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PUTTING LIVES ON THE RECORD

THE BOOK AS MATERIAL AND SYMBOL IN LIFE WRITING

ANNA POLETTI

In recent years, the study of life writing has become increasingly attentive to the role of the book in the production and circulation of life narratives. Gillian Whitlock's important work on the movement of life writing across national borders in the "war on terror" (*Soft Weapons*), Julie Rak's analysis of the rise of memoir as a best-selling genre in America (*Boom!*), and Kate Douglas's careful consideration of the production and sale of memoirs of childhood (*Contesting Childhood*) all situate the book as a contemporary media form that has specific affordances, practices of circulation, and modes of preservation that shape life writing. These studies of contemporary life writing are attentive to the placement of self-representation within specific material conditions that include commercial, technological, logistical, and ideological factors. Diary scholars, too, have discussed how the logic of the book, as the privileged medium for making knowledge consequential, structures both academic work on life writing and public engagement with autobiography beyond the book (Temple).

My contribution to these lines of inquiry in this article is to offer a different view of the relationship between life writing and the book by considering how research in the fields of book and media history can inform our understanding of the book as both a medium and a symbol that has been central to the practice and the scholarship of life writing. This article is a first attempt to think about how arguments and findings from these fields might shape the study of autobiography. Book history is, as Robert Darnton notes, a diverse and vibrant field that encompasses the study of publishing, authorship, and reading. As the work of Lisa Gitelman demonstrates, it may also be thought of as a component of the history of communication. As a large and very productive site of research, this area of study has much to offer our field; this

article can only scratch the surface of what might come from bringing autobiography and book and media history together. Moreover, the scratch I make is shaped by my own preoccupations, and it is my hope that the shortcomings in this paper spur further engagement and intersection between the fields.

My core interest is to use book and media history to examine the material conditions of the fundamental premise in life writing studies: that life narrative is a genre that puts personal experience “on the record.”¹ Following the turn to the book by scholars such as Johanna Drucker, N. Katherine Hayles, Leah Price, Peter McDonald, and Karin Littau, I historicize and theorize the book *as a form of media* used for life writing and consider the role autobiographical discourse itself has played at key points in the book’s history in establishing the book as a trusted and privileged medium. Taking my lead from Lisa Gitelman’s careful critique of a monolithic view of “print culture” (7–10), I focus on the mid-twentieth century as a specific moment in the history of autobiography, literary studies, and the book. When autobiography scholarship began in earnest in the mid-twentieth century, the materiality of the book was all but invisible to literary theorists and critics.² This article is an attempt to explore the legacies of that coincidence.

In what follows I bring book and media history into conversation with life writing studies through Jean-Paul Sartre’s 1963 autobiography *Les Mots* (*The Words*), a work published at the height of the book’s privileged—and largely invisible—status in literary culture. *The Words* consistently narrates the powerful specificity of the book as a medium. I juxtapose Sartre’s moment of writing with one example from the history of printing and one from the history of authorship that illuminate the role of autobiography in “the way books come into being and spread through society” (Darnton 10). There is some debate regarding appropriate terms for the study of what some refer to as the “‘history of books’ or ‘the history of the book’” (Darnton 9), “print culture” (Gitelman, “Print Culture” 183–85) or the study of history of authorship, reading, and publishing (as designated by the name of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing). Following Gitelman’s lead, I refer to distinct histories of print and authorship, while also seeking to situate how these influence the larger question of “the cultural meaning of the codex form itself,” what is sometimes referred to as “bookness” (Crain 156) or explored under the rubric of “bookishness” (Pressman). How autobiography studies might reflect upon the ways in which, to use Patricia Crain’s phrase, “a format [the codex] became a value [the book]” (156) could not come at a more important time given the expansion of the genre of autobiography across media formats (McNeill and Zuern). Thus, my aim in this article is to consider Gitelman’s point that “The histories of genres and the histories of media don’t so much overlap as they intersect, constituting partial and mutual conditions for one another” (*Paper* 10).

THE WORDS OR THE MEDIUM?

Widely understood as Sartre's farewell to literature and his rejection of the tradition of belles lettres as a bourgeois fantasy, *The Words* is an autobiography of Sartre's childhood. The work focuses on what Sartre sees as the two defining elements of his formative years: his experience of being born into freedom as a result of his father's death in the first year of his life, and his inculcation into his grandfather's religion of humanism through the worship of belles lettres and books. For the adult narrator of *The Words*, his worship of books and belief in the power of literature is a neurosis that enabled him to write the many novels, plays, and philosophical works that defined the man known as Sartre: "Without this fundamental illusion, I should never have written" (40). In *The Words*, Sartre diagnoses the "neurosis" that enabled his literary career from the perspective of his awakened political consciousness and his abandonment of the bad faith that was the belief in his identity as a writer. Of his youthful belief in that identity, Sartre writes:

I saw my birth as a necessary evil, a purely temporary incarnation that was making ready my transfiguration: to be reborn you had to write and to write you needed a brain, eyes, and arms. Your work done, those organs would be reabsorbed into themselves: round about 1955, a larva would burst and twenty-five folio butterflies would escape, feverishly beating their pages, and settle on a shelf in the Bibliothèque Nationale. These butterflies would be none other than myself. Me: twenty-five volumes, eighteen thousand pages of text and three hundred illustrations, including a portrait of the author. My bones are leather and cardboard, my parchment flesh smells of glue and mildew, and I strut at my ease across a hundredweight or so of paper. I am reborn, I have at last become a complete man, thinking, speaking, singing, thundering, and asserting himself with the peremptory inertia of matter. I am taken up, opened out, spread on the table, smoothed with the flat of the hand and sometimes made to crack. I let it happen and then suddenly I flash, dazzle, impose myself from a distance; my powers traverse space and time, strike down the wicked and protect the good. No one can forget me or pass me over in silence: I am a large, manageable, and terrible fetish. (122)

