes when he enlists Derrida on the side of a 'literary' discourse that would finally break with the deluded truth-claims of philosophy. Taking "writing" in
Derrida to mean the scriptive and worldly practice of writing, a practice that would differ from its usual philosophical interpretation to the extent that the object it is about is no longer the world but texts. Rorty . . . is bound to misunderstand it as literary writing’ (p. 274). In fact, Gasche argues, ‘writing’ for Derrida ‘has no proper value of its own, positive or negative’, and certainly not the kind of ultimate privilege that would justify literary critics (or anti-philosophers like Rorty) in their use of it as a slogan for rhetorical purposes.

The same goes for all those other terms in the deconstructionist lexicon (‘difference’, ‘supplement’, ‘trace’ and so forth) that Derrida appears to valorize against their more usual positive counterparts. In each case (according to Gasche) the point is not simply to invert the values of a commonplace hierarchical distinction but to push the enquiry much further back and ask what presuppositions are concealed by the structural difference in question. ‘Writing’ in this sense is a privileged term only in so far as, historically speaking, it has signified what Derrida calls ‘the most formidable difference’ from speech, self-presence, and the whole logocentric scheme of conceptual priorities. It is thus the most likely candidate, Gasche argues, for the role of deconstructing those various oppositions which have worked to maintain that scheme. But this strategic pre-eminence is not to be confused with the gesture - common in some degree to all forms of ‘literary’ deconstruction - which would elevate writing, rhetoric, or textual ‘free play’ above the claims of philosophical reason. What writing must be taken to signify in Derrida’s texts is ‘that synthetic structure of referral that accounts for the fact that in the play of differences between, say, speech and writing, ideality and writing, meaning and writing, philosophical discourse and writing . . . the pole allegedly present in and of itself, which allegedly refers to itself alone, must in fact constitute itself through the element that it abases’ (p. 275). And this would count against any simplified reading (like Rorty’s) that took Derrida to be arguing the case against ‘philosophy’ in the name of a generalized writing or rhetoric that could henceforth ignore the demands of conceptual critique. Although Derrida’s use of the term inevitably carries associative links with the ‘vulgar’, restricted, or commonplace usage, none the less it operates (as Gasche insists) at a level of philosophical argument beyond the grasp of such straightforwardly literal readings.

Gasche has a number of points to make against what he sees as the widespread misappropriation of Derrida’s texts. One is the fact that ‘literature’ has always been determined as in some sense the other of philosophy; that since Plato at least, the discourse on literary topics has taken its terms from the governing lexicon of philosophical concepts and categories. Thus literature belongs on the side of rhetoric (as opposed to reason), of metaphor (as opposed to literal or non-deviant usage), and of truth as opposed to the various kinds of fiction or imaginative licence that poets have commonly been thought to enjoy. And this means that there is no getting ‘outside’ philosophy to some alternative ground where the concepts in question would no longer apply. A deconstructive reading must always reach the point where its notions of the ‘literary’ turn out to be implicated in a certain genealogy of philosophical ideas. In the case of metaphor, as Derrida remarks in his essay ‘The white mythology’, it is impossible to advance a single proposition as to the nature of figural language
without in the process rejoining that tradition of philosophical thinking about
metaphor which has set the main terms of debate from Aristotle's day to the
present. The same applies to those various concepts of mimesis or poetic truth
which critics have advanced by way of defence against the claims of
disapproving philosophers and moralists. For again it is the case - as Gasche
points out, following Derrida - that philosophy will always have occupied in
advance the ground upon which these defences are conducted. 'This philosophical
inauguration has not only governed the reading of literature but has determined
the mode of its writing as well.' And for this reason, 'if it were possible to draw
one major proposition from Derrida's statements on literature, it would
certainly not be that everything is literature, but on the contrary that "there is
no - or hardly any, ever so little - literature" (p. 256).

