1-1-1971

On the Road with the Philosopher and the Profiteer: A Study of Hugh Henry Brackenridge's Modern Chivalry

Wendy Martin
Claremont Graduate University

On the Road with the Philosopher and the Profiteer

A Study of Hugh Henry Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry*

WENDY MARTIN

Modern Chivalry, the first distinctively American novel, was written in instalments in 1792-1815[1] by Hugh Henry Brackenridge, Princeton graduate and frontier lawyer.[2] In addition to providing extensive commentary on the political differences of the Jeffersonians and Hamiltonians, the novel attempted to establish an apolitical value system for the new democracy which was based on philosophical reflection rather than existing social precedence. Brackenridge's concern with independent thinking in *Modern Chivalry* foreshadows the themes of artistic isolation, subjectivity, and alienation which preoccupy many nineteenth- and twentieth-century American novelists.

Brackenridge is the first American novelist to focus on the theme of the alienated artist in a democracy. The problem of artistic self-definition in a society which denies the value of art can be better understood in the context of the efforts of Captain Farrago, the protagonist of *Modern Chivalry*, to survive the levelling influence of the mob and to counteract the confused values of the new democracy. Farrago, unable to accept the emphasis on profit and the materialistic definition of success in post-Revolutionary America, becomes a pioneer on the psychological frontier, and he is the first fictional protagonist in a long list of solitary figures who appear in later novels.

[1] Hugh Henry Brackenridge, *Modern Chivalry*, ed. Claude M. Newlin (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1937). All quotations from *Modern Chivalry* will be taken from Newlin's edition and cited by page number only in the text.

[2] See Claude M. Newlin, *The Life and Writings of Hugh Henry Brackenridge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1932), for a detailed biography of Brackenridge 1748-1816. Newlin discusses at great length Brackenridge's undergraduate days at Princeton, his law practice in Pittsburgh, his experience as a journalist with the *United States Magazine*, and his political troubles resulting from his effort to mediate between local and federal interests during the Whiskey Insurrection in Pittsburgh in 1794.

Like Captain Farrago, Natty Bumpo, Huck Finn, Ishmael, Miles Coverdale, Nick Carraway, Nick Adams, Augie March, Joe Christmas, and Stephen Rojack, are not merely eccentric bachelors but marginal men who must establish value systems on the basis of their own experience. Leslie Fiedler in his essay "Come Back to the Raft, Huck Honey," in *Love and Death in the American Novel*, observes that the American fictional hero is often single and implies that his marital status casts doubts on his heterosexuality. However, the fact that the American protagonist isn't married has little to do with his sexual predilections; rather it reflects his insistence on being free of social institutions like marriage which pre-structure his experience.

In part, the tradition of the solitary, introspective author stems from the Puritan habit of self-scrutiny in an effort to detect sin and discern God's message. That the Puritan legacy of self-scrutiny has had such a major impact on the American mind is demonstrated by the immense contemporary popularity of psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, and other therapies based on self-analysis and by the interesting anomaly that the work of Freud, a nineteenth-century European intellectual, satisfies American needs for self-analysis while being of much less importance to European thought in general. Puritan introspection is reflected in Brackenridge's insistence that "the man of real genius will never walk in the beaten track, because his object is what is new and uncommon" (11-12). Brackenridge warns his readers, however, that "it requires great courage to bear testimony against an error in the judgment of the multitude" (382) and that "the man is a hero, who can withstand unjust opinion. It requires more courage, than to fight duels" (412).[3] As a result of having to develop the habit of psychological self-reliance as an adaptive response to social rejection, Brackenridge's protagonist Captain Farrago learns that he must develop a sense of self that does not depend on community approval, social ritual or categories:

I have been called the Knight of the single Horse, having but one myself, and none for my attendant; in this particular unlike my predecessors, whose squires were mounted as well as themselves. In some places I have taken my designation from the Irish valet that I had, and of whom you have heard me speak, of the name of Teague, and have been called the Owner of the red-headed Bogtrotter; as it is probable I may now be designated

[3] Brackenridge himself was a marginal man and learned the importance of self-reliance while he was a lawyer in Pittsburgh at a time when law was an extremely unpopular profession, and again when he was defeated as a candidate for Congress. See Newlin, *The Life and Writings*, pp. 71-87, 241-251.

occasionally by the appellation of the Master of the raw Scotchman, . . . but all these things I look upon as inconsiderable. It is of little, or perhaps of no consequence to me, what my stile is amongst men; provided it contains nothing in it that may impeach my moral character. . . . They may call me Don Quixotte, or Hudibras, or the Knight of Blue Beard, or the Long Nose, or what they please. It is all the same to me (256–257).

