

Mother Night Study Guide

Mother Night by Kurt Vonnegut

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Plot Summary

Mother Night is a first-person narrative accounting the events in the life of Howard W. Campbell, Jr., who was a spy during WWII. Campbell is an American by birth, but made a name for himself as a writer in Germany. When World War II breaks out, Campbell chooses to stay behind in Germany and gets recruited by the Nazis to spread their propaganda, and he gets recruited by the United States to be a spy and send out messages through his propaganda. He is eventually put on trial in Israel for war crimes due to his participation during the war. This is the story of how a well-intentioned man recruited as an American spy becomes regarded as one of the most notorious Nazi propaganda machines.

The narrator, Howard W. Campbell, Jr., is asked to enter into the record a written account of his experience as a propaganda agent for the Nazis. As he sits in his jail cell, he starts to write what he remembers. He was born in New York in 1912 and eventually moved to Germany with his family. He married a nice German actress named Helga, and when the war broke out, his family left Germany, but he chose to stay there with Helga and her family. The narrator earned money during the war by serving as a broadcaster and writer of Nazi propaganda to the English-speaking world.

He is recruited by an agent of the U.S. government to become a spy for the Allied forces. He accepts the position and begins sending out coded messages in his broadcasts. This goes on until the end of the war. During the war, Helga begins entertaining the troops, and she is killed by an attack while she is performing.

At the end of the war, when the narrator is caught, he is released almost immediately and goes into hiding in New York City. His life is void of meaning and he spends most of his time inside the small attic he rents. Eventually, he meets his neighbor, George Kraft, and they help each other start living life again little by little. One day he discovers that a newspaper has done an article about him, praising him for his good work spreading the truth during the war, and they also published the address where he is living. He also got a piece of mail from the man who captured him after the war. In the letter, the man tells the narrator to expect a visit from him.

The publisher of the newspaper that revealed his address pays the narrator a visit. The publisher comes bearing a gift for the narrator. It is his long lost wife, Helga. They get reacquainted and everything seems like life could be back to the way it was. Then Helga breaks the news that she is not really Helga. She is Resi, Helga's younger sister. Nevertheless, the narrator accepts her for who she is any they carry on their love affair.

Soon, news spreads of the narrator's location and that he is indeed alive. He starts to get a lot of mail and he sees a newspaper article that says Israel is trying to get him over there so he can be tried for war crimes. Things are getting serious and they plan to escape to another country. When their escape plans are compromised, the narrator is saved by the secret agent who originally recruited him. The narrator finds out that Resi



is a Russian spy, and she is arrested along with his best friend, who also turns out to be a Russian spy.

Nothing in the narrator's world appears to be real. The only thing he had was his love for Helga and his love for Resi. With that gone, he feels there is nothing left. The narrator has a moment of clarity and he decides that he needs to stop running and face what he has done in his life. He turns himself in and he is transported to Israel to await trial.

As he waits for the trial to start, the narrator chronicles the events of his life for the historical record. Then, when he least expects it, the American agent who recruited him comes out of hiding to support his innocence and he sends a letter detailing how the narrator acted as a spy to help the Allied forces. That would be what he needed to aid his defense at trial. The narrator finishes up the story detailing his life and then he comes to the realization that he will always be remembered as the Nazi propagandist. He longs to be free and leave this life of hiding and being trapped behind him. He knows he has to take responsibility for what he has done. He decides the only way to be truly free is to end it all.



Chapter 1-3

Chapter 1-3 Summary

Mother Night is a first-person narrative describing the events in the life of Howard W. Campbell, Jr., who was a spy during WWII. Campbell is an American by birth, but made a name for himself as a writer in Germany. When World War II breaks out, Campbell chooses to stay behind in Germany and gets recruited by the Nazis to spread their propaganda, and he gets recruited by the United States to be a spy and send out messages through his propaganda. He is eventually put on trial in Israel for war crimes due to his participation during the war. This is the story of how a well-intentioned man recruited as an American spy becomes regarded as one of the most notorious Nazi propaganda machines.

The year is 1961. Howard W. Campbell, Jr., is sitting in a jail cell in old Jerusalem waiting for his trial to begin. Tuvia Friedmann, the Director of the Haifa Institute for Documentation of War Criminals, has asked him to contribute some writing to the archives about Nazi Germany. Friedmann has supplied Campbell with a typewriter, a stenograph service, and the use of research assistants so that he may properly document his memory of the events.

As he sits in his cell, the narrator looks out upon the infant nation of Israel, and while it is so young, the crimes that he is accused of, and the war in which they allegedly took place, seem to have happened so long ago.

The narrator begins a conversation with one of his guards, Andor Gutman. Andor Gutman spent time in Auschwitz extermination camp and tells the narrator of his experiences and how he almost became a member of Sonderkommando. Sonderkommando means special detail and if you were put on that detail, it became your duty to shepherd condemned persons into the gas chambers and then lug their dead bodies out at the end. When the job was done, the members of the special detail were then killed. Andor recalls for the narrator that people volunteered for the Sonderkommando, and he did as well. Andor then tells him that all day long at the camp, beautiful music played through the loud speakers. Often, the music would pause for an announcement that said, "Leichentrager zu Wache." The translation for this phrase is "Corpse-carriers to the guardhouse." The narrator says that he understands why Andor volunteered for certain death. Andor responds that it is one of the most shameful things he has ever done and deeply regrets it.

Later on, the guards change and Arpad Kovacs comes on duty. He demands to see what the narrator has written of his story. Kovacs proceeds to chastise the Jews who did not put up a fight against Nazism. He put up a fight and pretended to be a Nazi. He even joined the S.S., the most fanatical wing of Nazism, in order to blend in. He recalls that he was so convincing, he was put in charge of investigating a leak within the group. As a result of his investigation, 14 S.S. men were shot on his recommendation and



Adolph Eichmann personally congratulated him. Arpad comments that he was sorry that he didn't know how important Eichmann was, because if he had, he would have killed him.

Chapter 1-3 Analysis

The narrator agrees to write down his side of the story and reflect on why he is being tried for war crimes because he doesn't really see that the full effect of his actions during the war. It is not until he takes a full inventory of his life that his place in the world hits him.

When the narrator tells Andor that he understands why he volunteered for certain death, this is an allusion to one of the themes of the book. When you are dead, you are dead. Your guilt can no longer haunt you, and you are relieved of your suffering. The narrator can relate to the need to be free and how death is a means to achieve that freedom. After hearing the guards' stories, the reader gets the sense that people did whatever it was they need to do to get through the war.



Chapter 4-6

Chapter 4-6 Summary

At shift change at the jail, Bernard Mengel comes in to begin guarding the narrator. Bernard says to the narrator, "You are the only man I ever heard of who has a bad conscience about what he did during the war. Everybody else, no matter what side he was on, no matter what he did, is sure a good man could not have acted in any other way." When the narrator asks Bernard why he thinks he has a bad conscience about things, he answers it is because of the way he sleeps and dreams. Bernard says that not even Rudolph Franz Hoess, the man who looked after millions of Jews as they were gassed, slept the way that the narrator does every night. Bernard was present for the hanging of Hoess and the strap he put around Hoess' ankles before he hung felt exactly like the strap he puts around his suitcase. Both actions felt the same and he was numb to the fact that because of one of them, someone would die.

