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"Creating Power:" Social Mobility and the
Transformative Vision in Hugh Henry Brackenridge's
Modern Chivalry

Jon D. Blackstock

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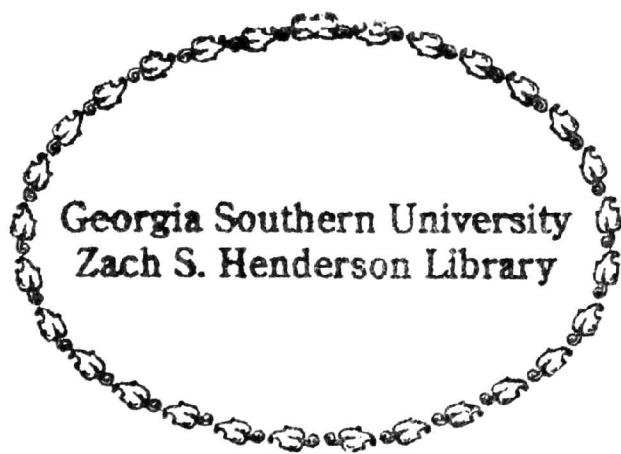
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"CREATING POWER": SOCIAL MOBILITY AND THE
TRANSFORMATIVE VISION IN HUGH HENRY
BRACKENRIDGE'S MODERN CHIVALRY

Jon D. Blackstock



Georgia Southern University
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“CREATING POWER”: SOCIAL MOBILITY AND THE
TRANSFORMATIVE VISION IN HUGH HENRY
BRACKENRIDGE’S *MODERN CHIVALRY*

A Thesis

Presented to

the College of Graduate Studies of

Georgia Southern University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master’s of Arts

In the Department of

Literature and Philosophy

by

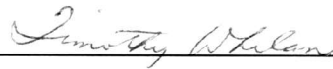
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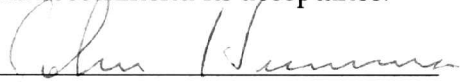
To the Graduate School:

This thesis, entitled "'Creating Power': Social Mobility and the Transformative Vision in Hugh Henry Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry*" and written by Jonathan Blackstock, is presented to the College of Graduate Studies of Georgia Southern University. I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master's Degree in English.

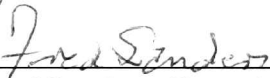


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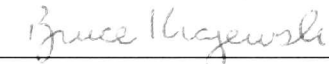
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my family members for their support, especially my wife Cheryl Blackstock and to our children Paul, Marissa, and Jack. Without their patience and support, I would not have been able to complete this thesis and degree.

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- “Poverty, My Friend” (Poem). *Slow Trains*. Fall 2001.
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Chapter I:

Introduction

Hugh Henry Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry* is America's first important novel. Preceded by promotional literature, plain-style journals, didactic domestic novels, and America's canon of legal and political documents, Brackenridge's picaresque novel presents a vision of America from multiple points of view, ranging from the uneducated Irish servant Teague O'Regan to the much-lampooned philosophical societies. Possibly the novel's most significant purpose is that it illustrates a commonality in the new American democracy that transcends economics, social class, and education: each citizen believes he has the right to transform the new government according to his own vision. Like his contemporaries, Brackenridge attempted to transform American politics and society according to his own transformative vision, but in *Modern Chivalry*, he presents his vision along with many different and often contrary visions.

Claude M. Newlin refers to *Modern Chivalry* as "[...] the most vigorous American book of [...Brackenridge's] time and the most penetrating commentary on American democracy in the making" ("Introduction" xl). The novel is "penetrating" because Brackenridge had first-hand experience trying to educate and motivate the people whose voices, he believed, were being distorted in America's representative democracy. He also believed these people, who shared

in America's creation and culture, had to develop a reasonable decision-making process if this "democracy in the making" could defend itself against aristocracy and "mobocracy" and become a rational democracy. *Modern Chivalry* is Brackenridge's most important outlet for his transformative imagination. Because the novel contains autobiographical elements and because Brackenridge's vision is the most balanced observation of the burgeoning new country, discussions of his imagination must begin with the author's life and career. Hugh Henry Brackenridge's early career, as a political writer, lawyer, and frontier legislator, proved fertile ground for his imagination, an imagination shaped by the dual reality of America as a society that transforms individuals as well as a society that was constantly being transformed by the power of each individual's imagination.

Hugh Henry Brackenridge's journeys began when he was five years old. In 1758, his father William Brackenridge, an impoverished farmer, moved his family from Scotland to York County, Pennsylvania, with hopes of improving his fortune.¹ According to Claude M. Newlin, William Brackenridge's transformative vision resembled the mass migration that caused many people to trade European poverty for the New World's promise:

Impoverished by the civil wars, and despairing of improving his condition at home, William Brackenridge turned to the New World to rehabilitate his fortunes, and in 1753, when Hugh

Henry was five years old, the family embarked for Pennsylvania, a microcosm in that great Celtic migration of the eighteenth century which gave to the American colonies their first real frontiersmen. (1-2)

Although the family desperately needed every available laborer to maintain their existence on the family farm, Hugh Henry Brackenridge was fortunate to have been born to a family that encouraged his eternal desire for education.

In his "Biographical Notice of H. H. Brackenridge" (1842), Henry Marie Brackenridge explains how his father's desire and genius made his success almost inevitable:

Great ardor in any pursuit will almost create for itself the means of success; but when sustained by genius, all difficulties give way before it, and impossibilities no longer exist. (2)

According to his son, Hugh Henry Brackenridge's early education shows as much ardor as genius despite the rampant difficulties the frontier threw in the young scholar's path. ² As a pupil of a local clergyman, Brackenridge learned Latin and "ma[d]e some progress in the Greek" by the age of thirteen.

Brackenridge lacked enthusiasm for outdoor work and his parents encouraged his study. His mother may have been such an advocate because she looked forward to having her son become a clergyman himself (2). The biggest

challenge to Brackenridge's education was the attainment of books, and he often traveled twenty or thirty miles for a book or a newspaper.

Brackenridge eventually exhausted the frontier's educational opportunities, and, in what Newlin says is Brackenridge's "first move for a better environment" (8), he applied for a teaching position in Gunpowder Falls, Maryland, when he was fifteen. According to his son, the school administrators were amazed by Brackenridge's qualifications, especially considering his age (2). The move to Gunpowder Falls allowed Brackenridge to further his learning, considering that a legal career might offer a "better chance for glory than the pulpit" (qtd. in *Life* 7). Before long, however, he realized that further education would be necessary, especially if he chose to pursue a legal career.

Brackenridge left Gunpowder Falls, entered the College of New Jersey, and began his literary career as a student at the College of New Jersey during the "paper wars" between the Cliosophian Society and the Whig Society, the latter of which was formed in 1769 by Brackenridge, Philip Freneau, William Bradford,³ and James Madison. These leaders contributed poems under the collected title *Satires against the Tories. Written in the last War between the Whigs and the Cliosophians in which the former obtained a compleat Victory* (*Life* 11).⁴ During his college years, Brackenridge did not consider himself a poet and felt more comfortable collaborating with Philip Freneau in 1770 to write *Father Bombo's Pilgrimage to Mecca*, a work that Michael Davitt Bell contends is America's first

novel (ix). Although this work may not be great literature, it serves two important purposes: it initiated Brackenridge's literary partnership with Philip Freneau, a partnership that led to their commencement poem for the College of New Jersey graduating class of 1771. In "The Rising Glory of America," the two young political reformers looked optimistically at the new country that was ready to be transformed into a new promised land:

Paradise anew

Shall flourish, by no second Adam lost,
 No dangerous tree with deadly fruit shall grow,
 No tempting serpent to allure the soul
 From native innocence. — A *Canaan* here,
 Another *Canaan* shall excel the old,
 And from a fairer Pisgah's top be seen. (16)

The optimistic collaborators later worked together in a school in Somerset County, Maryland (*Life* 25).⁵

In 1774, Brackenridge suffered a "nervous breakdown" and returned to the College of New Jersey to earn his Master's degree.⁶ At the commencement exercises, he read his *Poem on Divine Revelation* (*Life* 27). Brackenridge wrote two patriotic plays to be performed by the students at the Maryland academy, *The Battle of Bunkers-Hill* (1776) and *The Death of General Montgomery* (1777).

Brackenridge then left the academy to become an army chaplain. Although he

was licensed to preach, he was never ordained as a minister. His son mentions that Brackenridge could not preach values and theories in which he did not believe (3-4). The legacy of Brackenridge's foray into theology appeared in *Six Political Discourses Founded on the Scriptures* (1778). As the title implies and as his introduction to this book states, these sermons were mainly secular speeches (*Life* 41).⁷

When Hugh Henry Brackenridge moved to Philadelphia in 1778, he found a chaotic city. Newlin explains post-Revolutionary Philadelphia in terms of its excess, saying "Reckless extravagance was the rule of the day; failing credit and increased issues of paper money went hand in hand; soaring prices, futile legislation, hoarding, and speculation all played their part in the economic, social, and spiritual breakdown" (44).⁸ Brackenridge saw an opportunity to find some balance in this time of excess, and in January 1779, he circulated the first issue of his *United States Magazine*. His introduction to this magazine reveals his optimism about the new democracy. He writes, "We regard it as our great happiness in these United States that the path to office and preferment, lies open to every individual." This included manual laborers, such as "[t]he mechanic of the city, or the husbandman who ploughs his farm by the river bank" (Preface and Introduction 70). Unlike his later statements in the introduction to *Modern Chivalry* that each person should do only one thing (3-4), he says in the magazine's introduction that every individual has an "obligation [...] to exert a

double industry" involving both commerce and governmental duties. He knows that some people will not be able to obtain first-rate educations because the necessary time will conflict with their "daily occupations" (Preface and Introduction 71-2). He proposes that his new magazine will help educate these people so that they can become active citizens exhibiting his idea of "double industry."

As he would do later in *Modern Chivalry*, Brackenridge equates human beings with their imaginative capabilities in the *United States Magazine*. He asks, "For what is man without taste, and the acquirement of genius? An Ouran Outan, with the human shape, and the soul of a beast." He attempts to inspire his readers to support quality literature, noting that England always thought Americans would sink to a subhuman level. He says, "We hope to convince them [the British] yet more fully, that we are able to cultivate the *belles lettres*, even disconnected with Great-Britain; and that liberty is of so noble and energetic quality, as even from the bosom of a war to call forth the powers of human genius, in every course of literary fame and improvement" (Preface and Introduction 70-71). Brackenridge sees literary pursuits as something necessary, not distracting, to this new republic. Liberty and humanity require imaginative pursuits and their corresponding improvements.

Unfortunately, the *United States Magazine* failed because Brackenridge was too "adept in the gentle art of making enemies." As Newlin contends, "Almost

every party and class had felt in turn the sting of his biting wit, inspired in part by a concern for the public good, and in part, it seems, by a spirit of sheer mischief" (54). When the *United States Magazine* folded, Brackenridge exchanged literature for law and studied under Samuel Chase in Annapolis. In 1780, Brackenridge was admitted to practice law in Philadelphia, but after only one year, he moved to Pittsburgh, then a frontier town. Brackenridge changed his name at this time to Hugh Henry Brackenridge and crossed the Allegheny Mountains, leaving "America's political and intellectual metropolis" with the hopes that he might "emerge" as a prominent lawyer and politician in the frontier (*Life* 58-59).

For the next five years, Brackenridge established his legal career and married his first wife, a Miss Montgomery, about whom little is known. In 1786, he helped establish America's first frontier newspaper (the *Pittsburgh Gazette*), saw the birth of his son Henry Marie Brackenridge (11 May 1786), and was elected to the Pennsylvania State Assembly. During his election campaign, he promised to support land payments in part with state certificates of indebtedness, but he rescinded this promise because he believed "it would be injurious to the interest of the people in the western country" (*Life* 76-77). Brackenridge made this unpopular decision because he saw the whole state's needs rather than just the part that elected him, and he believed he knew more about his constituents' welfare than they did. Newlin says these statements

convinced no one because they were perceived to be “specious and insincere” (77). Newlin believes Brackenridge changed his mind for mainly honest reasons, but he may have changed his mind also because he felt more closely aligned to the more educated “expert” politicians of the East than to his uneducated constituents (77). William Findley, Brackenridge’s political antagonist, explained this in his letter to the *Pittsburgh Gazette*, which appeared on 28 April 1787, arguing that Brackenridge betrayed the constituents because he has a “most shining imagination, [that] makes a prey of the people’s confidence, betrays their interests, and trifles with his own solemn professions [...]” (qtd in *Life* 80). Brackenridge claimed Findley, a former weaver, simply wanted to advance his fortune by becoming a “man of the people,” but Brackenridge believed Findley did not really work on the people’s behalf due to his inability to make important legislative decisions (83-84).

As a result of his political experiences, Brackenridge wrote the Hudibrastic epic *The Modern Chevalier*, a precursor to the prose *Modern Chivalry*.⁹ Between 1789 and 1793, Brackenridge experienced a significant political transformation, breaking with the Federalist Party and becoming a spokesman for the opposition. Newlin contends that Brackenridge’s pre-occupation with the French Revolution in 1793, as well as his own “divided sympathies” in Western Pennsylvania politics, kept him from supporting or protesting the excise laws that led, at least in part, to the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794.

This rebellion provided a turning point in Brackenridge's life. Many of the Irish immigrants, who did not discern between laws of the elected legislature and laws intended to "bind them in all cases whatsoever," hated the excise laws. According to Henry Marie Brackenridge, the insurgents who refused to pay the taxes and who chased off tax collectors "only followed, as they supposed, the recent example of the American Revolution" (5). Brackenridge's son also believed that the laws were especially oppressive to the frontiersmen because whiskey was the only commodity they could feasibly carry to market, an oppressive nature that at least in part caused the greater violence in the Western protests.

Brackenridge agreed to attend a meeting held to protest the excise laws because he wanted to present a voice of reason to the crowd, as someone who opposed both the law and the violent protests, but he also worried that the meeting would stifle his political ambitions. When he spoke, he began by defusing the argument's seriousness, but finally told the group that serious consequences would result from this act of treason. Although he succeeded by advocating committees rather than violence at this meeting, he gained political enemies among those who had already become violent and among those who thought all who opposed the law were treasonous (8). Brackenridge succeeded in convincing the reasonable middle that they should not resort to violence

against the law, but those who wanted to justify their violence and those who wanted to uphold the law both envisioned Brackenridge as a traitor.

Brackenridge had become the object of the government's suspicion and an enemy to the militia leaders. He even considered leaving this part of the country, but he did not like the prospect of having to start his life again. He said his possessions were tied up in land rather than in money, so he could not leave the frontier now that he had become "too far advanced in life to begin the world altogether" (qtd. in *Life* 153). He also did not want to abandon the country that he had helped transform. According to his son, Brackenridge "saw no prospect of success in their open resistance, and his feelings revolted at the idea of disturbing the peace and harmony of the Republic, which he had assisted to establish" (12). Although Brackenridge tried to calm the insurgents, the government believed Brackenridge to be the leader of the insurrection and David Bradford to be a mere follower (13).¹⁰ When the army eventually advanced to stop the rebellions, Brackenridge remained at home, despite fears that he would be assassinated. A "party of military ruffians" advanced on Brackenridge's house to kill him, but their commanding officer stopped them just before the plan was carried out (16). Brackenridge was eventually subpoenaed as a witness to testify before Secretary of State Alexander Hamilton, who concluded that Brackenridge had not been a traitor (16-17).¹¹

Concerned about how he might be misrepresented by posterity, Brackenridge published *Incidents of the Insurrection in Western Pennsylvania* in 1796. His son states that Brackenridge's popularity grew as a result of his stance during the Whiskey Rebellion. The frontiersmen sympathized with Brackenridge when the government threatened his life, and the government appreciated his services in keeping the violence under control (18). Unfortunately, this new popularity was not enough to win Brackenridge the 8 October 1799 state election. He was, however, appointed to Pennsylvania's supreme court in December of that year by Republican Governor Thomas McKean "as a reward for his services to the Republican party" (*Life* 213). Brackenridge remained active in Pennsylvania politics and served as an advisor to Thomas Jefferson during his successful election campaign. In August 1801, however, Brackenridge abandoned his dream to emerge on the frontier and moved east of the Alleghenies to Carlisle, Pennsylvania (*Life* 240). He remained politically active in Carlisle, concentrating on the impeachment of Supreme Court justices and extremist reformers who were creating rifts in the Republican Party (*Life* 266). With many of these same political concerns in mind, Brackenridge wrote *An Epistle to Walter Scott* (1811) and *Law Miscellanies* (1814). Not long after completing this latter work, Brackenridge died in Carlisle, Pennsylvania on 25 June 1816.

Brackenridge's political experiences in Pennsylvania provided the basis for one of the dominant motifs of his literary and political writings: those individuals who have some genius should be responsible for sharing that genius with the populace, but that the populace, in turn, owes gratitude to the man of genius for having sacrificed his time for literature rather than for wealth.