In such vivid descriptions, Sartre narrates the powerful attraction of the book to writers while also providing an insight into the symbolic power of the book as a means of inserting one's voice into the store of human culture—or as life writing scholars commonly put it, "on the record." But as Sartre's fantasy of transformation details, it is the combination of the material affordances of the book and paper (the codex), the institutions charged with storing them (in Sartre's case the Bibliothèque Nationale), and the interaction with the reader that the material presence of the book enables (reading) that, taken together, form "the record" to which life writing contributes. Rereading Sartre's texts

through the lens of book and media history reveals how, in Gitelman's words, "Written genres in general are familiarly treated as if they were equal to or coextensive with the sort of textual artifacts that habitually embody them" (*Paper* 3). *The Words* is commonly interpreted through the lens of the linguistic turn: Paul John Eakin, for example, reads the text as a narrative of Sartre's coming to narrative. "There is much to learn from Sartre's brilliant diagnosis of the child's literary disease," Eakin argues, regarding "the fundamental uncertainty about the relation between autobiographical narrative and the life it claims to record" (129–30). In a psychoanalytic reading, Anne-Marie Picard argues that through *The Words* Sartre examines "the function of the symbolic in the life of a human subject" and by doing so "Sartre helps us understand Lacan" (78). For Picard the many books and the many types of print culture that populate Sartre's autobiography represent a Totem, and a single Book, which confirm that the fatherless Sartre "*had no choice but to 'choose writing as a symptom' in order to survive*" (85, emphasis in original). In a virtuosic analysis, Philippe Lejeune contends that *The Words* is a *dialectic* rather than a *narrative* that depicts Sartre's experience of bad faith. This article asks, what happens to our reading of *The Words* if we start from a position that assumes that Sartre was not writing metaphorically about books to talk about narrative, but writing about the book as an object and a symbol?

THE BOOK'S MATERIAL HISTORY

On the one hand, it is not the book but the more fundamental act of writing that underpins "the record" as it is commonly understood in life writing studies. But it is the codex—the means of binding sheets together in square or rectangular volumes—that made new ways of collecting, preserving, organizing, and reading written material possible (Pettegree 4–5). As Andrew Pettegree explains:

A codex allows for different sorts of reading. Where a scroll is intended for consecutive reading, a codex can be browsed. As the reader can move from one part of the text to another in a manner of their own devising, forwards or backwards, this encourages reflective thought. A codex provides not merely a narrative but a research resource. (5)³

For Sartre's bookish fantasy, the body of the codex is vital: "I am taken up, opened out, spread on the table, smoothed with the flat of the hand and sometimes made to crack" (Sartre 122). The codex is the material condition of accessibility and of contact between the author and reader that is agentic and embodied. In depicting his early experiences in his grandfather's library,

before he could read, Sartre emphasizes Pettegree's point regarding the mode of reading made possible by the codex:

each day I was present at ceremonies whose meaning escaped me: my grandfather—so clumsy, normally, that my grandmother buttoned his gloves for him—handled these cultural objects with the dexterity of an officiating priest. Hundreds of times I saw him get up absent-mindedly, walk round the table, cross the room in two strides, unhesitatingly pick out a volume without allowing himself time for choice, run through it as he went back to his armchair, with a combined movement of his thumb and right forefinger, and, almost before he sat down, open it with a flick 'at the right page', making it creak like a shoe. (28)

It is the affordances offered by the materiality of the codex that links the manuscript and print eras, and it is the codex that, in many ways, marks the start of the history of this new way of reading (Crain). Beginning in late antiquity, the era of the manuscript codex saw the formation and development of a range of institutions, discourses, and practices that utilized the new medium. In Europe, the monastic tradition of producing copies of sacred texts, the transformation of cathedral schools into universities in the thirteenth century, and the rise of humanist scholarship toward the end of the fourteenth century all made use of and created demand for the codex (Pettegree 5–11). The fate of Aztec codices when the Spanish invaded Mexico in the sixteenth century dramatically illustrates the association of the codex with “the record”: they were destroyed by Aztec kings who sought to rewrite history and by the Spaniards whose aim was to annihilate Aztec culture and religion in the process of colonization (Boone).⁴ In Europe, the collection and organization of books was a primary activity of institutions and wealthy collectors. Individual copies of texts produced by scribes were collected and organized. Thus, in the manuscript codex era, “the record” was the act of transcription that kept specific knowledge and texts recorded and available, and at the same time it was the collection of these texts in institutions where they could be accessed by a small number of literate people from across Europe (Müller).

With the invention of printing in the mid-fifteenth century, however, the small scale and personalized production, distribution, and accessing of books in Europe was destabilized. The codex underwent a change in identity as it moved from the manuscript era—when scribes commissioned and produced individual texts, and when scholars spent much of their time traveling and negotiating access to books that others owned—to a mass-produced object that printers and binders made. It is this mass-produced object that we, today, recognize as “the book.” It took readers, the public, and all those involved in the production of books many decades in the sixteenth century to make sense of this change from manuscript to print, and its outcomes were in no way

guaranteed (see Pettegree). Jan-Dirk Müller argues that during this transition the idea of a tradition, a record, to which individual books contribute emerges as being embodied in the longevity offered “by the numerous institutions that select the constantly growing reservoir of writings” (150). The codex in combination with print heightens the need, in Müller’s account, for publicly accountable repositories of books. The complex negotiations, arguments, innovations, and experiments that characterize the long transition from manuscript to print make for a fascinating story, at least as told by book historians such as Müller, Pettegree, and Johns. In what follows I trace a line through the histories of the printed book to demonstrate how self-representation and autobiography by those involved in the production and distribution of books were important paratexts and epitexts in the ongoing work of establishing and maintaining the book as medium for making knowledge and literature stable and consequential. This admittedly partial view recontextualizes the claims made in contemporary life writing scholarship that publishing life narrative puts marginalized voices “on the record” by demonstrating that “the record” is two things.⁵ Firstly, it is a symbol shaped by a long history of discussion and meaning-making *around* the book, one in which self-representation itself has played an important role. Secondly, the symbol of the book has its foundations in processes of mediation and materiality.

But this very broad material history of the book—from scroll to manuscript codex to print codex—I have just offered must be further complicated by considering the role of readers in the idea of “the record” because, as Hayles argues, “materiality depends on how the work mobilizes its resources as a physical artifact as well as on the user’s interactions with the work and the interpretative strategies she develops. . . . In the broadest sense, materiality emerges from the dynamic interplay between the richness of the physically robust world and human intelligence as it crafts this physicality to create meaning” (33). The material record is taken up and handled by embodied readers. This embodied, material handling is erased when we idealize the Book (Lit-tau) but is also a mundane reality that troubles the transcendental power associated with writing and, for Sartre, publishing.⁶

“I HAVE MADE MYSELF A PROSPECTIVE INTEREST FOR MILLIONS OF GLANCES”: THE FANTASY OF TEXTUAL FIXITY AND THE PROBLEM OF TOO MANY READERS

A key feature of the “physically robust world” of the book is often assumed to be textual fixity. Yet it is often repeated in book history scholarship that the material history of the book challenges the prevailing contemporary view that the book is defined by textual fixity and permanence. As Adrian Johns argues:

