A DEFINITION OF BRACKENRIDGE'S "MODERN CHIVALRY"

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the North Texas State University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

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Denton, Texas

December, 1979
"As yet I do not know how chivalry will work out in these calamitous times in which we live . . . "

Don Quixote
Alexander, Teresa L., A Definition of Brackenridge's "Modern Chivalry." Master of Arts (English), December, 1979, 132 pp., bibliography, 29 titles.

Early American writer Hugh Henry Brackenridge conceived and developed a code of modern chivalry in his writings that culminated in the long prose satire Modern Chivalry. He first introduced his code in the poem "The Modern Chevalier," in which a modern knight is shown traveling about the country in an attempt to understand and correct the political absurdities of the people. In Modern Chivalry, this code is developed in the three major themes of rationalism, morality, and moderation and the related concern that man recognize his proper place in society. Satire is Brackenridge's weapon as well as the primary aesthetic virtue of his novel. The metaphor of modern chivalry serves to tie the various elements of the rambling book into a unified whole.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Modern Chivalry, by Hugh Henry Brackenridge, is the product of a highly charged era in American political history—the period following the war for independence from Great Britain. When compared with the outpouring of didactic sentimentalism that flowed forth from the pens of most American novelists of the same period, it is a refreshingly intellectual, original, and well-written commentary on the American scene. Even critics and historians who have little use for other literary productions of this period find room for some praise of Modern Chivalry. Historian Marshall Smelser, for example, writes,

If all American fiction in circulation on Jefferson's inauguration day were erased by some chemical mischance, not much of it would be missed. Only one novelist of the day—not William Brown Hill [sic], not Susanna Rowson, not Hannah Foster, not Charles Brockden Brown, but only Hugh Henry Brackenridge—would leave a gap. . . . ¹

One of the historical virtues of Brackenridge's long, rambling novel is its depiction of the American scene and the struggles involved in the making of a democracy. Brackenridge's presence and comments on this scene are vital to the book's value—indeed, to its very existence. The novel originated in its author's intellectual involvement with the nation's democratic experiment, an experiment in which Brackenridge himself played at least a small role.

*Modern Chivalry* is a novel about democracy and contemporary American life, written by a man who understood its essence and excesses and who attempted to illuminate both for the benefit of the people. To examine both sides of American democracy, Brackenridge used a seemingly untimely metaphor: the "Chivalry" of the title. The work deals with political, social, and moral problems in the new nation from the point of view of a reformer and rational man, a point of view with which the idea of chivalry is made compatible, and Brackenridge uses the metaphor as a source for both theme and satire in *Modern Chivalry*.

An examination of the use of chivalry in *Modern Chivalry* must, of course, include discussion of Brackenridge's definition of the term and its incorporation into both theme and satire. To analyze fully its use in this politically inspired work, however, it is also necessary to examine the nature of the period which produced both the
man and the metaphor, particularly because the novel's publishing history follows closely events in the author's personal and political life.

Brackenridge was born near Kintyre, Scotland, in 1748 to a farming family who migrated to Pennsylvania in 1753. Growing up in Western Pennsylvania, the young man showed a love of learning—especially in the classics—at an early age and at fifteen became a schoolteacher in Gunpowder Falls, Maryland, where he continued for five years. In 1768, he entered Princeton University (then the College of New Jersey), where he became friends with James Madison and Philip Freneau and began his literary career. During his years in college, Brackenridge produced a number of satirical writings, generally in the form of verse composed for the Whig Literary Society, of which he and Freneau were both members. He received a Master of Arts degree in 1774 from Princeton, and in 1776, he joined Washington's army as a chaplain. Brackenridge was, naturally, supportive of the war for independence, and many of his sermons (some of which were published in 1778 under the title *Six Political Discourses Founded on the Scriptures*) were of a more political than entirely religious nature.

It was after the war, however, that Brackenridge began his most active political involvement, involvement
which resulted in frustration and disillusionment and ultimately in the first volumes of *Modern Chivalry*. Pennsylvania in 1776 was an ideal location for the avid democrat. The state adopted its constitution, drafted by George Bryan, Thomas Young, and Benjamin Franklin, on September 28, 1776. It was one of the most radically democratic constitutions in the Union, providing for a unicameral legislature and frequent rotation of the executive position. Henry Steele Commager and Samuel Eliot Morison note that "it established the nearest thing to a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' that we have had in America,"² and it was not changed until 1790, when a new convention drafted a constitution calling for a bicameral legislature. Brackenridge saw that the constitution posed something of a problem to governmental administration, but was unsure as to its remedy. Throughout his life he retained the dangerous ability to view rationally both sides of an issue and often hesitated long before taking a stand. In 1779 he established in Philadelphia the *United States Magazine*, a vehicle for his political writings. The stated purpose of the magazine was more or less the education of the masses, and Brackenridge had begun his career

as a reformer of the most quixotic nature. His principal biographer, Claude M. Newlin, refers to him at this period as "an adept in the gentle art of making enemies." 3

In 1781, at the age of thirty-three, Brackenridge left Philadelphia for the frontier town of Pittsburgh in order to establish his law practice and by doing so automatically placed himself squarely in the middle of the East/West (and later Federalist/Republican) quarrel that divided the early colonies. It was also in Pittsburgh that Brackenridge decided to involve himself personally in state politics; he ran for the State Assembly and was elected in 1786 on a platform largely sympathetic to the needs and desires of Westerners. According to Newlin, the problems that caused "unrest in the Western counties" and that were dealt with by Brackenridge's program were "scarcity of money, conflicting claims on land tracts, and the aggravation of the transportation problem caused by the closing of the Mississippi [by Spain] to Americans." 4 Western Pennsylvania also favored the radical constitution that was, naturally, opposed by the East. After he was elected, Brackenridge worked to help the frontier in many ways but was unfortunate enough to change

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4 Newlin, p. 74.
his mind on a bill dealing with state certificates of indebtedness that settlers could use to pay for their land. He voted against the bill, and his constituents were furious. To make matters worse, his change of heart was loudly denounced by William Findley, his fellow representative from Westmoreland County. Findley later served as the object of satire in Brackenridge's poem "The Modern Chevalier" and was transformed into Traddle the Weaver in a satiric episode of Modern Chivalry.

On May 25, 1787, in Philadelphia, the first Constitutional Convention met to amend or find a viable alternative to the entirely inadequate Articles of Confederation. The struggle that followed concerning the ratification of the constitution drawn up by the members of the Convention divided the states into two political "parties"--the Federalists, who supported ratification, and the Anti-federalists, who opposed it. The Federalists consisted mainly of men who were realistic, according to Commager and Morison. They realized that the American experiment needed a strong central government in order to succeed. They also "had the assets of youth, intelligence, something positive to offer, and the support of Washington and Franklin," to say nothing of Hugh Henry Brackenridge. In Pennsylvania, the new Constitution was opposed by the

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5 Morison and Commager, p. 289.
radical West and supported by the East, as it was in the country at large. Brackenridge wrote much in favor of ratification and helped rush the election of a ratifying convention through the State Assembly. It was due largely to this strategy of pushing the issue through before the opposing forces had time to organize that Pennsylvania became the second state to ratify the Constitution on December 12, 1787. It was also due to his siding with the "Easterners" that Brackenridge became finally estranged from Pittsburgh voters.

Brackenridge's political philosophy while a member of the Pennsylvania State Assembly was simple and rational; he believed in "defending his exercise of independent judgment and in stating the limitations of the average citizen." Or, as Vernon L. Parrington writes, "Federalist and Republican alike might lose their heads and indulge in unseemly clamor, but Brackenridge with good Scotch judgment refused to howl with the pack." Unfortunately, Brackenridge's stubborn independence in the Assembly caused him to become rather unpopular with the Western Pennsylvania populace; his law practice failed somewhat, and he was defeated for re-election in 1788 by his old opponent,

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6 Newlin, p. 84.

William Findley. In the same year, prompted by his political setbacks, he began writing the long poem in Hudibrastic verse that would later serve as the germ for his only novel, *Modern Chivalry*. The poem, "The Modern Chevalier," chronicles the experiences of a contemporary knight-errant in a setting that Newlin describes as "an abstract world of political thought." The verse is not particularly good, and its main value resides in the fact that it led to the novel. In "The Modern Chevalier," however, Brackenridge first formulated the scheme of viewing modern democracy from a more or less "chivalric" point of view, an idea that will be further developed in the second chapter.

The years following Brackenridge's "retirement" from Pennsylvania politics were taken up largely by the progress of the three American experiments: "independence, republicanism, and federal union." In spite of their political successes, Americans were not particularly wealthy, travelled on miserable roads, and endured several outbreaks of typhoid and yellow fever. Pennsylvania, the second largest state, housed the federal government at Philadelphia for ten years (1790-1800). Commager and Morison point out that "her racial heterogeneity, democratic

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8 Newlin, p. 115.
9 Morison and Commager, p. 296.
policy, and social structure, ranging from wealthy and sophisticated merchants to the wildest frontiersmen, made Pennsylvania a microcosm of the America to be."\textsuperscript{10} During the early 1790s, Brackenridge attended to the education of his only son, Henry Marie, married his second wife, Miss Sabina Wolfe (1790), and published the first two volumes of \textit{Modern Chivalry} (1792). While writing these volumes, he became alienated from the Federalist party and joined forces with the Western Republicans, supporting Pennsylvania's radical constitution of 1776, opposing Hamilton's proposed United States Bank scheme and the excise tax on liquor. In 1793, at the height of the French Revolution, Brackenridge, along with most Americans, strongly supported the French republicans. He urged American aid to France with her war against England in his writings in the \textit{Pittsburgh Gazette}. The French issue, more than anything else at this time, clearly divided the United States into Republican and Federalist loyalties. To most Americans, the issues seemed clearly black or white:

The French Revolution seemed to some a clear-cut contest between monarchy and republicanism, oppression and liberty, autocracy and democracy; to others, simply a new breaking-out of the eternal

\textsuperscript{10}Morison and Commager, p. 305.
strife between anarchy and order, atheism and religion, poverty and property. The former joined the Republican party; the latter, the Federalist.\textsuperscript{11}

Brackenridge eagerly supported the French attempt at democracy until he witnessed the violence of the revolution at first hand--during Pennsylvania's notorious Whiskey Rebellion of 1794.

In 1791, Alexander Hamilton, then Washington's Secretary of the Treasury, introduced an Excise Act calling for as much as twenty-five per cent tax on the price of a gallon of whiskey. The Act severely hurt the farmers of Western Pennsylvania, who had no other market for their grain due to the closing of the Mississippi by Spain. In many parts of the state, whiskey was accepted as "legal tender" in trade. Westerners were exceedingly hostile to government-sent excisemen and even threatened secession. In 1794, spurred on by events in France, hostilities mounted. Property belonging to tax officers was confiscated, the officers themselves were threatened, and there was talk of a march upon the town of Pittsburgh. The newly established government saw its authority threatened, and the militias of four neighboring states were called out to quell the fledgling "insurrection."

\textsuperscript{11}Morison and Commager, p. 342.
The militias responded immediately, and, joined by Hamilton himself, marched west over the Alleghenies to put down the insurgents. The threat of force, however, was sufficient to cool the tempers of most of the rebellious, and only two men were ever even tried for treason (and were subsequently acquitted). The rebellion ended almost as it began, and the federal government had proved its strength.

During the 1794 Whiskey Insurrection, Brackenridge played an important role; he sympathized with the tax-oppressed Westerners, but he feared violence as a political force. However, since his practice and property were in Pittsburgh, he did not dare oppose the rebels. His role was that of a mediator, a part for which he was well suited. Outwardly, he went along with the insurrectionists in order to use his influence to avert as much violence as possible. He helped delay the organization of a march on Pittsburgh while vocally subscribing to the rebels' measures. Consequently, the troops advancing on Pennsylvania believed him one of the major culprits, and he was indicted and tried by a federal judge. Then Hamilton himself examined Brackenridge, whose explanation proved satisfactory. Hamilton concluded that his conduct had been "horribly misrepresented," and he was acquitted. Unfortunately, this action angered both insurgents and townspeople, who

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12 Newlin, p. 172.
thought that Brackenridge had been let off too easily. The Insurrection, however, had ended, and in 1795 Brackenridge wrote a history of the rebellion (Incidents of the Insurrection in the Western Parts of Pennsylvania, in the Year 1794) in an attempt to clear himself. His reputation slowly recovered, and the events of the Insurrection provided Brackenridge with material for a continuation of Modern Chivalry.

Despite his harrowing experiences in Pennsylvania's Whiskey Rebellion, Brackenridge's sympathies continued to lie with the Republicans. His convictions were strengthened in the second year of the Adams administration by the passage of the Naturalization, Alien, and Sedition Acts. The first act lengthened the period of residency necessary for citizenship in the United States to fourteen years; the second "gave the President power to expel foreigners by executive decree"; the third declared the defamation of the President or Congress "a misdemeanor punishable by fine or imprisonment."\(^{13}\) Commager and Morison note that "some of the prosecutions" under this last act "were downright silly."\(^{14}\) These acts and others served to strengthen party opposition throughout the United States, and Pennsylvania was no exception. In

\(^{13}\) Morison and Commager, p. 365.

\(^{14}\) Morison and Commager, p. 365.
the same year, 1798, Brackenridge was responsible for establishing and leading the Republican Party in his state. He and other Republicans throughout the country "were proceeding cautiously toward Jeffersonianism."\(^{15}\)

In the election of 1800, when Republicans Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr defeated Federalists John Adams and Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, the two parties were at the height of their opposition. Federalists feared that Republicans would make the country little more than a French satellite, and Republicans feared Federalist ties with the British just as strongly. Businessmen despised farmers, and farmers distrusted businessmen. After the election, Republicans controlled the House and Senate, but Federalists still held the judiciary, and antagonism continued between these two government branches. Ironically, in 1799 Brackenridge had been appointed to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court as a reward for his work in the Republican Party by governor Thomas McKean. Jefferson's administration was marked by distrust of everything British (and Federalist), and Judge Brackenridge endured several attacks on his own office; he was nearly impeached in 1804 over a case with which he was only negligibly involved. The attack on the judiciary gave Brackenridge more satiric material for

\(^{15}\)Newlin, p. 204.
his novel, and in 1804 Part II of *Modern Chivalry* was published, much of it dealing with the prejudice against the bench, lawyers, education, and the common law.

Although Brackenridge had his doubts about the more extreme forms and prejudices of Jeffersonian democracy, he made it quite clear in his continuation of *Modern Chivalry* that he had no reservations about democracy itself; he believed it to be the best, the freest, the most just form of government on earth. Newlin attributes his lack of political success on the frontier to the nature of the West itself, a place "where democracy was a state of feeling rather than a conviction of intellect."\(^1^6\) Brackenridge's concept of democracy was both, but he continued to rely on his reason and realism in his political choices. This individualism was responsible for his shifts in party affiliation, which continued until his death. Brackenridge spent his last years as a judge writing his appraisal of the adaptability of British common law to the American judicial system, and although he supported the War of 1812 against Great Britain, he could not share in the Republican desire to "throw out" everything associated with the English. In 1814, he published his *Law Miscellanies* in Philadelphia, and in 1815, he republished *Modern Chivalry* with additional

\(^{1^6}\)Newlin, p. 306.