Brackenridge believed that "when a man of taste considers how much more he owes to those who have increased the store of literature, than to such as have amassed wealth for themselves and others, he will certainly consider the productions of the mind as more deserving his respect, than the acquisitions of the purse-proud; even though there may appear a little vanity in the publications of the author, which he has not had the self denial to suppress, or the prudence to conceal ..." (qtd. in *Life* 273). This passage may be self-reflexive, because Brackenridge knew he had included many biographical elements in his works; but he clearly believed that having lived his life in art, he had used more self-denial than those who simply amassed wealth, improving their finances without improving America.

Brackenridge offers his most comprehensive depiction of his vision of America – its politics, its culture, and its people – in his picaresque epic, *Modern Chivalry: Containing the Adventures of Captain John Farrago, and Teague O'Regan, his Servant*, a multi-volume work which appeared in revised installments between 1792 and 1815. John McCullough published the first two volumes of Part I in

Philadelphia in 1792. The third volume of Part I was published in Pittsburgh in 1793 by John Scull, making it the first book-length work of fiction to be published west of the Allegheny Mountains. Part II of *Modern Chivalry* was published in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, in two volumes (1804, 1805). In 1815, Brackenridge collected all previous volumes into one work for the first time and revised Part II, dividing this part into four volumes. In 1819, a posthumous edition appeared, reflecting revisions Brackenridge intended to make. In 1937, Claude M. Newlin published the most authoritative extant edition of *Modern Chivalry*.¹² Newlin's edition, which combines the second and third volumes of Part II, is the text that is used throughout this thesis.

Throughout *Modern Chivalry*, the dominant character is Captain Farrago, a farmer of some means and education, who sets out, much like Don Quixote, on a quest, not for glory and fame, but to learn the secrets of human nature. Much of *Modern Chivalry* is presented through Farrago's point of view. Other sections, however, periodically interrupt the Captain's narrative and are presented by the outside narrator, who speaks essentially for Brackenridge. The first volume of Part I begins with a general introduction to the novel, in which Brackenridge presents this novel as one that will help "fix the English language." The narrative begins with Captain Farrago leaving his small farm, taking only his horse and his uneducated servant Teague O'Regan to begin a journey to discover the truth about human nature. First, the Captain and his servant discover a

debate before an election that pits an educated politician against a weaver named Traddle. The people ultimately elect the weaver, but not before considering Teague a viable candidate. A conjuror explains to the Captain that people tend to vote for people who most resemble them, a thought that causes the outside narrator to reflect, "It is indeed making a devil of a man to lift him to a state to which he is not suited" (20). Further adventures in the first volume include a confrontation with some irrational members of a philosophical society, lecherous antics by Teague, a near deadly duel between Farrago and an insulted lover, and an attempt by a treaty-maker to hire Teague as a substitute Kickapoo chief.

In the second volume of Part I, The Captain and Teague continue their adventures, meeting a politician who persuades voters by offering them whiskey. Later, Farrago mediates between two men who both claim to be authentic preachers, even though one admits to Farrago that he is an imposter. At one point, Teague disappears, but Farrago finds him playing a witch in *Macbeth* and an Irishman in a farce. Farrago becomes angry with Teague and decides to find another servant. He considers buying a slave, but Teague eventually returns, having been beaten by the theatre manager. Farrago believes Teague should advance in the federal government, so he introduces his servant to the President.

The third volume of Part I begins with Farrago attempting to transform Teague into a presentable candidate for a government job, with the possibility

that the uneducated Irishman might eventually qualify to be a politician. This aspiration develops in Part I, Volume IV when President Washington commissions Teague as an excise officer along the Pennsylvania frontier. As Teague proceeds to his new job, the Captain hires a new servant, Duncan, a Scotsman. Unfortunately, excise officers are among the frontier's most despised individuals, and Teague's first experience on the new job is to be tarred and feathered. The local philosophical society, however, decides that Teague, now completely covered in feathers, is a new species and worthy of scientific study. Meanwhile, troops come to suppress the violent actions against the excise officers. The troops decide to arrest Farrago but decide, thanks to Duncan, that the Captain is deranged rather than criminal. Farrago ends Part I by going home.

The narrative becomes even more random in Part II and begins by acknowledging "a great gap." Farrago has convinced Duncan to become a preacher. As the Captain journeys to a nearby village, he stops to visit a hospital for the insane where he meets a moral philosopher, a lay preacher, a mad democrat, and a mad poet. The lay preacher and the mad democrat debate whether it is proper "that every man should do that which was right in his own eyes."¹³ The Captain continues his journey, discussing government and philosophy with various characters along the way. Farrago tries to convince people that the middle way is best and considers an question that runs

throughout *Modern Chivalry*: “How do you distinguish the demagogue from the patriot?” (415).

In Volume II of Part II, Farrago continues to discover “[h]ow [...] men err when they run from one extreme to another” (472). Farrago discusses education with the principal of a college and finds Teague about to be hanged because the people think he is a judge. After Teague runs away, a member of the lynch mob asks Farrago, “Do you call in question the right of the people [...] to hang their officers?” Farrago asks, “But are you the people?” (485). In discussions with the blind lawyer, Farrago admits that democracy can be distorted at times by the people’s desire to pull down authority, creating situations in which politicians confuse at times the voice of the people with what may only be the voice of the loud minority. The blind lawyer and Farrago try to convince Teague that he owes himself to the commonwealth and that he should be the devil the people want him to be. Teague soon disappears, but Farrago discovers that he has become a part of a conjuror’s show, playing the part of the devil. The blind lawyer agrees that the conjuror’s show is a fraud but says no legal action should be taken because the people are willing participants in the fraud. Remarkably, Teague eventually becomes a judge, despite his ignorance, and Farrago a governor. Most of the latter part of this volume contains the political and religious philosophies of Farrago, Brackenridge, the narrator, and several minor characters.

The final volume of Part II focuses mainly on a debate over animal suffrage, a debate which takes the form of allegorical satire. Since people are gaining rights without gaining reason, the next logical step, then, is for extreme democrats to advocate giving reasonless animals a voice in politics. Though the novel had earlier defined the imagination as the divider between man and beast, now only law separates the two. Farrago says, "But for the constitution and the laws, what would you differ from the rac[c]oons and opossums of the woods? It is this which makes all the *difference that we find between man and beast*" (755). The narrative ends with Farrago resigning himself to always being a bachelor and with the speculation that this is the end of the story, but the narrator hints that the story may continue with Teague traveling to England as an ambassador.

Brackenridge's chief purpose in writing *Modern Chivalry* was to strengthen the new American democracy, and in doing so, to present the people—their attempts to transform themselves and their attempts to transform the government—in a realistic way. When his characters explore the frontier, the people as a whole do not prove to be either complete barbarians or noble savages. The novel shows some surprising differences between what Farrago assumes and what he finds, but these surprises are important because "[t]he mind remains cold where there is nothing that surprises and comes unexpectedly upon it" (461). What separates *Modern Chivalry* from other early American works,¹⁴ even from Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1799), is that

Brackenridge's main characters are not trying to maintain domestic contentment in any way. *Modern Chivalry* attempts to prove that "[t]he mind enlarges with the horizon" (556). Unlike his contemporaries who attempted to enclose themselves during this time of change, Brackenridge believed that experience and education must accompany the transformative imagination; he was much more concerned about how the imagination is affected by ignorance and naïveté than with rakes and various external influences.

In *Modern Chivalry*, Brackenridge demonstrates how the transformative vision takes shape in America. Although the narrator says "it is a mistake to suppose, that a man cannot learn man by reading him in a corner" (6), the novel does not attempt to view the frontiersman from a corner. Brackenridge has attempted to "get forward" by moving his tale to the frontier, and the novel's main characters illuminate the vagaries of the frontier as they travel through it, which is to say as they *experience* it rather than as they theorize about it or explain their fears of it. By the time the "man with the pale visage" in Volume II of Part II asks, "Can there be any thing more simple than *for the people just to govern themselves?*" (508), Brackenridge has proved to his reader that nothing can be more complicated. *Modern Chivalry* raises questions about the simplicity and even the possibility of the people overcoming selfishness, distance, and distortion to participate actively and intelligently in the government. *Modern Chivalry* brings the common man's "improvable intellect" in for questioning,

asking if the common man has such an intellect, and if he will he use this intellect rationally to improve the government. *Modern Chivalry* also examines how the new democracy and the fading traditional sources of authority allow each individual to transform himself, as well as how the individual, empowered by his new freedoms, can transform the government and society.

The remainder of this thesis will explore the implication of the transformative vision as it is revealed in Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry*. The next three chapters place Brackenridge's vision in its historical context and explain how this vision works in the new democracy. Chapter Two examines the transformative imagination as it appears in early America's promotional literature. These early writers (especially John Smith, Benjamin Franklin, and J. Hector St. John De Crèvecoeur), as well as Brackenridge, viewed America as a place where immigrants could escape idleness and poverty and remove to America, transforming themselves and the land they found there. Brackenridge and Franklin, however, place some limits on these utopian possibilities as they are presented by Smith and Crèvecoeur. Chapter Three discusses how Brackenridge's transformative vision adds to the conflict between natural liberty and civil liberty, as defined by William Bradford of Plymouth, John Winthrop, and John Locke. Chapter Four examines how the transformative vision eventually works itself out in the new democracy, especially given the inherent distortions embedded within a representative democracy. Placing *Modern*

Chivalry in this historical, philosophical, and political context clarifies Brackenridge's transformative vision. Although the novel's narrative seems random and even absent in various points of the novel, the major premise is clear: the early American democracy survives as a medium between absolute direct democracy, that often becomes mob rule, and aristocratic representation, that would take from the populace its "creating power."

Chapter II: Transformation and Migration in Early America

The transformative imagination that motivated Hugh Henry's father William Brackenridge to move his family to America in the middle of the eighteenth century resembled the imagination that had been motivating Europeans to make similar migrations for many years. To William Brackenridge and others who came before him, the New World represented a potential paradise where a person could escape the arbitrary customs that kept a man from improving his fortune. Early American writers advertised the country as a land where the immigrant needed only hard work and virtue to pursue success, and immigrants believed they could improve their circumstances in the New World by transforming themselves and their environments. Once the individual achieved success by following his transformative vision, he often decided to share that vision with others. John Smith, J. Hector St. John De Crèvecoeur, and Benjamin Franklin all experienced transformative visions of America, and in their writings, they explain not only how they transformed themselves according to their own imaginations, but also why Europeans should – and in Franklin's case, why some Europeans should not – move to America to follow their own imaginations.

While these writers may have had practical reasons for sharing their visions,¹ some noble reasons also motivated the writers to share their accomplishments. Because their transformative visions brought them success, they shared the vision and the method that led them to that success, thereby taking on the role of reformer. Having improved themselves and their surroundings, they wanted others, both those of their time and of posterity, to look on their works and be inspired. This admits one of the more practical purposes; they may be bragging, but the motivations are not mutually exclusive. The man whose vision has transformed him may be proud of his success because he has earned it, rather than inheriting it or receiving it by a royal grant. Theoretically, the man with an effective transformative vision will improve himself and reform his society, making life better for himself and others. This theory motivated many early American writers, but to Brackenridge, the question was whether every man really had an “improvable intellect” that would allow him to serve the people’s needs rather than his own vanity and ambition.

I

John Smith’s *A Description of New England* (1616) promotes the New World as a place where a man born with few advantages could improve himself through courage, hard work, and virtue:

Who can desire more content, that hath small means; or but only his merit to advance his fortune, than to tread and plant that ground he hath purchased by the hazard of his life? If we

have but the taste of virtue, and magnanimity, what to such a mind can be more pleasant, than planting and building a foundation for his posterity, got from the rude earth, by God's blessing and his own industry, without prejudice to any? (114)

Smith's intentions included "erecting towns, peopling countries, informing the ignorant, reforming things unjust, [and] teaching virtue," but Smith shows no ambition to establish an autonomous government. His purposes include "gaining to our native country a kingdom to attend her" (115). Smith's nationalism seems paradoxical because he wants to encourage people to utilize their imaginations and help England enlarge its kingdom, but to do so, he has to persuade those potential immigrants that their "native country," England, offers no benefits to the poor. In contrast to the later political and religious reformers, Smith's appeal is economical. The individual gains financial hope by migrating, and he increases the wealth of his home country, as well as the investing company.

Smith offers reasons other than economic to persuade people to leave their country for the New World. To be prosperous, the immigrants would not only have to transform the "rude earth" with their industry, but they would also have to "convert those poor savages to know Christ" (114). To Smith and other promoters of the New World, a man could improve himself, but he would first have to recreate this paradise, largely in the image of Old World values. The

Europeans desired the opportunity to claim this “new” land because it contained an abundance of unspoiled natural resources, offering each individual a chance to improve at a time when Europe offered only idleness for a man of little means. To these opportunistic Europeans, the native inhabitants of America had squandered their rights to these resources because they had refused to improve the land with their own industry. The immigrant was to follow Smith’s example and improve himself. At the same time, he was to improve the natives by converting them to Christianity and civilization, thus transforming them into something useful to the new colony.

To make these transformations successful, the migrating Europeans would need just enough governmental control to protect property rights and to avoid bodily harm. Initially, the balance between order and freedom meant that the new land needed just enough order to ensure the individual’s freedom to transform himself and his environment. Smith includes liberty as part of the New World’s benefit:

Here nature and liberty afford us that freely, which in England we want, or it costs us dearly. What pleasure can be more, than (being tired with any occasion a-shore) in planting vines, fruits, or herbs, in contriving their own grounds, to the pleasure of their own minds, their fields, gardens, orchards, buildings,

ships, and other works, etc., to recreate themselves before their own door, in their own boats [...]? (116)

The immigrant can “recreate” himself with work that will actually bring pleasure. The recreated man can farm, and he can easily fish and catch so much that he will have enough to sell. Anyone can gain this “pleasure, profit, and contentment” if he is willing to work only three days each week (116-117). The settlements will need fortresses, and the necessary trades will need masters for the apprentices, but Smith’s description promises more natural than civil liberty, assuming that the colonists’ transformative visions will be similar. Smith’s vision unites the luckless but adventurous poor of Europe with the undeveloped, but potentially rich, land of America, assuming that the lack of opportunity in their homeland is the only barrier keeping Europe’s poor people from reaching their potential. Once the emigrants reached the new land, their transformation required great industry in America, but the rewards and possibilities for self-improvement retained their popularity. John Smith not only promises that the hard-working man can recreate himself and gain fortune, but also includes as a benefit for coming to the New World that “posterity [...will] remember thee; and remembering thee, ever honor that remembrance with praise” (115).

Similarly, Benjamin Franklin, in his *Autobiography* (1771),² describes the progress of his transformative vision, improving both himself and his society, and he wants to share that vision with posterity.³ Franklin not only emerges from impoverished anonymity, but also seeks to enable others to do the same:

Having emerged from the Poverty and Obscurity in which I was born [...and] bred, to a state of Affluence [...and] some Degree of Reputation in the World, and having gone so far thro[ugh] life with a considerable Share of Felicity, the conducting Means I made use of, which, with the Blessing of God, so well succeeded, my Posterity may like to know, as they may find some of them suitable to their own Situations, [...and] therefore fit to be imitated. (538-539)

Franklin became so concerned that his life would provide imitable mettle, that second drafts of his manuscripts often included ideas encouraging his readers to do as he thought reasonable rather than exactly as he had done. Paul M. Zall explains in his Introduction to *Franklin on Franklin* that second drafts of his manuscripts include “[i]nterpolated passages [that] subtly refocus the theme from the good-humored celebration of being a reasonable creature (because it enables one to find a reason for doing anything one has a mind to do). Later interpolations redirect the focus of amending our feckless behavior” (5). These alterations show a writer who is as much concerned with how his life may be imitated as he is with how accurately he records the events of his life.

Benjamin Franklin’s transformative vision remains an important part of the American composition because he attempts to show his readers how they can achieve success according to their own goals, not because he shows people how

to transform themselves and become just like him. In other words, it is not so important that citizens exercise their rights to become statesmen or to become inventors and directly follow Franklin's vision; rather, they should systematically develop self-control and financial independence so that they can follow their own visions. Franklin's *Autobiography* portrays a man more determined to become systematically virtuous than one that wants to prove innate virtue. When Franklin constructs his system for recognizing and correcting his own "errata," he observes that he is "[...] surpris[e]d to find [him]self so much fuller of Faults than [...he] had imagined, but [...he] ha[s] the Satisfaction of seeing them diminished" (595). When he marks his book indicating mistakes he has made in certain categories, he makes those marks in pencil so that he can erase them without destroying the book and without having to remake an entirely new book.⁴ If the book represents his life, his ability to erase and make new marks allows him to improve systematically without acquiring guilt and without having either to change his life completely or to hide his faults. Americans celebrate Franklin because he helped create and improve the new republic, ensuring and defining the people's place in civil government. Franklin's primary emphasis, however, should not be overlooked. The citizen who hopes to transform society must first transform himself. This modification of the American dream is important because it means that every citizen has a kind of natural liberty to become a leader after he or she has improved his virtue and

acquired an education. Franklin records his life because he believes his *Autobiography* will show an imitable process and a life spent in transformation. Franklin certainly advocates ambition,⁵ but self-control is an integral part of that ambition, regardless of the individual's goals.