We may consider fixity not as an *inherent* quality [of the book], but as a *transitive* one. That is, it may be more useful to reverse our common sense assumption. We may adopt the principle that fixity exists only inasmuch as it is recognized and acted upon by people—and not otherwise. The consequence of this change in perspective is that print culture itself is immediately laid open to analysis. It becomes a *result* of manifold representations, practices and conflicts, rather than just the monolithic *cause* with which we are often presented. (20–21, emphasis in original)

Our understanding of the book and the collection of books as constituting the fixity and stability of “the record” of human knowledge and culture is partly shaped by the material conditions of the book itself, and paper as a stable and durable object (Gitleman, *Paper* 3–4). As many book historians have shown, this idealization of the book and the record *requires* forgetting that not all books have long lives; popular books, school texts, salacious literature, and banned political tracts were read to death, hidden, or recycled (Gitelman, “Print Culture”; Price). A long and complicated history of editing and piracy also challenges this modern fantasy (Johns), as does the Romantic practice of writers themselves releasing multiple versions of a single text almost simultaneously (Piper, *Dreaming*) and the Victorian practice of serialization. Over and over again, the book historians remind us that the long history of activities that predate the practices of publishing we are familiar with are a part of a history of the book that modern bookish subjects often willfully forget or gloss over.

Book history and reader research also consistently argues that an investment in the symbolic ideal of the stable textual record relies not just on forgetting the history of the book, but also forgetting the history of debates about what reading is. The necessarily broad material history I provided above is complicated by the anxieties sparked by the mass production of books and increased literacy in the middle and working classes. With the rise of the mass-produced book and increased literacy, the literate elite faced the “problem . . . that literacy was spreading too widely to remain a reliable marker of rank and gender” (Price 2). The accessibility and proliferation of texts that came about with mass printing made palpable the tensions between, on the one hand, the symbolic ideal of a “record” made up of stable texts thought to be of importance and accessed by specific groups (the institution and the collection), and on the other, the possibility of reaching unprecedented numbers of readers (“the masses”). While the scholarly and intellectual community had long embraced the expanded circulation of ideas made possible by the book’s affordances, some were also wary of the problem raised by an increase in the number of readers whom they judged not to be morally or intellectually capable of encountering these important texts in the right way. The proliferation of “low” genres in the early centuries of the print codex—memoirs of socially

marginalized figures such as prostitutes chief among them—also put pressure on a symbolic investment in the book. These popular texts were often so well read, or recycled after use, that few of them remain.⁷ Thus book history is as much a story of lost texts and speculations about readers as it is the formation and consolidation of the written record of human activities.

This tense interplay between mass reading and mass printing shapes the symbolic function of the book, as we shall see below when we consider Rousseau's investment in the book market as a medium for a particular kind of idealized interaction with his reader. This interplay also defines the bookish genres of autobiography and memoir that literary scholars long dismissed as popular, except when these forms are taken up by writers whose aesthetic merit has already been established in the form of novels, poems, or plays, including Rousseau, Wordsworth, Sartre, and Goethe (Rak, "Are Memoirs Autobiography?"). Early criticism on autobiography worked tirelessly to address this issue. But how a text goes on "the record" is not as clear a process as these critics implied. When a given piece of writing is printed in book form, it has the *potential* to be read by tens or hundreds of thousands of people, *and/or* preserved in institutions and made accessible to particular kinds of subjects who are interested in the store of human knowledge. An investment in writing as a means of putting experience and knowledge "on the record," by definition, involves an investment in the codex and paper's potential to exceed the individual writer's life span. Thus the popular book is doomed to invisibility in this long view of human activity, its collection being sporadic due to the low status of its content. This raises the question: can we disarticulate the material affordances of the book from its symbolic power?

"I AM A LARGE, MANAGEABLE, AND TERRIBLE FETISH": THE BINDING OF THE MATERIAL AND THE SYMBOLIC

Leading historian of the book, Leah Price, wrestles with this slippery movement between material and symbol early in *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain*:

You'll have noticed my contortions in attempting to distinguish "text"—a string of words—from "book" or "book-object": a physical thing. In an everyday language incapable of even deciding what preposition should link the two—the text "of" a book, the text "in" a book?—one term appears sometimes as contained within the other, sometimes as antithetical to it. If "book" really connoted materiality, there would be no need to affix the pleonastic "object"; if "text" really provided an adequate term for a linguistic structure, I would refer to what you're now reading as "this text." Only the ambiguity of sentence openings prevented me from generalizing the distinction between the Bible (a text) and the bible (an object) to Books and books. (4)

The contortions of Price's text—its dashes and brackets, question marks, and parentheses—perform on the page the difficulty of untying the book from its contents, the rich symbolic form of the book from its material particulars. Price wriggles out of these knots, or at least loosens them so she can move more freely, by observing that reading (at its best) has long been viewed as an act of transcending material conditions: that a “good” text will transport the reader away from the binding and pages into the life of the mind and imagination (5–7, 31–33). Price takes a different tack in her investigation, focusing instead on what she calls “nonreading,” those instances where “The book's material properties trump its textual content” and its “value lies in attributes orthogonal to its legibility” (8). Price's project decentralizes reading in favor of handling.⁸

But what if we stay with the knots that make it difficult to distinguish books from Books (objects and texts)? Such an approach might maintain Price's well-articulated suspicion of the slippage between matter and content, but refrain from a belief in the possibility of their disarticulation. We might instead consider how books have functioned in the late twentieth century as “happy objects” (Ahmed) in our bookish culture, particularly for humanists. Such an approach would be attentive to how subjects in a bookish culture are oriented toward books *because* they have come to represent certain things that Sartre describes so vividly—connection to “the record” of human experience, a particular relationship with readers and with time, associations with the practice of reading, the circulation of knowledge, spiritual and personal development, and pleasure (see Piper, *Book Was There*; Crain). To be oriented toward something is to be predisposed to it: “certain objects are attributed as the cause of happiness, which means they already circulate as social goods before we ‘happen’ upon them” (Ahmed 28). From this perspective, disentangling the slippage between books and Books may become a lesser priority than considering our orientation toward the book as a privileged and privileging form. What is its history? How did we get here? How has this orientation toward the book shaped the way we make knowledge, what forms it can take, and how knowledge can be made consequential? These are big questions.⁹ Looking over the history of the book and following the thread of autobiographical discourse allows us to scale such questions to a more manageable size by asking how it is that the book has come figuratively and materially to shape the ways we think about the act of self-representation: what it is, what it does, and how and why it might matter. Thinking with Ahmed and with theorists of materialism, we might also approach the matter of fact of our orientation toward the book and its “naturalization” as a matter of concern not just because of the rise of the digital era, but precisely *because* the book

reached a level of ideological invisibility in the twentieth century.¹⁰ The publishing of books evolved to become a highly organized, privileged, and profit-driven system of knowledge distribution and validation that by the turn of the twentieth century was largely a given. However we might feel about books (as bookish subjects, or not), the book is the result of processes undertaken over many centuries of disciplining matter to make it trustworthy and profitable (Johns). This history of governing the book to shore up its profitability began almost as soon as printing became possible, and often centered around questions of propriety.