Gasche's second line of argument follows directly from this. It has to do with
the relationship between deconstruction and a certain thematics of 'reflexivity'
which has more or less prevailed in literary-critical treatments of the topic. On
this account, the aim of a deconstructive reading is to draw out those moments
of rhetorical doubling or self-implicated paradox where the text puts its own
authority into question by reflecting on the endlessly elusive character of
meaning and consciousness in general. These moments produce a kind of
infinite regression (more fashionably, a mise-en-abyme) which reveals the non­
existence of any ultimate ground, any means of arresting the otherwise
vertiginous play of specular representations. Such ideas have certainly taken
hold among many of those American literary theorists influenced by Derrida's
thinking. They have been most important for critics like Hartman, interpreters
of a strongly marked speculative bent, trained up on close-reading of the major
Romantic poets and anxious to find a language that would somehow respond to
the subtleties, the windings of self-conscious memory and desire, encountered
in the canonical texts of that tradition. Thus Hartman starts out (in his early
book on Wordsworth) as a critic of broadly phenomenological persuasion,
seeking to articulate the most intimate structures of mind, meaning, and
experience that emerge in the course of Wordsworth's growth towards mature
self-knowledge. Such understanding, he insists, is both elusive and subject to
constant visions and revisions, since there is no 'unmediated presence' -
whether of nature as Wordsworth perceives it or of Wordsworth's perceptions as
they strike the reader - which could offer any ultimate guarantee that true
communication had taken place. Still Hartman writes in the belief that poetry is
in some sense a meeting of minds, and that criticism is best engaged in the kind
of inward yet reciprocal dialogue that works toward a sense of achieved
understanding.

His later 'deconstructionist' essays show Hartman increasingly coming to
doubt this dream of perfect communication. They emphasize the extent to
which language, in its figural or rhetorical dimension, tends always to
complicate the dialogue between poem and reader, to the point where no degree
of hermeneutic tact can offer an assurance of right understanding. Hartman
never goes quite so far in this direction as others like J. Hillis Miller, whose
progress from a phenomenological 'criticism of consciousness' to a thoroughgoing
deconstructionist rhetoric of tropes provides the most striking example of this
symptomatic shift of allegiance.\textsuperscript{9} But he does show clearly what Gasche has in mind when he traces the emergence of 'literary' deconstruction to a certain thematics of \textit{reflexivity} deriving from Kant, Hegel and the German metaphysical-idealist tradition. Transposed into the context of Romantic nature poetry, this leads to a stress on those moments of intense visionary pathos where language comes up against the paradoxes inherent in all such reflection on time, memory, and self-understanding. Despite the shift towards a more rhetorical register, deconstruction in this mode remains closely tied to its origins in phenomenological criticism and, beyond that, the line of reflexive or speculative thinking that feeds from German philosophy into English Romanticism. It is still, in this sense, a 'criticism of consciousness', whatever the obstacles that language is seen to place in the way of any pure, unimpeded communion of minds.

Gasche considers this a false idea of what deconstruction is properly about. 'False', that is to say, in the sense that it ignores the most radical implications of Derrida's work, although Gasche can hardly deny that this is the form - however misconceived or 'vulgarized' - in which deconstruction has so far made its chief institutional mark. Nevertheless he is determined to locate the erroneous premisses upon which this widespread misunderstanding rests. They begin, he argues, with the move to assimilate deconstruction to that line of idealist-speculative thought which takes the antinomies of mind, meaning, and subjective experience as its thematic starting-point. 'Reflection and reflexivity... are precisely what will not fit in Derrida's work - not because he would wish to refute or reject them in favour of a dream of immediacy, but because his work questions reflection's unthought, and thus the limits of its possibility' (p. 6).