The narrator recalls that he too knew Rudolph Hoess, Commandant of Auschwitz. He had met him at a New Year's Eve party at the start of the war in 1944. Hoess complimented him on his creative writing ability. The narrator was at the party because his boss, Dr. Paul Joseph Goebbels, Head of the German Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, had ordered him to attend. Goebbels had dreams of creating propaganda plays and even using part of the Gettysburg Address to further their Nazi cause.

The narrator asks Bernard if he has any clue about what he dreams about at night. Bernard replies that last night he was saying the names of two women, Helga and Resi, repeatedly. Bernard says that he also told them goodbye, and that he mumbles something about New York.

The narrator then recalls information about New York, the city he refers to as his personal purgatory. He lived in New York for 15 years. He reappeared there after disappearing from Germany after the war. He rented an attic and continued to live there until one month before when he was brought to Israel for trial. He often sat in the attic and listened to the children playing their games in the park. A familiar cry from the kids was "Olly-olly-ox-in-free" which signified the hide-and-seek game was over and the kid hiding could go ahead and reveal himself. The narrator longs to hear that cry for himself. He is tired of hiding at this point.

Chapter 4-6 Analysis

In these chapters, the reader begins to get a sense that the narrator is not completely comfortable with the choice that he made to become a spy and work for the Nazis. The jail guard indicates that something about the way the narrator sleeps is very telling to this point. As the narrator sleeps, he cries out for the women in his life who have died.



He still feels a deep sense of loss, indicating that love was an important part of the narrator's life.

At the same time, the guard expresses how comfortable he got with his job and how normal death seemed to him after a while. The author writes of these issues as an anti-war statement. Nothing is black and white in war. Even the most horrible atrocities are excused and begin to seem normal. After a while, people long for it to end. They long to stop running and fighting, even if the solution is death. The narrator wishes to be free of the burden of hiding from the world. He is coming to terms with living in the open even if he is seen not as the American spy hero that he was, but rather the Nazi propagandist the world thinks that he is.



Chapter 7-9

Chapter 7-9 Summary

At this point in the book, the narrator recalls the events in his life that led him to Germany. He was born in Schenectady, New York in 1912. His father was an engineer and his job often had him away from the house. The narrator was an only child and was very close to his mother, who was a housewife and amateur cellist. He describes his mother as a beautiful, talented, and morbid person who was drunk most of the time.

When the narrator was 11, his father got a transfer to work in Germany. From then on, the narrator's life began as a German. He became fluent in the language and had many German friends. He became a playwright and married a German actress named Helga Noth.

The narrator's father and mother left Germany when the war broke out in 1939. The narrator and Helga stayed in Germany and the narrator earned his keep as a writer and broadcaster of Nazi propaganda to the English-speaking world until the war ended in 1945. The narrator explains that he was high on the list of war criminals due to the fact that his crimes were so public. He was transported to a Nazi death camp that the American soldiers had taken over. Nothing happened to him though. The narrator reveals that nothing happened to him because he served as an American agent all through the war. His broadcasts carried coded information out of Germany in the form of special mannerisms and pauses during the broadcasts. He never saw the people who gave him the instructions as to where to insert the pauses into the broadcasts, and he just always assumed that he was transmitting yes or no answers to certain questions.

It was this job as an American agent that saved his neck. He was freed under a technicality and disappeared into New York under an assumed name. He was left alone so much so that he began going by his real name of Howard W. Campbell, Jr., again. Even then, nobody bothered him and every once in a while he would see his name in a newspaper or magazine. The closest he came to being detected was by the mother of a Jewish doctor, Abraham Epstein, living in his building. The narrator had an infected thumb and went to seek help from the doctor. Epstein's mother made a point to tell the narrator that he has the same name as a famous broadcaster. As the narrator is leaving the doctor's apartment, his mother questions the narrator in German and asks him if he understands. The narrator replies that he doesn't know German. "Auf wiedersehen" the mother says, and the narrator says it back and confirms that it means goodbye. The mother corrects him and says that it means 'Until we meet again.'

The narrator explains how he became an American agent. He was recruited in 1938. At the time, he was 26 and had only been married to Helga for a month. He was enjoying a career as a fairly successful playwright at the time. As he sat on a park bench pondering the plot of his next great play, to be titled 'Nation of Two' about him and Helga, he was approached by an American man who proceeds to start up a conversation.



The American man begins to speak about a man he knows, and this man and his life sound curiously like the narrator's life. As the man goes on, he propositions the narrator to stay on after the war breaks out so he can pretend to be a Nazi. Since the narrator already knows many Nazis because of his popularity in his career, the American man, who reveals himself as Major Frank Wirtanen of the U.S War Department, says it should be no problem for him to continue to keep the trust of Nazi leaders and help the Allied cause at the same time. The best reason he cited for the narrator to become a spy is that he is a ham. He likes to act and fool everyone. Fool everyone, he did. He hid the real honest version of himself so far inside, no Nazis ever suspected a thing. The U.S. government neither confirms nor denies that the narrator was an agent of theirs. In fact, nobody believes that Frank Wirtanen even exists. The narrator refers to him as his Blue Fairy Godmother.

Chapter 7-9 Analysis

Initially, the narrator did not want to work as a spy. He told Wirtanen that he was comfortable with his life and his beautiful wife. Wirtanen tells him that as the war breaks out, nobody will be immune from its wrath. Then, he convinces the narrator that he might as well do what he does best. The agent plays on the narrator's need for attention and he tells him to ham it up for the public. Be the center of attention. Be so good at fooling people and show what a good storyteller he is.

The use of the phrase "Until we meet again" by the doctor's mother is foreshadowing that she will play an important part later on in the book. In addition, as the narrator sits pondering the next play he will write about the love between him and his wife, the narrator refers to them as a nation of two. This idea represents how two people can survive in a crazy world as long as they are loyal to each other and live only for each other, the nation of two. This theme of love above all else is the only thing that wills the narrator to live throughout his life. As the story progresses, he realizes this. The fact that he is alone in a world without love becomes very real to him.



Chapter 10-12

Chapter 10-12 Summary

The narrator truly appreciates the unconditional and uncritical love that he gets from Helga. So much so that he never revealed to her that he was a spy. He says it wouldn't have mattered to her one bit. She was happy with him the way he was and she believed that he meant all the nutty things he said at parties and on the radio. They had a wonderful life and Helga often entertained the troops. That is how the narrator lost her. She was entertaining the troops at Crimea and the Russians took it back. She was presumed dead. The narrator hired a private detective to hunt down any word of her, but he found nothing. The narrator was once a part of a nation of two, "and when that nation ceased to be," the narrator says, "I became what I am today and what I will always be, a stateless person." The narrator remembers that he was warned of this by his Blue Fairy Godmother. He told the narrator that to do his job right, he will have to commit high treason, and that he will never be forgiven for it as there is no legal mechanism in which forgiveness can be granted. "The most that will be done for you," he said, "is that your neck will be saved. But there will be no magic time when you will be cleared, when American will call you out of hiding with a cheerful: Olly-olly-ox-in-free"

The narrator then reveals that his parents have died. They left him enough money that he is able to live on the interest. During his postwar years in New York, he lives on very little. He is a recluse and has no joy in his life. Without Helga, his life is meaningless.

