

MODERN CHIVALRY: THE FORM

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LITERATURE," Robert E. Spiller wrote in the Preface to his *Cycle of American Literature* (p. ix), "... has a relationship to social and intellectual history, not as documentation, but as symbolic illumination." The role of a work of fiction in thus illuminating some essential quality in a people or in a period of history is a vital one indeed. Factual data provide the historian with his tools; literature furnishes his insights. In attempting to understand the period of the early American republic — that vigorous generation during which the fundamental American character and nation may be said to have taken shape — the student has available to him a richly varied amount of documentation. He may draw upon diaries and journals, sermons and political tracts, to form his ideas of the development of that character. In particular he will look to the magnificent body of contemporary political literature as a formal expression of the mind of the age. Yet with all this resource of fact he should not neglect the potential enlightenment of fiction.

The long work of fiction which may be called the first American book to depend for its significance upon an essentially American scene as well as an attitude truly symbolic of the emerging nation is Hugh Henry Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry*. Sentimental novels like *The Coquette* and *The Power of Sympathy*, though they may have been founded in part on real contemporary family sins and scandals, are fundamentally English in origin, theme, and tone. The melodramas of Charles Brockden Brown introduced the theme of the Indian and the wilderness, and began a tradition of psychological horror which was to continue in the work of Poe, Melville, Hawthorne, and Faulkner. Yet the chief influences on Brown were English and German gothic romances, with their elaborate apparatus of horror merely transplanted but not naturalized in an American setting.

Here is a novelty in creative and critical thinking and writing of a combination of literature and history such as comes only rarely from a modern source. Mrs. Mattfield is a teacher at the Southeastern Massachusetts Technological Institute at North Dartmouth. She has studied Hugh Henry Brackenridge's classic satire, *Modern Chivalry*, published between 1792 and 1815, with skill and spirit equal to make it flourish again in our challenging time as perhaps it never has before since the provocative days of our great-grandparents who were Brackenridge's contemporaries.—Editor

Inevitably, the chief literary influences upon H. H. Brackenridge were also European; he used a traditional form in his satire and openly acknowledged his English models. There is, however, one major factor which distinguishes *Modern Chivalry* from the work either of the domestic sentimentalists or of the Gothic romancers, the fact that it is more truly the kind of literature to which we may look for "symbolic illumination."

Modern Chivalry offers so generous a cross-section of American life between 1792 and 1815 that the book is ordinarily read for its undeniable value as historical documentation. In its theme, however, "this tale of a Captain travelling" which Brackenridge claimed to use "but as a vehicle to . . . [his] way of thinking on some subjects" (p. 350)¹ is in reality a dramatization of a new and permanently significant concept of the American character.

This concept is that democratic disparity between the ideal and the practice against which Alexis de Tocqueville was to warn the young nation. Brackenridge was acutely aware of the ambiguities which made the American culture one of basic contradictions, and which help to produce what Richard Chase has called in his consideration of *The American Novel and Its Tradition* "the profound poetry of disorder we find in the American novel" (p. 2). The enormous tension in the conflict, inherent in the entire experience of revolution and the formation of a constitution, between liberty and union, chaos and order, self-expression and the common good, creates the paradox of America in general and of *Modern Chivalry* in particular. Brackenridge's conviction that "the best men are the most moderate" (p. 536) represents an attempt at resolving the conflict, but is not without its own ambiguities and contradictions. The heart of the narrative is the recurrent balancing of oppositions; its method is a multiple use of point of view to bring those oppositions vividly to life. Thus, while *Modern Chivalry* is commonly recognized as a source of valuable documentary evidence about the social, political, and intellectual characteristics of America at the close of the eighteenth century, its symbolic value should not be overlooked.

I

Although generally recognized as an important contribution to American literature, Hugh Henry Brackenridge's long fiction called *Modern Chivalry* has been so variously described and classified as to

¹ Hugh Henry Brackenridge, *Modern Chivalry*, Ed. C. M. Newlin (New York, 1962). All references to the text refer to this edition.

justify a reexamination of its form. While nearly all critics and historians of the writing of the early American republic acknowledge that with its initial publication in 1792 its author began "the most vigorous American book of his time and the most penetrating commentary on American democracy in the making" (p. xl), there is far less agreement as to the essential nature of that book. At the simplest level of terminology, complete contradictions occur. *Modern Chivalry* figures in one general work as a "picaresque or 'rogue' novel,"² in a second as a "picaresque romance."³ Where so fundamental a difference can exist it is well to attempt a redefinition; is Brackenridge's masterpiece in fact either novel or romance?

This need to redefine the classification of *Modern Chivalry* is emphasized by still another widely prevalent critical reaction. Here there is almost complete agreement: the book is uniformly described as both long (which manifestly it is, running to eight hundred pages in the modern edition) and confused (which is a far more questionable judgment). "A jumbled thesaurus of Americana," quotes Brackenridge's modern editor (p. xl), and in his own view the book is "copious and somewhat chaotic" (p. ix). Others comment not only upon its richness but repeatedly also upon its "sprawling form."⁴ "Copious" *Modern Chivalry* certainly is; "chaotic" it is not. To fail to recognize the fact that its structure possesses a formal and highly stylized order is to misunderstand the governing principle of its composition. Such a misinterpretation helps to explain the critical confusions of classification, to which it is directly linked, and further suggests the usefulness of an examination of Brackenridge's form.

The narrative itself concerns the adventures of Captain Farrago, a sensible but naïf rational man, who sets out on a quixotic journey of exploration accompanied by his Irish bogtrotter servant, Teague Oregon, as a grotesque Sancho Panza. This journey enables Brackenridge to survey nearly every aspect of contemporary American life and to comment pointedly upon it. In the eagerness of the citizens to draft the illiterate and totally unqualified Teague into positions of the highest responsibility, we are presented with an explicit parallel to the egalitarian excesses of the American democracy. When the Captain is made governor of a new settlement in the back country, the second

² *Literary History of the U. S.*, Ed. Robert E. Spiller and others (New York, 1953), 178.