Hence the decidedly cryptic title of Gasche's book, where the 'tain' of the mirror (from French \textit{etain}) refers to the 'tinfoil, the silver lining, the lusterless back' in the absence of which no reflection could occur, but which itself lacks any kind of mirroring or reflective quality. And so it is with deconstruction, an activity whose real interest is in that which lies behind, beyond, or beneath the paradoxes of self-conscious speculative thought. Thus Derrida's philosophy is engaged in exploring systematically that 'dull surface' which enables reflection to take place, but which cannot itself participate in 'reflection's scintillating play'.

What distinguishes \textit{echt}-deconstruction from these other, less rigorous literary analogues is precisely its refusal to dwell at the point where consciousness willingly enters the labyrinths of speculative thought. Thus Gasche perceives a clear link between the kinds of aesthetic speculation that followed from various misreadings of Kant and the current celebrations of rhetorical 'free play' that likewise think to find warrant in Derrida's philosophy. These result from the failure to perceive that Derrida is engaged in a quite different enterprise, one that belongs squarely within the Kantian-Hegelian lineage, despite raising questions that press far beyond the more familiar (reflexive or speculative) terms of that tradition. It would therefore be a great mistake, Gasche argues, 'to conclude that because deconstruction is critical of the discourse of metaphysics and its concept of method ... it would, in total disregard of all levels, indulge in uncontrollable free play' (p. 123). The 'levels' in question are those established by the Kantian critique of knowledge and

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representation, a critique whose terms Derrida subjects to a rigorous deconstructive reading, but which cannot be simply wished away (as Rorty would have it) by an appeal to some undifferentiating rhetoric of tropes. What is required is a patient and meticulous thinking-through of the problems that emerge as Kant’s philosophy is criticized by subsequent thinkers in the same tradition - Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel - to the point where its ultimate presuppositions are thrown into sharp relief. It is here, according to Gasche, that Derrida’s project can claim to represent both the legitimate continuation and the most radical, far-reaching critique of Kantian idealist thought.

This involves him in some lengthy and elaborate passages of argument, conducted in a prose style that makes few concessions to the non-specialized reader. For the reviewer to pick out occasional chunks of summary statement is of course to run the risk of simplifying and distorting Gasche’s hard-won position. All the same one can gain some idea of his project in its broadest outlines from the following synoptic statement, where Gasche lays out both the main issues and the various genealogical stages through which they have arisen:

Fichte’s, Schelling’s, and Hegel’s philosophies develop the speculative and dialectical elements in Kant, promising that the gap opened up between thinking and being, sensibility and understanding, theory and praxis, and so on which Kant’s philosophy appears unable to overcome might be bridged. This impossibility of coming to grips with dualism characterizes Kant’s philosophy as a philosophy of reflection; consequently, any attempt to ground thinking in the speculative germs of Kant’s enterprise must be viewed as a critique of reflexivity. (p. 25)

This passage more or less sets the terms for Gasche’s ambitious undertaking. It involves, first, a detailed account of how Fichte and Schelling pressed the dualities of Kantian thought toward the twin extremes of subjective and objective idealism. These putative ‘systems’ were in turn criticized by Hegel, who expressly identified with Schelling’s (objective) dialectics of nature, but whose main argumentative drift was to demand that thinking overcome such bad antinomies in the passage to a higher stage of truly dialectical synthesis. Thus in Hegel’s mature philosophy ‘being and thinking are one, only moments in the objective process of self-developing thought’. But Hegel also sees that this wished-for outcome is dependent on a prior assumption, namely that concepts and sensuous intuitions must at some point coincide in what Kant had termed the ‘transcendental unity of apperception’. Otherwise there could be no firm guarantee that the world of experience as construed by the knowing subject corresponded with anything actually ‘there’ in the world of external objects and events.

