Today's writing: Art or séance?
by Alan Levy

ghost writers to write their speeches, and in instances even to write their books?

"Knowingly or unknowingly you are studying — and perhaps drawing inspiration from ghosted documents"

Here was an analogy that proved both logical and devastating. Ghostwriting appears harmless in individual doses. Cumulatively, however, its effect can be poisonous. Quiz fixing eventually reached a point where an attorney is alleged to have asked a defendant: "If you tell the truth and everything else lies, then you'll be the one who commits the crime." Similarly, ghostwriting can be rationalized from "It's O.K. for the President to have ghostwriters" and "I'd like to hear Rita Hayworth's story, but I wouldn't expect her to be able to express it all by herself" to a moral climate in which fraud becomes the rule, not the exception. The cynical reactions to Richard Nixon's literary ventures are typical of today's outlook.

The prevalence of ghosts may no longer be shocking to those in the know, but it is distressing to ad-libs and ordinary readers. "If I read a statement made by Konrad Adenauer," one reader affirmed, "I think it's important that I know if I'm written for him by an ex-Nazi." The historian and the editor should know exactly how much of Henry L. Stimson's On Action in War, Richard Nixon's In a Time of War, and Kevin McCann's unless I've already said of President Eisenhower: "I fear that depends so totally on ghost writers that his high ideals cannot shine through as they should."

As Dr. Claude M. Fuess, headmaster emeritus of Andover, once pointed out: "Ghost writers are help being discreet and unadventurous. Away from their responsibility, they have constantly on minds the disasters that a few careless words cause. Naturally, they tend to weaken adjectives, tone down extravagances. In pondering over syllables, they dilute spontaneity." On the other hand, in his recent essays on ghostwriting, the Washington Post's personnel critic, the journalist Joseph Sisk, "is often called in because someone who knows all the truth of the matter thinks that he and that he simply lacks the time or professional ability to do it himself."