³ Carl Van Doren, *The American Novel: 1789-1939* (New York, 1949), 6.

⁴ Edward Wagenknecht, *Cavalcade of the American Novel* (New York, 1952), 9.

part of the book becomes a kind of parody on American history — the settlement, Indian wars, the Constitution, the courts, the press, and the franchise. Superficially, therefore, it might seem accurate to agree that in “outward form it is a picaresque or ‘rogue’ novel” of which the “intellectual core consists of a satire on bad government.”⁵ As a long piece of narrative fiction in prose, *Modern Chivalry* logically falls today into the omnibus catch-all of the novel, and it is as a novel that it is most often described. Yet this description must invariably be qualified at once: it is a political novel, a satirical novel, a novel of purpose. It is at once all and none of these. And when the book proves to resist the orderly process of labeling, the inference seems somehow to be drawn that it is an embarrassing mutation, a brilliant failure.

When judged as a novel, *Modern Chivalry* does indeed prove too much an anomaly to be a success. A fundamental principle of criticism, however, is the obligation to evaluate a work only on its own terms. Before Brackenridge's book can be judged as literature instead of social document, therefore, it is necessary to define the terms of its existence. This task is complicated by the obscurities of vocabulary. Before considering *Modern Chivalry* as a “novel,” one must first attempt to limit the term itself and in particular to locate it in relation to literary history.

The novel was in 1792 still a relatively new genre. In spite of such forerunners as Lyly and Sidney, Nashe and Deloney, Aphra Behn and John Bunyan, it was in the eighteenth century that the English novel really became a significant form. The distinction between the novel and the romance was already being made; Steele had one of the characters of his *The Tender Husband* say, “Our amours can't furnish out a Romance; they'll make a very pretty Novel.” The terms were to continue to be applied loosely and interchangeably to any long prose fiction for many years, but the break had been made. The eighteenth century was necessarily a period of experimentation, as novelists attempted to master the technical problems of the form. The use of dialogue and the balancing of oppositions to establish attitudes are essentially dramatic techniques borrowed from the theater, and other stage devices found their way into the novel. Even the formal introductory and concluding statements appear to owe something to the mannered prologues and epilogues of Restoration drama, and many stock characters were transplanted freely. It is natural that Bracken-

⁵ *Literary History of the U. S.*, 178-179.

ridge, who was an admirer of Otway and Dryden and familiar with later dramatists, and who had earlier in his career himself written two plays, should draw in 1792 on the theater for an analogy by which to condemn the elevation of the unfit to positions of responsibility: "Amongst the dramatis personae of learned bodies, there are Tony Lumpkins, and Darby M'Faddins in abundance, yet there ought to be none . . ." (p. 133).

The major problem of the novelist of the eighteenth century, however, was one for which his experience of the stage provided no solution. "The whole intricate question of method, in the craft of fiction," one twentieth century critic believed "to be governed by the question of the *point of view* — the question of the relation in which the narrator stands to the story."⁶ This problem the eighteenth century writer got round, if he could not entirely solve, in a number of rather awkward ways. Like Defoe and Richardson, he might make use of the memoir or of the epistolary convention to allow for a first-person narration from one or more points of view. He might, like Fielding, reject these devices in favor of the straightforward omniscient third-person telling of his tale, but in this case he still found himself with the problem of commentary. Fortunately for the novelist, there was no tacit law of contemporary taste to prevent his interrupting the narrative as he chose with confidences about his characters, asides to the reader, digressions such as Thackeray and Trollope were to persist in more than a century later. In general, the English novel of the eighteenth century was long and leisurely, crowded with actors and incidents, and inclined to an essentially moral inquiry into contemporary man in his society.

In this as in other literary types, Hugh Henry Brackenridge was extraordinarily well-read. His taste in contemporary literature has been clearly indicated; again and again in the pages of *Modern Chivalry* he expressed his admiration for the masters of the novel in England. "I would ask," he wrote, "which is the most entertaining work, Smolet's [*sic*] *History of England*; or his *Humphrey Clinker*? For as to the utility, so far as that depends upon truth, they are both alike" (p. 406). So far as literary style was concerned, Brackenridge was equally emphatic. "In the English language, that of Hume, Swift, and Fielding, is the only stile that I have coveted to possess" (p. 643). In view of this testimony, it is logical to compare Brackenridge's own literary practice with that of one of his acknowledged masters, Henry Fielding.

⁶ Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (New York, 1921).

At first glance, there appear to be significant analogies between the form of *Modern Chivalry* and that of *Joseph Andrews* or *Tom Jones*. Both writers find the journey-plot a convenient device for examining the vagaries of society; both obtrude their personal comments on the action; and both make use of the mock-solemn introductory statement of purpose. In scope and variety and in number of scenes and characters, the roadside adventures of Captain Farrago and Teague are reminiscent of those of Tom Jones himself. Fielding's famous "preliminary observations" and the "bill of fare" preface to *The History of Tom Jones* demonstrate an attitude and a technique which must have been most congenial to Brackenridge, and his asides to the reader seem to anticipate the method of the Pennsylvanian.

Yet there is so fundamental a contrast between the works of Fielding and of Brackenridge as to suggest a real difference in kind. Even the picaresque scaffolding differs in that, however episodic Fielding's novels may be, the journey has an end in view. Joseph Andrews received the reward for his virtue; Mr. Jones was married to his Sophia; but except for Brackenridge's inclination and length of life, there was no reason why Captain Farrago and Teague might not have gone on forever. The personal commentaries of the authors differ fundamentally as well, in their relation to the narrative proper. Fielding looks genially over the shoulder of his reader, commenting upon the human nature which is the "provision" on his bill of fare. His treatment is subjective, personal, but no matter how lengthy the comment, we never lose sight of the fact that the story is our proper concern and that the characters are the focus of the story. Brackenridge's strategy is significantly different. His comments, presented in alternating interchapters rather than within the narrative sections, are by no means incidental. Instead they are essential, even central, to the book as a whole. Brackenridge's point of view is that of the objective observer engaged in an extended dialogue with his material as well as with his characters and his reader. The inevitable result of this procedure is to de-emphasize the importance of character.

