PREFACE

TRADITIONAL VIEWS of eighteenth-century England and its literature emphasizing their uniformity are recognized today largely as legacies of either unsympathetic—or, in some cases, nostalgic—nineteenth-century critics. Social historians have brought sceptical eyes to the older, superficially attractive, but never very convincing picture of brawling London mobs held in check by an almost too-civilized minority, with a bypassed and outmoded landed gentry looking on scornfully from the sidelines. Political historians have begun to reveal the intricate relationships of family and interest implicating what were once comfortably thought to be rather easily separable Whig and Tory ideologies. And economic historians examining the origin and development of industry and the new agriculture have thrown out of joint the neat patterns of progress favored by an age more certain of its destiny than are we.

In literary studies, poems earlier dismissed as immediately and completely comprehensible have been found to be as structurally complex and texturally dense as the best of any other age; and examinations of the variety of rhetorical resources used and effects created by eighteenth-century poets have assigned older criti-

cal formulations and catchwords to the dustbin. Eighteenth-century novels are no longer interesting mainly as increasingly mature ancestors of "superior" modern novels but as sophisticated, finished examples of a genre sensitively responding to and reflecting the most vital social and intellectual forces of the time. Biographical studies have emphasized the sharply individualistic nature of a once gray crowd, and new scholarly editions of letters, memoirs, and literature have emphasized the diversity, vigor, and endurance of their ideas.

From this kind of reinvestigation and re-evaluation what has emerged? Certainly no new labels, no overarching explanations. Complexity has taken the place of simplicity, and subsequent attempts to find unifying elements, through studies of the essentials of what used to be called neoclassicism or studies of what appear to be recurrent controlling ideas, archetypes, or metaphors, have been at least as successful in emphasizing what still must be done as what has been done. Yet understandably the desire for uniformity still lingers. Concepts such as "neoclassicism," with its accompanying associations of tradition and form, and "reason," with its accompanying associations of order, objectivity, and control, continue to attract, and this despite writers like Swift and Johnson (to name only two) whom modern studies have made it forever impossible to classify. The rage for order besets most naturally the editors of volumes of the kind here represented: unifying themes are sought, and if not easily discovered, occasionally devised.

The compilers of this volume wished to bring together a collection of essays concerned with the literature of the eighteenth century and written by students of one of the most active and influential modern scholars of that period, James Lowry Clifford, for whom this book was made and to whom it is gratefully dedicated. They frankly recognized the state of knowledge about the eighteenth century as one of unresolved complexities, and frankly invited contributors to submit their best efforts on aspects of the period about which they are best qualified to speak. The task of finding order in diversity—if it may ever be found—lies in the fu-

ture. The essays here presented may therefore be said to be uniform in one sense only—their concern with the literature of eighteenth-century England and with its clarification. The subjects considered, the approaches taken, the style of presentation and documentation, and the conclusions reached are as diverse and individualistic as that age itself. Therein, we believe, will be found one of the principal interests of this volume.

The Editorial Committee