

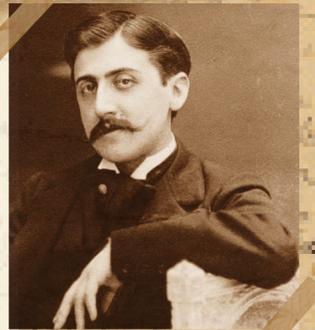
# THE DIGITIZATION OF MARCEL PROUST'S LETTERS

## The Project

Through this scholarship, I was invited to participate in an international research collaboration, Corr-Proust, whose goal it is to produce an online, updated and organised collection of the correspondence of Marcel Proust. As a research assistant, I undertook steps to transcribe and edit several letters from the year 1907, preparing them for digital publishing on the website. This allowed me to contribute to the project's aim to further our knowledge of Proust's writing process and of letter writing in the 20th century.

## Why Marcel Proust?

Proust (1871-1922) was a French novelist, considered to be one of the most influential authors of the 20th century. His famous seven-volume novel: *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* was published between 1913 and 1927, and is widely regarded as one of the longest literary works in history, and one of the greatest fictional works of all time.



## Original

Proust's original letter is unearthed. Some belong to personal collections of the recipient, and others reside at institutions such as universities.

## The Process

Many editions and volumes of Proust's letters have been published. The most systematic is that of Philip Kolb. This edition contains detailed information about each letter, such as where and when it was written, the recipient, and allusions to the novel and other letters.

## Document

Using the Kolb edition, a word document is created for each letter. A template is filled out with details of identification of the letter, as well as any notes clarifying or commenting on the contents of the letter.

## Edition

The word document is used to create an XML file for each letter. This file format allows for "tags" to be added to a text, so that certain words bring up boxes containing further information about the letter.

## Transcription

Next, the text is transcribed in full on the same word document.

## Website

Finally, images of the original letter, an exact transcription with formatting, a block text version, footnotes and other information about things referenced in the letter are uploaded together onto the Corr-Proust site, providing the full story around each letter.

## XML

## What is genetic criticism?

Genetic criticism refers to the study of the process by which a text came to be. It analyses the writing process of an author, by looking at drafts, notes, proofs, manuscripts and correspondence. Its focus is not on the completed work itself, but on all things that influenced a literary work.

## Why correspondence?

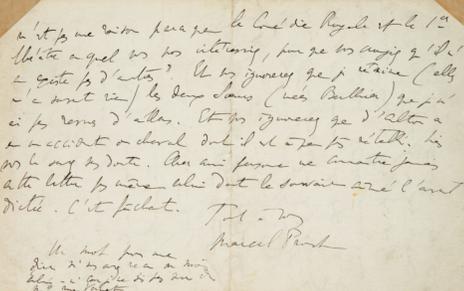
Proust did not keep a journal, so his letters are the most rich source of information about his life as a writer. Not only do they provide insight into his life, experiences and philosophies, including those that appear in his novel, but they also give historical background on things that influenced his novel, and a deep insight into Proust's artistic process, and how he worked.

## Why is digitization important?

A published, physical collection of Proust's letters is unable to provide any definitive classification (such as by date or by correspondent). This is because the corpus is constantly expanding as more letters are unearthed. A virtual collection also allows for accessible links to other manuscripts, letters and historical figures to be added, and this completeness makes possible further and deeper research.

## Why 1907?

While the year 1907 precedes Proust's full engagement with the novel, we were able to find many relevant letters: correspondence between Proust and colleagues and editors about his published articles, notes about how he writes and how his illness was affecting that, and many allusions to ideas and characters in that would later appear in his novel.



**By Zoë Simpson**  
with thanks to Yuri Cerqueira dos Anjos