

## Paul Metcalf Archive

The Paul Metcalf Archive was created and shaped primarily by poet, experimental prose writer and dramatist Paul Metcalf. It contains material that documents his life and work, and is especially illuminating of Metcalf's creative process through its published and unpublished manuscripts and associated material.

Whenever possible the files remain exactly as Metcalf left them—that which he chose to keep in the order he kept it. The Archive is a carefully composed record of important correspondence, notes, research materials and manuscripts, which lay bare this master collagist's methods of fieldwork, investigation and composition. His work resulted in the publication of more than twenty highly acclaimed books and the creation of a new genre of writing. As such, The Paul Metcalf Archive may be his most important work. In any case it will be of great interest to scholars and writers; several future creative projects dwell among the files.



Photograph of Paul by Nicholas Dean, probably mid-60s near the Metcalf's home in Becket, Massachusetts, 8 x 10 inches.



Snapshot of young Paul on Springside Road in Skyland, North Carolina, September 1955, 3-1/2 x 5 inches.

*Like a medieval chronicler with the eye of a poet and the heart of a tale-teller, he fits together radiant fragments into a wholly new kind of construct.*

— Guy Davenport

*[Genoa: A Telling of Wonders] invites us to pass our minds down a new but ancient track, to become, ourselves, both fact and fiction, and to discover something true about the geography of time."*

— William H. Gass

*My excitement and pleasure is such that I would like to emphasize here my very great respect for Paul Metcalf's writing and the unique significance of its publication....Much like his great-grandfather, Herman Melville, Paul Metcalf brings an extraordinary diversity of materials into the complex patterns of analogy and metaphor, to affect a common term altogether brilliant in its imagination."*

— Robert Creeley

## Brief Biography of Paul Metcalf

Paul Metcalf (1917–1999) was a poet, experimental prose writer and dramatist published by many small presses. He has been described by some as a "cult figure" and was followed and praised by writers and critics that included Robert Creeley, William Gass, Wendell Berry, and Guy Davenport.

Metcalf was born in East Milton, Massachusetts, attended private progressive schools, and eventually graduated from a formal Connecticut prep school. His mother, Eleanor Thomas Metcalf, was the oldest granddaughter of Herman Melville and was his literary executor. His father, Henry (Harry) Knight Metcalf, was a direct descendant of Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island.

Paul first met Charles Olson when he 14 (Olson was 20) when he stopped by their home to talk with Paul's mother about Melville. Paul would later say "more than any of the other Melvillians who flocked to our house, Charles treated me as a human being." The two had a casual friendship until they met again later at Black Mountain College.

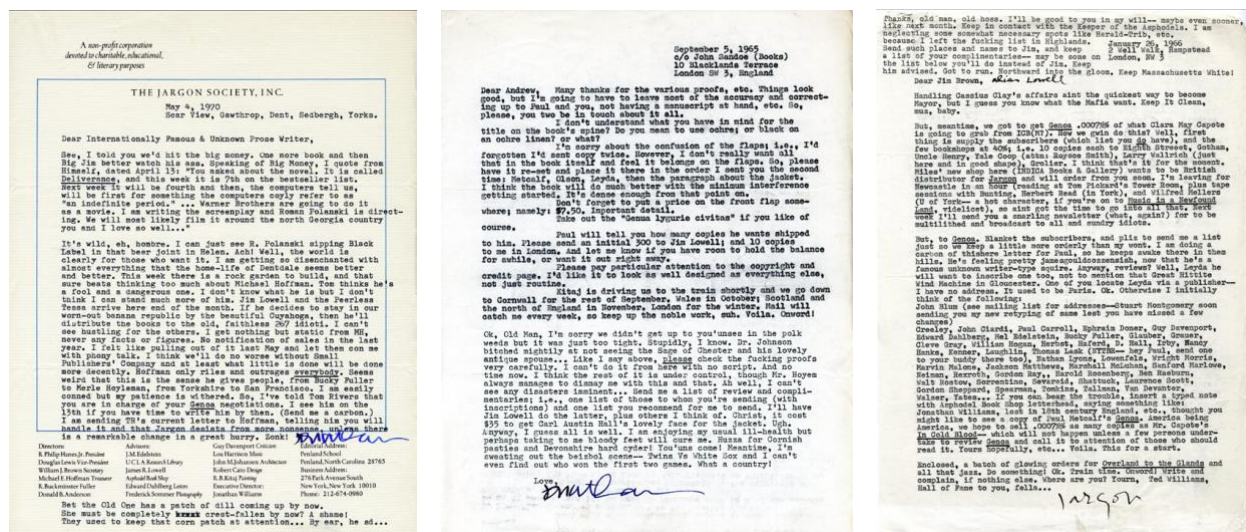
Around 1940, he spent an influential summer while living, "studying and drinking" with Conrad Aiken. Nancy and Paul Metcalf moved to New York, but he developed tuberculosis in 1945 and moved back to Cambridge and then to Georgia to convalesce. After recovering, they moved to western North Carolina. The couple would live the next twenty years primarily in the South.