This capitalist investment in the book has always sat uneasily alongside the cultural and epistemological investment in the symbolism of the book. As many book historians have shown, writers were often at odds with the craftsmen printers and the capitalist booksellers in discussions regarding the book's meaning and purpose (Woodmansee, Johns, Turnovsky). Literary critics, too, have long struggled with the problem of the common materiality of Literature and "other" forms of writing (such as memoir, genre fiction, long-form journalism, and comics, not to mention telephone books, instruction manuals, and pornography). We might consider the extensive work of building canons, creating and defending aesthetic criteria, and delimiting genres of writing as defensive mechanisms against the problem posed by this shared materiality, the fact that a book could "be" so many things other than Literature.

Two examples from different moments in the history of the book in Europe provide us the opportunity to consider the book in life writing studies by exploring the history of our orientation toward the book. I read these histories alongside Sartre's autobiography, a prime example of the mid-twentieth-century bookish subject. The orientation toward the book documented in the two historical moments I explore here is surprisingly circular: the book needed life narrative and self-representation to help secure its place in culture and the making of knowledge during its early period, just as autobiographical writing needed the book to enter culture as a form of knowledge. This circularity reveals why the very practice of life writing might be assumed to be bookish and explains why recent writing about the book often turns to autobiography.¹¹ It also demonstrates how materiality and mediation, life, and the process of reflecting on living are mutually constituted.¹²

My first example examines the history of the book prior to the author's rise in prominence in the book market, when books in England were seen to be the product of Stationers rather than the people who wrote them.¹³ The second example comes from the Romantic period in Europe, when authors were gaining importance both symbolically and in their claims to the books that bore their names. In this period, autobiographical writing and the print

genre of the collected edition influenced a turn away from the craftsmen and businessmen of the book trade as guarantors of a book's veracity and value toward the "amplification of the authorial persona" (Piper, *Dreaming* 30) and the view that the printed book "was capable of functioning as a timeless and unchanging object" that contained and preserved literary history (20). Taken together, these two moments from book history can initiate a critical understanding of Sartre's recognition of the book as a "large, manageable and terrible fetish."

FORGING TRUST: THE BOOK'S DOMESTIC TIES BEFORE THE RISE OF THE AUTHOR

In his important work of book history, Johns historicizes the current association of print with textual fixity and stability along with the book's status as a trustworthy medium for the recording and dissemination of knowledge. He examines how the epistemological practice of natural philosophy intersected with the production and circulation of print to try to forge a reputation for print as a trustworthy medium for the distribution of new knowledge. Johns's emphasis is on the fragile association between publishing and reputation, and the constant work required by a range of actors within English publishing to sustain and strengthen the association. Central to his account of this process is the examination of practices that resulted in "the merging of trust in people with trust in things" (37). Yet this merging in the early modern period was never complete: any given edition of a book lived under threat of the accusation of piracy, an accusation that could discredit the knowledge presented and impact the reputation of the people involved in its production. "Like print itself," Johns argues, "piracy therefore had *epistemic* as well as *economic* implications: it affected the structure and content of knowledge" by deauthorizing a writer's work and their claims (33, emphasis in original).

To combat the charge of unauthorized productions of texts and the resulting deauthorization of both print and new claims to knowledge, the key players in English publishing developed a range of strategies and practices to shore up the reputation of printing and the selling of books. These included the institutional formations in the form of the Stationers' Company, a powerful trade body that "created a cultural régime capable of disciplining the domains of print" (Johns 188) through practices such as retaining records of which printers owned the licenses to print specific texts and policing the propriety of the print and book shops.¹⁴ A complex code of civility was central to the work the Stationers' Company undertook, and this code included forging a reputation of reliability and respectability for print by encouraging an association among the civility and propriety of its producers, the printers,

and booksellers (187–90). Yet this self-governance could be interfered with by political figures and the monarchy through the granting of privileges and patents, insofar as chosen individuals could be elevated or bypass the workings of the company (249–62). The attempts to formalize and govern the book were constantly under threat from the exercise of executive power.

A finding in Johns's work that has significance for autobiography studies is that a "central tactic" in assessing a book's reliability "was that of attributing trust to a book on the basis of an evaluation of a person" (36). In analyzing this practice, Johns presents some history of the primary concern of autobiographical scholarship in the twentieth century: "how readers decided *what* to believe" (Johns 31, emphasis in original). In doing so he provides a *material* history of what, in life writing studies, has often been understood as a textual process, one where a reader encounters the autobiographical subject in a dematerialized textual space. An early and famous structural formulation of this relation, Lejeune's "autobiographical pact" considered the textual features that mark out autobiography as a genre of nonfiction and self-life-writing. While often misinterpreted as a contract, Lejeune's formulation highlights the importance of paratextual materials for guiding readers' approach to a book and sealing the referential relationship between the author, narrator, and protagonist.¹⁵ In the cultural history outlined by Johns, trust is forged through an association between a book and its place of production shaped by discourses of domesticity and family. This cultivation of trust provides an interesting standpoint from which to revisit the extent to which early theories of autobiography assumed the protocols of publishing as the material ground for the "pact" between reader and author. In the early modern period, it is the dynamic space of the home and business of the Stationers that secures the book's trustworthiness.

In effect, argument over the circumstances in which a book was made and displayed came to constitute claims of its potential for seditious, blasphemous, or obscene meaning—or on the other hand, for its positive worth. Whether a book contained safe, reliable knowledge could be questioned by asking whether it had been produced in conditions of propriety, or affirmed by asserting that it had. (Johns 127–28)

In the seventeenth century, the word "private" evoked "illicit, secret, or seditious" (128) and printing that occurred in non-domestic spaces was referred to as coming from "holes" (128). For those seeking to secure the reputation of the Book and govern the production and circulation of books, "Truth was made at home; lies emerged from holes" (129).

