The preceding chapters raise—for me at least—certain questions that seem well worth asking. If Pope is not an exception to the Augustan world, save in his genius, then the broader aspects of his art and thought should be typical or representative in some degree of the whole character of his age; and the qualities we discern in him may well help to define the phenomenon or phenomena we label neoclassicism. His conception and use of imitation, in particular, touch on an issue central to this problem, that of the nature of the classicism of neoclassicism.

The fundamental difficulty in our approach to neoclassicism derives essentially from the same source as our difficulty in approaching the *Imitations of Horace*. Just as critics have always seen Pope's Horace as their Horace, so too we have tended to interpret neoclassicism largely in the light of our own sense of Greece and Rome. Moreover, we have too often compartmentalized the literature of the Restoration and eighteenth century, and sealed it hermetically from its Renaissance predecessors. The classicism of Dryden and Pope must inescapably be the sense of the pre-Christian past that the Renaissance formed and nourished; correlately, our understanding of the very name "Augustan" must depend not on the simple fact of Augustus Caesar, but on the intricate, ambiguous, and often contradictory complex of ideas that he represented to the late Renaissance.

What did the imposition of the Pax Romana mean to literate men of the late seventeenth century? What was its significance as an analogue to the restoration of the Stuarts? Even more fundamentally, what did the collapse of the
Roman republic and the establishment of the Julian monarchy denote to English politicians and poets? What are we to make of such ambiguous figures as Cato and Seneca? And ultimately, beyond all other questions, why was it important to the Augustans that there be a classical precedent, an antique model, for their major actions and thoughts and modes of expression? What does the whole doctrine of imitation mean in its broadest cultural context? There are as yet no answers to many of these questions. Some are perhaps completely unanswerable. But they do point to an area of investigation that seems quite likely to reward careful reappraisal: the function of classical models in the poetry of the Restoration and eighteenth century. The contours of the classical poem underlying any given English one are almost always discernible: the content, however, remains more often than not an enigma. How much, one wonders, might we learn of Cowley's Pindarics by a judicious study of the Renaissance editions of Pindar? Dryden's accomplishment in translating Virgil was guided and shaped by the commentators: how much light would a careful investigation of this cast not only on the contemporary understanding of Virgil but on the total conception of epic form and content? The same, of course, applies to Pope's translation of Homer, which could probably reveal more about the whole problem of the epic than all the Renaissance arts of poetry put together. The interest in pastorals, the spate of verse epistles, English elegiacks—illumination of all these would seem to depend on our recapturing, in so far as it is possible, the contemporary understanding of their classical precedents and models. And this does not begin to approach the larger problems raised by the mock heroic, by the presence of classical fragments in otherwise original verse, by the nature of allusion itself, and—most complex of all—by the manner in which individual talents utilize the materials of common tradition.

The antithesis of all this is equally important. If Pope's practice is not typical, if the ancients and their poetry
should appear to mean something different to other poets than they do to him, then a whole new set of questions is raised. The problem then becomes one not of defining neoclassicism, but of distinguishing the varieties of neoclassicisms.

I

The publication of Samuel Johnson's first imitation of Juvenal (London) within a few months of Pope's last Imitation of Horace provides some interesting and instructive parallels and contrasts. While it is probably true to say that there are ultimately as many neoclassicisms as there are neoclassicists, I would suggest that for the purposes of criticism we may profitably distinguish two main branches: a neoclassicism of form and a neoclassicism of matter. To these, Johnson's and Pope's poems respectively correspond.

What the Bolingbroke imitates we have already seen. It is not concerned with the form and tone of the Horatian epistle (indeed, it and the other Imitations frequently enough depart from both) but with its content, with the total statement of the poem—not, let it be remembered, with the bare sentences of the Latin text, but with their import as they had been explained and amplified by generations of readers and commentators. What Pope reproduces in his English poem is primarily the Horatian matter as it was understood by the late Renaissance: an ethical doctrine of eternal and unchangeable validity, whose temporal applications may vary infinitely without in the least altering the essential content of the poem. (This indeed may be the only full explanation of Pope's plea to "Let me be Horace.") The Bolingbroke presents to the reader the ethical stance and the moral teaching of Horace's first epistle almost precisely as they were understood by the late Renaissance.

Johnson's imitation, although apparently dealing with the same sort of material in a similar manner, is substan-
tially different. It echoes a tone, a style, a format—the famous Juvenalian *saeva indignatio* and an equally famous diatribe against city life: what it does not reproduce is the essential matter of Juvenal’s poem in anything like the manner in which Pope presents Horace’s. Johnson imitates primarily the surface statement, not the underlying core of the poem: thus *London* contains what one rarely finds in Pope’s *Imitations*, a major passage (194–209) that is entirely inapplicable as a criticism of eighteenth-century England. Even the bare bones of the rhetorical structure that served to support Pope’s poems are missing from Johnson’s: all that is reproduced is a tone of voice and a bare format, the linear and topical progression of Juvenal’s poem. *London* lacks the Renaissance pedigree of Pope’s *Imitations*, and this seems to me to constitute an essential difference between the two. *London* and poems like it—much of the poetry of the later eighteenth century—form the real poetry of statement, and to lump them all together with Pope’s poems or Dryden’s seems a needless critical confusion.

