

“Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones” (NEH 478)

A thousand years or so before the Christian era (bce), the psalmist wrote, *‘Open my eyes, so that I may behold wondrous things.’* (Psalm 119 v18) and Ezekiel said, *‘...you have eyes to see, but do not see.’* (12 v2) Later Paul wrote to the people of the church at Corinth. *‘Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we shall see face to face.’* (1 Corinthians 13 v12) At the time a mirror would have been a piece of polished metal, copper or silver. If it was left unused, it would become tarnished, and the reflected image would be dimmed, distorted or obscured. Only by regular polishing, would the reflection be untarnished and clear.

Now: why did pirates wear eye patches? No, not because they had lost an eye in swashbuckling skirmishes. Below decks, gun powder was stored, amongst other things, and carrying a lighted candle to illuminate their dim perambulations, was clearly hazardous. They covered one eye, so that it was readily accustomed to the dimness, when they left the upper decks, and removed the patch.

And: have you ever considered that, 61% of all people in the UK wear spectacles, 75% aged 50 and over; look around you. But have you ever wondered why so few people in films or on television wear glasses? It does not accurately reflect reality. In fact, when we really stop to consider, how much of what we view on television is a true reflection of real life? For example in drama, people never stop talking, or indeed shouting if you watch Eastenders; they never have to stop to think; they always have a ready response. In reality we spend much of our time in non-oral communication; and in public places, that audiological space is filled by ubiquitous piped music!

Consider what I call cinematic clichés. When you are watching a piece of drama, look for the clichés, which are legion, and divorced from reality. For example:

- a body is found, the finder always screams and drops what they are carrying
- entering a church, the organ is always playing and the candles are always lit
- priest are nearly always played as caricatures
- burials always take place in graveyards which would have long ago been closed
- in a car chase, the driver always turns round to look; why, they have a mirror (don't try it!)
- there is always a parking space
- on a gravel drive, cars are just left, not parked
- cars are rarely locked and lights are left on
- characters getting out of bed always put on a dressing gown, never slippers
- when it's raining, the sun is always shining, and water, from a hose, cascades down the window
- coal fires always have big flames - obviously gas-fired
- empty houses are never that, there are always bits of furniture left behind

- food is rarely eaten, but chased around the plate
- drinks are often left when leaving a pub
- when someone leaves the room, they always say, “*Oh another thing*” Or “*One last question.*”
- people never say “OK” always “Very well.”
- people never whistle or hum a recognisable tune
- a couple about to kiss for the first time, are nearly always interrupted
- room walls are always coloured, never white
- when a ‘phone goes dead, the caller always looks at the mouthpiece
- ‘phone numbers never have to be looked up
- when searching with a torch, it is always briefly shone at the camera
- The movie always finishes with a zoom out, and a crane shot.

Okay, that’s ruined your viewing of drama for evermore, sorry! But what about the adverts? Do you watch them? Who does? It’s usually peetime or teatime! So to capture your attention they are usually, humorously distracting, depicting cartoons or animals, or both, often seemingly irrelevant to the product on offer. Now subliminal advertising is illegal. However, particularly in financial adverts., have you ever tried to read what is written at the bottom of the screen? I have. I can’t. It is usually covered by the moving images, and isn’t on the screen long enough anyway. But it is the disclaimer, rather like the pages of small print which they hope no-one reads, so they don’t want you to read this either!

Since 1895 Benjamin Disraeli has been credited with the following: “*There are lies, damned lies and statistics.*” However, doubts now hang over its true authenticity, but that’s by-the-by (www.york.ac.uk/depts/maths/histat/lies) Before I gave up collecting examples, I had 21 dubious statistical claims from TV adverts. Here are a few examples of those folk, who agreed with, or endorsed the products.

Clinique	70% of 73 people	Dove compressed	92% of 111	Tena Lady	70% of 99
Flora Proactive	82% of 69	Pearl Drops	52% of 52	Lencome	78% of 67

Well it’s all meaningless, until you have answers to such questions as; Was the sample random or a quota? Where were the people chosen; was it in a cluster or geographically significant. Anyway, the samples are too small to be reflected nationally. Were the people coerced in any way to accept samples? What were the criteria for success? Were they rewarded? And so on.

So when we *look*, do we actually *see*? Is our attention merely focused on the obvious and the transient, *on* the glass, or do we see beyond, questioning and challenging? *Through* the glass.

George Herbert (1593-1633) clearly understood this;

*'A man that looks on glass,
On it may stay his eye.
But if he pleaseth, through it pass,
And then the heav'n espy.'* (NEH 456 v2)

Then ... "*Bright the Vision that Delighted ...*" (NEH 343)

Howard Brayton