Because Farrago realizes that social labels do not reflect his individuality, his sense of self is not dependent on social approbation but rather on an awareness of his own uniqueness and conviction of the validity of his personal moral code. Although Brackenridge counsels intellectual and social independence, he realizes that some men prefer to be enslaved rather than to experience the uncertainty that accompanies freedom from social rituals:

but if you examine the capacities, and even the inclinations of men, will you not find, that some are qualified only to be slaves? They have not the understanding to act for themselves. Nor do all love freedom, even when they have it. Do not many surrender it; and prefer kissing a great man's backside, to being independent? It is not always, even from the views of advantage, that men are sycophants; but from an abstract pleasure in being drawn into vortex of others. There is a pleasure in slavery more than unenslaved men know (136).

This habit of psychological self-reliance creates a sensitivity to the difference between the individual's perceptions and social forms which pre-structure these perceptions. It is this preoccupation with subjective truth and the consequent sense of isolation which many critics maintain characterizes the American novel; however, no critic discusses these characteristics as being the special problems of the novelist in a democracy. Richard Chase, in *The American Novel and Its Tradition*, asserts that "The American imagination . . . seems less interested in incarnation and reconciliation than in alienation and disorder" (11), and "solipsism, Hypnotic self-regard, imprisonment within the self—these themes have absorbed American novelists" (107); Chase differentiates between the novel and the romance on the basis that "in a romance much may be made out of unrelatedness, of alienation, and discontinuity, for the romancer operates in a universe that is less coherent than that of the novelist" (22), but he fails to observe that the romance is narrative of the isolated self in a democracy.

Leon Howard, in *Literature and the American Tradition*, traces the habit of psychological self-reliance from Samuel Johnson who "developed the Platonic notion which was implicit in Ramean logic,

and asserted a kind of intellectual light within us" (50-51). However, like Chase, Howard does not attempt to analyze the individualism and subjectivity of the late nineteenth and twentieth century as being related to the isolation of the artist in a democracy—a tradition which Brackenridge articulates in the eighteenth century:

> This *new* [italics mine] individualism, however, was different from that of the mid-nineteenth century. For with James and his successors a new consciousness became evident in American literature—a pervading awareness of the conflict between the individual and society. Man was no longer free, as he had been in the mind of Emerson, to vault into his throne and lord it over the creepers and crawlers of the conventional world. He had to assert his individuality, by self-sacrifice, by isolation, by flamboyant rebellion, or by a parade of eccentricity, in order to be sure that he maintained it. The weight of a complex social organization was depressing the confidence of even those who were most determined to declare their independence, and it remained to be seen whether the American tradition would survive as a deep quality of belief or whether it would remain as no more than a symbolic refuge of the maladjustments of second-rate talent (246).

Finally, R. W. B. Lewis, in *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century*, discusses the plight of the American hero in terms of his innocence and lack of experience: not only does Lewis ignore the tradition of man's frailty established by both Puritans and the Enlightenment, but he ignores the special complications for the artist inherent in democracy as a social system.[4]

As Brackenridge observes the disparity between his version of reality and social versions, he becomes aware of the subjective nature of his experience and the relativity of his point of view—an awareness which is reflected in both the narrative technique and form of *Modern Chivalry*. The narrator of the novel is a detached observer who evaluates and discourses at length on the significance of the adventures of the philosopher and profiteer on the road; he is intellectually superior to Captain Farrago, who is depicted as being virtuous but often naive: "John Farrago, a man of about fifty-three years of age, of good natural sense, and considerable reading; but in some things whimsical, owing perhaps to his greater knowledge of books than that of the world" (6). The narrator, more knowledgeable and worldly than Farrago, often assumes a protective role toward the quixotic philosopher, and since

[4] See Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (New York: Doubleday, 1957); Leon Howard, *Literature and the American Tradition* (New York: Doubleday, 1960); and R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

his ego is not directly affected by the events of the journey, he is freer to reflect at length on the significance of Farrago's experiences. The narrator elucidates the meaning of Farrago's travels, which, in part, can be seen as a secular extension of the Puritan journey in which the voyager must endure trials from within and without: since the narrator is once removed from the action of the novel, like the Puritan preacher, he is able to play the role of penetrating social critic who provides deeper insights into the significance of the social drama in which Farrago and Teague are actors. At the same time, the perspective of the novel serves to heighten the reader's awareness of the subjective nature of reality as it becomes clear that the narrator, Farrago, and O'Reagan are each focusing on somewhat different worlds—the narrator is concerned with human values which transcend socio-cultural variables, Farrago with virtue in a democratic political system, and Teague with profit in a capitalistic economy and status in an upwardly mobile society.