On one of Paul's many visits to Black Mountain College, he renewed his friendship with Olson. It was Olson who introduced him to Jonathan Williams. The two became lifelong friends and Williams' Jargon Society published his first book *Will West* in 1956, and five subsequent works later.

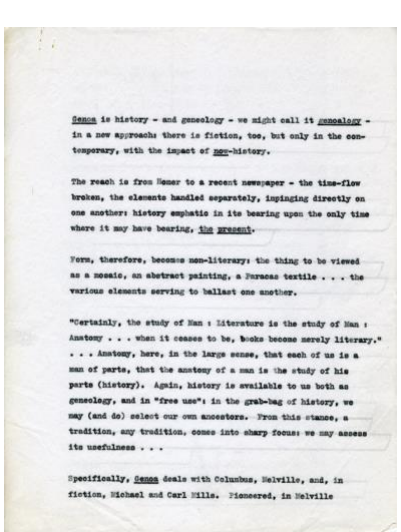
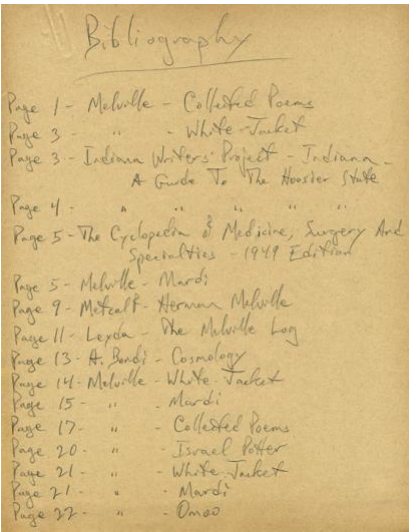
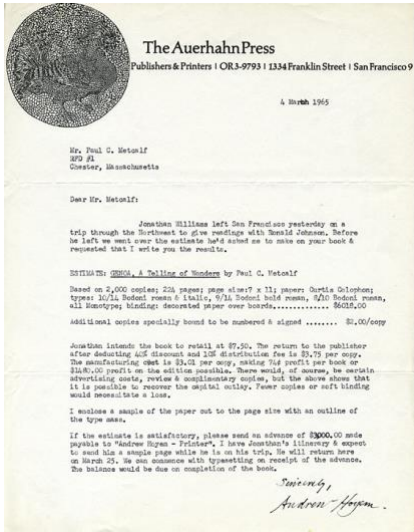
In 1963, the Metcalfs moved to the Berkshires in Massachusetts, where they would spend the rest of their lives. The Metcalf home became a locus for artists and writers in the area.

Paul Metcalf published over 20 books during his life. Coffee House Press published his *Collected Works* in three volumes in 1996–97 about which *Publishers Weekly* wrote: "Like Nathaniel Hawthorne or William Carlos Williams, Black Mountain poet Paul Metcalf accrues literary authority out of an acute sense of American history, as if that history were itself the fabled last frontier, a wilderness of wealth, massacre and movement to be traced, ultimately, in a verse as direct as the names on a map...those who know his work already will be excited to have these pieces all in one place."