This doctrine of ‘intuitive intellect’ is for Kant an absolute necessity, since it offers the only available bridge between the mind’s a priori forms of cognition and the realm of empirical self-evidence or common-sense knowledge. His philosophy therefore rests on the twofold axiomatic claim that ‘intuitions without concepts are blind’ and ‘concepts without intuitions are empty’. But this remains a matter of juridical fiat, rather than lending itself to any kind of rigorous transcendental deduction. It thus gives rise to that oscillating
movement between idealism in its ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ modes that
characterized the post-Kantian history of thought. And so it was left to Hegel to
draw out the full problematical entailments of Kantian thinking. ‘Hegel’s
argument demonstrates that Kant’s attempt to mediate apparently irreconcilable
opposites falls prey to his philosophy of reflection’ (p. 31). And this for the
reason that all such speculative systems - all philosophies aimed towards
resolving or transcending the dialectic of subject and object - necessarily
partake of a circular logic which allows of no escape from the antinomies of pure
reason. ‘Since the opposition that remains is that between self-consciousness
and empirical or objective consciousness, the unsolved problem arises from
turning the original unity of apperception into mere formal self-reflection’
(p. 32). What Hegel brings out - and what is also, according to Gasche, brought
out by deconstruction in its rigorous, Derridean form - is the fact that no form
of speculative reason can hope to articulate the ‘unthought’ background of
assumptions from which its own dialectical strategies take rise. ‘The ‘taint of the
mirror’ is both the precondition of this endless reflexive self-scrutiny and that
which cannot itself be included in the play of specular representations.

In developing this argument, Gasche writes at length on the cardinal role of
aesthetic judgement in the overall scheme of Kantian critique. It is by means
of this appeal to art as par excellence the domain of reconciled antinomies - of ‘a
nondiscursive intellect, linking things as heterogeneous as the intellect and the
intuitions’ - that Kant is able to predicate the ultimate unity of subject and
object, mind and world. The aesthetic thus becomes, under various names
(including that of productive imagination’), the principle that bridges the
otherwise disparate realms of conceptual and sensuous knowledge. But again,
this principle can only be invoked by an act of de jure stipulation, an act which
answers to the deepest requirements of Kantian critique but which cannot be
shown to follow necessarily from anything established elsewhere in the logic of
that critique. Gasche cites a passage of Hegel (from Faith and Knowledge) which
makes this point and strikingly anticipates much of what the current
deconstructors - among them Paul de Man - will have to say on the topic of
Kantian aesthetics.10 ‘We must not’, Hegel writes,

take the faculty of productive imagination as the middle term that gets
inserted between an existing absolute subject and an absolute existing world.
The productive imagination must rather be recognized as what is primary and
original, as that out of which subjective Ego and objective world first sunder
themselves into the necessarily bipartite appearance and product, and as the
sole In-itself. (Gasche, p. 31)

It is from this starting-point in Hegel’s critique of speculative metaphysics that
Gasche derives the authentic, the rigorous form of deconstructive thinking. It
aims to uncover those grounding assumptions that underlie the speculative
project at every stage - that make up, indeed, its very conditions of possibility -
yet which cannot be articulated within the logic or constitutive terms of that
project. ‘In a strange way, “arche-writing” is at once both more aid less
transcendental than the Kantian transcendental originary syntheses’ (p. 276).
Deconstruction is therefore unthinkable outside the post-Kantian tradition of
thought, but also (in a sense which Gasche seeks to elucidate) strictly unthinkable on the conditions laid down by that same tradition.

This leads him to describe the central terms of Derridean critique as 'quasi-transcendentals', figures of thought adopted in the knowledge that they cannot provide any ultimate account of their own genesis or structure, but deployed none the less with a view to explaining just why such necessities arise. For it is, Gasche argues, impossible to avoid that requirement of method or system which has always been a part of the philosophical project, even where reason turns back upon itself in the form of reflective auto-critique. What deconstruction brings out with maximum force - notably in Derrida’s readings of Hegel - is the presence of heterogeneous elements that cannot be finally subsumed or transcended through the powers of dialectical or totalizing thought. Gasche devotes a large portion of his argument to showing just how these elements work to disrupt any philosophy supposedly grounded in pure, self-identical concepts. But he also maintains that thinking cannot begin to criticize its own preconceptions without at some point yielding to the need for system and method. Deconstruction acknowledges this need while at the same time resisting the desire to treat it as a source of ultimate conceptual truths. Hence the various Derridean techniques for using terms whose philosophical import is strategically conserved yet placed 'under erasure' by means of typographical or other devices. It is at this stage - where philosophy comes up against the limits of its own conceptualization - that Gasche locates the real pertinence and force of deconstructive critique. What remains of the Kantian project is a principled scepticism as regards its more dogmatic or 'totalizing' claims, but also the knowledge that those claims cannot be criticized without the most rigorous account of their necessity within the Kantian system.