Modern Chivalry consists of the collected results of Hugh Henry Brackenridge's contact with and sensitivity to eighteenth-century American democracy. It is a long and almost formless book, but it is unified by the political and philosophical convictions of its author. That these convictions should be expressed through so incongruous a metaphor as chivalry is curious, but, given Brackenridge's own temperament and the nature of the times, it is also curiously fitting. The American experiment was new enough at the turn of the eighteenth century for its democratic ideals to play central roles in the actual political maneuvering of the nation, far more important roles than they play today. Brackenridge, naturally, subscribed wholeheartedly to these ideals, having been personally involved in the process that led to their incorporation in the American scene. However, Brackenridge's involvement with democratic ideals never dimmed his vision of the disparity that existed between the ideal and the actual; his firm reliance on reason as a moral and intellectual guide never permitted him to be swept along with the rest of the mob. His contact with the actual workings of democracy therefore paralleled
Don Quixote's tilt with the windmills, at least superficially. Brackenridge found himself considered slightly mad by both public and politicians, although his position was most often ironically rational. He became the "knight-errant" of American democracy and fittingly so because of his talent as a satirist. Brackenridge's application of chivalry to the American scene grew from his perception of himself as a reformer with a pen for a sword and a satiric wit for a cutting edge. In the progress of his conception of modern chivalry, from his long poem "The Modern Chevalier" to the novel itself, Brackenridge proceeded to develop and apply his own definition and philosophy of the chivalry of early American democracy.
CHAPTER II
CHIVALRY DEFINED

Hugh Henry Brackenridge used the metaphor of chivalry as a critical vantage point from which to view the follies of his fellow Americans, the "swinish multitude" of his novel, Modern Chivalry. In a letter addressed to "Mr. Scull," published as a preface to a sermon on duelling in the Pittsburgh Gazette, June 13, 1789, Brackenridge remarked, "The age of chivalry is not over."¹ In the same sermon, he denounced the duel as "the offspring of modern barbarism."² Brackenridge believed that his time, even though it witnessed the advance of Jeffersonian democracy, was a barbaric age in many ways. His opinion was, of course, affected by his personal frustrations in the political system. It seems therefore incongruous on his part to also term the period "the age of chivalry" and to assign the title "Modern Chivalry" to a novel calculated to examine and expose the excesses of the "swinish


²Brackenridge, Gazette Publications, p. 117; cited in Marder, pp. 144-45.
multitude." It is clear that Brackenridge's conception of modern chivalry differs greatly from the traditional meaning of the word; thus an examination of his definition is necessary before it can be shown how and why he used it in *Modern Chivalry*. There are no indications in his essays or letters to prove he had familiarized himself with any medieval romances or works on the subject of chivalry. However, it is apparent that he had read Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and had acquired some idea of the traditional meaning of chivalry. Modern chivalry must be based on medieval chivalry; therefore, chivalry must be defined first in its proper historical perspective before it can be applied to America at the turn of the eighteenth century.

"Chivalry" is a difficult word to define succinctly. C. Hugh Holman calls it a "system of manners and morals" which were "chiefly a fruit of the feudal system of the Middle Ages." It began as merely a military system, the system of knighthood. Indeed, "the English word 'knight' is . . . the equivalent of the French word 'chevalier'; and the English term 'knighthood' stands as a synonym for

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the French 'chevalerie.' . . . "

As a system associated with the military, chivalry peaked in the period lasting from approximately 1100 to 1300 A.D., the age of the Crusades. It was during this period that chivalry gained its associations of fervent patriotism, national service, and a strict personal code of training for knights. And, perhaps more significantly, the ideal that was at first purely military became saturated with Christian teachings and religious motivations. War mixed well with religion, and knights suddenly became the protectors of a sacred cause, instead of being mere cavalry members. Ironically, though, it was military progress that put an end to the practicability of chivalry (knighthood) as a system for defense. With the widespread use of increasingly sophisticated weaponry, heavily armored knights became more of a hindrance than an aid to defense. However, even though opportunities for the practical application of chivalry had ceased to exist, the patriotic and religious/moral flavor continued to hold its attraction, especially for the young.5 Because of the dissociation of the two sides


5At this time, the idea of romantic love was added to the other elements in the makeup of chivalry, war and religion; however, as this element is ignored in Brackenridge's definition of chivalry, I have omitted it in the historical definition of traditional chivalry.
of chivalry, the practical and the ethical or spiritual, the patriotic and moral virtues of the system were given a new, romantic interpretation in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, especially in England. Critic Arthur Ferguson calls this era "the Indian summer of English chivalry."\

The transition from practicality to romanticism was a smooth one, aided by the fact that the medieval knight was rarely a paragon of the chivalric virtues in the first place. F. J. C. Hearnshaw states,

Nothing more striking distinguishes the Middle Age both from the Classical Antiquity which preceded it, and the Modern Commercialism which supplanted it, than the enormous discrepancies that displayed themselves between its theories and its practices.\

Still, in the earlier and the generally barbaric Middle Ages, the atmosphere of virtue provided by a few good individuals who represented the teachings of chivalry was in itself a considerable advance in civilization and was one of the major reasons for the revival of interest in the obsolete military system in the fifteenth and

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Hearnshaw, p. 11.
sixteenth centuries. The "chivalric virtues of loyalty, prowess, and courage, of justice and liberality" were given new meaning during England's "Indian summer" of chivalry; during the Tudor period, they became the virtues necessary for public service, a logical transition from the patriotism required of the country's defenders to the patriotism required of the country's governing class.

The English humanism which prevailed as a philosophical system during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had little use for the forms and trappings of chivalry, but the personal code of ethics associated with knighthood was retained. The trappings of chivalry still held a "snob appeal" for many, but the chivalric virtues were turned to a more useful application--public service. Ferguson writes, "Those qualities which made for right living in private life were accordingly indistinguishable from those that would be appropriate to the discharge of public responsibilities." The knight, once the defender, acquired also the duty of governor or "Justicier." The obligation of the knight, still an arm of the government, was to act in the national interests at all times; this was "the characteristic contribution of England to the history of chivalric idealism." However, as chivalry still "belonged" to

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8Ferguson, p. 23. 9Ferguson, pp. 111-12.
10Ferguson, p. 112. 11Ferguson, p. 41.
the aristocracy, its pretentious qualities continued to exist side by side with its idealism and were largely responsible for chivalry's increasing loss of reputation, the end of its "Indian summer." By the end of the sixteenth century, the humanistic impulse, which stressed the importance of reason as a guide to morality, had conquered the stiff, formal trappings of chivalry, and its idealism had entered "that bourne of romanticism from which there is no return."[12]

The interest in chivalry did not resurface again with any degree of conviction until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when Europe, and especially England, underwent what one critic calls "the Romantic Reaction against Rationalism and Utilitarianism."[13] One of the most important works concerning the chivalric ideal at this time was Kenelm Digby's *Broadstone of Honour* (volume one in 1844), which examines chivalry mostly in terms of its association with Christianity. In defining chivalry, Digby stresses the connection between chivalric idealism and the idealism of youth (and therefore innocence), which he considered "the ground-work of natural chivalry."[14] He asserts, "As the heroic is always the earliest age in the

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history of any nation, so youth, the first period of human life, may be considered as the heroic or chivalric age of each separate man . . . "\(^{15}\) In his four-volume work, Digby includes an interesting and (for the purposes of this paper) an uncannily applicable discussion of the relation of chivalry to government. Digby notes,

"The republican form of government, though noble and dignified, was so far contrary to the mind of chivalry . . . for its evident tendency was to fill the whole heart and soul of men with matters of public moment, with just or false views of patriotism, and, above all, to engross the whole attention of each individual with the peculiar political tenets or prejudices of the sect or party to which he belonged."\(^{16}\)

The incompatibility Kenelm Digby found between democracy and chivalry is, in part at least, echoed in Brackenridge's Modern Chivalry, though perhaps unwittingly. It seems strange that chivalry, with its nationalistic tendencies, should be so peculiarly unsuited to a democratic form of government, but despite the half-mocking title of Brackenridge's book, the American author found the public seldom

\(^{15}\) Digby, pp. 86-87.  
\(^{16}\) Digby, p. 250.
able to live up to the ideals of the new government in actual practice.

Brackenridge's disappointments in the American people should not have been totally unexpected, however. In forming his definition of modern chivalry, he must have been reminded often of the outcome of the chivalric experiment in the model for his book, Don Quixote. References to Cervantes' "Knight of the Mournful Countenance" appear several times in Modern Chivalry, and critic Joseph Harkey notes, "Modern Chivalry aspires unabashedly to be a quixotic novel. . . ." In the novel, Captain Farrago says that he has "been called the Modern Don Quixotte [sic]," since he has set out on his travels "after the manner of the antient [sic] chevaliers." Farrago's quest (and Brackenridge's, for that matter) is unmistakably quixotic; he attempts to persuade the people to reason. In the introduction to his translation of Don Quixote, Samuel Putnam states, "He who sets out to set the world right is embarking upon a truly Quixotic enterprise." Since

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Farrago, Brackenridge's defender of modern chivalry, owes much to his seventeenth-century counterpart, Brackenridge's perception of modern chivalry is probably based on Cervantes' view of the traditional, romantic chivalry he satirized. An examination of the treatment and meaning of chivalry in *Don Quixote* should therefore preface any interpretation of Brackenridge's own definition.

Part I of *Don Quixote*, published in 1605, had the overt purpose of satirizing chivalry and romance. At the time, the chivalric romances in vogue in the sixteenth century were beginning to fail in their attraction, and Cervantes' prose satire most effectively ended their popularity. *Don Quixote*, however, does not merely satirize chivalry; it juxtaposes the code with contemporary Spanish life and gives chivalry "another chance." Don Quixote, with his sometimes pretentious, sometimes highly ethical code of honor, attempts to reform the vulgarities of the age. One of the hereditary weaknesses of chivalry, however, especially in its romantic form, is the fact that it is impracticable when applied directly to its environment. Despite its lofty ideals, it is simply not a code that ever really worked in either its ideal or its actual sense. Even during the period when chivalry was at its

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most practical, the time of the Crusades, its ethical code of conduct was often disregarded as an unnecessary burden to the knight.

In the course of the numerous "sallies" made by the Don and his squire, Sancho Panza, the appearances and forms exacted by chivalry are ridiculed again and again. Don Quixote does, however, reveal much concerning the true nature of chivalry. As a reformer, he firmly believes "that what the world [needs] most [is] knights-errant and a revival of chivalry."\(^2\)

Early in the novel, the Don explains the original purpose of the knight-errant: "The order of knights-errant was instituted, for the protection of damsels, the aid of widows and orphans, and the succoring of the needy."\(^2\) He calls knights "the ministers of God on earth"\(^2\) and later adds that his "profession is none other than that of helping those who cannot help themselves, avenging those who have been wronged, and chastising traitors."\(^2\) Knights must also be educated, especially since "they might be called upon to deliver a sermon ... just as if they were graduates of the University of Paris; from which it may be deduced that the


\(^2\)Cervantes, p. 82.  \(^2\)Cervantes, p. 94.

\(^2\)Cervantes, p. 126.
lance never yet blunted the pen nor the pen the lance."  

And above all, the knight (and Don Quixote in particular) "was born, by Heaven's will, in this our age of iron, to revive what is known as the Golden Age."  

Even though chivalry, as resurrected from the "romantic bourne," is unsuited to the life of Don Quixote's contemporaries, the chivalric code is still a valid statement of a personal code of ethics. As such, it cannot be ridiculed away. Quixote himself remarks, "Wherever virtue exists in an outstanding degree, it is always persecuted"; fortunately, it also always survives its persecution. In his discussion of Don Quixote, Digby wonders whom we are to emulate, if not the knight himself; most of the other characters, including Sancho, are motivated largely by greed or by pure mischief. For example, at Don Quixote's death,  

The household was in a state of excitement, but with it all the niece continued to eat her meals, the housekeeper had her drink, and Sancho Panza was in good spirits; for this business of inheriting property effaces or mitigates the sorrow which the heir ought to feel and causes him to forget.  

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25 Cervantes, p. 137.  
26 Cervantes, p. 146.  
27 Cervantes, p. 524.  
28 Cervantes, p. 987.
The picture presented of human nature is not particularly flattering. On the other hand, Digby finds the hero of the book full of "genius, virtue, imagination, and sensibility, all the generous qualities which distinguish an elevated soul. . . . " He is "brave . . . loyal and faithful . . . disinterested . . . a faithful lover, a humane and generous warrier, a kind and affectionate master, a gallant and accomplished gentleman. . . . "

In spite of his many virtues, however, Quixote apologizes before his death to Sancho for having led him into the error "of believing that there are still knights-errant in the world." His final, discouraging admission is reminiscent of his earlier fear: "As yet I do not know how chivalry will work out in these calamitous times in which we live. . . . " Chivalry did not "work out," but its failure was not due to its representative, nor to its code of ideals; it failed simply because the times were indeed too "calamitous," too real to accept it. This characteristic of chivalry, the fact that it is too idealistic a code ever to be practical, was very probably accepted as fact by Brackenridge in his readings of Cervantes' novel and may be an important part of his definition of chivalry. It is certainly

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29Digby, p. 166
30Cervantes, p. 986.
31Cervantes, p. 156.
evident in his first use of the metaphor, the long poem "The Modern Chevalier."

Brackenridge's "The Modern Chevalier" was written in approximately 1778-79, but was not published until 1806, when it was included in his Gazette Publications. Newlin notes, "The published poem is probably only a fragment of the whole work, however, as it is only thirty pages long, and Brackenridge said in 1792 that his piece was about 'two parts in three as large as Butler's Hudibras.'" The poem is written in Hudibrastic verse (octosyllabic couplets in iambic tetrameter, rhyming aa--bb, etc., after Butler's satiric poem "Hudibras") and, as earlier noted, is poorly written. It chronicles the experiences of a Knight or Chevalier who becomes rather abruptly involved with the American political scene by sticking his head through the window of a weaver's workshop and asking him why he continues to perform such menial labor when he could be sitting in the Senate. The weaver's wife overhears the knight's talk and promptly cudgels him for trying to involve her husband in politics, an experiment he had already made, much to the detriment of his trade and financial situation. She bewails the fact that a certain writer persists in ridiculing her husband's follies, and

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the knight, who has vowed to help damsels in distress, undertakes the mission of silencing him. However, upon talking with the writer, the knight realizes that there is a great deal of common sense in the ridicule of those who step from their proper spheres to run the government with no knowledge whatsoever of affairs of state, and the knight resolves to ride about the country setting the people straight in the matter of elections. The knight attends a local election on the advice of the writer and watches while the people elect the dispenser of whiskey over the man of common sense. The knight's remonstrances do no good, and, puzzled, he seeks out a conjuror to discover the cause of the people's erratic behavior. The conjuror declares that he does not know and sends the knight to a philosopher for his answer. The philosopher explains that the answer is "men's ordinary passions," that from envy of the good, they choose the worst or the stupid, who often appear intelligent because they remain silent from want of anything to say. Finally, antclimac-tically, the knight thanks the philosopher and departs, and the poem ends.

33 Hugh Henry Brackenridge, "The Modern Chevalier," in Gazette Publications (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Printed by Alexander and Philips, 1806), p. 338 [1. 1042]; all page and line references will hereafter be cited in the text, line references appearing in brackets since they are not actually numbered in the original.
The plot of "The Modern Chevalier" is rather frail, and the verse is usually strained, but the poem is important because it contains many lines indicative of what Brackenridge believed modern chivalry to be. The traditional associations are all there: the knight is mounted, has a fair way with words ("words melifluous and speeches / And parables, and far fair fetches" [p. 312 (ll. 33-34)]), refuses to defend himself against attacks by a woman (p. 315 [ll. 131-36]), compares the weaver's wife to Dulcinea "Dol' Tobosa" (p. 315 [l. 163]), propositions her (p. 317 [ll. 242-27]), and promises to right her wrongs, as befits a knight (pp. 318-19 [ll. 280-89]). However, as a result of the incongruity of the situation, a chevalier correcting the excesses of democracy, new meaning must be given to the knight's traditional calling.

When the knight first visits the writer and states his inclination to put a halt to the lampoons, he does so in such "eloquent" language that the writer remarks, "... though a man o' the' sword, / Yet by the grammar of your word / You seem of literary talent" (p. 321 [ll. 386-88]), thereby associating his own calling with that of his visitor. The comparison is further encouraged when the writer explains the purpose of his work: "Yet not without our proper use / In system to correct abuse, / When what is fungous, or absurd / In common matters has
occur'd" (p. 322 [ll. 400-03]). This purpose is remarkably like the knight's, as he explains it:

Am of the order, and a Knight
Whose object is to set things right;
Depress th' unworthy and raise up
The preferable to the top,
And injury and force restrain
Of warriors swords or writers pen,
Distributing best services
And keeping commonwealth in peace. (p. 324 [ll. 484-91])

The knight is also struck by the similarities of their duties; he accords the writer a place in his own profession:

[I] rank you as of class with us,
A writer at th' top o' th' house;
A kind of literary knight,
Dispos'd to keep the world quiet
By aid of your satiric verse,
Th' insignificant t' amerce,
Or put down villainy and pride
That has opinion on its side,
For ridicule's a test of truth,
No less than reason; for it sheweth,
The weak and vulnerable part,
And probes distemper to the heart. (p. 325 [11. 527-38])

The knight praises the writer's satiric powers highly, stating that "no power of champion's sword / Doth surer victory afford" (p. 325 [11. 553-54]). The writer considers it a great compliment to be compared to the knight (p. 326 [11. 557-60]) and thanks him for having undertaken the task of righting the wrongs of democracy.

