

**Classic Poetry Series**

**Peter Huchel**  
**- poems -**

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## Peter Huchel(1903-1981)

Huchel was born in Lichterfelde near Berlin. From 1923 to 1926 Huchel studied literature and philosophy in Berlin, Freiburg and Vienna. Between 1927 and 1930 he travelled to France, Romania, Hungary and Turkey. In 1930, he changed his first name to Peter and befriended Ernst Bloch, Alfred Kantorowicz and Fritz Sternberg. His early poems, published from 1931 to 1936, are strongly marked by the atmosphere and landscape of Brandenburg. In 1934, Huchel married Dora Lassel. The couple would divorce in 1946 and Huchel would marry Monica Rosental in 1953. Between 1934 and 1940, Huchel wrote plays for German radio. During the Second World War, he served as a soldier until he was taken prisoner by the Russians in 1945. After his release, he began working for East German radio and in 1949, he became editor of the influential poetry magazine Sinn und Form ("Sense and Form"). After the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, Huchel came under attack from the East German authorities and the following year he was forced to resign the editorship of Sinn und Form. From 1962 to 1971, he lived in isolation under Stasi (secret service) surveillance in his house in Wilhelmshorst near Berlin. In 1971, he was finally permitted to leave the German Democratic Republic and move, first to Rome, then to Staufen im Breisgau, where he later died.

# Eastern River

Do not look for the stones  
in water above the mud,  
the boat is gone.  
No longer with nets and baskets  
the river is dotted.  
The sun wick,  
the marsh marigold flickered out in rain.

Only the willow still bears witness,  
in its roots  
the secrets of tramps lie hidden,  
their paltry treasures,  
a rusty fishhook,  
a bottle full of sand,  
a tine with no bottom,  
in which to preserve  
conversations long forgotten.

On the boughs,  
empty nests of the penduline titmice,  
shoes light as birds.  
No one slips them  
over children's feet.

Translated by Michael Hamburger

Peter Huchel

# Meeting

For Michael Hamburger

Barn owl  
daughter of snow,  
subject to the night wind,

yet taking root  
with her talons  
in the rotten scab of walls,

beak face  
with round eyes,  
heart-rigid mask  
of feathers a white fire  
that touches neither time nor space.

Coldly the wind blows  
against the old homestead,  
in the yard pale folk,  
sledges, baggage, lamps covered with snow,

in the pots death,  
in the pitchers poison,  
the last will nailed to a post.

The hidden thing  
under the rocks' claws,  
the opening into night,  
the terror of death  
thrust into flesh like stinging salt.

Let us go down  
in the language of angels  
to the broken bricks of Babel.

Translated by Michael Hamburger



# Melpomene

The forest bitter, spiky,  
no shore breeze, no foothills,  
the grass grows matted, death will come  
with horses' hooves, endlessly  
over the steppes' mounds, we went back,  
searching the sky for the fort  
that could not be razed.

The villages hostile,  
the cottages cleared out in haste,  
smoked skin on the attic beams,  
snare netting, bone amulets.  
All over the country an evil reverence,  
animals' heads in the mist, divination  
by willow wands.

Later, up in the North,  
stag-eyed men  
rushed by on horseback.  
We buried the dead.  
It was hard  
to break the soil with our axes,  
fir had to thaw it out.

The blood of sacrificed cockerels  
was not accepted.

Translated by Michael Hamburger.

Peter Huchel