'Differance', 'arche-writing', 'supplementarity' and other such Derridean key-terms are various names for that which exceeds philosophical reflection in its quest for legitimizing principles or grounds. They should be seen, Gasche suggests, as so many quasi-transcendentals or 'infrastructures', paradoxically marking both the limits of conceptual critique and (in an eminently Kantian sense) its conditions of possibility. Thus he lists a whole series of Derrida’s strategic neologisms in a paragraph (pp. 223-4) which spells out precisely their unsettling effects upon the logic, ontology, and grounding assumptions of philosophical discourse. And in a subsequent passage he takes up the point that this critique can only claim any kind of philosophical warrant in so far as it works through and beyond the terms established by other, more traditional forms of thinking.

Focusing on an analysis of those heterogeneous instances that are the 'true' conditions of possibility of reflection and speculation without being susceptible to accommodation by the intended totality, Derrida’s philosophy reinscribes, in the strict meaning of this word, reflection and speculation into what exceeds it: the play of the infrastructures, (p. 239)

Rather than merely dispose of reflexivity ('the surest way for it to reenter through the backdoor'), deconstruction sets out to think the limits of speculative reason and to show where it encounters irreducible problems in the nature of its...
own enterprise. One should not be misled, therefore, when Gasche uses the
word 'play' to describe that perpetual slippage or undecidability which governs
the working of these 'infrastructural' predicates. Such play has nothing
whatsoever to do with the attitude of free-for-all interpretative licence which is
commonly ascribed to deconstruction by literary critics (who welcome its
advent) and by mainstream analytical philosophers (who reject it as merely a
species of last-ditch rhetorical sophistry). It should rather be conceived - as
Derrida suggests - by analogy with a piece of precision machinery where the
'play' between parts, for instance in a bearing, is a matter of fine tolerance and
essential to the machine's proper functioning.

This is what makes it so hard for philosophy to think beyond the limiting
conditions laid down by an essentially reflective or speculative notion of its
own project. Gasche here refers to one of Derrida's essays on Hegel ('From
restricted to general economy'), where the issue is posed once again in terms of a
generalized 'writing' whose effects exceed and frustrate the grasp of any purely
dialectical account.

Total reflection is a limited play, not because of some defect owing to its
finitude - as Hegel has shown, it is a truly infinite play - but because of the
structurally limitless play of the undecidables that make it possible, which the
mirror's play cannot accommodate without at the same time relinquishing the
telos of its operation: the actuality of the unity of all that is reasonable.

(Gasche, p. 238)

It is in this sense that Derrida's work must be seen as at once intensely
philosophical and yet as surpassing the conceptual limits of hitherto existing
philosophies. Deconstruction is concerned with 'a naivety unthought by
philosophy in general, a blindness constitutive of philosophical thought, Hegel's
speculative system included' (p. 125). But this blindness or naivety cannot be
counted as one more sign of philosophy's chronic obsolescence, of its not having
grasped (as Rorty would say) the current 'conversational' rules of the game, a
game that would demote philosophy to just another 'kind of writing' and
effectively substitute rhetoric for reason. Such moves are beside the point,
Gasche contends, since they ignore the complex philosophical genealogy of all
those terms and distinctions which they blithely, uncritically continue to use.
Thus 'the logical and the rhetorical are, precisely, corresponding intraphilosophical
norms of the cohesion and coherence of the discourse whose unthought is being
focused upon here' (p. 126). To pass clean over these obstacles is to fall back
upon an attitude of pre-critical dogmatism that ignores not only the rigours of
Derridean thought but the whole history of conceptual debate carried on by
philosophers from Plato and Aristotle to the present.