The characters themselves are the major point of difference between the practice of Fielding and that of Brackenridge. Fielding's characterization, almost without exception, is "round." Even his minor figures breathe; they possess a vitality which Brackenridge's personages do not. The characters of *Modern Chivalry* appear briefly and vividly, illuminated by the glare of their creator's wit, and then give place to others equally without development. Indeed, the book has

no hero. Unlike the "comic epic"⁷ of Fielding, with the heroic attributes and the comic apparatus of epic battles,⁸ it offers the reader no real protagonist. The reader is diverted by Teague and indulgent toward the Captain, but waits always for the cool, ironic voice of the author. Neither Captain Farrago nor Teague Oregon nor even Brackenridge himself, ultimately, is central to *Modern Chivalry*. Each is merely a vehicle for ideas conveyed through dialogue and dramatized by action. If the measure of a novel is the degree to which its characters live, the American book must be judged as greatly inferior to its English forerunner; as a novel, *Modern Chivalry* is not a success. The superficial resemblances which it bears to the picaresque or loosely episodic "comic epic" of Fielding have, however, been misleading. For *Modern Chivalry* is not a novel, and it is not a failure. To determine just what genre it is at which Brackenridge so brilliantly succeeds one must look further.

The key to classification lies in its affinity to the work of other writers. *Modern Chivalry* is directly in the tradition of Juvenal and Lucian, of Rabelais and Cervantes, of Samuel Butler and Jonathan Swift. Throughout his book, Brackenridge is so very explicit in his allusions and acknowledgments that the line of descent is always clear. He frequently points out parallels between his work and that of his predecessors and freely acknowledges his indebtedness. In particular, Brackenridge has pointed out that his book is modeled in part upon Swift's *Tale of a Tub* (p. 77). The resemblance between the two men extends even to some of the circumstances of their personal lives. Both prepared for careers as clergymen, although Brackenridge soon found the law more to his taste. Both were political writers: Swift's pamphlet of 1701, "Discourse of the Contests and Discussions between the Nobles and Commons in Athens and Rome," was concerned with questions of constitutional government and of the dangers of impeachment, both of which topics were to be treated by Brackenridge in *Modern Chivalry*. Both men were to be accused of changing their political views and, as a result of this charge, to be frustrated in their desire for advancement. Both brought to their writing an anger which heightened the intensity of its comic power, for both were sensitive and kindly men whose indignation was exacerbated almost beyond endurance by the idiocy of their countrymen. In Brackenridge's case, however, though he had sound personal reason to fear the mobocracy he inveighed against, this indignation is surprisingly free from the

⁷ Henry Fielding, *The Adventures of Joseph Andrews*, Author's Preface, xl.

⁸ Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones*, V. I, 337-338.

vituperation and bitterness of Swift. He maintains a stinging sanity, and never loses his perspective or his ultimate faith in the democratic process. In his irony, Brackenridge is even closer to Swift, whose name he invokes on the very first page of his narrative (p. 3). Later he attributes his "ironical, ludicrous way of thinking and writing" to the influence of "the modern wits, . . . especially Swift" (p. 43).

In technical matters, this resemblance is most marked. Swift's *Tale of a Tub* is a grimly comic dialogue between author and reader, and between author and material, on a single subject, the absurdity of religious institutions and their pretensions to infallibility. In the centrality of its theme, the *Tale* resembles *Modern Chivalry*, which devotes eight hundred pages to illustrating "the evil of men seeking office for which they are not qualified" (p. 611). In developing their themes, moreover, both cultivate the art of the digression — Swift, indeed, in his Section VII presents a "Digression in Praise of Digressions" — and both lard their pages with classical quotations and displays of scholarship which reinforce the irony.

Swift's use of interchapters of digression is so extreme that only about one-third of the book is devoted to the *Tale* itself, while another third is occupied with mock introductions, dedications, prefaces, and booksellers' notices. Brackenridge's serio-comic introductions and interpolations can be traced directly to this device, although his modern editor seems at least partly to have misread their intention. "His own introductory statement in *Modern Chivalry* that he aimed at nothing but style is of course merely a humorous overstatement" (p. xxxviii), according to Newlin, but in the light of his usual practice it would seem more accurately described as a deliberate and complete misstatement. His "hope to see it made a schoolbook" (p. 77) seems also to have been credited by his editor (p. v) when in reality it is an echo of Swift's elaborate "Project for the Universal Benefit of Mankind" found at the conclusion of the *Tale of a Tub*. His tongue-in-cheek challenges to the critics in the introduction and the conclusion to the third volume of *Modern Chivalry* owe much to Swift's "Digression Concerning Critics" in Section III. Thus an understanding of Brackenridge's irony depends in large measure upon recognizing his debt to Swift.

The link to Swift is paralleled also by the qualities which appear to be defects in characterization in *Modern Chivalry*. No reader seriously expects Captain Gulliver to exist on the same plane as Tom Jones, nor should he look for the same rounded characterization in Captain Farrago. The minor figures appear in the same way: the

Bedlamite, the Drapier, Bickerstaff of Swift; the blind lawyer, Tradle the Weaver, Duncan of Brackenridge are vivid but flat — masks merely — in contrast to the richly varied creations of Parson Adams, Squire Western, even the sharply differentiated servants and landladies of Fielding. The cause of this contrast lies in the objectivity practiced by both Swift and Brackenridge. The reader is struck by the fact that in both cases there is a containment, even a repression, of emotion. The essential personality of the author manifests itself only through the intellect, whether he speaks through the mask of one of his characters or in his own person. This aloof detachment heightens the irony when events observed are as outrageous as they frequently are in the pages of Swift and Brackenridge.