The writer's speech contains in essence the meaning of "modern" chivalry as opposed to traditional chivalry. He remarks,

I deem it greatly fortunate
That in this boist'rous time though late,
One has arisen with such skill
To subjugate all shape of ill.
It seem'd to me not long ago
As I did read a page or so,
The spirit of Chivalry was gone
Which has in other ages shone,
And left the world to common means;

But since excluding this conclusion,
You as it were have made intrusion,
And shewn by an example splendid,
That such exertion is not ended,
Go on like other combatants
Not just like them in killing g'ants;
But in performing modern good,
For ages are not now so rude
As to produce the like disorders
Which were remov'd by antient orders;
And more by chivalry of tongue
Remains it now to redress wrong,
Than by an actual violence. (p. 326 [11. 563-87])

This conversation between knight and writer most clearly explains Brackenridge's conception of modern chivalry. Each character is a representative of the new form of chivalry. Like traditional chivalry, modern chivalry exists for the purpose of correcting abuse of the governmental or philosophical system under which it exists. Each also is didactic in that its representatives set examples for the rest of society. The weapons of the modern chevalier, however, consist as much of satire as they do of broadswords; the weapons are ridicule and reason, the "chivalry of [the] tongue." The knight is no longer a representative of a separate social class; he tells the voters,
... am no aristocrat
To blame what people would be at,
In chusing from the multitude
Him destitute of noble blood,
Nor fenc'd with family connections,
To gain the popular affections. (p. 332 [11797-802])

The only aristocracy to which the modern knight must belong
is the aristocracy of talent, Jefferson's "natural aristocracy."

The transition from poem to novel was, fortunately,
an easy one for Brackenridge. His Chevalier became Captain
Farrago, and the Writer became the voice of the chapters
"Containing Observations," the persona presumably being
Brackenridge himself. Brackenridge did not, however,
define modern chivalry as clearly in his novel as he did
in the earlier poem. In fact, chivalry is seldom men-
tioned in Modern Chivalry. Brackenridge's conception of
modern chivalry did not change dramatically in the course
of the transition, but its diffusion in the work became
infinitely more subtle, adapting itself to theme and tech-
nique, satire and form. Most of the few references to
chivalry appear in Part II of Modern Chivalry, the part
less inventive and more openly didactic, and, consequently,
seldom read. In Book II of the second part, Brackenridge
writes, "The democrat is the true chevalier, who, though he wears not crosses, or the emblazoned arms of heraldry, yet is ready to do right, and justice to everyone" (MC, p. 404). Later in the book, Brackenridge touches again on the responsibility of the voter through the chivalric metaphor:

The chevalier of that day [the Middle Ages] was a conservator of the peace.--His prowess was instead of laws. Now the vote of the citizen takes place of the sword of the adventurer. Shall the knight of the Golden Cross be free from stain in his achievements [sic]; and shall a republican prostitute his vote, or dishonour his standing in society by bestowing it on the unworthy? (MC, p. 521)

In Modern Chivalry, Brackenridge has expanded the chivalric code to include each and every member of a democracy. However, the true chevalier must be a man of reason, and there are unfortunately very few characters in the novel who can approach that requirement. Actually there are only three: the blind lawyer, Farrago himself, and the narrator, whose voice is presumably that of the author. Each recognizes the excesses of the people, and each is endangered when he attempts to dissuade them from their erroneous ways. It seems that neither in the poem nor the novel does modern chivalry actually work. Therefore,
the modern version is much like its original: impractical and idealistic, even to the point of romanticism. The "real" and "ideal" democracies are quite as incompatible as the "real" and "ideal" forms of chivalry. The truth of their incongruity is seen both in the national scene and in Brackenridge's own experiences.

Claude M. Newlin conveniently sums up the major points of Brackenridge's political beliefs in the introduction to his edition of Modern Chivalry. There are six of them:

(1) the paramount importance of judicious exercise of the suffrage, (2) the discouragement of demagoguery, (3) the existence of a class struggle between the aristocrats and the people, (4) a preference for the people's side in this struggle, (5) the recognition of the excesses of mere democracy, and (6) the admission that extreme reform movements, although disturbing, are necessary for political advance. (MC, p. xxxiii)

Each one of Brackenridge's convictions is incorporated in some way in the conception of modern chivalry in both the poem and the novel. In Modern Chivalry, Brackenridge assigns the role of chevalier to the voter who exercises judgment in selecting his candidate (MC, p. 521); however, as he also points out, the number of men who rely on reason
alone in the electoral process are few and far between. Thus, the number of "chevaliers" in the new democracy is necessarily small. Brackenridge hoped to correct that fault by ridiculing it, both in his Gazette publications and his novel. The "swinish multitude," unfortunately, ignored him and continued to elect men on the merit of their appearances, connections, and liquid assets. Brackenridge's third belief, in the existence of a class struggle between aristocrat and plebeian, is an essential part of the makeup of traditional chivalry. In modern chivalry, however, the struggle takes place between a small aristocracy of natural talent and the unruly and irrational populace. Wendy Martin notes, "The novel [Modern Chivalry] attempted to establish an apolitical system for the new democracy which was based on philosophical reflection rather than existing social precedence." Both methods, philosophy and social precedence, played large parts in traditional chivalry, but could not be reconciled for practical application. Brackenridge adopts the first method for his metaphor and satirizes the second, social precedence, along with other trappings of chivalry such as the duel and heraldry. The fourth and fifth points of his philosophy, concerning a preference for the

public's side in the struggle and the recognition of democracy's excesses, result from Brackenridge's own disillusionment and disappointments by both the public at large and the various political parties to which he belonged. Again, he thought the remedy was reason and his corrective weapon satire.

Brackenridge's final political belief, the acceptance of reform movements, is perhaps the best reason for his use of the term modern chivalry. Chivalry is opposed to the equalizing force of extreme democracy, which Brackenridge attempted to combat with his satire. Paradoxically, Brackenridge is himself a reformer attempting to halt the excesses of democratic reform--quite a quixotic situation. The results are sometimes rather pompously didactic, but more often are humorous and gentle, if somewhat frustrated. "Modern chivalry" is opposed to what Brackenridge called "modern barbarism" and consists of an attempt to combat the irrational with reason and the ridiculous with ridicule in order to preserve the principles of a form of government Kenelm Digby believed singularly unsuited to chivalric purposes, a new democracy.
CHAPTER III

MODERN CHIVALRY: THE THEMES

Miguel de Cervantes' Don Quixote provided Hugh Henry Brackenridge with the starting point for his definition of modern chivalry. It is evident that the historical situation in which Brackenridge found himself greatly influenced the final formulation of that definition as well as the development of his main character. Neither chevalier, Quixote or Farrago, is actually in touch with his environment (though different reasons prevail in each case), a fact which cannot help but somehow affect the type of chivalry each represents. A further comparison of the two works, Don Quixote and Modern Chivalry, will show that the American work owes more to its Spanish precursor than its conception of chivalry; the relationship of the two includes, to varying extents, similarities of form, character, and theme, each of which has some bearing on the discussion of satire that follows in this thesis. Although eighteenth-century American and seventeenth-century Spanish cultures have little in common, the problems faced by each pair of major characters, Quixote and Sancho, Farrago and Teague, are essentially similar, regardless of the diversity of their environments. Both
protagonists, Quixote and Farrago, are somehow incompatible with their respective eras. This mutual incompatibility results from the fact that they hold the unenviable position of chevaliers in decidedly unchivalric worlds. Their problem with their worlds (or with reality) forms the basis of plot, character, theme, and especially of the satire of the two quixotic prose works, Don Quixote and Modern Chivalry.

The most obvious resemblance between the two books is, naturally, the similarity in form. Each work is picaresque: each employs the journey as the narrative technique, each is primarily satiric, and each includes a rogue (the picaro) as one of its main characters. Another obvious resemblance exists between the protagonists of each: educated masters followed by their simple-minded servants. The curate in Don Quixote remarks: "It would seem they had both been turned out from the same mold and that the madness of the master without the foolishness of the man would not be worth a penny."¹ This is true to an extent of each pair, but less so of Farrago and Teague, whose relationship is less personal; indeed, Modern Chivalry suffers little from Teague's temporary replacement by Duncan, the religious and rabidly

nationalistic Scotsman. The pairs differ also in that in Don Quixote, it is usually the Don who leads Sancho into scrapes, while in Modern Chivalry, it is Teague's ambition that generally causes trouble, although Sancho is never shown to be free from that vice either. Sancho, with his endless but usually apt proverbs, is also possessed of much more common sense than is Teague, who believes in one episode that he is being prepared for the bar in a workhouse, "and that the several flagellations, and grindings, and poundings, [are] so many lessons, and lectures, to qualify him for the practice of law."² It is true that both servants are peculiarly gullible; Sancho never ceases to believe he will be the governor of an island as the reward for his labors, and Teague never realizes he is not fit to be a politician, a judge, a writer, etc. But they are certainly no more innocent than their masters. Sancho, in fact, is singularly less so. Don Quixote and Captain John Farrago, by the very nature of their calling as chevaliers, are as far removed from the reality of their worlds as either of their servants. Quixote's innocence results from the fact that he is essentially a "madman" (although this is a point long debated by Cervantes scholars), but Farrago's innocence results, ironically,

mostly from his rationalism. Both chevaliers are unworldly, but Quixote's innocence is a product of his reading of books of romance, while Farrago's results from "ideas based on reading in lieu of social experience." In the first case, Quixote has rejected the world of reality in favor of the world of imagination; in the second, Farrago has attempted to apply the rational ideas he has acquired from his education to a world with little use for reason. Quixote is the romantic; Farrago is the rationalist. Neither is in touch with reality.

It seems odd that a man of reasonable ideas should be represented as quixotic in a novel entitled Modern Chivalry; however, there is one very important difference between the respective realities with which Captain Farrago and Don Quixote are so out of touch. Reality in Don Quixote is shown to be hard, uncompromising, sordid, and even mocking; in other words, it is an easily recognized type of reality, and its nature may in part excuse the Don's escape to the world of imagination. Eighteenth-century American reality, on the other hand, is not always recognizable, at least in Brackenridge's depiction of it. In Modern Chivalry, the absurdities of everyday life are emphasized and exaggerated. As Joseph Harkey notes,

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"The frontier society, not Farrago, is mad in Modern Chivalry." The truth of this statement is found in every encounter between Farrago and "the swinish multitude."

For example, it is evident when Farrago attends an oration at the Philosophical Society, where he hears Cuff, a Negro, contend that the first man was black and later became bleached white (MC, pp. 114-16); it is evident in Farrago's visit to a court of law, where he hears arguments concerning whether the taking of water from a neighbor's well is trespass or larceny (MC, pp. 152-53); it is evident in the arguments he hears in favor of electing animals to the Assembly (they will not make long speeches or worry about re-election, etc.) (MC, pp. 661-64). That the society and not the chevalier is mad is most evident, however, when Farrago visits an asylum. He hears a "madman" lecture against revenge and the resentment of injuries with perfectly rational arguments, hears a preacher and a "mad democrat" argue on anarchy, and visits a "mad" poet who is recording the Captain's travels (MC, pp. 384-87).

The first man laments:

"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

"Harkey, p. 196."
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." (MC, p. 385)

This statement seems to describe accurately Farrago's position as well as Don Quixote's, and Brackenridge may even have had his own situation in mind when he wrote it. Indeed, as Farrago leaves the asylum, the scenes he has witnessed depress him; as Brackenridge writes,

In the mean time we shall dismiss the Captain from the hospital, not but that there was much more to see and hear amongst the Bedlamites still, but affected with melancholy and weary of the scene. At the same time doubting with himself, whether those he saw confined were more devoid of reason than the bulk of men running at large in the world. (MC, p. 387)

The question of madness must, of course, always be a relative one. It has already been noted that Kenelm Digby finds Quixote's "madness" morally superior to the other characters' sanity in Don Quixote. Farrago's "madness" (as it must be termed, if only to differentiate the man from his environment) is of the same virtuous type. This chevalier's code of ethics, however, is founded wholly on common sense--Brackenridge believed reason to be the best source of morality. Since both Farrago and Quixote
are representative of chivalry, both subscribe to a code of ethics peculiar to their calling. The chivalric ideal does not differ significantly for either--only the source of it does. Both men are aristocratic; only the qualifications for inclusion in the "aristocracy" differ. Both men, in short, are intelligent though unworldly, educated, and highly moral. Each would be perfectly comfortable in environments which were noble, rational, and virtuous--"the Golden Age" Don Quixote is pledged to recreating. It is only the fact that such a time or place has never existed and probably never will that makes these characters "madmen." At the same time, though, it is responsible for their being what they are--chevaliers.

There are at least three themes in Modern Chivalry that involve the code of modern chivalry to some degree: the struggle, already touched upon briefly, between Rationalism and Romance; the ever-present concern with the natural capacities and proper places of men; and the theme of benevolence and Brackenridge's conception of morality. The first, involving the struggle between eighteenth-century rationalism and nineteenth-century romantic tendencies, is one factor that differentiates modern chivalry from traditional chivalry and that separates Captain Farrago from his Spanish ancestor, Don Quixote. America was in a more peculiar position in this struggle than any
of her European counterparts, excepting perhaps France. The belief in a working democracy was based on a belief in the innate goodness of the individual, a tenet that was a part of the Jeffersonian ideal. Thomas Jefferson believed that democracy must work because of man's capacity to serve his country's best interests, to be rational and good. Brackenridge never quite abandoned this principle, but his own experience made him skeptical, to say the least. His skepticism is apparent throughout Modern Chivalry, but it is more obvious in the latter half of Part II, in the episodes dealing with the visionary philosopher's attempt to educate animals to take places in the government. Brackenridge, always eminently logical, took the theory of the perfectibility of man (set forth by Erasmus Darwin and espoused by Thomas Jefferson) a step toward its logically absurd end, the perfectibility of beasts. In this episode, Farrago, now the governor of a small frontier community, is approached by a visionary philosopher with the intention of instituting a school for the animals, and, with misgivings, Farrago agrees to the experiment:

Notwithstanding the governor's opinion seemed to be against him, yet the visionary philosopher still persisted in his idea that the brutal nature was capable of cultivation, if not in moral qualities, yet so
far as respected the acumen ingenii or the powers of
the understanding. He had before this time, turned
his attention to the instituting an academy, where
he had a number of animals, of different species,
and amongst them some squirrels which he had put to
study Algebra. (MC, p. 680)

Brackenridge's opinion of the perfectibility of either man
or beast is wryly given in the following chapter. He
writes:

It is a melancholy consideration to consider how
nearly the brutal nature borders on the human; be-
cause it leads to a reflection that the difference
may be in degree, not in kind. But on the most
diligent consideration that I have been able to give
the subject, it would seem to me, that no reason-
able doubt can exist of there being a distinction
in kind. (MC, p. 685)

The author's own experience of human nature could not
allow him to subscribe to this sort of "visionary
philosophy."

This overwhelming belief in the individual was, of
course, a remarkably romantic conception, though cer-
tainly creditable. Brackenridge, however, often dis-
covered the individual to be primarily motivated by
somewhat less than romantic impulses, and his disappoin-
tment is reflected in the experiences of his chevalier.
Wendy Martin attributes part of the disparity between
Jefferson's hopes and man's actual behavior to the post-
Revolutionary social instability which prevailed. She
writes, "The post-Revolutionary philosophers, unlike the
Puritans, did not have the comfort of clear-cut social
and religious rituals to reinforce their political con-
victions." She sees the purpose of Brackenridge's modern
chivalry, in part, as "an effort to establish values which
transcend the limitations of a nation committed to indus-
trial growth and social mobility." Farrago, the chevalier,
is repeatedly disappointed in his efforts to impose reason
on his fellow Americans. In fact, to protect himself and
Teague from similar follies, he is more often than not
reduced to unreason. Historian Robert Hemenway, in a
very perceptive study, links the conflict between the
romantic and rational impulses to the narrative technique
employed in Modern Chivalry. In each of the episodes
describing an encounter between Captain Farrago and the

5Wendy Martin, "The Rogue and the Rational Man:
Hugh Henry Brackenridge's Study of a Con Man in Modern
Chivalry," Early American Literature, 8 (1973), 179.


