

Introduction

In the introduction of "Mother Night," the narrator grapples with a significant moral: "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be." His reflections begin with a personal account of his limited experiences with Fascism in his hometown of Indianapolis during the 1930s. He recalls encounters with local native Fascists, a memory of receiving a copy of "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," and the absurdity surrounding his aunt's marriage to a German, which required her to provide proof of her non-Jewish heritage.

The narrative transitions to his experiences during World War II, where he found himself captured and interned. As a private battalion scout, he had the peculiar fortune of working for his keep rather than enduring perpetual imprisonment. This led him to Dresden, a city he describes as beautifully adorned and deemed an "open" city, supposedly untouched by the war's atrocities.

However, this changed dramatically on February 13, 1945, when American and British bombs fell mercilessly on Dresden, creating an unprecedented firestorm that resulted in the deaths of 135,000 people—an event he chillingly summarizes as the largest massacre in European history. The narrator shares vivid details of his harrowing experience in a meat-locker beneath a slaughterhouse while the devastating bombardment raged above. He describes the eerie aftermath, where he and others were turned into "corpse miners," extracting bodies from the ruins, often discovering the deceased clutching valuables, while relatives looked on.

Ultimately, the narrator contemplates what might have been had he been born in Germany, reflecting darkly on the possibility of having been a Nazi himself. He emphasizes the finality of death, stating, "When you're dead you're dead," punctuating his thoughts with a somewhat unexpected yet poignant note: "Make love when you can. It's good for you." Thus, the introduction captures not just the horrors of war but also the complexities of identity, morality, and human experience itself.