The literary significance of the frontier is also clarified when evaluated in terms of the possibilities it offers for self-definition by freeing the individual from confining social roles.[5] Brackenridge embodies the frontier ideals of getting back to essentials and psychological self-reliance in the character of the Marquis de Marnessie, a French emigrant who rids himself of a title—a comfortable social category—and returns to a more basic life-style:

> . . . having cleared a small spot, [he] had made a garden and cultivated what is called a patch of Indian corn, subsisting and amusing himself and his family, chiefly by trapping and hunting in the neighbouring mountain. . . . His cabbin [sic] was neat and clean, with flooring of split timber, and stools made out of hewn logs. A few books, and a half a dozen small paintings, a fuzee, and an old sword being the only ornament of its walls (310).

Thus, the frontier by freeing the individual from the elaborate social and economic patterns of the city or town enables him to get closer to the core of human experience.

Brackenridge's preoccupation with human values which transcend pragmatic imperatives and which are concerned with subjective experience rather than excessively stylized social interaction or entrepreneural activities, explains why in *Modern Chivalry* there is no

[5] Henry Nash Smith, in his classic study of the literary significance of the frontier, *The Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1950), discusses the political and economic implications of the frontier in shaping the American character, but he does not discuss the frontier as providing the opportunity for psychological self-reliance or as a refuge for the artist.

description of physical environment—landscape or buildings—or financial transactions and why there are almost no details of clothing or material goods. Instead, the novel concentrates on the narrator's response to the experiences of the social philosopher and the profiteer as they explore life in the new nation. The narrator's alienation is clearly revealed:

> Why is it that I am proud and value myself amongst my own species? It is because I think I possess, in some degree, the distinguishing characteristic of a man, a taste for the fine arts; a taste and characteristic too little valued in America, where a system of finance has introduced the love of unequal wealth; destroyed the spirit of common industry; and planted that of lottery in the human heart; making the mass of people gamblers; and under the idea of speculation, shrouded engrossing and monopoly everywhere (281).

Thus, the divergence in world-views of Farrago, the philosopher, and Teague, the profiteer, is reinforced by the economic structure of capitalism. Max Weber and Emile Durkheim argue that the division of labor creates multiple realities often resulting in social dislocation of the individual, which is experienced as solitude or anomie depending on the degree of alienation,[6] and while the existence of multiple realities helps the con man to conceal his trickery, it causes the American writer to feel all the more alienated.[7]

In addition to the tensions created by a democratic social structure and a capitalistic economic system, the distinction between matter and mind, subject and object, which separates the knower from the known, manifests itself in the eighteenth century in Lockean associationism, an approach to perception based on the conviction that reason is simply an arranger of experience[8]—that there are no a priori

[6] See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons (London, 1930); Emile Durkheim, *Division of Labor in Society*, translated by George Simpson (New York: Free Press, 1947).

Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), argues that economic specialization created by capitalism resulted in an emphasis on the individual (61), and that the concomitant to economic individualism was solitude (86-92). However, Watt doesn't discuss the multiple realities created by capitalism nor the effects of solitude on point of view in the novel.

[7] Helene S. Zahler, *The American Paradox* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1964), pp. 108-109, comments on economic structure in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century

> As an increasingly complex economy needed and attracted a new kind of working force, so it gave rise to new groups of the dispossessed and thus generated alienation more like the modern kind than the isolation experienced by colonial intellectuals. The newly alienated fall into three categories: the traditional artisan; the artist; and the intellectual, often the educated son of an established family, whose place in the esteem of the community was being taken by men more successful in making money.