Brackenridge's relationship to Swift suggests the solution to the problem of classification. It is a commonplace of criticism to term Swift's narratives "satire" and thereby to suggest that they belong to a distinct subspecies to which the "rules" of the novel may not apply. A further problem of terminology arises at once, however, for "satire" is generally applied in modern literature to a tone and a purpose, not to a form. The answer lies in the fact that *Modern Chivalry* is not a modern work. It is as much the product of its author's thorough grounding in the classics as of its eighteenth century affinities, and it should be regarded as a satire, and not as a novel.

A most useful distinction has been made by Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism*. Here the differentiation made by Hawthorne between the novel and the romance is extended. Just as the novel and the romance are both "personal" but differ in that the former is "extroverted," or concerned with the individual in society, while the latter is "introverted," or concerned with the self, so also it is possible to find impersonal or "intellectualized" counterparts of both novel and romance. In Frye's schematic arrangement, the "confession" or autobiographical fiction which centers in an abstract intellectualized thesis parallels the form of the romance, and may be illustrated by the *Confessions* of Rousseau. Equivalently, the intellectualized version of the novel forms a separate category. This category would include the fictions of Swift, of Sterne, of Voltaire, of Peacock, and similarly hard-to-classify works which resemble novels but which are too eccentric, too atypical, to qualify as novels in fact. In this company Brackenridge would surely be entirely at home.

The form is not an accident of personal or whimsical taste, but a lineal and respectable descendant of a classic mode: the Menippean or Varronian Satire. The characteristics of this genre include the dialogue

upon a single social idea, among static characters who are impersonalized embodiments of a point of view or a professional attitude. They include also the "free play of intellectual fancy and the kind of humorous observation that produces caricature . . . At its most concentrated," Frye states, "the Menippean satire presents us with a vision of the world in terms of a single intellectual pattern. The intellectual structure . . . makes for violent dislocations in the customary logic of narrative . . ." ⁹ Such a satire frequently uses incidental verse to illustrate the prose thesis, as the original Greek and Roman examples mingled prose with verse satire. To the form belong such conventions as abrupt and lengthy digressions, brilliant encyclopaedic displays of erudition, and Rabelaisian catalogs. Later examples of the form developed into the "anatomy," and Frye prefers that term to the more ponderous "Menippean Satire." While he points out that the four forms of fiction described in his scheme are seldom found in an entirely pure state and that "hybrids" are the rule, especially in modern literature, the distinction is a useful tool of analysis.

It becomes apparent, then, that the characteristics of the "anatomy" apply neatly to Hugh Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry*, and help to clarify the organizing principle underlying the book. In adopting the Menippean Satire, Brackenridge wisely chose a form most congenial to his own taste and habit of mind. His biographer has pointed out that when he most desired to influence his fellow citizens — as for example during the Whiskey Rebellion when his ready wit helped to avert mob violence¹⁰ — Brackenridge coupled humor with reason. *Ridendo dicere verum* was his practice from his days at Princeton throughout his life. His irony was not always recognized, even by the same sympathetic biographer, and undoubtedly contributed to his relative lack of success in political life, yet it is the key to his vision of the American scene and to the purpose of his long narrative.

The verse interludes traditional to this form of satire were equally natural to Brackenridge, whose earliest literary experiments had been with poetry. He had collaborated with his classmate, Philip Freneau, on an "epic" poem, *The Rising Glory of America*, and had originally begun his major work in imitation of Butler's *Hudibras* (p. 76). *The Modern Chevalier* soon was wisely abandoned in favor of the prose version, *Modern Chivalry*, but Brackenridge maintained his interest

⁹ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, 1957), 302-314.

¹⁰ C. M. Newlin, *The Life and Writings of Hugh Henry Brackenridge* (Princeton, 1932), 135-165.

in poetry. The "Introduction" to Volume III contains two long satirical poems in Hudibrastic verse, one on critics (pp. 164-167), the other on the Order of the Cincinnati (pp. 173-194). Part II of *Modern Chivalry* includes another poetic satire, a mock-heroic dialogue between George III and Charon, as well as a half-dozen ribald songs of "Clommel the Ballad-singer" which give vivid expression to the ideas of the prose narrative. Brackenridge makes it clear (p. 799) that, unlike Fielding, he does not think of his book as an "epic," although he is clearly aware of its relationship to poetry.

Still another characteristic of the "anatomy" which is found in *Modern Chivalry* is the piling up of exhaustive displays of erudition. "No one can have a greater contempt of Pedantry . . . than I have," observes Brackenridge (p. 543), and many of his disquisitions on obscure points of law, on language (pp. 580ff), and on every imaginable topic, are ironic parodies of pedantic scholarship, as is his chapter "In the manner of Montaigne" (pp. 616ff). The fact that "Latin quotations abound more than a reader of English may be disposed to relish" (p. 464) is in part an instance of this exuberant erudition. It is true that allusions to classical authors in Volume I alone outnumber references to English writers three to one, and that in the same brief space at least a dozen quotations from Latin authors appear. This trait serves an additional purpose, however. It is more than a reflection of Brackenridge's personal taste for the Classics; it is a hint that in them we can look for his purpose and his models. "I have a great mind, in order to elevate the composition, to make quotations from the Greek and Roman history" (p. 21), Brackenridge says, though it is not his composition he wishes to elevate, but his fellow citizens. "Captain Farrago was a good man, but unacquainted with the world. His ideas were drawn chiefly from what may be called the old school; the Greek and Roman notion of things" (p. 53). The ironic ambiguities, the contrast between the Captain's "notion of things" and what he finds as he travels through the world, provide the dialogue on the conflict of ideas which forms Brackenridge's satire. The quotations themselves are pointedly relevant to the theme: *ne sutor ultra crepidam* (p. 11); *unicuique in arte, sua perito, credendum est* (p. 12); *non nascimur nobis ipsis* (p. 53). Thus even the apparently superficial characteristics of the form — verse interpolations, learned catalogs of the "light things" which he promises his future readers: "a comparison of Thucydides with Livy; thoughts on the Egyptian hieroglyphics; on the Carthaginian commerce; a comparison

of the French and English eloquence; a supplement to Buffon, containing a description of several genera of animals not taken notice of by him; hints for the improvement of the microscope; on the use of the Masoretic points; on the recent origin of the earth; on the criminal code of the Siamese, &c." (p. 76), the tone of contemplative irony — serve the central purpose of the satire.

