RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE PETER HUCHEL COLLECTION IN THE JOHN RYLANDS UNIVERSITY LIBRARY OF MANCHESTER

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Following the acquisition by the John Rylands University Library of Manchester in 1989 of some 350 books collected by the German poet Peter Huchel (1903–81) and his wife Dora (1904–85) in the years up to 1946, in March 1991 a second consignment of papers was acquired from Huchel’s daughter Susanne.1 Like the library, the papers relate to Huchel’s activities until just after the end of the Second World War. When Peter and Dora Huchel separated in 1946, the papers remained in Dora Huchel’s hands until her death in 1985. They then passed to their daughter. The papers consist of the following items: fifty-four letters and postcards to Dora and Susanne Huchel, of which fifty-two were written by Huchel between 1929 and 1945; twenty-four photographs, most of them featuring Huchel and dating from the first decade of the century to the mid-1930s; and three drafts of Dora Huchel’s hand-written account of her life with Peter Huchel. Miscellanea include typescripts of the poems ‘Abschied’, ‘Requiem’ and ‘Mädchen im Mond’; a cutting of ‘Die Kammer’ taken from the journal Die Kolonne; and a copy of Huchel’s school-leaving certificate.

In my introductory piece dealing with the Huchel library I sought to shed light on its significance for our understanding of the literary development of a poet hitherto regarded as a singularly ‘enigmatic figure’.2 My appreciation of Huchel’s development, which included historical and biographical as well as stylistic considerations, was supported by reference to a small selection of the letters and by the reproduction of four of the photographs which have now been added to the Huchel Collection. The material released by Susanne Huchel in 1991 complements the earlier consignment of books in that it provides the researcher for the first time with information essential for an informed appreciation of the first half of the poet’s life. It is in relation

1 For an introduction see my essay ‘The Peter Huchel Collection of German literature in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester’, Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester, 72 (1990), 135–52. The present paper was written during the tenure of a Research Fellowship awarded by the John Rylands Research Institute for the academic year 1991–92. I should like to thank Susanne Huchel as well as academic and library staff at the University of Manchester for their continuing support of my research.

to the years up to 1945 that the Huchel enigma is, arguably, at its most
impenetrable. As I have already written, its growth can be attributed
in some measure to a temperamental inclination towards privacy and
to the coincidence of a significant portion of Huchel’s career with that
heavily stigmatized period of recent Germany history, the era of
National Socialism. Indeed, much of the fresh material bears upon the
years the Huchels spent together from the mid-1920s to the mid-
1940s. However, documents relating to Huchel’s earliest years, which
are in fact no less shrouded in obscurity, indicate that other circum­
stances relating to his emotional and psychological life, themselves
decisive in the birth and growth of the poet, need to be taken into
account.

By its very nature, the new material is best suited to chronological
presentation, following the course of the poet’s biography. If the focus
will necessarily be on Huchel’s life, then some reference will also be
made where appropriate not only to the poetry but also to radio and
film work. Initially, however, some brief comment upon the most
substantial additions to the Collection – the correspondence and Dora
Huchel’s account – is in order. The correspondence consists of the
following items: thirty-seven letters and ten postcards from Peter
Huchel to his wife; two letters and three postcards to his daughter; a
postcard dated 18 May 1937 to Dora Huchel from the Huchels’ friends
Götz and Baila Kozuschek; and a postcard dated 21 May 1946 to Dora
Huchel from their Potsdam friend Rudolf Elter. As far as can be
ascertained, Huchel’s letters and postcards to his wife and daughter
constitute the poet’s only extensive correspondence from the period
before 1945. 3

The letters were not written with a view to future publication, and
they could not be described as carefully-wrought literary artefacts.
Nor, for that matter, are they a source for sustained speculation upon
aesthetic or philosophical questions, to which Huchel was in any case
not given. On a quite fundamental level, however, the correspondence
provides a great deal of information hitherto lacking regarding
Huchel’s movements and activities. His literary projects, ranging from
poetry to radio and film work, are a topic of discussion throughout.

3 Dora Huchel’s replies have not survived. An additional fifty or so letters from Huchel to his
family were destroyed by Soviet soldiers when in April 1945 they occupied Michendorf, the
village south of Potsdam where the Huchels lived. The only published correspondence from the
period in question involving Huchel is the sequence of two letters and three cards sent to him in
the late 1920s by his friend Hans Arno Joachim. See Hans Arno Joachim, Der Philosoph am
contain only a small selection of letters, which relate to his poetry and which were written by him
after the war. Subsequent references to the 1984 edition will be included in the main body of my
essay, volume and page numbers appearing in brackets. The holder of the copyright to Huchel's
works, his second wife and widow Monica Huchel, has forbidden the publication of his
correspondence with his first wife. As a result, there can be no quotation from it in the present
essay.
The letters also afford valuable insights into his everyday concerns, particularly during the war years when as many as forty-six were written. Like the pre-war correspondence, his wartime letters are characterized by the warmth and affection in the discussion of everyday matters typical of family correspondence. At every turn the reader encounters a tone in which gentle irony blends with a self-deprecating manner. Following conscription on 15 August 1941 life with his comrades-in-arms is described in some detail and with some enthusiasm, at least during the early period of service after the shock of basic training has been put behind him. On the quite rare occasions when wider issues are discussed such as German expectations of victory, the reluctant though conscientious soldier articulates the mild scepticism and desire for peace of someone essentially anti-militarist, whose prime aim, quite understandably, was survival. Letters from the final year of the war are coloured by an awareness of the impending collapse of the National Socialist system. These letters contain, on one occasion, a statement of veiled opposition and, on another, the expression of the sort of unguarded sarcasm that began to circulate in the closing stages of the war.

Like the correspondence, Dora Huchel’s account serves to fill in many of the gaps in Huchel’s biography. It also provides the researcher with vital clues in the pursuit of further biographical information relating especially to his background and early years. It must be said that Dora Huchel’s overriding concern when she began writing her account in 1983–84, as she struggled against illness during the final years of her life, was to set the record straight as she saw it. In her eyes, after they separated her husband pursued a quite deliberate strategy when, in the post-war period in East Berlin, he re-cast certain key aspects of his life spent with her. In doing this he created a self-image which was broadly consistent with the requirements of a political and cultural environment shaped by anti-fascist and socialist values, but which virtually excluded any acknowledgement of the life they had shared. He was helped in this by, in some cases, unknowing friends and critics such as Horst Lommer and Alfred Kantorowicz, who promoted him and his work in the early post-war years. In his book Verboten und verbrannt, which Kantorowicz co-authored with Richard Drews and which appeared in 1947, Kantorowicz, who had just returned from exile, wrote of Huchel, ‘Während der Hitlerzeit hat er geschwiegen’. In a speech from the same period he claimed, ‘Er hatte keinen Kompro-miβ mit den Übeltätern, den Kulturschändern geschlossen. Nicht um eines Nagels Breite hat er sich ihnen zur Verfügung gestellt, eher gehungert, gedarb. Jahre einsam und vollkommen zurückgezogen auf dem Lande gelebt’. The image of unimpeachable countryman close to

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4 Verboten und verbrannt: Deutsche Literatur zwölf Jahre unterbrochen, ed. Richard Drews and Alfred Kantorowicz (Berlin and Munch: Helmut Ullstein-Helmut Kindler Verlag, 1947), 77. Alfred Kantorowicz: 1948 piece ‘Peter Huchel’ was included in Kantorowicz, Deutsche Schöck-
peasant life and far removed from the corruption of the cultural world presided over by the Nazis had considerable appeal in the Soviet Zone and the German Democratic Republic. It was in fact only in the 1970s that there was some erosion of this image, and even then it remained essentially intact until after Huchel’s death.

As we shall see below, evidence from other sources – including Huchel’s own letters – provides corroboration of fundamental points made by Dora Huchel. It is, however, possible to place her account in a broader context of biographical interpretation not fully acknowledged by her despite her awareness of other major discrepancies. Within this broader context, the post-war re-casting of the self can be seen as the continuation of a pattern that recurs throughout the public presentation of his life. Available evidence points to a deeply ingrained habit of mind, established, at the latest, by the end of the 1920s in relation to his earliest years, on the basis of which Huchel concealed uncomfortable memories and experiences through the construction of a fictionalized self as child and man of the countryside. It is altogether in keeping with this self-mythologization that, with the striking exception of his childhood, the poet should have been extremely reticent about the actual details of his life. Hitherto only the barest outline has been available. It is true that after he left the G.D.R. for the West in 1971 he divulged a certain amount of information about his editorship of *Sinn und Form*. Otherwise, in speeches and interviews, as well as in written testimony, he returned repeatedly to the abiding influence of what he described as his upbringing on his grandfather’s farm in the Brandenburg village of Alt-Langerwisch.

sale: Intellektuelle unter Hitler und Stalin (Vienna, Cologne, Stuttgart, Zurich: Europa, 1964), 79-93 (84). Horst Lommer expressed similar sentiments in a newspaper profile ‘Das dichterische Wort Peter Huchels’, which was published by the organ of the Soviet Military Administration in Berlin, *Tägliche Rundschau*, on 4 June 1947. Lommer wrote, ‘Ich habe nur wenige Menschen gekannt, die mit einer so entschlossenen Erbitterung das nazistische Trugbild verabscheuten und bekämpften wie Peter Huchel... Peter Huchel ließ sich nicht korrumpieren, er machte keine Konzession’ Lommer’s piece was recently reprinted in *Peter Huchel: Materialien*, ed. Axel Viereggs (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 273-6.

5 See, for example, Ian Hilton’s book Peter Huchel: plough a lonely furrow (Dundee: Lochee Publications, 1986). It seems that Huchel wrote little of the autobiography commissioned by Suhrkamp in the 1970s. Undoubtedly, illness, too, played a part in his lack of progress. In addition to those mentioned above, portraits of Huchel can be found in the memoirs of friends such as Oda Schaefer and Karola Bloch, but their scope is invariably limited. These and other sources are referred to below.

6 For Huchel’s discussion of *Sinn und Form* see the interview conducted in 1972 by Hansjakob Stehle and published as ‘Gegen den Strom’ (ii, 373–82). See also Huchel’s short prose piece ‘Der Fall von *Sinn und Form*’ written in 1975 (ii, 326–9). An example among many of the way Huchel presented his rural upbringing is the carefully wrought statement in ‘Erste Lese-Erlebnisse’, an autobiographical piece from 1975, in which he wrote, ‘Der preußischen Streng meines Großvaters, der mich aufzog, und dem klaren Wassern meiner Heimat verdanke ich es, daß ich das lange Lineal fürchtete und das Schilfrohr liebte’ (ii, 317). Further statements by Huchel relating to his early years are included in the discussion of his childhood below. Lommer helped to set the tone in the early post-war period, when he wrote, ‘Auf einem markischen Bauernhof hat Peter Huchel seine Kindheit verbracht. In Alt-Langerwisch ist er aufgewachsen, Ziegelstreicher, Havelfischer, Schäfer und Landarbeiter waren seine Gefährten’. 
Yet it emerges, on the basis of information from Dora Huchel’s account and from other sources, that this idyllic rural childhood with his grandparents was largely a poetic construction. Through it, he concealed the reality of an unhappy suburban childhood with his parents, of which he was deeply ashamed.

Huchel’s self-mythologization proceeded upon the basis of this fiction of an idyllic childhood in Alt-Langerwisch. Moreover, through the deployment of the persona of unimpeachable countryman and poet in relation not only to the Third Reich but also, later, to the G.D.R., Huchel created a self-image that in time was taken to symbolize an unequivocally oppositional stance towards both regimes. This was the case especially in the West in the 1960s, at a time when Huchel’s life in the G.D.R. corresponded more closely than at any other time to this image. If critics have hitherto been disposed to accept Huchel’s self-image at face value, then this can be attributed to two principal factors: the persuasive manner in which Huchel presented himself as the embodiment of this image, and the readiness of critics to invest the poet with the moral and political authority which opposition to totalitarianism brings. There is, however, another side to the Huchel story. The very same self-image was attractive, for similar ideological reasons, to the cultural politicians of both the Third Reich and the G.D.R., who sought to promote Huchel accordingly. Thus, in the Soviet Zone and the early G.D.R. Huchel enjoyed a prestigious position among the intellectual élite. From 1945 to 1948 he was employed at the Berliner Rundfunk, from 1949 to 1962 as editor-in-chief of Sinn und Form, and from 1952 to 1971 he was a member of the German Academy of Arts. Equally, as my first essay on the Huchel Collection demonstrated, Huchel participated more fully in the literary life of the Third Reich than has generally been appreciated. Huchel’s position throughout was, then, much less clear-cut, his prime motivation less obviously moral and political than related to his sense of vocation as a writer.

Dora Huchel’s determination to counter what, with some considerable justification, she viewed as the distortions to which her memories of her life with Peter Huchel had been subjected is in evidence in the title of her first twelve-page draft entitled ‘Entgegnung auf grobe biographische Verfälschungen’. At its beginning she confronts head-on a number of the myths surrounding her husband, which relate to the first years of their relationship in the years 1925–30. Through this approach she manages to clear the ground, so that a narrative can begin to take shape already in the first draft, then more markedly in the short second draft of just over three pages, and more

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fully in the longer third draft of nineteen pages, in which her memories and emotions come to the fore in their own right. As her story unfolds, it emerges that despite rejection, the re-casting of the life she had spent with him and the pain these things had caused, her love for Peter Huchel continued unabated to the end of her life.