Thus judgments about a particular Stationer's character—how he ran his family home and his printing house—were central to whether the books and

other printed matter he produced could be trusted.¹⁶ This practice of forming a judgment regarding someone's professional conduct using an assessment of their personal life is familiar to us in the contemporary moment. We, too, live in an era when a powerful capitalist like Mark Zuckerberg insists that—to grow their markets—"privacy must be overcome" (Zimmer), and Google must be told by the European Union that individuals have a right to be forgotten. Assessments of personal conduct routinely undermine claims to authority by politicians, authors, and other public figures. Like contemporary readers of online texts, when early modern readers were making assessments of individual printed texts, "Their worries about literary credit were often resolved, as a matter of everyday practice, into assessments of the people involved in the making, distribution and reception of books" (Johns 31–32). This adjudication was not a matter of making assessments of authors, but of the printers, booksellers, and other tradesmen involved in the *production* of books.

This complex history of the intersection between material processes, locations, and discourses that informs both the governing of the book and individual reader's evaluation of the veracity of texts provides life writing studies with a thicker definition of what we are referring to when we say that life writing puts voices "on the record." Trust in autobiographical texts is commonly understood as being established by the success with which an author *produces* a trustworthy text through linguistic and rhetorical strategies (Bruss 1–23). Johns's history of the book in early modern England shows us that rhetorical strategies such as appeals to the moral authority of the patriarchal family and the moral control exerted in the household were embedded in material practices—such as the layout of bookshops, the visibility of print materials in the streets, and the co-location of domestic and commercial space—to establish the cultural dominance of the book. As Julie Rak, Gillian Whitlock, and Kate Douglas have shown, this complex intersection of discourses of value and propriety and the material practices of publishing continue to influence the reception of life writing when it is published in book form. Book covers and the layout of bookstores are fundamental to the social and political work undertaken by published life writing in the cases of memoirs of childhood (Douglas), memoirs from and about the Middle East (Whitlock), and in the popularity of memoir in the American book market in 2003 (Rak, *Boom!*).¹⁷

Once the reliability of the printed book had been largely secured in the early modern period, the attention of those involved in the production of books turned to its profitability and to how the book could instantiate new kinds of social, intellectual, and spiritual interactions between writers and readers. Perhaps unsurprisingly, one author who was particularly interested in this question was autobiographer, novelist, and philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

SOMEWHERE, OUT THERE: ROUSSEAU'S IMAGINING OF THE BOOK MARKET

While the seventeenth-century book was understood in terms of its locatedness within existing and emerging sites of the professional and the personal, by the late eighteenth century the book was well entrenched in cultures of knowledge and as a transnational commodity. Once the function and reliability of the book had been largely secured, the question of authorship and the more vexed question of how the profits of the book trade should be shared became an issue. What also emerged in this period was a new investment in what the Book was capable of. As Piper argues, this investment involved writers' increasing awareness of and engagement with the "bibliocosmos" both in the content of their writing and in how they understood what it meant to write for publication. In his study of Rousseau's writing about publishing (which appeared mostly in the life writing form of letters), Turnovsky argues that at this moment in the history of the book in Europe,

the literary market represented an imagined space, which not only gave shape to but was also given shape by the evolving expectations of writers, as these were affected not so much by commercial publishing *per se*, but by the slow decline of a traditional patronage system that nonetheless continued to dominate their pre-occupations, attitudes, and behavior. (388)

As I discuss further below, Sartre inherited this idealized understanding of the commercial space into which writing, via the medium of the printed codex, was released. This idealized space forms part of "the record" to which contemporary scholars refer when they theorize the importance of life writing. Turnovsky argues that the book market itself became a symbol that writers such as Rousseau thought of in particular ways and attached ideas to. These imaginings *shaped* how the book market developed, particularly in regard to the question of how authors began claiming a share in the profits that the circulation of books produced as commodities to, in Rousseau's case, establish themselves as financially independent from the social elite. In Turnovsky's account, Rousseau's imagining of the book market stems partly from his dissatisfaction with the social requirements of an *homme de lettres* who relies on good social standing with the social elite to secure pensions on which to live. Turnovsky tells the story of Rousseau's orientation toward the Book as an investment in its potential to travel into the hands of his idealized reader.¹⁸ Rousseau was less interested in—and ambivalent about—the fact that the mechanism of travel is the market, and thus the process of travel involves the logic of profit and loss. The book and its mode of circulation became an object associated with the authentic expression he was formulating *as a* good, and which would influence the Romantic period. When Rousseau left Paris in the

mid-1750s, he did so partly out of disgust with the social demands on successful *hommes de lettres* that they be witty and erudite entertainers of the social elite. An isolated life in the country allowed Rousseau to concentrate on his writing and to develop his commitment to “a new kind of cultural ethic based on sincerity and passion, rather than elegance and wit” (Turnovsky 394). For Turnovsky, Rousseau wanted to be free of the requirement of being socially acceptable *to* and socially accepted *by* the elite, which meant shifting the meaning of a writer’s identity from its association with the embodied social sphere of the Paris salon to the object of the circulating book. For Rousseau this meant developing a view of the Book as a site of privileged communicative potential for an author’s writing (work), a view of the book as a prosthetic:

The work became the privileged site in which to elaborate, represent, and appreciate an authorial persona, precisely because the work offered a line of communication with a putative interlocutor that potentially escaped regulation by the norms governing and instrumentalizing relations in salons and at court. In turn, by transforming works into circulating books that could in practice reach a reader, the commercial publishing sector laid out the real-life conditions in which such a communication might take place. Perceived as such by the writer, it was engaged as much more than either an income-generating system in the absence of more respectable sources of revenue or a network that efficiently diffused ideas and concepts. For the book trade was now also conceptualized as a cultural field into which the writer entered with the specific hope and expectation of constructing a public image as a preeminent cultural figure, considered now as an embodiment of virtue, autonomy, and disinterest. (Turnovsky 396)

Rousseau’s investments in the book remain influential in literary criticism and in how the book is understood. His preference to find ways to avoid being a charming guest in the salons of Paris, and his impatience at the prospect of the imagined payoff of the intimate contact with his reader that the release of his books on the market promised, make Rousseau an early and influential example of a bookish authorial subject whose moral and affective investments form part of the history of the book as a happy object in the contemporary moment. Sartre inherited this idealization of the book as a happy object. In *The Words* he continues his rhapsodic account of becoming-book, quoted at the beginning of this article, by imagining his material dispersion:

