

Clark University

## Clark Digital Commons

---

Faculty Works

Scholarly Collections & Academic Work

---

1980

### Beware the Eyes of March

Nicholas S. Thompson

Clark University, [nthompson@clarku.edu](mailto:nthompson@clarku.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.clarku.edu/facultyworks>

---

#### Repository Citation

Thompson, Nicholas S., "Beware the Eyes of March" (1980). *Faculty Works*. 49.  
<https://commons.clarku.edu/facultyworks/49>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Scholarly Collections & Academic Work at Clark Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Clark Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [larobinson@clarku.edu](mailto:larobinson@clarku.edu).

Nicholas S. Thompson

MARCH-APRIL 1980 11

We have recently read a lot in Harvard Magazine's pages about the genetic determination of character. Last spring, my life presented me with a poignant demonstration of how little (or how much) that concept can mean.

After enjoying forty years of perfect vision, I found that I could no longer read the phone book in the dim closet where we keep the telephone. After being depressed for a few weeks about this change of life, I took myself to the eye doctor. The doctor ran me through a marvelous computerized eye check and then sat me down to talk. He confirmed my need for reading glasses. But then he asked me if I hadn't had difficulty with reading all my life.

"Why do you ask?" said I.

"Well," he explained, "your eyes don't want to converge. Every time you try to bring them together to concentrate on something close, they fight you. I'm sure it's been that way all your life. People who have these sorts of eyes often find that they have to rest themselves while reading, by staring off into space or at some distant object."

The fact is that I *do* stare off into space a lot when I read. I have a reflective nature. Both my father and my brother have reflective natures. My brother has had the eye test, and his eyes don't want to converge just like mine. In school, his teachers said he was bright but lacked attention to detail. My teachers used to say the same thing of me. I once thought that I stare into space a lot because I had, like my brother, inherited my father's reflective nature. In reality, it seems I stare into space a lot because I have inherited his eyes.

How, then, do I come by my need to reflect on things? Given the eyes I have, what else am I to do? Holding the book in my lap, resting for a second my struggling eye-control circuits, I almost have to spend the time reflecting: reflecting on the glacial motion of the cirrus across the sky, on the thrashing of the barren elm tree, on the light touch of the cat as it crosses the damp grass, or even . . . reflecting on the book I am reading.

I suppose in some sense I inherited my reflective nature. But if the diagnostic computer had been invented forty years ago, and if a pair of glasses had been designed to correct the impairment, I might now be a wealthy accountant or a powerful policy maker, instead of a professor, a sometime freelance writer, and a dreamer.

The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars.

But in our eyes.

*Nicholas S. Thompson reflected at Harvard in the class of 1959 and now is associate professor of psychology and ethology at Clark University.*