7Robert Hemenway, "Fiction in the Age of Jefferson:
The Early American Novel as Intellectual Development," Midcontinent American Studies Journal, 9, No. 1 (1968),
91-102.
madly democratic public, Farrago is always unable to dissuade the people from their various absurdities when he relies on reason. Time after time, when his arguments succeed at all, they succeed only because he has reverted to non-reason and to absurdity himself.

Each time Farrago dissuades Teague from some immoderate ambition, he is able to do so only by abandoning the truth and inventing an absurd threat in order to prevent his servant from involving himself in some irrational scheme. Afterwards, the commentator (ostensibly Brackenridge himself) further remarks on the irrationality of the preceding scene. Hemenway notes that this pattern is followed again and again throughout the novel. He writes, "Modern Chivalry documents the efficacy of non-reason in dealing with a world where the unexplainable, irrational act can be successfully proposed," and he concludes, "Modern Chivalry illustrates the apparent failure of Neoclassical rationalism to check uninhibited, unreasonable democratic individualism." The struggle, for Brackenridge at least, ended in defeat. Farrago never does win through reason, and Brackenridge himself, to the end of his life, never found cause to retire his satiric wit from the battle against impractical, romantic ideas. Another Brackenridge scholar, Amberys Whittle, agrees

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8Hemenway, p. 93.  9Hemenway, p. 96.
that "the fools dominate because 'imagination governs the world' (p. 65) rather than sense."¹⁰ The "fools" do in fact "dominate"; only Farrago himself and the blind lawyer in Part II oppose them with reason. The call of chivalry in the new world is heard by few indeed!

The subject of the French Revolution appears many times in the pages of Modern Chivalry and is a prime example of Brackenridge's stance on romantic individualism run mad. At the time, he supported the ideals of the French Revolution as he did those of America's own fight for liberty; however, his sympathy turned to concern and skepticism as the Revolution progressed and its violent excesses increased. This concern is evident in his treatment of the subject in Modern Chivalry. He writes, in a chapter containing "Observations" on the French Revolution,

> In a revolution every man thinks he has done all. He knows only, or chiefly, what he has done himself. Hence he is intolerant of the opinions of others, because he is ignorant of the services which are a proof of patriotism; and of the interest which is a pledge of fidelity. Fresh hands especially, are apt to over-do the matter, as I have seen at the

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building of a cabbin [sic] in the western country. A strong man takes hold of the end of a log, and he lifts faster than the other. From the unskilfulness, and inequality of his exertions, accidents happen. Prudent people do not like rash hands. States have been best built up, by the wise as well as the honest. (MC, p. 426)

The rashness of the individual, Brackenridge believed, led most often to the excesses of the mob. His own experiences in Pennsylvania's Whiskey Insurrection had shown him the truth of this philosophy, and he attributed the outrages of the French Revolution largely to this fault. In describing a beer-house discussion of the problem in Modern Chivalry, Brackenridge states his fears concisely by having one character remark, "The mass of the people conducted the revolution, and is it in the nature of things, for them to stop at a proper point?" Another character responds, "It is in the nature of things, . . . but it is a rare felicity" (MC, p. 382).

Brackenridge believed that most often, due to the encroachment on rationalism by romantic ideas, the "fools" who "dominate" and who do the worst damage in society tend to be the philosophers rather than the general public, the working men whom they dissuade from
common sense. Putting his own reflections into the Captain's mind, he writes,

The Captain walking by himself, could not avoid reflecting on the nature of government; a union of souls, and corporal force. It makes all the difference that we see between the savage, and civilized life. The plough, the pulley, the anchor, and the potters wheel, are the offspring of government; the loom, the anvil, and the press. But how difficult to link man with man; how difficult to preserve a free government! The easiest thing in the world, says the clown, if the sage will only let it alone. It is the philosopher that ruins all. . . . Imagination, and experiment are distinct things. There is such a thing as practical sense. Do we not see instances of this every day? Men who can talk freely, but do nothing. . . . There is too much vision mixed with the fact. (MC, p. 414)

"Too much vision" is a phrase that sums up Brackenridge's reaction to the flood of romantic ideas that was overwhelming America, and "too much vision" is the evil that his modern chevalier, Farrago, tries vainly to counteract. Reason in Modern Chivalry, as in the end of the
eighteenth century itself, fights an eternally losing battle against romanticism and against an excess of "vision."

Related to the eighteenth-century Romanticism-versus-Rationalism struggle in *Modern Chivalry* is Brackenridge's overwhelming concern with moderation in everything, a rule which, if properly observed, leads naturally to a state of fitness in all things, to everyone's recognition of his proper place. An indirect example of this eighteenth-century virtue can be found in Brackenridge's clear and exact style. Alexander Cowie notes that Brackenridge "possessed abundantly the crowning glory of the novelist, namely, mastery of his medium, a perfect sense for the words which will obey the thought of the writer and gratify the ear of the reader."\(^{11}\) Brackenridge himself notes (ironically) that his sole purpose in writing the novel is to "give an example of good language . . . which might serve as a model to future speakers and writers" (*MC*, p. 3) and is not to attempt to write any sense whatsoever, as he observes the two to be mutually exclusive. Brackenridge's sense of style is based on his belief in moderation and simplicity and in the proper places of all things; indeed, at the close of the first volume, he

notes that every word is in place and that he would change only one: "it is near the beginning; where I say figure on the stage, instead of appear, or make a figure on the stage" (MC, p. 77). Late in Part II, Brackenridge more humbly admits that he has never mastered the perfect style, and he names three eighteenth-century writers who possess that quality:

I will acknowledge . . . entre nous, that stile is what I never could exactly hit, to my own satisfaction. And in the English language, that of Hume, Swift, and Fielding, is the only stile that I have coveted to possess. For I take it they are precisely the same, according to the subjects of their writing. But the easy, the natural, and the graceful, is of all stiles, whether of manners or of speaking, the most difficult to attain. (MC, p. 643)

Style, for Brackenridge, is not a personal but a universal virtue, associated with the qualities of simplicity and moderation. This conviction is apparent in the models he has chosen, among whose various styles he does not distinguish. Brackenridge's own concern with style is of course largely satiric, but the virtues he espouses in this area are identical with those his chevalier would
impert to the American public--simplicity, fitness, and, 
above all, moderation in all things.

Brackenridge's concern with moderation pervades 
Modern Chivalry and is not confined to his preoccupation 
with style. His concern is evident in the previously 
noted observations on the French Revolution and even 
more obvious in the satiric thrusts at the excesses of 
his own democracy. Every episode in which the people 
prove themselves (in the author's opinion) to be fools 
contains implicit warnings against immoderate and absurd 
behavior. These warnings often take the form of lectures 
and, whether from Farrago's mouth or Brackenridge's own, 
are sometimes rather defensive. Brackenridge was forced 
to defend his views many times during his public life; 
thus, it is not surprising that his chevalier should be 
called upon to do the same. Before Farrago leaves his 
home village for good, he rises to just such an occasion, 
justifying his involvement in the village's political 
affairs. After denying that he has ever intended a slur 
upon the Irish nation through his treatment of his servant 
Teague, he states,

Much less have I intended a reflection upon a demo-
ocratic government, in the countenance I have given 
to the proposition of advancing him in grades, and 
occupations. Nor is it democracy, that I have meant
to expose; or reprehend, in any thing that I have said; but the errors of it: those excesses which lead to its overthrow. These excesses have shewn themselves in all democratic governments; whence it is that a simple democracy has never been able to exist long. An experiment is now made in a new world, and upon better principles; that of representation and a more perfect separation, and near equipoise of the legislative, judicial, and executive powers. But the balance of powers, is not easily preserved. The natural tendency is to one scale. (MC, p. 507)

It is the purpose of modern chivalry to lend its strength in balancing this scale, to urge men to reflect before they act and to stop before they go too far. Modern chivalry relies on that "rare felicity," the virtue of restraint and judicious conduct, especially with regard to America's political life. Brackenridge writes,

Phaeton, you know, . . . had the best advice from his father[;]

In medio tutissimus ibis.

The middle way is best; yet before the middle of the day, he had set the earth on fire. (MC, p. 399)

Setting "the earth on fire" is an apt metaphor for what Brackenridge sees as the folly of the people. Since they
will not listen to reason, they can have no conception of the true meaning of democracy. It must be noted, though, that Brackenridge preferred the excesses of the people to the rule of the aristocracy; he believed in democracy as the "best of all possible" governments and perhaps realized that his chivalric mission was at most ineffective. Modern Chivalry, though some critics--Amberys Whittle, for example--have disagreed, is not a particularly embittered piece of writing. It is above all a comedy, a frustrated expression of a particularly quixotic vision of America. Brackenridge's satire is more often generous than biting, and the absurdities he portrays are more often the result of ignorance than evil. "Modern chivalry" is at best a somewhat wistful pipe-dream; it is doubtful that Brackenridge really intended it to be a cure for his country's errors.

Brackenridge believed that moderation and reason would inevitably lead to everyone's adhering to his proper place, and another purpose of his modern chivalry was to urge that each man recognize and be contented with his own sphere. This theme figured in the definition of modern chivalry from its first formulation in the long poem "The Modern Chevalier" and may even have been influenced by the importance of social precedence in the traditional definition of chivalry. It is
certainly evident in Don Quixote, for the Don several times explains to Sancho the boundaries of their separate duties and privileges as based on his readings in the romances.

Teague O'Regan is Brackenridge's primary example of the evils of ignoring one's own natural capacities, although others abound. In each episode, Teague's excess of ambition leads to the Captain's frustrated abandonment of reason and to Brackenridge's reflections on the absurdities of the populace. For example, in one episode Teague aspires to the clergy, and the Presbytery are favorably inclined toward him. The Captain's attempt at reasoning with the clergymen proves futile, and he finally addresses Teague himself, indicating to him the difficulty of preparing a sermon and informing him that he must give up whoring. His most persuasive argument, however, concerns the insult Teague would be likely to offer the devil, who would repay him in the next world. Farrago tells Teague,

Think you the devil will forget the mischief you do him in this world, and not resent it when he comes across you in a future state? . . . Keep a good tongue in your mouth, and let those who chuse to dispute it with Belzebub [sic], dispute. . . . When you go to hell . . . you can expect but little quarter, after abusing him in this world. He will make you squeel [sic] like a pig; take you by the
throat, and kick you like a cat. His very scullions will piss upon you . . . while these very clergymen . . . will stand by laughing in their sleeves that you could be such a fool. (MC, pp. 39-40)

This episode is repeated with variations throughout most of the first part and some of the second part of Modern Chivalry. It is significant that Teague's ambition, though discouraged at times, is never totally quashed. Neither Farrago's use of reason nor his absurd threats are sufficient to persuade his servant to be contented with his lot.

Unfortunately, as Farrago and Brackenridge both discovered, the evils of ill-founded ambition are not limited to illiterate Irish servants. This theme pervades every episode of Modern Chivalry and may be termed the novel's philosophical basis, as well as the source for much of its humor. As Brackenridge notes, "There is nothing makes a man so ridiculous as to attempt what is above his sphere" (MC, p. 14). Brackenridge shares this conviction, ironically enough, with the ambitious Sancho Panza, whose proverbs include such apt sayings as "To her harm the ant grew wings,"12 "St. Peter is well enough off in Rome; by which I mean that each one should follow the trade to which he was born,"13 and "Every ewe to her mate, and let

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no one stretch his leg beyond the sheet."¹⁴ Sancho's proverbs and Brackenridge's own concern with this theme are related, again, to Thomas Jefferson's conception of a "natural aristocracy." Jefferson wrote to John Adams on October 28, 1813, "There is a natural aristocracy among men. The grounds of this are virtue and talents," and he named good humor, beauty, strength, and politeness as "auxiliary ground of distinction."¹⁵ This idea is echoed by Brackenridge in Modern Chivalry:

Democracy embraces the idea of a standing on virtue alone; unaided by wealth or the power of family. This makes "the noble of nature" of whom Thomas Payne [sic] speaks. Shall this noble not know his nobility, and be behind the noble of aristocracy who piques himself on his honour, and feels a stain upon his delicacy as he would a bodily wound?

(MC, p. 404)

The "noble of nature," the virtuous democrat, is the true chevalier. The honor is not limited, as it is in traditional chivalry, to the rich, the powerful, or the

¹⁴Cervantes, p. 859.

wellborn. In a democracy, each man is given the freedom to exercise his natural powers to their fullest extent regardless of his station in life. A crucial point in Brackenridge's philosophy is to know the limit of these powers and to recognize greater capabilities when they exist in others. This virtue will counteract the leveling tendency of democracy--the inclination of every man to believe that because he has exactly the same rights his neighbor does, he is just as good, as wise, as well suited to any position, governmental or otherwise. The chevalier's business is to make known the difference between the right to rise above one's station in life and the ability to do so, and, as Farrago learns, it is a very thankless business, indeed. Modern chivalry is doomed to failure as long as men remain indifferent to reason and are swept along by romantic notions of the capacities of the individual to undue opinions of their own abilities. They will continue to be "the swinish multitude," in Brackenridge's opinion, until they find and adhere to their proper spheres.

Virtue and reason have been shown to bear a close relation in the themes of rationalism and moderation in Modern Chivalry. Brackenridge's own moral philosophy was itself founded purely on reason, as is clear in his
son's recollections of his father. Henry Marie Brackenridge writes,

My religious and moral principles were left to spring up spontaneously, the cultivation of the intellect being erroneously considered all-sufficient. . . . Vice and impiety may be regarded as follies in the eye of reason, and the mind rightly trained may be supposed to view them in that light; and such was the philosophy of my father, who was a perfectly honest man. . . . The idea he meant to convey was, that honesty is a thing of course, and deserving no praise. . . . He was, in fact . . . a perfect example of the philosophy he taught.¹⁶

Morality is not the primary theme of Modern Chivalry, yet it is important in many episodes and in the meaning of modern chivalry. In Part II, Brackenridge considers the qualifications and training of a good orator, a characteristic that has been seen to be extremely helpful to the chevalier, a large part of whose mission is didactic. Brackenridge emphasizes first the cultivation of the understanding, as opposed to the heart. He writes,

For I know no difference between good sense, and virtue, except that the one is the judgment of what is virtuous, and the other the practice. I take a knave and a fool to have only this difference, that the fool is a knave in his transactions without meaning to be so; the other intends it. . . . I say that every man who knowing the right, intends the wrong, is not wise; that is, a fool. Above all things, give me a good judgment as the foundation of morals . . . . (MC, p. 667)

This totally logical approach to ethics (another Neoclassical influence) lends a benevolent atmosphere to all of Farrago's encounters. The extreme sensibility of Henry MacKenzie's Man of Feeling, when it appears at all in Modern Chivalry, appears as an object of satire, as is shown in the episodes concerning Teague's love escapades. The humanitarian impulse, however, pervades the novel; chivalry itself is essentially a benevolent code in both its traditional and modern versions. Brackenridge's conception of benevolence is exemplified in the oft-cited episode of the suicide of a young girl forced to prostitution after seduction, an episode representing his nearest approach to late eighteenth-century sentimentalism. In the episode of the suicide, the Captain is moved by the young girl's story and promises to help her if he can.
The girl believes herself beyond hope, however, and kills herself. At her poor grave Farrago contemplates her fate and the world's treatment of her:

It remains only with heaven's chancery to reach the equity of the case, and, absolve her from a crime; or at least qualify that which was the excess of virtue. . . . for her daring disdain of herself and fate, was a mark of repentence,—stronger than all tears. (MC, p. 113)

Brackenridge himself reflects, "The only universally distinguishing criterion of humanity, that I know is, the mild treatment of every creature that has feeling, and is in our power. This ought to be inculcated as a moral duty" (MC, p. 717). Virtue, in Modern Chivalry, relies on reason, and sensibility, in Brackenridge's view, culminates in humanitarianism.

