

# The New Criterion

## Notebook

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### Crudity beyond belief

by [Theodore Dalrymple](#)

On the English town Walsall, and its new art gallery.

It is possible that there are uglier towns in the world than Walsall, but if so I do not know them: and I consider myself better than averagely traveled. But while Walsall undoubtedly exists, it is difficult to know where precisely it begins and ends, because it is in the middle of one of the largest and most depressing contiguous areas of urban devastation in the world, the Black Country of the English Midlands. There is nowhere in the world where it is possible to travel such long distances without seeing anything grateful to the eye. To the hideousness of nineteenth-century industrialization is added the desolation of twentieth-century obsolescence. The Black Country looks like Ceausescu's Romania with fast food outlets.

I have been to Walsall twice in my life. The first time was to visit its then principal attraction for outsiders, an establishment called the Serpentarium, which advertised itself as the 1 ...

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