

RUTH ROACH PIERSON  
**EINE DUNKLE SEITE**

hallo Uwe, I can't help  
thinking about that year  
*das die Weichen meines Lebens*  
*stellte*, throwing the switch  
that shunted my train onto tracks  
it would not otherwise have travelled

and you are the only surviving  
member of the family I lived with  
that year, except for Renate,  
the youngest sibling who decades

later withdrew her affection  
after discovering in my poems  
*eine dunkle Seite*<sup>1</sup> I kept hidden

during that exchange year  
revealing to others only  
the vivacious, accommodating  
and polite side to my self,  
living, as I was, as the guest

of a family of which I was not  
a member but wished I were  
at a time when I, naïve, knew  
nothing about the *dunkle Seite*  
of Germany's recent past, only

of Germany's defeat in the war,  
nothing about the crimes committed  
by a land known for its *Dichter und Denker*<sup>2</sup>

a *dunkle Seite* zealously wrapped  
throughout those post-war years  
in a deadening silence

there is a German saying  
that to avoid being struck  
by lightning in a thunder storm,  
one should not stand under an oak  
but under a beech, a *Buche*  
as in *Buchenwald*

<sup>1</sup> a dark side

<sup>2</sup> poets and thinkers