Johnson’s criticism of Pope’s *Imitations* applies much more accurately to his own, and indicates exactly how great the gulf is between the two generations. The real disjunctions in the history of literature take place at points like this, when one idea, one world view, has lost its validity, and another rises to replace it. The distinction between Renaissance and neoclassical is, in the sense in which it is normally used, meaningless: the convenient century marks and political events that literary historians have tended to rely upon can tell us nothing of importance about the ways of poetry. The important difference is between a “neoclassicism” that encompasses both form and matter—literally a new classicism in its own right—and a “neoclassicism” that consists primarily in formal imitation of the ancients and observance of supposedly classical proprieties. Thus Johnson in his criticism assumes that his and Pope’s ideas of poetry are identical because of their formal similarities, while his failure to grasp the true nature of Pope’s *Imitations* reveals the substantial difference between them.
Johnson’s criticism of Milton’s *Lycidas* reveals nothing so much as this fact: his inability to see the value and function of myth, his objection to the propriety of linking shepherds and pastors indicate his loss of the framework of thought in which these things made not only sense, but poetry. His derision of the Lodona story in Pope’s *Windsor Forest* is entirely consistent with this critical viewpoint. What Johnson seems to possess are the rules, the standards, the critical terminology of the earlier neoclassicism without the substance that had previously accompanied them. The simple fact of his birth in 1709 seems to have denied his great critical intelligence the right to understand poetry as more than verbally serious: for him and his age, poetry can only be a heightened and condensed form of rhetoric.

His comments of the Metaphysicals seems to me to illuminate this:

But Wit, abstracted from its effects upon the hearer, may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of *discordia concors*; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. Of wit, thus defined, they [the Metaphysical poets] have more than enough. The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions; their learning instructs and their subtilty surprises; but the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly bought, and, though he sometimes admires, is seldom pleased.

The nature of wit clearly remains purely verbal: it is an ingenious rhetorical device by which essentially disparate ideas are forcefully linked for the purpose of surprising or impressing the reader. The conception of *concordia discors* itself seems equally one-dimensional: it quite obviously does not—cannot—exist for him as a fundamental law of the universe, or even as a meaningful analogy, but only as an intellectual conceit, a brilliant but basically meaningless play of the mind upon farfetched similarities. The distance between this and Pope’s understanding of it shows graphically the revolution or devolution that had taken place.
in thought in the intervening years. Between Pope's and
Johnson's formulation of the idea there is only a formal or
verbal similarity, while Cowley's definition of wit—tempo­
rally equidistant from Pope—appears almost identical to
what we can judge of the latter's conception:

What is it then, which like the Power Divine
We only can by Negatives define?
In a true piece of Wit all things must be,
 Yet all things then agree.
As in the Ark, joyn'd without force or strife,
All Creatures dwelt; all Creatures that had Life.
 Or as the Primitive Forms of all
(If we compare great things with small)
Which without Discord or Confusion lie,
In that strange Mirror of the Deitie.

For Cowley and for Pope, concordia discors constitutes the
underlying rationale of wit and poetry; it forms the essential
pattern of the universe, linking God and nature, man and
art, in a series of mutually explicative analogies. For Pope,
it provides a valid and coherent mode of understanding the
universe, an intellectual foundation on which poetry and
philosophy are built. Johnson is, by historical accident, un­
able to hold this view. He does not—obviously cannot—
share its presuppositions: yet he inherits a poetic mode
based upon them and conceptions like them: and that is pre­
cisely the distinction between his neoclassicism—the neo­
classicism of the later eighteenth century—and that of Pope.

II

All of this may also suggest reasons for the importance of
satire in Augustan literature. The triumphs of concordia dis­
cors, as Pope chronicles them, are more often personal ones,
executed in the sphere of art, than the larger victories of the
political and philosophical worlds. In those areas, since the last of the Stuarts, there is only satire, cataloguing man's failings as measured against the yardstick of the harmonic ideal. This idea and others like it—the great chain of being, the analogy of kingship and divinity, man as microcosm—are seemingly still intellectually valid, for this is the way the world should be organized; but the facts all too frequently neither fulfill nor support them. The inevitable result must be satire—cherishing the idea and scorning the world for failing it—and, after that, the passing of the idea. Donne's line was prophetic, but only partially true: the new science called all in doubt, but so did the new politic, the new philosophy, the new psychology, and even the new society. What once was felt as a complete reality became a theory, then an unattainable ideal, and ended as a rhetorical trick. Obviously, this did not happen overnight: there must have been many in Pope's own lifetime for whom this and similar conceptions were already meaningless. But we can see that for the generation of Johnson, most of these ideas were entirely void: the Lives of the Poets bears witness that within forty years of Pope's death his poems were in fact no longer understood. The Renaissance poetic mode was finished: what remained was simultaneously a dead legacy and and as yet unfulfilled promise.