Like John Smith, Franklin promotes America as a land where the individual can recreate himself, but in his "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America" (1784), he includes a warning for the European aristocrat who would migrate with the ambition to make money as a politician in the new democracy. Accomplishments and vision are more important than birth to a man who expects to become a leader in America:

[...] it cannot be worth any man's while, who has a means of living at home, to expatriate himself, in hopes of obtaining a profitable civil office in America [...]. Much less is it advisable for a person to go thither, who has no other quality to recommend him but his birth. In Europe it has indeed its value; but it is a commodity that cannot be carried to a worse market than that of America, where people do not inquire concerning a stranger, *what is he?* but, *what can he do?* If he has any useful art, he is welcome; and if he exercises it, and behaves well, he will be respected by all that know him; but a mere man of quality,

who, on that account, wants to live upon the public, by some office or salary, will be despised and disregarded. (529)

Franklin's perspective upholds the ideal that "all men are created equal" because being born to the aristocracy does not exclude a man from holding political office, but the man born into a wealthy family does not have an advantage over the man who is born with little means. Regardless of a man's birth, he has the freedom and responsibility to prove what he can do. Even the poor can exercise their transformative vision because, "[...] if they are sober, industrious, and frugal, they soon become masters, establish themselves in business, marry, raise families, and become respectable citizens" ("Information" 531). Any man can improve himself and rise in America, but any man who hopes to transform the government has to prove that he is a qualified and honest leader. The American public will simply disregard any man who has more personal ambition than public concern.

J. Hector St. John De Crèvecoeur is less concerned about the aristocratic immigrants' attempt to transform the government and lead the American people, but like Franklin, Crèvecoeur explains how the impoverished immigrant can transform himself. Like John Smith, who speaks of the New World as a place where immigrants can "recreate themselves," Crèvecoeur refers to the United States as the "American asylum" that offers the poor of Europe a land of regeneration. Crèvecoeur says in *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782),

“Everything has tended to regenerate them; new laws, a new mode of living, a new social system; here they are become men [...]” Crèvecoeur compares the emigrants to plants that lacked purpose and the means to sustain life but that have “taken root and flourished” thanks to “the power of transplantation” (659). In “Letter III,” Crèvecoeur defines what it means to be an American: “From an involuntary idleness, servile dependence, penury, and useless labor, he has passed to toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence. – This is an American” (660). Because people can improve themselves in America, they in turn improve the country. According to Crèvecoeur, a sense of religious tolerance (663) and a lack of crime (661) help the new country surpass the living conditions of the Old World.

Crèvecoeur notices important characteristics of the American transformative imagination when he discusses opportunity for the various religious and ethnic groups and when he discusses the laws under which all of these people abide. First, he encourages immigration because the New World and the new democracy offer opportunity for Europeans, even of various cultural backgrounds, to abide peaceably in America. In theory, all citizens are protected equally under the law, and his praise for the American citizen resembles John Smith’s belief that the man who moves to the New World will thrive as long as he works hard and lives “without prejudice to any” (114). However, Crèvecoeur offers no asylum for those Americans whose migration is

being forced, whether from Africa to America or from the East to the West of the continent. Crèvecoeur praises ethnic and religious toleration among different groups of people as long as the differences among those people are not profound.

Second, the transformative imagination becomes more possible for voluntary immigrants because the new country has less structure and fewer laws. The lack of ordered form provides enough freedom for Americans to use their imaginations, but he does not believe the country remains a hideous or chaotic wilderness. He says, "The laws, the indulgent laws, protect them as they arrive, stamping on them the symbol of adoption [...]." The government creates the laws, but "the original genius and strong desire of the people" create the government. He contrasts the majority of the new world, where the people have freedom to create, with Nova Scotia, where "the province is very thinly inhabited" due in part to "the power of the crown in conjunction with the mosquitoes" (659-660). Not only have the American people gained a more active role in their government, but Crèvecoeur's vision also implies that they have gained a more active role in their fate. Crèvecoeur has a human cause in mind when he explains how people have changed by coming to America: "By what invisible power has this surprising metamorphosis been performed? By that of the laws and that of their industry" (659). Crèvecoeur, like Smith and Franklin, believes the promise of America is that each man creates rather than accepts his

destiny, and the collection of men controls the government. The transformative imagination, rather than strong and traditional authority, provides the key to contentment.

II

The ideologies that persuade Europeans to migrate may contain as much fiction as truth, but as *Modern Chivalry's* narrator says, "fiction, or no fiction, the nature of the thing will make it a reality" (22), and the ideology continues to encourage people to make the journey. Despite the early hardships and the later return of arbitrary obstructions to the plans for improvement by the emigrants, people continued to cross the Atlantic hoping to transform themselves and the land they would find there. Like so many other immigrants, Hugh Henry Brackenridge's father, William, hoped to build a similarly prosperous foundation when he moved his family to America in the mid-eighteenth century. The Brackenridge family, "[i]mpoverished by the civil wars," migrated to frontier America hoping to "rehabilitate [...] their fortunes" (*Life* 1-2). Hugh Henry Brackenridge followed Franklin's model for self-improvement, but the young Brackenridge did not have to run away from his family in order to begin this rise. In fact, William Brackenridge's transformative imagination not only included a way to make life better for his children, but it also included a means to make life easier in terms of necessary manual labor. Hugh Henry Brackenridge owed

much of his early scholarly success to his father who, rather than seeing him as a needed laborer, understood the necessity of education as a vehicle for improvement. William Brackenridge afforded his son the opportunity to learn, and Hugh Henry Brackenridge took full advantage of this opportunity. To Hugh Henry Brackenridge's family, education was a major part of their designing imagination, hoping their family circumstances would improve through their son's success (*Life* 5-6).

Hugh Henry Brackenridge's humble origin as the son of a working-class family makes his theories about class and legislation even more interesting.⁶ If *Modern Chivalry* is an important work in the developing country, it is because the novel clarifies some of the paradoxes left by political theorists and shows how the citizens incorporated those theories into their own transformative imaginations. One of the more noticeable paradoxes in the early political theories focuses attention on the phrase "all men are created equal" in *The Declaration of Independence*. Not only does the idea seem less than "self-evident," but such a phrase written and signed in part by slave owners questions whether the phrase was believed at all. In *Modern Chivalry*, the phrase is questioned again, not as it applies to slaves, but as it applies to the transformative visions of free men.

Modern Chivalry's first two chapters separate educated men and manual laborers, implying that a politician or any citizen can belong either to one or the

other category but not to both. Much of *Modern Chivalry* explains why giving people an equal voice in politics does not mean they should exercise that right by aspiring to become legislators, revealing Brackenridge's great reservations about how a manual laborer might hope to transform himself as well as how he might attempt to transform the new democracy's legislative system. In the final "Reflection" of Part I, Volume I (20-22),⁷ *Modern Chivalry's* narrator explains the difference between being equal under the law and being equal in potential:

A Democracy is beyond all question the freest government:
because under this, every man is equally protected by the laws,
and has equally a voice in making them. But I do not say an
equal voice; because some men have stronger lungs than others,
and can express more forcibly their opinions of public affairs.

(20)

The narrator explains that politics, arts, sciences, and religious offices are open to all who apply, but those who do not have "taste and genius" should not apply.

While it is almost self-evident that those who are more qualified should earn appropriate positions, the question in terms of the transformative vision asks how a person might become qualified, and in this chapter's reflection (Volume I, Book I, Chapter V), that vision seems limited. The narrator argues, "It is indeed making a devil of a man to lift him up to a state to which he is not suited." The

narrator's explanation even seems to advocate an unbreakable class system separating manual laborers from the intellectuals:

A ditcher is a respectable character, with his over-alls on, and a spade in his hand; but put the same man to those offices which require the head whereas he has been accustomed to impress with his foot, and there appears a contrasts between the individual and the occupation. (20).

This separation between the manual laborer and the intellectual offices supports the fixity that begins the narrative. In the beginning, the narrator says Teague O'Regan's name explains his entire character. The narrator also explains the Captain's character with the maxim "once a captain, and always a captain" (6). The narrator's concern provides a contrast with that of Benjamin Franklin. In "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America," Franklin wants to discourage any European who "has no other quality to recommend him but his birth" from moving to America if the immigrant hopes to get rich as a politician. Brackenridge's narrator, however, seems quite concerned that a man born without the means or the ability to study legal matters might attempt to rise as a leader in that field.⁸

The narrator consistently divides manual labor from scholarly labor, but in doing so, he never claims that a man born with more monetary means will have more qualifications than a poor man. The narrator says he "would not

mean to insinuate that legislators are to be selected from the more wealthy of the citizens, yet a man's circumstances ought to be such as afford him leisure for study and reflection" (21). Brackenridge's transformative vision contains an important paradox: he escapes a life of hard work and anonymity and he encourages this trait in others,⁹ but he never explains how those who aren't professional politicians or philosophers – those who survive on subsistence living – will find time or financial resources for more thorough education. While Brackenridge hopes his *United States Magazine* (January –December 1779) will help the "honest husbandman" improve his mind during "proper intervals of business" (Preface and Introduction 72), he neither explains how a man trying to earn a living might find those "proper intervals," nor does he provide a personal example of how he had to overcome such time constraints. In his legal and literary rise, Brackenridge gave up manual labor early. As Newlin says, Brackenridge's early, more personal, poetry "shows certainly that Hugh's heart was not in the work of reclaiming the soil. Luckily for this boy whose nature was already urging him toward the intellectual rather than the active life, opportunities for education were not lacking even on this far frontier" (4). While Brackenridge escapes manual labor to continue his studies, he does not become a passive or simply contemplative observer. As an historical figure, Brackenridge is at least as important for his legal actions as he is for his writing; however, in escaping the world of work early, he seems to prove that a potential expert –

someone who shows some sign of an “improvable intellect” – cannot continue as a manual laborer and aspire to become a leader of the people.¹⁰ Had Brackenridge not pursued his studies rather than “reclaiming the land,” he would not have had time to become a scholar.

Neither Brackenridge nor the narrator absolutely opposes man’s transformative imagination, but much as Franklin opposes those who would migrate “in hopes of obtaining a profitable civil office in America,” *Modern Chivalry’s* narrator opposes a man’s attempt to rise in politics for purely financial gain. A man’s political motive should reflect his intention to improve government for all people, not to increase his fame or his funds.

There are individuals in society, who prefer honor to wealth; or cultivate political studies as a branch of literary pursuits; and offer themselves to serve public bodies, in order to have an opportunity of discovering their knowledge, and exercising their judgment. (20)

Modern Chivalry’s narrator does not advocate the political ambition of an unqualified rich man any more than he offers hope that a manual laborer can find time to become qualified and rise to political leadership. The narrator endorses the man who has enough literary and legal education to become a useful servant of the people. Not surprisingly, the man endorsed by *Modern Chivalry’s* narrator seems to share many characteristics with Hugh Henry

Brackenridge. This does not mean that the narrator or Brackenridge himself would argue that only Brackenridge has the right to exercise his transformative imagination, but Brackenridge does not believe that anyone has the opportunity to become anything. When Franklin explains that his life is “imitable” and shows people how he improved his virtue, he presents improved virtue as a prerequisite to other transformations. To Brackenridge, the ditcher can be respected only if he stays in his place with his over-alls and his spade, but the ditcher’s improved virtue should be the end of his transformation rather than the beginning. Brackenridge does not disapprove of anyone’s transformative imagination, but he does believe that ambition, as a part of liberty, can reach excess.

When Brackenridge exercised his transformative imagination, he began by doing what so many other discontented people have done – he relocated, a plan that will at least make a person’s situation different even if it fails to make it better. While William Brackenridge’s migration to America epitomized the transformative imagination that inspired Europeans to move to America, Hugh Henry Brackenridge’s move to the frontier (1781) exemplified the continuing discontent that pushed Americans to migrate westward. Brackenridge’s discontent arose partially from the failure of his *United States Magazine*. As Newlin writes, “Brackenridge was already an adept in the gentle art of making enemies. Almost every party and class had felt in turn the sting of his biting wit,

inspired in part by a concern for the public good, and in part, it seems, by a spirit of sheer mischief" (54). When the *United States Magazine* folded (December 1779), Brackenridge gave up Miss Urany Muse for Miss Law (Brackenridge's representations for literary and legal studies respectively) and left Philadelphia. Brackenridge "[...] saw no chance of being anything in that city, [because] there were such great men before [...him]," so in an attempt to satisfy his transforming imagination, he "pushed [...his] way to these woods where [...he] thought [...he] might emerge one day, and get forward [...]" in politics (57). Unlike Franklin, who "emerge[s] from [...] poverty and obscurity" after moving to Philadelphia, Brackenridge's transformative imagination required him to leave "America's political and intellectual metropolis" with the hopes that he might "emerge" as a prominent lawyer in the frontier (58-59).

Hugh Henry Brackenridge's writings display a similar optimism for the immigrant to flourish in the New World, but unlike Crèvecoeur, Brackenridge attributes the immigrants' success more to their ambitious spirit than to the land. In the "Fragments" section at the end of *Modern Chivalry*, Brackenridge says, "[...] though it may be sometimes a matter of casualty, yet it would seem to me that it cannot well be otherwise, but that in new countries the human genius will receive a spring, which it cannot have in the old." Similar to Crèvecoeur, Brackenridge believes the new country offers room for genius to transform the individual's life, but Brackenridge believes the land may be less the cause of this

ability than the immigrants' initiative. To Brackenridge, "[...] the cause lies deeper; and in this, that the strongest minds, and the most enterprising, go there" (758). The land even seems a deterrent in Brackenridge's "An Epistle to Walter Scott" (1811), in which the speaker looks favorably on Scotland's beautiful bracken and heather, lamenting the "Hard fate to be so rudely torn / By poverty and need of change, / Away to this a foreign range [...]" (389-390). Nevertheless, Brackenridge agrees that the absence of traditional and settled authority enables the imagination to flourish in America and that this absence will encourage immigrants.

The enterprising imagination that encourages Europeans to move to America resembles the transformative vision that will cause citizens to become discontented with the East and move to the frontier. In *Modern Chivalry*, Brackenridge lists frontiersmen who have been better generals and orators than those of the East, and he explains why those who move and experience the new land improve more than those who remain in domestic safety:

The plodding cub stays at home, while the more active tatterdemalion, quits his paternal roof, and goes to build a cabin, and make a new roof for himself, in the wild woods of Tennessee, or elsewhere. The same elasticity and spirit of mind, which brought him there gives him distinction where he is. —
The independence of his situation contributes to this; fettered by

no obligation, and kept down by no superiority of standing.

Why is it in the arts that an age of great men cannot but be succeeded by an inferiority of powers? This holds true in poetry, which is the province of the imagination. (758-759)

Brackenridge's perspective provides not only an optimistic hope but also a prescription for happiness: an enterprising young man should move to the frontier. Where authority is weaker, the imagination is allowed to grow stronger. Brackenridge not only explains migration in terms of leaving the traditional authority, here represented by the "paternal roof," but he also relates the transformative vision and the desire for distinction with imaginative literature. Both the transformative imagination and the literary imagination require liberty and a certain amount of independence.

Many early American writers promote the New World and the later new republic as a land of opportunity, where an industrious and virtuous man can exercise his transformative vision. The individual has the right, not only to transform himself according to his own principles, but also to help cultivate the new land and to create the new government. The difference between Brackenridge and Crèvecoeur or Smith is that the novelist shows how the new liberties can become excessive. Newlin explains post-Revolutionary Philadelphia in terms of its excess, saying "Reckless extravagance was the rule of the day; failing credit and increased issues of paper money went hand in hand; soaring

prices, futile legislation, hoarding, and speculation all played their part in the economic, social, and spiritual breakdown" (44). Brackenridge does not present his philosophy as taking away freedom, but much in the same way Franklin advocates curbing desire with frugality, Brackenridge believes democracy should include rational and informed citizens who desire political office only when they are qualified and when they can improve society for the majority of people.

To these writers, Europe's customs and governments constrained potentially industrious and virtuous people, keeping them from improving their own condition and from improving the general state of affairs. To Brackenridge, America had become, or was at least starting to become, a country where a man with a vaulting ambition could rise beyond his competency. All citizens had the right to better themselves and to follow their visions unless forbidden by the law, but having the liberty to rise past the state to which they were suited did not mean they should attempt this rise. While earlier writers persuaded readers to utilize their transformative imaginations freely, Brackenridge hoped to convince readers to utilize their freedoms reasonably.