In the context of the present introductory essay extracts from the three drafts of Dora Huchel’s account will be presented to illuminate key biographical issues. However, comprehensive treatment of her testimony, including a detailed commentary, will be reserved for a separate publication. The short second draft begins with a section called ‘Kindheit’, which reads as follows:


In a very rare reference to his parents in an autobiographical piece published in 1931, which he later stated had been co-authored by his friend Hans A. Joachim, Huchel described their first meeting, writing that his father ‘hat als Ulanenwachtmeister im Sommermanöver bei Alt-Langerwisch eine wohlhabende Bauerntochter zur Frau genommen’ (ii, 213). The N.C.O. Fritz Huchel from the crack First Lancer Guards Regiment (Uhlans) stationed in Potsdam and the farmer’s daughter Marie Zimmermann married on 14 August 1897 at Bornstedt, Potsdam. They rented a flat near the Neuer Garten at Große Weinmeisterstraße 73, within walking distance of Fritz Huchel’s barracks near the Ruinenberg. A first son, Fritz Carl Hans, was born at the flat on 6 October 1897. As Dora Huchel writes, he was to die in the First World War. Huchel, in fact, never publicly acknowledged that he had an elder brother, nor until recently was his existence
recorded in critical literature. One of the few remaining traces of Fritz Carl Hans's life – and one of the earliest of his younger brother's – is the photograph, one of eight reproduced along with the present essay. The portrait of the two boys, which probably dates from 1905 or 1906, was taken in the centre of Berlin at the Globus Atelier, Leipziger Straße 132/137. A further reference to Fritz Carl Hans among the books in the Huchel Collection is contained in the copy of Reinhold Koser's *Aus dem Leben Friedrichs des Großen* (Stuttgart and Berlin: Cotta, 1912). It was presented by the authorities of the Präparanden-Anstalt Oranienburg to their pupil, the trainee teacher Fritz Huchel, on 27 January 1912, in commemoration of Frederick's 200th birthday. The recipient of this celebration of Prussian glory would presently give his life in its name.

Fritz Huchel senior, who originally came from the small village of Laasau in Silesia, had risen through the ranks to occupy one of four N.C.O. positions in his cavalry regiment. However, he left the army at the turn of the century for the Prussian civil service, where he was employed near the bottom of the hierarchy, initially as a 'Kanzlei-Diätar', then as a 'Kanzlei-Sekretär' and finally as a 'Geheimer

9 Dora Huchel conveyed information relating to Huchel's family background in a series of interviews which I conducted with her at her home in Mora, Sweden in September 1981. I was able to include some of this information in my article in 'Collected – recollected – uncollected? Peter Huchel's Gesammelte Werke', German Life and Letters, 40 (1986), 49-70.

10 In Susanne Huchel's view Fritz Carl Hans took after his father, while as a small boy her father was very much a Zimmermann. The family likeness receded during early manhood, but as he aged Huchel's face assumed the broad, heavy-boned features typical of the Zimmermanns. It was with the Zimmermann side of the family rather than the Huchel side that the poet identified.

11 Huchel included details of his father's background in the 'Ariernachweis', the document proving his Aryan descent, which he filled in for the Reichsschrifttumskammer in 1939. The document is deposited at the Berlin Document Center. Fritz Huchel was born in the village of Laasau in the Striegau area of Silesia on 15 August 1867. His father Karl Huchel worked as an 'Aufseher', an overseer of foreign labourers on an estate. (Knowledge of the work done by Huchel's paternal grandfather provides interesting new background information for the study of Huchel's depiction of the migrant worker in the well-known poem 'Der polnische Schnitter' ([45])). Karl Huchel had moved to Silesia from the village of Wieglitz in the Altmark, where he had been born on 30 March 1834. According to local records, Karl Huchel was the son of Johann Wilhelm Huchel, who was an innkeeper at Wieglitz. His father, in turn, was Johann Christoph Huchel, a linen weaver in Wieglitz. I should like to thank Revd Hans Heidenreich for supplying me with these details from local records. The information is wholly at variance with the poet's account of his father's background in the autobiographical piece 'Europa neunzehnhundertvierzig'. There one can read, 'Sein Vater, entstammend einer sächsischen Schäferfamilie, die 1546 bei der Kirchenvisitation in Harbke für einen Altar lehnspflichtig genannt wird und die im 19. Jahrhundert auf dunklem Prozeßweg Haus und Mühle an das gräfliche Stammgut verloren hat' ([ii, 213]). In response to a request for corroboration of the details presented by Huchel, the 'Rat des Kreises Oschersleben' wrote on 15 April 1982, 'Wir haben uns bemüht, in unseren Archivunterlagen hierüber Auskünfte zu finden. Die von Ihnen gemachten Angaben können wir nicht bestätigen. Es sind keine Angaben in den Personenstandsbüchern des Standesamtes der Gemeinde Harbke vorhanden. In einer Chronik der Gemeinde Harbke tritt der Name Jacob Huchel 1659 in Erscheinung. Es handelt sich hier um einen Kaufbrief des Huchel, welcher Schulmeister und wohnhaft in Badeleben war'. Clearly, Huchel's radical transformation of his father's background was intended to bring it into line with the Zimmermanns', thus making him a product of farming stock on both sides of the family. Seen in this light, his father's career as a soldier and civil servant marked a deviation from a path to which his son had returned as a poet celebrating rural life.
Kanzlei-Sekretär’. The titles became grander as the years of service mounted up. Fritz Huchel held these minor clerical positions first with the central administration for Brandenburg schools at Linkstraße 42 in the centre of Berlin, then from just before the war with the Ministry of Education on Unter den Linden. When he left the army, the family moved from Potsdam to Groß-Lichterfelde, a suburb to the south-west of Berlin. There they occupied a flat first at Chausseestraße 45, then at number 32 on the same street, which is known today as Hindenburgdamm. It was at Chausseestraße 32 that the Huchels’ second son Hellmut – as the poet was in fact called by his parents – was born on 3 April 1903. (He adopted the name Peter only in 1930. Huchel generally spelled his Christian name with one ‘t.’ I shall follow him in that.) In the decade immediately preceding the First World War the family moved three more times in the adjoining suburb of Steglitz, first to Adolfstraße 18, then to Marksteinstraße 7 (nowadays Suchlandstraße) and finally to Jeverstraße 18. In the autumn of 1915 the family returned to Potsdam and in the period up to the early 1930s lived at three addresses on Teltowerstraße (now Schlaatzstraße).12 Following Fritz Huchel’s retirement in the early 1930s, he and his wife Marie moved to the area where she had been born and spent her early years. They moved out first to Alt-Langerwisch and then to Michendorf.

Yet beyond the fact of Huchel’s birth, readers will search in vain among his autobiographical statements for any mention whatsoever of his childhood years spent with his parents and elder brother in Groß-Lichterfelde and Steglitz. As Dora Huchel writes, Huchel instead maintained that he had been brought up on his maternal grandparents’ farm in the Brandenburg village of Alt-Langerwisch. This rural upbringing, according to his later testimony, decisively shaped his poetic temperament and furnished him with the subject matter for poems such as ‘Kindheit in Alt-Langerwisch’ (i, 51) referred to by Dora Huchel. Huchel in fact went much further in his claims concerning his rural upbringing than the four years between the age of four and eight mentioned by Dora Huchel. In a statement broadcast in 1932, but published only posthumously Huchel presented a version of his rural upbringing in relatively measured terms. He began by referring to the village ‘in dem meine Mutter groß wurde – und in dem ich später aufwuchs’ (ii, 242). He then qualified his statement as follows:

12 Not untypical of the confusion surrounding Huchel’s childhood years is the recent statement, ‘Als Dreijähriger mit den Eltern (Friedrich, Beamter im Preußischen Kultusministerium; Maria) nach Potsdam gekommen (Abitur 1923), erlebte er sehr bewußt noch die vorindustrielle Welt des großbürgerlichen Bauernhofs im nahen Alt-Langerwisch’. The statement is contained in Axel Vieregg’s entry ‘Peter Huchel’ in Literatur Lexikon. Autoren und Werke deutscher Sprache, 15 vols., ed. Walther Killy ( Gütersloh and Munich: Bertelsmann, 1990), v, 492-5 (492–3). This version of Huchel’s childhood was, it seems, adopted in the light of the untenability of the previously accepted view, according to which one could read, ‘Peter Huchel: geboren 1903, aufgewachsen in einem Dorf der Mark Brandenburg’ (See Axel Vieregg, Die Lyrik Peter Huchels. Zeichenprache und Poesiemythologie (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1976), 9). See my article ‘Collected – recollected – uncollected . . . ’ for a first questioning of the story of Huchel’s rural childhood.

Such a relatively circumspect statement remained inaccessible to critical scrutiny during Huchel’s lifetime and was superseded in the post-war period by others, in which he gave the impression that his childhood had been spent on his grandparents’ farm prior to his secondary education in Potsdam. In the 1970s Huchel went so far as to make the following claim:


Unsurprisingly, critics simply followed Huchel’s own testimony until information imparted by Dora Huchel began to filter through into critical debate. 14 In 1981 she made the following statement regarding Huchel’s claims about his Alt-Langerwisch childhood:


Information now available concerning Huchel’s schooling corroborates Dora Huchel’s statement. 15 Huchel’s elementary schooling, in Germany normally four years from the age of six, took place at the Gemeindeschule 1, Ringstraße 54–55, Steglitz. 16 He evidently progressed satisfactorily and was able to proceed to the Steglitz Oberreal-

13 Huchel made this statement in the course of an interview with Ekkehart Rudolph in the series ‘Autoren im Gespräch’ broadcast by Süddeutscher Rundfunk on 31 August 1973. See also the interview with Karl Corino in 1974, durzig which Huchel stated, ‘Ich habe eine Kindheit auf dem Lande verlebt’ (ii, 393).

14 See, for example, Manfred Dierks, ‘Peter Huchel’, in Kritisches Lexikon zur deutschesprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur, ed. Heinz Ludwig Arnold (Munich: Edition Text und Kritik, 1982), 1–10 (1), where one can read, ‘Wegen Krankheit der Mutter verbrachte er seine Kindheit auf dem Hof des Großvaters im märkischen Alt-Langerwisch’ Hilton states, ‘His early upbringing therefore centred on rural village life’ (12) and writes further of ‘the Brandenburg Marches where he grew up on his grandfather’s farm’ (33)

15 Information relating to Helmut Huchel’s Steglitz schooling is deposited in the archive of the Hermann-Ehlers-Oberschule, Elisenstraße 3–4, formerly the Oberschule zu Berlin-Steglitz. I should like to thank the staff of the Hermann-Ehlers-Oberschule for their help during my visit. I should also like to thank Frau Fürstenberg of the Bezirksamt Steglitz for drawing the existence of the archive to my attention.

16 The site is now occupied by the Freiherr-von-Hunefeld-Grundschule, Lauenburgerstraße 114 (formerly Ringstraße).
schule, to which he was admitted on his tenth birthday, 3 April 1913. The choice of an Oberrealschule, with its emphasis on natural sciences, mathematics and modern languages rather than the classical philology of the traditional humanist Gymnasium or the compromise between 'old' and 'new' offered by the Real-Gymnasium, undoubtedly reflects the nature of the Huchels’ aspirations for their younger son. The boy was, however, only moderately successful during the two and a half years he spent at the Steglitz Oberrealschule before the Huchels left Steglitz for Potsdam.

As one would expect, and as he himself wrote, Helmut visited his grandparents at their farm in the country from an early age. There can be no doubt that he was looked after by them for a period of time when he was four, while his mother was being treated for a lung complaint at the nearby Beelitz-Heilstätten. Moreover, in his grandfather he encountered a wholly unconventional figure. In 1888 Friedrich Zimmermann had been persuaded to swap an evidently superior holding in Michendorf for one of the same size in less sought-after Alt-Langerwisch. He was apparently seduced by the rather grand Alt-Langerwisch manor house, which had been built by the Hohenzollerns in the late eighteenth century. There he aspired to a lifestyle appropriate to the lord of the manor, enjoying pastimes such as shooting game, compiling a library and writing poetry. He left the running of the farm to his wife. In 1931 his grandson offered the following characterization:

There can be no doubt that Friedrich Zimmermann and his rural world made a profound impression on the boy and that his significance by no means diminished after his death on 9 November 1913, when the boy was just ten. Yet the fact that Helmut came to identify with his grandfather’s world to the exclusion of his lower-middle-class suburban upbringing with his parents and elder brother testifies not merely to the attractiveness of the Alt-Langerwisch world but to a need to compensate for the deep unhappiness of his actual childhood. The frequent upheavals in the Huchel household as the family moved from

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17 The Michendorf and Alt-Langerwisch properties were both 130 'Morgen'. Further details of the Zimmermanns and their property are contained in chronicles of the two villages produced by local people. The Langerwisch chronicle was written in the eighties by Carla Kruger and Frank Nest, the Michendorf chronicle in 1954 by Alfred Schön. I should like to thank Carla Kruger for supplying me with relevant information from them.
one rather cramped flat to similar conditions in another, took place in an atmosphere that was generally acrimonious and at times violent. Fritz Huchel, the former career soldier, was accustomed to the strict and unquestioning discipline of the Prussian army, while Huchel’s mother, Marie, exhibited the uncouth manners of her peasant farming background and not a few of her father’s eccentricities. There was only the most rudimentary communication between Fritz and Marie Huchel, little understanding of their children’s needs, and certainly little intellectual stimulus. The sensitive Helmut, it seems, recoiled at the shock of this thoroughly unpleasant atmosphere. Its sheer awfulness was compounded by a schooling on the eve of and during the First World War, which set great store by the inculcation of the glories of Prussian militarism embodied by the Kaiser. The deeply patriotic Fritz Huchel was wholly sympathetic to such ‘teaching’ and viewed the war itself as an opportunity to demonstrate Prussian worth. Even though he lost his elder son in that futile struggle, he continued later to display the incorrigible attitudes that came from his blind adulation of his ideal, the Kaiser. The grotesque irony of the situation would surely not long have been lost on the younger Helmut, who presently experienced, too, the misery and turmoil to which German society was exposed in the aftermath of the war through the folly of its ruling élites. The boy’s rebellion against school and home was not long coming. In 1981 Dora Huchel estimated that Huchel’s loss of respect for his parents could be traced back to his early teenage years. It was accompanied by academic underachievement. Yet, through poetry the boy discovered in himself the gift to create his own world, into which he withdrew from the squalor of his surroundings. He could draw, too, on the memory of his poet-grandfather as a powerful ally in his endeavours. In the place of memories which he could not later countenance – but as is the way with such things returned to the surface of consciousness in poetic images which exist on the periphery of his major lyrical themes – he sought in time to ground his existence and identity in the seeming stability and tranquillity of rural Brandenburg. It was against this background that in the mid- to late 1920s, under a variety of other influences, he came to construct the poetic myth of his ‘Kindheit in Alt-Langerwisch’.