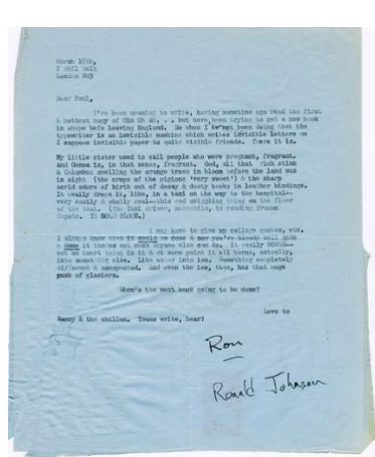
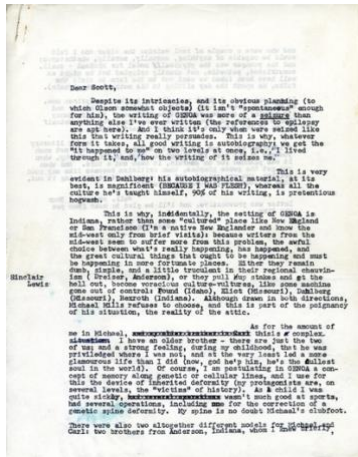
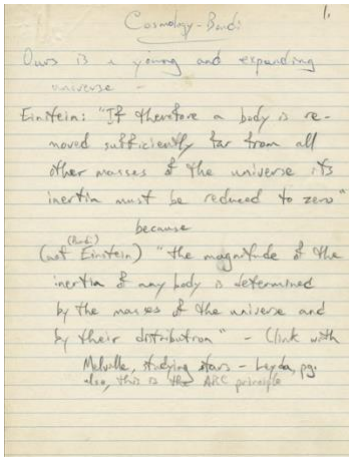
## Selected Highlights from the Archive



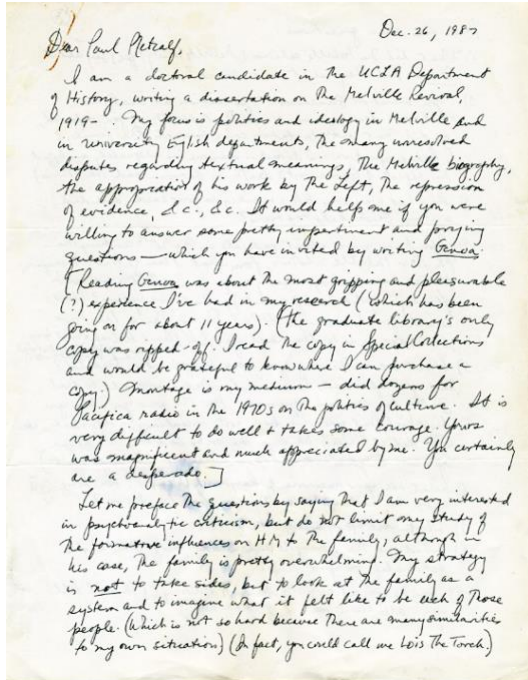
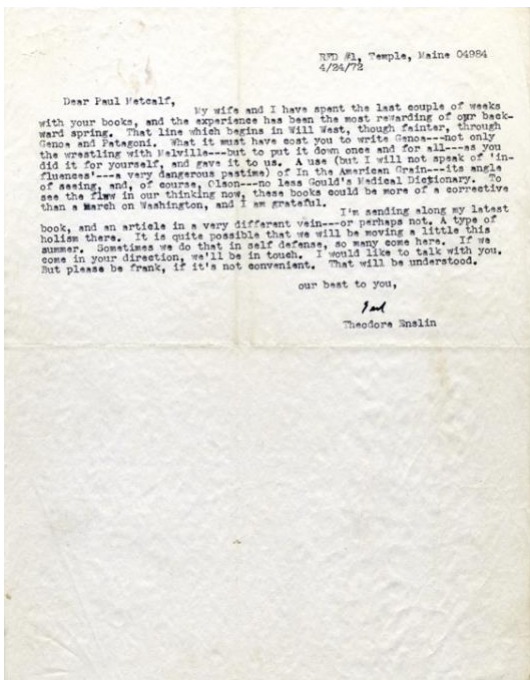
Letter from Jonathan Williams to PM, 'Dear Internationally Famous & Unknown Prose Writer,' May 4, 1970, 1 p. Jonathan discussing the publication and distribution of *Genoa*, including that Paul was to be in charge of *Genoa's* negotiations; Jonathan Williams letter Andrew Hoyem and PM, September 5, 1965, 1 p. The top of the letter a carbon of letter to Hoyem, designer / printer of *Genoa*. The bottom of the letter is a typescript addition to Paul and is signed by Williams; Jonathan Williams letter to Jim Lowell of Asphodel Book Shop, with an additional note typed on the top of letter to Paul, January 26, 1966, 1 p.