In naturalizing the classical and European form, Brackenridge adapted it skillfully to the American situation and produced a permanently significant fiction which — for all its scholarship — was at home on the raw American frontier. Like the literature of Romanticism somewhat later, this neoclassical form was transplanted successfully to democratic soil, but something in the American intellectual climate inhibited the growth of its wilder excesses. The influence of Colonial restraint, and above all of moral and utilitarian purpose, must account in part for the modifications Brackenridge made in the genre.

One of these is the lack of emphasis on sexual and scatological extravagances, in comparison with its English counterparts. Brackenridge's book is robust, violent, and broadly farcical, but the difference is noticeable. The most obvious modification, however, lies in the nature of the digressions. Although the effect of these is to strengthen the link to Swift and Sterne, it is soon observed that the interchapters, for all their abrupt dislocation of the structure, are not in fact digressions from the theme. They are instead an essential and integral part of the whole, making possible an elaborate dramatic counterpoint which creates the total impact of the book. The flat, static quality of the characters — who are for the most part merely clever caricatures like Duncan Ferguson, Tom the Tinker, the Latin schoolmaster, the Visionary Philosopher, or the French dancing-master — maintains this pattern, since the dramatic interest lies in the conflict of ideas and not in the characters themselves.

The narrative exists to display its author's vision of his world in terms of his single intellectual preoccupation. With almost geometric precision, he repeats his pattern. Thus it was possible for Brackenridge to continue writing, revising, and publishing *Modern Chivalry* piecemeal over a period of at least twenty-five years because of the nature of its form. A novel or a romance composed under such circumstances would surely suffer from a hopeless lack of unity. *Modern Chivalry* is entirely unified, not by plot or character development, but by its theme. The recurrence of similar episodes is explained by Brackenridge as

the system I proposed, not to exhaust a subject all at once, but to touch it for the present, and introduce it afterwards in a different point of view, . . . just as, in order to preserve a relish for the same food, we do not dine upon it in continuance, but having had veal to day, take pork tomorrow, and the third day return to veal again.

Having certain ideas to inculcate, I bring them forward at various times, and in various shapes . . . (p. 224)

But at whatever time and in whatever shape they occur, they are all variations upon a single idea, and every varied episode goes to support Brackenridge's unifying theme: "There is freedom enough in the constitution; why need we be afraid of aristocracy in practice" (p. 448)?

The roadside adventures of Teague and the Captain are, therefore, more than mere stock elements in a typical eighteenth century rogue's progress. An analysis of the first two chapters of Part I may serve to bear this assertion out. This portion of the book constitutes the "first unit" (p. xxiv) of *Modern Chivalry* and serves to demonstrate Brackenridge's technique clearly.

Volume I begins with an introduction in which the author describes the purpose of his work. He has undertaken the noble task of setting an example of English prose style which will serve to regularize the English language as no Dictionaries or Academies could do. To this end, he will attempt only style, without content or the "smallest degree of sense" (p. 4) which might detract from the perfection of his style. Brackenridge has here created the pattern to which he will recur whenever he might be accused of a satiric purpose or of any deeper meaning behind his narrative.

Chapter I of Book I introduces Captain Farrago and his man Teague, about to "ride about the world a little, . . . to see how things were going on here and there, and to observe human nature" (p. 6). Their first adventure takes them to the Races, where the Captain's plough horse is mistaken for an entry in spite of his courteous protests. The jockeys demand to know its pedigree; the Captain reasonably points out that even among men lineage is no guarantee of worth. The racing is conducted with so little regard for decorum that the Captain undertakes to appeal to the crowd as reasonable men, but he is jostled, falls from his horse, and injures his head. He is treated by a surgeon who uses so much medical jargon that the Captain rejects his advice in disgust. The narrative is an omniscient account in the third person. It is followed in Chapter II by a brief series of "General Reflections" on the events. The observation to be made on each action in the brief narrative links it to the underlying theme

of the satire as a whole. The Captain's good sense in recognizing that his horse was not qualified to be a race horse is to be commended, the author points out, for we should be concerned with "cultivating and shewing to the best advantage the powers we possess," and not with "going beyond them" (p. 11). The Captain was wrong, however, in attempting to compose the differences of the crowd "by reason and good sense," for they are not men who are accessible by such means. The third reflection on the Captain, while sympathetic toward his irritation at the surgeon, makes a negative judgment also. The Captain should have followed his professional advice, for "everyone is to be trusted in his profession according to his skill" (p. 12). These two short chapters establish the pattern which is to shape *Modern Chivalry*: first, the reader is presented with a brief narrative in which Captain Farrago confronts a social institution or manifestation of human nature and comments upon it. Then a chapter of observations follows, in which the author offers a kind of editorial on the implications of the narrative and his comments upon his own actors.

