

ADVANCED READING

PASSAGE 1

The impressionist painters expressly disavowed any interest in philosophy, yet their new approach to art had far-reaching philosophical implications. For the view of matter that the Impressionists assumed differed profoundly from the view that had previously prevailed among artists. This view helped to unify the artistic works created in the new style.

The ancient Greeks had conceived of the world in concrete terms, even endowing abstract qualities with bodies. This Greek view of matter persisted, so far as painting was concerned, into the nineteenth century. The Impressionists, on the other hand, viewed light, not matter, as the ultimate visual reality. The philosopher Taine expressed the Impressionist view of things when he said, "The chief 'person' in a picture is the light in which everything is bathed."

In Impressionist painting, solid bodies became mere reflectors of light, and distinctions between one object and another became arbitrary conventions; for by light all things were welded together. The treatment of both color and outline was transformed as well. Color, formerly considered a property inherent in an object, was seen to be merely the result of vibrations of light on the object's colorless surface. And outline, whose function had formerly been to indicate the limits of objects, now marked instead merely the boundary between units of pattern, which often merged into one another.

The Impressionist world was composed not of separate objects but of many surfaces on which light struck and was reflected with varying intensity to the eye through the atmosphere, which modified it. It was this process that produced the mosaic of colors that formed an Impressionist canvas. "Light becomes the sole subject of the picture," writes Mauclair. "The interest of the object upon which it plays is secondary. Painting thus conceived becomes a purely optic art."

From this profoundly revolutionary form of art, then, all ideas—religious, moral, psychological—were excluded, and so were all emotions except certain aesthetic ones. The people, places, and things depicted in an Impressionist picture do not tell story or convey any special meaning; they are, instead, merely parts of pattern of light drawn from nature and captured on canvas by the artist.

PASSAGE 2

Many readers assume that, as a neoclassical literary critic, Samuel Johnson would normally prefer the abstract, the formal, and the regulated to the concrete, the natural, and the spontaneous in a work of literature. Yet any close reading of Johnson's criticism shows that Johnson is not blind to the importance of the immediate, vivid, specific detail in literature; rather, he would underscore the need for the telling rather than the merely accidental detail.

In other ways, too, Johnson's critical method had much in common with that of the Romantics, with whom Johnson and, indeed, the entire neoclassical tradition are generally supposed to be in conflict. Johnson was well aware, for example, of the sterility of literary criticism that is legalistic or pedantic, as was the case with the worst products of the neoclassical school. His famous argument against the slavish following of the "three unities" of classical drama is a good example, as is his defense of the supposedly illegitimate "tragicomic" mode of Shakespeare's latest plays. Note, in particular, the basis of that defense: "That this is a practice contrary to the rules of criticism," Johnson wrote, "will be readily allowed; but there is always an appeal from criticism to nature."

The sentiment thus expressed could easily be endorsed by any of the Romantics; the empiricism it exemplifies is vital quality of Johnson's criticism, as is the willingness to jettison "laws" of criticism when to do so makes possible a more direct appeal to the emotions of the reader. Addison's *Cato*, highly praised in Johnson's day for its "correctness," is damned with faint praise by Johnson: "*Cato* affords a splendid exhibition of artificial and fictitious manners, and delivers just and noble sentiments, in diction easy, elevated, and harmonious, but its hopes and fears communicate no vibration to the heart." Wordsworth could hardly demur.

Even on the question of poetic diction, which, according to the usual interpretation of Wordsworth's 1800 preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, was the central area of conflict between Romantic and Augustan, Johnson's views are surprisingly "modern." In his *Life of Dryden*, he defends the use of a special diction in poetry, it is true; but his reasons are all-important. For Johnson, poetic diction should serve the ends of direct emotional impact and ease of comprehension, not those of false profundity or grandiosity. "Words too familiar," he wrote, "or too remote, defeat the purpose of a poet. From those sounds which we hear on small or on coarse occasions, we do not easily receive strong impressions, or delightful images; and words to which we are nearly strangers, whenever they occur, draw that attention on themselves which they should transmit to things." If the poetic diction of the neoclassical poets, at its worst, erects needless barriers between reader and meaning, that envisioned by Johnson would do just the opposite: it would put the reader in closer contact with the "things" that are the poem's subject.

PASSAGE 3

The idea of building "New Towns" to absorb growth is frequently considered a cure-all for urban problems. It is erroneously assumed that if new residents can be diverted from existing centers, the present urban situation at least will get no worse. It is further and equally erroneously assumed that since European New Towns have been financially and socially successful, we can expect the same sorts of results in the United States.

Present planning, thinking, and legislation will not produce the kinds of New Town that have been successful abroad. It will multiply suburbs or encourage developments in areas where land is cheap and construction profitable rather than where New Towns are genuinely needed.

Such ill-considered projects not only will fail to relieve pressures on existing cities but will, in fact, tend to weaken those cities further by drawing away high-income citizens and increasing the concentration of low-income groups that are unable to provide tax income. The remaining taxpayers, accordingly, will face increasing burdens, and industry and commerce will seek escape. Unfortunately, this mechanism is already at work in some metropolitan areas.

The promoters of New Towns so far in the United States have been developers, builders, and financial institutions. The main interest of these promoters is economic gain. Furthermore, federal regulations designed to promote the New Town idea do not consider social needs as the European New Town plans do. In fact, our regulations specify virtually all the ingredients of the typical suburban community, with a bit of political rhetoric thrown in.

A workable American New Town formula should be established as firmly here as the national formula was in Britain. All possible social and governmental innovations as well as financial factors should be thoroughly considered and accommodated in this policy. Its objectives should be clearly stated, and both incentives and penalties should be provided to ensure that the objectives are pursued. If such a policy is developed, then the New Town approach can play an important role in alleviating America's urban problems.