

AN INFORMAL HISTORY OF THE PLUTZIK READING SERIES

by Jarold Ramsey
Professor of English Emeritus
University of Rochester

*“... a writer’s work deserves to be heard aloud, vocalized by the writer him/herself, not just read off the printed page. Those who were fortunate enough to listen on campus to Hyam Plutzik reading from his own works-in-progress, the wonderful lyrics that make up *Aspects of Proteus* and *Apples from Shinar*, and especially from what became the verse-narrative masterpiece *Horatio*, would probably put those sessions at the head of their own list of unforgettable literary experiences. Lucky for them! But for all of us, what’s worth celebrating here and now is the long life and ongoing success of the reading series that proudly bears Hyam Plutzik’s name and example into the twenty-first century.”* — Jarold Ramsey

One of Hyam Plutzik’s most cherished and enduring legacies at the University of Rochester and in the city of Rochester is the tradition of literary readings he established. Writers may have given occasional readings from their works on campus and in the city before he came—but unmistakably Plutzik’s regular renditions of his own and other modern poets’ works in the Welles-Brown Room of Rush Rhees Library, beginning in the late 1940s, inspired a practice that carries on to this day. The Plutzik Series, created in his memory in 1962 soon after his death, is one of the oldest and most prestigious literary reading series in America.

When poetry readings were “all the rage” on campuses in the late ’60s and early ’70s, and visiting poets were celebrated like rock-stars (if not paid as much), the American poets Donald Hall and James Dickey each published hilarious accounts of their (mis)adventures on the academic poetry circuits. (Dickey’s essay was titled “**Barnstorming for Poetry.**”) Nobody to my knowledge has ventured to write an obverse companion to their pieces—that is, an account of the life and times of a local poetry series. Chronicling the Plutzik Series over its eventful fifty years, with poets and writers and literary tastes coming and going, might serve to complement what Hall and Dickey have had to say. It’s one thing to go barnstorming as a poet; it’s quite another to try to maintain at regular intervals a hospitable institutional “barn” for such flights!

How the Series was created is a signifying story in itself, and it deserves to be recorded here, as researched by Professor Russell Peck, the Series’ first Director. Upon Hyam Plutzik’s death on January 8, 1962, the English Department had little difficulty in determining what a suitable memorial for their beloved colleague should be. For Plutzik, poetry was a performative art. He loved poetry readings. Oral presentation of poetry was a mainstay in his seminars. He had figured prominently in the bringing of writers to campus in conjunction with his creative writing classes and courses in modern literature, and he helped English chair George Ford, who had a genius for such things, put together the idea of an annual conference on modern writers which would run throughout the school year. The first of these programs occurred in 1958, when poets Stephen Spender, Marianne Moore, and E.E. Cummings read from their work, and novelists Elizabeth Bowen, Saul Bellow, and John Dos Passos spoke on and read from theirs. The conference also featured readings by the in-house poets, Plutzik and W. D. Snodgrass.

The “Modern Writers Conference” was not simply an English Department venture, however. Under the general plan of Dean Kenneth Clark to “put Rochester on the map,” it was coordinated with an inter-department conference on “Literature and the Arts in Contemporary Society,” which brought to campus poet and critic John Ciardi, architect Paul Rudolph, painter William Kienbusch, and literary critic Harry Levin. The Fine Arts Department, in addition to

hosting Kienbusch, mounted an exhibition of Cummings' paintings in Rush Rhees Gallery. The Outside Speakers Committee of the Undergraduate College Cabinet did their part in adding to the intellectual stimulus. According to the online University of Rochester History (ch. 38) they brought to campus that same year of 1958 a host of other luminaries: "Historian Oscar Handlin, Sovietologists Alex Inkeles and Ernest J. Simmons, and Oxford philosopher H.J. Paton came to speak before student groups, as did astronomers Bengt Stromgren and Harlow Shapley. Public affairs were discussed by Frances Perkins, former Secretary of Labor under Franklin Roosevelt, and Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, and the political pot was kept at simmer...by Senator Jacob Javits on the Soviet Threat and Senator Barry Goldwater on the case for conservatives, and by Senator John F. Kennedy [shortly before he began his campaign for the Presidency]. Coffee hours on Wednesday afternoons in the Welles-Brown Room continued [to be] popular; weekly attendance in 1958 averaged eighty-five."