My consciousness is in fragments: all the better. Other consciousnesses have taken charge of me. They read *me* and I leap into their eyes; they talk about *me* and I am on everyone’s lips, a universal and singular language; I have made myself a prospective interest for millions of glances. For anyone who knows how to like me, I am his most intimate disquiet: but if he wants to touch me, I draw aside and vanish: I exist nowhere but I *am*, at last! I am everywhere: a parasite on humanity, by my good deeds I prey on it and force it endlessly to revive my absence. (Sartre 122, emphasis in original)

Rousseau's and Sartre's belief in the everywhere-ness of the book has been described by book historian Andrew Piper as the "bibliocosmos." He traces the history of this idea to the Romantic period in his study *Dreaming in Books: The Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age*. Piper focuses on nineteenth-century Europe as a key moment in "our" development as "bibliographic subjects." He argues that while the book is often thought of as a discrete unit whose

boundedness and typographical regularity became the perfect embodiments of the temporal continuity and spatial autonomy on which both the modern subject (as *Individuum*) and the political form of the nation were to be founded. . . . Romantic books and romantic literature . . . foregrounded the relational structure of books, that there was a bibliographic elsewhere, before, and after which with books and their texts were increasingly engaged. (14)

The circulation of books in the transnational book trade, the translation of literary works, the production of miscellanies, multiple editions, and collected works, were all hallmarks of the book trade that became a preoccupation in Romantic print culture and literature. A conscious engagement by writers and publishers with the "bibliographic horizon" (14) or Romantic "bibliocosmos" (15) was a vital part of "the naturalization of the book in the nineteenth century" (13) that Piper argues we have inherited. Piper's formulation reminds us we have become oriented toward the book not just because the codex is easy for the individual reader to organize and travel with, or because it makes possible new ways to store and access information, in turn fostering new ways of reading, but also because the book itself *travels*: its radical potential for movement is a matter of concern (to use Latour's term) to the Romantics and a matter of fact in the twentieth century, when Sartre is writing.

"THREE HUNDRED ILLUSTRATIONS, INCLUDING A PORTRAIT OF THE AUTHOR": THE WORK, THE LIFE, AND THE BOOK IN THE ROMANTIC PERIOD

Rousseau's pre-Romantic idealization of the book market as offering a zone of contact between the authorial persona and readers that was less constrained by the norms of elite society and more open to possibility continued to develop in the nineteenth century. One example of how this idealization occurred powerfully demonstrates the history of the association between an individual's life, their work, and the materiality of the book: the bookish genre of the collected edition. Piper argues that while the collected edition was a recognized publishing genre prior to the Romantic period, it "came to play an increasingly prominent role in the organization of literature as a category in the nineteenth century" (55). The collected edition in the Romantic

period deployed the spatial unity offered by the book to create a “temporal continuity” by reproducing and organizing an author’s existing works (54). Thus, while it was an important material tool for the creation of a literary canon, it was also a technique for organizing and responding to the enormous proliferation of genres and modes of publishing that defined the era.¹⁹ The collected edition “served an essential function in the monumentalization of literature in the nineteenth century” (54) through the production of large identical books that acted as single containers for the diverse genres of writing that comprise an author’s body of work. Despite the emphasis placed on the instability and inconsistency of hand-printed text in recent accounts of book history, Piper argues, “what mattered to the collected edition’s rise in cultural prominence during the early nineteenth century was precisely the *imaginative* possibility that something stayed the same” (56, emphasis in original). Moreover, this imaginative investment in the Book’s ability to stabilize an author’s work “was not seen as either illicit or creatively impoverished but juridically and aesthetically legitimate” (56).

Piper’s analysis of how the collected edition contributed to the evidentiary and aesthetic legitimacy of the book is a vital part of the shared history of life writing and the book because it furthers our understanding of the installation of the book as a happy object in the study of life writing, and the deep and complex relationship between “the life” and the book. The Romantic collected edition was a key point in the merging of ideas regarding the material aspects of the book with cultural (re)investments in the power of the Book. The Romantics’ use of the collected edition provides a compelling example of how the materiality of the book is given meaning and value through its association with autobiographical discourse. While the early modern book was anchored to social and cultural norms through its association with the lives of Stationers and their adherence to existing discourses and practices of propriety, craft, and the family, by the turn of the nineteenth century the discourse of individuality that was so important to Rousseau was reshaping cultural investments in the book.²⁰ The material properties of the book—binding, organization, its ability to act as a container—allowed the bookish genre of the collected edition to act as an argument “for a fundamental homogeneity of its content through the overwhelming promotion of the author as the single organizing figure behind the collection” (Piper, *Dreaming* 54).²¹ Providing a material container for a given author’s entire written output and thus making a material body for their body of work, the print genre of the collected edition deployed two forms of life writing as framing techniques that consolidated the association between the life, the work, and the book: the author portrait and the biographical sketch.²² In this sense, “In reading the collected edition, one experienced a persistent encounter with a person” (59).

The inclusion of a portrait of the author in a collected edition became a standard practice at this time and is an important bibliographic legacy of Romanticism. Evidencing the increased importance of the figure of the author as a representative of cultural tradition, the author portrait was used for cultural and political ends and forged the “autobiographization of literature” (59), which would be destabilized by literary critics of the mid-twentieth century. The visual representation of the author’s face as a technique for “orienting the reader’s relationship to the increasingly dispersed and mediated self of bibliographic culture” (59) was accompanied by a second technique for linking the life and the work to the book, the biographical sketch. “The author’s self-portrait became the discursive frame to complement the visual frame of the face that shaped the reception of the author’s works” (60). While a biographical sketch would open the edition, a large variety of life writing genres also began to be included in the collected editions to strengthen the link between the private life of the author and their texts, and to satisfy the market demand for the edition to include some piece of previously unseen writing by the author. In response to this trend, the presentation of the collected editions of Rousseau were reorganized, with the placement of the *Confessions* at the front of the collection instead of the *Discourses* (60). Where published autobiographical writings were not available, letters, diaries, and notes were included as well as a biographical sketch.