One day, the narrator decides to purchase an old wooden broom. He starts carving up the broomstick and suddenly finds himself making an entire chess set. He is filled with joy for the first time in a while and he must share his creation with someone. He seeks out his neighbor, and he introduces himself. His neighbor is George Kraft. He is a painter and incidentally, a Russian spy whose real name is Colonel Iona Potapov, but the narrator has no idea he is a spy when he meets him. They begin to play chess together and they form a friendship. The narrator thinks about being better at ping-pong than he is at chess. He recalls how he and his double partner, Heinz Schildknecht, were the propaganda ministry ping-pong champions for four years running. The narrator and Kraft end up playing at least three games a day every day for a year. They both begin to help each other feel alive again.

For a while, the narrator lied to Kraft about what he had done and who he is, but the friendship strengthened so quickly that the narrator eventually reveals everything to him. When the narrator tells him, Kraft reacts in defense of the narrator. Kraft says he is ashamed to be an American because of the way the narrator, an American hero in his mind, is being treated. The narrator shows Kraft his writing and Kraft encourages him to start writing again.

The narrator goes downstairs to check his mail only to find several that he has gotten several curious pieces of correspondence. The first was a newspaper called The White



Christian Minuteman. It was an anti-Semitic, anti-Negro, anti-Catholic hate sheet, published by the Reverend Doctor Lionel J.D. Jones, D.D.S. The second piece of mail was a letter from an American Legion post. It was a piece of hate mail from Bernard O'Hare, the man who captured him in Germany. He threatened the narrator that he knows where he is and he will be paying him a visit really soon.

The narrator was a bit puzzled as to how Bernard found out where he was living, and then as he leafed through the Minuteman magazine, he saw an article about himself, praising him for his part in spreading truth, and it gave his full address.

Chapter 10-12 Analysis

The narrator used his love for Helga to get through the war. All his energy was concentrated on her and he was able to block out all the bad in the world. This was the only way he was able to enjoy life. After she died, he became sort of a death-worshipper. His days were meaningless and they revolved around saying good morning to Helga and toasting her with a drink at night. He lives in the past and tries to remember the good; although as time goes on, the narrator's deeds during the war start to become more real for him as he realizes those are the memories he is still trying to reconcile as his life moves on.

The Blue Fairy Godmother warned the narrator that war will destroy everything and if the narrator insisted on staying on in Germany, he might as well serve the Allied forces because in the end he will be left with nothing. When this prediction came true, the narrator became void of purpose. The author is sending the reader an anti-war message that if you engage in war, you will be left with nothing. You will be an empty shell of a human being.



Chapter 13-15

Chapter 13-15 Summary

The narrator provides a full biography of the bigoted Doctor Lionel J.D. Jones, D.D.S., D.D. in order to provide a contrast between him and a race-baiter who is ignorant and insane. The narrator says, "I am neither ignorant nor insane. Those whose orders I carried out in Germany were as ignorant and insane as Dr. Jones was. I knew it. God help me, I carried out their instructions anyway."

The mail in the narrator's mailbox increased in number after his address was published. He got a ton of mail from supporters letting him know that he was not friendless in the world. At the time, the narrator still has no idea how anyone found out where he was living. However, the narrator later reveals that it was George Kraft who wrote a letter to the Minuteman magazine telling of the narrator's whereabouts and asking that a copy of the paper be sent to Bernard O'Hare. Kraft had plans for the narrator, but the narrator said he was unaware of them until much later.

The Reverend Jones and his entourage decide to pay the narrator a visit. They come bearing a rather unusual surprise. The narrator is shocked to discover that they have brought his Helga back to him after all these years. While a bit older, now 45 years of age, Helga was still as lovely as he remembered her. It was she, and the narrator couldn't believe it. She survived the attack.

Chapter 13-15 Analysis

The narrator is careful to draw a strict contrast between Dr. Jones and himself. The contrast is drawn to demonstrate that the narrator is not insane or ignorant. While this is achieved, the fact that he is not crazy is almost worse because he was complicit in the Nazi cause out of free will. He did it knowing the Nazi message was insane and wrong, but he carried out their orders with a clear conscience at the time. He had a clear conscience because he thought that in the end, the good person he knew himself to be inside would be recognized. He indulged the part of himself that liked attention and liked to fool people. The thought there would be time for people to know the loving side of him later. The author makes it clear that in war, there is only the present. How you conduct yourself defines who you are to the rest of the world. When Helga is reintroduced into his life, the narrator feels like he is alive again. It is almost as if no time has passed. Little does he know that the Nazi illusion he has created in his life has come back to haunt him.



Chapter 16-18

Chapter 16-18 Summary

Helga and the narrator immediately caught up for lost time and the narrator introduced her to his good friend Kraft. It turns out that the Minuteman paper has a small circulation in West Germany and coincidentally, the narrator's wife just turned up as a refugee there. She got in touch with Dr. Jones and that is what brought her back into the narrator's life. For the past 15 years, Helga did anything she could just to survive. She worked as part of a labor group for a few years. She spent some time in jail and was sent to Siberia to be an interpreter at a huge prisoner-of-war camp.

Dr. Jones interrupts the happy couple and says that it was the monetary donations of thanks from many of the narrator's supporters that paid the way for Helga to return to him. The narrator was baffled that people thought he needed thanking. He inquires as to why he is being thanked. Dr. Jones replies, "For having the courage to tell the truth during the war when everybody else was telling lies."

After the crowd of guests left, Helga and the narrator start talking about their past. Helga tells the narrator that she knows how her father died, but that she hasn't been able to find out anything about her mother and Resi. The narrator recalls the events of the last time he saw them. It was February 12, 1945. The narrator had stolen a motorcycle and went over to his in-laws' house to say goodbye. The Russians were only 20 miles from Berlin. As the narrator chats with Werner Noth, Noth reveals that he never liked the narrator because he would have preferred for his daughter to marry a German, and over the years he would have liked nothing more than to be able to prove he was a spy and to have him shot, but then Noth realized something. Noth tells the narrator that it doesn't matter if he was a spy because he never served the enemy as well as he served the Nazis. Noth goes on to say, "I realized that almost all the ideas that I hold now, that make me unashamed of anything I may have felt or done as a Nazi, came not from Hitler, not from Goebbels, not from Himmler - but from you. You alone kept me from concluding that Germany had gone insane."

Chapter 16-18 Analysis

In these chapters, it becomes clear to the narrator just how wide his influence had been on the public all those years. He thought he was passing time to get through the war and helping the United States at the same time. He regarded it as a simple task, but really, his job was equal to the most heinous of the war criminals. His propaganda influenced the German public's perception of the Nazi cause. He was more of an enabler of the Nazi mission than Hitler had been. It may have been Hitler's manifesto that started the fire, but it was the narrator's broadcasts that spread the flames. The narrator is well regarded as a propagandist, so much so that many people praised him for being the strong light for truth. It was a Nazi truth, but a truth to them nevertheless.



Chapter 19-21

Chapter 19-21 Summary

Before the narrator left his father-in-laws house, he stopped by to say goodbye to little 10-year-old Resi Noth. He tells Resi that he is going to the front lines of the war to fight the Russians. She tells him he will probably die, and they will never see each other again. Since that is the case, Resi finds it appropriate to tell the narrator that she loves him... like really loves him. She tells him that she was so jealous of Helga when they would come there together. Now, since she has been dead, Resi has been having dreams about growing up to marry the narrator.