The decision to found the Plutzik Series was undertaken in this larger effort to connect the University to the intellectual vitality of the world at large, a vitality that linked all aspects of the University and viewed the Arts and Sciences as coeval parts of Rochester's academic mission. But who should the first speaker in the Series be? In the Fall of 1961, after Hyam Plutzik's activities had become restricted because of his illness and he was unable to teach, Russell Peck, a young medievalist who loved modern poetry, was given the responsibility of teaching Plutzik's poetry seminar (it was Peck's first semester of teaching). George Ford saw to it that the modern writer who visited campus that fall would be a poet, and invited back Marianne Moore, whose *The Marianne Moore Reader* had just been published and was being used in the seminar. She read in the Welles-Brown Room on her 74th birthday, Nov. 15, 1961. After her reading the audience sang "Happy Birthday," to which she responded with a spontaneous recitation of "O to Be a Dragon." In a way she might be reckoned as the first reader in the Plutzik Series; but when it came time in the Fall of 1962 to formally inaugurate the Series, the planners wanted someone like her, a writer of national importance.

The invitation went to e.e. Cummings for a host of reasons. He, like Moore, had participated in the 1958 conference, but his ties to Rochester went much further back than that. Like Marianne Moore, who had worked in the New York City Public Library in the early 1920s and gone on to become editor of *The Dial*, Cummings had been affiliated with the Rochester literary and art scene since 1920, when he first became involved with James and Hildegard Watson in their venture to revitalize *The Dial*, the first issue of which included two poems by Cummings. Cummings at that time was freshly back from France where he had been studying painting. In 1924, the Watsons gave him a residence and workplace at 4 Patchin Place in New York City, which became his NYC home for over two decades. In 1944 he had given a one-man show of his paintings at the Memorial Art Gallery in Rochester, and, in 1954, after the publication of *Poems 1923-1954*, he returned to the Memorial Art Gallery for a second exhibition of his paintings, accompanied by readings from his newly collected poems.

When he was invited to inaugurate the Plutzik Series, he accepted with enthusiasm. He was eager to see the Watsons and also his god-daughter Valery Ayer Wright (daughter of the British philosopher A.J. Ayer; her husband had just entered the new Ph.D. program in English at Rochester). Cummings loved the idea behind the creation of a memorial poetry series in Hyam Plutzik's name, and declared that he was honored to be the inaugural speaker. The reading was set up for early October. But on September 2, while chopping wood at Joy Farm in New Hampshire, Cummings collapsed with a cerebral hemorrhage and died the next day. The Series planners had already scheduled L.L. Salomon as the second reader in the Series, and thus he became our first reader, though the Series was in fact not formally dedicated until the following spring, with a reading by W. D. Snodgrass, who had recently won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. Snodgrass was followed the next Fall by Anthony Hecht, later to become the John

Hall Deane Professor of Literature, and also a subsequent winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry.

The cost of the Series in its first year was met through a gift from Joseph Wilson, who had been a Classics major at the University, and was now CEO of the Xerox Corporation and Chairman of the University's Board of Trustees. Joe Wilson's initial donation was subsequently institutionalized as a line-item in the Dean's annual budget for the English Department, usually amounting to \$1500, extending over several decades. It was, in itself, a generous annual contribution to the literary life of the campus, but as poets' and writers' fees and travel expenses inflated over the years, the directors of the Series had to learn to be inventive in the face of economic necessity. When feasible, for example, we co-sponsored readings with student groups like the Outside Speakers Committee and the Black Students Union. And other schools in the Rochester area were invited to share the costs of bringing writers to Upstate; eventually such informal arrangements led to the creation of the Upstate Poetry Circuit, whereby schools like Rochester, Syracuse, and campuses of the SUNY system were able to bring in two well-known writers each year at shared bargain rates, sending them off on marathon, logistically challenging tours lasting up to two weeks, making appearances from Utica to Fredonia and from Potsdam to Binghamton. This was "barnstorming for poetry" indeed! In the 1980s the institution of grants from Poets and Writers Inc. and other sources made such interlocking circuits unnecessary. More recently, a campaign to establish a Plutzik Series Endowment drew generous support from UR alumni and local patrons, and from the early 1990s generous benefactions from the Plutzik family and others have transformed the scope and reach of the Series.

