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Encoding Prose: The Complete Letters of Willa Cather a Literary Project in Digital Humanities

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Encoding Prose: The Complete Letters of Willa Cather

A literary project in Digital Humanities

Simone Droge and Gayle Rocz, Research and Editorial Assistants

WHAT IS THIS PROJECT?

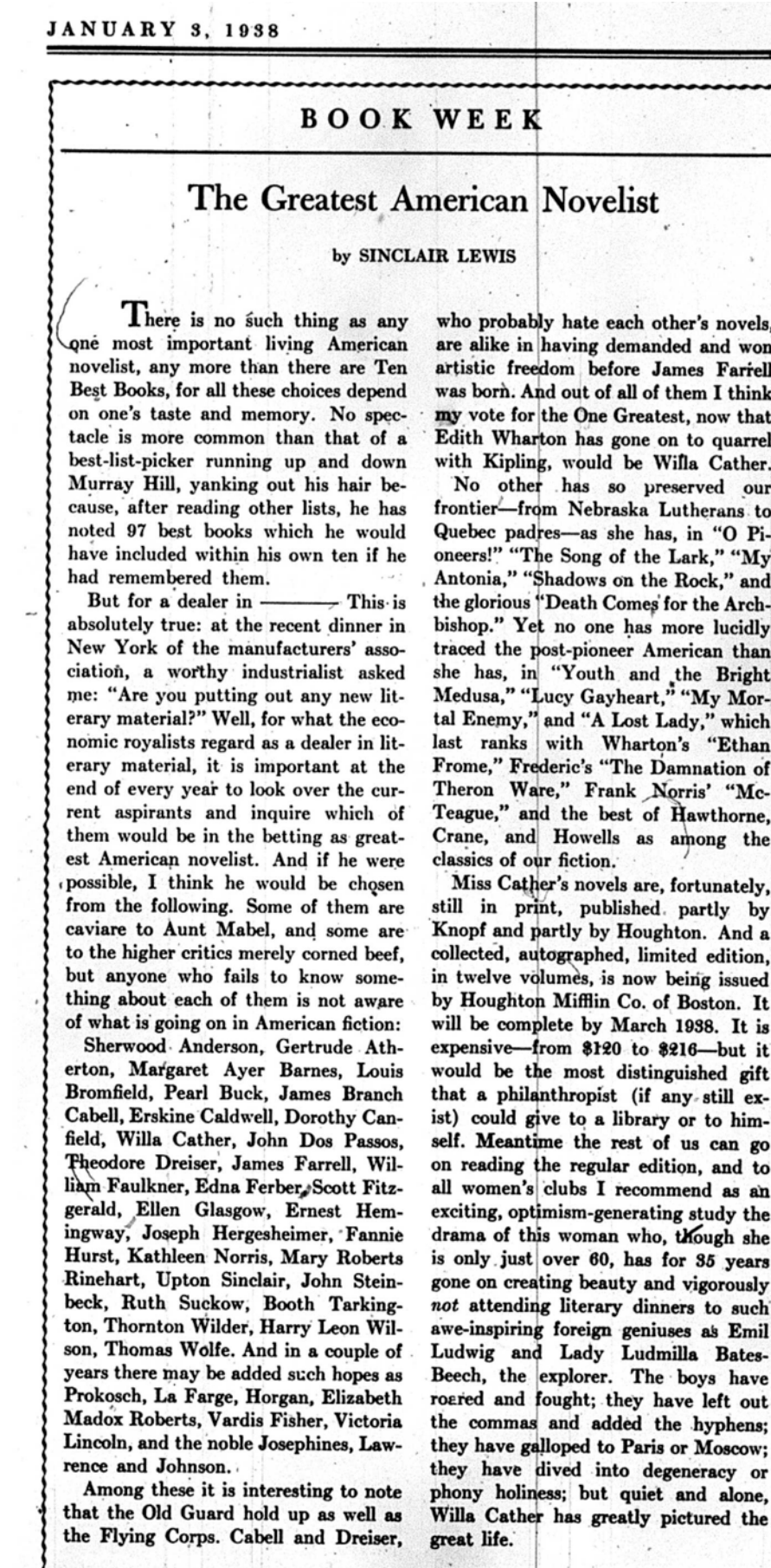
- “The Willa Cather Archive is an ambitious endeavor to create rich, useful, and widely accessible site for the study of Willa Cather’s life and writings.”
- The Complete Letters of Willa Cather is an ongoing project, and has been published since 2018
- Project mission: to create a digital edition of Cather’s entire body of correspondence

WHAT IS OUR ROLE?

- We are research assistants for The Complete Letters of Willa Cather
- Our recent work has included: transcribing and encoding letters and answering research questions that assist in the annotation process.
- When encoding the letters we tag all of the people, places, and works, all of them possessing previously written annotations
- For example, if Cather mentions Robert Frost, we tag his name, and his biographical annotation will appear

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE?