The narrator has known for a while that his father-in-law was dead. The detective agency he hired to find out about Helga told him of the news. Then, the narrator reveals that he found out more recently in 1958 or 1959, exactly how Werner Noth died. Noth was hanged from his own apple tree by slave laborers, mostly Poles and Russians. They had no idea who he was, only that he was somebody important. They hung him for the pure satisfaction of hanging somebody important. They hung him and revived him eight times, then finally gave him what he begged for - death.

The narrator then backtracks to explain what he meant when he said that he has stolen a motorcycle to pay a visit to his in-laws. The narrator says he didn't really steal the motorcycle; it is more as if he borrowed it for all eternity from his best friend in Germany, Heinz Schildknecht. The motorcycle was Heinz' most prized possession. He once confessed to the narrator that he loved it more than he loved his wife.

The narrator and Heinz were sitting around drinking one night, and the narrator asks him how good a friend he really is. Heinz was taken aback by the question and asks the narrator why he would ask such a thing. The narrator then says that he needs a favor. He wants to borrow the motorcycle. Heinz did not hesitate when he told the narrator to "take it!" The next day, the narrator took off on the beloved motorcycle. He never saw Heinz again.

The narrator asked the people at the Haifa Institute for the Documentation of War Criminals for any news of Heinz. They told him that Heinz is now in Ireland, and he is an expert on the death of Hitler seeing as how he stumbled upon Hitler's gasoline-soaked body as it was burning but still recognizable.

Chapter 19-21 Analysis

The narrator shrugs off Resi Noth's confession of love for him, but it is significant because it speaks to her intentions. She dreams of being his wife; it is foreshadowing for the narrator's future.



Again, the theme of death providing a sense of relief from life is present when the narrator describes the death of Werner Noth. Noth begged for death to take him out of his living misery.

Heinz's love for his motorcycle and the fact that he loves it more than his wife is a testament to the damaging effects of war. There is a deep detachment to humanity and to the feelings of human beings. This detachment allows Heinz to disregard his wife and her worth, and instead put value on an object above her with no real remorse for doing so.



Chapter 22-24

Chapter 22-24 Summary

Helga and the narrator discuss how the attic is not a fit place for a nation of two. They discuss getting a hotel. Before they go, Helga says she has a surprise for him. Helga reveals that she has a suitcase filled with all the narrator's old manuscripts and almost every heartfelt word ever written by the narrator. They reminisce and read some of his old poetry, and then the narrator thinks to ask her how it she happened to find all this stuff. Helga says that when she went to West Berlin, she went to the old theater they used to perform in and inquired about him. Nobody remembered him, but someone remembered that there was a trunk stashed away with the narrator's name on it. Inside, Helga found all of his life's work.

Helga and the narrator proceed to find a hotel and spend a glorious night together. When they awoke in the morning, they went out hunting for a new bed, but were unsuccessful because the stores were closed in observance of Veteran's Day. All of a sudden, Helga says that they haven't really gotten a chance to talk things over. The narrator doesn't think there is anything to talk about, and adds that nothing she could do or say would make him love her less. She challenges that notion and questioningly confirms that nothing she could do would spoil their love. Then Helga admits that she has something to say that she was afraid to say it before. The narrator tells her to just say it. So, she says that she is not Helga. She is her little sister, Resi.

After Resi broke the news to the narrator, they go and sit down to chat. The narrator questions her about why she would do such a thing to him. She tells him again and again it is because she loves him and she has always loved him. She says that when she escaped to West Berlin, they gave her a form to fill out asking her who she was and who she knew. Being Helga, a popular actress, seemed much more appealing than being Resi the cigarette-machine operator. The narrator accepted Resi for who she was and forgave her. Gradually, Resi's personality came out. The narrator got to see that she wasn't as much like Helga as she said she was. The contrast only made her look younger and him feel older.

Chapter 22-24 Analysis

As the narrator and Helga become familiar with each other again, they are just like they always were. They had a great night together and realized that they still had all the love they used to have. They were two souls in love; a nation of two.

Then, when Resi breaks the news that she was just posing as Helga, the narrator's heart is broken again. Yet, he is easily convinced that Resi is worthy of love, as well. He feels a bit of guilt about accepting Helga's sister's love, especially given the age difference, but he puts his conscience aside and welcomes Resi into his life.



Chapter 25-27

Chapter 25-27 Summary

When the narrator and Resi finally make it home, the narrator notices that his mailbox is stuffed full again and now someone has drawn a swastika next to his name on the box. The narrator lets Resi in on his renewed fame. All of a sudden, a man walks up and says, "Campbell! Howard W. Campbell. You know him?" The narrator starts to deny it when the man pulls out a newspaper picture of the narrator and discovers that the narrator is the man he is looking for. He narrator looks down at the paper to discover one of the headlines indicates that Israel has located a war criminal and is pressuring the United States to send him there to be tried. The war criminal was him. Israel wants him sent over there. Before he could full process this information, the man hit him and said, "That one was for Private Irving Buchanon. Buchanon is dead. He was the best friend I ever had." Then the man hit him again and said, "That's for Ansel Brewer." The man continued to hit the narrator and rattle off names of his buddies who had died at the hands of the Nazis.

The narrator woke up in a dark, humid studio. Banners of Adolf Hitler and swastikas hung all over the room. Resi was by his side and he soon realized that he was in the cellar of Dr. Lionel Jones. Dr. Abraham Epstein had given first aid to the narrator at the scene of the beating, and then Dr. Jones took him to a hospital for further treatment.

The narrator realizes what he had read in the paper. He asks Resi, "The Republic of Israel really wants me - to try me for what the paper said?" His thoughts are interrupted by loud shooting noises. The narrator asks who is making that loud racket. Resi says that it is his friend George Kraft. The narrator is puzzled and inquires as to why Kraft is there at all. Resi replies, "He's coming with us. It has all been decided. Everybody agrees that the best thing is for us to get out of the country. Dr. Jones has made arrangements."

Chapter 25-27 Analysis

Things are getting more serious for the narrator. More people are starting to pay attention to the fact that he is still alive. It hits him that people still remember him and what he did in the war even though, to him, it seems like another lifetime ago. For him, when he originally started exploring his life as a spy, he didn't realize how much hatred there was for his cover job. Being a propagandist was just a cover and a way to help him live a somewhat normal life in a time of war. After he notices the seriousness of the hatred for him, he realizes that his life may be in jeopardy and that the Israelis are serious about wanting to try him for war crimes. The thought of going on trial for his propaganda really made it sink in for the narrator that what he did was serious, even though he did it while working as an American spy.



Chapter 28-30

Chapter 28-30 Summary

The narrator goes to find Kraft, who is busy target shooting. The narrator finds that he is shooting at a Nazi propaganda caricature of a Jew. The narrator recognizes the target because it was something that he drew. He remembers that he wasn't asked to draw the target. He drew it in an effort to be a more convincing Nazi. It soon became the most popular piece of recognizable propaganda. The Nazi soldiers used it for target practice and refused to use anything else. The narrator starts discussing the escape plans with Kraft. They discuss where to start a new life. Kraft talks about what a true friendship they have and the narrator agrees.

As the narrator was nursed back to health in Dr. Jones' basement, Kraft and Resi kept him company. News came that Israel had stepped up its demands for the narrator. Since nobody had records of the narrator's citizenship, the United States was reluctant to turn him over so easily. The anger toward the narrator grew more vile and serious. People were volunteering to be a part of his firing squad and others were ransacking the attic he used to live in. People were on the hunt for him. Incidentally, Bernard O'Hare submitted a letter to the newspaper saying he wanted to get his hands on the narrator one last time, and that he is coming to get him.