The pattern continues to explore similar oppositions. Even the rowdy comedy of the clergyman and the housemaid in Chapter I, Book III, becomes an instance of the dangers inherent in trusting to circumstantial evidence, especially when furnished by a Teague Oregon. The romantic tale of the melancholy young man at the inn in Chapter I of Book VI, though it begins very much like a Pickwickian encounter or a passage from Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*, is no less relevant to the theme of *Modern Chivalry*, for it is a condemnation of inequality in love as in all other human relationships. In the edition of 1797, Volume IV of Part I; and in the three volumes of Part II, which appeared in 1804, 1805, and 1815, Brackenridge altered his method slightly. "It may be observed," he remarked,

that as I advance in my book, I make fewer chapters, by way of commentary, and occupy myself chiefly with the narrative. It is the characteristic of old age, and may be decorous towards the conclusion of the work. (p. 278)

It is scarcely necessary to observe that neither are the chapters which follow conspicuously decorous, nor was Brackenridge at forty-nine noticeably afflicted by the "old age" which had yet to impair his style when he died at sixty-eight. There is, however, a change in the average length of chapters and in the extent to which the narrative is developed, although chapters of commentary still continue to be frequent. As in Fielding's fiction, a paragraph of comment often occurs within a narrative episode. The only real significance of the change

lies in the fact that the author has matured. His technique is even more firmly under control, and he has gained greater flexibility in handling the structural and rhetorical devices used to create — not an unsuccessful novel — but a brilliant example of the Menippean Satire.

II

The frame of narrative which loosely contains a *mélange* of incident and opinion is a characteristic of structure common to traditional satire. As an organizing principle, the frame provides "a semi-dramatic situation in which vice and folly may reasonably be dissected. Here is the heart of the satire," and while only "the demands of relevance bind . . . [the work] internally . . . the frame binds it externally."¹¹ Within the frame of a formal verse satire, no matter how disorganized it may appear, a common structural principle has been detected.¹² In general, such a work is built around a conflict between the satirist and an adversary who opposes his views and who thus provides the occasion for the dialogue. To dramatize his theme, the verse satirist has traditionally used

miniature dramas, sententious proverbs and quotable maxims, . . . compressed beast fables (often reduced to animal metaphors), brief sermons, sharp debates, series of vignettes, swiftly sketched but painstakingly built up satiric "characters" or portraits, figure processions, little fictions and apologues, visions, apostrophes and invocations to abstractions — anything and everything to push his argument forward to its philosophical and psychological conclusions in much the same manner as events might push action forward to a denouement in drama or fiction.¹³

The Varronian satirist or anatomist in prose has appropriately drawn upon the same rich variety of structural and rhetorical elements to implement his satire. This fact serves in part to explain the charge that *Modern Chivalry* is "chaotic," for Brackenridge has with propriety adhered to this classic formula for his "farrago." He uses most of the common elements of formal satire, deriving from the classical Greek and Latin prototypes, and also reflecting the modes and themes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England. Within the frame of *Modern Chivalry* can be distinguished so many of these elements that only a sampling can be cited here. A closer analysis of Brackenridge's "Observations" would yield interesting examples of the adaptation of the technique of formal Aristotelian logic and rhetoric

¹¹ Robert C. Elliott, *The Power of Satire* (Princeton, 1960), 111.

¹² Mary Claire Randolph, "The Structural Design of the Formal Verse Satire," *PQ*, XXI (1942), 368-384.

¹³ Randolph, 373.

to the service of his irony. Mock-logic and the traditional methods of argument — exordium, narration, digression, division of proofs, peroration — are employed very much as they are in Swift's more famous satires,¹⁴ and further investigation would be most rewarding. The appeal to authority and the argument from parallel examples, for instance, account for most of the pseudo-scholarly digressions and sententious maxims with which the work is plentifully sprinkled. The scope of *Modern Chivalry* is so extensive, however, that a preliminary examination of only the more conspicuous ingredients of the satire will be useful.

The rhetorical techniques of *Modern Chivalry* are a major factor in the success of the satire. It has been pointed out that "the devices of rhetoric are conspicuous in great satire,"¹⁵ and that these devices intended to "win the reader"¹⁶ preclude mere polemic or gross invective. However deeply the satirist is moved to criticize human personal and social conduct, he must contrive "ways of making readers comprehend and remember that criticism and adopt it as their own"¹⁷ or he cannot achieve his purpose. The ways open to him are the traditional techniques of rhetorical persuasion and the resources of his individual imagination. Laughter as a social corrective belongs to no century and to no literary form alone. Hugh Brackenridge indicated from the beginning, however, that *Modern Chivalry* was to be read as a satire in the classical tradition. By invoking in his epigraphs both Horace, who brought more ethical content to the genre, and Juvenal, who enlarged its scope,¹⁸ Brackenridge reminds the reader of his own solid grounding in the classics.¹⁹ In his themes as well as his forms he echoes Democritus and Aristophanes; the presumptuous Teague and Traddle the Weaver resemble the sausage seller of Aristophanes' *Knights*, who — according to Demosthenes — has "all the statesman's advantages" because he is totally unqualified for public office. Like Robert Burton, the "Democritus Junior" who saw "wise men degraded, fools preferred . . . the world turned upside downward . . .,"²⁰ Brackenridge felt it was better to laugh than to weep, "to be," as he put it, "Democritus" (p. 663). Among Samuel Butler's many imitators in the art of political verse satire, H. H. Brackenridge must, of course,

14 Charles Allen Beaumont, *Swift's Classical Rhetoric* (Athens, Georgia, 1961), presents a detailed analysis of Swift's practice.

15 David Worcester, *The Art of Satire* (New York, 1960), 8.

16 Worcester, 14.

17 Worcester, 13.

18 Gilbert Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire* (Princeton, 1962), 41.

19 Newlin, *Life*, 4-10.

20 Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, I (London, 1837), 55.

be included,²¹ not merely for the use of Hudibrastic verse in *The Modern Chevalier* and in his shorter poems, but more significantly because Butler, too, "felt allegiance to truth; he felt, or at least he expressed, no allegiance to any party."²² It is hardly surprising that Brackenridge should have found the satiric forms of his predecessors as compatible as he found their views, and that he should have adopted many of their techniques. His admiration for Dryden (p. 171), who himself with justice "claimed to be writing Varronian satire,"²³ and for Swift, who "relied almost exclusively upon classical rhetoric as a means of creating the ironies of his essays,"²⁴ leads us to expect that *Modern Chivalry* will follow a similar plan. As orator, clergyman, and lawyer, Brackenridge was schooled in the formal rhetoric of his own age as well as of the past, and we may look for the patterns of those special disciplines in the fabric of his narrative.