These were the circumstances in which the poet was born, as a process was set in train which in time culminated in re-creation of the self in the image of his grandfather and his world. Huchel’s earliest extant compositions date from 1918. They demonstrate that already as a fifteen-year-old he was beginning to develop a sense of self far removed from his immediate background, if not so far from his late grandfather, though the language, ideas and style of these compositions owe more to the influence of the Youth Movement than to Friedrich Zimmermann and his Alt-Langerwisch kingdom. Despite the evidence of early independent thought and creativity, it is quite consistent with the values inculcated at home and at school that in
March 1920 Huchel as a sixteen-year-old Potsdam schoolboy should have taken part in the Kapp Putsch on the side of the right-wingputschists. He described the event as a seminal experience in 1931 (ii, 215-17) and referred to it again in the 1970s as follows:


Dora Huchel echoes his account, when she writes in her second draft: 'Mit 17 (sic) Jahren "kämpfte" er 1920 in Potsdam auf Seiten Kapps und kam mit einem Oberschenkelschuß ins Krankenhaus, wo er Le feu las und "bekehrte" wurde'. The socialist Barbusse’s account of the barbarity of trench warfare would surely have struck a chord. Yet Huchel’s political consciousness did not then or later extend to any explicit commitment to the politics of working-class victory and the activism which such a commitment implies. His position by the mid-1920s as a student had become one of sympathy with the aims of the left, and, as he himself acknowledged in 1931, any ‘conversion’ following his political initiation in the Kapp Putsch had not taken place overnight:


If not so much politics, then girls were an early distraction for the handsome schoolboy. In 1931 he suggested that already during the war he had gathered his first sexual experiences:


Whatever we may make of this passage, which probably owes something to Hans Arno Joachim’s prose style and perhaps, also, something to his imagination, love poems are among Huchel’s earliest compositions. According to Dora Huchel, the first were addressed to Erna Kretschmar, a local girl, who remained a friend of the family. Others from the early 1920s were written for Lydia, a fair-haired girl
The boy's academic record during his two and a half years at the Oberrealschule in Steglitz had been moderate, and the distractions of adolescence made for no improvements at the Potsdam Oberrealschule. He studied there for eight years before he was awarded 'Abitur' in the autumn of 1923. His leaving certificate reveals that he twice had to repeat a six-month period in the upper school. In 1931 Dora Huchel recalled being told by Huchel's schoolfriend and neighbour Ewald Fritsch that he had once been asked to leave. She recalled further that her husband had said he had scraped through 'Abitur' 'mit Hängen und Würgen, Physik mit Hilfe von Zeichensprache'. He excelled only in German and with few exceptions, one being Religion where his performance was good, all his marks were on the pass-fail borderline. His academic achievements scarcely indicated potential for further study. It was not uncommon in such cases for Oberrealschule leavers to pursue a career in commerce. Huchel's leaving certificate contains the statement that he was leaving school 'um Kaufmann zu werden'.

Whatever the views of teachers and parents, he clearly had no intention of doing any such thing and managed to secure his parents' financial support to enable him to enter university. It was, though, more with a view to pursuing his vocation as a poet than any systematic programme of study that on 19 October 1923 he registered as a student of German and Philosophy at the Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin. After three semesters in Berlin, during which his first poem 'Kniee, weine, bete' (i, 266) was published in the 1924 Dürer Kalender, he spent the summer semester of 1925 at Freiburg, where he got to know Hans Arno Joachim. Joachim became one of

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18 In a letter to his wife written in mid-November 1941 from Neubrandenburg, where he was stationed, Huchel reported that Erna Kretschmar had returned his juvenilia to him. According to Dora Huchel these poems were in a hand-written collection Für das Tausendschönchen dedicated to Erna Kretschmar. Huchel took the collection with him when in 1947 he removed his possessions from their house in Michendorf. There is no reference to the collection in the 1984 Huchel edition. It seems unlikely that the hand-written collection Erste Gedichte, 1918–1923 referred to in the edition (i, 451) is identical with it. On p. 14 of the manuscript of Erste Gedichte, 1918–1923, which is deposited in the Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach am Neckar (folder one), there is a reference to Lydia in a couplet, which was not included in the edition. The couplet shows similarities in style and diction to other love poems from the early twenties also surely addressed to the fair-haired Lydia. Apparently writing on the basis of stories which Huchel told him during his stay at the Villa Massimo in Rome in 1971–72, Karl Alfred Wolken wrote of Huchel's adolescent adventures, 'So brennt der junge Huchel sechzehnjährig mit seiner Klavierlehrerin durch' Wolken's essay 'Zwiesprache mit der Wirklichkeit' appeared in Über Peter Huchel, ed. Hans Mayer (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), 183–203 (187). For Dora Huchel the story of Huchel's 'flight' related not to a piano teacher but to Erna Kretschmar, who was somewhat younger than him and whose father caught them alone on returning home one day. By the end of the day all had been forgiven. The story was apparently frequently told in Huchel's parents' household.

19 I should like to thank Dr W. Schultze, archivist of the Humboldt University, for supplying me with information relating to Huchel's registration as a student in Berlin.
Huchel’s closest friends in the period before 1933. He arranged other early publications, one with Alfred Kantorowicz, another close friend from the late 1920s onwards. These publications in 1925 and 1926 were followed by silence for the rest of the decade as Huchel sought to develop his own distinctive voice.

Huchel looked further afield for the winter semester of 1925–26, embarking on his first trip abroad to Vienna. In her second draft Dora Huchel recalls her first encounter with Huchel and the early stages of their relationship:


Wir waren bei vielen Sterngrucknächten des Professor Thomas (eines Siebenbürgers) dabei, die in die Wiener Umgebung führten, ein durchaus von meiner besorgten Wirtin gebilligtes Unternehmen.

Beyond its significance in capturing something of a female student’s
life in Vienna in the mid-1920s, Dora Huchel’s account provides invaluable insights into Huchel’s lifestyle as a student during the early stages of their relationship. 20 In her first draft she further characterizes his concerns as follows, ‘Er selbst fühlte sich weniger von der Wissenschaft als vielmehr fast ausschließlich von Euterpe angezogen, was dann schnell hintereinander und u.a. einige Liebesgedichte entstehen ließ: “Die Kammer”; “Holunder”; “Mädchen im Mond”. The records of the University of Vienna indicate that during the summer semester of 1926 Huchel registered for four courses: ‘Grundriß der Poetik’, taught by Professor Robert Franz Arnold; ‘Nietzsche als Philosoph’, taught by Professor Robert Reininger; ‘Soziologie des modernen Dramas (erläutert an Ibsen)’, taught by Professor Emil Reich; and ‘Platons Ideenlehre’, taught by Professor Heinrich Gomperz. 21 Yet, as Dora Huchel points out, Huchel was much more concerned with his own compositions that with formal study, and like her he was eager to explore the cultural life of the city and the surrounding area. A highlight was their trip to the Wachau area. 22 In his acceptance speech delivered in Vienna in 1972 on receipt of the Austrian State Prize for European Literature – a text probably unknown to Dora Huchel – he touched upon some of their common memories of Viennese life without, however, referring to his female companion. He began his speech as follows:

Den Boden Wiens nach über vierzig Jahren wieder zu betreten, gleicht fast einem Abenteuer. Damals, es war das Jahr 1926, studierte ich an der Wiener Universität zwei Semester Literatur. Empfohlen vom Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag, Potsdam, kam ich mit Herrn Dr. Beer in Verbindung, der Intendant am Volkstheater war. Bald befreundete ich mich mit dem Dramaturgen und Dichter Franz Theodor Csokor. Unvergeßlich die Abende in seinem kargen Dreckszimmer, unvergeßlicher noch als die Premieren mit Elisabeth Bergner oder mit Mossi . Wien nahm mich auf, 20 An early token of Huchel’s love was the present he made to Dora Lassel of Kafka’s *Die Verwandlung*. The copy, now in the Rylands Huchel Collection, contains the dedication ‘Für Dora Ostern 1926 Helmut’. For further information regarding this and other early Kafka editions in the Huchel Collection, see ‘The Peter Huchel Collection’, 142–3.

21 I should like to thank Dr Kurt Mühlberger, archivist of the University of Vienna, for supplying me with information relating to Huchel’s studies in Vienna. Interestingly, Emil Reich’s *Ibsens Dramen* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1925) is among the books in the Rylands Huchel Collection.

22 On 10 May 1926 Kantorowicz published Huchel’s Viennese poem ‘Stadtpark im Frühling’ in the Mannheim newspaper *Neue Badische Landes-Zeitung*, of which he was arts editor. A typescript among Huchel’s papers in fact bears the title ‘Wiener Stadtpark’ (i. 373). Dora Huchel’s third draft contains the following additional information concerning their trips into the country: ‘Der Frühling kam und mit ihm die Entdeckung der näheren und weiteren Wiener Umgebung, die Donauauen, natürlich auch Prater, Schönbrunn, berühmte Grüber, Wienerwald, die “Fleuring”-Orte, Nachtwanderungen in Astronomie unter fachkundiger Führung. Der Höhepunkt all Glücks aber war eine etwa zehntägige Wanderung durch die Wachau, die dann den Dichter zu “Holunder” und “Mädchen im Mond” inspirierte und eine nostalgische Erinnerung blieb’. Eleven years after the trip to the Wachau Huchel recalled it in a letter sent to his wife from Franconia in December 1937. The countryside along the Main reminded him of the Wachau. He suggested to his wife that when their daughter was older they might take a second honeymoon along the Main. See below for further details of the trip to Franconia undertaken with Gunter Eich and A. Artur Kuhnert.
eine Fülle von Anregungen stürmte auf mich ein, Theater, Kunstausstellungen, Konzerte (ii, 312-13).

He recalled, too, ‘auch ich müßte von 60 Mark in einer kleinen Kammer in der Florianigasse mein Leben bestreiten’ (ii, 313), although for him, unlike Dora Huchel, the circumstances surrounding the composition of the love poem ‘Die Kammer’ did not apparently figure as a prominent memory. Instead, he conveyed his abiding impressions of artistic life in Vienna. In doing so he stylized himself, in what by late in his life had become his accustomed public manner, as the farm boy bringing with him to the city his rural mode of perception:


The proximity of the Huchels’ flat on Teltowerstraße to the main Potsdam railway station suggests daily exposure to sounds quite different from the clanking of milk churns. Huchel’s projection of the farm boy/countryman image, within which actual experience is assimilated and transformed, can be traced further in his accounts of his life in the later 1920s and 1930s. This certainly applies to his comments on what he did after Vienna. In the 1972 speech he referred to Paris ‘wohin ich dann für einige Jahre ging’ (ii, 313), while in his last major public appearance, in Brussels in 1977 on receipt of the Europalia Prize for Literature, he enlarged upon his stay in France as follows:


The length of Huchel’s stay in France was in fact more modest than he suggested and it began a little later in the 1920s. Nor, it seems, were

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23 In fact, following Friedrich Zimmermann’s death in 1913 his widow Emilia and son and heir Carl Otto Friedrich began to sell off the property, a process completed in 1919-20 with (i) the sale of the manor-house and land to a local mill owner, Heinrich Weber; and (ii) the sale to P. Funke of farm buildings and a ‘Landschloßchen’ that Friedrich Zimmermann had built for his son at the end of the nineteenth century. This information is contained in the Langerwisch chronicle referred to above in footnote 17.