Brackenridge's sense of morality seems to owe very little to any religious belief; in fact, he seems to have held a rather low opinion of most religious creeds and dogmas. Modern chivalry, unlike ancient chivalry, does not ally itself with conventional Christian traditions. Its ethical code, like that of its author, is based on rationalism as the incentive for virtuous behavior. However, the subject of organized religion is treated many
times in *Modern Chivalry*, usually satirically, and Brackenridge's primary vehicle for the satire of religion is Duncan, the nationalistic Scotsman. Farrago takes on Duncan Ferguson as his servant to replace Teague, who has become an excise officer, and the ensuing episode reveals Farrago's (and ostensibly Brackenridge's) religious opinions. Duncan is a Scottish "Covenanter" and is shocked to discover that the Captain is of no denomination at all and has never read "Crookshank's history of the Covenanters" (*MC*, p. 256). The Captain remarks that narrow specialization, in religion or learning, is neither healthy nor educational: "There is a degree of information on most subjects which it becomes a gentleman to have; but the going beyond this may savour of pedantry, and argue the having spent more time in trifles, than bespeaks strength of mind and elevated talents" (*MC*, p. 257). Duncan, who is extremely superstitious, is the perfect example of the true ignorance of narrow-minded religious "pedantry" and exemplifies the same lack of common sense Brackenridge finds in his politically minded fellow Americans.

In several digressions in *Modern Chivalry*, Brackenridge deplores the absurdity of human beings with regard to religion. He reflects on the insanity of the once-required human sacrifice to divinity and concludes that mankind in the modern age has advanced little from a barbarism now practiced in other forms. He writes,
It is true, I do not see you at this moment offering up your children, or even enemies, as sacrifices to please a divinity, which out-herods Herod, in all conceptions, yet I hear doctrines published, and see them in books, which are still worse. . . . in the doctrines which I have in view, a good deity, and even represented as good, by these blasphemers . . . is holden out as having created existences, the sum of whose misery may exceed the happiness. Nay, even the escape from the excess of misery . . . may depend upon a charm. For the idea of felicity in a future state depending upon subtilities [sic] of creeds, is placing it upon the mere accident of situation, and the casualty of belief. (MC, p. 719)

Brackenridge's reflections on the future state of man are most often wryly logical; he is amused by the opinions and requirements of the various sects regarding the afterlife, and in one chapter he outlines a brief history of the variations in religious prognostications concerning who will be damned and for how long (MC, pp. 121-22). He worries about the ideas of those who abjure belief in existence of hell, since, "if the thing should take a turn, it might go to the other extreme, and be all hell; so that none should be saved; and instead of universal salvation,
we should then have the doctrine of the damnation of the whole, bodily" (MC, p. 122).

Brackenridge does concede, however, that man's constant concern over his fate in the next world provides the fine line that distinguishes him from the beast. He writes,

Yet this anxiety is given so strong to our nature that it is the constant subject of our thoughts: our reasonings concerning it are infinite; our aerial castles . . . are without end. . . . However false we may suppose this peopleing [sic] with celestial powers, or earthly divinities, it cannot but be consolatory to reflect that it makes a boundary at all times distinct, between the human mind, however in darkness, and that of what we consider the mere animal creation. (MC, pp. 686-87)

Brackenridge's philosophy has little to do with creeds; all of his sometimes rather ambiguous consideration of religion is grounded firmly in logic and reflects the thought of a highly sensitive mind. Whether he himself subscribed to belief in an afterlife is impossible to tell, but he shows himself to be a very tolerant man with regard to this religious conception, more so than most of the sects he satirizes.
Brackenridge recognized the prevalence of religious hypocrisy in America, a nation originally founded, ironically enough, on religious tolerance. It is nevertheless characteristic of his views and of the conception of modern chivalry that pervades the novel that he does not dismiss Christianity because of this hypocrisy. Logically enough, he merely dismisses those who preach but practice little. His own moral code, humanitarianism, differs little from the true purpose of Christianity, and he does not hesitate to point out this fact. He writes, "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" (MC, p. 719). Brackenridge deprecates "visionary philosophy" in religion as well as in politics, and modern chivalry, though it defies association with any particular sect, is yet the embodiment of the underlying principle of Christianity, the practice of humanitarianism.

Brackenridge's main concern with regard to democracy, reason, philosophy, and religion is with the practical application. Through the medium of his chevalier, Brackenridge states,
I incline to think, with those who consider all religion as but the cultivation of good habits; and this from the consideration of present convenience, and future happiness. I say present convenience; because there cannot be a deviation from virtue, without bringing with it a degree of punishment to the individual, even in this life. And if there is a future state . . . the condition of an individual must take its complexion from what has been done here. (MC, p. 610)

The "cultivation of good habits" is perhaps the primary theme of Modern Chivalry; it incorporates rationalism, moderation, and morality and depends upon the practice of the individual. Farrago, the modern chevalier, exemplifies this creed, and the modern code of chivalry represents his (and Brackenridge's) attempt to extend this cultivation to "the swinish multitude" of the new democracy. Whether or not the attempt is successful is unimportant; what is significant is the civilizing effort itself.
CHAPTER IV

MODERN CHIVALRY: THE SATIRE

Modern Chivalry is primarily a satiric novel; it is modeled to some extent on a satire of chivalry, Don Quixote, it is written in a picaresque form, a genre incorporating satire, and it is didactically aimed at topical issues. Most critics find the satire of Modern Chivalry to be its major aesthetic virtue, and indeed often its only enduring literary quality. Alexander Cowie notes, "Before the novel could grow up it badly needed some development of its intellectual content,"¹ which he finds ably provided by Brackenridge. Supporting this view, another Brackenridge scholar, William L. Nance, writes,

In view of the truism that the use of satire is one of the first signs of intellectual and artistic maturity, an examination of this element should

make clearer just how conscious a literary artist Brackenridge was, and how successful.\(^2\)

It is incongruous that Modern Chivalry should be so often praised for its satire and yet be faulted for its rambling, piecemeal narrative structure. Modern Chivalry with a coherent, well-developed plot and fully rounded characters would be a Modern Chivalry with considerably less effective satire. In an excellent article on the form of Modern Chivalry, Mary S. Mattfield objects to its being called a novel at all. She calls Modern Chivalry a "Menippean satire" or (in Northrop Frye's terms) an "anatomy."\(^3\) Indeed, as Gilbert Highet in his The Anatomy of Satire points out, "The name 'satire' comes from the Latin word satura, which means primarily 'full,' and then comes to mean 'a mixture full of different things.'"\(^4\) Modern Chivalry is undeniably a "mixture"; its major artistic quality is its satire, and all other elements of the novel (except perhaps theme) are subordinate in this mixture. Given Brackenridge's background in the classics, it can be no


\(^3\)Mary S. Mattfield, "Modern Chivalry: The Form" (Part I), Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine, 50 (1967), 314.

accident that he named his protagonist "Captain Farrago." As Hightet again points out, "Juvenal . . . calls his satires by the name of another mixed food, farrago, a mishmash of grain given to cattle." Variety is essential to satire, and the resulting "mishmash" is an excellence, not a fault, of Modern Chivalry.

It has been suggested in chapters two and three that the mission of the modern chevalier, as it was of the medieval knight-errant, is reform. Brackenridge, himself an example of the modern chevalier, actually attempted to influence the opinions and actions of his fellow citizens (with a small degree of success) through his use of reason and ultimately with his satiric wit in most of his Pennsylvania Gazette publications. In Modern Chivalry, he employs these same weapons, reason and satire, in a highly complex fashion. The protagonist of the book, though his name reflects his satiric origins, relies primarily on reason, which usually fails. When reason is defeated by absurdity, he resorts to absurd tactics himself, and the scene is then commented on satirically by the narrator. The total disparity between reason and the follies of the people provides the basis for the comedy of Modern Chivalry; indeed, as Hightet notes, "The very heart of our sense of comedy . . . is the happy perception of incongruity."³

³Hightet, p. 231. ⁴Hightet, p. 67.
If this definition of comedy is valid, then the eighteenth century in America must have been a particularly comic age in several ways. A crucial factor in the development of the early American scene was the discrepancy between the real and the ideal, the incongruity between the noble political ideas of the time and the practice of the people. For Brackenridge this disparity resulted largely in frustration, but fortunately also in the comedy of Modern Chivalry. As a metaphor, chivalry is again apt; it is an incongruous code when applied to Brackenridge's contemporary American life, as it was when Cervantes transported it to seventeenth-century Spain. Out of its romantic or military context (and sometimes even in it), chivalry is always comic; or, if it is not, then its context, its new environment, must be. The first is true of Cervantes' Don Quixote; the second, of Brackenridge's Modern Chivalry.

The satire of chivalry (Don Quixote) and the chivalry of satire (Modern Chivalry) are two entirely distinct ideas. Still, an examination of the first may afford some insight into the nature of the second. Some of Cervantes' satiric concerns are not far removed from those of Brackenridge. It has been noted that the protagonists of both works are naively out of touch with their environments, largely because they represent ideal codes which cannot be practically compatible with the everyday life they encounter.
This naïveté is the starting point for the satire of each book. Hightet notes that Quixote "in some ways . . . was a projection of Cervantes himself,"\(^7\) and the same is true of Farrago and Brackenridge. Hightet continues, "Sometimes Cervantes doubted whether he spoke for Quixote trying to change and amend the world, or for the world laughing at Quixote's useless efforts."\(^8\) Quixote's madness, often questionable, is the source of the humor of the work when juxtaposed with the "sanity" of his countrymen. Farrago's rationality serves the same purpose when contrasted with the madness of the people. Yet there are incidents in both works which provide not only humor and satire but also insight into the relative meanings of sanity and madness. In speaking of the heroes of the classics and of romance, Quixote informs Sancho, "And these personages, be it noted, are not depicted or revealed to us as they were but as they ought to have been, that they may remain as an example of those qualities for future generations."\(^9\) It will later be shown that one of the methods of the satirist is to offer an ideal in contrast with the actual; in this passage, it seems that Quixote himself recognizes and employs this technique with, like Farrago, little or

\(^7\)Hightet, p. 117. \(^8\)Hightet, p. 119. 

no success. Highet again writes, "[Cervantes] also affectionately mocks the ideal of knighthood even as it was in its full flower--the ideal which he himself had nobly tried to serve--by contrasting its impossible aspirations with the hard low comic facts of real life."¹⁰ The satirist seems always doomed to frustration. Neither Farrago nor Quixote wins any converts to his ideal.

There are several other satiric similarities between Don Quixote and Modern Chivalry aside from the positions of their protagonists in their societies. Both books are filled with a gentle type of irony indicative of the authors' affection for their subjects. Neither believes the human race to be the pack of vermin that satirist Jonathan Swift thought it was. Human beings in each work are shown to be absurd and sometimes cruel, but never unredeemably evil. A second similarity can be found between Cervantes' superficial concern with truth and Brackenridge's professed concern with style only, never sense. The tale of Don Quixote is supposedly a translation from the Arabic manuscript "History of Don Quixote de la Mancha, Written by Cid Hamete Benengeli, Arabic Historian."¹¹ The narrator, in speaking of the translation, notes,

If there is any objection to be raised against the veracity of the present one, it can be only that the author was an Arab, and that nation is known for its lying propensities. . . . it should be the duty of historians to be exact, truthful, and dispassionate, and neither interest nor fear nor rancor nor affection should swerve them from the path of truth. . . . ¹²

Indeed, Don Quixote's madness resulted from his dangerous readings of fictional romances, a fact which the reader is never allowed to forget. The same obsession is found in Brackenridge's frequent reminders that his book contains nothing of sense, only a most perfect style.

A third similarity between the satire of the two works is the fact that they both employ rogues as major characters, a requirement of the picaresque tradition into which both books (with some difficulty) fit. Teague and Sancho are illiterate, lower-class characters who eventually penetrate most levels of society with alarming results. Because of their positions in life, they are wrongly judged less irrational than their masters by their peers, who make up a large number of the incidental characters of both novels. Another similarity between the works is the fact that, contrary to the traditional

¹²Cervantes, p. 73.
picaresque form, the rogues are not the protagonists; their masters are. While the servants are certainly objects and sometimes vehicles of satire, their more literate masters are the primary vehicles, the innocents abroad in an unsympathetic world.

A final similarity between Cervantes' and Brackenridge's satire is the blackly ironic descriptions each author occasionally employs. The most striking resemblance occurs between Farrago's description of the mistress of an inn and Cervantes' description of a "beautiful" girl, a resemblance also noted by critic Joseph Harkey. Brackenridge writes,

She was a good looking woman, being about fifty-seven years of age, with grey hairs, but a green fillet on her left eye-brow, as it seems the eye on that side was subject to a deflection of rheum, which made it expedient to cover it. It could not be said that her teeth were bad, because she had none. If she wanted the rose on her cheek, she had it on her nose, so that it all came to the same thing. Nothing could be said against her chin, but it used her mouth ill in getting above it. She was not very tall,

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but what she wanted in height, she made up in breadth; so that multiplying one dimension by the other, she might be considered as a very sizeable woman.¹⁴

This rather black humor is echoed by Cervantes when he describes a woman of the family "Perlerines," thus named because they are all paralytics. Cervantes writes,

"If the truth be told, this lass is like an oriental pearl or a flower of the field only when you look at her from the right-hand side; from the left-hand, not so much so, for on that side one eye is missing which she lost when she had the smallpox. The pockmarks on her face are many and large, but those who are fond of her will assert that those are not scars at all but graves where the hearts of her lovers lie buried. She is so neat that, in order not to dirty her face, she carries her nose turned up, . . . so that it looks as if it were running away from her mouth. . . . Her mouth is wide, and if it were not that ten or a dozen front teeth and grinders are missing, she might pass as one of the comeliest of maidens.

"Of her lips I shall say nothing, for they are so thin and delicate that, if it were the custom to use lips for such a purpose, one might wind them in a skein. Their color is different from that which is commonly seen, and the effect is marvelous; they are speckled with blue, green, and an eggplant hue. . . . I love her and to me she is not bad-looking.\textsuperscript{15}

This sort of macabre humor is characteristic of the satirist's use of description and in this case mocks the paeans to beauty so often found in chivalric romances. Its use by Brackenridge and Cervantes serves to emphasize the frailties encountered in the contemporary world, as does most of the satire of both \textit{Don Quixote} and \textit{Modern Chivalry}.

Brackenridge is obviously a satirist and a very good one at that. However, he follows closely the satirist's rule of claiming realism and denying exaggeration or parody.\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Modern Chivalry} contains many reminders to the reader that its author is concerned with style only and never sense and includes also several vehement denials of satiric purpose. Indeed, the very first episode in the novel, which contains a satire on the language of the medical profession, is followed by just such a denial by

\textsuperscript{15}Cervantes, pp. 813-14. \textsuperscript{16}Highet, p. 5.
the narrator: "I have to declare, that it is with no attempt at wit, that the terms are set down, or the art of the surgeon hinted at; because it is so commonplace a thing to ridicule the peculiarities of a profession, that it savours of mean parts to indulge it" (MC, p. 11). Brackenridge is certainly not above threatening satire, however, if the occasion should demand the use of his sharp wit:

It is well for men in office, that my pen has taken this turn; and that I employ myself in writing harmless nonsense, rather than strictures on their conduct. . . . It were, therefore, wise policy in such, to assist the sale [of this book] as much as possible; and it might not be amiss . . . to buy up, each of them, a number of copies. (MC, p. 156)

Brackenridge professes himself fortunate in the avoidance of satire and, in the true style of the satirist, writes,

I am very happy in the composition of this work; for though but of a trifling nature as to sentiment; yet, in what I do write, no one can attribute to me the least tincture of satire, or ridicule of individuals or public bodies. . . . It is indeed acting but a poor part in life, to make a business of laughing at the follies of others. . . . It may be said of
Brackenridge is himself exceedingly rich in the talents of "wit and humour," and he merely observes the satiric tradition in denying them. However, he (inconsistently) also continually and didactically reminds the reader of the moral of his book and explains several times his method of narration. The satire alone suffices to make *Modern Chivalry* an entertainingly didactic work (a rare combination), aimed as it is at reform. One reason for Brackenridge's constant (and sometimes rather vain) concern for the effect of his book on its audience lies in his conception of modern chivalry. The code, while employing the weapon of a satiric wit to effect reform, seems also to entail some unnecessary sermonizing.