[8] Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1965), p. 84, points out that the heritage

principles for structuring experience.[9] David Hume in his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* elaborates the phenomenon of associationism: "the creative power of the mind amounts to no more than the faculty of compounding, transposing, augmenting, or diminishing the materials afforded us by the senses and experience."[10] Thus, experience becomes process, knowledge and reality subjective states of mind. The loose structure of *Modern Chivalry* reflects this shift from experience as product to experience as process,[11] and the open form of the novel captures the fluidity of associative subjective experience, as does the language which Brackenridge says is modeled on Hume's *Religion of Nature* (630), "rising and falling with subject, as the movements of the mind themselves" (78). The novel does not conclude with a scene which resolves all of the tensions in the plot; instead it ends as it began, with Teague still successfully conning the

---

of the Enlightenment is that reason "gives no laws of itself" but is an organizer of facts and ideas.

[9] Charles Feidelson in *Symbolism in American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), argues that the logical methodology which the Puritans derived from Ramus is responsible for the subject/object dichotomy in American thinking:

> The logical methodology which the Puritans derived from Ramus mapped out a world of discrete entities—"arguments." . . . Every disciple could be schematized by a succession of dichotomies so as to distinguish and put in their places the arguments of which it was composed. The syllogism was of minor importance beside this method of dichotomizing. . . . the Ramistic logic was more than a mechanically divisive system; but its practical effect was to convert the universe into an assemblage of logical counters, a mechanical framework of causes and effects, "subjects" and "adjuncts" whose "either-or" relationship was dramatized by the elementary principle of dichotomy (87).

According to Feidelson,

> The intellectual stance of the conscious artist in American literature has been determined very largely by problems inherent in the method of the Puritans. The isolation of the American artist in society, so often lamented, is actually parallel to the furtive and unacknowledged role of artistic method in the American mind; both factors began in the seventeenth century with the establishment of Puritan philosophy and of a society that tried to live by it (89).

Feidelson also points out that

> by 1800 the philosophy taught in American colleges was almost entirely Lockean, and the political, social, and economic life of the New World was an embodiment of the New Learning (107).

Thus, Cartesian dualism combined with the already established habit of either/or thinking to further separate the individual from his world:

> Cartesian dualism had made the world safe for science by creating separate repositories, called "matter" and "mind." . . . Empirical theory held that the given materials of knowledge are atomistic sensations, passively received and variously combined by the intellect, so that the fullness of subjective life becomes unreal (110).

[10] David Hume, *Enquiries concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1902), p. 19.

[11] Northrop Frye, "Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility," *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963), pp. 130-138, discusses the shift from product to process in the eighteenth century, and although he considers the effect of this shift on such novelists as Sterne, he says nothing of the effect of process-oriented experience on the form of the novel in general. Similarly, M. H. Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), discusses the emergence of the associative imagination as characterizing Romanticism (177), but, like Frye, he does not discuss the implications of this change for the form of the novel.

public and Farrago still wandering around the countryside—hence, the conclusion creates no artificial break with reality but presents life as an unbroken process.

Brackenridge's concern with subjective experience is also reflected in the many digressions and the didactic commentary interwoven with the chapters which narrate the adventures of the philosopher and the profiteer; although critics have insisted that these discursive sections make the novel excessively repetitive and rambling, the digressions and didactic sections, which Brackenridge says are modeled on Xenophon, Swift's *Tale of a Tub*, *Gulliver's Travels*, Tacitus (77), permit him to explore and elaborate at length his version of reality, while at the same time surveying the political, social, and economic values of the new democracy. Brackenridge attributes the digressions to "a multiplicity of ideas at one cause. They are numerous and press for utterance; and when a certain set have had an outlet in part, the speaker suspends awhile the prosecuting them, and goes back to fetch others. It would be like Charon in his boat upon the river Styx, were there an island in it, ferrying a number of shades half way; leaving them on the island, and going back to bring others that distance, who are crowding on the shore, and anxious to cross. Or like a mechanic, that has a great number of customers, and cannot satisfy, but by beginning the work in general, and carrying it on by pieces; having it in his power to say to all that their work is on hands" (655).

While the entrepreneur perceives his world in terms of profit and losses, the independent thinker is free to explore many versions of reality because he is not bound by pragmatic imperatives. As *Modern Chivalry* progresses, Brackenridge develops a growing sense of cultural relativity: the first two books of *Modern Chivalry* concentrate on the detection of Teague's plots and the training of Teague to be president; the subsequent books not only survey the new democracy in an attempt to determine national values, but also reveal a contempt for ethnocentricity which limits the horizon of the new nation to the profit motive. For example, in rebuking an arrogant British inn-keeper for his excessive chauvinism, Farrago says,

> I wonder if the wasps that are in your garrets in London, consider themselves better than the wasps that are in these woods? I should suppose they must; such is the contemptible vanity of an island, which, taken in its whole extent, would be little more than a urinal to one of our Patagonians in South America (89).