24 Hitherto the beginning of Huchel’s stay in France has been dated in the light of what he wrote in 1931: ‘Nach sechs Semestern Berlin, Freiburg, Wien liegt es näher, Reisen zu machen als auf der Universität zu bleiben. Die Städte: Paris, Marseille, Bordeaux . . .’ (ii, 217). Thus,
his activities there quite as he presented them. Dora Huchel’s account includes a short section relating to the academic year 1926–27, which they spent together in Berlin/Potsdam after Vienna and before Paris. According to her first draft they left Vienna at the beginning of August 1926: ‘Schließlich schwerer Abschied in verschiedene Richtungen, Huchel nach Potsdam, wo seine Eltern damals wohnten, ich nach Kronstadt zu Eltern und Bruder. Unzählige Briefe und die Gewißheit des Wiedersehens im Herbst trösteten uns’. The letters exchanged that summer between Potsdam and Kronstadt, Romania, have not survived. The short section in the first draft entitled ‘Berlin 1926/27’ is in fact preceded by the following statement: ‘Diese Aufzeichnungen sind ein Wettrauf mit der Krankheit. Es kann nur noch Stichworte geben’. The section reads as follows:


During that year, not least no doubt for financial reasons, Huchel sought to maintain towards his parents the pretence that he was studying, and he registered at Berlin University on 4 November 1926. The university authorities, however, terminated his registration on 24 January 1927 ‘wegen Unfleiß’. Huchel managed to keep this news from his parents, who continued to finance his ‘studies’ later while he was in Paris. Dora Huchel’s reference to the manner in which he addressed his parents testifies not to any liberal upbringing, but rather to a lack of respect for figures who had, in his eyes, long since forfeited any right to be regarded as rôle models. He was particularly ashamed of his mother. According to Dora Huchel in 1981, while they were still in Vienna he said, ‘Meine Mutter stelle ich dir nie vor’. For Dora Huchel it was ‘wirklich wunderlich, daß er der Sohn solcher Eltern war’. Through the adoption of the Langerwisch childhood he would in time banish the suburban background that he shared with them and in his poetic imagination ‘save’ his mother from what she had become by

for example, the table of Huchel’s life in the 1984 edition follows Huchel in stating that his stay in France began in 1926 (i, 459). In dating the end of the period in France as 1928 (i, 459), the edition apparently follows a note inserted by Huchel in the collection Gedichte (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1948), where he states (p. 100) that a number of poems in the collection were written in Paris and the South of France in 1927 and 1928.

19 See footnote 19 above. Huchel applied for a leaving certificate on 26 November 1927. He was sent it on 9 December 1927.
transporting her back into the rural world where she had spent her early years.

Huchel's background contrasted sharply with Dora Lassel's, and this very contrast was surely a factor in his later dismissal of his parents from any substantial role in his upbringing. Dora Lassel came from a line of Transylvanian-Saxon academics, clergymen and business people long established in Kronstadt, where her father was vicar of St Bartholomew's Church. Eugen Lassel had studied Theology, Philology, History and Philosophy at Marburg, Budapest and Berlin. After four years of study he was awarded his doctorate in Marburg on 5 August 1890.26 It was understood that when Dora had completed her studies in German, French and English she would take up a teaching post in Kronstadt. After Vienna and Berlin a period of study in France was, it could be argued, necessary preparation for examinations to be taken in Bucharest. Thus, it was Dora Lassel's studies that took the couple to Paris in the autumn of 1927, which in the event turned into a stay of two academic years.

In her first draft Dora Huchel describes the period in France as follows:

**Frankreich-Paris 1927/28 und 28/29**


In **Über Peter Huchel** ist auf Seite 187 Folgendes zu lesen: "Aber um die Mitte der Zwanzigerjahre streunt Huchel viereinhalb Jahre durch Frankreich als ein der Polizei durchaus verdächtiges Subjekt, einmal Land-, einmal Hafenarbeiter, standig ausweisungsbedroht . . . ' Wahr ist nur, daß diese Behauptung ein vollkommener Blödsinn ist, ansonsten aber eben kein wahrhaftes Wort enthält.

Wir haben von Paris aus 2 Reisen unternommen.

2. Grenoble, Busfahrt hinauf nach Corenc, dort ein Häuschen gemietet.

Fällt ein Hang weidenstruppig, moorig.
Feld und Wiese tausendohrig horchen groß auf Grillensang.

26 In 1905 Eugen Lassel wrote an account of his career up to that date. A copy of the account is in Susanne Huchel's possession. Huchel composed the poem 'Requiem' (i, 36) following Eugen Lassel's death in 1932.

Huchel had scraped through French at 'Abitur' despite failing the oral examination and was able to fall back on his school knowledge in his encounter with the rich life of the French capital. In 1981 Dora Huchel stated that Huchel's parents became concerned at the lack of any direction in their son's 'studies'. They wrote urging her to persuade him to embark on a serious course of study. He was, however, busy soaking up the atmosphere of the city and enjoying its pleasures to the full. Composition remained, as ever, his priority over study. Kantorowicz, Joachim and another friend Wilma Papst joined the couple in the spring of 1928, and the three men took a summer holiday in Brittany on the island of Bréhat, while the two women visited Kronstadt. The couple then returned to Paris for the new academic year. From Berlin Joachim wrote a postcard to Piese, as Huchel was nicknamed, on 26 September 1928. It was addressed to Huchel at rue Rollin 13, Paris, Hotel Liberty and conveys something of the flavour of their Bohemian lifestyle:


Huchel's post-war account of his period in France was, however, informed by quite different emphases. Both Huchel's 1977 speech and the 1972 essay by Karl Alfred Wolken, from which Dora Huchel quotes,28 inflate the period in question and depict the poet as earning his living as a manual labourer far away from the mainstream of literary life. In these and other accounts the poet has generally been depicted as toiling on the land as a farm labourer but there are variants, as Wolken's docker shows. As early as 1947 Horst Lommer wrote that in these years Huchel had gained employment 'als Hirt, als Knecht, als Gelegenheitsarbeiter'.29 The story of Huchel as farm

27 Der Philosoph am Fenster, 216. The explanation offered by the editor for the meaning of the word 'Pica' in Joachim's letter is somewhat wide of the mark. The word is Romanian and means 'daughter'. The word's spelling is normally 'fica'. Huchel used the word as a nickname for his Romanian girlfriend and continued to use it as a form of address for his wife in their correspondence. In his letters Huchel frequently used his own nickname Piese, which he had been called since childhood.
29 Lommer, 'Das dichterische Wort Peter Huchels'.
labourer has been deployed most frequently in relation to the Corenc trip, which may have had particularly difficult emotional associations for both of them, for all their apparently relaxed Bohemian attitudes. The lines quoted by Dora Huchel were in fact published in the Berlin *Vossische Zeitung* on 1 June 1930 as the first stanza of the poem ‘Wiese bei Corenc’, which was collected only posthumously (i, 19–20). The poem contains two further stanzas, which read:

Durch die mondverwachsenen Weiden
weht dein Haar.
Soll ich eine Rute schneiden
für das Mädchen, das mir untreu war?

Längst schlägt schon der Vogel, der beim Namen
unsre Liebe nennt.
Krötenrufe kamen,
und des Sommers Herz verbrennt.

In a conversation with a friend, the Czech poet Ludvik Kundera, at the turn of the 1960s Huchel suggested that he had briefly entertained thoughts of suicide in Corenc on account of a love affair. It would appear that both Dora Huchel, with her memory of only the first stanza of the poem, and Peter Huchel, with his story of labouring on the land, were attempting to block out painful aspects of the days in Corenc.

In the post-war period, perhaps in order to convey the impression of the hard-won financial independence of someone making his way in literary life, Huchel maintained that he had undertaken other employment in Paris. In the 1977 speech, for instance, he referred to work in a ‘Übersetzungsverlag’. The table of Huchel’s life in the 1984 edition refers to ‘Übersetzungen für die *Vossische Zeitung*’ (i, 459). In 1981 Dora Huchel disputed such claims. She stated that while in Paris they knew a German Jew called Desiré Schwarz, who ran a small translation operation. They occasionally visited him at work but neither she nor Huchel did translations. In this case, no further corroborative evidence is available, but it can be said that Dora Huchel’s version of events is not out of line with the pattern already observed of Huchel’s transformation of other elements of experience.

Huchel and Dora Lassel were aware that after a second year in Paris she was expected to return to Romania. After Corenc, however, they both returned to Potsdam. In her third draft Dora Huchel writes

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30 In the 1984 edition one can read in a note to the poem ‘Wiese bei Corenc’; ‘Gemeint ist das Bergdorf Corenc in der Nahe von Grenoble, wo P.H. 1928 für einige Monate als Knecht bei einem Kleinbauer arbeitete’ (i, 372). Their stay in Corenc was almost certainly in the autumn of 1929. A card from Joachim to Huchel at Corenc published in *Der Philosoph am Fenster* (216–17) is dated 8 October 1929.

31 At the time Kundera was preparing a biography of Huchel, which, in the event, was not completed. Kundera recorded their conversations in a notebook, which he kindly showed me during a visit from 23–28 September 1981. Kundera’s notes suggest that retrospectively Huchel looked upon this emotional crisis with his accustomed ironic distance.
that from Potsdam she wrote to her parents announcing her intention to stay in Germany. In late November she travelled home in order to talk to her parents about her situation. In 1981 she stated that she and Huchel had arranged that he should meanwhile write, informing her parents that they wished to stay together. The Lassels sought to dissuade their daughter from such a course of action, arguing that she had not thought things through. Huchel’s earliest surviving letters to Dora Lassel, from December 1929 shortly after her departure from Potsdam, relate to this delicate situation. Both letters, which were signed Helmut, are written in a simple, generally correct French, perhaps in order to protect their content from prying eyes. They are informed by a playful tone not too far removed from Joachim’s in his correspondence with Huchel. The first was written in Berlin at the flat of their friend Wilhelm Blaβ, with whom Huchel had shared in Vienna. He expressed his sorrow at the thought of Dora’s room in Potsdam, in which they had said goodbye. He reported that together with Joachim he had paid visits the previous evening to Doblin and Brecht. He urged her to draw strength from the thought that in two weeks they would be back together in Potsdam. In the second letter, signed, too, by Joachim and another person, who went by the name of Lala, he offered further words of comfort and encouragement. Clearly referring to the future of their relationship, he stated that he had not yet written to her parents; he was waiting for news from Dora and her father.

Eugen Lassel, it seems, played for time. His daughter was, however, not prepared to accept her parents’ advice. Using money that Huchel had borrowed from a friend, she fled Kronstadt and travelled back to Potsdam by train. In her third draft Dora Huchel continues the story as follows:

Huchel schrieb an meine Eltern, worauf mein Vater ankam und die Situation sondierte, nicht ohne daß sich beim Kennenlernen von Huchels Eltern unbeschreiblich komische Situationen ergaben. Von “Helmut” Huchel war mein Vater sehr angetan und unterhielt sich mit ihm sehr angeregt und erklärte sich außerdem bereit, uns auch nach Kräften finanziell zu unterstützen. Alles endete höchst friedlich. Im März 30 Standesamt und zu Ostern in Kronstadt kirchliche Trauung.

Fritz Huchel had, it seems, not felt able to receive such a high-ranking guest without the aid of some libation, but this did little to improve the quality of communication. Nevertheless, Eugen Lassel, a man with a deep interest in literature, was at once taken by his daughter’s poet friend. Neither she nor Huchel set any great store by convention but Eugen Lassel’s paternal authority prevailed. It was agreed that since they wished to stay together marriage would be the appropriate course. In her first draft Dora Huchel further describes arrangements:

Am 8. März 1930 heirateten wir standesamtlich in Potsdam und fuhren Ende März oder Anfang April nach Kronstadt, wo die kirchliche Trauung durch meinen Vater
vollzogen wurde. Durch die finanzielle Unterstützung meiner Familie konnte sich Huchel zunächst völlig sorgenlos seiner Muse widmen, nach dem Tode meines Vaters wurde es knapper, doch bis Ende 1943 kam immer noch regelmäßig ein beträchtlicher Zuschuß, samt regelmäßigen Futterpaketen. 1944 aber war nichts mehr möglich.

The church wedding took place at Eugen Lassel’s church, St Bartholomew’s, on 21 April 1930. A wedding photograph shows that the couple did not take the occasion so very seriously. Some lack of regard for convention can be detected in Huchel’s dress: for the occasion he had borrowed a suit from Alfred Kantorowicz which was several inches too short in the leg and not the best of fits at other points. A further photograph from the following day shows the couple having a meal at the Lassels’ with Dora’s parents and a close friend of hers.

In addition to pledging their financial support for the marriage, the Lassels also paid for the honeymoon and a stay in Kronstadt, which lasted until September. The honeymoon is described by Dora Huchel in draft three:


Dora Huchel’s memories of the honeymoon contrast sharply with the prevailing wisdom concerning Huchel’s life in the late 1920s and early 1930s as one of toil, adventure and some deprivation spent on the margin of legality. When in September they returned to Germany, they lived briefly with Huchel’s parents in Potsdam. They then rented a studio flat on the Kurfürstendamm for a short while, before in early 1931 they moved into a large flat near the Bülowplatz, which they shared with Kantorowicz, Joachim and Wilma Papst. Kantorowicz was working as arts editor for Vossische Zeitung, Joachim had begun to publish essays in Neue Rundschau and Wilma Papst was writing her doctorate on Frege. In 1930 Huchel began to publish regularly once

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32 The table of Huchel’s life in the 1984 edition contains the following entries relating to his marriage and the period he spent on his honeymoon and in Kronstadt: ‘1929-31 Reisen nach Ungarn, Rumänien, in die Türkei. 1930 Huchel heiratet in Potsdam Dorothea Lassel aus Kronstadt, Siebenbürgen’ (i, 459).

