

Review of Hyam Plutzik's *32 Poems*

by [Chloe Moore](#)

Do you know what it's like to leave home? To move to a country where no one understands a word you say? How lost you feel when you can't vocalize your pain? For each person who goes through this, the experience is different. One thing that is consistent, however, is the fact that you're never truly alone. Throughout his poetic collection, *32 Poems/32 Poemas*, Hyam Plutzik expresses the ways in which poetry is more than just a beautiful version language, it is "the synthesizer, the humanizer of knowledge."

Considering his background, one might think that it would be hard to connect to Hyam Plutzik. Born a first generation American in a Yiddish speaking household, he would come to use his swift ability to manipulate the English language in beautiful pieces of art. Unbeknownst to him, his work would go on to reach people who could relate to his challenges directly through translation. Plutzik sadly passed away in 1962, but his memory will forever live on in his words, now available to a wider audience than he ever could have imagined.

32 Poems/32 Poemas is not only a collection of Plutzik's best and most impactful works, but also a collection of translations of said pieces, eloquently created by bilingual authors such as Layla Benitez-James, Rhina P. Espaillat, Pedro Medina, Gastón Virkel, Ximena Gómez and many more. These amazing contributors, in the words of the editor, George Henson "not only revive the memory and work of a brilliant American poet but also make his work universal." These contributors not only dabble in literature, but some are even immigration attorneys, art critics, civil rights activists, but most importantly are all passionate about poetry.



The Adirondack Review

I'm an immigrant myself. I understand the struggles of moving to a place where your main language is lost. And to be honest, I was skeptical of these poems having an impact on me, as I don't come from a Yiddish or even Spanish household. I was wrong. I can honestly say that Plutzik makes language irrelevant. You don't need to be able to understand the Spanish translations to understand their journey's. Every poem creates its own home for the reader to belong to. You realize that poetry is truly the synthesizer. Plutzik defies the boundaries of language or origin and creates "our mutual home, our shared culture and history, our same language" as put by Richard Blanco, the author of the Foreword and fifth inaugural poet in U.S. history.

Plutzik's poetry is not only unique in the sense of creating unity amongst strangers, but also in execution. He ignores the standardized poetic principle of "show, don't tell", which leaves most poems feeling soulless and empty. Instead, his poems show and tell, as he maintains a declarative power in his writing. He never seems to fail at telling us something through his poems. In "To My Daughter", he declares, "You must learn soon,soon, that even love / Can be no shield[...]." It's moments like this when Plutzik maintains his archaic voice while creating an intimate tone you want to listen to. Blanco puts it best when he states that "Plutzik understands that poetry that relies only by thoughts on subject matter — what he tells — is not enough; a poem without an emotional *raison d'être* (purpose) is a mute songbird."

The translators' works who make up the epitaph to Plutzik's work help make these poems an embodiment of culture, language, and a home for those who feel that they have none.