Sometimes the Plutzik Series has managed to eke out its ambitious yearly agenda of six to eight readings mainly on the basis of lucky timing and the good will of writers. One such lucky stroke brought John Updike to campus in the late 1960s; we brashly invited him, offering \$250 (probably only a fraction of his standard fee even then). To our astonishment, he replied, "Sure — why not?" (As it happened, the Dean of the College had invited his friend Saul Bellow to campus for the same day, so it was Bellow in the afternoon, and Updike at night, and the campus seemed briefly like a literary crossroads!)

If in those days we were sometimes frustrated by the seemingly wide gulf between our ambition to bring in literary lions, and our limited resources, we kept at it—and as the roster of Plutzik Series readers will attest, the custodians of the Series have somehow managed by hook, crook, luck, and ingenuity to piece together a remarkable field of poets and writers. And, keeping to the spirit of Hyam Plutzik's own dedication to making modern poetry and writing accessible in and out of Academe, we've never once charged admission to campus readings, neither to Rochester students, faculty, and staff nor to the townspeople who have loyally supported the Series from the beginning.

What has been the purpose underlying the considerable outlay of time and money spent on maintaining the Plutzik Series? I don't know that those of us who have been involved have ever formally addressed this question, but at bottom, I suppose, we have shared the conviction, inherited from Hyam Plutzik himself, that contemporary poetry and fiction matter greatly, most especially in university communities like Rochester, and that local visits by active writers are worth the having. (Very early on, the Series moved to include fiction writers as well as poets.)

When possible we've tried to engage artists whose work was actually being studied in literature classes, and of course in-class appearances by visiting writers in the Series have been popular features of our creative writing seminars. To hear figures like Charles Wright, Andrea Barrett, or Richard Howard talking informally and answering questions about their own writing or gossiping about other writers, or to have them reading and commenting on one's own work—this has been heady stuff for young writers at Rochester for fifty years now.

Not that everyone has always agreed with these arguments on behalf of Live Poetry and Writing at the University. A few colleagues have muttered darkly about the academic unwisdom of thus “reducing” poetry to mere performance; others have simply avoided attendance at readings altogether (leading one cheeky undergraduate to inquire what it would take to get Prof X to come to a Series reading—an appearance, maybe, by Walt Whitman or W. B. Yeats?) Once at least the whole sanction of on-campus readings seemed to come down to a turf-wars face-off between poetry-lovers gathered for an afternoon reading in a campus science-hall lecture-hall, and a contingent of life-sciences faculty and grad students accustomed to ad hoc use of the same space. Tempers flared, absolute arguments about the human merits of the Two Cultures were brandished, neither the *literati* nor the *scienziati* seemed willing to budge—until a peaceful solution arrived in the person of a senior professor of biology, himself a great lover of language and literature, who graciously led his ruffled colleagues off to another room, and the endeavors of Science and Poetry went forward. Hyam Plutzik, who believed passionately in the rapprochement of the Two Cultures, might have urged the two sides to sit down and talk it over then and there...

The operation of the Series has varied widely over the years, but essentially it has worked like this: The faculty Director and his English Department committee (more often than not including graduate students) meet several times a year to consider whom to invite for the coming semester or year. The choices typically involve a calculus of literary and non-literary factors—who’s “hot” (and/or likely to excite student interest); who’s known to be coming to Upstate, or to be on tour; who’s by report a good reader; who’s affordable, and so on. To my knowledge there has never been a formal policy calling for diversity in our offerings—but in practice a complex balance has been maintained—of Big Names and Writers of Promise, of writers representing the rich racial and ethnic variety of modern American writing—African American, American Indian, Asian American, Latino, as well as international artists; of male and female; of rhyming formalists and “language” poets, and other stylistic and conceptual gradations across the wide gamut of modern literature. At last count, the Plutzik roster includes four Nobel Laureates, thirty-two Pulitzer Prizes in Poetry and thirty-one National Book Award winners, and twenty-two American Poet Laureates (formerly known as Poetry Consultants to the Library of Congress).

When the great American poet Theodore Roethke (who died the year after the Series began and thus, alas, never visited Rochester) would go forth on reading tours, he liked to boast on behalf of the creative writing staff at the University of Washington where he taught that “Our team can lick your team!” The same cheerfully unprovable boast might be made about the range and diversity and quality of the Plutzik Series over its fifty years. Again, skeptics are invited to inspect the Series roster.