Chapter III:

Freedom and Order as Part of the Transformative Vision

If the New World and the new democracy really worked according to Crèvecoeur's vision in *Letters from an American Farmer*, America would need few laws protecting each citizen from his equally virtuous and industrious neighbor. Because Crèvecoeur believed idleness to be the root of most European evil, he believed America was ready for a limited government. Crèvecoeur describes the American "asylum" as one of natural virtue that needs few laws and little legal intervention:

I saw neither governors, nor any pageantry of state; neither ostentatious magistrates, nor any individuals clothed with useless dignity: no artificial phantoms subsist here[,] either civil or religious; no gibbets loaded with guilty citizens offer themselves to your view; no soldiers are appointed to bayonet their compatriots into servile compliance. But how is a society composed of 5000 individuals preserved in bonds of peace and tranquility? How are the weak protected from the strong? [...] Idleness and poverty, the causes of so many crimes, are unknown here, each seeks in the prosecution of his lawful

business that honest gain which supports them; every period of their time is full, either on shore or at sea. (670)

Crèvecoeur envisions a population that tries neither to remake Europe nor to live as noble savages. The lack of idleness makes the American citizens “strangers to licentious expedients” like those of Europe. On the other hand, the citizens are not savages because “[...] the law at a distance is ever ready to exert itself in the protection of those who stand in need of its assistance.” According to Crèvecoeur, government remains capable at a distance, and without needing to scare people with gibbets and standing armies. According to this vision, people are basically good, and they simply require natural liberty to exercise their transformative visions.

Crèvecoeur is more distanced from law than is Judge Brackenridge and can more adamantly advocate natural liberties. Brackenridge is more directly bound to the law and knows the reformer’s transformative vision has to include creating the legal system. Like Crèvecoeur, Brackenridge notices how distant the legal system can be, but the government’s distance usually allows a distorted justice, and even when the government is “ever ready to exert itself,” as Crèvecoeur says, it is not always able to enforce the laws that ensure civil liberty.¹ While a limited law is best, law is still necessary, and a reformer who advocates freedom can reform too much. Crèvecoeur celebrates America because man can exercise his natural liberty, but Brackenridge knows that not

business that honest gain which supports them; every period of their time is full, either on shore or at sea. (670)

Crèvecoeur envisions a population that tries neither to remake Europe nor to live as noble savages. The lack of idleness makes the American citizens “strangers to licentious expedients” like those of Europe. On the other hand, the citizens are not savages because “[...] the law at a distance is ever ready to exert itself in the protection of those who stand in need of its assistance.” According to Crèvecoeur, government remains capable at a distance, and without needing to scare people with gibbets and standing armies. According to this vision, people are basically good, and they simply require natural liberty to exercise their transformative visions.

Crèvecoeur is more distanced from law than is Judge Brackenridge and can more adamantly advocate natural liberties. Brackenridge is more directly bound to the law and knows the reformer’s transformative vision has to include creating the legal system. Like Crèvecoeur, Brackenridge notices how distant the legal system can be, but the government’s distance usually allows a distorted justice, and even when the government is “ever ready to exert itself,” as Crèvecoeur says, it is not always able to enforce the laws that ensure civil liberty.¹ While a limited law is best, law is still necessary, and a reformer who advocates freedom can reform too much. Crèvecoeur celebrates America because man can exercise his natural liberty, but Brackenridge knows that not

every ambition is so honest. While so many of the early American promoters believe that industry and virtue will save man in the new country, Brackenridge knows that these qualities must be balanced with “*wisdom*, which contains in it truth, and justice.” In one of *Modern Chivalry*’s many “Observations,”² Brackenridge explains that society needs more than hard work and honor because “[i]ntegrity cannot save error. It can only reduce it from misdemeanour to frailty” (472). Brackenridge writes to “Tom, Dick, and Harry, in the woods” (471) because he believes the frontiersman has the right to transform himself according to his own imagination, but that imagination must be guided by wisdom. Like Franklin, who believes some Europeans migrate to America to get rich as politicians, Brackenridge is concerned that some people will want the freedom simply to take advantage of others. Some people will attempt to follow their personal ambition with no regard for the effects this might have on the public welfare. Along with this concern, Brackenridge knows that those who desire natural liberties will reject the necessary civil liberties the new republic requires, but he is not willing to advocate stifling those natural liberties because the individual’s vision requires freedom to develop.

Brackenridge not only explains the necessity of freedom to the imagination but he also demonstrates how freedom and the imagination work together in *Modern Chivalry*, America’s first picaresque novel.³ Although this novel moves without a direct and clear narrative as its characters ramble across

the country, the story is often interrupted by the narrator's intrusions when he explains the chapters. In many of these essays, often called "Reflections" or "Observations," the narrator limits the proceeding chapters' meanings to make sure their contents do not advocate an excessive freedom for the reader, for the ambitious populist, or for the aristocrat. The novel's picaresque narrative rejects the conventional novel's more stylized form, but the occasional essays limit the picaresque freedom. In both form and content, *Modern Chivalry* presents the struggle between order and freedom that was so important to the early American Pilgrims, especially William Bradford, the leader of the Plymouth Colony, and to European theorists, such as John Locke.

I

Although William Bradford did not write *Of Plymouth Plantation* ⁴ to promote the New World as a haven for individual freedom, his transformative vision resembles the vision of many discontented Europeans. Bradford's vision begins in Europe with those "godly and zealous preachers" who spread God's word until "many became enlightened [...] and began by His grace to reform their lives [...]." Unfortunately, those who had been transformed by the "godly and zealous" reformers remained a minority, and "[...] the work of God was no sooner manifest in them but presently they were both scoffed and scorned by the profane multitude; and the ministers [of the Church of England] urged with the

yoke of subscription, or else be silent" (157). Being discontent with this yoke, the Separatists "shook off this yoke of antichristian bondage" and left Europe for the New World (158-159).⁵ The transformative visions, displayed by the other early American writers, such as Smith, Franklin, and Crèvecoeur demonstrate how the individual can better himself by escaping Europe's idleness and lack of opportunity, but Bradford is more concerned with communal freedom from the beginning. Bradford explains his discontentment with Europe's religious and political bondage, rather than with personal economic difficulties. The early Pilgrims were discontent because they lacked civil liberties in England.

Upon reaching the New World, the Pilgrims' first impulse was not to guarantee lasting individual freedom but to ensure unity. In other words, the Pilgrims did not come to America intending to create a haven for natural liberty. They hoped to create a religious society, and this transformative vision did not include the religious tolerance Crèvecoeur observes. The Puritans, who had so recently escaped governmental oppression, had to establish authority because of "[...] the discontented and mutinous speeches that some of the strangers amongst them had let fall from them in the ship: That when they came ashore they would use their own liberty, for none had power to command them [...]" (174). For this reason, America's first governmental document ("The Mayflower Compact" of 1620) was written to ensure "the general good of the Colony, unto which [...the signers] promise all due submission and obedience" (174).

Bradford would not endure the “yoke of subscription” in Europe, but in America, he was quite comfortable with a compact that ensured the group’s unity and that secured his authority over the group’s members.

The original Plymouth settlers needed to stay together to survive, so their laws and actions made sure that those “strangers” would not be able to disrupt the dominant group’s transformative vision of America. Because these settlers believed “one wicked person may infect the many” (190), they could not allow disorderly imaginations to influence their own community. As a result, the Pilgrims of Plymouth and the later Puritans of Massachusetts Bay could not tolerate a man who accepted the land and the natives as he found them, transforming *himself* rather than the world around him. For example, they could not tolerate Thomas Morton, who surveyed the new land and decided, “The more I looked, the more I liked it.”⁶ He not only saw the land (which he calls “Nature’s masterpiece”) as a place where he could exercise his natural liberties, but he also invited local natives to assist him in a May Day celebration, complete with a Maypole, around which young men and women danced, drank, and recited poetry (198-201). To Bradford and to the authorities of Salem, Morton had become the “Lord of Misrule,” whose maypole festivities represented that consistent archetype of disorder – “the beastly practices of the mad Bacchanalians” (Bradford 180). Unlike John Smith, who wanted to “convert those poor savages to know Christ” (114), Morton, the New World’s Dionysus,

wanted to make the native women “welcome to [...his company of revelers] night and day” (200). The early Pilgrims and later Puritans, like Pentheus reconstructed, “resolved [...] to send Captain Standish⁷ and some other aid with him, to take Merton by force” (Bradford 182).⁸ To set up a system of civil liberties and to maintain unity, the religious authorities not only had to construct a society according to their narrow perspectives, but they also had to purge that society of any influences that might threaten their unity and the leaders’ authority. The ancient contest between civil liberty and natural liberty would erupt with dramatic force on the New World’s stage.

When Governor John Winthrop planned to transform the later Puritan society into a “city upon a hill,” he also wanted to ensure unity among the society’s members. In his sermon “A Model of Christian Charity” (1630), Winthrop argues that the community “[...] must be knit together in this work as one man,” and he envisioned his “[...] community as members of the same body [...that would] keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace” (216). When the Puritans discussed conflicts between ordered unity and personal freedom, they did not intend to find a balance between civil and natural liberty because civil liberty was the only way to obtain God’s blessings. In his “Speech to the General Court” (1645), Winthrop explains that there is a “twofold liberty: natural ([...] mean[ing] as [...] nature is now corrupt), and civil or federal.” According to Winthrop, natural liberty “is common to man with beasts and other creatures”

and allows man to do whatever he wants to do (224). Winthrop opposes natural liberty because “[t]his liberty is incompatible and inconsistent with authority, and cannot endure the least restraint of the most just authority” (224-225). Man’s natural liberty, which encouraged the individual’s transformative vision, threatened Winthrop’s communal vision because, in threatening his authority as governor, natural liberty threatened the society’s unity.

To justify civil liberty over natural liberty, Winthrop was forced to create a tricky paradox: a citizen gains freedom by accepting Winthrop’s authority.

Winthrop advocates civil liberty because it “[...] is maintained and exercised in a way of subjection to authority. It is of the same kind of liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.” According to Winthrop, civil liberty is the only true liberty, even though it requires the individual to submit to authority. Those who pursue only natural liberty will “be always striving to shake off that yoke” (225). Here, Winthrop uses the same term (“yoke”) that Bradford uses in *Of Plymouth Plantation*, but Winthrop uses the term to achieve the opposite effect. To Bradford, the early Pilgrims shook off the yoke by defying the oppressive authority of King James I, whose authority kept both the Separatists and the English Puritans from creating what they believed to be a more righteous society. When Winthrop says submission to authority breaks the yoke’s bondage, the yoke is no longer a king’s authority, an authority Bradford believed had become corrupt, but the individual’s natural liberty, which Winthrop contends is totally

depraved. Both Winthrop and Bradford prefer civil liberty to natural liberty because civil liberty saves the community from man's corrupted nature. Paradoxically, the transformational vision allows an individual to defy authority, but that individual can also use the same vision – sometimes, even the same terms – to gain and justify his own authority.

John Locke's initial explanation in *An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent and End of Civil Government* (1690) differs little from that of Bradford and Winthrop. Like Bradford, Locke begins by advocating a natural law over monarchy, and like Winthrop, Locke ultimately decides that civil liberty surpasses both natural law and absolute monarchy. Both monarchy and natural law allow those who have acted as they wish to be judges in their own cases because natural liberty allows the mass of people to do whatever they want just as monarchy allows the regent to do as he or she wishes. Locke attempts to substitute the authority of divine right with natural law. He says of natural law that

[...] it is certain there is such a law, and that too as intelligible and plain to a rational creature, and a studier of the law, as the positive laws of commonwealths: nay, possibly plainer; as much as reason is easier to be understood, than the fancies and intricate contrivances of men, following contrary and hidden interests put into words; for so truly are a great part of the

municipal laws of countries, which are only so far right, as they are founded on the law of nature, by which they are to be regulated and interpreted. (9)

The laws of nature should be easier to understand, according to this theory, because they follow reason rather than a legislator's "hidden interests put into words."

Like Crèvecoeur, Locke assumes that citizens would thrive if they were governed by only natural law because this would give them the freedom to use reason. The objection to Locke's theory is that people may gain authority and freedom without gaining the ability and willingness to use reason when they make crucial civil decisions. Locke attempts to defeat this objection:

To this strange doctrine, *viz.* That in the state of nature every one has the executive power of the law of nature, I doubt not but it will be objected, that it is unreasonable for men to be judges in their own cases, that self-love will make men partial to themselves and their friends: and on the other side, ill-nature, passion and revenge will carry them too far in punishing others; and hence nothing but confusion and disorder will follow; and that therefore God hath certainly appointed government to restrain the partiality and violence of men. I easily grant that

civil government is the proper remedy for the inconveniences of the state of nature [...]. (9-10)

Locke recognizes three options for government in his essay: monarchy, civil liberty, and natural liberty. Monarchy resembles natural liberty because both systems allow the individual to become a judge in his own case, and Locke agrees that such a situation would fail “since [it is] easy to be imagined, that he who was so unjust as to do his brother an injury, will scarce be so just as to condemn himself for it [...]” (10). In other words, a man cannot have the liberty to do whatever he wants and then have the responsibility of being his own judge. Locke disagrees with those who would advocate an absolute monarchy because monarchs are not more virtuous than other men and have no more right to judge their own actions:

[...] absolute monarchs are but men; and if government is to be the remedy of those evils, which necessarily follow from men’s being judges in their own cases, and the state of nature is therefore not to be endured, I desire to know what kind of government that is, and how much better it is than the state of nature, where one man commanding a multitude, has the liberty to judge in his own case, and may do to all his subjects whatever he pleases without the least question or control of those who execute his pleasure? and in whatsoever he doth,

whether led by reason, mistake or passion, must be submitted to? which men in the state of nature are not bound to do one to another. And if he that judges, judges amiss in his own, or any other case, he is answerable for it to the rest of mankind. (10)

Locke recognizes that the notion of the divine right of kings has lost its validity and that the monarchy has lost its absolute authority. If the decisions of the kings can be judged, the monarch's mandates are no longer beyond reproach.

Locke's theory differs from that of the Puritans in that Locke speaks of natural law as the default. In other words, civil liberty exists only to protect the individual from personal harm and from the loss or damage to his property. Civil liberty cannot protect the individual from his own corrupted nature. According to Locke,

The natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on earth, and not to be under the will or legislative authority of man, but to have only the law of Nature for his rule. The liberty of man in society is to be under no other legislative power but that established by consent in the commonwealth, nor under the dominion of any will, or restraint of any law, but what the legislature shall enact according to the trust put in it. Freedom, then, is not what Sir Robert Filmer tells us, [...] *A liberty for every one to do what he lists, to live as he pleases, and not to be tied by any*

laws; but freedom of men under government is to have a standing rule to live by, common to every one of that society, and made by the legislative power erected in it. A liberty to follow my own will in all things where the rule prescribes not, not to be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary will of another man, as freedom of nature is to be under no other restraint but the law of nature. (15)

Like Winthrop, Locke believes that natural liberty is opposed to society's well-being, but unlike Winthrop, Locke believes man has the right to follow his own will when a law does not specifically forbid his actions. But when the law is clear and specifies a need for the individual to forfeit his will to civil law, the individual must yield to the communal. Although Locke believes that the individual does not have to forfeit his natural rights automatically to become a part of society, he argues that in cases where the individual's rights contrast with the priorities of the community, the latter should rule:

And thus every man, by consenting with others to make one body politic under one government, puts himself under an obligation to everyone of that society to submit to the determination of the majority, and to be concluded by it; or else this original compact, whereby he with others incorporates into one society, would signify nothing, and be no compact if he be

left free and under no other ties than he was in before in the state of nature. (57)

The individual can be transformed by the larger will of the community, and if he does not submit to this transformation, is no longer a part of the social contract.

Locke's discussion of natural and civil liberty makes clear that civil liberty takes priority over natural liberty when the two liberties directly conflict. His discussion leaves two important questions unresolved: what happens when the executive authority has a better plan to improve the people's welfare than the people have for themselves? and does the individual have a right to transform himself according to his own vision even when his society disagrees? Locke offers little practical help when he considers the executive power's prerogative to make decisions against the law and against popular opinion. He believes the executive power should have the right to make such decisions because the legislature can be too slow to accommodate more immediate needs and because each member of the electorate does not always have the entire commonwealth's welfare in mind when decisions need to be made. Locke offers little assurance for those who fear the executive power will consider selfish ambitions rather than the people's welfare.