It is one great virtue of Gasche's book that it dispels so many of these false or
conveniently simplified ideas. This is not to deny that there are problems with his
way of distinguishing sharply between genuine ('philosophical') deconstruction
and its hybrid, vulgarized, or 'literary' forms. As other critics have remarked -
notably Suzanne Gearhart, in a penetrating essay for the journal *Diacritics* -
Gasche's distinction appears to be premised on a kind of generic essentialism

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(philosophy versus literature) which scarcely stands up to deconstructive scrutiny.\textsuperscript{12} It encounters resistance in the work of Paul de Man, where clearly there is something more going on - something more 'philosophical', less concerned with matters of localized thematic or interpretative interest - than in the writings of (say) Geoffrey Hartman or J. Hillis Miller. And yet de Man constantly denied any involvement with 'philosophy' as such; thought of himself as first and foremost a close-reader of literary texts; and often came out in marked opposition to Gasche's line of argument by claiming that 'literature' was the most rhetorically self-conscious, hence the least mystified form of discourse, and that therefore the delusive truth-claims of philosophy were best deconstructed by way of a 'literary' reading.\textsuperscript{13} Furthermore, Gearhart argues, there is no getting around this awkward series of facts by constructing (as Gasche does) a partially redemptive version of de Man which would have his main emphasis conveniently shift from the 'literary' interests of \textit{Blindness and Insight} to the more 'philosophical' position developed in \textit{Allegories of Reading}. What this version has to ignore is the evidence that de Man continued to privilege literature above philosophy, to the point of stating - in a much-quoted passage from \textit{Allegories} - that philosophy may at last turn out to be 'an endless reflection on its own destruction at the hands of literature'.\textsuperscript{14} And Gearhart is likewise able to show that de Man persisted in equating deconstruction with a certain thematics of reflexivity, despite what Gasche is disposed to view as his progress beyond such a limiting approach.

In \textit{The Tain of the Mirror} Gasche has little to say about de Man, understandably perhaps in a book that has its work cut out establishing Derrida's philosophical credentials. In fact his one passing reference appears to concede the major points of Gearhart's critique, stressing as it does the very marked 'discrepancy' between Derrida's and de Man's projects, and assimilating the latter to a species of literary-critical practice whose real antecedents should be sought not in philosophy but in a certain tradition of 'American-bred literary scholarship' (p. 3). But the question then remains as to how far Derrida's work permits of such a rigorous and confident beating of the bounds between philosophical and non-philosophical discourse. On the one hand Gasche argues that philosophy has always in some sense pre-empted such distinctions; that 'literature speaks the voice of philosophy . . . it is a mere proxy, stillborn . . . there has hardly ever been any literature, if literature is supposed to mean something other than philosophy' (p. 256). And the same would apply to those characteristic features (like metaphor) whose presence has traditionally been thought to signal the difference between literature and other kinds of language.\textsuperscript{15} On the contrary, says Gasche: 'owing to the particular status of this quasi-transcendental, determined by the very specific philosophical problems to which it responds, Derrida's theory of metaphoricity cannot be of any immediate concern to literary theory' (p. 318). But if literature - and presumably literary theory - are in any case part and parcel of philosophy, there would seem to be no real purpose in arguing against the kinds of appropriative reading that deconstruction has allegedly suffered at the hands of literary critics.