- The Complete Letters of Willa Cather gives casual readers and academic scholars of Cather access to more information than ever before
- Historically, only those who could afford to travel from archive to archive would be able to study Cather’s letters
- Before 2015, her letters could only be paraphrased in published material
- This project allows anyone interested in Cather to hear the unpolished voice of the great American novelist



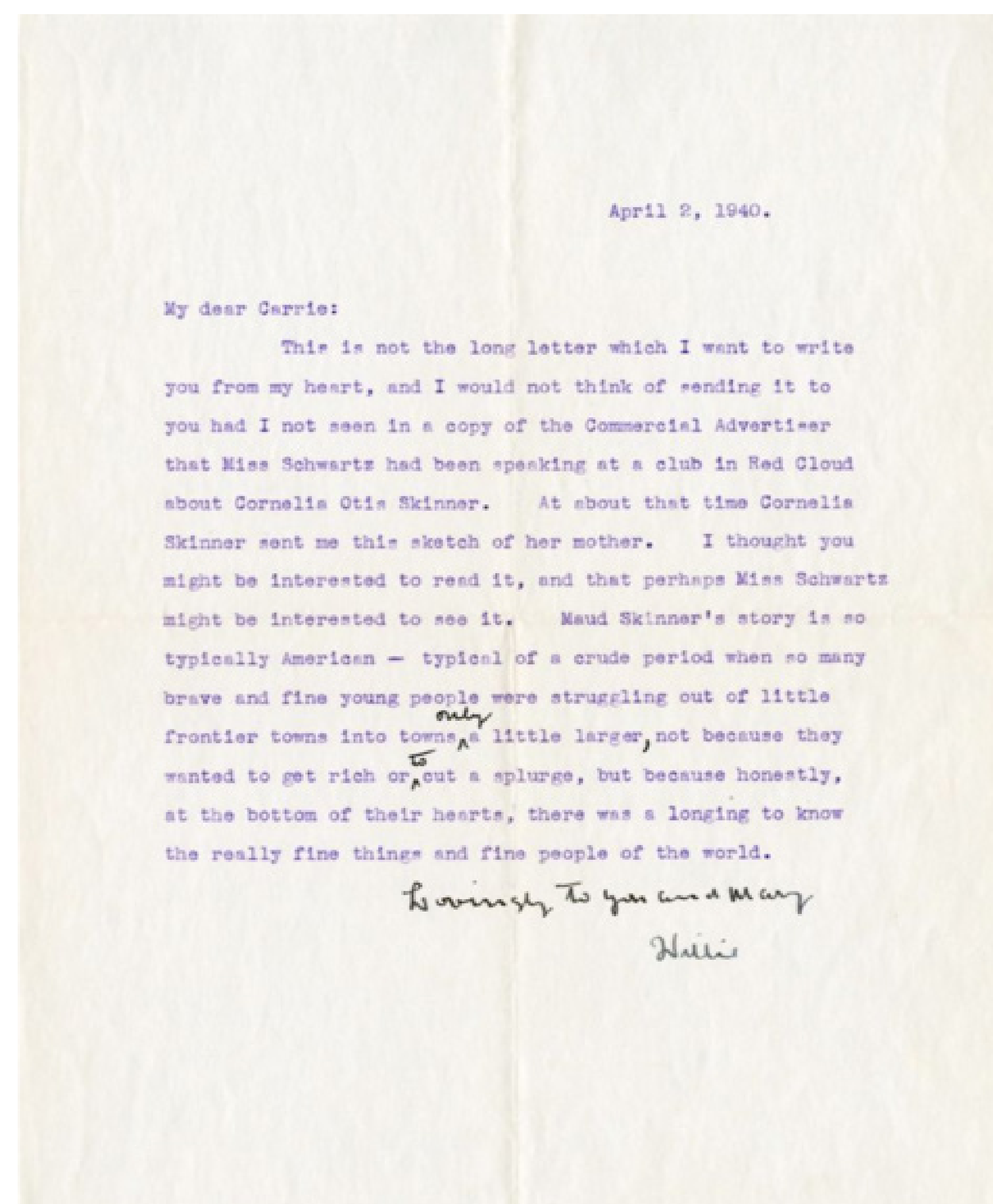
Opinion article written by Sinclair Lewis in 1938 about Willa Cather

ABOUT RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- The research questions we answer come to us from scholars who annotate the letters, such as Melissa Homestead or Kari Ronning
- The research tools we use include: online databases to access public records and documents, as well as physical materials found in the library’s Archives and Special Collections
- We utilize interlibrary loan service frequently. This allows us to access specific newspaper/magazine articles, images, or microfilm from libraries across the country

WHAT IS DIGITAL HUMANITIES

- The digital humanities, simply, applies computational tools to traditional humanities disciplines
- The Cather Archive is a prime example of DH because it presents humanities research to the work on Cather within a website format
- A primary goal of digital humanities is accessibility, especially considering the humanities’ exclusive and elite scholarly history
- Another goal is the uplifting of unheard voices: those of women, people of color, and the historically silenced



Willa Cather to Carrie Miner Sherwood, April 2, 1940



Willa Cather at Grand Manan, possibly taken by Edith Lewis in the 1930s.