

**Shame and Blame: Second-Generation Memories of Nazi  
Germany.**

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## **Summary:**

Through creative and critical writing my thesis investigates the ways in which second-generation Germans may inherit their parents' traumatic memories. I explore the role that creative projects may play in liberating those who have been troubled by a painful past.

This venture began when I met a Jewish man whose family died in the camps. At this moment, feelings of shame threatened to overwhelm me. My mother lived in Germany during World War II. Anxiety about my heritage had always been difficult to manage. Consequently, my thesis became a pilgrimage of reconciliation as I tried to heal this shameful legacy. This move towards healing stemmed from the belief that my burden of shame was out of place three generations after the war. My acknowledgement encouraged me to explore a variety of creative techniques used by others who had grappled with trauma. How did other creative artists devise narratives that facilitated healing?

I chose to reconcile my burden of shame by creating my mother's story. Because my mother rarely spoke about her past, I employed imagination, historical research and reconstruction to produce a narrative out of silence. During this undertaking, her story became mine as I explored my response to her life. Conjuring up memories of my mother also shed light on my own identity, enabling me to leave behind a childhood denial of my German heritage. By accepting that I belonged to a nation capable of committing terrible atrocities, my auto/biography became an act of witness, for my mother and myself which I found healing. This act of witness culminated in a practice-led narrative and an academic inquiry, constructed in response to the encouragement of literary theorists who believe that painful pasts could be repaired by engaging with them via writing. My exegetical response to my narrative was designed to enable the reader to situate my story within a wider historical and cultural perspective of second-generation German shame. The exegesis also reflected

critically on my creative composition, particularly in relation to the ethics of constructing my mother's voice for my own benefit.

Finally, I investigated the concept of healing via creativity: for individuals and a nation, as they endeavour to construct an identity that reconciles people with a difficult past. My conclusion highlights the importance of engaging imaginatively with suffering and providing strategies for addressing such traumas.

**Key words:** Shame, memory, trauma, legacy, forgiveness, healing, second-generation, Holocaust, Germans, creativity.

**Declaration:**

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

**Signed**.....

**Date**.....

**Signed**..... **Date**.....

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I especially want to express my appreciation to the people who so generously agreed to be interviewed for this project. Their honesty and insight have enabled me to move beyond theory as I seek to understand the long-term effects of trauma and shame.

And, finally, I would like to dedicate this book to my mother. After writing so many words about her I still find it difficult to express my newfound gratitude for being her daughter.

*In the Shadow of the*

*Shoah,*

*by*

*Barbara Brown.*

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