33 Wilma Papst’s doctorate, Gottlob Freges Philosophie, was published in 1932 in Berlin. It is among the books in the Rylands Huchel Collection. Kantorowicz produced an intriguing portrait of his circle of friends and acquaintances in the 1920s and early 1930s in the novel Der Sohn des Bürgers. After the war it was published in serialized form under the pseudonym Helmut Campe in Kantorowicz’s journal Ost und West. It contains the following portrait of Huchel: ‘Peter Hügelin war ein sanfter, verträumter Jungling, der mit leiser, klangloser Stimme charmante
more after a break of four years. Major outlets for his poetry were *Vossische Zeitung*, through Kantorowicz, and *Die literarische Welt*, edited by Willy Haas. It was Haas who did most to promote Huchel in the early 1930s. The Huchels moved out of the city for the summer of 1931, when they rented a little house together with Kantorowicz at Kiadow on the Havel. In the autumn they were among the first inhabitants of the artists' colony in Wilmersdorf, where they rented a flat at Kreuznacherstraße 52.

It was during the early 1930s that Huchel made the acquaintance of some of the figures associated with the journal *Die Kolonne*, who would be among his closest friends during the Nazi years. In 1931 through Kantorowicz the Huchels got to know Horst Lange and Oda Schaefer. 1932 saw the beginning of his friendship with Elisabeth Langgässer and that year in fact signalled something of a break-through: Huchel was awarded the *Kolonne* prize for poetry and his work was anthologized for the first time. However, the beginnings of personal success coincided with the deepening of the German political crisis. Soon after Hitler came to power on 30 January 1933 many friends and acquaintances fled Germany, including Haas, Kantorowicz and Joachim. Many left the artists' colony, which had become a target for SA attacks and house searches. In the third draft Dora Huchel describes events as they affected them:


Willy Haas recalled his first encounter with the poet in his post-war essay ‘Ein Mann names Peter Huchel’, which was published in *Hommage für Peter Huchel*, edited by Otto F. Best (Munich: Piper, 1968), 55–9 (55). Haas writes, ‘Ich sagte zu mir, daß man sich angesichts dieser Verse entscheiden müsse, und beschloß, daß ich alles, was er etwa noch schreiben würde und mir anvertraute, veröffentlichen würde’

35 For details of signed first editions of works by Langgässer and Lange in the Rylands Huchel Collection, see ‘The Peter Huchel Collection’, 146–7.

36 For another account of house searches in the artists' colony which includes mention of the Huchels, see Karola Bloch, *Aus meinem Leben* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1981), 80–1. After the war in East Berlin Huchel claimed that he had been storing illegal communist material from Kantorowicz’s cell when his flat was searched. He included the claim in a questionnaire dated 24 May 1948, which is deposited in the archive of the Akademie der Künste zu Berlin, in the ‘Teilbestand Sinn und Form’, reference number 59. Neither Dora Huchel’s nor Karola Bloch’s account offers corroboration. In his *Deutsches Tagebuch* (Berlin: Verlag europäische ideen, 1980), i. 253, Kantorowicz writes that following his decision to become politically active with the K.P.D. in the autumn of 1931 he and Huchel drifted apart.
Dora Huchel quotes here from Haas's post-war essay on Huchel, in which he writes that in 1933: ‘Ich kehrte in meine Vaterstadt Prag zurück und gründete wiederum eine Zeitschrift, Die Welt im Wort. Unter anderen lud ich auch ihn zur Mitarbeit ein; aber er sagte ab. Er habe sich entschlossen, schrieb er, das Dichten bis auf weiteres ganz aufzugeben und durch die Arbeit seiner Hände zu leben’. Once again the persona of the manual worker emerges to cover Huchel’s involvement in a reality that he negotiated in a manner that was anything but as clear-cut as Haas suggests. The evidence of Huchel’s poetry published in anthologies, newspapers and journals in the mid-1930s indicates that he did not give up writing, nor cease participating in literary life. A shift from lyric poetry took place in the mid-1930s, as work produced for broadcast on the radio gradually took over as Huchel’s main area of activity. This shift undoubtedly derived in part from economic pressure following Eugen Lassel’s death in 1932. Already in December 1932 Haas had arranged for Huchel to present his poetry on the radio, and in 1933 he developed this activity with further readings. Huchel was introduced to radio play work by Elisabeth Langgässer’s husband, Wilhelm Hoffmann, who worked for the Jugendfunk in Berlin. He extended his contacts to Harald Braun at the Reichssender Berlin and, from 1936 to 1939, to Gerhard Heller at the Kurzwellensender. Further important contacts in the later 1930s were A. Artur Kuhnert and Veit Roßkopf at the Reichssender Leipzig. The first broadcast of a radio play by Huchel took place on 16 December 1934 (ii, 410), after the Huchels had spent much of that year with Dora’s family in Kronstadt.

According to Dora Huchel, in all the poet spent three lengthy periods with the Lassels in the 1930s: the first was in 1930, the second in 1934 and the third in 1939. Following the birth of their daughter Susanne in 1935, Dora and Susanne spent long periods in Kronstadt in 1938 and 1943. Such were the ties with his wife’s family that in a statement to the Reichsschrifttumskammer in 1939 Huchel suggested that since 1930, as a result of his marriage to a Kronstadt woman, he had been dividing his time between Germany and Transylvania. Yet, as with many episodes in Huchel’s life, legends have grown up around his Romanian connections that have eclipsed a generally much more mundane reality. In her third draft Dora Huchel describes their stay in 1934 as follows:


37 Haas, ‘Ein Mann namens Peter Huchel’, 56.
38 The papers in question are deposited at the Berlin Document Center.
geliehene Skiausrüstung die Anfangsgründe dieser gefährlichen Kunst. Mitte Dezember ging's leider wieder ins "Dritte Reich" nach Langerwisch und zum "Wolkenberg" zurück. Den Freunden war viel zu erzählen. 39

One critic, however, has transformed Huchel's stay with his mother-in-law into emigration from the Third Reich, which took him out of mainstream literary culture into a folkloric world populated by peasants, shepherds and gipsies:

Kaum gebührend zur Kenntnis genommen wurde bisher, daß Huchel außerdem aus der politischen Unzucht der 'Welt der Wolke, Welt der Ratten' nach Rumänien emigrierte – ein Schritt, der mehr wache, kritische Vernunft voraussetzt, als man heute noch darin wahrzunehmen geneigt ist. Und doch scheint dieses Schicksal bei ihm aus der Phantasie zu kommen. Wer damals, um Hitler aus dem Weg zu gehen, nach Rumänien ging, ging aus der Welt, der literarischen zumindest, ging zurück zu Bauern, Hirten und Zigeunern. Die Wahl des Dreißigjährigen führte ihn aus der Erwachsenen-Zweckwelt zurück in die Welt seiner Kindheit, gegen jede begründete Hoffnung auf Stellung und sicheres Einkommen. So kann es nicht wundernehmen, daß die Emigration scheiterte und Huchel zurückkehrte, auch wegen einer kranken Frau, die ärztliche Behandlung bedurfte. 40

Among Kronstadt's ethnic German, Transylvanian-Saxon community there were a number of influential Nazi supporters. Prominent among them were middle-class intellectuals such as Heinrich Zillich, editor of the Kronstadt literary magazine Klingsor. Huchel published in Klingsor during their stay in 1934, as he had previously as early as 1926 and would again in 1937. As one of the journal's authors, Huchel together with his wife was invited to parties and other social gatherings organized by the Klingsor circle. In 1978 Zillich himself countered Wolken's depiction of Huchel's Romanian 'emigration':


Das also war Huchels Flucht zu Zigeunern, Hirten und Bauern! Eine angenehme Einkehr bei Deutschen, deren Gastfreundlichkeit er reichlich genoß [ . . . ] Auch

39 On 29 December 1933 Huchel signed a questionnaire for the Reichsverband Deutscher Schriftsteller, forerunner of the Reichsschrifttumskammer, which offers clear corroboration of Dora Huchel's account, though it suggests a slightly earlier date for the trip to Kronstadt. In the questionnaire Huchel gave his address for future correspondence as Siebenburgen, Kronstadt-Brasov, Rossmarkt 14, bei Pfarrer Wilhelm Lassel, Rumänien.
40 Wolken, 'Zwiesprache mit der Wirklichkeit', 187.
Zillich was apparently unaware that Huchel's wedding had taken place in Kronstadt in 1930, and his choice of 1937 seems to have been determined by the year of a later publication by Huchel in *Klingsor*. Supported by his wife's family, Huchel could enjoy the pastimes and leisure activities of Kronstadt's moneyed middle classes, shooting game, skiing and sightseeing. In 1981 Dora Huchel offered corroboration of Zillich's statement that on such outings Huchel often accompanied Zillich's brother-in-law, Hermann Scherk, a rich factory owner. Shortly after the 1934 visit in July 1935 Scherk agreed to be one of Susanne Huchel's godfathers. Just as they did in Corenc, during their stay in Kronstadt the Huchels sought out a rather remote village, where they could observe and to some extent participate in peasant life and folk customs. In Wolken's version this element of experience is inflated and transformed, until it conceals the surely embarrassing details of some relationships in Kronstadt. Life there mixing with the *Klingsor* circle is replaced by a pastoral world far from the viciousness of politics, German or, for that matter, Romanian. It would, finally, be wrong to attribute the Huchels' return to Germany in late 1934 to the collapse of any plan to emigrate or to view it as prompted by 'einer kranken Frau, die ärztliche Behandlung bedurfte'. In fact, both Dora and Peter Huchel received medical treatment during their stay: Huchel had his appendix removed and in November his wife became pregnant.

Having given up their address in the artists' colony, they moved in on a temporary basis with Huchel's parents. Following Fritz's retirement, they had left Potsdam for Marie's village, Alt-Langerwisch, where they occupied a flat at Am Wolkenberg 13. After their return, Peter and Dora Huchel resumed contact with Berlin friends, among them Götz Kozuschek, Eberhard Meckel, Sebastian Haffner, Horst Lange and Oda Schaefer. In the later 1930s

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42 The attraction of such primitive peasant communities for Huchel was clearly related to his own rejection of a suburban background for the rural world of Alt-Langerwisch. Huchel returned to the Balkans and to the Baltschik area with his second wife Monica in 1957 and visited a similarly remote settlement, whose primitive beauty he captured in the poem 'Momtschil' (i, 126). The 1984 edition contains the following note: 'Nach Auskunft von Monica Huchel war Momtschil “eine winzige Zigeuneransiedlung unweit von Baltschik, mit winzigen, weiß gekalkten Häusern, ein paar Zigeunerfamilien und ein paar Pferden” (i, 400). See also 'Schlucht bei Baltschik' (i, 125) and the accompanying note, ‘Baltschik ist ein Hafenort an der bulgarischen Schwarzmeerküste, wo sich P.H. 1957 aufhielt, nachdem er schon Anfang der 30er Jahre dort gewesen war’ (i, 399).

43 Material in the Huchel Collection relating to Huchel's friends and acquaintances in the 1930s provides the clues necessary in order to match up names with some of the initials accompanying Huchel's 'Sprüche 1–7' in the 1984 edition, 'deren Auflösung nicht gelungen ist' (i, 454). The solutions are: G.K. = Götz Kozuschek; W.B. = Werner Bergengruen; H.L. = Horst
Kozuschek and Haffner, who were both married to Jewish women, would flee Germany. Lange and Schaefer introduced the Huchels to other writers in their circle, among them Werner and Charlotte Bergengruen. Charlotte Bergengruen came to their rescue in the months leading up to and following Susanne Charlotte’s birth. In return she was asked to be a godmother to the baby, who was given her name. It was through Lange and Schaefer that at the latest in early 1935 the Huchels got to know Günter Eich, Huchel’s friend and collaborator in the mid- to late 1930s. The Huchels were invited by Eich to stay with him at his house at Poberow on the Pomeranian coast and spent some four or five weeks with him in June 1935. Relations between Eich and the Huchels were not harmonious. In 1981 Dora Huchel recalled that during their stay ‘Mißstimmungen sind an der Ostsee aufgetaucht’. 44 Despite their disagreements and continuing tensions, the two writers, who, temperamentally so different, were the most talented in their circle, recognized each other’s gifts and valued personal friendship as their literary collaboration developed during the decade.

The Huchels returned from the Baltic coast with Dora’s pregnancy at an advanced stage and with much work to be done on the flat at Jägerstrasse 5 in Michendorf, which they would move into after the birth of their child. Susanne Huchel was born on 21 July 1935 in the hospital at Herrmannswerder, Potsdam. Huchel celebrated his daughter’s birth with the composition of the poem ‘Das Kinderfenster’, which was published, with the dedication ‘An Susanne’, in the second volume of the Almanach der Dame in 1935. 45 Just a few days after their daughter’s birth Huchel sent his wife a postcard showing the Herthasee in Michendorf. The postcard, the third item in Huchel’s correspondence with his wife, bears the postmark 30 July.

