

1st May 2021

Beauty

**“Beauty is all very well at first sight;
but who ever looks at it when it has been in the house for three days?”**

George Bernard Shaw, Man and Superman

The quote above has always intrigued me. What made Shaw so cynical about beauty? Or was he really as jaundiced about beauty as his writing would indicate? And what on earth was it that had deteriorated so quickly over three days in his house that caused its beauty to disappear?

In my first year as a student, I lived in a campus of university Halls beside the imposing *Arthur's Seat* in the centre of Edinburgh. Surrounded by parkland, from Duddingston Loch to the royal park and Holyrood Palace, it's a magnet for joggers and picnickers, dog-walkers and courting couples, and a motely array of students – mostly dodging their studies. On the evening of 30th April 1968, a bunch of us decided to climb *Arthur's Seat* at dawn the following morning, encouraged by the story that if you washed your face in the dew at dawn on May Day, you would become beautiful. So, more asleep than awake, a dozen of us found ourselves on the top of *Arthur's Seat* as dawn gifted us a wonderful May Day. With great ceremony, and not a little laughter, we bathed our faces in the morning dew. I can't speak for the others, but it didn't improve *my* looks. The better part of the escapade was having bacon-and-egg rolls and steaming cups of tea in an early-opening local café. That was beauty enough!

The old Proverb tells us, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” The measurement of beauty is surely, beyond any individual to define. The poet, Robert Browning, in *Fra Lippo Lippi*, put it this way:

*If you get simple beauty and naught else,
You get about the best thing God invents.*

So let's not bother defining beauty by what we might achieve with the dawn's dew on *Arthur's Seat* – or anywhere else – on a May Day morning, but look for beauty in the simple things, and give thanks to the God who gave us eyes to behold such beauty, and hearts that can appreciate it.

A prayer for today

*Lord, you give us the best of things, and offer us beauty in simplicity.
Help us to notice, to give thanks, and to show simple beauty to others. Amen*

An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>