overview of the historical context both for *Truth and Method* and for Gadamer’s other works.

*The Philosophy of Gadamer* is broken down into five chapters that map onto the three main sections of *Truth and Method*: 1) The Problem of Method and the Project of a Hermeneutics of the Human Sciences; 2) Truth After Art; 3) The Destruction of Prejudices in Nineteenth-Century Aesthetics and Epistemology; 4) Vigilance and Horizon in Hermeneutics; and 5) The Dialogue That We Are. Grondin’s book maps onto Gadamer’s exceptionally well, and does this in only 180 pages. The majority of Grondin’s book is devoted to elucidating the central themes and ideas of Gadamer, providing historical background and the ideas of central figures in the hermeneutical, humanist, and natural science traditions, and clarifying parts of the text that can easily be misunderstood. Grondin also points out some of Gadamer’s shortcomings and conceptual errors, sometimes quoting from an elder Gadamer himself (this critical addition to Grondin’s study is especially helpful in approaching a balanced reading of *Truth and Method*). Grondin explains, for example, regarding Gadamer’s notion of the experience of truth in art, that “[p]erhaps this aspect of Gadamer’s hermeneutics is the most important, and also the most misunderstood. If it is misunderstood, it is because Gadamer in *Truth and Method* sometimes has a tendency, as he later recognized, to take an epistemological approach to the problem in talking of ‘knowledge.’... He was the victim of too epistemological a connection with the problem of understanding that he wanted to unsettle” (19–20).

Grondin’s book has many merits aside from these technical aspects. His writing style is relatively casual; the book reads like he is talking about an old friend—as, in fact, he is. The book also gets straight to the point, without ever losing its academic rigor. Grondin does an excellent job of illustrating the relevant figures and historical contexts that inhabit and surround Gadamer’s magnum opus. He unfailingly provides his reader with the right amount of background information to understand Gadamer’s main point, and also provides enough insight to be able to stand back and critically evaluate Gadamer’s analyses and critiques. Grondin’s book is, in short, an ideal companion to *Truth and Method*. *The Philosophy of Gadamer* is superb in its exposition of Gadamer’s difficult and often complex ideas, as well as in detailing how Gadamer has advanced the modern study of hermeneutics, the philosophical problem of method, and the further development of Heidegger’s ideas on language and thought. Grondin’s book is essential reading for anyone who wishes to appreciate more fully both the bold general undertaking and the more subtle dialectical inroads of *Truth and Method*.

KIMBERLY BALTZER, Wilfrid Laurier University

*Deconstruction and Critical Theory*
PETER V. ZIMA
London: Continuum, 2002; 231 pages.

*Deconstruction and Critical Theory* announces itself as an important piece
of writing for graduate students interested in the various branches of deconstruction that stem from Derrida's writings. Excellent as a graduate text, Zima's book is too basic for anything beyond graduate school, with the possible exception of his final chapter, in which he spends considerable time outlining the various critiques of deconstruction. On the whole, this book serves as a useful tool with which deconstruction might be examined by graduate students. The structural organization of this book is superb. Each of the seven chapters is fairly self-sufficient and informative in its own right. As the title suggests, Zima explores deconstruction's relation to critical theory, however this exploration occurs more as a matter of fact and less as a thematic point of focus. Of the seven chapters, four are devoted exclusively to writings of Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartman, and Harold Bloom. The first two chapters explain Derrida's deconstruction and attempt to show its historical roots in Heidegger, Nietzsche, and the romantics. The final chapter provides an outline of the various critiques of deconstruction.

The main thrust of *Deconstruction and Critical Theory* consists in displaying the historical roots of deconstruction in general as well as the similarities and differences between particular strains of deconstructive thought as they appear in the writings of de Man, Miller, Hartman, and Bloom. While there are several noticeable differences between Derrida and American writers on deconstruction, one thing stands in common: the enormous influence that Nietzsche and the German romantics have had on deconstruction. This influence, described as a "precursor of deconstruction," opens the door to the critique of logocentric thought, and is exemplified in Friedrich Schlegel's question, "is incomprehensibility really something so reprehensible and bad?" (10). No one would question Zima's elementary point that Schlegel's romanticism anticipates the key ideas of deconstruction. Nor would we question the immense importance that Derrida's readings of Nietzsche have had on his writing style and content. Zima's first two chapters, wherein he spends most of his time stating and restating the various ways in which deconstruction has been influenced by Schlegel and Nietzsche, provide nothing new for the scholar. However, these chapters contain everything that a graduate student might need to become familiar with the project of deconstruction and its place within the history of philosophy.