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44 Dora Huchel was unwilling to divulge the background to their differences. Eich’s application to join the N.S.D.A.P. in 1933 points to a clear difference in political opinions. There was always a certain ‘edge’ to Huchel’s relations with Eich. In his autobiography Ein Deutscher auf Widerruf (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984), ii, 230, Hans Mayer testifies to their violent disagreement at a meeting of the Gruppe 47 in 1954. Eich alluded to their altercation in a postcard, which he sent to Rainer Brambach from Würzburg on 17 October 1954. The card is among Eich’s letters (folder two) deposited at the Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach am Neckar. For a depiction of the Kolonne writers at Eich’s summer house, see Christoph Meckel’s Suchbild: Über meinen Vater (Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1980), 27: ‘Mehrmals verbrachte er [Eberhard Meckel – S.P.] ein paar Sommerwochen im Ferienhaus Günter Eichs an der Ostsee. Huchel, Eich und mein Vater in den Dünen von Prerow. Das Hafergras ging in die Verse ein, der Regen, die Sterne und was sie für zeitlos hielten. Sie arbeiteten gemeinsam, spielten Tischtennis und lasen sich abends neue Gedichte vor.’ In the 1970s Huchel recalled his friendship with Eich as follows: ‘Als ich mit Günter Eich zusammenlebte, haben wir beide Gedichte geschrieben aber wir haben uns nie ein Gedicht gegenseitig vorgetragen’ (ii, 391).

45 A copy of the Almanach der Dame, including annotations to the poem in Huchel’s hand, is in the Rylands Huchel Collection. ‘Das Kinderfenster’ was collected posthumously (i, 277) without any reference to variants.
1935. It was also signed by Götz Kozuschek, who was helping to decorate and move furniture. Huchel’s description of their labours is informed by the gently ironic and self-deprecating tone typical of his correspondence with those close to him. The removal had been fraught with problems: the removal men had turned up only at eight in the evening and had worked until one in the morning to complete the job. Despite setbacks, he and Götz had almost finished painting the flat and varnishing furniture, which was now in place.

The Huchels were not, however, fortunate in their choice of neighbours in Michendorf. The house owners and co-residents were Nazi supporters and the Huchels’ unconventional lifestyle did not meet with their approval. All their worst suspicions were confirmed in an incident early in 1936, when the Huchels were visited by Horst Lange. Lange, who – not unusually – had been drinking, flew into a rage and began to curse Hitler at the top of his voice. The neighbours could not fail to hear Lange’s drunken invective and reported it to the Michendorf police. As the head of the offending household Huchel was at once summoned to the police station. According to his wife’s testimony, he simply did not follow this instruction, so she went along in his place. The affair dragged on for a number of months, but finally things were smoothed over. However, they received notice to quit from the house owners.46 As a temporary measure, in the summer of 1936 they moved into a flat near Huchel’s parents in Alt-Langerwisch, Am Wolkenberg.47

Finally, in 1937 they were able to move on a more permanent basis to accommodation of more generous proportions. For eighty marks a month they rented a house at Waldstraße 32, Michendorf, which had a large garden backing onto woodland. The house was situated on the Willichslust development. Somewhat apart from the older village and its inhabitants, Willichslust was inhabited predominantly by middle-class professionals such as civil servants and teachers, some of them Potsdam and Berlin commuters. A number of them became friends of the Huchels, who stayed at Waldstraße 32 until after the war. This chapter in Huchel’s life, like a number of others, has figured only sketchily in post-war accounts through references in Oda Schaefer’s memoirs and Christoph Meckel’s account of his father’s life. Waldstraße 32 became a meeting place for the Huchels and their Berlin friends, for whom Michendorf represented a pleasant break

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46 Huchel referred to the incident in 1948 in his application for the post of editor of Sinn und Form. On this occasion Peter and Dora Huchel’s dating of the event tallies, although Huchel’s account makes no mention of Lange and suggests that he himself was questioned by the Michendorf N.S.D.A.P. ‘Ortsgruppenleiter’ Huchel’s statement, dated 24 May 1948, is deposited in the archive of the Akademie der Künste zu Berlin in the ‘Teilbestand Sinn und Form’, reference number 59.

47 It was during that summer, too, that Lange sought Huchel’s and Elisabeth Langgasser’s advice, as he struggled to complete his novel SchWARZE WEide. For further details, see ‘The Peter Huchel Collection’, 147.
Figure 1: Peter Huchel (right) and his elder brother Fritz. The photograph was taken, probably in 1905 or 1906, in Berlin at the Globus Atelier, Leipziger Straße 132/137.
Figure 2: Dora and Peter Huchel on their wedding day 21 April 1930 in Kronstadt, Transylvania.
Figure 3: Peter and Dora Huchel (centre) at the Lassels' with a girlfriend of Dora's the day after their wedding, 22 April 1930.
Figure 4: Huchel at Kladow, where in the summer of 1931 he and his wife shared a house with Alfred Kantorowicz.
Figure 5: Huchel, probably at Kladow in the summer of 1931.
Figure 6: Huchel in the mid-1930s.
Figure 7: Huchel with his daughter Susanne, who was born on 21 July 1935.
Figure 8: Huchel as a Romanian peasant, Am Wolkenberg, Alt-Langerwisch, 1936.
from life in the nearby capital. During the war years, as the bombing of Berlin intensified, the house would provide a refuge for friends such as Lange and Schaefer, Hans and Edith Nowak, Günther and Bobba Birkenfeld, and Eich and his wife Else.

During the mid- to late 1930s Huchel’s friendship with Eich developed. They undertook a number of trips together in Eich’s car, often accompanied by other figures from the *Kolonne* circle. Christoph Meckel depicts one of their trips as follows:


In the late autumn of 1937 Huchel accompanied Eich and a further *Kolonne* figure, A. Artur Kuhnert on a motoring holiday to Franconia. There Kuhnert, a member of the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (N.S.D.A.P.), who was working as a radio reporter, had a house in Hohenfeld.49 Huchel wrote to his wife from Franconia in December 1937. Eich and Kuhnert added their signatures. Huchel was captivated by the Franconian experience and was greatly enjoying his male company. He suggested to his wife that when Susanne was older they should take a second honeymoon along the Main; so much of the landscape was reminiscent of the Wachau area near Vienna, which they had visited in 1926, shortly after they had met. He estimated that they would not be back in Michendorf until just before Christmas. They had driven Eich’s car so hard every day that it had broken down and had been towed into a garage. Repairs would be completed on 19 December at the earliest. Their return journey would take in Rothenburg, Dinkelsbühl, Bamberg, Jena and Leipzig. In Leipzig they had arranged a meeting with Veit Roßkopf.50

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48 Meckel, *Suchbild*, 31–2. Huchel’s poem was collected after the war as ‘Wiepersdorf’ (i, 91). An earlier version from the mid-1930s, ‘Herbstabend’ (i, 280), was included in the cycle ‘Strophen aus einem Herbst’, published in *Das Innere Reich*, 2 (1935–36), 813–16.

49 Kuhnert joined the N.S.D.A.P. in 1937. Papers relating to his membership are deposited at the Berlin Document Center.

50 In his *Horspiele im Dritten Reich: Zur Institutionen-, Theorie- und Literaturgeschichte* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1985) Wolfram Wessels notes (20) that Roßkopf had been a member of the N.S.D.A.P since 1931. He was in charge of literary broadcasts at the Bayerischer Rundfunk before moving...
From Leipzig they would travel straight back to Michendorf, in time for him to see to all the Christmas preparations. Huchel also discussed with his wife in the letter the arrangements for the dismissal, apparently for some breach of trust, of their girl in service, Helene Itau. 51

Like Eich, Huchel was now well established as a radio play author, whose work was in some demand from a variety of stations. A number of commentators have suggested that Eich and Huchel collaborated on radio work in the 1930s but no specific examples have been cited. However, Gerhard Heller, who knew Huchel from their schooldays in Potsdam and who from 1936–39 was employed at the Kurzwellensender in Berlin, recalled that he had commissioned a piece of collaborative work from them. They wrote 'Die Freundschaft von Port Said', which was broadcast on 7 April 1938. 52 When not long afterwards, in mid-July, Dora and Susanne visited the Lassels in Kronstadt, Peter Huchel remained in Michendorf, where he pressed on with a quite gruelling writing schedule for the radio. Only a matter of hours after their departure on 18 July he sent them a postcard, which was followed at the end of the month by a letter in response to one from his wife. He described the pressure he was under with his work: Leipzig were pressing for 'Margarethe Minde', and he had now agreed to submit it by mid-August, even though he still had forty pages to write after he had worked through papers in the Staatsbibliothek. 53 He also had a pressing piece of work to do for the Kurzwellensender. He mentioned Eich, who was still at his house on the Baltic coast, and Kuhnert, from whom he had received 150 marks. The money had gone towards paying some bills. He went on to inform his wife that in order to take his mind off such problems he had bought a huge black leather sofa for fifteen marks. Finally, he had been further consoled by the news that Leipzig were repeating 'Die Freundschaft von Port Said' on 15 August.

Despite the above evidence of Huchel's financial difficulties, it would be wrong to conclude that the Huchels were especially poor in

to Leipzig. With its reference to 'einer glaubigen Schicksalsgemeinschaft' (ii,418) the summary of Huchel's radio play 'Brigg Santa Fe' broadcast from Leipzig on 23 December 1937 echoes Nazi jargon. This tone is in keeping with what Wessels (168) describes as the reassertion from late 1936 onwards of the primacy of political propaganda over mere entertainment. Wessels (170) notes the encouragement of 'gemeinschaftsbildende Sendungen' during this phase of Nazi control of the radio. As Germany embarked on its expansionist plans, listeners were encouraged to identify with the Reich as a whole rather than with a particular German region. 'Brigg Santa Fe' was one of three plays by Huchel first broadcast by Leipzig in 1936 and 1937. 'Margarethe Minde' would follow in 1939.

51 Helene Itau was a gipsy girl, whose surname Huchel would use in the late poem 'Entzauberung' (i, 246).
52 Gerhard Heller kindly supplied me with this information in a letter of 8 June 1981. The adventure story 'Die Freundschaft von Port Said' is untypical of much of Huchel's radio work but shows similarities to 'Brigg Santa Fe', which was broadcast only four months earlier. (See footnote 50 above.)
53 In the event 'Margarethe Minde' was broadcast only on 22 June 1939. See ii, 419 for a discussion of Huchel's sources.
the mid- to late 1930s. On two occasions he provided the Reichsschrifttumskammer with details of his income: in 1937 he earned 3,820 marks gross, 2,519 marks net; and in 1938 he earned 3,513 marks gross, 2,279 marks net. His income in the years 1935 and 1936 was estimated at between 3,000 and 3,500 marks by the Reichsschrifttumskammer in a letter to the Schillerstiftung dated 24 July 1940.\(^5^4\) Such figures are on a par with the average income in the mid-1930s of someone working in an administrative grade in law or education and double the average income of workers employed in industry and handicrafts.\(^5^5\) Huchel’s calculations exclude the support the family regularly received from Kronstadt. The Huchels’ income was thus broadly in line with that of their neighbours and certainly sufficient to keep a girl in service; the girl’s dismissal was clearly not for financial reasons. What is more, despite the fact that Huchel always opposed the Nazis’ politics, gradually as the 1930s progressed he accepted working arrangements with figures like Ropkopf, which made for a reasonably comfortable life but brought with them a degree of dependence, which would become seriously compromising following the outbreak of war.

In the summer of 1939 the Huchels once again enjoyed the Lassel family’s hospitality in what would prove to be Huchel’s final visit to Kronstadt. When they returned to Germany in September it was to a country at war with Britain and France following the invasion of Poland. One consequence of the outbreak of war was the suspension of all radio play production. A month after their return from Romania Huchel received an emergency payment of 150 marks from the Schillerstiftung to ease his financial difficulties stemming from the suspension.\(^5^6\) When production was resumed it was on a war footing, and radio play production was subsumed within the war propaganda effort. It seems that, faced with a choice between conscription or writing propaganda work for the radio, Huchel opted for the latter. An anti-British piece, an adaptation of George Bernard Shaw’s ‘Denshawai Horror’, was broadcast on 23 January 1940.\(^5^7\) It seems possible that a second piece ‘Peter Paul Rubens’, broadcast on 30 May 1940, was also part of the wartime propaganda effort.\(^5^8\) May, however, saw

\(^{54}\) The letter is among Huchel’s papers in the Berlin Document Center.


\(^{56}\) The letter of 7 October 1939 to Huchel from the Schillerstiftung contains the following statement: ‘Auf Anregung von dritter Seite lasse ich Ihnen heute durch Postscheck aus unserer Postenstausche eine einmalige Beihilfe von RM 150.- (einhundertfünfzig) zur Erleichterung Ihrer wirtschaftlichen Lage zugehen’. The letter is among Huchel’s papers in the Berlin Document Center.

\(^{57}\) For his adaptation Huchel used Siegfried Trebitsch’s translation for S. Fischer of Shaw’s John Bull’s other island. It is one of eleven Shaw translations in the Rylands Huchel Collection. For further details of Huchel’s adaptation see my article ‘Peter Huchel als Propagandist. Huchels 1940 entstandene Adaption von George Bernard Shaw’s “Die Greuel von Denshawai”’, Rundfunk und Fernsehen, 39 (1991), 343-53.

\(^{58}\) See ‘Peter Huchel als Propagandist’, 351, footnote 25.
the virtual end of any coherent radio play programming, and in late July 1940 Huchel approached the Reichsschrifttumskammer for financial aid. He was supported with 150 marks in July, August and September. There is no evidence of further payments, and it seems possible that prior to his conscription on 15 August 1941 Huchel began writing film scripts for the local Ufa studios at Babelsberg. As the soldier’s letters demonstrate, he later did radio and film work between 1941 and 1944.