The strategy of point of view is a most notable instance of the effective use of a rhetorical device in *Modern Chivalry*. Satire requires a perspective, an illusion of detachment from the ideas and foibles criticized, which will at once disarm and persuade the reader. To achieve this distance, the author often adopts one or more masks, not only the personae of his characters but also — more subtly — the role of author as character. This creation of an author's voice which is as consciously an artifact as those of the personages of his work is not, of course, confined to satire. Wayne C. Booth has explored in a most illuminating study the way in which Henry Fielding (whom Brackenridge so greatly admired) invented for his novels a distinct personality whom the reader accepts as Fielding himself yet who is in reality "the narrator created to speak in his name."²⁵ However true this may be of novels, however, the method is especially effective in satires. Swift used it brilliantly in his "Modest Proposal" and in the work Brackenridge called his "model," *The Tale of a Tub*. Essentially the technique involves the creation of an implied author of distinct characteristics and habits of mind. The "Modern Author" of Swift's *Tale* is not Swift, and the elaborate dedicatory apparatus with which the work begins is more than a whimsical conceit: it serves to confirm the author's separate existence. The humane proponent of the "Modest

21 Edward A. Richards, *Hudibras in the Burlesque Tradition* (New York, 1937), 112-113.

22 Richards, 40.

23 Worcester, 157.

24 Beaumont, vii.

25 Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago, 1961), 71-72; 215-218; *et passim*.

Proposal" performs the function of the appeal to "ethical proof" in Aristotelian rhetoric, for he is established as a well-intentioned and disinterested citizen, more than a trifle obtuse but undeniably sincere.²⁶ As many as six separate personae have been distinguished in *The Tale of a Tub*,²⁷ and the multiple masks of Gulliver form a most interesting study.²⁸ It is both a naive and a dangerous misreading to assume that these speak consistently or continuously for Swift himself; it is equally naive to make a comparable assumption about the voice of the author in *Modern Chivalry*. The candor with which Brackenridge acknowledged his models suggests the immediate source of his technique.

Brackenridge's more discursive work enabled him to develop this technique to the full and even to elaborate upon it, so that point of view becomes a very successful vehicle for irony. The "author" whose personality emerges from the pages of *Modern Chivalry* is not the independent jurist, Hugh Henry Brackenridge. He is, however, an ideally convincing voice — reasonable, dispassionate, most unwilling to give offense by his observations (pp. 574-575). He has weaknesses, but they are those calculated to convince the reader of his trustworthiness as a witness, for they include a pedant's concern with minutiae and with appeals to authority for support, as well as an innocent self-confidence in the merits of his book (p. 807). The implied presence of this "author" permits a wider range of variation in views expressed, which was clearly Brackenridge's intent.

That Brackenridge fully intended this divergence of views is emphasized by his own description of the plan of *Modern Chivalry*:

We have written this book in the manner of certain of the ancients; that is, with a *dramatic cast*. The book of Job, is amongst the earliest of all compositions, and after an introduction containing a history of his misfortunes, and malady, introduces the speakers in three different characters, and names, each sustaining his opinion; and giving the author an opportunity to canvass the subject he had in view, the ways of Providence, and to give lessons of humility and resignation to man . . . [The method was used also by] Plato in his dialogues . . . Zenophon . . . , [and] Sir Thomas More. (p. 630)

This use of the "dramatic cast" is reminiscent of Brackenridge's experience as a playwright. But it is significant to note that in his plays "the drama is carried on through conversation" and that, although "there is no satire here, [the work] . . . is the expression of one great quality, that of courage."²⁹ Even in his writing for the stage, therefore,

²⁶ Beaumont, 16-17.

²⁷ Ricardo Quintana, *Swift: An Introduction* (London, 1954), 54-61.

²⁸ Elliott, 184-222.

²⁹ Arthur Hobson Quinn, *A History of the American Drama from the Beginning to the Civil War*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1943), 50.

Brackenridge was anticipating the Menippean dialogue upon a central theme which was to be his major work. The presence of the implied author in *Modern Chivalry* broadens the scope of this dialogue and enhances its irony. For the figure of Brackenridge as author is elusive: at times he speaks in his assumed character; at times the mask is dropped and the ardent and independent patriot, the rational justice, speaks out soberly and without ambiguity. Part of the reader's delight in watching the controlling consciousness of Brackenridge manipulate his dramatic cast derives from the unexpected quality of these glimpses, for there is no external indication by which Brackenridge in fact can be distinguished from Brackenridge in fiction. This apparent inconsistency or confusion is by no means a defect in *Modern Chivalry*. Similar discrepancies between the conflicting characters of Gulliver have been logically attributed to Swift's "free use of the mask," made possible because he was not governed by "a novelist's primary regard for the absolute integrity of the fictitious character itself."³⁰ In the same way, the naive Brackenridge-character and the consciously ironic Brackenridge-author are opposed with complete propriety since "what in novels would be called inconsistency in characterization can be found in nearly all Menippean satires."³¹

In the anatomy of his masks, Brackenridge deftly assimilates many other elements of traditional satire. Linked to the use of the "implied author" in his satiric dialogue, for example, is the adaptation of the device of the innocent abroad. Captain Farrago is far from being — as he has been termed — "always Brackenridge's *alter ego*."³² Rather, he is in the tradition of Don Quixote, of Candide and the Huron of *L'Ingénu*, of Gulliver — he is the simple good soul unable or unprepared to comprehend the world in which he finds himself. Like Don Quixote, he upholds the values of an earlier, nobler time, and he finds the standards of Greece and Rome nearly as inappropriate to the contemporary scene as were the Knight's dreams of chivalry. Like Voltaire's heroes, he sometimes finds his innocence a dangerous handicap; and his rather prosaic and commonplace nature, like that of Gulliver, throws into sharper relief the extraordinary circumstances he encounters. His observations are predictably reasonable but limited, and the presence of the voice of the author-as-character provides a

30 William Bragg Ewald, *The Masks of Jonathan Swift* (Oxford, 1954), 148.

31 Elliott, 191.

32 Newlin, *Life*, 117.

pattern of correction and amplification of Farrago's views. Yet this author himself is as fictional as Farrago, and one of the most successful vehicles for the real Brackenridge's irony.

