

# The Deception of Good Writing

by Andrew Gold

The contest for this issue is based on an essay written by the GF's own Professor James Miller, published in *Lingua Franca* several years ago, entitled, "Is Bad Writing Necessary?" In the piece, Professor Miller compares the opacity championed by Theodor Adorno with the transparency of George Orwell, and, if you have not read the essay, you probably can infer from the title (which Professor Miller did not write) which style of writing he favors. Orwell, he concludes, communicates; Adorno is "waiting for a messiah who may never come"

There is a part of me that is inclined to accept Professor Miller's conclusion. For one of my classes, I have been reading Judith Butler, who writes in the Adorno tradition, and have found myself alternately bored, confused, frustrated and downright intolerant at the way her sentences bog down in bloated, technical language and how often the crux of her argument is submerged to the point of being unidentifiable. I would like to believe that what could be termed more fairly as "difficult writing" is unnecessary, but unfortunately I doubt that we as a culture

have that luxury. It is precisely from the limitations of a transparent style that the need and usefulness of difficult writing and difficult thought arise.

To illustrate why, though, I think it helps to start by looking at Orwell's writing. I want to look at one of Orwell's most quoted lines, which comes from his seminal 1946 essay, "Politics and the English Language." He writes, "In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible." This is obviously an excellent piece of rhetoric, clear and pointed. Its staying power, though, is due less to its construction, which probably would not have separated it from thousands of other finely-crafted sentences written that year, than to the fact that people have continued to see a pattern of "indefensible" political speech over the past 50-plus years. The