At the same time as this collection and organization of material was becoming common, Piper notes, the materiality of collected editions reached a surprising level of standardization. The material characteristics of the genre included almost identical title pages as well as the more mundane standardization that was achieved by having works previously printed in a range of publications set in the same typeface on the same paper stock and bound together. For Sartre, the standardized materiality of the mass-produced book is constitutive of the book’s potential as a device for time travel. It is the possibility of the book’s body outliving the author’s body that invites the fantasy of the book as a prosthesis for the life and the work. While Sartre condemns his investment in Literature and belief in his destiny as a writer, he maintains, at the time of writing *The Words*, an inability to believe in his own mortality. The “conjuring-trick” of imagining his transformation into a book “succeeded”:

I buried death in the shroud of glory. I thought only of the glory, never of death, without reflecting that the two were one. Now, as I write these lines, I know that I have had my time to within a few years. Now, I can picture to myself clearly, but not too cheerfully, the approach of age and my future decline, the decline and death of those I love; but my own death, never. I sometimes hint to those around me—some of whom are fifteen, twenty, even thirty years younger than I am—how sorry I shall be to outlive them: they make fun of me and I laugh with them, but nothing will happen: when I was nine, an operation removed my capacity for feeling that sense of the pathetic thought proper to our condition. (122–23)

This moment of reflection presented from the moment of writing appears directly after the extended celebration of the boy's transformation into a book that opened this article and provides further evidence of the power of the Book as a symbolic and material substrate for life writing. Do we condemn Sartre as unable to detach from this last shred of bad faith? What might Sartre's belief in the book tell us about the book as a happy object in autobiography practice and criticism?

BECOMING BOOK: THE PERFORMATIVE POWER OF MATERIALITY

In Eakin's interpretation, Sartre's evocative description of becoming a book is representative of "the elusiveness of self-knowledge experienced by any practicing autobiographer" (151). Eakin's analysis of Sartre's text is emblematic of the preoccupations of autobiography criticism: the autobiographer's struggle to understand the gap between narrative and experience, self and language, and the literary techniques they use to represent this struggle. Eakin interprets the descriptions of the effects of publishing, the physicality of the book, the role of the author, and the book as a medium of time travel presented in *The Words* as *metaphors* for writing and constructing narrative. Such an approach reads Sartre's powerful evocation of his transfiguration from boy to book as metaphor and downplays the role of the bibliocosmos in enabling and organizing Sartre's autobiographical project. The bodily transformation Sartre describes is powerful not only because it paints the surreal image of the bookish-boy, but also because Sartre's fantasy is enacted by every reader who encounters an edition of *The Words*. Sartre invests the author function not just with the power of a classificatory function in discourse—as Foucault articulates—but also with a *material* existence that has enormous potential. This material existence is the result of the unique performative power of the book's materiality and is the foundation of "the record" so commonly evoked in life writing criticism. In imagining and staging the scenario of becoming bookish, Sartre becomes not an identity constituted by narrative but rather "twenty-five volumes, eighteen thousand pages of text and three hundred illustrations, including a portrait" of the author's previous physical incarnation as a man. In becoming book, Sartre becomes a "large, manageable, and terrible fetish" for the bookish subjects who are his readers, and in the bibliocosmos he participates in by being placed "on a shelf in the Bibliothèque Nationale." He also achieves the status of radical mediated potentiality that he feels eludes him as a boy whose life appears to have no purpose beyond receiving praise from his mother and grandparents.²³

Sartre's description of the book as dynamic and flexible, yet inert, articulates an understanding of and belief in the enormous potential the book offers in the mid-twentieth century. As literary criticism's forgetfulness regarding the

book advanced, Sartre was preparing for publication a testament to how the material properties and potential of the book and its attendant institutions could shape self-perception and the autobiographical project.²⁴ The passage describing Sartre's fantasy of transforming into a book articulates a number of the fundamental and highly valued characteristics of the book as a happy object of the mid-twentieth century. This fantasy involves a passionate investment in the physical interaction between the body of the reader and the book. Once he becomes a book, Sartre begins to work on the bodies of his readers. He can "leap into the eyes" and then onto "the lips" of those who read him, he courts "millions of glances" through the processes of mass production and distribution in the book market and collection in libraries. The passage plays on the slippage between the physical properties of the book and the mental activity of reading that was so important to Rousseau. While grasped and flattened, Sartre-as-book is also elusive: "I exist nowhere but I *am*." To become a book is to achieve an everywhere-ness by gaining circulation and permanence, to be integrated into the consciousness of readers, while remaining fugitive through distribution across multiple volumes. In *The Words* Sartre's life and consciousness have meaning because they are mediated, and it is the specific materiality of the printed book—rather than just linguistic representation, as the title suggests—that evokes the autobiographical act. It is a mediated performance that exploits the material properties of the book that gives Sartre life. Our understanding of the power of the book to give life and of the importance of "the record" becomes sharper when the intertwined histories of the book and life writing are acknowledged.

NOTES

1. See James Olney's characterization of his interest in autobiography as being "focused in one direction on the relation traceable between lived experience and its *written record* and in the other direction on what that written experience offers to us as readers and as human beings" (x–xi, emphasis added), Leigh Gilmore's argument that "The recurring mark in the women's autobiographies I study is that a *written record*, a testimonial, or a confessional document can represent a person, can stand in her absence for her truth, can re-member her life. Indeed, even in the narrowest and most ambivalent sense, writing an autobiography can be a political act because it asserts a right to speak rather than to be spoken for (40, emphasis added), and G. Thomas Couser's discussion of the role of memoir in democracy where he comments that memoir "often puts *on the record* lives that would otherwise be transient, evanescent" (181, emphasis added).
2. See Hayles (31–32), Littau (10–12), and Price (31–33).
3. This characterization of the reading made possible by the codex can be compared with William A. Johnson's discussion of the reading practices associated with bookrolls.
4. Yet because there was also an interest in sending manuscript codices produced by Aztec and Mixtec peoples back to Europe to be collected and studied, the practice of making codices continued into the period of colonization.

