

Your main commentary should be focused on *articles*. Other topics may also be addressed.

### Arthur

A child wants to see. It always begins like this, and it began like this then. A child wants to see.

5 He was able to walk, and could reach up to a door handle. He did this with nothing that could be called a purpose, merely the instinctive tourism of infancy. A door was there to be pushed; he walked in, stopped, looked. There was nobody to observe him; he turned and walked away, carefully shutting the door behind him.

10 What he saw there became his first memory. A small boy, a room, a bed, closed curtains leaking afternoon light. By the time he came to describe it publicly, sixty years had passed. How many internal retellings had smoothed and adjusted the plain words he finally used? Doubtless it still seemed as clear as on the day itself. The door, the room, the light, the bed, and what was on the bed: a  
15 'white, waxen thing'.

A small boy and a corpse: such encounters would not have been rare in the Edinburgh of his time. High mortality rates and cramped circumstances made for early learning. The household was Catholic, and the body that of Arthur's grandmother, one Katherine Pack.  
20 Perhaps the door had been deliberately left ajar. There might have been a desire to impress upon the child the horror of death; or, more optimistically, to show him that death was nothing to be feared. Grandmother's soul had clearly flown up to Heaven, leaving behind only the sloughed husk of her body. The boy wants to see?  
25 Then let the boy see.

An encounter in a curtained room. A small boy and a corpse. A grandchild who, by the acquisition of memory, had just stopped being a thing, and a grandmother who, by losing those attributes the child was developing, had returned to that state. The small boy  
30 stared; and over half a century later the adult man was still staring. Quite what a 'thing' amounted to – or, to put it more exactly, quite what happened when the tremendous change took place, leaving only a 'thing' behind – was to become of central importance to Arthur.

### 35 George

George does not have a first memory, and by the time anyone suggests that it might be normal to have one, it is too late. He has no recollection, obviously preceding all others – not of being picked up, cuddled, laughed at or chastised. He has an awareness of once  
40 having been an only child, and a knowledge that there is now Horace as well, but no primal sense of being disturbingly presented with a brother, no expulsion from paradise. Neither a first sight, nor a first smell: whether of a scented mother or a carbolic maid-of-all-work.

45 He is a shy, earnest boy, acute at sensing the expectations of others. At times he feels he is letting his parents down: a dutiful child should remember being cared for from the first. Yet his parents never rebuke him for this inadequacy. And while other children might make good the lack – might forcibly install a mother's doting face or a father's supporting arm in their memories – George does not do so. For a start, he lacks  
50 imagination. Whether he has never had one, or whether its growth has been stunted by some parental act, is a question for a branch of psychology science which has not yet been devised. George is fully capable of following the inventions of others – the stories of  
55 Noah's Ark, David and Goliath, the Journey of the Magi – but has little such capacity himself.

He does not feel guilty about this, since his parents do not regard it as a fault in him. When they say that a child in the village has 'too much imagination', it is clearly a term of dispraise. Further up the  
60 scale are 'tellers of tall stories' and 'fibbers'; by far the worst is the child who is 'a liar through and through' – such are to be avoided at all costs.