The old question will be asked in this matter of prerogative, But who shall be judge when this power is made a right use of? I answer: Between an executive power in being, with such a

prerogative, and a legislative that depends upon his will for their convening, there can be no judge on earth. As there can be none between the legislative and the people, should either the executive or the legislative, when they have got the power in their hands, design, or go about to enslave or destroy them. The people have no other remedy in this, as in all other cases where they have no judge on earth, but to appeal to Heaven. (99)

If the executive power, or any power even if elected, has the right to make decisions for the common welfare despite the common agreement, the executive's power would differ little from the absolute monarch's. Locke thoroughly discusses natural and civil liberty, explaining the importance of each and, ultimately, the priority of civil liberty only when the two are in direct conflict. When Locke advocates allowing the executive power this sort of prerogative with only divine retribution, he draws into question whether either liberty will be recognized when the plan is enacted.

II

Modern Chivalry provides an important litmus test for the struggle between natural and civil liberty because, rather than supporting one liberty as superior to the other, this picaresque novel shows, through its content and form, how both freedom and order frame the citizen's transformative vision. Dana

Nelson explains Brackenridge's method for dealing with opposing ideals: "His less-regulated notion of 'good-enough' democracy thrives on reasonability instead of rationalism, on continuing dissensus rather than unified harmony" (27). *Modern Chivalry* presents this conflict between order and disorder in a method of "dissensus" rather than as a search for harmony. Brackenridge broadens the novel's scope in order to include both sides of the argument, rather than finding and supporting a thesis, but this balanced scope is important to the new country because those citizens that so recently fought for freedom cannot be told simply to give it up completely. On the other hand, a government must be established to create a system of laws to protect the government from the demagogue's trickery and to protect the individual's rights from the majority's whim. According to Daniel Marder,⁹ "The problem so urgent today – how to be both free and orderly – is the same that consumed the life of Hugh Henry Brackenridge at the beginning of the democratic experiment" (5-6).

Brackenridge's vision of America does not follow Crèvecoeur's utopian espousal of natural liberty any more than it supports Winthrop's assertion that the individual must "submit to the determination of the majority." As Marder says, both freedom and order are important, and *Modern Chivalry* presents the need for a true balance of freedom and order in the American transformative vision.

In presenting his arguments for freedom and order, Brackenridge creates a picaresque novel so broad that both William Hoffa and Alexander Cowie believe

Modern Chivalry can be considered a novel only if we broaden the genre's definition.¹⁰ In his "The Language of Rogues and Fools in Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry*," William Hoffa says *Modern Chivalry* more accurately resembles "that loosely generic body of European works which are encyclopedic in scope, engagingly shifty in tone and perspective, and exasperatingly digressive in manner." *Modern Chivalry*, according to Hoffa, fits in the same category with *Don Quixote*, *Tale of a Tub*, *Hudibras*, *Praise of Folly*, and *Gargantua and Panagruel*. Like these "encyclopedic works," Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry*, according to Hoffa, "has at its center a complexly 'comic' vision of man's warring allegiances to 'apollonian' order and 'dionysian' disorder" (289-290). Hoffa's reference brings Brackenridge's balance between order and freedom into contrast with Bradford's desire to purge his community of "the beastly practices of the mad Bacchanalians."¹¹ As both Crèvecoeur and Brackenridge explain when they discuss America's more lenient legal system and the frontier freedom, the lack of firm traditional authority provides the American imagination room to grow, providing the "elasticity and spirit of mind" that Brackenridge discusses in the novel (758-759). Brackenridge makes the novel's scope large enough to contain "encyclopedic" multitudes, including America's seemingly contradictory need for both order and disorder.

Modern Chivalry's narrator seems to advocate the people's freedom when he says that a man of expertise should not become bitter when he loses to a

common man because “[t]he people are a sovereign, and greatly despotic; but, in the main, just” (21). If one could assume that Brackenridge totally agrees with this statement, Brackenridge’s stance would be clear. The executive prerogative, such as Locke explains, would be antithetical to Brackenridge’s vision of democracy. According to the narrator’s statement, the voters’ imagination should directly transform the government. In other words, the politician should act directly according to the people’s will, rejecting his own ideas when they conflict with those of his constituents. Such a puppet of the people’s resolve, though, would need few qualifications because he would only have to directly represent the people’s will, becoming the “Ay and No man” the narrator says “sacrifice[s] his credit to his vanity” (21).

Mark Patterson writes in *Authority, Autonomy, and Representation* (1988) that “Brackenridge himself believed, as did most Federalists, that those with the best education and breeding should represent the people.”¹² Brackenridge believed himself to be a better candidate than his rival William Findley in 1786 because, as Patterson says, “[...] Findley lacked the learning necessary to judge such vital matters” (30).¹³ Brackenridge’s ideal politician listens to the people, but ultimately makes decisions based on his own beliefs. As Madeline Sapienza says, “Brackenridge explains that the representative must respect the people’s rights but distrust (and analyze) their impulses.” Because Brackenridge believes “a successful republic thrives better on honest, enlightened representatives who

will not be swayed by any temporary oncoming wave of the populace," he hopes that "[i]n the long run, the people will eventually learn to distrust their own impulses and listen to their elected officials" (96). As the narrator says in Part I, Volume I of *Modern Chivalry*, "[...] every one is to be trusted in his profession" (12). Brackenridge's opinion resembles Locke's theory because the elected official's prerogative does not become directly subservient to the people's whim. The people can transform the government by electing an official, but once the elected official takes office, he becomes responsible for the people's welfare even if his methods contradict the people's will. The people can elect the official, but they do not have the right to transform him any more than the characters of *Modern Chivalry* have the right to transform Teague into a devil.

This conflict between the constituents and the elected official further complicates the conflict between order and freedom because the despotic power has shifted from the despotic leader to the equally despotic people. The question once asked, whether the individual had the natural liberty to do what was right in his eyes if his vision opposed that of the official leader, has now become whether an individual has the right to oppose the majority, even if the individual is elected by the people. Brackenridge and Locke would agree that a man should not be judge in his own case, whether that man be a monarch or a private citizen, but new questions arise in *Modern Chivalry* about civil order: Does the collective majority have the right to be the judge in its own case when the elected official

may have a better plan? Does the elected official have such a prerogative that he has to answer only to his own conscience or to his own reason? While Brackenridge opposed giving aristocracy priority over the will of the people, he clearly believes that a man must transform himself, improving both his virtue and his education, before he can impose his imagination on the government or on society. Once the population delegates power to an elected official – i.e. delegates their transformative vision to that of the elected official – that elected politician has the freedom, and even the responsibility, to make decisions that oppose the population's ephemeral will. The decision between virtual and direct representation becomes a matter of whose imagination is more trustworthy – that of the majority or that of the expert.¹⁴ Wendy Martin says the appearance of the "politician as manipulator of the masses" meant the loss of absolute authority because it reveals "the shift from the concept of statesman as God's agent to that of politician as manipulator of men" (181). While the monarch may lose traditional authority, the politicians can still stand between the populace and rational decisions with their own transformative visions.

This view of the politician's freedom will likely upset some of the population, and this is what Brackenridge deals with in much of *Modern Chivalry's* Part II. The frontiersmen have grown so accustomed to exercising their natural liberty in a country of limited government that they begin to turn against civil liberty altogether. They do not agree that individual rights must be

forfeited to enforce civil liberty. The people become violent when they decide a local lawyer talks too much (Part II, Volume I, Book II, Chapter IV). The Captain discovers “a crowd of people with a lawyer gag[g]ed.” Because the people “[...] thought he spoke too much, or at least was tedious in his speeches,” they stretch the lawyer’s jaws until he is unable to speak. The narrator describes this action as “[...] a wicked thing, and [e]tirely a la mob, to stretch the jaws so immeasurably.” His description makes the mob’s actions seem almost unstoppable:

But the people will have their way; when they get a thing into their heads; there is no stop[p]ing them, especially on a fair day, such as this was. It is true the thing was illegal, and he could have his action, but they took their chance of that. (428)

Although this scene presents a more extreme example, it resembles the “Containing Reflections” in Part I where the narrator advises “the man who means well to the commonwealth” not to “be hurt in his mind” when the people reject him because “[t]he people are a sovereign, and greatly despotic; but, in the main, just” (21). The “gag[g]ed” lawyer is hurt in body, and the “despotic” people “will have their way” without reason or laws to stop them.

If a citizen can act without consulting reason or fearing legal retribution, then such unregulated natural liberty allows that citizen to do “that which [i]s right in his own eyes.” In Part II, Volume I of *Modern Chivalry*, Captain Farrago

observes a debate between civil and natural liberty when he visits a hospital for the insane. In one apartment, Farrago finds a madman, who fancies himself a "Lay Preacher"¹⁵ and who begins his sermon with a quote from the Book of *Judges*: "In those days there was no King in Israel; and every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (385).¹⁶ A mad democrat from a nearby apartment interrupts the preacher's sermon. The democrat believes Israel is better ruled without a king, but he does not believe that America has achieved a better situation because, to the mad man, civil liberty has simply replaced the king's authority. The mad democrat says, "When we got quit of a king, the same thing was expected here, 'that every man should do that which was right in his own eyes;' but behold we are made to do that which is right in the eyes of others." The democrat believes that, despite "Acts of Assembly," the courts, and the common law, "[a] man[']s nose is just as much upon the grind-stone as it was before the revolution. It is not your own will that you must consult; but the will of others." The mad democrat decides that he would like to get rid of law altogether (385-386). The mad preacher justifies the Bible with Lockean principles. He says, "It is an evil that men should do that which is right *in their own eyes*. A man is not a proper judge of right in his own cause. His passions bias his judgment." The preacher believes republican ideals fail when a man becomes judge in his own case. A "wild state of anarchy" ensues because people do whatever they want, "[...] *but it was wrong in the eyes of others*" (386).

Like John Locke, the mad democrat compares monarchy to natural liberty, but rather than concluding “that civil government is the proper remedy for the inconveniences of the state of nature,” as Locke explains, he prefers natural liberty because civil liberty forces him to consult other people’s will. The Lay Preacher fears that man being judge in his own case will cause anarchy. His concern resembles Locke’s assertion that “it is unreasonable for men to be judges in their own cases, [...because] self-love will make men partial” causing “confusion and disorder.” Locke believes “God hath certainly appointed government to restrain the partiality and violence of men” (9-10), and the Lay Preacher believes Israel’s anarchy produced “[a] time for Sampson to live, that could knock down people with ‘*the jaw bone of an ass.*’” The mad democrat, like the mob the Captain finds with the “gaged” lawyer, prefers such anarchy to modern times when “honest men [are] knocked down with the *jaw bones of lawyers, arguing a cause, and the judges that decide upon the case*” (386). Farrago does not judge between the two visions but simply passes on and visits a mad poet who is writing about the Captain’s travels.

What may be as important as the argument’s content is that the mad democrat gets the last word, even though his opinion sharply contrasts with the “reasonable democracy” that Brackenridge and his narrator consistently advocate. In fact, the argument comes to no resolution before Farrago moves on, but the scene seems to imply that no resolution is possible. Those who advocate

pure natural liberty will equate any form of civil liberty with tyranny no matter how much reason is presented to the contrary. The narrator later interrupts with a chapter (XIV) "Containing Observations" where he "[...] doubt[s] much whether in the present commercial state of society, and where property is not held in common, people would be safe and prosperous without law altogether." He even believes that lawyers are "a necessary evil" (394). Farrago's opinion in the hospital scene, however, is conspicuously absent. This scene resembles the election in Part I between the educated politician and the weaver¹⁷ because, in both scenes, the main character meets a character who represents the novel's author – the educated politician in Part I and the mad poet in Part II. The difference is that, in Part I, the educated politician and Farrago become major active parts of the argument and ultimately lose the argument when the people elect the weaver despite his poor qualifications. Farrago does not meet the mad poet, who is writing an epic about Captain Farrago, until he leaves the room where the Lay Preacher and the mad democrat are arguing. In avoiding the conflict, Farrago visits the mad poet who is "a quiet man." In fact, the last paragraph presents a quiet end to the scene: the mad poet is not directly quoted, and Farrago leaves "melancholy and weary," believing that the people he has just seen are no more insane than "the bulk of men running at large in the world" (387). The Farrago of this scene is a wiser, quieter Captain who, like the novel's author, gives up trying to convince his audience with reason and simply moves

on, accepting that the conflict between natural and civil liberty is unresolved but balanced.

Later in Part II of *Modern Chivalry*, Farrago and a blind lawyer pursue Locke's preference for civil liberty to its extreme. The scene begins when Farrago visits the blind lawyer, who explains that "[t]he idea of reform delights the imagination. Hence reformers are prone to reform too much."¹⁸ Excessive reform not only causes a problem with people's liberty but also upsets the delicate balance of legislative powers that maintain the checks and balances. Farrago is concerned that the people, like the mad democrat, want to get rid of laws altogether. His concern with reform is that "[...] the present idea of reform seems to be to pull down [the legal system] altogether [...]"

Farrago's concern about natural and civil liberty changes. He is afraid that people are attempting to pull down all sources of civil law, but the danger is that the "more uninformed" will usurp the civil rights of the people to transform the government. Those citizens, who have more ambition, even if they have no more qualification or more rights, often dictate the reform (488-489). Farrago seems concerned not so much that natural liberty will overshadow civil liberty, but that the ambitious members of society will take away both liberties from the majority of citizens.

This concern continues to change when a "tumult" interrupts Farrago's conversation with the blind lawyer. The people have decided to make Teague a

judge, not so much because they believe it is the right thing to do but because the idea was proposed twice. The narrator has already learned that members of a mob are hard to stop because “when they get a thing into their heads; there is no stop[p]ing them.” Here, the narrator says, “Talk much about a thing, and you will put it into the people’s heads” (489). The people make this first decision irrationally, but the situation is worsened when “a rash man” decides to make Teague a devil. When the people accept the motion, they search for horns, hair, and a tail to transform Teague. Rather than protecting Teague, Farrago tells Teague to accept the position because the people have made their choice.

Farrago says,

Is it a false pride, or a false delicacy, that induces you to decline the appointment? Were it not more advisable for you to accept your credentials; the tail and horns, than, through an affected modesty, to decline the commission; or at least carry the matter so far as to be a fugitive from honour [?] (489-490)

The lawyer not only agrees, but explains Teague’s involuntary transformation in terms of his civic duty:

In a free government [...], a man cannot be said to have *dominium directum*,¹⁹ or absolute property in his own faculties. You owe yourself to the commonwealth. If the people have

discovered in what capacity, you can best serve them, it behooves you to submit, and accept the trust. (490)

While a man should not be judge in his own case, the blind lawyer's maxim that a man "owe[s] [him]self to the commonwealth" questions how much an individual should accept the civil transformative vision, even when the individual decides that such a transformation is undesirable. When the narrator explains in one of the previous observations "[h]ow [...] men err when they run from one extreme to another" (472), he represents Brackenridge's desire to find, as Newlin says, the "golden mean" of "reasonable democracy" (ix). Just as the individual can become too ambitious in his attempt to transform society, that society can become too aggressive in its attempt to transform the individual. To have a "reasonable democracy," the society must be protected from the demagogue just as the individual must be protected from the mob.

Brackenridge tests this theory when the congregation decides that Teague is the Devil. The townspeople are unable to make Teague look like a devil because, when they go to find the necessary paraphernalia, Teague escapes before they get the chance to transform him, but in the next chapter, a congregation has more success. They become convinced that Teague is the Devil when they misunderstand the clergyman's sermon. The clergyman tries to convince his congregation to stop worrying about "devil-making" because he is more concerned with "the diabolism of wicked men" than the scriptural devil.

He quotes from Job, "And Satan came also among them." Unfortunately, Teague walks by at that moment, and the people believe the clergyman means that Teague is the devil among them. The mistake not only convinces the congregation, but also convinces Teague. When the people chase him, he combines what he believes to be the clergyman's authoritative proclamation with the congregation's opinion and concludes that he must be the devil. Although he could escape the townspeople's transformation in the previous chapter, he cannot escape misunderstanding the words of the clergyman, in the same way that the townspeople misunderstand.

The bog-trotter, was under a more unfortunate mistake; for he took it for granted, from the words of the clergyman which he had heard, and from the alarm of the people, that he had in reality undergone a change, and had become a devil. (494)

Teague submits when he believes he is the Devil and attempts to shed his appearance. Teague has been transformed by misunderstanding and public opinion. For true liberty to exist in the new democracy, the majority's transformative vision must be balanced with the individual's right to transform, or, in some cases, not to transform, himself.