5. It is not possible here to do justice to the complex arguments and the variety of opinions on how best to conceptualize the changes inaugurated by the shifts from bookroll to codex, from manuscript to print, from small-scale to mass production, and the concomitant rise of literacy and changing cultural and political investments in the codex and in reading. There is clearly a need for more scholarship in the field of autobiography studies that considers how the debates regarding these issues in book and media history might shape our work on autobiography. Indeed, Gittleman argues against sweeping analysis of media history, arguing that it is “Better, indeed, to admit that no medium has a single, particular logic, while every genre does and is” (*Paper* 9). My approach in this article is to think about what this more precise approach might look like in the case of autobiography studies by reading the mid-twentieth century against two earlier uses of autobiography as a genre.
6. The line of inquiry I am tracing here, between the symbolic power of the book and its material affordances, builds on Derrida’s analysis of “good” and “bad” writing as structures of logocentrism and his deconstruction of the division between signifier and signified. “The idea of the book,” for Derrida, sits on the side of “good” writing, that presupposes a “totally constituted signified”—a divine or Natural presence—that authorizes it (Derrida 17–18). He writes: “The idea of the book is the idea of a totality, finite or infinite, of the signifier; this totality of the signifier cannot be a totality, unless a totality constituted by the signified preexists it, supervises its inscriptions and its signs, and is independent of it in its ideality. The idea of the book, which always refers to a natural totality, is profoundly alien to the sense of writing. It is the encyclopedic protection of theology and of logocentrism against the disruption of writing, against its aphoristic energy, and . . . against difference in general” (Derrida 18).
7. See Price’s work for a history of the recycling of books, Spedding’s attempts to evidence readership of the popular writer Eliza Haywood (1693–1756), and Gitelman’s discussion of non-codex printing in “Print Culture.”
8. Price’s important reframing makes possible an examination of all the ways books function as a material resource rather than media. By emphasizing how books were used in the preparation and storage of food and as toilet paper, Price charts the fate of all the butterflies that did not land on the shelves of the national library. Sartre is also interested in handling of the idealized and mundane kind, noting the unread books in the library of his grandfather, who taught translation and thus had working copies and untouched editions of the same book (42–43).
9. Piper tackles this last question in *Dreaming in Books*.
10. As Lisa Gittleman and other scholars have noted, the interest in defining how the book (and print) rose to prominence has taken a sense of urgency from the idea that the age of print is waning (*Paper* 9). See Hayles and Pressman (vii) for an example of this reasoning.
11. See for example Hayles, who takes up a third-person autobiographical persona, Kaye, “almost against my will” (9). See also Piper (*Book*), as well as the plethora of memoirs and elegies for the book aimed at a general audience.
12. See Zylinska and Kember’s chapter “Mediation and the Vitality of Media” for a theory of this mutual constitution based on Heidegger’s theory of technology (37–102).
13. “Stationer” (capital S) refers to “someone who was a member of the Stationers’ Company—which included not only paper-stationers, but also printers, booksellers, and binders” (Johns xix).

14. The history of licensing as a practice of law is incredibly complex, involving negotiations between the Stationers' Company and its court, and between Parliament and the monarchy. Its history spans the tumultuous period of the Reformation. See Johns (230–48) and particularly Table 3.2 “Measures Regulating the Press, 1586–1710” (232–33).
15. See Johnson for a discussion of the specific “paralinguistic features” that provide the conventions that guide the reader of the codex.
16. Stationers often defended themselves by producing “a defense of trade”—a defense of their own character—in juridical settings, in sermons, published pamphlets outlining the moral character of the printer, and in memoirs such as *The Life and Errors of John Dunton late Citizen of London; written by Himself in Solitude* (1705). See Johns (141–46).
17. See for example how both Douglas and Whitlock discuss the importance of book covers in the circulation of autobiography and memoir and their relationship to the cultural work life writing is positioned to undertake (Douglas 43–66; Whitlock 45–68). Rak has a chapter dedicated to the placement of memoir in bookstores (*Boom!* 73–119).
18. This investment can be juxtaposed with the use of circulating print by the lesser-known English author and publisher Francis Kirkman who, in 1673, published an autobiography in which he falsely presents himself as a gentlemen and in so doing comments upon the importance of one's circulation and readership in establishing the legibility of the subject (see Greene).
19. See, for example, Piper's discussion of Goethe's publication of multiple versions of *Wilhelm Meister's Travels* and his dispersion of the novel across a publishing network that included miscellanies, novellas, and advertisements in newspapers that Goethe took out himself (*Dreaming* 22–51).
20. See Hayles's discussion of how the development of copyright and the focus on *sentiment* rather than materiality contributed to the overlooking of the book in literary criticism (31–32). See also Woodmansee.
21. The Romantic collected edition was also an important moment in terms of the role publishers played in the formation of the literary canon (as they invested increasingly large amounts of capital, time, and resources into the production of collected editions) and their simultaneous retreat from the literary sphere as actors (Piper, *Dreaming* 56–57).
22. The rise of collected works in this period was, Piper argues, closely associated with “the political and economic recuperations that were taking place” in Europe “after the close of the Napoleonic wars” (*Dreaming* 58). In what we now know as Germany, the Romantic period coincided with a tumultuous period of attempts to unify German-speaking states into a single nation. The establishment of a German literary tradition was an important component of this political project. Yet Piper argues:

If the collected edition highlighted nascent political aspirations, it also participated in the early-nineteenth-century ideal of fashioning an image of heroic individuality on which such national states were to be based. As much as any genre or discourse in the early nineteenth century, the format of the collected edition contributed to and grew out of the idea of literature as an index of personality. (59)

23. *The Words*, Lejeune argues, is organized by Sartre's "phenomenology of temporality" that questions the idea of "the existence of the past in itself, and the identity of the relationship of succession and of the relationship of causality" (Lejeune 100). For Lejeune, this view of temporality is united with Sartre's notion of "project," a view on existence that stipulates,

Man is not a causal system, but a freedom. Placed in a certain situation, he does not submit to it; he invents a way out of it, within the field of the possible. This invention of the future is not situated *in* the framework of time; it is this invention of the future that constitutes time. (103, emphasis in original)

The quest for meaning from a position of freedom is the Sartrean project. Sartre depicts the foundation of his bad faith, telling the story of his encounters with freedom, the anguish it provoked, and his flight from that freedom through a belief in his destiny as a writer. This originating freedom—"freedom as an absolute origin"—is the foundation of Sartre's philosophy of existentialism (Lejeune 82). "Freedom is outside the story" and is the "*hole* that engenders any story, that makes the existence of a story necessary . . . that will moreover *recur* indefinitely throughout the story, and will be, in that way, its true motor" (82, emphasis in original). Lejeune's essay explores and celebrates the deftness of Sartre's writing of this experience through a close analysis of his use of a "phenomenological" writing style and "rigorous dialectical order" (98–99). Yet he also notes that without the second volume of Sartre's autobiography, "clarifying the last part of the story" (Sartre's movement out of bad faith) the "corrosive power intended by Sartre" in writing *The Words* is not achieved (99). Sartre's continued belief in the power of the book, despite his rejection of the identity of the writer anointed by destiny, makes *The Words* a vital testament to the performative power of the book, and the fundamental importance of mediation and materiality in any act of self-representation.

24. See Littau and Hayles for arguments regarding the lack of attention to the materiality of the book in twentieth-century literary criticism.

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