The newspaper published a biography of the narrator and as he read it, he recalled that the picture was taken by a photographer named Arndt Klopfer. Everyone went to him, even Adolph Eichmann. In fact, the narrator met Eichmann the first time as they crossed paths as they were getting their pictures taken. The narrator recalls that on his way to Old Jerusalem, where he currently sits, he was locked up in Tel Aviv for 24 hours. On his way out of Tel Aviv, the guards brought him by Eichmann's cell for a little reunion. At the time, Eichmann was busy writing the story of his life. The narrator asks him if he felt that he was guilty of murdering six million Jews. Eichmann replies, "Absolutely not." The narrator asks him what his defense is going to be. The narrator makes a little fun and says, "You were simply a soldier taking orders from the higher-ups, like soldiers around the world?" Eichmann starts yelling at the guards for showing the narrator his statement. The narrator says that he has never seen the statement. Eichmann is baffled and replies, "Then how do you know what my defense is going to be?" The narrator is stunned that his defense was any excuse for what he had done. Eichmann then makes a joke and says, "Listen - about those six million. I could spare you a few for your book. I don't think I really need them all." The narrator reveals that the escape plan is to fly to Mexico City. All the arrangements have been made for Kraft, Resi and the narrator to go down there.



Chapter 28-30 Analysis

The narrator never had a sense of just how much he hid away his true self in the name of being a spy until he remembered that he had drawn that propaganda target. He drew the target just because he could, and because he wanted to prove himself a loyal Nazi without question. It dawns on the narrator in these chapters that maybe he was actually a Nazi after all. When he converses with Eichmann about his defense, the narrator is stunned that the thought that he was simply taking orders would be a good enough defense for what he had done. The author puts this little exchange in the book to satirize the fact that there is no defense for the Nazi actions during WWII, yet that is the defense the entire nation used. When Eichmann says to the narrator that he can spare a few of the six million, he is perhaps trying to let the narrator know that he is to blame as well, and he shouldn't be smug as his hands have blood on them.



Chapter 31-33

Chapter 31-33 Summary

The narrator attends a meeting of The Iron Guard of the White Sons of the American Constitution in order to eulogize one of the members of Dr. Jones' entourage who had recently passed away. At the meeting, Dr. Jones plays a clip of one of the narrator's broadcasts. The narrator sat there in the darkness and listened to his horrible words being replayed for him. He wasn't shocked by them, as he knew full well what he had done and said.

He feels a note being slipped into his pocket. After he gives the eulogy, he rushes off into the bathroom to see what is on the note. It reads, "Coal-bin door unlocked. Leave at once. I am waiting for you in vacant store across the street. Urgent. Your life in danger. Eat this." It was signed by the narrator's Blue Fairy Godmother.

The narrator went to meet him. The Colonel Frank Wirtanen was seated alone. He had aged considerably. Wirtanen get right to the point. He informs the narrator that it is no mystery why the Israelis would want to get their hands on him, but it is more of a puzzle as to why the Russians would. The narrator is confused. What Russians? Wirtanen tells him Resi Noth, and the old man, George Kraft. Wirtanen says, "They are both Communist agents. We've been watching the one who calls himself Kraft now since 1941. We made it easy for the girl to get into the country just to find out what she hoped to do."

Chapter 31-33 Analysis

As the narrator sat in the darkness and listened to his own words being played back for him, he wasn't the least bit shocked at the things he had said. He knew what he had done, and he couldn't deny that it was him. After all, there are plenty of recorded archives documenting it. It was all him. Even though he was acting as a propagandist to help the Allied cause, the narrator fully embraced his role. He could hear it in his voice. The narrator is alone the one responsible for becoming more than an actor and a spy. He was a real propagandist.

When Wirtanen tells the narrator that the two closest people to him are really spies, he is sucked back into a world where people only use others as a means to an end. He thought he was loved, but really, he has only been pursued as some prize this entire time. This is the author's way of demonstrating just how seriously people exploit each other during wartime. Their allegiances shift and the focus becomes winning at all costs even if it means betraying who you are. Destroying human life is a necessary evil, and winning is like this big monster that takes over your body. War becomes a blanket excuse for your actions.



Chapter 34-36

Chapter 34-36 Summary

The narrator sits stunned and Wirtanen continues to tell him of his friends' betrayal. Kraft/Potapov wanted to get the narrator to another country where he could be more easily kidnapped. Mexico was the choice. Wirtanen tells the narrator that there is a plane waiting for him in Mexico right now ready to take him to Moscow. It seems the Russians want to use the narrator as an example that the Americans are hiding such people, and they also want to see if he will confess to all sorts of collusion between the Americans and the Nazis at the start of the Nazi regime. This information is so important to them that they will threaten death to get it. However, it was Resi's death, not his.

It all becomes clear to the narrator now. Resi was sent there to make him love her. However, how did she get his manuscripts? Wirtanen reveals that they were in Moscow already. They were evidence in a trial against a man named Stepan Bodovskov. Bodovskov found the narrator's trunk of writing and decided to pass it off as his own. He was extremely successful at it and the narrator's plays went on to be fabulous hits. Then Bodovskov decides to try to start writing on his own.

Kraft/Potapov realizes that Bodovskov's writing isn't his own after the narrator showed him his collection of works. Kraft/Potapov reports to the Russian government that Bodovskov is a fake. The Moscow government raids his villa only to find a trunk full of the narrator's writing and some additional writing that Bodovskov had done himself. The original writing got him in trouble. He was tried, convicted and shot for his originality. Bodovskov had written a 2,000-page satire on the Red Army in a style that was "distinctly un-Bodovskovian" and for that behavior, he was shot.

Wirtanen then tells the narrator that the meeting is surrounded and is about to be raided. He suggests that they get out of the neighborhood. The narrator asks what will happen to the people he cares about inside. Wirtanen replies that Resi will be deported, and Kraft/Potapov will be arrested along with the Reverend Doctor Jones for various firearms charges.

Chapter 34-36 Analysis

In one instant, Wirtanen has taken away the best parts of the life the narrator has managed to hold together for himself. In a sick twist, he discovers that someone else took credit for his life's work and made a very successful career out of it. The only bright side of that deal is that people actually liked his plays, and they did very well. The narrator is about to watch his love and his best friend get hauled off to jail. Despite their betrayal, the narrator is genuinely worried about them.



Chapter 37-39

Chapter 37-39 Summary

Wirtanen advised the narrator to leave the scene of the raid, but something comes over the narrator and he realizes the only place he wants to be is with his love and his best friend. He returns to the meeting area and finds it is over. Everyone is sitting around playing cards and going about their business. The narrator begins talking to Kraft/Potapov and Resi. He mentions very slyly that maybe they should go somewhere besides Mexico, possibly Moscow. Kraft/Potapov knows the narrator is onto him and starts to try to avoid the conversation, but the narrator confronts him fully and Kraft/Potapov is busted for his lies. So is Resi. In an emotional rant, Resi tries to appeal to the narrator and tell him that the original plan was for them to get him to Russia, but she really was always in love with him. When she met him, she realized she couldn't betray him. She crafted a plan with Kraft/Potapov to go to Mexico and stay there happily ever after.