Again, the dislike of confining cultural habits is revealed when Farrago calms Duncan, the superstitious Scottish servant who has

temporarily replaced Teague: "It is the prejudice of your education, to suppose that the devil can take the shape of men, or tangible substance; at least that he can eat food, and converse with a human voice. You will come by and bye to have a better sense of things" (263). Opposing sets of values are held by Teague who creates false confidence in his audience and by Duncan who is continually victimized by con men: ironically, Duncan is willing to suffer the considerable inconvenience of staying awake all night to guard against devils who he thinks lurk outside, thereby defending his version of reality (265-266). As Farrago becomes aware of the fact that reality is consensus, or as the mad democrat says, "Behold, we are made to do that which is right in the eyes of others" (385), he wonders if the men in the insane asylum are "more devoid of reason than the bulk of men running at large in the world" (387).

Madness, a major theme in *Modern Chivalry*, is often seen as sanity in a society where profit takes precedence over knowledge, an inversion of values which is reflected in the mad philosopher's lament: "Oh! the inconsistency of human life and manners. I am shut up here as a mad man, in a mad place, and yet it appears to me that I am the only rational being amongst men, because I know that I am mad, and acknowledge it, and they do not know that they are mad, or acknowledge it" (385). The madman asks the question that reveals he has more wisdom than those who judge him: "But how can one rebut the imputation of madness; how disprove insanity? The highest excellence of understanding, and madness, like the two ends of a right line, turned to a circle, are said to come together" (430). The following dialogue, patterned on the traditional reversal of roles in which the fool, or blind man, has more insight than his inquisitors, reveals Brackenridge's sympathy with the mad man rather than the mob:

> You are a man of books—
> A little so.
> What books have you read?
> History, Divinity, Belles-lettres
> What is the characteristic of History?
> Fiction
> Of Novels?
> Truth
> Of Metaphysics?
> Imagination
> Of natural philosophy
> Doubt

What is the best lesson in moral philosophy?
To *expect no gratitude.*
What is the best qualification of a politician?
Honesty
The next best?
Knowledge
The next best?
Fortitude
Who serves the people best?
Not always him that *pleases them most* (431–432).

The jury's verdict reveals the intolerance of the mob for divergent world-views:

1. Juryman: he seems to be a little *cracked.*
2. He does not appear *to be right in his head.*
3. I cannot think him in his *right mind.*
4. He is *beside himself,* doubtless.
5. Crazy
6. Out of his reason
7. Deranged
8. Insane
9. Mad
10. Stark mad
11. As mad as a march hare
12. Fit for Bedlam

Verdict—*Lunacy* (431).

Farrago himself prefers to be called mad than to accept the mob's version of reality (508): admonishing his accusers, "Gentlemen, there is now nothing more difficult for a man than to prove that he is not mad" (509), he goes into voluntary exile where, ironically, he finds men from Scotland and France who have likewise abandoned their countries rather than accept the mob's version of reality (510-514).[12]

The materials added to *Modern Chivalry* in 1815 reveal that Brackenridge extends his concept of the relativity of world-views to other

[12] Michel Foucault, in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New American Library, 1967) observes that our contemporary definition of insanity as an illness requiring institutionalization has emerged since the rise of empiricism in the late seventeenth century. In addition to pointing out that the insane have replaced lepers as social outcasts and scapegoats in modern society, Foucault suggests that present taboos surrounding insanity impoverish our cultural resources—that by ostracizing the insane, modern man denies himself access to psychic truths which enrich our understanding of the human condition as well as our art. Similarly, G. S. Rousseau in his article "Science and the Discovery of the Imagination in Enlightened England," *Eighteenth-Century Studies,* 3 (Fall 1969), 108-135, asserts that the eighteenth-century conviction that madness was the result of physiological rather than religious disorders, wrenches insanity "from the imaginary freedom which permitted it to flourish in the Renaissance when scientists could demonstrate that the body and mind worked together in organic fashion" (119).

cultures, and his lengthy discussion about the relative merits of classical and European languages in which he presents his reasons for preferring Greek, indicates his ethnographic and comparative interests: "But of all languages that I have ever tasted, the Greek, unquestionably, with me has the preference to others. Bred in a soft air, and warm climate; whereas the English would seem to have been frozen in the North, before it began to be spoken by man; or rather it was first spoken by frozen men" (720-725). Just as he is depressed by the mob's tyrannical insistence in punishing the philosopher for not adhering to the social version of reality, so he is discouraged by the excessive ethnocentricity of his countrymen which prevents them from revering those values which will preserve civilization:

> Is there reason to suppose that this earth is, with respect to some superior order of beings, but a beehive; and that they are amused looking at our working? It is humiliating enough, to conceive so of our insignificance, and therefore I repel the idea; but supposing it be so, it must be amusing for them to see the same revolutions over again in the moral world. The like abstract notions in metaphysics, and theology, with similar experiments in government: For it is true what the philosopher observes, "there is nothing new under the sun" (727).

The awareness of cultural relativity in *Modern Chivalry* is again seen in the Captain's expedition with the American Philosophical Society to an underground cave to examine artifacts of pre-European civilization such as Indian cave engravings of forest animals:

> Near the entrance, and on the right, was the passage to what is called the petrified grove. This, on their return they entered, and in about thirty steps found themselves in a spacious square, which appeared to have been once the surface of the earth: For here were trees in their natural position, with wasps nests on them, all petrified; and buffaloes standing under, in their proper form, but hard as adament. A bleak wind, with a petrifying dew, had arrested them in life, and fixed them to the spot; while the mountain in a series of ages had grown over them. That which struck the Captain most was an Indian man reduced to stone, with a bundle of peltry on his back (277).

The cave contains buried realities of past civilizations existing on the very continent which was the site of the democratic experiment. This metaphor of the cave with its buried layer of civilization—one of the few metaphors in *Modern Chivalry*—also reveals Brackenridge's conviction that men must make a conscious and responsible effort to preserve civilization, or, like the cave which is in danger of being buried by mud, civilization will decay:

The mouth of the cave was of a height and width to receive a man walking upright, and without constraint, on his entrance; after a passage of a few yards, lined with solid rocks, it opened into an apartment of about eighteen feet cube. The oozing from above formed the stalactites, and would probably in the course of a century or two, fill up this chamber altogether, unless by digging above, the course of the water could be diverted from the roof, and carried off by a conduit on a solid part of the mountain (276).

Although Brackenridge acknowledges the relativity of cultural values, he realizes that culture is a hedge against chaos and that institutional order is a shield against anxiety and anomic terror: culture provides a

picture of human nature, from childhood to old age; from the baby-house to the laying out money in bank stock; or the purchasing land for which the owner has no occasion. It all goes to engage, and employ the mind, whether it is throwing a long bullet, or drawing up an address to the President of the United States. Our hands must be employed or our minds (756).

However, in an effort to provide alternatives to the values of American culture which emphasize profit and social mobility, Brackenridge includes hundreds of quotations from classical literature and philosophy in *Modern Chivalry*, in spite of the fact that he knows many of his readers will ignore them: "It is a strange contrast, that we *admire learning in a pig, and undervalue it in a man*" (419). In addition to the perspective provided by education, Brackenridge maintains that art shapes chaos, differentiating men from lower orders of life:

I consider these sculptures, as the first rude essays of the fine art of engraving; and to have been the work of savages of taste, distinguished from the common mass, by a talent to imitate in wood or stone, the forms of things in nature, and a capacity of receiving pleasures from such an application of the mental powers. Whilst a chief of genius, was waiting for the assembling of other chiefs, to hold a council; or while the warrior was waiting at a certain point for others, that were to meet him, he may have amused himself in this manner; or it may have been the means to cheat weariness, and solace the intellectual faculty, when there was no counselling in the nation or wars to carry on. Happy savage, that could thus amuse himself and exercise his first preeminence over animals we call Beasts. They can hunt, and devour living things for food; but where do you find a wolf, or a fishing hawk, that has any idea of these abstract pleasures that feed the imagination? (280).