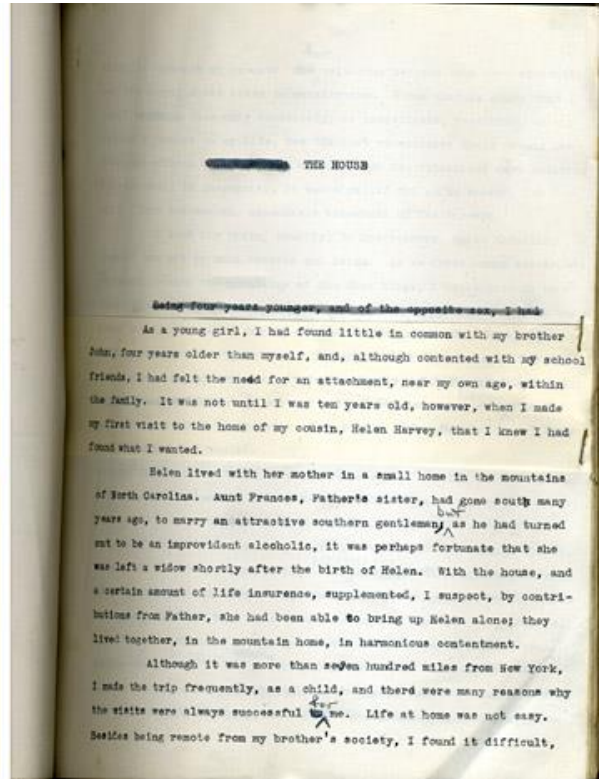
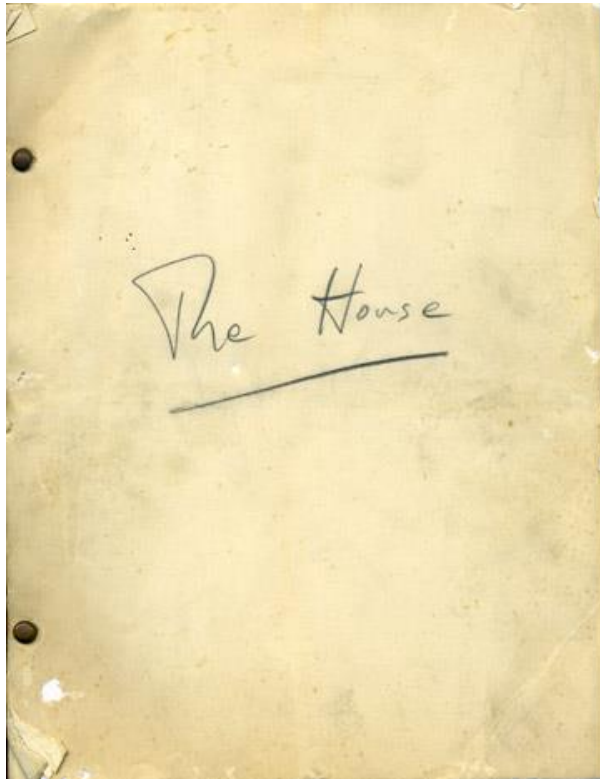
Andrew Hoyem letter to Paul with an estimate of the cost for printing Genoa (\$6,018) and asking for an advance of \$3,000, March 4, 1965, 1 p.; 1st page of Paul's handwritten, in pencil, bibliography for Genoa; 1st page of original full version of the manuscript of Genoa.