The narrator tells them that American agents have surrounded the building and that there is about to be a raid. Resi pleads with him to believe her love for him is real. She argues and questions him that if they don't live for love, what should they live for? Then, the raiders brake in and start to arrest everyone. Resi proclaims that she has nothing to live for. In a subtle gesture, she touches her lip. It turns out she slipped a little capsule of cyanide into her mouth. Resi mutters, "I will show you a woman who dies for love." Seconds later, she died in the narrator's arms.

Chapter 37-39 Analysis

As everything is falling apart, the narrator discovers how it is that Dr. Jones, his father-in-law and the rest of the Nazis can be so adamant about their clearly wrong cause. He wonders how people can appear so normal, but really be missing a part of their thought process. How is it that they can discard worldly true pieces of information? It is as if these people just ignore the truths and put in place their version. The narrator finds a small sense of relief that at least he never messed with the internal parts of his brain. He never bought into that reality and discarded the truth.

When Resi died in his arms, he lost faith that love was something to live for. It became something to die for instead. She gave up and he gave up. What else is left in his life now that love is gone?



Chapter 40-42

Chapter 40-42 Summary

The narrator is arrested in the raid along with everyone else. He was released within an hour, no doubt thanks to his Blue Fairy Godmother. As he was being released, the narrator froze. It wasn't a fear of death that froze him, for he had learned to accept death as a friend. It wasn't guilt that froze him, for he taught himself not to feel guilt. What froze him was the fact that he has absolutely no reason to move in any direction. What had made him move through all those horrible years was curiosity, and now that has disappeared too.

The narrator finally found his way back to his attic apartment. There he meets a policeman who is guarding his place from looters and angry citizens. He strikes up a conversation with him. The policeman notices that the narrator is down in the dumps and he brings up chemicals. He tells the narrator that scientists are finding out it is all about the chemicals in our brains and that sometime they make people do crazy unexpected things.

The narrator goes into his apartment and starts reliving memories of the great days when it was just him and Helga. He remembers that one time, he and Helga were hiding in a bomb shelter as the bombs kept raining down on them. All of a sudden, one of the women in the shelter couldn't take it any more and she just cried out, "We surrender! We give up!" As she turned to yell the good news to her children, he husband knocks her out cold. He then turns to the Nazi soldier inside and apologizes for his wife's behavior. The soldier doesn't flinch at the woman's behavior. Instead, he tells the husband that everything is fine and that it was understandable. The man marveled at a system that could forgive weakness. All the while, the bombs dropped overhead, and the children didn't bat an eye. Nor would they ever bat an eye.

Chapter 40-42 Analysis

As the narrator ponders the fact that the children were never fazed by the events in the shelter, he thought they would never again be fazed by anything. He would never again be fazed by anything. He was completely numb. As he said, he had no reason to move in any direction. His life was at a standstill. Everything that once compelled him to keep going was lost. Maybe his whole life full of choices had just been simple chemical reactions in his brain playing with him. Maybe he was never really thinking for himself at all.



Chapter 43-45

Chapter 43-45 Summary

When he went into his apartment, he realized the door had been torn off the hinges. Someone placed a board outside that read, "Nobody and nothing inside." The lights didn't work, and nobody was playing out back in the park. At that moment, the narrator longed to hear someone cry, "Olly-olly-ox-in-free." There was complete silence, until the narrator hears a rustle.

It was Bernard O'Hare. He finally came to make good on his promise to find the narrator and take care of him a second time. It isn't long before the narrator realizes that Bernard is drunk. He was waiting there for him a while and had managed to drink himself silly. They start a conversation and Bernard mumbles that it was in the stars that they meet again someday. He goes on to tell of what a disappointment his life had become and how nothing had turned out the way he thought it would. Then Bernard says he realized why he was in the world and that purpose was to take care of the evilness that is Howard W. Campbell, Jr.

The very drunk Bernard swings at the narrator and it doesn't take much effort for the narrator to defeat him in a hand-to-hand fight. Then the narrator tosses him out of the attic. Bernard says, "I'll get you yet brother." The narrator replies that that may be so, but it won't change his destiny of bankruptcies, too many children and no cash that he complained of.

Flash forward to the narrator is sitting in his cellblock recalling how he got there. He remembers that he went right downstairs to Dr. Abraham Epstein's apartment and asked to turn himself over to the Israelis. Epstein's old mother was glad to help him accomplish this goal. Then, some Jewish friends came to take him to face his fate in Israel. As he is being escorted out the door, the mother croons to him, "Leichentrager zu Wache." Translation: Corpse-carriers to the guardhouse.

So there the narrator sits, inside a jail cell in Israel, put there from his own free will, preparing for his trial. Bernard O'Hare has come to testify against him, as has his old doubles partner. He is no doubt upset about his motorcycle. The narrator has prepared himself for the outcome of the trial. He knows what he has done.

Unexpectedly, the narrator gets a letter in the mail. The letter is from Wirtanen. The letter contains Wirtanen's real name and information. It says he is willing to come forward to testify on the narrator's behalf. That is all the narrator needs to go free. The narrator ponders the letter and the fact that he will be a free man again. He finds the prospect nauseating. The decision has been made that tonight Howard W. Campbell, Jr., will hang for his crimes. He will hang for his crimes against himself. He knows without a doubt that tonight is the night.



Chapter 43-45 Analysis

The author uses the sign "nobody and nothing inside" as the description of the narrator at this point in the book. As the narrator writes the last part of his story, he longs to be free of the burden of knowing what he has done. He has come to terms with his actions and realizes there is no excuse for what he did and who he is. He decides that death is the only cure to remedy the crimes he has committed not only against the world, but against himself. He betrayed who he really was inside, and instead nurtured someone who enabled genocide. In the words of Kurt Vonnegut, he is just "a man who served evil too openly and good too secretly, the crime of his times."



Characters

Howard W. Campbell, Jr.

Howard W. Campbell, Jr., is the narrator and main character. He was born in Schenectady, New York in 1912. He moved with his family to Germany when he was 11. He grew up to become a writer and playwright. He took a German wife named Helga Noth. He is at heart a rather simple fellow, who loved his wife and his work. During the war and because of his work as a Nazi propagandist, he stuffs his true self deep inside and puts on a façade for everyone. He is so successful at hiding himself, that people only know him as the Nazi he pretends to be. After the death of his wife, Campbell retreats out of the mainstream and begins hiding his physical being, as well. He becomes so tortured by his work with the Nazi's that he is no longer sure who he really is. He discovers that he is only the illusion he has created, and nothing deeper inside matters to the outside world. The only thing real is the world for him is the love he had for Helga. It kept him sane in the insanity that he was propagating. Without that kind of love in his life, it is all just meaningless and for him, life is not worth living.

Major Frank Wirtanen

Major Frank Wirtanen is a member of the U.S. War Department. He recruits the narrator to stay on in Germany after the war starts so that he can become an American spy. The narrator has no proof of his existence, and he simply contacts the narrator when it is most important. He often gets the narrator out of trouble. Even though the narrator only has contact with Wirtanen a few times in the book, he is a major character as Wirtanen serves as a mirror to the narrator. Wirtanen is always reminding the narrator that the life he has chosen is one of illusion. At one point, the narrator asks Wirtanen whether he trusts him. Wirtanen replies that he could never trust a man who has been as good a spy as he has. Wirtanen reveals that most of the other people he recruited to spy during the war either had their covers blown or were dead. This makes the narrator particularly special to Wirtanen. Wirtanen reveals his identity for the narrator's benefit when the narrator is on trail for war crimes. He contacts the narrator via letter and tells him that his real name is Harold J. Sparrow.