Brackenridge leaves the reader in no doubt as to the moral of *Modern Chivalry*. If the satiric episodes are insufficient to convey his message, his pointed repetitions of it are not. The novel's second part, especially, is filled with these repetitions, and the narrator, often a satiric mask in Part I, grows more and
more like the unmistakeable sound of Brackenridge's own voice. Often, the author's direct statement of his own opinions is entertaining and educational, but it distracts from the book's value as a narrative satire just as frequently. For example, in Part II Brackenridge writes, "The great moral of this book is the evil of men seeking office for which they are not qualified. The preposterous ambition of the bog-trotter, all points to this" (MC, p. 611). If the satire of Modern Chivalry has not already taught as much to the reader, then the modern code of chivalry has indeed failed in its mission. Approximately seventy pages lager, Brackenridge repeats his explanation and his moral:

But such is the sanguine temperament of the human mind, that who is there that does not think himself equal to any undertaking? This is the moral of this book, and the object of setting the example of the bog-trotter before the people; not as what is universal in every instance of a candidate for office; but as an instance of what is too common, and which ought to be avoided rather than imitated. (MC, p. 675)

As it is the chevalier's method first to reason with the fictional populace and then to resort to absurdity and satire, it seems to be the rule of the code of modern
chivalry itself to employ first the weapon of satire and then to follow it with reason. Brackenridge must have believed his audience dense indeed if he thought his satiric wit insufficient to convey his moral and in need of overt explanation of his method.

It is interesting to note just how frequently Brackenridge does explain his own narrative method. These explanations are usually serious but are also sometimes satiric. It is characteristic of Brackenridge's style that it is often difficult to separate the two—to distinguish between the sound of the author's own voice and that of his satiric persona. However, even when these explanations are tongue-in-cheek, they are usually correct. Brackenridge repeats several times his method of touching on subjects little by little in the course of the work so as not to weary his reader. For example, he writes,

Having certain ideas to inculcate, I bring them forward at various times, and in different shapes, with front, flank, rear, corps de reserve, &c. As the human mind, from defect of attention, or incapacity, cannot be reached all at once, in the manner of the prophet, imitating his zeal, and knowledge of the heart, I give "line upon line; precept upon precept; here a little, and there a little." (MC, p. 224)
Brackenridge later touches upon the reasons for his choice of this narrative method. They include not only a concern for the reader but the author's own enjoyment as well:

It may be so with my book, which is calculated for all capacities; and a mixture of images drawn from high and low life, with painting serious and ludicrous, may conduce to the being more read; and lasting longer in the world. Or should it not be read, and that object fail, it is amusing to one's self to indulge variety; to discumb and to rise.

(MC, pp. 669-70)

This statement reveals one of the primary charms of Modern Chivalry: it is obvious that Brackenridge enjoys his work and his chevailer. His didacticism arises from his belief not only in democracy but in the American people, as well as in the merit of his own book. Half-mockingly, half-seriously, he writes, "It is an opus magnum, which comprehends law, physic, and divinity. Were all the books in the world lost, this alone would preserve a gem of every art" (MC, p. 727). Modern Chivalry, either the novel or the code, intends a distinctly civilizing influence which is responsible for its author's curious combination of satire and didacticism.
In *The Anatomy of Satire*, Highet distinguishes between two types of satirists: the optimists and the pessimists. He writes,

One likes most people, but thinks they are rather blind and foolish. He tells the truth with a smile, so that he will not repel them but cure them of that ignorance which is their worst fault. Such is Horace. The other type hates most people, or despises them. He believes rascality is triumphant in his world; or he says, with Swift, that though he loves individuals he detests mankind. His aim therefore is not to cure, but to wound, to punish, to destroy. Such is Juvenal.\(^{17}\)

Brackenridge falls into the first category, the tradition of the Horatian satirist, though his optimism seems often clouded by frustration. One reason for this classification of Brackenridge's satire is his theme of modern chivalry. If the distinguishing mark of satire is its purpose, then the satire of *Modern Chivalry* falls clearly into the gentler category. *Modern Chivalry* is didactic; though the satire may wound at times, Brackenridge's intentions are always humane. Therefore, the mixture of satire and overt didacticism which makes up so much of Brackenridge's "opus

\(^{17}\)Highet, p. 235.
"magnum" is not necessarily inconsistent. It is merely in keeping with the tradition of modern chivalry and is responsible for the book's being made up in such large part by chapters "Containing Observations" or "Containing Reflections." Brackenridge himself writes,

It may be said, of what use, a great part of the preceding book? Some things may have a moral, and carry instruction to the mind. But a great part can have no meaning or effect; farther than to raise a laugh, or to make a person smile for a moment. That itself is something; and may conciliate the reader to what is more solid. An ingredient, not in itself savoury, may give a relish to substantial good. Asafetida gives a flavour to a beefsteak. (MC, p. 479)

Satire is not only the weapon but the great attraction of the code of Modern Chivalry; it is also the primary aesthetic virtue of Brackenridge's book. Satire pervades the themes and the structure of Modern Chivalry, wounding and entertaining. To truly appreciate modern chivalry, therefore, it is first necessary to appreciate its greatest asset, its use of satire.

In a chapter containing "Observations" in Part II of Modern Chivalry, Brackenridge openly explains his satire and its victims. He writes,
. . . It is impossible to anticipate in all cases, the sensations of others. Things will give offence, that were meant to inform, and assist; or to please and divert. In the case of public bodies especially, no man knows, what may make an unfavourable impression. . . . A town, a society, a public body, of any kind might be presumed to bear more than an individual, because, the offence being divided amongst a greater number; it can be but a little, that will be at the expense of any one person. (MC, p. 410)

Later he adds,

We have been often asked for a key to this work. Every man of sense has the key in his own pocket. His own feelings; his own experience is the key. It is astonishing, with what avidity, we look for the application of satire which is general, and never had a prototype. But the fact is, that, in this work, the picture is taken from human nature, generally, and has no individual in view. It was never meant as a satire upon men; but upon things. (MC, p. 411)

The "things" satirized in (and by) Modern Chivalry are almost innumerable. It seems that almost everything in its author's scope of experience is subject to his satiric
wit. However, his statement that the satire of *Modern Chivalry* applies not to the individual but to the group is, for the most part, accurate. Whether his desire to lessen the offense by diluting it is responsible for his choice of victims, one can only guess.

If one accepts Leonard Feinberg's classification of the traditional objects of satire into individuals, types, society, and the cosmos (fate), then Brackenridge's victims clearly are made up largely of the second and third groups. He does not ignore either the individual or the cosmos, but their importance beside the type and the society is relatively small. His satires on individuals, though infrequent in *Modern Chivalry*, provided the impetus for his conception of modern chivalry in the poem "The Modern Chevalier." Brackenridge's political defeat by William Findley, the former weaver, prompted his satiric descriptions of Traddle the Weaver in the poem, the episode in *Modern Chivalry* in which a man of education is defeated by a weaver in a local election, and the later episode in which Duncan the Scotsman suggests to a weaver that he run for office, whereupon he is beaten by the weaver's wife. This preponderance of weavers surely points to Brackenridge's old enemy, Findley, and is only one example of an

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episode of Modern Chivalry's being influenced by its author's own experiences. However, Modern Chivalry is far from a roman à clef. Except for a few episodes, such as the satire in Part II on George III in hell (MC, pp. 603-07), Brackenridge's original frustration with individuals is expressed in a satire on groups or types of individuals. These types generally include hypocritical and pretentious people or ignorant and unreasoning masses, all of whom help to make up "the swinish multitude." Many of these types represent institutions (clergymen, doctors, lawyers, philosophers, politicians, critics, chemists, members of "partial institutions" [MC, p. 71], and the like) and are therefore included in Brackenridge's satire of society. What is left, then, are the types who make up the mass of the populace, the foolish and the ignorant. Leonard Feinberg notes that the satirist often sees the world as a "fool's carnival"1\textsuperscript{19} or as a "ridiculous puppet show."2\textsuperscript{0} Such labels are indeed applicable to Brackenridge's vision of the new democracy. He writes, "The truth is, I will not give myself the trouble to write sense long. For I would as soon please fools as wise men; because the fools are the most numerous, and every prudent man will go with the majority" (MC, p. 37). These fools pervade every social and political institution, and are

\textsuperscript{19}Feinberg, p. 48. \textsuperscript{20}Feinberg, p. 46.
characterized by a prejudice against learning (MC, p. 41), a succumbing to romantic sentiment in love (MC, pp. 63-67), dishonesty in suffrage (MC, pp. 83-85), a prejudice against all things British, a prevalent bias during Jefferson's presidency (MC, pp. 367-71), and unfounded ambition, best evidenced by Teague O'Regan himself. The fools in *Modern Chivalry* constitute most, if not all, of the minor characters. They include the ambitious Teague, the religious and nationalistic Duncan Ferguson, the visionary philosopher, the Pedlar, Tom the Tinker, Harum Scarum, the Latin schoolmaster, the Lay Preacher, O'Fin the Irishman, Clonmel the ballad singer, and Will Watlin, to name only a few. They are generally unimportant as characters, weakly drawn, and only briefly evident. Their significance lies in their characteristic ignorance and absurdity which Brackenridge attempts to combat with modern chivalry. Thus, they represent the one type (fools) found in the new democracy that is Brackenridge's primary object of satire.

American society is another victim of the satire of modern chivalry insofar as it is represented by other different types -- individuals associated with institutions. These individuals and the institutions they represent are generally the victims of parody in *Modern Chivalry*, a technique that will be discussed later in this chapter. The types include a large variety, but the representatives of
the bar and the judiciary bear the brunt of the author's satire. They are characterized in large part by their vocabulary, which is usually pretentious, and by their long-winded arguments and orations. They are sometimes revered but usually reviled by the fictional populace, who are singularly unimpressed by their erudition. A certain amount of pomposity seems characteristic of most of the victims of Brackenridge's social satire. One attribute all of these types--lawyers, doctors, politicians, members of the Philosophical Society, and members of the Order of the Cincinnati--have in common, besides their social pretensions, is the fact that they have little or no grasp of reality. They are too involved with absurdities to be able to recognize or evaluate real-life situations. For example, at the end of Part I, Teague O'Regan, who has been tarred and feathered as an excise officer, is captured and caged by two hunters and examined by members of the Philosophical Society. He is the subject of a trial to determine whether he is bird or beast, and the conclusion reached by the philosophers is that "all things considered, we incline to think that it is an animal of a species wholly new, and of a middle nature between a bird and a beast; yet so widely differing from a bat, as not to be classed with it" (MC, p. 320). Time and again society is shown to be seriously engaged in this sort of madness
and refuses to respond to Farrago's reasonings. It is the absurdity of society that Brackenridge satirizes; however, it is rarely seen to be depraved or malicious--only hypocritical, foolish, pretentious, and badly in need of reform.

The forms Brackenridge uses to frame his attacks on individuals and society shape the satire of *Modern Chivalry*. In *The Anatomy of Satire*, Highet classifies the forms of satire into three varieties: the monologue, the parody, and the narrative. Brackenridge employs all three satiric forms in his long, rambling book. *Modern Chivalry* is first of all a narrative; it is "this tale of a Captain travelling," according to its author (MC, p. 350). Mary Mattfield notes,

> Like *Gulliver's Travels*, *Modern Chivalry* is itself incidentally an extended travesty on a genuine travel narrative, for--although it is told in the third person--it follows the form of the genre as it typically appeared in the eighteenth century.²¹

The novel is primarily a satiric narrative, but it is also more than that. It is a collection of excellent parodies

²¹Mary S. Mattfield, "Modern Chivalry: The Form" (Part II), *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, 52 (1968), 21; Part II of Mattfield's article consists of an excellent examination of many of Brackenridge's satirical techniques, and I have paralleled many of her examples in this chapter.
on topical issues, and (as it is clearly not told exclusively in the third person) it is also a collection of clever monologues delivered sometimes by Brackenridge himself and sometimes by his satiric persona. The monologue and the parody are equally as important as the narrative and help make Modern Chivalry the "farrago" of satiric elements it is.

The title of Hight's chapter on the satiric narrative in The Anatomy of Satire is "The Distorting Mirror"; the narrative presents a usually ludicrous picture of the world. He notes that "the narrative must be interesting, and it must be well told. But for the satirist the narrative is not the end: it is the means." Modern Chivalry, in offering "a tale of a Captain travelling," provides Brackenridge with the opportunity to illustrate and satirize the follies of the American people. Indeed, he himself writes, "For the fact is, that I mean this . . . as a vehicle to my way of thinking on some subjects" (MC, p. 350). Hight notes that the satirist may present his distorted picture of this world in several ways: through the use of the animal tale, the caricature, or the travel book. Although a large section of Part II of Modern Chivalry is slightly reminiscent of the traditional animal tales.
tale (the characters, though not themselves beasts, elevate animals to human positions of importance), Brackenridge relies most heavily on the caricature and the satiric stories of the travel motif as the vehicles for his satire.

The picture of the new democracy found in *Modern Chivalry* is most certainly a caricature. Brackenridge exaggerates its absurdities and excesses in each one of the Captain's encounters. His picture of the world is not realistic, though it may claim to be. One indication that his portrayal is satiric is the lack of any geographical or physical description of America. The scene is undoubtedly American, it is true, but it is only abstractly American. Brackenridge concentrates not on visible culture, but on the political, social, and moral aspects of the American scene, a scene with which the author was intellectually involved. Concerning the satirical picture of the world, Highet writes,

> It is most successfully achieved by authors who are, or pretend to be, themselves part of the ludicrous and despicable pattern of human life; or by authors who, while standing outside their stories, still relate them either with wide-eyed and apparently honest naïveté or with what looks like mild indulgent humor.\(^2^5\)

\(^{25}\)Highet, p. 190.
Brackenridge uses both techniques in *Modern Chivalry*. As his "alter-ego," Captain Farrago, he is directly involved with the world's absurdities, and as the sometimes ironic voice of the narrator, he relates (with digressions) his tale with "indulgent humor." But in either guise, Brackenridge's involvement with his created world remains usually on an emotional and intellectual plane—the physical contacts which occur are unimportant in the picture of the young democracy. Indeed, it is only a caricature of the democracy of *Modern Chivalry* that the reader sees and seldom a caricature of the American culture. The abstract quality of the picture is emphasized by the fact that the names of the characters of *Modern Chivalry* are either representative or nonexistent. In the first category are the names of Farrago, Teague O'Regan (a generic and insulting label for Irishmen), Tom the Tinker, Will Watlin, Duncan Ferguson (a typical Scots name), Harum Scarum, and so on. The second category includes all those characters who are simply labeled, such as the visionary philosopher, the blind lawyer, and the Latin Schoolmaster. Characters are distinguished by their eccentricities or occupations alone and, especially in the latter category, represent institutions or ideas rather than individuals. All of these elements contribute to the absurdly abstract picture of the new democracy in *Modern Chivalry*. 
As pointed out above, Mary Mattfield sees the narrative form of *Modern Chivalry* as a "travesty" of the eighteenth-century travel book. It does indeed qualify as such according to Hight's listed characteristics of a satiric travel book: it contains satiric stories that are episodic, improbable, and shocking, and its hero is "a sort of knight-errant, who irrupts into various groups and upsets both them and himself." Both Farrago and his ancestor, Don Quixote, are such heroes. In a typical episode of *Modern Chivalry*, Farrago and Teague become involved in an irrational situation which results in Farrago's becoming frustrated when the people will not listen to reason and in Teague's narrow escape from being elevated to a position of responsibility and power. These situations are episodic; they recur frequently, consistently throughout Part I and rather less so throughout Part II. The situations themselves are almost always improbable; for example, in the very first episode of the book, Farrago finds himself among a group of jockeys who believe that his old plough horse must secretly be "of swiftness uncommon" (*MC*, p. 7) and of an impressive pedigree. The Captain responds with a somewhat irritated but perfectly rational lecture on his horse and on pedigrees in general. As a result, "The jockeys thought the man a

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26Hight, pp. 206-13. 27Hight, p. 198.
fool, and gave themselves no more trouble about him" (MC, p. 8). This episode, along with many others, is improbable in that it exaggerates the absurdities of the people. The reader cannot seriously believe in the public demand for Teague's services in high positions or in the foolishness of the Captain's new settlement in placing animals in court and extending suffrage to them. The episodes are not impossible, but they are certainly improbable. This improbability, combined with the episodic nature of the narrative, is an important element of satire. Highet writes that the satirist is concerned with "displaying many different aspects of an idea; and, as a satirist, he does not believe that the world is orderly and rational." Thus, the narrative form of Modern Chivalry, incorporating as it does the travel motif, the episodic form, and the improbability of its situations, is fitting for its purposes—the demonstration by a modern chevalier that the people are usually fools, through the use of the didactic weapon of satire.