Brackenridge presents the conflict between civil and natural liberty in *Modern Chivalry* in a way that defies the conventional novel's form. When Alexander Cowie argues that "The term novel must be stretched considerably to

accommodate *Modern Chivalry*, a bulky, episodic, almost plotless book" (43), his conclusion that the novel succeeds allows Brackenridge more freedom than if his work were to be held to stricter criteria, such as the power of its rising action or the believable resolution of its conflict. If we accept Cathy N. Davidson's belief that the American novel "[...] is a genre emerging within a culture precisely as that culture attempts to define itself" (viii), then the novel's depiction of civil and natural liberty in a loosely plotted picaresque novel, reveals Brackenridge's willingness to experiment in writing about a group of people transforming their culture and their government. Even if *Modern Chivalry* does not meet the traditional novel's criteria, it does meet Frederick Montoser's criteria for what makes "good stories." In *The Picaresque Element in Western Literature*, Montoser says, "When the life of the individual is disrupted [...], situations of intense interest are generated by the sudden need for adjustment, and human beings in such situations are vital and significant." If *Modern Chivalry* successfully presents the conflict between order and freedom, the book even includes what Montoser believes is literature's most vital element: "Of those elements which invigorate literature, none is so dependable as social disruption" (1). Because the picaresque novel often portrays a servant trying to survive by his mostly amoral wits (Montoser 3-4), this genre provides the perfect frame for Farrago's travels with his servant Teague. Both main characters at times prove Montoser's belief that "there were still asocial individuals who so completely exemplified the

independent, resistant-to-rules America" that their "lives and behavior were essentially picaresque" (75).

Wendy Martin explains that the picaresque anti-hero's role in *Modern Chivalry* depicts "the problems of a culture in flux." She argues that "[...] the satire of *Modern Chivalry* attempts to solve the problems of ambition and self-interest which threaten to undermine the young democracy" (180). While Brackenridge's novel contains definitive picaresque elements, such as unqualified citizens attempting to transform themselves beyond their qualifications (most notably Teague's constant attempts to become something other than Farrago's servant, the various dishonest politicians, and the false preacher²⁰), the novel does not usually celebrate these characters' efforts but instead reveals that the lack of traditional authority, rather than creating an asylum for natural liberty, primarily offers an opportunity for con artists. According to Martin,

Brackenridge warns the readers of *Modern Chivalry* that democracy by its very nature invites roguery by encouraging the belief that all men have the right to be president. He also points out that the confusion based on upward mobility but which has no defined standards to evaluate performance is aggravated by an economic system which rewards profiteering in any form. (180)

Such a system invites the picaresque anti-hero to attempt the “unnatural hoist” Farrago notices when the weaver attempts to transform himself into an elected official. Because democracy lacks the evaluative standards inherent in traditional order, the “rogue” has the freedom to pass himself off as a “rational man.”

While Martin explains how roguery can take advantage of democracy, she misses the balance of roguery and rationalism in the main characters. Martin believes Farrago is fixed as the rational man and that Teague consistently plays the part of the rogue, but these roles do not consistently fit the characters. Martin says, “Farrago is the rational man or philosopher who is [...] disturbed by Teague’s efforts to play roles he is not qualified for [and] his criticism of Teague’s exploits is intended to teach his audience that common sense and moderation can counteract the rampant opportunism fostered by the myth of equality [...]” (181-182). Occasionally, Teague is as much sinned against, as he is a sinning con-artist, especially when the mob tries to transform Teague into a devil. The main characters’ roles are directly reversed in places where Farrago tries to con Teague into playing roles for which he is not qualified. In the most extreme example of Farrago’s con-artistry, he attempts to persuade Teague to fight a duel for him.²¹ Farrago’s argument is so absurd that it almost seems that he is trying to convince Teague that dueling is wrong, but reverse psychology would not be appropriate here because Teague shows no interest and never claims any ability to fight a duel. The Captain has insulted a man he calls Jacko by trying to gain the

affections of Jacko's fiancée (45-46). Farrago eventually declines the man's invitation to duel, citing "two objections": one objection being that Farrago may hurt the other man, the other being that the other man may hurt him (52). Between the invitation and the letter that declines the challenge, Farrago tries to convince Teague to fight for him and tries to convince Teague that the duel would be in his interest:

The females of the world, especially admire the act [of dueling], and call it valour. I know you wish to stand well with the ladies. Here is an opportunity of advancing your credit. I have had what is called a challenge sent me this morning. It is from a certain Jacko, who is a suitor to a Miss Fog, and has taken offence at an expression of mine, respecting him to this female.

I wish you to accept the challenge, and fight him for me. (49)

Nothing in the Captain's argument would teach the audience that common sense is good and that opportunism is to be avoided. Often, Farrago cons Teague out of doing things that might either hurt the servant or sacrifice his virtue, but in saving Teague, he is also maintaining Teague's services. Regardless of how rational Farrago may be, he is not always a model of selfless virtue or honesty.

In another case, Farrago convinces Teague to forgo his transformative ambition to become a preacher. The Presbytery, with whom the main characters have been lodging, become impressed with Teague and decide to make him a

minister. Farrago fails to convince them that this is a bad idea because the Presbytery believes the Captain “to be a carnal man.” The Captain then addresses Teague’s “hopes and fears,” explaining that preaching would require literary analysis and that such a rise would not be an honor since preaching has become so common. Furthermore, Teague would have to help fight the war with the devil, who will take revenge on Teague when he goes to Hell, as he inevitably will. When this happens, “these very clegymen, that put [...Teague] forward to blackguard for them, will stand by laughing [...] that [...Teague] could be such a fool.” As usual, Teague is persuaded and abandons his ambition (38-40). By itself, this scene shows Farrago trying to keep Teague from taking advantage of an ill-advised Presbytery. Even though he tricks Teague into maintaining his servitude, the intention to keep him in order may be laudable.

The Captain’s virtue here is balanced with dishonesty, though, when he later encourages a false preacher to maintain his pretenses and helps the usurper steal the real preacher’s identity.²² Farrago happens upon another at a church where two men argue over who has the right to preach – one has the clothes of a preacher and the other has the paperwork. The man with the papers explains that the two men had been messmates on a ship from Ireland and that the other has stolen his coat. The reader and Farrago discover that this cannot be the case, and the man with the papers privately admits to Farrago that he has lied.

Wendy Martin makes note of this scene and decides that it proves Farrago's honest intelligence:

As we have seen, the modern chevalier is dedicated to piercing the veil of illusion created by Rogues like Teague; and often the captain, as the man of sense and reason, performs the function of distinguishing appearance from reality. For example, in the case of the two men who both claim to be preachers, Farrago decides that the one who sermonizes best rather than the one who wears clerical vestments is legitimate [...]. (184-185)

To Martin, this proves that Farrago does not fall for the illusion that "the clothes make the man in a democracy." This assessment would be valid if not for the fact that the man wearing the "clerical vestments" is legitimate, not because the clothes make him legitimate, but because he really is the legitimate preacher that the other is pretending to be after having stolen the legitimate preacher's papers. What makes this worse is that the false preacher "[...] had purloined [...the other man's] papers; and would have taken his coat, had it not been too little for him" (100). Martin says this scene illustrates that ability is more important than clothes, but the false preacher would have taken the clothes if they had fit. Furthermore, the next chapter allows the preachers to perform, with the best preacher gaining rights to preach in the community.

The legitimate preacher's sermon is so aligned with the principles advocated in this novel that this could be a sermon Brackenridge would deliver himself. The legitimate preacher begins by explaining "*Whence it is that men are averse to instruction*" and explains that "[t]he mind loves ease, and does not wish to be at the trouble of thinking." The false preacher simply "preache[s] up and down the scripture," a random method that not only shows no ability but that also shows little or no potential. Ultimately, the people cannot decide because the younger people in the audience prefer the second preacher and the older people prefer the first (102-104). Farrago, rather than "distinguishing appearance from reality," actually distorts reality. The people in the audience do not know that one of the preachers is false, but Farrago does. In spite of this knowledge, Farrago encourages the false preacher to go ahead with the ruse because ecclesiastical and civil bodies are easily fooled (100). His dishonest encouragement in this scene counterbalances any virtue Farrago may display when he discourages Teague from becoming a preacher. Ultimately, Farrago advocates another balance when he persuades the audience that both the false and legitimate preachers can find work in the vast country. The clergy decides that Farrago must be a wise man and they invite him to the elder's house. Wendy Martin believes that Farrago's rationality provides a contrast to Teague's roguery. Instead, Farrago is the embodiment of the struggle between order and freedom: he often keeps Teague in order by destroying his roguish schemes, but

Farrago balances this order when he feels free to take advantage of others.

Farrago never really becomes a picaresque anti-hero himself, but he does encourage anti-heroism in others.

For every character in *Modern Chivalry* that advocates civil liberty or authority, an opposite character rises to advocate natural liberty or absolute freedom. Newlin says in his introduction to *Modern Chivalry* that Brackenridge “represents more completely and more vitally than any other [writer of his time] the classical and eighteenth-century ideals of sanity and moderation” (ix). While moderation and sanity may be to many the novel’s subject and Brackenridge’s philosophy, the novel’s scope is far from moderate and the characters, both inside and outside the insane asylum of the early American frontier, rarely provide moderation. If even one character presented some moderation, Crèvecoeur’s asylum of natural liberty might be possible, but *Modern Chivalry* demonstrates that, since the conflict between order and freedom rages, often violently, without resolution, reasonable and just laws must be created to save the new democracy. The novel is not written to prove that either civil or natural liberty should take priority, but to posit a balance of the two so that an informed electorate can exercise a rational transformative vision, improving the civil government and each member of society.

Chapter IV:

Transformation and Representation

Many early American writers prioritized civil liberty over natural liberty because people with diverse cultural backgrounds settled in varied locations in a country whose culture and geography continued to expand. If such diverse transformative visions were to be accommodated by one government, some compromise had to be made when citizens' natural liberties inevitably conflicted. Just as Brackenridge tries to attain balance rather than agreement in *Modern Chivalry*, the new democracy set up a system of checks and balances to make sure branches of government, which rarely agree, would have a balanced power. Similarly, some type of balance had to be created to make sure the majority did not become a mob, concerned with only those citizens who composed that majority. Along with the potential oppression of minority rights, the rule by the majority raised at least two other questions: If the majority even cares what is right for the commonwealth, will the majority selflessly and intelligently make decisions that benefit the commonwealth? and how will elected officials know what the majority wishes? America's representative rather than direct democracy resolves some of these problems because the elected representative acts as a filter, making sure the majority voice really is the voice of the people

and that the majority does not make decisions that infringe upon minority rights and that do not endanger the commonwealth.

Theoretically, the majority of voters chooses the representative and influences the representative's decisions, but the link between the people and the representative can be distorted. In his introduction to Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798), Jay Fliegelman says the novel "powerfully address[es] these larger fears about the Jacobinization of the impressionable American mind." Like many early American novels, *Wieland* shows "the fallibility of the human mind and, by extension, of democracy itself. Ventriloquism and religious enthusiasm, the novel's dramatic devices, seem with a sardonic literalness to call into question all possible faith in the republican formula *vox populi, vox dei* – the voice of the people is the voice of God." This "fallibility" shows the limits of democracy because "representation always involves distortion and loss," a distortion that is "[...] most exemplified in the late 1780s by a small group of privileged white men who, though often strenuously disagreeing among themselves, yet described themselves as 'We the People,' a single homogenous entity that the Constitution and the delegates to it, in effect, invented" (x-xi). If, as Fliegelman says, the *vox populi* is the *vox dei*, the former replaces the latter because representatives must appeal completely to the popular opinion rather than to an aesthetic logic, to an antique precedent, or to a divine authority. The pragmatic representative, then, does not try to convince the people to want what

is most beneficial for them; instead, he will simply try to convince people that he or she represents the majority's current desires.

Modern Chivalry presents a character who transforms himself and broadens his vision by abandoning domestic contentment, hoping thereby to directly discover the people's transformative vision for themselves and for their government. Captain John Farrago begins his picaresque journey because "the idea had come in to his head, to saddle an old horse that he had, and see how things were going on here and there, and to observe human nature" (6). In many ways, *Modern Chivalry* resembles the captivity narrative more than the domestic novel by showing people going out, albeit voluntarily, into the frontier to experience strange and foreign cultures. Although Farrago and Teague are citizens of the new United States and want only to meet and understand other similar citizens, the Americans they find are not the Americans Farrago expects to find. Madeline Sapienza says of Farrago's adventure that he "decides to leave his farm for a while and travel through the state to ascertain whether the reality of 'the world' matches the image formulated from his book-learning" (7).

Modern Chivalry may even be a precursor to such books as *On the Road, Travels with Charley*, and *Blue Highways* in which a character leaves familiar surroundings to find the real America and loses naïveté in the process.¹ Even in the young republic through which Farrago and Teague travel, a great gulf exists

between the privileged legislators – the “We the People – and the public at large – the *vox populi*.

Rather than trying to maintain domestic safety or to create theoretical legal systems, Brackenridge attempts to provide samples of the population’s attitude so that those with quieter dissenting opinions may be heard by the government, an entity that remains both geographically and philosophically removed from most of the incidents in the novel. Brackenridge’s fiction is a model of America, but it is not a model that attempts to show exemplary perfection in the way the Puritans attempted to create a “city on a hill.” Instead, Brackenridge attempts to find truth in the frontier, and his reaction to the frontier’s fluctuating culture causes him neither to condemn it nor to show its tragic consequences, but simply to represent the conflicts in which Farrago is placed as a valid depiction of the people’s efforts to transform themselves and their government according to their own imaginations.

Farrago quickly discovers that the people would rather “elevate” someone of their own class, and he requests first conjuror he meets in Part I to explain this desire. The conjuror contends that the people, instead of trying to transform themselves to meet the government’s vision of what they should be, attempt to transform the government, imagining a government that would represent their existing desires. Davidson explains this popular imagination in *Revolution and the Word*:

While many members of an educated class or gentry conceived of a republic governed by and for gentlemen, many middle- and lower-class Americans stood ready to elect legislators like themselves who pledged to serve their interests as opposed to what they saw as the narrow and special interests of the nation's aristocrats (with that last term itself becoming increasingly pejorative in the new republic). (153-154)

The voters, especially the Western frontier voters, questioned whether representatives were trying to advance the people's will or the politician's vision. Newlin believes Brackenridge writes *Modern Chivalry* to prove that the people cannot be trusted to advance their transformative visions and elevate those politicians who most resemble them. Newlin says, "As Brackenridge leads Captain Farrago and Teague O'Regan along the road from the frontier to Philadelphia, he makes one episode after another illustrate his thesis that "the people" are fools (*Life* 117), but even if many people act foolishly, they are not more foolish than the main characters. Brackenridge again presents a balance, allowing opposing extremes an equal voice in *Modern Chivalry*. Part I, Volume I of *Modern Chivalry* presents contrasting points of view – that of Farrago who believes only experts should earn votes, and that of the conjuror who explains why the people want to be represented by non-experts, which is to say, by people like them.

Book I Chapter III begins with the scene that critics recognize as being probably the most autobiographical.² Farrago and Teague arrive at a meeting where people are deciding who will represent them in the state legislature. The election pits a weaver (an obvious reference to Brackenridge's political opponent of 1788, William Findley), who appears to be the popular choice, against "a man of education" (a reference to the more highly educated Brackenridge). The ensuing scene explains why a weaver (like Findley) could be elected in place of a man (like Brackenridge) who would, if he were elected, represent the state's best interest. Still, the reader should not anticipate a directly revengeful *roman à clef* when the narrator introduces the educated man.³ The narrator says, "Relying on some talent of speaking which he thought he possessed, he [the educated man] addressed the multitude" (13). When the narrator refers to the educated politician's ability to speak as a "talent [...] which he thought he possessed," the narrator implies either that he does not agree or that the people do not agree that this man possesses such a talent. In either case, and both are likely, the narrator invites the reader to disagree and believe that the educated man's speaking ability, like Farrago's in the surrounding scenes, needs work if it intends to appeal to the multitude.

The educated man begins by claiming to have no "great abilities," but he claims to "have the best good will to serve" the people. He then insults the weaver, explaining that a man of "mechanical business" would not have enough

time to “apply himself to political studies.” Instead, such a man should forfeit his transformative vision, including his personal ambition, and accept “the sphere where God and nature has placed him” (13). First, this reasoning can be considered effective only if an election is the people’s attempt to decide where “God and nature” want a candidate to be. Second, the people will likely disagree that the educated man hopes to “serve” them because, by insulting the weaver for his inability “to exercise his mental powers” (13), he insults the citizens in the crowd who favor the weaver because he resembles them. One could argue that the politician is not really insulting the people because the politician claims the weaver maintains dignity as long as he stays in his place. But even if this belief in fixed status does not insult the people who have gathered to hear the debate, the politician’s argument will not persuade any group of working class individuals to vote for the learned man.⁴

Captain Farrago not only believes the educated man will make the best candidate, but he also insults the weaver for his occupation. Farrago says,

I have no prejudice against a weaver more than another man.

