

**Hyam Plutzik Centennial Committee**  
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**CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS:  
a poets' conversation**

In the late 1950s, a professor of English out in California eagerly wrote to his friend Hyam Plutzik back in Rochester that he had recommended some of the poet's earlier work to a student, and that the student had become a "Plutzikophile" as a result. Shortly after this incident, Plutzik wrote the poem "On Hearing that My Poems Were Being Studied in a Distant Place," which was not published until many years after the poet's death.

Earlier this year, a few students at the University of Rochester contributed commentaries on this poem to "Rochester Students Read Plutzik," part of the Rare Books Department's exhibit honoring Plutzik's life and work. Now we invite poets to contribute to a new project, in a similar vein: not merely to react to this particular poem itself, but to ask, as Plutzik did, what does it mean to you as a poet, to think of your works and words going out into the world, to be confronted by readers in distant places? To imagine how the words (which found a strange power in you, and you in them) may have power in another, an unknown person? To wonder how your poem may change another human being outside of your living knowledge, and how strange people will transform your poem into whatever thing they will?

***We invite written contributions of 100-200 words. Pieces can take any form—story, commentary, new poem, polemic... They will be posted on the Plutzik Centennial blog, "a fistful of words," and archived online. As the conversation continues, the pieces may also be produced in print form.***

***Submissions can be sent via email attachment (.doc, .docx, or .pdf formats only, please) to [centennial@hyamplutzikpoetry.com](mailto:centennial@hyamplutzikpoetry.com). Visit [www.hyamplutzikpoetry.com](http://www.hyamplutzikpoetry.com) to learn more about Plutzik, the Centennial, and the Plutzik Reading Series, and to read the blog "a fistful of words."***

**ON HEARING THAT MY POEMS WERE  
BEING STUDIED IN A DISTANT PLACE**

What are they mumbling about me there?  
"Here," they say, "he suffered; here was glad."  
Are words clothes or the putting off of clothes?

The scene is as follows: my book is open  
On thirty desks; the teacher expounds my life.  
Outside the window the Pacific roars like a lion,

Beside which my small words rise and fall.  
"In this alliteration a tower crashed."  
Are words clothes or the putting off of clothes?

"Here, in the fisherman casting on the water,  
He saw the end of the dreamer.  
And in that image, death, naked."

Out of my life I fashioned a fistful of words.  
When I opened my hand, they flew away.

~ Hyam Plutzik, 1911-1962

***Hyam Plutzik*** was a Jewish American poet and professor of English at the University of Rochester. The son of Russian immigrants, Plutzik was born in Brooklyn, and spent much of his childhood in Connecticut. He was educated at Trinity College and at Yale University, and spent a few intervening years as a journalist back in Brooklyn. He also served as a Lieutenant in WWII, stationed on an air base in England. In his lifetime, Plutzik published poems in numerous journals including Poetry, Yale Review, Antioch Review, Kenyon Review, and The Nation, as well as three books of poetry: *Aspects of Proteus* (1949), *Apples from Shinar* (1959, 2011 reissue), and *Horatio* (1961), which was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. Hyam Plutzik: *The Collected Poems* was published in 1987. Upon his death in 1962, the University of Rochester established the **Plutzik Memorial Reading Series**, which continues to this day. The longest-running collegiate reading series in the country, the Plutzik Reading Series has hosted readings by nearly 300 acclaimed international writers.