George Kraft

George Kraft, otherwise known as Colonel Iona Potapov, is the narrator's neighbor in New York and also a Russian spy operating in the United States. He is a talented painter and chess player. He befriends the narrator and ultimately betrays him. He is such a good spy, he is willing to exploit the things that he loves in order to benefit his cause.



Tuvia Friedmann

Tuvia Friedmann is the Director of the Haifa Institute for Documentation of War Criminals. He is a specialist in war criminals. He has requested that Howard Campbell write a book detailing his experiences and involvement with the Nazi party while in jail awaiting his trial for war crimes.

Helga Noth

Helga Noth is the wife of the main character Howard Campbell. She is a successful German actress and the love of the narrator's life.

Resi Noth

Resi Noth is the little sister of the narrator's wife, Helga. She pretends to pose as Helga in order to satisfy her need to be loved by the narrator.

Werner Noth

Werner Noth is the narrator's father-in-law. He is the Chief of Police of Berlin.

Arnold Marx

Arnold Marx is one of the Jewish jail guards. He is only 18-years-old and barely remembers WWII or the horrific events that took place in Nazi Germany. He has lived his whole life in Israel, and he makes the narrator aware that people have moved on and have looked past the crimes committed in WWII.

Andor Gutman

Andor Gutman is another one of the jail guards. He has a first-hand recollection of the events that took place during WWII. He spent two years at the Auschwitz extermination camp. He tells the narrator of his experiences in the camp.

Arpad Kovacs

Arpad Kovacs is the third man who guards the narrator. He is on duty from 6:00 p.m. until midnight. During the war, he was a Jew who did not give in quietly to the demands of the Nazi's. He was living in Hungary at the time and secured fake papers and joined the Hungarian S.S, one of the most fanatical wings of Nazism.



Bernard Mengel

Bernard Mengel is the Polish Jew who guards the narrator from midnight until 6:00 a.m. He saved his own life in WWII by pretending to be dead among the bodies. He pretended to be so dead that a German soldier came along and pulled out three of his teeth with gold inlays and never suspected that he was alive.

Heinz Schildknecht

Heinz Schildknecht is an employee at the Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda. He is an expert at propagandizing New Zealanders and Australians. At one time, he is the narrator's best friend and ping-pong doubles partner.

Lieutenant Bernard B. O'Hare

Lieutenant Bernard B. O'Hare is the man who captures the narrator at the end of the war and later seeks him out as he is hiding.

The Reverend Doctor Lionel J.D. Jones, D.D.S.

The Reverend Doctor Lionel J.D. Jones, D.D.S. is the publisher of *The White Christian Minuteman*, a hate sheet newspaper. He seeks out the narrator's friendship and eventually becomes the only person whom the narrator can trust.

Abraham Epstein

Abraham Epstein is a doctor, who lives with his mother, in the same building in New York that the narrator lives in. He and his mother eventually help the narrator turn himself into the Israelis.

Rudolph Franz Hoess

Rudolph Franz Hoess is the commandant of the extermination camp at Auschwitz.

Dr. Paul Joseph Goebbels

Dr. Paul Joseph Goebbels is the narrator's boss. He is the head of the German Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda.



Adolf Eichmann

Adolf Eichmann is the architect and great experimenter of Auschwitz. He introduced the conveyor belts into the crematoria, and he was the "greatest customer in the world" for Cyklon-B, which was the gas used in the death chambers.

Alvin Dobrowitz

Alvin Dobrowitz is the lawyer working for the narrator's defense at his war crimes trial.



Objects/Places

The Old Jerusalem Jail

Old Jerusalem Jail is where the narrator waits for his trial. While he is incarcerated here, he writes the detailed account of how he got there.

Haifa Institute for Documentation of War Criminals

This institute is interested in gathering information about war criminals from World War II. The director of the institute asks the narrator to document the events of his life to enter into the historical record.

The Attic

The attic where the narrator lived in New York for 15 years while he was hiding out from the rest of the world.

The Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda

The Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda is the Nazi ministry office that the narrator works for during the war.

A Nation of Two

The narrator refers to himself and his wife Helga as a nation of two. This idea represents how two people can survive in a crazy world as long as they are loyal to each other and live only for each other.

The Motorcycle

The narrator borrowed for eternity, his best friend's most prized possession. This motorcycle was something his best friend loved more than he loved his own wife.

The White Christian Minuteman

The White Christian Minuteman is the anti-Semitic, anti-Negro, anti-Catholic hate sheet, published by the Reverend Doctor Lionel J.D. Jones, D.D.S.



The Cellar at Dr. Jones' House

Dr. Jones' cellar is where the narrator wakes up in as he is recovering from being beaten by an angry American. It is in this cellar that plans are made for the narrator's escape from America.

The Jew Target

The Jew target is a caricature of a cigar-smoking Jew. The narrator drew it as a piece of propaganda. It became so popular that the Nazi soldiers used nothing else for their target practices.

The Iron Guard of the White Sons of the American Constitution

The Iron Guard is the hate group assembled by Dr. Jones and his entourage to carry on their truth of white power. There are 20 students currently attending the meetings. They all have blonde hair, are over 6 feet tall and are always nicely dressed.



Themes

We are Who We Pretend to Be

Howard Campbell was a genuine person who loved his life and his wife. The war came along and he chose to indulge his acting skills to become someone who he wasn't. He became a master at illusion. Even his wife thought that he really believed the crazy things he said. She didn't care though because she was totally convinced that it was their life and nothing but their love mattered. He spent the whole war telling lies and he became responsible for those lies. He was recognized only as the person he showed the world that he was. Even though the narrator kept reminding himself that he was that nice genuine person inside, he was the only one who was even aware such a person existed at all. That is the danger of illusion. The author is trying to get across that we are in this world who we portray ourselves to be. Who we want to be or who we think we are in this world is meaningless. Intentions of goodness are meaningless. The narrator knew that his role in the war as a spy was helping the Allied cause, but ultimately his job as a propagandist hurt his people more. The only thing the narrator was known for was his evil acts. He let that side of him become him. He was so good at it that there was not a single soul in the world who could say he was somebody better.

Love May be the Only Real Thing in the World

Out of all the things that the narrator pretended to be in this world, he never pretended about love. Love was the only real thing. He knew it his love for Helga was true. When Resi pretended to be Helga and fooled him, he was willing to overlook that and forgive her because he felt her love was real. After the narrator found out that Resi was a Russian spy sent there to bring him to Moscow, he felt the love was nothing. He was completely lost without it and had no reason to move forward in life. Love was his salvation and it helped him keep his sanity in an insane world. When he lost it, he had no reason to live.

When You are Dead, You are Dead.

Death plays a major role in this book. No matter what situation the characters were in, death seemed to be an option to make the pain go away. The author wished to get across the finality of death and that when you are dead, all your worldly pains are alleviated. The Jews in the death camps volunteered to be corpse-carriers and meet a certain death. After being hung and revived several times, Werner Noth begged for death. Resi learned that the narrator didn't believe her love for him was real and without that love, she had nothing. She ended her suffering with death. Ultimately, the narrator chose death too.

For the author, death is the greatest gift and most horrible consequence of war. Great in the sense that for the people who suffer from living through a war, it is a way to stop

their horrible memories from haunting them. It is the most horrible consequence of war because after human beings suffer through the death and destruction of war, they become numb. They are just living corpses so tortured by their memories that they beg for the gift of death.