Like the fine arts, written language is a measure of civilization: "*Recte scribendi, sapere principium est, et fons.* Good sense is the foundation of good writing" (475). Writing, like painting, is a culture-

creating act; it is not simply utilitarian (480) but an antidote to intellectual pain (479): "There is a pleasure in writing, which only the man who writes knows" (492). Insisting that eloquence is "good sense expressed in clear language" (667), Brackenridge adheres to the Ciceronian concept of the tripartite function of rhetoric—to teach (docere), to persuade (mouere) and to delight (delectere).[13] Although Brackenridge views language as a hallmark of the civilized man, he spurns verbal posturing as well as illiteracy:

> Language being the vestment of thought, it comes within the rules of other dress; so that as slovenliness, on the one hand, or foppery, on the other, is to be avoided in our attire; so also in our speech, and writing. Simplicity in the one and the other, is the greatest beauty (77).[14]

Like the Puritans who used the plain style in order to reach the "meanest and lowest," congregation member Brackenridge attempts to reach the widest possible audience by using syntactically simple sentences, colloquial diction, while at the same time his prose is studded with allusions and quotations, and by adhering to common-sense logic:

> It is the secret of good taste and perfection in behavior to conceal that you ever think at all. So it is the most perfect proof of a good style, that when you read the composition, you think of nothing but the sense; and are never struck with the idea that it is otherwise expressed than every body would express it (161).

Brackenridge scorns verbal affectation and delights in deflating the egos of pompous individuals who conceal their lack of ability behind a screen of "officialese" or jargon: avoiding the pose of the erudite writer, Brackenridge shuns self-conscious stylistic elegance and writes simple, graceful prose; he uses Greek and Latin quotations and classical allusions not in a pedantic attempt to impress his audience

[13] See Cicero, *De Oratore*, Books I, II, trans. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham; Book III, trans. H. Rackham, 2 vols, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., 1942). Although Brackenridge read Cicero for pleasure, he also learned Ciceronian dictates from Witherspoon (see Newlin, *Life and Writings of Hugh Henry Brackenridge*, pp. 8-11), who taught them to his Princeton students via the Scottish Rhetoricians George Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776), and Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres* (1783). See John Witherspoon, *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1912), ed. Varnum Lansing Collins, introduction.

[14] Howard Mumford Jones, "American Prose Style: 1700-1770," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 6 (November, 1934), pp. 115-151, argues that American prose style grows more plain and lucid from Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana* in 1700 to Franklin's *Autobiography* in 1771. Brackenridge, like Franklin, writes lucid prose using Hume, Swift, and Fielding as his models: "And in the English Language, that of Hume, Swift, and Fielding, is the only stile that I have coveted to possess . . . but the easy, the natural, and the graceful, is of all stiles, whether of manners or of speaking, the most difficult to attain" (643).

with his learning, but to illustrate his conviction that reason is constant in spite of socio-cultural variables.

Brackenridge reminds his readers that clashing realities can result in violence and death unless laws are able to mediate the difference in conflicting world-views: Farrago as Governor of a frontier colony responds to a citizen who asks for "a bit of ground to set potatoes and to plant cabbage, with the free use of the shilelah into the bargain, as we had it in our country," in the following manner:

> That being the case, said the governor, the constitution that you have, will answer every purpose. It is for securing you in your possessions; and the free use of the shilelah subordinate to no law but that of the country, that the constitution has been framed. But for the constitution and the laws, what would you differ from the racoons and the opossums of the woods? It is this which makes all the *difference that we shall find between man and beast* (755).

In order to avoid complications created by conflicting world-views, Brackenridge defers to the law as a means of establishing agreed-upon reality:

> Godwin, in his "Political Justice," with great brilliancy, supports the idea of deciding every case on its *own peculiar circumstances*, according to the notions of equity, which lie in the breast of the judge. This is what is done in Constantinople. But it is to avoid this that *laws* are enacted, and means used to procure uniformity of construction, and application in a free country. This object is to produce *certainty*. The imperfection of the human judgment produces uncertainty (542–543).

Brackenridge supports the law in a time when the general public was hostile toward all laws and lawyers as infringing on individual prerogatives. However, Brackenridge knows that the law is an effective reality-structuring device and that an established legal code prevents the catastrophes which can occur when realities fail to mesh:

> But difference of opinion produces ill will. A man and a wife will separate on a disagreement which has taken place about fixing the hencoop, or laying out a bed of parsley. Christians have burnt each other because one would say *off*, and the other *from*, and what man of sense doubts, but the burner, and burn'd, were equally good men. The creeds, confessions and commentaries of the one were just as orthodox as the other, but not precisely the same; *and the nearer they come together the more wrath.* This ought to teach in politics, at least, *concession and forbearance* (544).