Nor do I know any harm in the trade; save that from the sedentary life in a damp place, there is usually a paleness of the countenance: but that is a physical, not a moral evil. Such usually occupy subterranean apartments; not for the purpose, like Demosthenes, of shaving their heads, and writing over

eight times the history of Thucydides and perfecting a stile of oratory; but rather to keep the thread moist; or because this is considered but as an inglorious sort of trade, and is frequently thrust away into cellars, and outhouses, which are not occupied for better use. (14-15)

Farrago uses the imagery of the lowly – the “subterranean apartments” and “cellars” – to associate the cellar with the grotesque in much the same way he refers condescendingly to Teague as his “bog trotter.”⁵ Farrago says he has “no prejudice against a weaver more than another man,” but the litany of insults that follows this statement brings into question how prejudiced the Captain may be against all men. Like the educated man, Captain Farrago believes the weaver has some dignity as long as he stays where “God and nature has placed him,” “[b]ut to rise from the cellar to the senate house, would be an unnatural hoist” (14). The weaver is allowed some transformative ambition as long as he wants only to become a better weaver. Farrago and the educated man echo John Winthrop’s assertion in “A Model of Christian Charity,” that God has decided the individual’s place in society to such a degree that “as in all times[,] some must be rich, some poor, some high and eminent in power and dignity; others mean and in subjection” (206). The people of Western Pennsylvania in the 1790s, however, disagreed with these fixed stations, and the educated politician loses to the weaver just as Brackenridge lost to William Findley.

According to this passage and other passages in the novel, one could assume that Brackenridge wholly discounts the transformative imagination and prefers that people stay in their place; however, Brackenridge's opposition to such an imagination is not consistent throughout his career. Brackenridge's introduction to the *United States Magazine* is optimistic about the upward mobility inherent in the new democracy: "We regard it as our great happiness in these United States that the path to office and preferment, lies open to every individual." This included manual laborers, such as "[t]he mechanic of the city, or the husbandman who ploughs his farm by the river bank" (*Reader* 71).

Despite his statements in the beginning of *Modern Chivalry* that each person should do only one thing (3-4), he says in the introduction to his magazine that every individual has an "obligation [...] to exert a double industry" including both commerce and governmental duties. He even says that some people will not be able to obtain first-rate educations because the necessary time will conflict with "daily occupations" (*Reader* 71). He proposes that his magazine will help quickly educate people so they can become active citizens of this "double industry."

Brackenridge lost his optimism when *The United State Magazine* folded, however. According to Grantland Rice, "[...] in his last editorial for *The United States Magazine*, Brackenridge asserted that he no longer believed that most Americans, freed from England's rule, had the wherewithal to govern

themselves; he feared that such a lack of literary discernment did not bode well for a democratic government based on theories of representation" (264). In his "Conclusion of the First Volume of the Magazine," Brackenridge even speculates that certain people will be happy about the magazine's failure. The "suspension of this work will not be disagreeable [...] to those persons who are disaffected to the cause of America" and who "have been sorely pricked and buffeted with the sharp points of Whiggism [...]." This failure will equally please "the people who inhabit the region of stupidity and cannot bear to have the tranquility of their repose disturbed by the villainous jargon of a book" (105). At least a bit of egotism is present in this change. When Brackenridge began the magazine, he believed he could transform the mechanic and the husbandman into politically active citizens, but he failed to transform enough readers to maintain a fiscally viable circulation. Brackenridge concluded that this lack of interest must have been caused by the working class's lack of "literary discernment" rather than by his failure to appeal to an audience.

Newlin recognizes a similar paradox in *The Modern Chevalier*, the Hudibrastic poem that Brackenridge abandoned in favor of the novel *Modern Chivalry*. In *The Modern Chevalier*, Brackenridge insults the weaver Traddle as revenge for William Findley's populist victory over Brackenridge in the election, but he also chides the weaver Traddle, "a weaver who has served the state," for being a lowly creature with no ambition. Traddle is

A breed that earth themselves in cellars,
 Like conjurors or fortune tellers;
 Devoid of virtue and of mettle;
 A sort of subterranean cattle,
 Of no account in church or state,
 Or ever think of being great,
 As warriors or as politicians,
 But lurk in dungeons as magicians. (qtd. in *Life* 113)

Newlin says, "The chevalier ironically chides the weaver for being without ambition and urges him to become a statesman." Immediately, however, the poem's "writer character" intervenes to explain why such a weaver should not aspire to be elected. Even though such a man as Traddle would surpass "[t]he ignorant though monied ass," he should not aspire to become a politician because he is not qualified (*Life* 113). In other words, the weaver is "[o]f no account" if he never leaves his cellar, but he should not attempt to transform himself into a legislator. This sentiment is carried over from the poem to the novel when Farrago tells the weaver in *Modern Chivalry*, "There is nothing makes a man so ridiculous as to attempt what is above his sphere" (14). According to Farrago, the weaver's upward mobility is still ridiculous, even if the people decide he directly embodies their political ambitions.

The people seem to have no loyalty to the weaver because, when Teague decides to make himself a candidate, the idea “was not displeasing to the people, who seemed to favour [...Teague’s] pretensions; owing, in some degree, to there being several of his countrymen among the cro[w]d; but more especially to the fluctuation of the popular mind, and a disposition to what is new and ignoble” (15). In what becomes a predictable end to Teague’s ambition, Farrago becomes alarmed that Teague will gain a position for which the Captain believes his servant to be unqualified, and Farrago ultimately scares Teague into keeping his position as his servant. The Captain uses less reason than deception with Teague and convinces him that he would be in danger if he accepted the people’s vote. Farrago has reason to believe his logic will fail with Teague because his logic fails with everyone else. Farrago had earlier attempted to convince the weaver that he may be able to “think justly enough,” but even if he could, he would fail to speak because the weaver is “not in the habit of public speaking.” Farrago tells the weaver he is “not furnished with those common place ideas, with which even very ignorant men can pass for knowing something” (14). Farrago’s insults fail to convince the weaver to abstain from politics, just as his entreaties fail to convince the masses that they should abstain from voting either for the weaver or for Teague (14-17). Although the voters may be inconsistent, alternately favoring the weaver and Teague, the voters consistently ignore the educated man and Farrago.

The reader could conclude from this chapter that the people ignore the more educated men because the people do not have the political discernment to make the right choice, much as Brackenridge decided his magazine failed because the masses did not have the necessary "literary discernment." In order to draw such an absolute conclusion, however, the reader would have to ignore, as most critics do,⁶ the next chapter's events (Book I Chapter IV) where Farrago approaches a "conjuring person" and asks what causes "the multitude [...to be] so disposed to elevate the low to the highest station." The conjuror explains that he may not be qualified to answer Farrago's question. The conjuror makes his living finding tangible objects that have been stolen or lost, "but as to this matter of man's imaginations and attachments in political affairs, [...he] ha[s] no more understanding than another man" (18). Farrago wonders why the conjuror can find distant objects but "should know so little of what is going on in the breast of man, as not to be able to develop his secret thoughts, and the motives of his actions" (18-19).

Farrago's question goes to the heart of the difficulties Brackenridge saw in early American frontier politics. How does a politician determine what the people really want when he cannot truly know each man's imagination, wherein lie his "secret thoughts"? This difficulty is increased if social class and philosophy distance the politician. The politician's ability to represent the people becomes distorted, not unlike that of the legislature that is distanced from the

Indian tribes and from the frontiersmen.⁷ Second, the voting population knows that the politician harbors his own “secret thoughts,” creating mistrust between the constituents and the politician. The people have no way to determine whether a politician will represent their vision or his own agenda. For this reason, the people become less likely to vote for the educated man or listen to the more educated Captain, even though both of these individuals have better qualifications and more public speaking experience. The people favor the weaver because he shares their occupation and Teague because he shares their nationality. This latter commonality provides another problem for the politicians because, even though the novel takes place in the United States, people still identify themselves with their European ancestry, calling into question how a politician might successfully represent a “We the People” when “the people” imagine themselves to be so different from each other.

The conjuror reiterates that he does not hold the qualifications to answer Farrago’s question, but he sums up the people’s transformative will in a way that earns no argument, from Farrago or the observing narrator.

There is no need of a conjuror to tell why it is that the common people are more disposed to trust one of their own class, than those who may affect to be superior. Besides, there is a certain pride in man, which leads him to elevate the low, and pull down the high. There is a kind of creating power exerted in

making a senator of an unqualified person; which when the author has done, he exults over the work, and like the Creator himself when he made the world, sees that "it is very good."

(19)

According to the conjuror, the people want a politician who will provide a blank slate rather than a doctrine of expertise. This emptiness and lack of qualified authority facilitate the voters' transformative vision—their "creating power"—and provokes Brackenridge to move from Philadelphia's established metropolis to Pittsburgh's frontier (1781). Mark Patterson contends that Brackenridge moved to the frontier in order to utilize his own transformative vision: "Ambitious and dissatisfied, Brackenridge, too [i.e. like Franklin], hoped to establish a new identity, and the unformed town of Pittsburgh must have seemed the ideal stage" (35). The transformative vision cannot be utilized when the system's form is fixed and a qualified authority is established. The town or the candidate that presents itself as a formless *tabla rasa* makes transformation possible. The conjuror believes that many of the populist candidates may be unqualified, but the people believe that they can elect a more trustworthy candidate if they elect a person who resembles them. By electing a qualified expert, the people even give up some of their "creating power," distorting their ability to transform the politician according to their own imaginations.

The conjuror also explains that a natural conflict rises between “the aristocrats endeavoring to detrude the people, and the people contending to obtrude themselves.” The conjuror believes “[...] it is right it should be so; for by this fermentation, the spirit of democracy is kept alive” (19). This conflict perpetuates democracy’s spirit because it creates that balance between traditional order of the Eastern aristocracy and the populist freedom often exercised in the Western frontier. The conjuror’s “fermentation” creates as much balance as the narrator’s reflection in the next chapter (V) when he says, “[...] a fellow blowing with fat and repletion, conceives himself superior to the poor lean man, that lodges in an inferior mansion. But in this case, as in all cases, there must be a medium” (21). As Newlin says in his introduction to *Modern Chivalry*, Brackenridge is a satirist in constant search for the “golden mean,” and the conjuror explains how “this fermentation” keeps “the spirit of democracy” alive (19). According to Newlin, Brackenridge believed in a “rational democracy equally removed from aristocracy and radical democracy” (*Life* 259). Farrago explains why the government should be removed from radical, irrational populism, but the rational author allows the opposing view to the conjuror. *Modern Chivalry* does not provide a one-sided argument against the transformative imagination either in terms of people transforming themselves or recreating their government in their own image. Like the many people who

speak in their own dialects, the conjuror speaks with his own rationality, explaining a balance that does not provide Brackenridge with a literary revenge.

Ultimately the conjuror of Chapter IV, who begins by explaining that he is not more qualified than any other man to answer the Captain's question, refuses to take Farrago's payment because "the solution to these difficulties was not within his province" (19). Not only does the conjuror show some reasoning abilities, but the conjuror also exhibits virtue that would support Brackenridge's theory that each man should stick to his area of expertise. Brackenridge allows this balanced argument because he wants to portray a reasonable and balanced democracy, not because he is trying to create Farrago as a hero or a mouthpiece for the author. If Brackenridge's objective is to present balanced argument, then Newlin misrepresents Farrago's character. Newlin praises Brackenridge's change from the "shadowy 'Chevalier'" of the poem to the novel's Farrago: "This change put the book into close relation with its basis in Brackenridge's experience and provided a character well adapted to express the author's opinions" (115). While the writer or narrator includes many commentaries after the novel's scenes, neither the writer, nor the narrator, nor any mouthpiece for the author ever enters to give the characters advice in these chapters as the "writer character" does in *The Modern Chevalier*. By keeping adamant and clear opinion out of this scene, Brackenridge allows the audience to draw its own conclusions, and by letting so many different characters speak contrary and

logical opinions, the novel becomes a vehicle for reform since the strong hand of the author's authority is absent. In other words, the novel is more of an educational exercise in which the author, rather than trying to clarify morality or discipline literature,⁸ allows the reader a journey through opposing opinions.

In many ways, the conjuror's explanation of the popular transformative vision resembles Brackenridge's explanation for why he wrote the book. In Part II, the narrator, who I believe speaks directly for Brackenridge in this case,⁹ notes, "Some may ask me of what use it is to have recorded these freaks of the town's people" (492). He offers two explanations. First, that writing is a noble pleasure that keeps his hands busy. His second reason shows that Brackenridge, like Part I's conjuror, has given some thought to elevating the low. The narrator explains:

Is it nothing to be able to shew how easily I can elevate small matters? That is the very reason I assume this biography. Any one can write the campaign of a great prince, because the subject sustains the narrative. But it is a greater praise to give a value to the rambles of private persons or the dissensions of a borough town. One advantage is, that these transactions being in a narrow compass, the truth can be reached with more certainty, the want of which is a drawback upon histories of a greater compass, most of them being little better than the romance of the middle ages, or the modern novel. (492)

Modern Chivalry, America's first frontier novel, offers a view into the lives of the common people that does not exist with the Puritans because they, as Arthur Miller observes,¹⁰ allow neither the reading nor the writing of novels.

Brackenridge argues that histories, which should include the earlier writings of John Smith, Crèvecoeur, and Cotton Mather, do not have the "narrow compass" of *Modern Chivalry*, for only in his novel are the people represented without assumption or distortion.

While few readers would agree that this novel's compass is narrow in any way, it does provide a view of the frontier people that not only allows them to speak with their own logic but in their own dialects. *Modern Chivalry* serves as a balanced dialogue that explores opposing opinions, allowing a narrative voice to agree inconsistently with one side and later the other. While much of *Modern Chivalry* shows that a man who is elevated reaches his level of incompetence, Brackenridge acknowledges that there is some nobility in transforming the lowly to a position of respectability. Unlike many eighteenth-century novels, *Modern Chivalry* shows the "rambles of a private person" without allowing him either to be the victim of the external forces he finds, or to become an external force that victimizes the frontiersmen. Brackenridge also wants to present "the dissensions of a borough town," a completely different motive from William Bradford of Plymouth, who composes the *Magna Charta* as a means of keeping the strangers' nonconforming voices from infecting his flock. This desire to elevate the lowly is

not unique to America, and Brackenridge says he “[...] mean[s] this as no burlesque on the present generation; for mankind in all ages have had the same propensity to magnify what was small, and elevate the low” (86). *Modern Chivalry* shows democracy’s excesses and limits, but Brackenridge never completely abandons his ambition to elevate the reader, creating a more educated electorate.

Even if reformers like Brackenridge can create a more informed electorate, the problem of distorted representation remains. The government remains at a geographical and philosophical distance that allows distortion when the people try to transform their government through the representative process. Farrago discovers this distortion in *Modern Chivalry* when he meets the Indian treaty-maker, who has his own transformative vision for Teague.¹¹ The Indian treaty-maker wants to make Teague a Kickapoo chief because “[...] it is much more profitable to hire substitutes and make chiefs [...]” rather than going out to find authentic native chiefs (55). Farrago resents the offer, not only because he wants to transform the common man Teague according to his own vision, but also because the offer seems dishonest and contrary to Farrago’s vision of what America should be.

It is a very strange affair, said the Captain. Is it possible that such deception can be practised in a new country[?] It

astonishes me, that the government does not detect such imposition. (56)

The transformed white men make adequate chiefs because the government is so distant that it cannot possibly keep up with the natives on the frontier. Of course, the greater part of the novel is not concerned with the government treating Native Americans fairly. The Indian treaty-maker unintentionally implies that the government that is too far away to acknowledge the Indian is also too far removed to understand and represent the frontiersman.

The government, said the Indian treaty-man, is at a great distance. It knows no more of Indians than a cow does of Greek. The legislature, hears of wars and rumours of wars, and supports the executive in forming treaties. How is it possible for men who live remote from the scene of action, to have adequate ideas of the nature of Indians, or the transactions that are carried on in their behalf? Do you think the one half of those savages that come to treat, are real representatives of the nation? Many of them are not savages at all; but weavers and pedlars [...], picked up to make kings and chiefs. (56)

If “weavers and pedlars” can falsely represent the Indians, then educated aristocrats can just as easily misrepresent frontiersmen.

This distance causes the distorted representation Jay Fliegelman notices when he says “representation always involves distortion and loss” (xi), and it makes possible the manipulation William Hoffa recognizes when he explains democracy’s “linguistic precariousness” (290). According to Hoffa, Brackenridge is more concerned that the language will be a tool of the demagogue than that it will fail to be unique. Hoffa says, “Brackenridge is less interested in the much debated question of ‘American English’ than in the possibility that the democratic impulse might usher in an atmosphere of such linguistic license and illusory liberation that skillful and unprincipled manipulators of words will be able to invent and control not just the illusions but the reality of the weak and visionary ‘many’” (290). In his attempt to transform the new country and its electorate, Brackenridge cares less about creating a unique language or dialect than he does about warning the “many” that their transformative visions might be manipulated by, or even created by, the “skillful and unprincipled manipulators.” Because the government is so distanced, many manipulators can distort the people’s voice, transforming the country without a true democratic process.