Parody is both a form and a technique of satire Brackenridge extensively employs in Modern Chivalry. Almost all of Brackenridge's satire of society occurs in the form of parody, including his caricatures of the elements of American democracy. Highet distinguishes between two types of parody in The Anatomy of Satire,

———. Highet, p. 206.
"formal and material," \(^2^9\) although he notes that many parodies consist of the mixture of the two. In the formal parody, the satirist's target is the outward form of the original. In the material parody, "the form is maintained virtually unaltered, without exaggeration, without distortion, while the thought within it is made hideously inappropriate to the form, or inwardly distorted, or comically expanded." \(^3^0\) Highet comments that "many of the finest political and religious satires are material parodies." \(^3^1\) While many of Brackenridge's parodies are primarily material, as, for example, are his parodies of the medical profession, the bar, the judiciary, and the clergy, he also satirizes their forms through the use of exaggeration and affectation. An excellent example of Brackenridge's skill as a parodist is found in a chapter describing Farrago's visit to a court of law. The case being tried concerns the "'feloniously taking and carrying away water out of the well of Andrew Mab'" (MC, p. 152) by one Jonathan Mun. The defense argues that the crime is not larceny but a trespass, but the prosecution differs:

It was answered, that water being *fluitans et mobilis*, could not be considered as real property;

\(^2^9\)Highet, p. 69.  
\(^3^0\)Highet, p. 70.  
\(^3^1\)Highet, p. 76.
that an ejectment would not lie for water, but for so many acres of land covered with water, Yelv. 143. 1 Burr. 142. Because it was impossible to give execution of a thing which is always transient and running, Run. 36. quotes Cro. Jas. 150: Lev. 114. Sid. 151.

Thence it is that in a grant of the soil it is necessary, as we see from old forms, to add the right of ways, woods, and water-courses, Lilly Con. 132. and 179. Bridg. Con. 321. That whatever might be said of water in its natural bed on the soil, as water in a running stream; yet a well being dug by the labour of hands, the water thus acquired, must be counted as personal, not real property. Barbcray, Titius, and Locke. That at a well, the water being drawn up by the bucket, and thus by one act separated from the freehold, and by another taken from the bucket, it becomes a subject of larceny; as in the law of corn, trees, or grass growing. For if these be severed at one time, and at another time taken away, it is larceny. Hawk. Pl. Cr. 93. (MC, p. 152)

This incredibly ridiculous argument by the prosecution is followed by an equally ridiculous defense. Brackenridge stresses the irony of the original crime at the end of the lawyer's remarks, when Farrago asks a lawyer what difference there is between the punishment of a larceny
and a trespass: "He was answered, that in the one case it was hanging by the common law, and in the other to pay the value of the property. A very material difference indeed, said the Captain, to depend on so nice a distinction" (MC, p. 153). Brackenridge uses this combination of formal and material parody repeatedly in *Modern Chivalry* and often follows it with this same sort of ironical commentary. Parody is the prevalent form he uses to satirize institutions such as the law, and it is typical of Brackenridge's sense of satire that these institutions are generally shown occupying themselves with rather lowly concerns. Although much of Brackenridge's use of parody is confined to the satire of society, he also shows himself to be extremely capable of literary parody. The parody of literature, according to Hightet, consists primarily of two methods: the mock-heroic parody and the burlesque. \[32\] Brackenridge does not employ the mock-heroic parody in the strictest sense of the term; however, he does use the technique of burlesque in two different ways. The victims of Brackenridge's burlesque are either trivial subjects that are satirized by being elevated to inappropriate heights or else are subjects of some stature made to be

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\[32\]Hightet, p. 103; the mock-heroic is the form of literary parody that satirizes the epic tradition by treating a vulgar or trivial subject in the epic style, while the burlesque is the form of parody that distorts and ridicules a serious subject.
appear vulgar and ridiculous in certain situations. Mary Mattfield helpfully distinguishes between these two methods by terming them (respectively) "high" and "low" burlesques, and she conveniently lists the literary genres Brackenridge parodies:

The sermon, both in the traditional plain style with text, doctrine, and applications (pp. 102-03), and in the less orthodox manner of the unschooled camp-meeting preacher (pp. 577-78); the oration (p. 168); the Hudibrastic (p. 621) and the ballad (p. 571); the learned disquisition (pp. 720-27); the lecture (p. 362); the pomposities of congres-

sional debate (pp. 123-24).

However, Brackenridge's application of the first type of parody, the "high burlesque," is not confined to literary parody. The preceding example of his parody of the lawyer's arguments must be included under this heading, since he elevates a trivial subject, stealing water from a well, to a higher form--an affected and "erudite" argument over the distinction between larceny and trespass.

Brackenridge is habitually eloquent on trivial subjects,

33Mattfield, Part II, p. 22.
34Mattfield, Part II, pp. 21-22.
a characteristic also noted by Mattfield,\(^3\)\(^5\) and he writes, "Is it nothing to be able to show how easily I can elevate small matters?" (MC, p. 492). The misadventures of Teague himself are good examples of Brackenridge's skill with high burlesque. Teague is unfit for the high positions to which he aspires. The fact that the people think him the proper candidate to elevate to such positions is a high burlesque of both Teague and the people. By pointing out the incongruity between the ridiculous demands of the people and the (often unspoken) proper method of distributing responsibility in the new government (or the clergy, the bar, and so on), Brackenridge has emphasized the tendency of the American people to self parody; he has shown how trivial are the bases of their prejudices and many of their opinions, which is the purpose of his modern code of chivalry.

Brackenridge's use of low burlesque in *Modern Chivalry* is also skillful and effective. Teague, as a character, is burlesque, as is Sancho Panza. His language as well as his appearance is coarse and sometimes vulgar; he is cowardly, hypocritical, and greedy. Highet defines burlesque (Mattfield's "low burlesque") as a method which "treats its subject with ridicule, vulgarity, distortion, \(^3\)^5Mattfield, Part II, p. 22.
and contempt"; Teague is such a subject. His ambition is laughable and absurd, his love escapades cause both him and his paramours ridicule, he is tarred and feathered as a reward for his promotion to excise officer, and his speech is represented in an illiterate Irish dialect. The populace themselves are also subject to Brackenridge's use of burlesque; their concern with the social and political elevation of animals in Part II, along with their desire to promote Teague to various offices, degrades them. Teague's promotion to the bench in Part II is a good example of Brackenridge's skill with low burlesque. Teague's success as a judge presiding over an assault and battery case is related in a report by "Lawyer Tarapin":

What with the names with terminations, of a like sound, and the intricacy of the case, the judge was puzzled, and getting in a passion, snatched a staff from a constable, and fell upon the suitors. "By my showl, said he, I will be after bating de whole o'd you togeder. A parcel of spalpeens and bog-trotters, to be coming here bodering me wid your quarrels, and your explanations: better fight it out like men of honour wid a shilelah, and not come here to trouble de court about it." (MC, p. 546)

\(^{36}\)Highet, p. 105.
Throughout *Modern Chivalry*, Teague's elevation, a ridiculous subject treated seriously by the people, is high burlesque; the results of this elevation constitute a low burlesque on both Teague and the social or political institution to which he is raised or proposed.

Another form of satire Brackenridge uses within the frame of the narrative is the monologue. Hightet notes that there are several variations in the satiric monologue: the monologue delivered by the satirist's victim, the monologue delivered by the satirist himself in an ironic mask, the letter, and the prearranged dialogue. Brackenridge uses the first two of these four variations in *Modern Chivalry*. The first method, the self-exposure of the satirist's victim, may be found in *Modern Chivalry* in Teague's and Duncan's dialect speeches, in the cases argued by the lawyers, in the arguments of the visionary philosopher, and, indeed, in almost every speech by a character other than Farrago or the blind lawyer. An excellent example of a combination of parody and satiric monologue is the sermon delivered by a man pretending to be a member of the clergy. The last part of this sermon is no more than a confused listing of biblical names:

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37 Hightet, pp. 52-66.
and Soloman built him a house; and silver was as plenty as the street stones in Juerusalem; Reho-boam, and Jehosophat, and the kings of Israel and Juda; Daniel was cast into the lion's den; and Shad-rach, Meshach, and Abed-nego; ... Mary Magdalene, out of whom were cast seven devils; and the father of Zebedee's children; and Pontius Pilate, and the high priest; and Ananias, and Saphira, and the seven trumpets, in the Revelations, and the dragon, and the woman. Amen. I add no more. (MC, p. 104)

In this one "sermon," Brackenridge has parodied the traditional but confused ramblings of many of the clergy, has proved a yarn merchant unable to preach a text, and has further shown the "lay people" and "some of the younger of the clergy" to be no more than fools when they prefer this sermon to a more rational one delivered by an educated clergyman (MC, p. 104). Self-exposure is indeed Brackenridge's main weapon to point out the follies of the people; given a chance to express their views, they are almost always revealed as fools.

Brackenridge's use of the second variation of the monologue, that delivered by the satirist in an ironic mask, is just as prevalent in Modern Chivalry as the self-exposing kind and is usually far more subtle. Brackenridge wears many masks in Modern Chivalry--his views are
sometimes expressed through the medium of his chevalier, Parrago, sometimes in the blind lawyer's lectures on the law, sometimes through the voice of the narrator, and sometimes simply in his own voice. These last two voices are often difficult to distinguish, and the reader is sometimes beguiled into believing he is hearing the voice of one when the other may be speaking. Brackenridge's irony is often subtle in the chapters containing "Observations" or "Reflections." These chapters constitute a whole series of satiric and serious monologues, and are often more prominent than the narrative itself, especially in Part II. Mary Mattfield, in a discussion of these chapters, distinguishes between the two voices of Brackenridge as the narrator:

The naive author is the pedant whose response to a crisis is to retreat to the language and the mores of a vanished civilization. . . . The sophisticated author, in contrast, is equivalently a classical scholar, but in his case the serious values of the past are seriously related to the present . . . .

The first author, Mattfield's "naive author," is Brackenridge's ironic mask. He is a vehicle for satire by reason of his innocence and is seemingly blind to the absurdity

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\(^{38}\)Mattfield, Part II, p. 18.
of the situation upon which he comments. His blindness serves to emphasize this absurdity by continuing it, and when he is speaking, the reader must not take his statements literally. The second voice, that of the "sophisticated author," belongs to Brackenridge himself. The irony of the mask is present in this voice also, but to a much lesser degree. This narrator can be identified by his usually learned and yet sincere discourse and by the didactic hue of his statements. Both voices serve the cause of modern chivalry in different ways—the first with its satire and the second with its earnest reason.

The naive author speaks on all manner of topics. It is he who recommends that treaties like those made with the Indians should be extended to the animals (MC, pp. 61-62), that the honor of the duel would be enhanced if men were to kill each other for only minor affronts (MC, pp. 53-54), that criminals should be allowed time to learn new trades instead of being locked up (MC, pp. 138-40), and that he is not the least concerned with the sense of the book (MC, pp. 35-37). He is heard in chapters on the history of tarring and feathering (MC, pp. 306-07), on the reception of George III in hell (MC, pp. 603-07), and on the right of a man's property to vote (MC, pp. 646-52). One particularly good example of the mask-persona is found in a chapter in Part I dealing with the origin of the races.
After describing preposterous theories advanced by the Philosophic society, the narrator proposes a theory of his own. He states, "I am of opinion that Adam was a tall, straight limbed, red haired man, with a fair complexion, blue eyes, and an aquiline nose; and that Eve was a negro woman" (MC, p. 117). He continues to explain that these traits combined throughout the ages to produce all the racial varieties of the world. He solves the difficulty presented by the Flood in this way: "It may be asked, How at the flood? when Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives, eight persons, only were saved? It is but giving some of the sons negro wenches for wives, and you have the matter all right" (MC, p. 118). The naive author has an answer for everything; he is logical but absurd. His voice is heard most often, and it provides a great deal of the satire of Modern Chivalry.

The sophisticated author, on the other hand, is the serious proponent of modern chivalry. He uses irony only slightly, to give a certain emphasis to his ideas and may be called the true representative of Brackenridge himself. He is the narrator who so often repeats the moral of the book and who explains its narrativemethod. He is heard on such subjects as the French Revolution (MC, pp. 425-27), the history of Pennsylvania (MC, p. 471), demagogues (MC, p. 525), Thomas Jefferson (MC, pp. 786-87); moreover, he
gives a historical "key" to the entire novel (MC, pp. 805-08). His concerns are most closely tied to Brackenridge's concerns; many of his monologues deal with suffrage and democracy. Sometimes he is a bit tedious, as in the chapter on certificates of indebtedness, state and continental debts, the bank of America, and Indian treaties (MC, pp. 220-27). Often, though, he is almost moving in his concern with the issues, as when he states,

I should think myself justifiable in excluding from my society, and the government I had formed, the inhabitants of another planet . . . but men of this earth, of similar forms, and of like passions with ourselves, what have I to fear from them? What right have we to exclude them? We are not born for ourselves; nor did we achieve the revolution for ourselves only. We fought for the cause of all mankind; and the good and the great of all mankind wished well to us in the contest. (MC, pp. 536-37)

This narrator's monologues are usually long, earnest, and impassioned; they continually remind one that Brackenridge wrote sermons before he wrote fiction. Both voices are necessary to the cause of modern chivalry, however; both the satire and the sermon point to the proper course for man, the path of reason.
Within the three forms of satire in *Modern Chivalry*, the narrative, the parody, and the monologue, Brackenridge uses an amazing variety of the techniques of the satirist. Many of these techniques have been discussed in the sections on the forms of Brackenridge's satire, but others should be touched upon briefly. In his *Introduction to Satire*, Leonard Feinberg lists the four methods of the satirist, distortion, indirection, externality, and brevity, and the techniques he relies on to produce them.\(^{39}\) Brackenridge employs each of these devices in his satire to varying extents. His picture of the American scene, first of all, is undeniably distorted. It has been noted that the scene is primarily abstract, not concrete, and that the political and social absurdities of the people are exaggerated. Exaggeration is an important technique in Brackenridge's art, and is seen in every episode in which Farrago dissuades Teague from some foible by using exaggerated threats about the consequences of the act. Brackenridge also uses understatement to achieve distortion, usually in his satiric monologues. For example, when Farrago wishes to dissuade Teague from interfering in the love matches of others, he tells him that he must naturally challenge his rivals to duels. In describing a duel, he points out,\(^{39}\)

\(^{39}\)Feinberg, pp. 85-100.
It is no uncommon thing to have an arm broke, or a splinter struck off the nose, or an eye shot out; but as in that case, the ball mostly passes through the brain, and the man being dead at any rate, the loss of sight is not greatly felt. (MC, pp. 50-51)

Both exaggeration and understatement are "form[s] of attack and . . . indispensible procedure[s] for a satirist," and they are the methods Brackenridge uses to present his distorted picture of the new, American democracy.

