

- How does the way the narrator addresses the reader reveal his attitude towards the photographs he's examining?

I have seen three pictures of the man. The first, a childhood photograph you might call it, shows him about the age of ten, a small boy surrounded by a great many women (his sisters and cousins, no doubt). He stands in brightly checked trousers by the edge of a garden pond. His head is tilted at an angle thirty degrees to the left, and his teeth are bared in an ugly smirk. Ugly? You may well question the word, for insensitive people (that is to say, those indifferent to matters of beauty and ugliness) would mechanically comment with a bland, vacuous expression, "What an adorable little boy!" It is quite true that what commonly passes for "adorable" is sufficiently present in this child's face to give a modicum of meaning to the compliment. But I think that anyone who had ever been subjected to the least exposure to what makes for beauty would most likely toss the photograph to one side with the gesture employed in brushing away a caterpillar, and mutter in profound revulsion, "What a dreadful child!"

Indeed, the more carefully you examine the child's smiling face the more you feel an indescribable, unspeakable horror creeping over you. You see that it is actually not a smiling face at all. The boy has not a suggestion of a smile. Look at his tightly clenched fists if you want proof. No human being can smile with his fists doubled like that. It is a monkey. A grinning monkey-face. The smile is nothing more than a puckering of ugly wrinkles. The photograph reproduces an expression so freakish, and at the same time so unclean and even nauseating, that your impulse is to say, "What a wizened, hideous little boy!" I have never seen a child with such an unaccountable expression.

The face in the second snapshot is startlingly unlike the first. He is a student in this picture, although it is not clear whether it dates from high school or college days. At any rate, he is now extraordinarily handsome. But here again the face fails inexplicably to give the impression of belonging to a living human being. He wears a student's uniform and a white handkerchief peeps from his breast pocket. He sits in a wicker chair with his legs crossed. Again he is smiling, this time not the wizened monkey's grin but a rather adroit little smile. And yet somehow it is not the smile of a human being: it utterly lacks substance, all of what we might call the "heaviness of blood" or perhaps the "solidity of human life"—it has not even a bird's weight. It is merely a blank sheet of paper, light as a feather, and it is smiling. The picture produces, in short, a sensation of complete artificiality. Pretense, insincerity, fatuousness—none of these words quite covers it. And of course you couldn't dismiss it simply as dandyism. In fact, if you look carefully you will begin to feel that there is something strangely unpleasant about this handsome young man. I have never seen a young man whose good looks were so baffling.

- What do the narrator's observations about objects, people and places reveal about his attitude and values?

Mine has been a life of much shame.

I can't even guess myself what it must be to live the life of a human being. I was born in a village in the Northeast, and it wasn't until I was quite big that I saw my first train. I climbed up and down the station bridge, quite unaware that its function was to permit people to cross from one track to another. I was convinced that the bridge had been provided to lend an exotic touch and to make the station premises a place of pleasant diversity, like some foreign playground. I remained under this delusion for quite a long time, and it was for me a very refined amusement indeed to climb up and down the bridge. I thought that it was one of the most elegant services provided by the railways. When later I discovered that the bridge was nothing more than a utilitarian device, I lost all interest in it.

Again, when as a child I saw photographs of subway trains in picture books, it never occurred to me that they had been invented out of practical necessity; I could only suppose that riding underground instead of on the surface must be a novel and delightful pastime. I have been sickly ever

since I was a child and have frequently been confined to bed. How often as I lay there I used to think what uninspired decorations sheets and pillow cases make. It wasn't until I was about twenty that I realized that they actually served a practical purpose, and this revelation of human dullness stirred dark depression in me. Again, I have never known what it means to be hungry. I don't mean by this statement that I was raised in a well-to-do family—I have no such banal intent. I mean that I have had not the remotest idea of the nature of the sensation of "hunger." It sounds peculiar to say it, but I have never been aware that my stomach was empty. When as a boy I returned home from school the people at home would make a great fuss over me. "You must be hungry. We remember what it's like, how terribly hungry you feel by the time you get home from school. How about some jelly beans? There's cake and biscuits too." Seeking to please, as I invariably did, I would mumble that I was hungry, and stuff a dozen jelly beans in my mouth, but what they meant by feeling hungry completely escaped me.

Of course I do eat a great deal all the same, but I have almost no recollection of ever having done so out of hunger. Unusual or extravagant things tempt me, and when I go to the house of somebody else I eat almost everything put before me, even if it takes some effort. As a child the most painful part of the day was unquestionably mealtime, especially in my own home.