Gasche of course thinks otherwise and states categorically that 'Derrida's marked interest in literature . . . has never in his thinking led to anything.
remotely resembling literary criticism or to a valorization of what literary critics agree to call literature' (p. 255). His reasons for this are equally clear: the belief that deconstruction has been kidnapped and deprived of its critical force through the current *mesalliance* with literary theory. It is important that this case should be made, especially in view of the routine dismissal of Derrida by philosophers who take the presumed tie between deconstruction and literary theory as a pretext for simply failing to read him with anything like the requisite care and attention. Still, there is a problem for Gasché in the fact that Derrida's writings have encouraged - even actively solicited - such treatment by literary critics. And this is not merely (though it is in large part) an accidental feature of the process of transmission into a different cultural context. It also has to do with what Gasché himself acknowledges: the way that 'arche-writing essentially communicates with the vulgar concept of writing', so that deconstruction lends itself as it were naturally to the purposes of textual criticism. In this respect it is worth noting that Derrida has maintained a certain studious reserve on the topic of so-called 'American deconstruction'. His response when questioned is usually to remark that the word has taken on a life of its own, a whole set of independent meanings and fortunes for which he can scarcely be held accountable. Some of these developments are no doubt strikingly remote from anything that Derrida would wish to recognize as germane to his own enterprise. But he is clearly just as anxious not to suggest that they have somehow missed the whole point, or that they represent a mere falling-away from the philosophical rigour of *echt*-deconstruction.

This puts Gasché in the odd position of claiming to know more surely than Derrida what should or should not be accounted a proper, philosophically warranted use of Derrida's work. It results, I think, from Gasché's extreme determination to banish those elements of literary interest - thematic, self-reflexive or whatever - which strike him as a mere distraction from Derrida's most important work. But this position is hard to maintain if one considers, for instance, how 'writing' functions in the chapters on Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*, or (again) how Derrida's essays oh Freud complicate the relation between life, writing, and fantasy investment to a point where such distinctions must appear grossly misconceived. Gasché is certainly right to insist that these texts cannot be reduced to just one more, ultra-sophisticated variant of old-style thematic criticism. Thus 'writing' as it figures in Rousseau's corpus is a term whose unsettling chain of effects goes far beyond anything that could ever be pinned down or treated as a straightforward literary 'theme'. So Gasché might seem fully justified in his claim that 'writing, a concept that has been so easily accommodated by so-called deconstructionist criticism, has little or nothing to do with the (anthropological, subjective, and so on) act of writing, with the psychological pleasures and displeasures to which it gives rise' (p. 274). But again, such statements must appear unduly restrictive when set alongside Derrida's reading of Rousseau. For there is simply no way of drawing such a firm, juridical line between 'writing' as the quasi-transcendental term which governs the elusive economy of Rousseau's discourse and 'writing' as the theme, activity, or focus of obsessional fear and desire which effectively provides the *mise-en-scène* of Derrida's reading. And the same applies to all those other
deconstructive key-terms which Gasche would likewise restore to a condition of philosophical purity and rigour.

But these problems should in no way be taken as detracting from the fine achievement of Gasche's book. Along with recent publications by Irene Harvey and John Llewelyn, it marks the emergence of a serious, intellectually demanding response to Derrida's work among the more acute Anglo-American commentators. In the end there is no denying Gasche's central claim: that Derrida is a thinker of the highest philosophical importance whose writings both require and repay such scrupulous analytical treatment.

NOTES

4 See Richard Rorty, Philosophy as a kind of writing', in Consequences of Pragmatism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 89-109.
5 This argument is further developed by Rorty in his essay 'Deconstruction and circumvention', Critical Inquiry, vol. XI (1984), 1-23.
10 Paul de Man, 'Phenomenality and materiality in Kant', in Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica (eds), Hermeneutics: questions and prospects (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 121-44.
13 See especially the essays collected in de Man's posthumous volume, The Resistance to Theory (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
15 On this topic see Derrida, 'The white mythology' (op. cit.) and 'The retrait of metaphor', *Enclitic*, vol. II, no. 2 (1978), 5-33.

