Ghosts . . . in Writing!

Did you know that many books aren’t actually written by the author named on the cover? They’re written by people called ghost writers: professional writers who sell their services to would-be authors. It is estimated, in fact, that up to 50 percent of all nonfiction books are actually ghost-written by anonymous writers.

Why do prospective authors use ghost writers? The main reason is that while an author may be great at generating ideas, he or she may not be able to translate those ideas smoothly into words. The author may have a general outline of a plot, its characters, setting, and so forth, but not have much skill putting it down on paper, a skill that comes naturally to ghost writers. Some authors also use ghost writers due to visual or motor impairments that make the physical task of writing difficult for them.

One genre that ghost writers commonly write in is autobiography. Celebrities or sports stars may wish to capture a piece of immortality by telling their story in print. But someone who excels at singing or playing basketball may not be the greatest writer in the world, or may simply be too busy to write a book—hence, the need for a ghost writer.

Once hired, a ghost writer usually records interviews with the subject of the book, taking extensive notes on his or her life. The ghost writer then organizes the information and writes it in a way that will be enjoyable for readers, preserving the story for generations to come. While some people believe the practice of ghost writing is deceptive, it nonetheless has its place in the literary world. Without ghost writers, we would never hear the stories of many people we have come to love and admire.