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Track Changes

A Literary History of Word Processing

Matthew G. Kirschenbaum

“Track Changes is *delightful, magisterial, and instantly essential*. Kirschenbaum unimpeachably delivers on his promise to give an account of word processing in all its wonderful messiness and complication. In his lively attention to storytelling, Kirschenbaum offers an account that brims over with interest and surprise.”

—Matthew Battles, author of *The Library: An Unquiet History* and *Palimpsest: A History of the Written Word*

The story of writing in the digital age is every bit as messy as the ink-stained rags that littered the floor of Gutenberg’s print shop or the hot molten lead of the Linotype machine. During the period of the pivotal growth and widespread adoption of word processing as a writing technology, some authors embraced it as a marvel while others decried it as the death of literature. The product of years of archival research and numerous interviews conducted by the author, *Track Changes* is the first literary history of word processing.

Matthew Kirschenbaum examines how the interests and ideals of creative authorship came to coexist with the computer revolution. Who were the first adopters? What kind of anxieties did they share? Was word processing perceived as just a better typewriter or something more? How did it change our understanding of writing?

Track Changes balances the stories of individual writers with a consideration of how the seemingly ineffable act of writing is always grounded in particular instruments and media, from quills to keyboards. Along the way, we discover the candidates for the first novel written on a word processor, explore the surprisingly varied reasons why writers of both popular and serious literature adopted the technology, trace the spread of new metaphors and ideas from word processing in fiction and poetry, and consider the fate of literary scholarship and memory in an era when the final remnants of authorship may consist of folders on a hard drive or documents in the cloud.

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