Bitstreams

### The Future of Digital Literary Heritage

Matthew G. Kirschenbaum

"Matthew Kirschenbaum has almost single-handedly taught us how to read digital objects as material texts. Now, in this field-defining achievement, he shows us the future of bibliography. Like the works of D. F. McKenzie before it, *Bitstreams* will be required reading for generations to come."—Whitney Trettien, University of Pennsylvania

What are the future prospects for literary knowledge now that literary texts—and the material remains of authorship, publishing, and reading—are reduced to bitstreams, strings of digital ones and zeros? What are the opportunities and obligations for book history, textual criticism, and bibliography when literary texts are distributed across digital platforms, devices, formats, and networks? Indeed, what is textual scholarship when the "text" of our everyday speech is a verb as often as it is a noun?

These are the questions that motivate Matthew G. Kirschenbaum in *Bitstreams*, a distillation of twenty years of thinking about the intersection of digital media, textual studies, and literary archives. With an intimate narrative style that belies the cold technics of computing, Kirschenbaum takes the reader into the library where all access to Toni Morrison's "papers" is mediated by digital technology; to the bitmapped fonts of Kamau Brathwaite's Macintosh; to the process of recovering and restoring fourteen lost "HyperPoems" by the noted poet William Dickey; and finally, into the offices of Melcher Media, a small boutique design studio reimagining the future of the codex.

A persistent theme is that bits—the ubiquitous ones and zeros of computing—are never self-identical, but always inflected by the material realities of particular systems, platforms, and protocols. These materialities are not liabilities: they are the very bulwark on which we stake the enterprise for preserving the future of literary heritage.

Matthew G. Kirschenbaum is author of *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination* and *Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing*. He is Professor of English and Digital Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park.
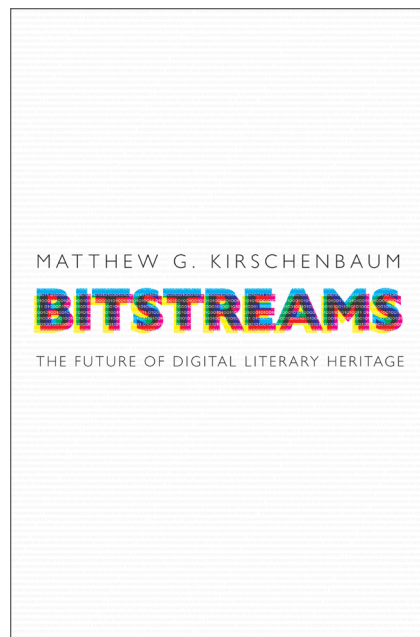
Order online for a 20% discount!

Ordering from North America, South America, or the Caribbean? Visit http://www.upenn.edu/pennpress/book/16248.html and enter promo code **FA21PP** during checkout to receive a 20% discount.

Ordering from outside the Americas? Visit https://www.combinedacademic.co.uk and enter promo code **FA21PP** during checkout to receive a 20% discount.

Interested in an ebook? Visit https://www.combinedacademic.co.uk and enter promo code **EBOOKPP20** during checkout to receive a 20% discount.