Huchel was thirty-eight when he joined a Luftwaffe signals regiment, the 11 (Flugmeldedienst Reserve) Luftgau Nachrichten Regiment 3. Basic training took place at Hottengrund near Kladow. References to Hottengrund in letters from later that year indicate that, above all as a result of the treatment meted out by brutal N.C.O.s, basic training was a nightmarish experience for someone to whom the harshness of military discipline was futile and demeaning. After

59 Details of payments are contained in Huchel’s papers in the Berlin Document Center.
60 The 1984 edition contains two ‘Filmnovellen’, Der Nobiskrug (ii, 127-77) and Das Fräulein von Soor (ii, 179-209). The edition reproduces Huchel’s statement to Ludvik Kundera that his film projects ‘hatten 1938 der UFA vorgelegen’ (ii, 421). Available evidence points, however, to the early 1940s rather than the late 1930s. Huchel left the film section blank in a questionnaire that he filled in for the Reichsschrifttumskammer on 30 May 1939. He was usually conscientious in his statements to that organization. The questionnaire is among Huchel’s papers at the Berlin Document Center. Wessels writes (304) that following the suspension of radio play programming in 1940 a number of writers, including Kuhnert and Eich, switched to the film industry. Huchel’s correspondence with his wife includes references to film work only during the war years. In a statement dated 18 May 1948, deposited in the archive of the Akademie der Künste zu Berlin, ‘Teilbestand Sinn und Form’, reference number 59, Huchel claimed that his two film scripts had been banned by the Propaganda Ministry. Drawing on Huchel’s conversations with Kundera, the 1984 edition states, ‘Die Projekte seien aber nicht realisiert worden, dar er - P.H. - als früherer Mitarbeiter so “jüdischer” Presseerzeugnisse wie Die Vossische Zeitung und Die literarische Welt der Reichsfilmkammer nicht genehm gewesen sei. Dieser Erklärung ist Glauben zu schenken’ (ii, 421). Huchel’s wartime letters indicate collaboration over a period of some four years during the war. In them there is no hint whatsoever that Huchel personally or the work he was producing were anything but acceptable. A reading of the two texts in the 1984 edition bears this out.

61 As with other aspects of Huchel’s life, many of the accounts of Huchel’s career as a soldier owe more to legend than reality. Apparently relying on Huchel’s own testimony, Kantorowicz in his essay ‘Das beredte Schweigen des Dichters Peter Huchel’, published in Zwanzig. Jahrbuch Freie Akademie der Künste in Hamburg, Hamburg, 1968, 156-82 (167), reported that Huchel ‘nahm an Vormarschen und Rückmarschen im Osten teil’. Similarly, in his essay ‘Tradition und Widerstand. Einführung in das Werk Peter Huchels’, published in Regensburger Universitätszeitung, 10 (1974), No. 5. 2-9 (3), Bernhard Gajek writes of ‘fünf Jahre des Soldatenseins in Rußland’. For a discussion of these and other accounts which stress Huchel’s acquaintance with the Soviet Union and its culture, see my essay ‘The outsider as insider: Peter Huchel in the SBZ’, published in Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur, 15 (1990), No. 2, 169-92 (176). The 1984 edition comes closer to the truth in stating that between 1941 and 1945 Huchel was a ‘Soldat in einer Flak-Einheit bei Berlin’. In 1971 Huchel said in an interview, ‘1940 habe ich vor versammelter Truppe meinen Feldwebel niedergeschlagen, der uns treute. Georg von der Vring hat mich gerettet’ (ii, 371). The evidence of Huchel’s letters suggests that this episode most likely took place at Hottengrund. In any case, it must have occurred at least a year later than he claimed. Von der Vring was a writer, who like Huchel had contributed to Die literarische Welt and Die Kolonne during the Weimar Republic. In the war he became an officer. His translation of a selection of Verlaine’s poetry entitled Gedichte is in the Rylands Huchel Collection. It is signed by Huchel. The volume was published in 1939 by the Ulrich Riemerschmidt Verlag, Berlin. The printing was done by Eduard Stichnote, Potsdam. Together with Huchel, in 1948 Riemerschmidt and Stichnote were key figures in discussions regarding the design of Sinn und Form.
Hottengrund ‘Funker’ Huchel was deployed at various locations in North Germany, monitoring British aircraft movements. His first posting was to Joachimsthal in the Uckermark. In a note to his wife from the beginning of October he supplied the address of his lodgings with master baker Welck’s family at Horst-Wessel-Straße 64. Joachimsthal was, however, only the briefest of interludes, since a few days later he was transferred to a unit stationed on the estate of Behrenhoff near Greifswald.

From there in just three weeks he wrote as many as ten cards and letters. These letters, like those following from other later postings, contain regular requests and subsequent thanks for cigarettes, food and clothing. The correspondence from Behrenhoff describes the simple pleasures of life on the remote estate with his ten comrades. The letters of 9 and 14 October contain quite extensive depictions of the estate and of the delicious food prepared for them in its kitchen. In the letter of 16 October he describes the relaxed atmosphere fostered by a head of section who was a First World War veteran: there was just half an hour’s drilling per week, everyone knew his job and went about it without any fuss. He evidently enjoyed the company of soldiers who in peacetime had been simple working men in Pomerania and the Uckermark, though later in the month he wrote wistfully of a visit to Greifswald, where the sight of a bookshop window had prompted thoughts of a world far away from the daily conversations centring on the pleasures of food and sleep.

He found his duties quite strenuous: they were organized around a rota of twenty-four hours on watch and twenty-four hours rest. When on watch the cycle he followed was one hour spent up the watch tower, one hour manning the telephone and one hour on standby. Exposure through the night to the harsh autumn weather was clearly wearing, yet in a letter such as that of 9 October he registered a sense of satisfaction at his developing skills as a plane spotter. And for all his antipathy to war and military discipline, he was conscientious in his work. Nor was his ‘good’ attitude lost on his superiors: on 31 October he announced that he had been selected for the more demanding duties at flight command in Neubrandenburg. Yet he was a reluctant hero, as his decidedly unenthusiastic response to this posting demonstrates. For all that, the extent of the esteem in which he was held by his superiors would emerge in the later war years when discussion turned to the quite realistic option of officer training.

The posting to Neubrandenburg was most untimely, since he had been exploring a transfer to flight command at Grunewald, which was both much nearer home and as close as he could possibly be to his literary contacts in Berlin. Huchel’s friend Günther Birkenfeld was already stationed there, in a position where he could exert influence in Huchel’s favour. Through Birkenfeld, Willi Schäferdiek at the Kurzwellensender and Jürgen Eggebrecht at the Stabstelle Papier, Huchel would in the coming months pursue the transfer, which in the
Huchel also lost no time in winning Schaferdiek’s support for his application to take leave in order to do radio work. A request for three weeks was initially refused but two weeks were finally granted from 8 January 1942. In the letter of 23 October he discussed with his wife the publication of his poem ‘Späte Zeit’ in the magazine *Die Dame*. Huchel had been extremely angry to discover that the editors had substituted ‘Im nassen Sand’, a phrase from the poem, for his own title. It would appear that ‘Späte Zeit’ had been too defeatist for them in spite of the poem’s reference, surely drawing on Huchel’s recent experience as a plane spotter, to the ‘fremder Hund’ in the German skies.

The transfer to Neubrandenburg took place at the beginning of November. He would stay there until well into 1942. Thirteen letters and cards from Neubrandenburg have survived. The earliest is from 1/2 November – written during the transfer – and the latest from early February. The correspondence documents his continuing preoccupation with the proposed transfer to Grunewald, as well as with his radio and film work. Arrangements at Neubrandenburg regarding both work and accommodation were quite different and much less agreeable than at Behrenhoff. He had quarters in the small, bare attic of a house and had to cater for himself using bread and milk coupons. The loneliness and drabness of his situation made him think back to his friendship with Hans A. Joachim in the mid-1920s and to what he called his Expressionist phase.

Although his night-time duties at flight command were inside rather than exposed to the rough autumn weather, there was the prospect of greater responsibility, of courses and of more frequent drilling. In early November he lamented the pointlessness of what he was doing and wondered just how long it would go on. Yet he busied his mind with compositions and literary plans. In mid-November he discussed with his wife a project with Ufa, on the basis of which he hoped to secure a short spell of leave. In the event it was not granted and in late November he found his literary talents being harnessed by the officer at Neubrandenburg responsible for the organization of Christmas festivities. Huchel was required to

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62 In his *Career at the cost of compromise: Gunter Eich’s life and work in the years 1933–1945* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1989) Glenn Cuomo describes (26) how during the war years Eggebrecht used his influential position to help Eich. In her memoirs, *Auch sein du traurst, gehen die Uren* (Munich: Piper, 1970), Oda Schaefer recalls (286) that Eggebrecht helped Horst Lange, who was encountering difficulties with the censor relating to the publication in 1940 of his novel *Ulanenpatrouille*.

63 The date of composition and the interpretation of Huchel’s poem have been the subject of some vigorous discussion since Hans Dieter Schafer drew attention to the fact that the poem had been entered for a competition of war poetry. For further details see Hans Dieter Schafer, *Das gespaltene Bewußtsein: deutsche Kultur und Lebenswirklichkeit* (Munich and Vienna: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1981), 213, footnote 276.

64 In 1981 Dora Huchel recalled that Joachim had encouraged Huchel to follow – a little belatedly perhaps – the Expressionist penchant for neologisms. In his letter Huchel mentions the word ‘Einsamkammer’, which occurs in the poem ‘Der Totenherbst’ (i, 15), first published in 1930 in *Die literarische Welt*. Other examples can be found in Huchel’s early poetry.
follow the officer's instructions in producing a thoroughly Christian play. In mid-December he quoted from one of the speeches of the traditional character Ruprecht, explaining to his wife how the words were to be spoken by a sergeant, who was totally lacking in any rhetorical skills. Following performances on 20 and 21 December Huchel reported to his wife just how ludicrous a business it had all been.

Yet the play scarcely afforded a distraction from his duties. In letters from the end of December and the end of January he reported upon his monitoring of enemy aircraft. The British had been flying not only to Hamburg, Bremen, Hanover and Berlin, but as far as Warsaw and Prague before turning for home. He and his wife discussed prospects for an end to the war, for which both longed and which both, unsurprisingly at the time, evidently expected to be a German victory. While Dora Huchel, it seems, thought a swift end to the war possible, her husband urged caution, suggesting, with uncanny accuracy, that it might take as long as four years. In January he wrote that those in his regiment who had been born in 1908 and 1909 were being transferred to the infantry for deployment on the Eastern Front. He expected that his time would come. All the same, he was able to look forward to leave over Easter and to the prospect that his transfer to Grunewald would finally come through.

After early February 1942 the sequence of letters is interrupted until 19 August 1942, the date of a card sent from his posting to Gollin, a tiny village in the Uckermark near Templin. In all he sent eight cards and letters to his family from Gollin between 19 August and 30 November 1942. After flight command at Neubrandenburg he was back with a small unit taking his turn up the watch tower. He lodged first with the Schumachers, a quite young family who had a smallholding, and towards the end of his posting with the more elderly Brenneckens. On 21 August he wrote to his wife that when off duty he was helping the Schumachers with the harvest. This was a way of increasing his food allocation. For all the image of the poet rooted in peasant life cultivated by Huchel, it would appear that this was his only direct experience of farm work. Hardly surprisingly, it was so tiring that he had to postpone any work on his own compositions. Yet he was rewarded with three weeks leave in early September in order to recover from his exertions.

After he had returned to Gollin, in a letter of 28 October 1942 he pondered upon his options in order to avoid the worst of what might be coming in the war. His letter reveals the ability to safeguard his own immediate interests through foresight and some strategic planning. It must be said that throughout his life Huchel was much more strongly motivated by such considerations than has been appreciated hitherto by critics who have accepted the image of the uncompromising poet and countryperson suffering in rural isolation. He was confident that the transfer for which he had waited so long would probably go ahead, but
he and his wife had been considering other options. His father would be delighted at the thought that he might apply for an officer training course, yet he was pessimistic about his chances of success even though he evidently expected that he would be accepted for training. He was aware, too, that girls were being trained to do signals work previously done by men, who would be redeployed in the spring of 1943 in the flak or in the dreaded infantry. For that reason, he was still considering an application to join a propaganda company. Many of his fellow writers had followed that path.

However, on 30 November he was reporting his success in persuading his superiors that he should be transferred nearer to Berlin so that he could do the film work that was been asked of him. His transfer to Ferch, only a short distance from Michendorf, came through almost immediately, to date from 3 December. This meant, too, that he could live at home. Soon afterwards the transfer to flight command at Grunewald was finally completed. He lived at Hubertusallee 50, just a short walk from the Reichssender Berlin on the Masurenallee. From Hubertusallee he wrote a card on 28 January 1943 explaining that a planned weekend at home would have to be postponed because of his duties. He was, in fact, able to stay at home frequently during his long posting at Grunewald. A consequence is the absence of correspondence from that period. Over Whitsuntide 1943 Dora and Susanne made what would be their last visit to Kronstadt. Only one item from Huchel’s correspondence with his wife and daughter during that stay has survived: a card to Susanne dated 12 June and written in Michendorf.