Something needs to be said here in praise of the audiences for Plutzik Series readings—those for the sake of whom the whole endeavor has been carried on for so long. Simply stated, our Plutzik audiences have been one of the program’s chief assets—polite, discerning, remarkably attentive in the challenging task of registering writers’ work aloud. I recall more than one visitor remarking after readings that they had never encountered such a high degree of audience attention anywhere else; one added that at first she found it somewhat unnerving! This was true even in the days when readings on American campuses were generally expected to be literary/political “happenings”; it’s unlikely that the current craze for “poetry slam” competitions for audience favor will ever be welcomed at Rochester, because the students, academics, and townspeople who are the patrons of the Series care too much for the best poetry and fiction to tolerate such shenanigans.

Those of us who have worked to maintain the Series have done so gladly, our only compensation being the pleasure of bringing all sorts of writers to campus and getting to know

them at least glancingly. But of course for each and every appearance by Poet X or Novelist Z, there's a laundry-list of tasks for the home folks to attend to behind the scenes—making travel arrangements, reserving halls and cranking out PR, picking up the guest at the airport/train-station/wherever, getting him or her lodged, dined, introduced, partied, paid (“Did you remember to pick up her check?”—“I thought you were picking it up!”), and delivered back on time to the airport/wherever (usually very early the next morning). In the toils of such mundane but crucial housekeeping and hospitality details (especially when they went astray), I used to wonder if I was preparing for a post-academic career in the service of Sol Hurok, the great impresario and concert and lecture organizer. But then at last the crowd of 150 (or 15) would gather in Hoyt Hall or the Koller-Collins Room or the Welles-Brown Room, the writer of the hour would appear and be introduced, and begin to read to us from work he or she had written “in the loneliness of the heart”—and invariably, all the preliminary backstage hassles would seem worthwhile.

Indeed, it would be fun to poll long-time Plutzik Series regulars about the most memorable readings they can recall. Lacking that, I can only offer the following personal list of unforgettable appearances, in no particular order or rank, but they were all knockouts!

- **Anthony Hecht**, reading mainly from *The Hard Hours* soon after it received the 1968 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. Hecht had only recently joined the Rochester faculty, becoming the University's first designated poet since the death of Hyam Plutzik. The audience was excited and welcoming, and Hecht—always an eloquent and elegant reader—gave one of his finest readings ever. It was a great, defining moment for the English Department and the Plutzik Series.
- **W.S. Merwin**, reading from *The Moving Target* and the soon-to-be published *The Lice* (1969). Few of us had read the austere, apocalyptic poems that make up *The Lice*, and his brilliant renditions of them had a genuinely physical impact on the audience—I remember the immediate consensus of students and faculty was that an American era that increasingly felt itself to be nearing the end of all the old social, political, and environmental continuities, had miraculously found an authentic voice in Merwin's new poems. “On the door it says what to do to survive. / But we were not meant to survive / Only to live.” (“The River of Bees”)
- **Ted Hughes'** reading (in cavernous but packed Strong Auditorium, with his friend the Irish poet Richard Murphy) in the early 1970s, from his new collection, *Crow*. Many of us thought we knew Hughes' feral poetry, knew about his marriage to Sylvia Plath and its sensational consequences; but what we heard that wintry afternoon about *Crow*, beginning with the author's absorbing account of the poems' genesis (“From the Life and Songs of Crow”) seemed unlike anything ever attempted in English verse, an invented Trickster narrative-cycle, catching and transfiguring more of our time's contradictions and polarities than seemed possible. All of it declaimed in Hughes' inimitable Yorkshire accent—the scariness and the ghastly humor of *Crow*'s adventures made all the scarier by the poet's way of intoning words like “e-e-e-rie.”
- **Anne Sexton**—who had been invited in the Fall of 1970 to read in the Upstate Poetry Circuit, despite some anxieties about whether she would be up to the challenge of the Circuit, psychologically. She was, after all, a newly risen star of the “Confessional” school, given to making poetic capital out of intense personal distress and misery. Her first book was mordantly titled *To Bedlam and Part Way Back*; her second, *All My Pretty Ones* (after

Macduff's cry of anguish on hearing that Macbeth has slaughtered his children). How would she fare at Rochester?

In person, she was tall, elegant, deep-eyed—and clearly very nervous about performing as a poet night after night, starting with Rochester. Despite our best efforts at dinner to reassure her and put her at ease (or maybe because of them!) her anxieties seemed to grow—until, as we were leading her to the backdoor of the big hall in the Frederick Douglass Building (where the UR Bookstore is now), she stopped in her tracks and said, “Boys, I don't think I can do this!” One of us in attendance, with more stage-manager zeal than compassion, replied, “Miss Sexton, you must do it!” and led her into the crowded hall.

