

facevalue

Don't be fooled by appearances – what you see may not be the reality, writes **Fiona Hoban**

Although I like the start of a new year, I like the start of spring even more. I know it's a well-worn phrase, but is it not absolutely wonderful to notice a stretch in the evenings? And what about that first sight of daffodil stalks as they peep up again? It won't be long before we get a glimpse of their distinctive yellow and orange flowers.

I read something quite incredible about flowers and their colours recently in John O'Donohue's book, *Divine Beauty*. Light is made up of made up of seven different colours on a spectrum (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet). Each colour vibrates at a particular frequency and rhythm. In fact, all objects vibrate at their own particular frequency and rhythm. When light reaches an object, not all of the colours on the spectrum are absorbed; some are rejected. Whatever colour is rejected is reflected back. Whatever is reflected back is what we perceive as the object's colour. A daffodil, for example, is typically perceived by us as being yellow. Yellow is the one colour on light's spectrum that the daffodil does not absorb. The daffodil absorbs red, orange, green, indigo and violet but rejects yellow. Therefore yellow is reflected back and we see this as the daffodil's colour.

If a daffodil were to get up and look at itself in a mirror, it probably wouldn't recognise itself. It would be looking for the blend of blues and reds that it has absorbed into its core.

O'Donohue says: "The mirror would offer no glimpse of the inner

colours ... they continue to live concealed within the object." As I read O'Donohue's piece, I thought how strange it is to think that, in some way, the actual colour of a daffodil is every colour but yellow.

What else have I been seeing in a topsy-turvy fashion? Just because I see something in a particular way, I assume that what I see is true or accurate. It's the oldest one in the book: outward appearances can be deceiving. A friend of mine told me that her mother once said to her: "Just because a boy has a bit of a quiff in his hair doesn't mean you should write him off immediately."

She thought this was a fair point until her father pulled her aside and said: "That's all good and well, but I've found in life that anyone that has a bit of a quiff in their hair, there's usually good reason for it!"

He would probably concur with Oscar Wilde, who said: "It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances."

However, I think it's fair to say that much of Western culture is caught up with over-valuing outward appearances. The term "looks-ism" is relatively new and it underpins the tendency to put an undue emphasis on the importance of physical appearance as well as a distorted ideal of beauty. Marilyn Munroe, herself an icon of physical beauty, is quoted as saying: "I don't mind making a joke, but I don't want to look like one."

But, as John O'Donohue reminds us, so much is often "concealed within". How often do I see mere yellow when, if I gave it some thought, I could see through to the absorbed blues and reds at the core?

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We're so quick to label, to make assumptions based on outward appearances, to take things at face value. We also seem to be overly concerned about how others might see us and judge us accordingly. Helen Keller sums it up nicely when she says: "The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched – they must be felt with the heart."

When my daffodils bloom this year, I will look at them with a new-found appreciation that while they appear to me as yellow, they have many other colours concealed within their essence.

On a more sentimental note I was thinking maybe the daffodil doesn't reject the colour yellow; maybe it somehow knows that this is the colour that will be most pleasing to the human eye, so it generously reflects it back to us. Like someone who selflessly gives away a prized piece of jewellery, happy in the knowledge that the recipient will appreciate and enjoy wearing it. ✨