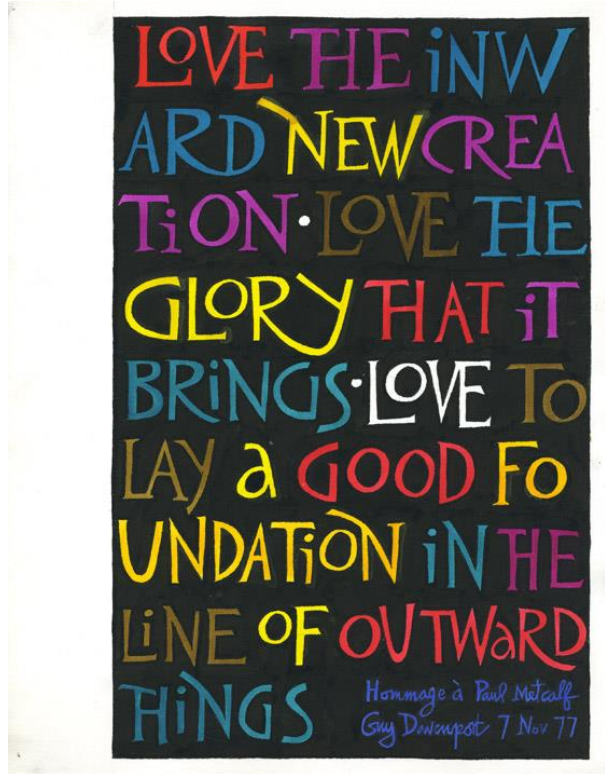
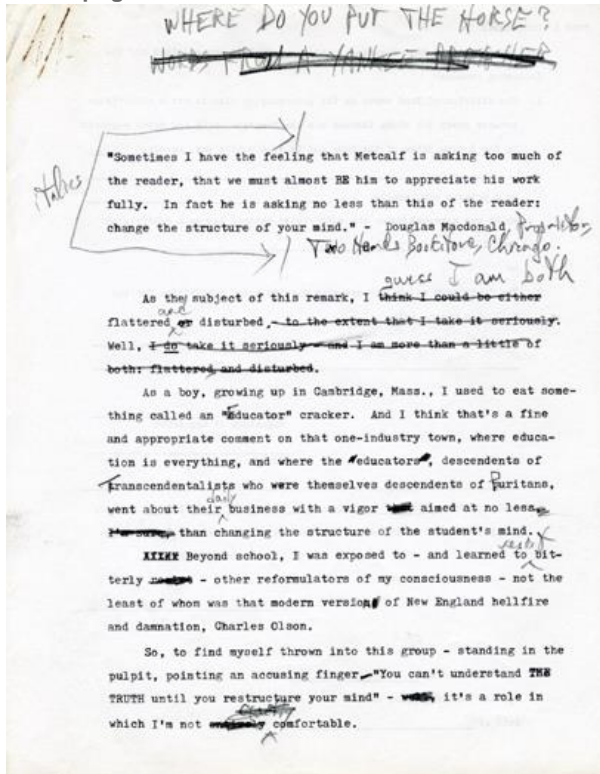
Page of Paul's handwritten notes on H. Bondi's Cosmology, one of the textual sources for Genoa; Letter from Paul in response to several letters from graduate student G. Scott Johnson in praise of Genoa and asking for PM's comments on literary criticism, 2 pp. Johnson's letters are also in the archive and are dated March 5 and March 10, 1966; Letter from Ronald Johnson, March 15, 1966, 1 p. Johnson praises Genoa: 'I may have to give up collage quotes, etc. I always knew that it could be done & now you've bloody well gone & done it theres not much anyone else can do.'



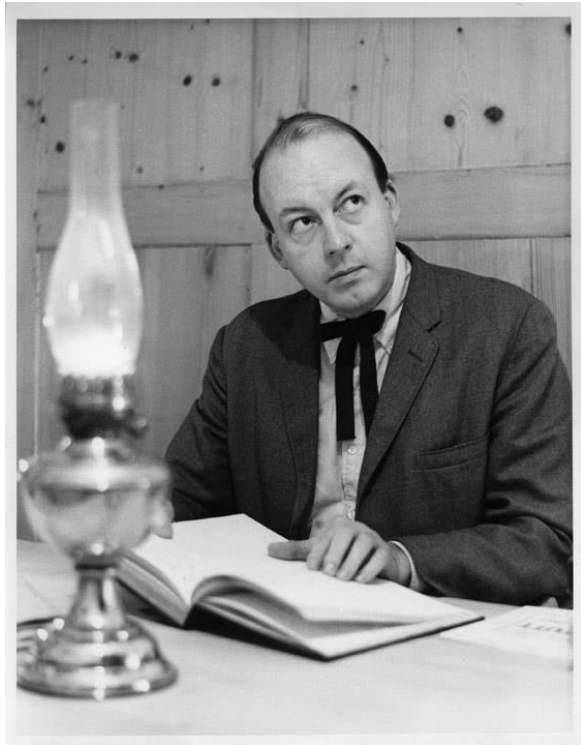
Letter from Theodore Enslin in praise of Genoa, April 24, 1972, 1 p.; 1st page of letter from Clare Spark, December 26, 1987, 3 pp. This was the initial letter to PM from Spark, a then doctoral candidate on the Melville revival, introducing herself to Paul. Their correspondence (all in the archive) would become Enter Isabel: The Herman Melville Correspondence of Clare Spark and Paul Metcalf (University of New Mexico Press, 1991).