While the first two chapters read more like a history lesson, the section on de Man is the first chapter where we find Zima's own position and interpretation of deconstruction. It is in this chapter that Zima begins to critique deconstruction by challenging ideas presented by de Man. Zima asks, for example, "How can one assert that a particular way of reading—deconstructive or otherwise—is the correct one, and that the contradictions revealed by de Man or another deconstructionist are 'contained' in the object?" (85). With this in mind, Zima concludes that "de Man seems to commit the very Hegelian error he criticizes when he declares that 'a deconstruction always has for its target to reveal the existence of hidden articulations and fragmentations within assumed monadic totalities'" (85). Zima takes issue with de Man's highly speculative and particularized interpretations of poetic fragments. He expresses frustration with de Man's repeated attempts to turn his subjective fantasies into interpretations, and describes de Man's interpretations of poetic fragments as "Nietzschean
The chapters discussing de Man, Miller, Hartman, and Bloom lead into Zima's final chapter where his own critical voice becomes most apparent. In this final chapter, Zima lumps together all writers of deconstruction and aims his axe in their general direction. Not only do we hear Zima's own critique of deconstruction, we are also made aware of the many critical voices that have been launched against it. Many of these attacks are well founded and to be expected. From this banquet of assaults we find the following samples: (1) the many paradoxes and logical contradictions of deconstruction; (2) the problematic distinction between the non-theoretical/non-methodological "non-essence" of deconstruction versus the theoretical and methodological essence of particularized interpretations (e.g., de Man, Miller, Hartman, and Bloom); (3) deconstruction's inability to speak of a history without interpreting this history as rhetorical; (4) deconstruction's limited applicability to social problems and inability to offer pragmatic interpretations of legal texts; (5) deconstruction's glossing over of political issues, its ambivalence toward cultural values, and its rejection of the social sciences; (6) deconstruction's undermining of traditional literary criticism; (7) deconstruction's unfortunate consequences of creating a paralysis of action, a denial of lucidity, an inability to reflect on itself as a theory having social, political, and historical ties, and a presentation of itself as an ideological monologue of indifference; and finally (8) deconstruction's negation of the agency of the individual subject, the disavowal of historical action, and the complete disintegration of political action or agency.

While, on their own, none of these attacks is new, what is unique about Zima's book is the concise, lengthy, and formidable presentation of these various attacks as a unified front leveled against Derrida and his American followers. Zima offers little consolation to the deconstructionists and does not entertain the possibility that deconstruction will be able to sustain itself against its numerous critics. Instead, he offers a rather terse and uncritical suggestion that anyone wishing to move deconstruction into the "future" must confront the fact that deconstruction is incapable of accounting for a non-rhetorical "history." At this point, we could imagine how proponents of deconstruction might happily embrace a nonutopian utopia where subjective agency, political agency, and social decisions are never desired, but instead give way to the free play of aporia and interpretive indifference. At any rate, Zima does make one critical and powerful point to frighten away many readers from deconstruction—namely, Lehman's fantastic suggestion that deconstruction could plausibly interpret Hitler's Mein Kampf as follows: "Hitler rejects religious anti-Semitism ... its author secretly implies the opposite of what he declares 'openly.' ... Hitler as a democrat ... or as a friend of the Jews ... represses his sympathies" (175). Zima's point here haunts his reader and lingers as a kind of threat or dare for writers of deconstruction—a dare to see how far they are willing to go to defend their happy acceptance of a rhetorical history, and a threat to test how steep their conviction might be when they claim that all interpretations (Lehman's included) are interesting and clever readings encouraged by the text itself.