Brackenridge is also a master of the device of indirection; in fact, his satire is sometimes so subtle that it is difficult to distinguish between his satiric voices. Many of the methods Feinberg lists as achieving this indirection have already been discussed, such as verbal irony, the mask persona, burlesque, and parody. In Part II, for example, he describes a scene in the new settlement in which a Harlequin represents "a politician with the people on his back" in a pantomime (MC, p. 440). Mattfield explains that "the pantomime of the distressed Harlequin groaning under the weight of the people provides a vivid image for one concept of the responsibility of the politician in a free society. The varied comments of

\footnotesize{Feinberg, p. 91. Feinberg, p. 93.}
the spectators represent a cross-section of typical attitudes." "2 Other instances of allegory in Modern Chivalry include the people's attempt to right an overturned cart (MC, pp. 418-19), the making of a soup from ingredients contributed by the people at a timber-cutting (MC, pp. 791-93), and a comparison of the revolutionary fever with the building of a cabin (MC, p. 426). Mattfield even suggests that "the new settlement in Modern Chivalry is an allegory for the new world." "3 The device of allegory is used infrequently in Modern Chivalry, and it is usually followed by an explanation of its use, but it is another important technique in the indirect quality of Brackenridge's style.

Two other methods the satirist uses to reach his goal are externality (detachment) and brevity. The first, a sense of distance between the satirist and the thing satirized, is effected in Modern Chivalry by Brackenridge's use of the naive character, the mask persona, and the ironic tone. The second method, the brevity that is so important in keeping the audience's attention in satire, is brought about in Modern Chivalry by Brackenridge's use of the journey motif—which allows for numerous separate episodes—and frequent divisions in the narrative. One other technique Feinberg does not mention is the use of the

digression. Brackenridge follows Henry Fielding in this respect; his chapters are filled with digressions. One excellent chapter contains the narrator's thoughts on such various subjects as the origins and relative merits of the Greek and German languages, the prevalence of goiter and its causes among the Swiss, the relationship between beautiful features and a sweet voice, the connection between oratory and various modes of dress, the posterior, one's fitness for various occupations and callings, the population of Britain and their ancestors, the fine arts, and the narrative method of the book (MC, pp. 720-27). Brackenridge's knowledge on a number of topics is immense, and the fact that he shares that knowledge with the reader not only serves to hold the reader's interest but also forms a more personal bond between author and audience. Brackenridge is a charmingly intrusive author in true eighteenth-century style.

Humor is one of the most important elements of satire, and the satirist who is not also a humorist can be little more than a tedious moralizer or a manipulator of invective. Modern Chivalry is both satire and comedy, and Brackenridge's techniques of humor are equally as important as his satiric methods. Feinberg groups the techniques of humor into four classes, each containing elements that often overlap the methods of satire already discussed.
Feinberg's four groups are the techniques of incongruity, surprise, pretense, and superiority, each of which Brackenridge draws on to some extent in creating the comedy of his novel. The first technique, incongruity, includes many elements that are part of the satire of Modern Chivalry. They are exaggeration, invective, caricature, *reductio ad absurdum*, understatement, contrast, analogy, epigram, and paradox.\(^4\) Brackenridge uses all of these weapons of humor except invective, epigram, and paradox to create the incongruity between his ideals and the actual workings of the world. Most of these have already been touched on in some way except the logical device of *reductio ad absurdum*, which deserves closer attention. Feinberg defines this logical trick as an argument which "may carry to a logical, and ridiculous, conclusion a popularly accepted concept," or "it may pretend to accept an opponent's argument and carry it on to an unacceptable conclusion . . . ."\(^5\) In the manner of Swift, Brackenridge does both, as, for instance, in a chapter in Part I on Indian treaties. Brackenridge believed negotiating with the Indians useless, since he considered them little better than wild beasts. Thus, he logically

\(^4\)Feinberg, p. 101. \(^5\)Feinberg, pp. 105-42. \(^6\)Feinberg, p. 112.
proposes that the next governmental step should be treaties with the animals. He writes,

I have been led to wonder, that the agricultural societies, have not proposed treaties with the wolves and bears, that they might not clandestinely invade our sheep and pig folds. This might be done by sending messages to the several ursine and vulpine nations, and calling them to a council fire, to which four or five hundred waggon load of beef should be sent, and distributed. (MC, p. 61)

He further warns against "the introduction of spirituous liquors" (MC, p. 62); seeing that Indian chiefs have few qualms about becoming drunk and setting bad examples for their tribes, he does not believe one should expect animals to behave with more dignity.

The next two techniques of humor, surprise and pretense, either include elements already covered in the discussion of Brackenridge's satiric techniques or are used only negligibly in Modern Chivalry. According to Feinberg, surprise in a work of humorous satire is made up of unexpected honesty, unexpected logic, unexpected letdown, and unexpected events (dramatic irony). Since the scene Brackenridge presents contains almost nothing

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Feinberg, pp. 143-75.
but the unexpected, the quality of surprise in Modern Chivalry is somewhat undone. At the beginning of the book, Brackenridge ironically claims that he will write nothing but nonsense, thereby giving himself license to stray so far from realism that the only surprise for the reader must lie in the excellence of the work itself, written as it is in a rather barren period in American literature. The technique of pretense, which employs irony, parody, disguise, a mask persona, symbol, and allegory,\(^4\) is, on the other hand, a crucial part of Modern Chivalry. Pretense in the novel is so prevalent that it is difficult for the reader to adjust himself to Brackenridge's occasional fits of high seriousness. Modern Chivalry is a wonderful joke on the American nation at a time when the intellectual atmosphere was idealistic and rather formal. It is written also by a fairly sober character, a judge, partially as a joke on himself. Brackenridge's frustrations in life become comical satires in his book, due in large part to his optimism and ability to pretend.

Feinberg's fourth technique, the sense of superiority transmitted from author to audience, is important to the comedy of Modern Chivalry and to the definition of the reforming code. Because of his ability to remain rational amid the madness of the crowd, the modern chevalier is

\(^4\)Feinberg, pp. 176-205.
superior to the populace he tries to teach. And because the audience of *Modern Chivalry* recognizes his superiority, they sympathize with him and laugh at the people's absurdity, thereby reinforcing their own sense of superiority. The audience of a satire must be able to laugh with the satirist; otherwise, he will only lose their attention as they feel themselves insulted. Brackenridge achieves this balance in several ways: through his personal asides to the reader, his use of types rather than individuals, and through the techniques which cause his victims to appear vastly inferior to Farrago, the narrator, or to the reader. Feinberg lists five of these techniques; the satirist must portray his victims as ignorant and banal, he must insult and unmask them, and he must show them as subject to small misfortunes. Teague is usually Brackenridge's victim in the use of the last technique. He is at various times beaten, tarred and feathered, and run out of town, yet he is never the object of sympathy, on either Farrago's part or that of the reader. His misfortunes are always well-deserved and thus are not tragic but comic and satiric.

The other four techniques of superiority have, again, already been touched upon in various places. Brackenridge's victims are all irrational; they are the "swinish multitude"

"Feinberg, pp. 206-25."
and seem incapable of change. He portrays them as ignorant and absurd, whether they are in the process of electing Teague or burning down a college because they distrust learning. Their own actions as well as the narrator's comments expose them, and Teague is the prime example of their foolishness. One way Brackenridge, a very learned man, satirizes Teague is through his illiterate Irish dialect. Brackenridge seems to have had a good ear for dialect, and he uses appropriate misspellings to represent its speech patterns. He often uses dialect spellings to represent Teague's reaction to a proposition for his promotion, and the comic results serve to emphasize the incongruity between the responsibility of the position and the incompatibility of the aspirant. For example, when it is suggested that Teague appear at the Presidential levee in order to be appointed to a governmental position, Farrago believes he should have some instruction in etiquette. He engages a French dancing master to show Teague a more graceful way to move about, with hilarious results. The two are unable to understand each other's dialects, the French and the Irish, and, given Teague's lack of grace, the ensuing scene becomes a slapstick comedy (MC, pp. 207-12). Brackenridge's command of both dialects, and later of the superstitious Duncan's Scots dialect, is good and serves to make the objects of his satire
more ridiculous than ever. The audience feels no compunction at laughing at these characters because their creator feels none.

Modern chivalry, as a social force, is only as strong as its weapon, satire. Brackenridge's novel is the culmination of the ability of the code to effect reform, and if satire really has an impact on society, then Modern Chivalry is pervasive; it is complex, skillful, good-natured, entertaining, and didactic. However, as Feinberg notes, "Institutions . . . are not likely to be influenced by satire. But individuals are." The American scene was not reformed by the publication of Modern Chivalry, but it was enriched. Brackenridge did not ridicule individuals as a rule in the work; its effect was of a different kind. The effect of Modern Chivalry on the individual was, and is, that of pleasure. It is one of the first American novels with any real intellectual content, and it is one of the first American satires. The code of modern chivalry cannot therefore have completely failed in its mission; it produced, by means of its author's satiric wit and concern for the new democracy, a lasting impression in American literature--the first good American novel, Modern Chivalry.

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50 Feinberg, p. 259.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Hugh Henry Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry* is unique in its time; it was one of the first American novels to combine humor with didacticism. Thus, as Carl Van Doren points out, "It is the only early American novel which is still entertaining, and it a lasting document on its confused time."<sup>1</sup> Its time was indeed confused; were it not for the unification provided by Brackenridge's themes and often repeated moral purpose, *Modern Chivalry* would be little more than a rambling collection of satiric observations on this important era in American history. The novel is, however, unified, and one of the reasons that it is so coherently constructed is Brackenridge's use of modern chivalry as a metaphor for his purpose. Indeed, the book is unified even by reason of its title; *Modern Chivalry* is a novel shrewdly named by its author. The book itself mentions modern chivalry very seldom. Why, then the apparently irrelevant title? Brackenridge must have realized that what his book represented was the sum of his attitudes toward and opinions of contemporary America.


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His name for that collection reflects not only his personal moral and political philosophy but also his desire to actively reform the excesses he observed, even though he could actually make very little impact on the whole of society. It is observed in chapter three that Brackenridge was a humanitarian at heart, and the title Modern Chivalry in one sense represents his humanitarian impulse, his desire not only to reform but to help his fellow citizens. The desire is, occasionally, rather pretentious, but the sentiments which produce it are always earnest and sincere.

On the other hand, the title of Brackenridge's quixotic novel may also imply a mocking attitude on its author's part. The chevalier of the novel embarks on his travels in a thoroughly mad, thoroughly irrational world. He is incongruous in this world and finds himself reduced to absurdities in order to survive in it. The chevalier simply does not fit his world; his situation is the reverse of Quixote's—he is sane in a mad world. However, like Quixote, he is the representative of an obsolete code, a philosophical experiment in values. The values of romantic chivalry could not apply to Quixote's seventeenth-century Spain; the values of modern chivalry do not seem to apply to Farrago's eighteenth-century America. What, then, one might ask, is "modern" about modern chivalry?
How is it updated? The differences between the romantic chivalry satirized by Cervantes and the modern chivalry of Brackenridge's poem "The Modern Chevalier" that is later represented by Captain John Farrago are outlined in chapter two. It is distinguished by its purpose—the reform of democratic excess in eighteenth-century America. Yet, modern chivalry is totally incapable of achieving its purpose. The results, as noted in chapter four, do not include a profound effect on society but entertainment for the individual reader. The title *Modern Chivalry* may, in fact, consist of a satiric comment on the state of American society. The reader sees little evidence in the novel that society is guided by any values like those associated with chivalry; indeed, chivalric values, even the modern type represented by Farrago, are repeatedly repulsed by society. The title of the work may be a satiric reminder to the reader that modern chivalry simply does not exist in Brackenridge's depiction of the American scene.

This thesis attempts to define Brackenridge's metaphor and describe its use in *Modern Chivalry*. Brackenridge's term, modern chivalry, is defined in chapter two, in light of its predecessor, traditional chivalry. Brackenridge seems to have done very little reading in medieval romances, the genre in which the
system was fully developed. However, since he had apparently studied Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and since his novel loosely follows Cervantes' in form, it is safe to assume that his concept of traditional chivalry was greatly influenced, if not wholly determined, by the treatment given it by Cervantes. Brackenridge's definition of modern chivalry is stated most clearly in his long poem, "The Modern Chevalier." In its transition from poem to novel, the chivalric code takes on various subtle characteristics as a result of Brackenridge's having used it to represent his philosophy of what was wrong with contemporary America. In the poem, however, Brackenridge clearly and straightforwardly defines his term—he presents, literally, a knight-errant riding about in modern times to discover why it is the people are so determined in their follies, such as electing unqualified men to office. Brackenridge compares the modern chevalier to a satirical writer, both of whom work to stamp out such "disorders" in society.

The themes of *Modern Chivalry* are all associated with Brackenridge's conception of modern chivalry and help give the code a deeper, more complex meaning than it had in the poem that inspired the novel. Three themes in particular have strong associations with modern chivalry. The first theme, the struggle between rationalism and
romantic democratic ideals, has its roots in the incompatibility of the romantic Don Quixote with his often sordidly pragmatic environment. Brackenridge satirizes the idea of the perfectibility of man in his chapters on the schemes of the "visionary philosopher," and every episode in which the people wish to promote the illiterate Teague O'Regan to some elevated position is a satirical comment on romantically democratic notions of the capacity of the individual. A related theme in *Modern Chivalry* is Brackenridge's concern that man practice moderation and recognize his place in the scheme of things, and much of the novel is taken up with both the narrator's and Farrago's warnings against immoderate behavior, which Brackenridge depicts as always resulting in absurdity and irrationality. The third theme in *Modern Chivalry* that is related to Brackenridge's code is morality. Chivalry is traditionally an ethical system associated with Christianity, and modern chivalry is no less moral. Brackenridge's philosophy, however, is not associated with religion, being grounded entirely in reason. Its active expression is humanitarianism, and it is because of this philosophy that *Modern Chivalry* is also a didactic novel. The impulse to reform is based on a moral impulse, the sincere desire to change the world for the better.
The satire of *Modern Chivalry* is the means by which Brackenridge hopes to reform American society. Satire is the primary weapon of modern chivalry, though it is often supported by the straightforward reasonings of both Brackenridge (through the narrator) and Farrago. Brackenridge's satire is the primary artistic merit of *Modern Chivalry* and the source of its value as a still entertaining novel, as noted by Carl Van Doren. The satire of *Modern Chivalry* is diverse and complex; its techniques and its forms are many. Brackenridge relies on three satiric forms—narrative, parody, and monologue—and he uses a wide variety of satiric techniques ranging from the subtlety of the mask-persona to slapstick comedy and dialect humor. The purpose of Brackenridge's satire is identical with the purpose of modern chivalry; it is the moral purpose of exposing unfounded ambition that is so often repeated both openly and through the satiric episodes of *Modern Chivalry*. The success of Brackenridge's satire in attaining its end is, however, unimportant. Artistically, *Modern Chivalry* is a success in its own right because of Brackenridge's skillful satire. Thus, although modern chivalry may not have succeeded in reforming the world, it is yet a success to the same extent its greatest weapon, satire, is a success. *Modern Chivalry* gives its
readers a great deal of pleasure and is therefore far from being a failure as a novel.

In terms of criticism, Modern Chivalry seems to be as much the property of the historian as the literary critic. The novel is often praised as a realistic chronicle of early frontier life and sometimes as little else. However, as Alexander Cowie notes, Brackenridge "was no shirt-sleeves philosopher but a scholar."2 Realism in Modern Chivalry, when it does appear, exists on an abstractly intellectual plane. Brackenridge does indeed present in some ways a realistic picture of the early American scene, but it is a picture of the emotional and political turmoil of the time, to say nothing of Brackenridge's own struggle. For Brackenridge was primarily a satirist, and, as Gilbert Highet points out, "All satirists are at heart idealists."3 The American scene Brackenridge depicts is colored by his own idealistic philosophy, the philosophy represented by the metaphor of modern chivalry. Brackenridge was realistic in many ways; he did see the disparity between ideal democracy and the actual democratic practice of the people, and this disparity is the basis for his commentary

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on the scene. However, he remained in many ways an idealist, like Jefferson himself. He loved and believed in democracy, for, had he not, he never would have conceived of the code of modern chivalry to correct its abuse. In effect, *Modern Chivalry* is the work of a democrat and a scholar, and, above all, of an idealist.
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