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Nikos Gatsos archive at Harvard Library sheds light on Greek cultural history

Harvard Library has acquired the archive of influential Greek poet and lyricist Nikos Gatsos (1911-1992), preserving his life's work for future generations of researchers

Key Points:

- Manuscripts, personal correspondence, music, notebooks, photographs, and more from the avant-garde twentieth century writer will be made available to scholars around the world
- The collection spans the humanities—from literature to music, social commentary to cultural history, philosophy to folklore

CAMBRIDGE, MA—The archive of Greek poet and lyricist Nikos Gatsos has found a permanent home at Harvard Library. The acquisition is a key addition to the Library's collections in Greek literature and civilization and will be made available to students and scholars around the world.

Nikos Gatsos (1911-1992) had a profound influence on the post-war generation of Greek poets. Writing of both loss and hope, Gatsos's unique blend of surrealism, symbolism and folk song created intense admiration and assured his place alongside his friends, Nobel laureates Odysseas Elytis and George Seferis, as one of the great twentieth-century Greek poets.



The poet at 28 years old, 1939-40

Panagiotis Roilos, George Seferis Professor of Modern Greek

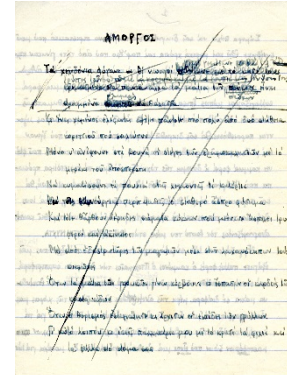
Studies and Professor of Comparative Literature at Harvard, strongly encouraged the Library to acquire the archive. "Nikos Gatsos was one of the most prominent figures of the European avant-garde. His long poem *Amorgos*, which was published in 1943, during the occupation of Greece by the Germans and their allies, was almost instantly hailed by both critics and poets as an emblematic work of Greek surrealism." Roilos continued, "The Gatsos archive will be a major addition to Harvard's archives on European modernism and of course to its unique collection on Greek literature and culture. I cannot stress enough the potential educational and research value of the archive for several scholarly areas, including Greek and broader European cultural history, comparative literature, Greek world literature and translation studies."

Gatsos was greatly admired for his command of the Greek language. His close friend, the poet Peter Levi recalled: "Seferis used to say that Gatsos was the only man whose Greek he truly envied." Nikos Gatsos heard music in the words he carefully chose for his poems. In 1943, a young Manos Hadzidakis presented Gatsos with a musical setting for the poem "Amorgos," beginning a lifelong friendship and fruitful collaboration between the poet and composer. Gatsos also spent much creative energy working with other Greek composers, such as Mikis Theodorakis and Stavros Xaharkos, transforming his poems into songs forever etched in the

musical psyche of the Greek nation. His oeuvre includes a total of three hundred and sixty songs—a newly [revised edition](#) of his songs edited by his partner Agathi Dimitrouka has just been released.

"This collection will be a tremendous resource not only for philologists and historians, but for musicians and musicologists as well," says Dr. Panayotis League, a recent graduate of Harvard's PhD program in Ethnomusicology and a current fellow at the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature. "Gatsos was one of the most important Greek lyricists and songwriters of the twentieth century, and his collaborations with the greatest Greek composers of the twentieth century helped define the course of Greek popular music in its marriage of the folkloric to the avant-garde. The opportunity to examine not only Gatsos's notes and papers but also audio recordings of song sketches and unfinished compositions will certainly prove invaluable to future musicological scholarship and help us better understand the work of this pioneering songwriter."

Gatsos was also a gifted translator, mostly of theatrical works. He introduced the work of Federico García Lorca, Archibald MacLeish, Eugene O'Neill, and August Strindberg to Greek audiences. Gatsos's poems and lyrics have been translated into English, French, Danish, Spanish, Italian, Catalan, Korean, Swedish, Turkish, and Finnish. In 1987, he was awarded the Athens City Prize for his life achievements and in 1991 he was recognized as Deputy Member of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Barcelona for his contribution to the promotion of Spanish literature in Greece.



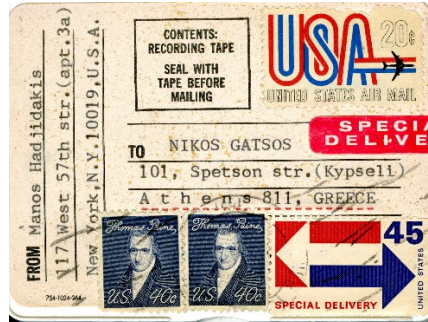
The first draft of "Amorgos" which was written on the verso of an incomplete short story "Lake Kaliamba."

The Gatsos archive includes a rich collection of manuscripts, typescripts, notebooks, correspondence, books, photographs, and musical recordings. Users will find:

- eighteen letters from Odysseas Elytis (ranging from three to twenty-five pages)
- fifty years of postcards from his good friend and popular singer Nana Mouskouri
- record albums signed by composers
- cassette tapes labeled "songs in progress"
- the script of Elia Kazan's *America* (with annotations by Kazan)
- annotated typescripts by George Seferis, Archibald MacLeish, Desmond O'Grady, and Charles Haldeman

Rhea Lesage, Librarian for Hellenic Studies, Coordinator for the Classics and Center for Hellenic Studies Associate for Collaborative Initiatives at Widener Library and Leslie Morris, Gore Vidal Curator of Modern Books & Manuscripts at Houghton Library joined forces to make this acquisition possible. "Bringing the Nikos Gatsos archive to Houghton Library, Harvard's primary repository for rare books and manuscripts, will ensure that his life's work will be preserved for future generations to research," said Lesage. "Plans are already underway to promote and celebrate this important archive that will be accessible to scholars everywhere once preliminary processing is complete."

Gregory Nagy, Francis Jones Professor of Classical Greek Literature and Professor of Comparative Literature, who is the Director of the Center for Hellenic Studies in Washington D.C., highlighted the importance of the Gatsos acquisition in promoting the cause of Hellenism. “The work of Nikos Gatsos touches upon the humanities writ large, from literature to social commentary, from history to philosophy. I congratulate Harvard Library for taking this important initiative. The Center for Hellenic Studies stands ready to support the Library’s future initiatives in sustaining the legacy of Gatsos.”



A “Special Delivery” musical recording from composer Manos Hadjidakis.

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