Cover of section of 'The House,' the 1st section of manuscript of Metcalf's unpublished novel *The Statue* and its 1st page.



1st page of the 7-page manuscript of 'Where Do You Put the Horse?' marked with many corrections. The manuscript has been typed on the back of an application to the Planning Board. The essay was published in Metcalf's collection of essays *Where Do You Put the Horse?* (Dalkey Archive Press, 1986); Guy Davenport's contribution to *P.M. 60*, a 1977 festschrift for Paul organized by Jonathan Williams. 8-1/2 x 11 inches.



Fielding Dawson's contribution to *P.M. 60*, a 1977 festschrift for PM organized by Jonathan Williams. The 8-1/2 x 11 inch unique collage is comprised of various elements, including ticket stubs and pills; Portrait of Jonathan Williams taken by Graham Keen. Keen was also the graphics editor of *International Times* and the editor of *Cyclops*, Great Britain's first adult comic newspaper.



Snapshots of Jonathan Williams and Tom Meyer in the backyard of Paul and Nancy Metcalf's home in Becket, January 1969;



Photograph of Paul by Gerard Malanga, 11 x 14 inches.

---

## Summary of the Paul Metcalf Archive

### Correspondence

Significant correspondence from Paul Metcalf's colleagues is present from wide range of poets, writers, scholars and others, including Russell Banks, Wendell Berry, Guy Davenport, Vincent Ferrini, Allen Ginsberg, Andrew Hoyem, Ralph Maud, Clare Spark, John Taggart, and Jonathan Williams. Yet what may be most interesting about this series is the inclusion of original letters that Paul Metcalf wrote to several colleagues. After his death, his daughter contacted many of Metcalf's correspondents asking them to donate his letters to the archive. Several agreed and supplied original letters (or photocopies); consequently the Archive includes several hundred letters written by Paul Metcalf to some of his closest correspondents over several decades, providing a rich resource for investigation into his practice.

### Manuscripts

Manuscripts in various states with much associated material, including: *Enter Isabel*, *Genoa*, *Patagoni*, *I-57*, *Will West* and the unpublished early novel *The Statue* [a.k.a. *Household Gods*], and *Willie's Throw*. Approx. 9 linear feet.

### Published material

Included are approx. 37 books by Paul Metcalf (several with substantial annotations in Metcalf's hand); approx. 17 broadsides and posters; approx. 54 magazines, anthologies, and other books with contributions by Paul Metcalf; approx. 26 books by others (many inscribed and with notes or letters); and *P.M. 60*, a unique festschrift for Paul Metcalf organized by Jonathan Williams for Paul's birthday in 1977.

### Audio / Visual

There are approx. 9 assorted VHS tapes; approx. 350 photographs of friends, family, and Paul Metcalf; approx. 30 photographs of and by Jonathan Williams, including two portraits by Graham Keen; approx. 20 color slides; and Nicholas Dean and Gerard Malanga portraits of Paul Metcalf.

### Family

Among other items included are genealogic material, memorabilia, and some personal effects.

### Melville

Included are items related to Henry Metcalf, Paul's father (including items related to the Herman Melville estate); assorted articles about Melville; documentation about the Metcalf donation of Melville family documents and artifacts to the Berkshire Athenaeum; and other such items.

### Assorted

Many other assorted items, including publicity, reviews, and resumes.

*The archive comprises approximately 19 linear feet (14 boxes, plus oversize).*