Style

Point of View

Vonnegut's *Mother Night* is told from a first-person narrative and it is a book within a book written by the narrator. Because the story is told this way, you only know events as the narrator recalls them; therefore, as a reader, you are forced to take the narrator at his word. As the story unfolds, the narrator discovers more about himself as does the reader. The book is centered on the narrator's experiences. He is the protagonist, but also his own worst enemy. The narrator spends time recounting his life and his encounters with the other characters. As he discovers more about who he really is, it is clear that the other characters are in the book to help reveal the narrator's true self. A common disadvantage of first-person narration is that a first-person narrator cannot adequately characterize himself or herself, but in this case, the narrator attempts to do so. The narrator is often revealing admirable qualities about himself as an attempt to define himself as a better person than his life events would lead the reader to believe. For Vonnegut, this type of first-person account of events was necessary in order to really get across his dislike for war. He uses the narrator and subjects him to all the horrors in order to convey his anti-war message. It allows the reader to experience the emotional angst of someone who lived through World War II, much like the author did.

Setting

The narrator of *Mother Night* indicates that he writes the book in 1961. He writes it because Tuvia Friedmann, the Director of the Haifa Institute for Documentation of War Criminals, has asked him to describe for the record the events of his life. His recollection of events covers his life in America and his move with his family to Germany. Then another section of his life takes place back in America when he lives in New York for 15 years. He lives in a small attic in Greenwich Village. He has nothing of real value there, and the whole attic is furnished by Army care-package items from the Salvation Army store. Finally, the narrator moves back into the present tense and he finds himself sitting in a jail cell in Old Jerusalem waiting to be tried for war crimes.

Language and Meaning

The author's use of language is fairly simple and straightforward. He uses foreshadowing and written clues to alert the reader that he or she should take note of particular parts, because they will be important elements later on in the book. All the themes in the book ultimately come back to the idea that war is hell. All the characters in the book are written simply and this allowed the author to isolate their experiences with the war and concentrate on fleshing out their feelings about how they were changed by living through war. Throughout the book, the author uses subtle dark satire to highlight

his anti-war message. The author makes it clear just how people use each other to their own detriment.

Structure

Mother Night is divided into 45 short chapters, with an introduction and an editor's note by Kurt Vonnegut, where he rededicates the book to the main character Howard W. Campbell, Jr., because he is "a man who served evil too openly and good too secretly, the crime of his times." The timeline of the book starts out in the present and moves around throughout the narrators past as he recalls the defining points of his life. It ends again in the present and concludes shortly thereafter.



Quotes

"My name is Howard W. Campbell, Jr. I am an American by birth, a Nazi by reputation, and a nationless person by inclination." Chapter 1, pg. 1

"After two years of hearing that call over the loudspeakers, between the music," Gutman said to me, "the position of corpse-carrier suddenly sounded like a very good job." Chapter 2, pg. 9

"After we finished hanging Hoess," Mengel said to me, "I packed my clothes to go home. The catch on my suitcase was broken, so I buckled it shut with a big leather strap. Twice within the hour I did the very same job - once to Hoess and once to my suitcase. Both jobs felt about the same." Chapter 4, pg 16

"And I, hiding from many people who might want to hurt or kill me, often longed for someone to give that cry for me, to end my endless game of hide-and-seek with a sweet and mournful - 'Olly-olly-ox-in-free.'" Chapter 6, pg. 24

"It gave itself a title, which was 'Das Reich der Zwei' - 'Nation of Two.' It was going to be about the love my wife and I had for each other. It was going to show how a pair of lovers in a world gone mad could survive by being loyal only to a nation composed of themselves - a nation of two." Chapter 9, pg. 33

"It wasn't that Helga and I were crazy about Nazis, I can't say, on the other hand, that we hated them. They were a big enthusiastic part of our audience, important people in the society in which we lived. They were people. Only in retrospect can I think of them as trailing slime behind." Chapter 9, pg. 36

"No young person on earth is so excellent in all respects as to need no uncritical love. Good Lord - as youngsters play their parts in political tragedies with casts of billions, uncritical love is the only real treasure they can look for." Chapter 10, pg. 42

"You hate America, don't you?" she said. "That would be as silly as loving it," I said. "It's impossible for me to get emotional about it, because real estate doesn't interest me. It's no doubt a great flaw in my personality, but I can't think in terms of boundaries. Those imaginary lines are as unreal to me as elves and pixies. I can't believe that they mark the end or the beginning of anything of real concern to a human soul. Virtues and vices, pleasures and pains cross boundaries at will." Chapter 23, pg. 132

"I must admit that this target represents an excess of zeal, since I was not working as a graphic artist for the Nazis. I offer it into evidence against myself. I presume my authorship of it is news even to the Haifa Institute for the Documentation of War Criminals. I submit, however, that I drew the monster in order to establish myself even more solidly as a Nazi." Chapter 28, pg. 154



"Watching Kraft pop away at that target, I understood its popularity for the first time. The amateurishness of it made it look like something drawn on the wall of a public lavatory; it recalled the stink, diseased twilight, humid resonance, and vile privacy of a still in a public lavatory—echoed exactly the soul's condition in a man at war." Chapter 28, pg. 154

"Say what you will about the miracle of unquestioning faith, I consider the capacity for it terrifying and absolutely vile." Chapter 28, pg. 160

"I can hardly deny that I said them. All I can say is that I didn't believe them, that I knew full well what ignorant, destructive, obscenely jocular things I was saying. The experience of sitting there in the dark, hearing the things I'd said, didn't shock me. It might be helpful in my defense to say that I broke into a cold sweat, or some such nonsense. But I've always known what I did. I've always been able to live with what I did. How? Through that simple and widespread boon to modern mankind - schizophrenia." Chapter 31, pg. 179

"It was wholly unexpected. Resi seemed so in favor of life, so right for life, that the possibility of her preferring death did not occur to me." Chapter 38, pg. 219

"Then tell me what to live for - anything at all. It doesn't have to be love. Anything at all!" She gestured at objects around the shabby room, dramatizing exquisitely my own sense of the world's being a junk shop. "I'll live for that chair, that picture, that furnace pipe, that couch, that crack in the wall! Tell me to live for it and I will!" she cried. It was now me that her strengthless hands laid hold of. She closed her eyes and wept. "It doesn't have to be love," she whispered. "Just tell me what it should be." Chapter 38, pg. 221

"There are plenty of good reasons for fighting," I said, "but no good reason ever to hate without reservation, to imagine that God Almighty Himself hates with you, too. Where's evil? It's that large part of every man that wants to hate without limit, that wants to hate with God on its side. It's that part of every man that finds all kinds of ugliness so attractive. It's that part of an imbecile," I said, "that punishes and vilifies and makes war gladly." Chapter 43, pg. 251

Topics for Discussion

What role does death play in the book? Is death a good thing or a bad thing?

Why does Vonnegut use real historical figures in a fictional novel?

Why isn't the narrator conflicted by his initial acceptance of the propaganda job? When and why do his feelings about his role in the war change?

Why was the narrator's role in the Nazi movement more important than Hitler's?

What is the most important theme of the book and why?

Why was the target caricature drawing an indictment of the narrator as a war criminal?

The novel has a strong anti-war message. What arguments comprise that message?

Why does Resi pretend to be Helga?