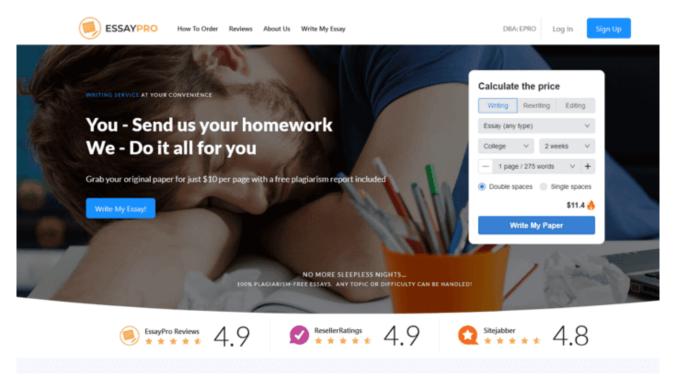
Kurt Vonnegut - The Only Story of Mine Whose Moral I Know



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Kurt Vonnegut - The Only Story of Mine Whose Moral I Know

"This is the only story of mine whose

moral I know. I don't think it's a marvelous

moral; I simply happen to know what it is: We

are what we pretend to be, so we must be

careful about what we pretend to be."

"Look out, Kid!"

-Bob Dylan, Subterranean Homesick Blues

Vonnegut's work is rife with instances of lie become truth. Howard Campbell's own double identity is a particularly strong example, although Vonnegut's message is subtle. His actions were an attempt to survive, but also an attempt to serve his country. Campbell would no doubt have survived regardless - survival is his special talent - but we aren't given any indication that he would have become a cog in the war machine. In fact, the opposite seems to be true. When approached by Major Wirtanen, his contact with the DOD, he protests that he is not political and will not help the war's progress. He was not an anti-Semite, and does not become one. Furthermore, in at least two passages in the novel he makes reference to a true self that he kept hidden. Campbell's "we are" in his moral cannot be just a reference to personality. Instead, we must take a less psychological view. Campbell pretends to be a man who incites other men to hatred. He becomes that man. It is in Campbell's actions and their effects, along with his societal and legal persecution, that we find the lie that becomes truth. As Mr. Campbell was not the only propagandist at work in Germany in World War Two, it is for the most part impossible to determine what measure of war and genocide guilt he deserves. Nor can we say that he helped win the war in the sense that those who stormed the beaches at Normandy did. But as he became his lie to the Germans, he becomes his lie to Israel and

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