A further testimony relating to Huchel’s Grunewald posting exists. It was written shortly after the war by Günther Birkenfeld, who had been instrumental in Huchel’s transfer. It contains the following portrait:

Zwischen den vielen Alarmen, Schlaflosigkeit und allgemeiner Überreiztheit, saß er da im engen Wachkabuff unseres Bunkers, tagelang, nächtelang, und starrte vor sich hin über einer dünnen Octavkladde, in die er mitunter eine Zeile schrieb, zumeist aber das Leere hinwegdichtete, von fiebernder Nervosität oder auch schon von wütiger Erbitterung angefüllt, von der Wut des Vaganten hinter Kerkermauern.65

Yet Huchel had engineered for himself a position which was much more favourable than that of many of his compatriots. His literary talents and connections had demonstrably contributed to the attainment of that position.

The extant correspondence recommences only on 20 September 1944 with a postcard of Schiller’s birthplace at Marbach am Neckar. The card was written at the Ossweil barracks (formerly the

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Karlschule, where Schiller was educated) in Ludwigsburg. It was the first of nine cards and letters sent from Ludwigsburg between September and the end of October, after which Huchel returned to the Berlin area. Huchel’s correspondence from Ludwigsburg indicates that he had been accepted for the officer training programme which he had been considering in October 1942. In the meantime the tide had turned decisively against Germany on both the Eastern and the new Western Front, while in Germany itself some of the conservative elite around Stauffenberg and his co-conspirators had come out against Hitler. Huchel’s letters to his wife reflect something of the new mood engendered by these developments and record, too, something of the mounting evidence of impending defeat. In his postcard from Marbach Huchel cited Schiller’s words, ‘In tyrannis’ and on 24 October he adopted a tone of scarcely veiled sarcasm in relation to the supposed powers of the German secret weapons such as the V2 rockets deployed since September against British targets. He had received eye-witness reports of the German army’s sudden collapse in the face of the Soviet assault in Romania, and he sought to reassure his wife that her family would survive. In fact, Dora Huchel’s mother Josefine Lassel was run over by a Soviet tank as it swept through Kronstadt. From Ludwigsburg he had watched the enemy air attacks on Stuttgart, which had been reduced to rubble. He had failed in his attempts to contact Georg von der Vring, who had probably left the city. He asked his wife to send him the Bergengruens’ address at Achenkirch in Austria, presumably as a possible refuge. In Ludwigsburg, however, he was sitting a series of examinations, some of which related to technical and scientific matters, while others addressed questions of leadership and organization. He predicted failure at every stage. It seems that this happened only with the final examination, following which he returned to his comrades near Berlin. His rank by the end of the war was ‘Obergefreiter’, in British terms a senior aircraftsman.

Even at this late stage of the war Huchel had other irons in the fire. Through his wife he was maintaining contact with people from the Berlin film world, among them a Dr Born. His wife reported in 1981 that late in the war he was paid a large amount for a film project. The money was deposited in the Michendorf bank and survived the war, but it lost much of its value. As the allies closed in on Berlin Huchel was finally deployed to an aircraft monitoring unit at Dahnsdorf near Belzig, to the south west of Michendorf. It was from there that on 19 April 1945 he sent his wife his final wartime letter, only days before Michendorf and his own position were captured by Soviet troops. On 19 April Huchel was still expecting that it would be the Americans who would sweep through from the Magdeburg Front. His unit was only lightly armed and could put up little resistance. He

66 The extent of Huchel’s possible involvement in the script of Helmut Kautner’s film ‘Unter den Brücken’ has yet to be ascertained.
hoped that the Americans would simply bypass their insignificant position. He planned to blow up his signals equipment and the tower, and then make his way as best he could. He sought to comfort his wife that all would be well and that they would be back together soon. He noted down for her Sebastian Haffner’s address in Cambridge and asked her to make a copy of his poem ‘Sommerabend’. She should ensure that it was kept in trustworthy hands. 67

According to Huchel’s own account, he was captured by the Soviets at the end of April near Rathenow. 68 This implies that he had been fleeing in a northwesterly direction from Belzig in order to escape the advancing Soviet troops. 69 The next information about his movements relates to 8 May 1945. From that day he was registered as living at Bayernallee 44. 70 That address had been commandeered by the Soviets for use by their own and German personnel, above all K.P.D. figures returning from Moscow, who were working to recommence broadcasting at the nearby radio station in the Masurenallee. The station had been captured on 2 May, but there was a critical lack of people with the necessary expertise. Huchel, captured only days earlier, had considerable experience of radio work in that very same building and, as his wartime letters demonstrate, had acquired technical knowledge through signals work. He was, it seems, recruited

67 On the face of it ‘Sommerabend’ is an unlikely poem to be singled out for special care. It was, however, the first in a selection of Huchel’s poems that were among his earliest post-war publications in Ost und West, 1 (1947), No. 1, 79–84 (79–80). It would appear that the poem’s subject matter, the threatened idyll of boys riding horses to water, had a particular autobiographical resonance. With its *memento mori* in the closing line, ‘Bald ist der Sommer vorbei’, it might easily have come to act as an epitaph for both the Huchel boys lost at war. It is quite in keeping with Huchel’s secretive attitude towards his background and the allusive quality of his poetry that such a meaning would almost certainly have been lost on readers. The autobiographical significance can be traced through the imagery of the poem, which describes ‘Reiter mit jungen Stimmen’. As we have seen, Fritz Huchel senior had been a horseman in earlier years, while in 1931 Peter Huchel recalled growing up during the First World War as follows: ‘Der Krieg fängt für ihn so an: Er hättmer auf dem Klavier, mit paukendem Anschlag, die Pedale als Steigbügel, das Reitersterbelied “Morgenrot, Morgenrot’’’ (ii, 214). Wilhelm Hauff’s ‘Reiters Morgensang’ was in fact among the canonical texts that Huchel was required to learn off by heart as a schoolboy in the ‘Quinta’, the second year of his Oberrealschule, to which he progressed in April 1914. The poem was included in the boy’s German reader, *Deutsches Lesbuch fur Quinta* and again in *Deutsches Lesbuch fur Quarta*, ed. J. Hopf, K. Paulsiek and C. Muff, and published in Berlin by Grote. With lines such as ‘Gestern noch auf stolzen Rossen,/Heute durch die Brust geschossen’ and ‘Ach, wie bald/Schwindet Schönheit und Gestalt!’, this poem would surely have assumed the most dreadful poignancy following his brother’s death. Through thematic counterpointing, apparent already in the title ‘Sommerabend’ as well as in the idyllic setting, Huchel reworks the imagery of the young horsemen, ‘Wenn sie reiten zur Schwemme’. As the poem draws to a close, the poet addresses them as follows: ‘Knaben, schon ist das Leben, wenn es noch stark ist und gut’. The ‘noch’ hints at the threat to existence which becomes explicit in the final line.

68 Huchel provided this information in a questionnaire for his employer, the Deutsche Akademie der Künste, dated 31 May 1954. The questionnaire is deposited in the Zentrales Akademiearchiv, reference number Al.

69 There is clearly no truth in reports that Huchel deserted to the Soviets. For a discussion of such reports see my article ‘The outsider as insider’, 176–7.

70 This information was conveyed in a letter of 15 February 1984 from the ‘Polizeipräsident in Berlin, Referat Meldeangelegenheiten, Paß und Ausweisungswesen’. 
after at most a week or so in captivity and was involved in the preparations for the resumption of broadcasting on 13 May.\textsuperscript{71}

Conscientious and equipped with a combination of literary and technical skills, Huchel quickly gained the confidence and support of Soviet officers, who – unlike many returning German communists – were quite prepared to accept that intellectuals who had remained in Germany during National Socialism might not have been able to avoid certain compromises but were for all that far from being Nazis. Information recently emerged concerning Huchel’s promotion by the Soviets during the summer of 1945 before he had resumed contact with his family. According to Huchel’s own testimony,\textsuperscript{72} he was put in charge of the ‘Antifa-Aktiv’ at the Rüdersdorf P.O.W. camp to the east of Berlin. There he implemented the political and cultural re-education policies of the Soviets for his former comrades-in-arms.\textsuperscript{73} In addition, he was selected for the Soviet Military Administration’s school at Rüdersdorf run by Major Wilhelm Martens.\textsuperscript{74} It prepared a small number of Germans for leading roles in the new administrative structures. Huchel’s crash course took place in August and early September 1945. It was from the S.M.A.D. school in Rüdersdorf that on 26 August and 2 September Huchel sent his first notes home since his letter of 19 April. He informed his wife and daughter that he was enjoying more than adequate food and tobacco rations and was spending his time studying. On 26 August he knew that he would be able to return home in mid- or late September and confirmed this arrangement on 2 September. He was indeed back in Michendorf later that month to see his wife and daughter, who had survived the Soviet occupation unscathed. His visit home took place shortly before he returned to Bayernallee 44 and assumed the posts of ‘Dramaturg’ and personal assistant to the ‘Sendeleiter’ at Berliner Rundfunk on 20 September. His subsequent rapid promotion under Soviet patronage was as follows: 16 May 1946, ‘Chefdramaturg’, while retaining the post of personal assistant to the ‘Sendeleiter’; 1 August 1946, ‘Sendeleiter’ and ‘Direktor’; September 1947, ‘Künstlerischer Direktor’.

\textsuperscript{71} It was surely to experiences from early May 1945 rather than from the autumn of that year that Huchel was referring when he told his second wife that he ‘wurde [. . .] dann, eines Tages, zusammen mit einigen Technikern, Musikern usw. auf einem Lastwagen, ohne zu wissen wohin es ging, zum Berliner Haus des Rundfunks in der Masurenallee gebracht’ (ii, 407).

\textsuperscript{72} See footnote 68 above.

\textsuperscript{73} In Vladimir Mayakovsky’s \textit{Ausgewählte Gedichte}, translated by Hugo Huppert and Franz Leschnitzer (Moscow: Das internationale Buch, 1941) the Rylands Huchel Collection contains an example of the material that came Huchel’s way in the immediate post-war period. The volume is signed by Huchel, and its introduction, which discusses the writer’s social role, contains many margin marks.

\textsuperscript{74} See footnote 68 above. In 1981 Dora Huchel stated that her husband had informed her of his membership of the anti-fascist organization ‘Freies Deutschland’ at the end of the war. No evidence could be found in Berlin archives to substantiate this claim, although Huchel would surely not have excluded details had it been true. Given the links between ‘Freies Deutschland’ and the S.M.A.D. schools, both in terms of personnel and political orientation, it seems likely than Huchel blurred the distinction between them.
Although the final post officially ran until March 1949, he was working full-time on Sinn und Form from October 1948.

In May 1946 the Huchels’ Potsdam friend Rudolf Elter wrote to Dora Huchel as follows, offering his family’s congratulations on her husband’s success:

Der glänzende und verdiente Erfolg Ihres Mannes hat die gesamte Sippe mit herzlicher Freude erfüllt, und wir möchten zuerst Piese, dann aber auch Ihnen als der Leidensgenossin während so vieler schwerer Jahre unsere aufrichtigen Glückwünsche aussprechen. Zwar verhehle ich meine Besorgnis nicht, daß Piese einer derart ‘exponierten’ Stellung bald überdrüssig werden kann, doch ist im Augenblick nur Anlaß zu heiterer Genugtuung. Meine Mutter sagte kürzlich bewundernd: “Piese ganz gross”, nachdem sie eine schöne Mozart-Sendung gehört hatte. Wir hoffen, dass recht viele Zuhörer so denken. Yet by this time things were going badly wrong in the Huchels’ relationship. In addition to difficulties in adjusting after four years apart during the war, the direction that Huchel’s career had now taken was a cause of deep conflict. Dora Huchel was opposed to such high-level collaboration with the Soviets, and at the end of her third draft she sets out the terms of their disagreements and growing estrangement:


As we have seen, Huchel continued his advance under Soviet patronage, first with the Berliner Rundfunk, then with Sinn und Form. In autumn 1946 he got to know Monica Melis (nee Rosenthal, later Monica Huchel), a journalist with Neues Deutschland. In her he found someone whose aspirations were in tune with his own, as in the new political climate he pursued a career path that was in many ways at variance with his life before 1945. They soon began to live together and later married, following the Huchels’ divorce.

For Peter Huchel, as for many others who had never supported the National Socialists, Germany’s defeat signalled the opportunity for

75 Rudolf Elter’s card, dated 21 May 1946, is among the papers in the Rylands Huchel Collection.
a fresh start, when all the frustrations and compromises of the previous twelve years could be put behind him. With the support of figures such as Lommer and Kantorowicz, Huchel embarked on a radical transformation of his past designed to demonstrate his anti-fascist credentials and to promote the image of the unimpeachable countryman and poet. Uncomfortable aspects of his past were conveniently forgotten. In the polarization of German life that was taking place with the onset of the Cold War, he played down relations with writers such as the Kolonne figures Eich, Lange, Meckel and Kuhnert, who had stayed in the country and subsequently settled in Western zones. He emphasized instead his friendship during the Weimar Republic with well-known anti-fascists such as Kantorowicz and Bloch, who returned to Germany from exile.

While such a reinterpretation of personal history was by no means unusual in the immediate post-war period, the particular nature of Huchel’s recasting of his life is of especial biographical interest. Elements of his empirical self were subsumed within a pattern of self-mythologization that embraces the presentation of his childhood and later episodes in his life. Taken together with the material treated in my earlier essay on the Huchel Collection, the documents which form the basis of the present essay provide an opportunity for the first time to probe the Huchel enigma. In doing so, it has proved possible not only to point out major discrepancies but to offer an explanation for the growth of the enigma by exploring the psychological and emotional roots of Huchel’s fictionalized self as well as the social and political pressures which shaped its later development.