In addition, Brackenridge insists that the new nation can refine its legal system by studying past codes:

> Romulus made regulations; Numa institutions; the plebiscita, or resolutions of the tribunes, and the commons; Senatus consulta; judicia pretoris; responsa prudentum; these continued in the twelve tables, institutes, pandects, and commentaries, are grounds of that law, which on the decline and fall of the empire, was incorporated by the barbarous nations on their codes, as they became civilized, and an agricultural, and commercial people. It is the experience and wisdom of ages which alone can provide for the cases of difference in matters of claim, or right amongst a people (565).

Just as the creative efforts of the poet or the painter shape primordial energy giving rise to the tradition of artist as maker, legal and educational systems channel this undifferentiated energy in order to make civilization possible; thus, Brackenridge subscribes to the classical conviction that institutions enable men to be human. Denying the Rousseauian doctrine of spontaneity which asserts that institutions are repressive and hostile to man's true nature, Brackenridge insists that the "spontaneous overflow of emotions" is not self-expression but destructive mobism and that political and educational institutions convert primitive energy into culture. Brackenridge is a conscious mythmaker: he knows that a "self" can exist only in civilization and that all legal and moral codes such as Christianity are designed for this purpose; "All the rules of morality are but maxims of prudence. They all lead to self-preservation" (618). Like the Scottish moralists Adam Smith, David Hume, Adam Ferguson, Thomas Reed, Francis Hutcheson, Dugald Steward, Lord Kames, and Lord Monboddo and their disciple John Witherspoon who taught Brackenridge philosophy at Princeton, Brackenridge knows that all systems of morality, religious or ethical, are hedges against chaos and represent an effort to preserve human culture: "For the Christian religion is a system of humanity, and truth; and the great object of it is to secure morality amongst men. It has no metaphysics in the nature of it; but is intelligible to a child, though catechisms are not" (719). Like his mentor John Witherspoon who taught his Princeton students the democratic virtues through a series of lectures on contracts, oaths and vows, property rights, the constitution, and voting qualifications, Brackenridge hopes that his narration of the adventures of the philosopher and the profiteer as well as his digressions on the nature of democracy will help the general public to internalize democratic virtues. Brackenridge hopes that *Modern Chivalry* will create a common mentality based on democratic values; in his effort to socialize the Toms, Dicks, and Harrys of the new nation by making democratic values understandable to them (416), he not only draws on the wisdom of past

traditions as evidenced by the numerous classical allusions, he uses experience of the common expressed in diction that will appeal to the masses, as the following passage reveals: "I exclude attornies that are mere *money gatherers*; or professional men, that screw the needy, and grind the faces of the poor. Such there will always be. *But nature presents nothing without an allay of evil*" (436). Thus Brackenridge hopes to reach the man in the street as well as the educated elite, and his purpose is reflected in the mixture of learned and colloquial passages in the novel: "This book is written for individuals of all attainments, and of all grades of intellects" (584). At the same time, he hopes that *Modern Chivalry* will preserve the cultural heritage of the new democracy: "It is an opus magnum, which comprehends law, physic, and divinity. Were all the books in the world lost, this alone would preserve a germ of every art. Music, painting, poetry, etc. Statuary it says the least about. Nevertheless, some hints are given that will serve to transmit the reputation of Phidias and Praxiteles; and stimulate the efforts of the chisel upon stone, in generations yet to come" (727).

Although Brackenridge knows that "there is no perfection in any human institution" (497) and therefore refuses to subscribe to popular utopian theories of exponential growth in man's capacity to solve his problems, "Time and chance happeneth to all men" (496), he insists that reason and moderation enable man to resist his destructive potential and to realize his creative capacity. In spite of the fact that he maintains that the institutions of law, education, and art will enable men to be more fully human by establishing agreed-upon reality, he respects the necessity of the independent thinker in the new democracy to explore his subjective reality as an adaptive response to a society which denies his worth. Thus, *Modern Chivalry* chronicles the *private vision* of the artist as well as narrating the adventures of the rogue and the rational man.[15]

Queens College of the City University of New York

[15] See Ronald Paulson in his "Prefatory Note" in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 3 (Fall 1969), 1-3. Paulson underscores the importance of understanding the eighteenth-century imagination and suggests that a new methodology for eighteenth-century studies needs to be developed. Chiding critics for slighting "the personal and deeply distinctive voice which lies somewhere between the Freudian unconscious and the direct communication and mingling with an audience," he states that

it is time to penetrate the screen of public and commonly shared assumptions with the audience, get at the imagination, the sensibility that structures the poems, and find what is unique, even idiosyncratic, in the poet, and what is merely determined by the recalcitrance of materials, convention, or the public mode itself.