The introduction over, she stood up, not looking at the audience but rather behind her, as if to flee. Spying an old piano stool, she seized it, sat down, and spun around several times, her long legs flashing. The audience laughed appreciatively. Next, fixing on a student in the front row, she asked him (in a good imitation of Lauren Bacall's voice) “Hey kid, you got a butt?” So he produced a cigarette and lit it for her—and the reading got underway!

It was, in truth, an extraordinary reading, not just because it almost didn't happen (only a few of us knew about *that*), but on its own merits. In Sexton's voice those harrowing poems transcended their burden of personal anguish, their achievement was not really “confessional” at all, but rather the brave discovery of words and images for feelings most of us must suffer in silence. We gave her a standing ovation—and when we learned a few days later that she had left the Circuit and gone home to Massachusetts, we felt sorry and relieved (for her), and all the more grateful for her gallant reading at Rochester.

- **William Stafford**, in what turned out to be the last of his many UR appearances, in 1986. Stafford, a great favorite of Rochester audiences, was at the top of his form in such a familiar and friendly setting, and he led off with a strange little poem that he had composed that very morning, he said, after walking to campus from our house the day before. It illustrated his conviction that poets should be willing to follow up any experiential thread, not just those “golden threads” that William Blake believe would lead to the Gates of Paradise; and whatever its merits, it's offered here as the only poem known to have been occasioned by the Plutzik Series:

A Monument of a Wrinkle in the Pavement
near Strong [Auditorium]

The years 1914-1986—in case these numbers
Mean anything to those who come after—
Were my part of forever. In the middle of my life
I stumbled one day while wheeling cement
And created this flaw. Other monuments
Weathered away, but this wrinkle stayed,
Nudging limousines and reminding officials
That I existed for my long years.
Those who pass by: let your foot falter.
Some day an event in your life may have
Significance for those who come after,
Like this of mine.

- **Gwendolyn Brooks**, who would not fly and therefore came by train to Rochester, gave a characteristically warm, well-attended reading in the Series in the 1980s—but it was

something she did the morning after her performance that made her visit unforgettable. She was co-sponsored by the Plutzik Series and the UR Black Students Union—and apparently recognizing that the BSU's morale at that time needed boosting, she undertook to take most if not all of its campus membership out to breakfast, no doubt using up much of her fee in the process in order to cheer them up about the value of their cause.

- **Gary Snyder**, like Gwendolyn Brooks, did something while on campus for his reading (I think it too was in the early 1980s) that seemed to express the poet's generous human vision in action, not just in words. In recognition of his long-standing dedication to environmental issues, we had invited the chairman of the UR undergraduate environmental society to join us for lunch at the Faculty Club. Chatting with the student en route, and determining that he "didn't know beans" about the ecological movement, Snyder requested a little time alone with the student to talk things over. When at length they rejoined the rest of us for lunch, Snyder was still listing titles, names, facts, and issues, and the student, wide-eyed, was still taking notes. If he didn't go on to a successful term as a well-informed leader of the Environmental Society, it wasn't for lack of instruction and encouragement from the visiting poet!
- **Andrei Voznesensky**. Bringing an eminent Russian poet during the Brezhnev Era of the Cold War caused, of course, quite a stir on campus and in the community. Would he be shadowed by the KGB; or was he maybe (as was rumored about his contemporary Yevtushenko) merely a poetic puppet of the Kremlin? What if (delicious if unlikely prospect) he decided to defect in Rochester? In person on campus, Voznesensky was wiry, boyish, very engaging, flirtatious with coeds (a campus legend persists that one flew away to Russia with him), and breathtakingly outspoken about the current state of things in the USSR. But when he began to recite his poems in Russian that night in Strong Auditorium, the Cold War and all that separated him politically from us quickly vanished, as we listened, utterly enthralled, to the music he was making out of Russian consonants and vowels. As a student said later, it sounded like a symphony of bells...and for the writers in the audience, the question came to mind, could they ever hope to achieve such musical effects with good old English?