A characteristic use of the voice of the created author occurs in the fifth book of the second volume of Part I. In the first chapter of this book, the Captain attends a meeting of the Philosophical Society. Brackenridge had already satirized this body because of its lowered standards for membership (pp. 23-27), and here he returns to the attack. On the present occasion the speaker before the Society is Cuff, an illiterate Negro slave, and his topic is the origin of the races of mankind. The first man and woman were black, Cuff theorizes (p. 116), and their offspring were bleached by the elements to their present varying shades of skin. This brief narrative chapter is followed by observations by the author (pp. 117-118) in which his own theory on the origin of the races is more elaborately logical and formal but no more reasonable than that proposed in dialect by Cuff. The ingenuity of his theory and his references to scripture and to scholarly works both reflect the naive author, as does his alleged "diffidence" (p. 117). The created author typically speaks again (pp. 306-307) on the absence of a classical precedent for the custom of tarring and feathering, which he concludes to be a "revolutionary punishment . . . answering the same end, but with a more mild operation, than that of the lantern, at the commencement of the revolution in France" (p. 307).

Among similar ironic observations, the chapter on lawyers as a necessary evil (p. 394) is especially effective. The device of concession is here used extensively; the author pretends to be considering objectively the current mania, vividly dramatized in the preceding narrative chapter, for abolishing the rule of law. In acknowledging that the legal process is time-consuming, that judges may be tyrannical and lawyers long-winded, he creates the illusion of such scrupulous fairness that the reader must be disarmed. "I think, all things considered," he observes mildly, "that there is some use in courts of justice" (p. 395), and the litotes neatly supports the irony of the chapter. In contrast to the ambiguity in the voice of Brackenridge as the created author, the truth is sometimes presented without equivocation through the mask of a minor character. "What is the reason, said the Captain, to a Gentleman who dined with him the next day, of the fluctuations of parties in republics?" (p. 399), and the anonymous Gentleman briefly and rationally sets forth the views of the real Judge Brackenridge. At times also such views are presented directly. In his

"Observations" on the importance of education to a democracy (p. 401), on the political history of Pennsylvania and on false economy in government (pp. 471-474), and on the definition of practical democracy (pp. 530-537), the author speaks straightforwardly, without the mask.

One of the most interesting uses of the ironic mask of the author is to be found in Brackenridge's canvassing of the exceedingly sensitive question of slavery. Here the pattern is the usual formula: a situation arises which permits a brief narrative and a dramatic dialogue (in this instance between Captain Farrago and a Quaker), and a chapter "Containing Remarks" by the author follows. The Captain's arguments ostensibly advocating the institution of slavery contain excellent examples of false logic and sophistry. The law of nature is one of force; the ancients practiced slavery; and in any event all men do not "love freedom, even when they have it" (p. 136). "Thy reasoning, said the Quaker, is more rhetorical than logical" (p. 137), and the author continues the commentary in the next chapter. "It is thought by some, the Captain was not serious in thus advocating the cause of slavery" (p. 138), he begins, and the reader expects that he will proceed to correct the Captain's judgment as he has frequently done. Whatever doubts have been raised by the Captain's rhetoric will surely be dispelled by the more trustworthy voice of the author. But a magnificent example of the irony of inversion follows instead. The Captain, we are told, "omitted some serious arguments, that naturally present themselves on that side on which he reasoned" (p. 138), and the author goes on to demolish the pro-slavery arguments totally while affecting rationally to defend them on legal and moral grounds. This brief passage demonstrates Brackenridge at his ironic best. If the original act of enslaving an African were morally evil, how could so many humane persons hold slaves, since they would become in effect receivers of stolen goods? Therefore, the original traffic must be justified, especially since no religious bodies "except the fanatical people called Quakers" (p. 138) have made slavery a question of conscience. *Gradual* abolition has been advocated, and Brackenridge has always thought it "a defect in the criminal codes of most nations, not giving licence to the perpetrators of offences, to proceed, for a limited time, in larcencies, burglaries, &c. until they get their hands out of use to these pursuits, and in use to others" (p. 139). The objection to the gradual method is that it will "entramel the case with *political* or *moral* doubts respecting the

original right of caption" (p. 139),³³ and such doubts would be dangerous. They might even cause pious churchmen to recall that "the African . . . is of their own species" (p. 139), and refuse to keep slaves. As for the legal aspects of the matter, the author professes fear that some "young lawyers" might plead the Constitution, which declares "all *men* are born equally free and independent." If the Negro is a man, "on a habeas corpus, he must be set at liberty," and may even be enfranchised under the Constitution. But the law favoring gradual abolition seems to imply that he may be a slave, though the Constitution represents a higher law than that of the legislature. And if he may be a slave, and therefore property, how can the "legislature affect that property, without indemnification to the masters?" By obscuring the ethical problem under tangles of legal interpretation, Brackenridge satirizes churchmen, jurists, slaveholders in general. In this chapter, he rises briefly to a level of ironic rhetoric equal to that of Swift's more extended treatments, and reminiscent of the "Modest Proposal" in particular. The mask of the created author has been used with great skill, and the satire has served to disarm the reader and to move him to the author's true opinion.

(To be continued)

33 All italics in quotations are from Brackenridge's text.