Now, anyone who would deduce from such happy stories that the Plutzik Series has been mishap-free needs to know that Murphy's Law operates in the realm of literary events just as effectively as it does in other realms. With writers on stage and on campus, if things can go wrong, they probably eventually will. It's good to be able to say that our mishaps over four decades have rarely been caused by the visiting writers themselves. No-shows, drunken and stoned readings, boorish behavior at dinners and receptions—one hears of such disasters happening along the poetry circuits, but in truth they've not been a major part of the history of this Series, the result, maybe, of good planning, and no doubt of luck. But luck sometimes runs out, and planning won't always suffice when circumstances turn unruly.

One afternoon, when the late distinguished British science-fiction writer **Angela Carter** had begun to read to a large audience in a windowless auditorium on campus, all the lights went out, plunging the event into darkness and confusion. Before anything could be done, the lights came on again, and Carter good-humoredly resumed her reading—and then it was Lights Out again! A voice in the darkness suggested that the University had been installing motion detectors in lecture halls to save electricity—when they were empty, between classes, the detectors would switch off the lights. So we invited the audience to stand up, stretch, wave their arms, and sure enough the lights came on, and Ms. Carter again resumed her reading—and then she and her listeners were plunged into darkness again. So it went for a truly dreadful hour,

redeemed only by Angela Carter's gracious forbearance and persistence (she did eventually complete the reading of one story).

Of course there have been untimely ice-storms, dead or dying microphones, newspaper listings giving wrong dates, hours, and locations for readings, and extraneous Noises Off invading our hushed poetic premises—low-flying, circling airplanes, gangs of lawnmowers, once a backhoe that beeped loudly every time it went into reverse, and so on. (No one has ever been reckless enough, I think, to schedule a Plutzik Reading outdoors.)

On the occasion of **John Ashbery's** first reading at the University, part of the problem was unexpected "white noise" from the ventilation system, but compounding that problem was the poet's own very private reading style—head down, very soft and uninflected voice, no "patter" between poems—and of course the inherent difficulty of his poetry. At the end the audience response was polite but baffled. As it happened, Ashbery's elderly mother had brought members of her book club to the reading (Ashbery, after all, was born in Rochester, and grew up in neighboring Sodus), and as he left the podium to greet his mother and her friends, one of them called out, for all to hear, "Lovely reading, Johnny—didn't understand a word of it!" Ashbery just smiled, enigmatically.

Some of the Series' near-disasters have (almost) happened after readings, perhaps on the same principle whereby most mountaineering accidents occur on the descent. For example, the day after Ted Hughes and Richard Murphy's reading, they asked if they could visit Niagara Falls. Because of visa problems, we could only offer them the American Falls, which were extensively barricaded because of heavy snow and a recent ice-storm, with signs reading EXTREME DANGER—STOP HERE! But before we knew it the poets were over the barriers and skittering down over crusted snow and ice to the very brink! Likewise, when **Robert Lowell** asked if he could see the High Falls of the Genesee River (because of William Carlos Williams' celebration of the Falls and Sam Patch's famous leap over them, in Paterson), I spent an antic afternoon with him trying to get through the screen of old warehouses, derricks and industrial detritus that effectively hid the Falls from public view in those days before urban renewal and the creation of High Falls Park. Finally, after much scrambling, only a huge "semi" seemed to block our way to the view Lowell wanted—but just as he knelt to crawl under it, the truck roared to life and began to pull forward! As both situations were unfolding, the headlines were being instantly printed in my mind, in gothic type—CELEBRATED POETS VISIT ROCHESTER AND DIE IN BIZARRE ACCIDENTS! It is a relief even now, to affirm that no such catastrophes have actually happened in the course of our many literary visitations.

This survey of triumphs and what William Stafford would call "wrinkles" in the Plutzik Series could go on and on, as I have said, drawing on the memories of the thousands of students, faculty and staff, and townspeople who have come to watch and listen over the years, affirming in each reading the principle that a writer's work deserves to be heard aloud, vocalized by the writer him/herself, not just read off the printed page. Those who were fortunate enough to listen on campus to Hyam Plutzik reading from his own works-in-progress, the wonderful lyrics that make up *Aspects of Proteus* and *Apples from Shinar*, and especially from what became the verse-narrative masterpiece *Horatio*, would probably put those sessions at the head of their own list of unforgettable literary experiences. Lucky for them! But for all of us, what's worth celebrating here and now is the long life and ongoing success of the reading series that proudly bears Hyam Plutzik's name and example into the twenty-first century.