Similarly, Farrago is concerned in Part II¹² that politicians might perceive the voices of these manipulators as being the voice of the people. The blind lawyer tells Farrago that “[t]he idea of reform delights the imagination. Hence

reformers are prone to reform too much." Farrago envisions an even more chaotic situation in which the legal system is destroyed:

But the present idea of reform seems to be to pull down altogether, said the Captain. I do not know what you will see "down with the judges" just written upon fence-rails; or scored on tavern windows; but it is a very common language, among the more uninformed of the community. The danger is that it may be mistaken *for the voice of the people*,¹³ and under that idea, influence the constituted authorities. (487)

The blind lawyer's response recognizes that the government is not always transformed by the majority's "creating power" but by that of the citizens who make the most noise:

That would be an error, said the blind lawyer. *For it does not follow, that, because a thing seems to have advocates, that it is the voice of the people. The noisy are heard; but the dissentients are silent.*

Hence it is that those who hold the administration for the time being, are not always aware of the real inclination of the public mind. It is at the moment they seem to have the greatest way, that an under current begins to set. The truth and justice of the case, therefore is the great guide; not what may appear to be the popular opinion. (487-488)

Farrago and the blind lawyer are concerned that the noisy voices will infect the ruling authority and distort the dissenting majority's right to representation.

This distortion of the people's voice reenters the novel when then Governor Farrago refuses the rights of animals to have a voice in politics.¹⁴ He debates the proposed animal electorate with the Visionary Philosopher who asks Farrago if he is aware of Erasmus Darwin's theory.¹⁵ Farrago says he is aware, but being aware does not make him believe, as the Philosopher says, "that man may have been originally a cray-fish, or a flying squirrel." Farrago says creation theory may be distorted, but it is more believable than Darwin's proposal:

And though I do not know that the Lord spoke all things to Moses that he is said to have spoken; for there may have been some mistakes in the translations from the Hebrew, as in other versions; yet there seems to me more probability in the cosmology, of that Hebrew writer, than in the reveries of Darwin in his *Temple of Nature*, or his *Zoonomia*. (709)

Farrago incidentally proposes a serious epistemological question: How do we know what God said to Moses since he speaks through a representative whose words may be distorted in translation?¹⁶

The debate continues and includes the argument from "some one in the crowd" that if Teague can aspire to higher office, then the beasts should be allowed to exercise their voice in the legislature (710). Ultimately, the animals do

seem to exercise their proposed rights. A “man with a strong voice” agrees with the “vulgar” citizens that animals should have a voice in politics. The animals get a voice in this decision because “[a] bull happening to roar, and a horse neigh at the same time, it was called out that it was the voice of the people” (712).

These citizens believe the random animal sounds signify agreement with their cause. By implication, elected representatives similarly mistake the people’s intentions. According to the ideals of republican democracy, the people transform government through representation, but that opinion assumes that nothing will distort or filter the people’s voice. If the people’s voice is not unanimous, the majority decides, but that is only if the majority is heard and understood.

Brackenridge continues his search for democracy’s “golden mean” by allowing Farrago to explain why only certain people are qualified to be legislators and by balancing this thesis with the conjuror’s antithetical argument that people naturally try to “elevate the low.” He even explains that he writes about men like Farrago and Teague rather than more epic characters to show “how easily [...he] can elevate small matters.” Brackenridge accepts, even if Farrago does not, that part of man’s transformative vision is to raise those who most closely resemble them. Although Farrago argues that politicians should be judged by their abilities, the people want to elect those who agree with them on specific issues. Because, in the latter case, in which the politicians would be

directly responsible to the people, the people are nonetheless free to exercise their “creating powers.” In Part II of *Modern Chivalry*, Brackenridge becomes more concerned with the opposite transformation. He can relate to the people’s desire to “elevate the low,” but he shows the dangers that occur when the electorate tries to “pull down the high,” and destroy the legal system rather than creating a more improved system to protect civil liberties. Even if the majority does not advocate “the present idea of reform [which] seems to be to pull down altogether,” the elected officials may confuse the loudest or most adamant voices with the *vox populi*. This confusion causes a subversive distortion in a representative democracy. The narrator says in Part II just before the animal electorate debate that “[i]t is abundantly evident from the history of the human mind, that the more extravagant any opinion is, it is the more likely to prevail in some times and places” (700). If an idea is more “extravagant,” it gains more attention from elected officials. The opinion may not be more reasonable or even more popular, but because the idea gains more attention, it distorts the will of the people and alters their transformative vision.

Chapter V:

Conclusion

Modern Chivalry shows political theories in action and questions whether the philosophies that appear logically sound really work. Farrago begins his journey because he wants to compare his suppositions about human nature to the people he finds on the frontier. Most importantly, is man really ready for the democracy provided for in the great political documents of America? Is each man really created equally? Can each man pursue life, liberty, and happiness without infringing on another person's right? Will those who have fought or migrated for freedom and natural liberty sacrifice some of their individual liberty for a "more perfect union" of civil liberties? Farrago does not simply catalogue the people he meets. He argues with them, but he also learns from them, praises them and insults them. In other words, Farrago sets out, not just to meet people, but also to exercise his own vision, transforming himself, his servant, and his society. Unlike the government, which is presented as always at a distance, Farrago goes out to the frontier and attempts to transform the people with reason rather than with laws and militias.

The question of transformative imagination in *Modern Chivalry*—the question of whether the imagination leads to improvement or chaos—is a

question of whether the American Dream is possible and whether it leads to a stronger country. Brackenridge answers this question with qualifications. Yes, the transformative imagination remains necessary, but this does not entitle a man to rise to his level of incompetence by overreaching or by pursuing selfish ambition. In other words, a man should not simply become a politician in hopes of transforming the government just so his life can be easier or so he can acquire fame. In much the same way Franklin encourages self-control, Brackenridge advocates self-denial and open-minded learning (489) because a man must first improve himself before he can be a valuable social reformer. In *Modern Chivalry*, Hugh Henry Brackenridge is concerned that the people transforming the United States government may not be qualified to make the right decisions, and that these people are being elected by an uninformed and easily fooled electorate, but Brackenridge never gives up on the republican form of government. The people should maintain the right to choose representatives, but people should become more informed, and literary pursuits, even fictional, provide a key element to an informed electorate.

Farrago does not always present the ideals of perfect and honest reasoning. When he meets the sighing lover near the end of Volume I,¹ he tries to convince the young man to appear to be something he is not. The best way to make a woman want to marry, he tells the young lover, is to pretend to be a rake so that she might want to reform him. Farrago says,

For it is natural for the human mind, when it observes a great security and confidence in another, to imagine there must be some ground for it. It will argue a consciousness, on your part, of having a good or better in your power. It will impress her with the same idea; and imagination governs the world. (65)

The human mind makes decisions based on what *seems* more than what *is*. The desire to transform others is so strong that the young lover can pretend to want to “debauch” the young woman and she will want to trap him in marriage. Imagination, rather than reason or virtue, “governs the world” by transforming reality. This theory of the imagination would be too grand for this trivial love scene except that it prepares the reader for the irrational process with which the uninformed electorate chooses a politician with hopes of elevating the low. Like the woman who wants to create a quality husband from what she believes is a rake, the populace attempts to choose a politician by elevating and transforming what they believe to be a simple and honest representative. In both cases, the lover and the politician are not as honest as they appear. Unfortunately, when people make decisions based on romantic imaginations rather than their reasoning abilities, they often make incorrect and even dangerous choices.

When an uninformed electorate chooses an incompetent politician, the people have used their “creating power” to build a society that wants to pull down benevolent laws altogether and a government at odds with both civil and

natural liberties. Brackenridge satirizes this dangerous condition, and aspires to transform both the electorate and the officials with this satire. In Part II, a character called the “advocate”² admits that he is in favor of animal suffrage because it represents an extreme that might make people realize their folly:

The truth is, I am so much dissatisfied with this mischief in sending incompetent persons to represent us in legislative bodies, talking a long time and saying nothing, or worse than nothing, that I must either laugh or cry; and I think it is as well to laugh [...]. But if there is any remedy for this evil, it must be ridicule; and I am willing to try my hand a little at it. If a cow or a horse was chosen, people would begin to think; by pushing the thing to an extremity, the contrast is better seen. (663)

Again, Brackenridge’s transformative method in *Modern Chivalry* depends on a balance: in this case, a balance between the realistic and the extreme. While much of the novel’s satire uses extremity to make the choices more clear, reality and general observations balance the extreme view with one of rationality. If Brackenridge only presented extreme views, the reader could dismiss the novel’s logic as an either/or fallacy and say that he or she resembles neither one extreme nor the other. Brackenridge uses the extremes to make the choices more clear, but to make his satire more relevant – more clearly transforming – he argues that much of what he presents is not burlesque caricature. In his observation³

following the first encounter with the American Philosophical Society, the narrator says, "Should it [i.e. the proceeding scene] be considered in the light of burlesque, it must be a very lame one; because where there is no excess there can be no caricatura" (29). Often, Brackenridge does not have to fictionalize society's excess; he only has to hold up that mirror to show society its actual excess.

Finally, in the novel's last volume (Part II, Volume IV), Brackenridge reiterates many times why he has written *Modern Chivalry*. He gives numerous different reasons, but his most consistent ambition is to create a more informed electorate with a clearer vision for the new democracy. Although this vision is clear – America should create a reasonable and moderate democracy – the method by which people might understand this vision is left as open as the novel's narrative. Not only does he intimate that he is considering more volumes for *Modern Chivalry*, but Brackenridge also seems to leave his vision as an inheritance for the reader. This book, which Brackenridge says he hopes will be taught in schools, advocates an electorate that hopes to improve the government for everyone rather than a chaotic war of individuals in which each citizen tries to perfect society for himself. In Volume IV, Brackenridge, in words apropos to his novel, writes, "Every new man, must have a new constitution; for he will wish one to suit himself; and he will have no doubt but that he can make one, that will at least have in it what he wants" (676). The transformative vision is necessary for everyone, and *Modern Chivalry* is Hugh Henry Brackenridge's

encyclopedic attempt to demonstrate the impact of such a vision on early America, a vision in which freedom balances itself between opposing excesses, allowing each individual the power to imaginatively transform himself and his government, while simultaneously tempering the government's power to transform the people.

NOTES

Chapter I

¹ Most of what we know about Hugh Henry Brackenridge's early life comes from his son's "Biographical Notice" in *Southern Literary Messenger* (1842) and from Claude M. Newlin's *The Life and Writings of Hugh Henry Brackenridge* (1932). This does not mean the two always agree. While most scholars (including Newlin, Marder, and Sapienza) agree that Brackenridge was born in 1748, Henry Marie Brackenridge says his father was born in 1750. They do agree that the author was christened Hugh Montgomery Brackenridge, a name he would change to Hugh Henry Brackenridge in 1781.

² Although Brackenridge showed an early genius in literature and language, he believed mathematics to be one of his weaknesses, even in college, but whenever his genius failed him, his ardor remained. Hugh Henry even struck a deal with a young man who knew math but not dead languages, and the young men educated each other (Brackenridge, Henry Marie 2).

³ William Bradford was a member of the class of 1772 and later became the Attorney General of the United States (Bell xi).

⁴ The manuscript notebook once belonged to William Bradford and now belongs to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (*Life* 11). This manuscript

contains a copy and what was once considered the only surviving parts (Book III only) of *Father Bambo's Pilgrimage to Mecca* (1770), and Newlin's biography uses this manuscript. In 1957, a complete copy (Books I-III of the manuscript was found in a lost notebook of John Blair Smith, a member of New Jersey College's class of 1773 (Bell xi-xii).

⁵ Probably, economics and status affected their different perceptions of this school; Brackenridge made more money at this academy and received more respect, especially from aristocratic families (*Life* 25-26).

⁶ Both Claude Newlin and Michael Davitt Bell refer to this problem as a nervous breakdown. According to Newlin, Hugh Henry Brackenridge calls it a "stroke" as a result of a sedentary life, and Henry Marie Brackenridge says the illness was caused by fatigue due to his father's study habits. Regardless, Brackenridge remained an employee of the academy in Somerset County (26).

⁷ The same assessment made of his sermons could also be made of his plays, which lack dialogue and stage action and present mainly character monologues. Both his sermons and his plays serve patriotic purposes rather than literary or theological purposes, and Brackenridge, in his literary career, would consistently lampoon clergymen and actors, especially in *Modern Chivalry*.

⁸ M. M. Hoover gives Newlin's biography a favorable review in the March 1933 *American Review* but is disappointed with Newlin's lack of new research

dealing with this period of Brackenridge's life (1779 and the publication of the *United States Magazine*) and with his relationship with Philip Freneau (80).

⁹ Brackenridge wrote *The Modern Chevalier* from 1788 to 1789 but did not publish it until *Gazette Publications* in 1806.

¹⁰ According to Henry Marie Brackenridge, David Bradford often gave fiery speeches that inspired violent, uncompromising passions in the insurgents. Henry Marie Brackenridge speculates that Bradford may have been manipulated by the crowd and by other prominent leaders, but he would not have been a follower of Hugh Henry Brackenridge since the men disagreed at every meeting.

¹¹ Shortly after discovering that Brackenridge had been talked into attending the first meeting at Mingo, he decided Brackenridge's "conduct ha[d] been most horribly misrepresented" (Brackenridge, Henry Marie 17).

¹² The year after Claude M. Newlin published what remains the most thorough biography of Hugh Henry Brackenridge, M. M. Hoover reviewed the biography positively, citing only minor reservations about research during certain points of Brackenridge's career. Hoover concluded his review with a recommendation: "What we need [...] is a good edition of *Modern Chivalry* with notes." Hoover says these notes should tie the text to its sources and to its author's biography. Hoover says, he "[...] recommend[s] this task – an arduous but a worthy one – to Professor Newlin" (81). Four years after this call for an authoritative edition of *Modern Chivalry*, Newlin published the most

comprehensive extant edition of *Modern Chivalry* with the American Book Company (1937). Newlin used the serialized publications between 1792 and 1805 as his text, using the 1815 revised text only to correct first edition misprints. Although Newlin's notes are not nearly as "copious" as Hoover wanted, Newlin's edition brings together the entire novel for the first time since the 1819 revised edition. Newlin's edition was republished by Hafner Publishing Company in 1962. Lewis Leary published most of Part I in his 1965 edition by New College and University Press, and Daniel Marder included some of the novel in *A Hugh Henry Brackenridge Reader*. In 2002, Janice McIntire-Strasburg published an electronic version with the University of Virginia (<http://xroads.virginia.edu/%7EHYPER2/chivalry/table.htm>). McIntire-Strasburg's edition is a complete version that takes the 1819 revised text as its copy text. This text offers the last version Brackenridge revised himself. Newlin used the serialized version of the novel so "[...] the reader will [...] be following the successive parts as they first made their impact on the American public" ("Preface" v) and proofed it against the 1815 revised version, the final complete text published during the author's life. Because Newlin wanted to preserve this historical impact, he combined the third volume of Part II with that part's second volume. For that reason, Newlin's edition jumps from Volume II to Volume IV in Part II.

¹³ Judges 21:25.

¹⁴ Many early American novels contrast domestic safety with external threats. In general, experience and imagination (i.e. wonder and curiosity) threaten established authority and bring both male and female characters to ruin. These novels include William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), Hannah Foster's *The Coquette* (1797), and Tabitha Gilman Tenney's *Female Quixotism* (1801). Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798) differs from these examples because both external and internal forces (Carwin and Wieland respectively) threaten Clara's safety, but all of these examples show external threats destroying domestic contentment by appealing to a character's wonder and fancy. In contrast, *Modern Chivalry* portrays a character's willful exploration, and although Farrago and Teague experience threatening situations, they always escape them in the picaresque fashion. Unlike his contemporaries, Brackenridge makes experience seem more like an adventure than a threat.

Chapter II

¹ These practical reasons could have been financial. John Smith, for example, probably advertised the New World's transformation as part of the investment that paid for his trip. Benjamin Franklin may have written *The Way to Wealth* to sell the book and increase his own wealth. But these reasons leave room for a more useful motivation: having improved themselves, these men want to help other people imitate their successes.

² The biography is not published until 1791, but the sections I have used for this thesis were concluded in 1771, and the letter to Franklin's son is dated in that year.

³ Although this part of the *Autobiography* is written as a letter, the letter seems to be more literary convention than personal correspondence. He addresses it generically to "Dear Son," and family members are mentioned in the way they relate to Benjamin Franklin rather than to his son, William. For example, he refers to "My grandmother" and "My mother" rather than to Williams' great-grandmother or grandmother. Given this public tone, I believe Benjamin Franklin addresses the American public with this letter at least as much as he addresses his son.

⁴ Franklin hoped to improve in thirteen categories: temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity, and humility. He created a chart in which he could record his mistakes in these categories, hoping to show decreased faults as he worked on improvement (*Autobiography* 591-593).

⁵ Franklin's concern for ambition may be most noticeable in *The Way to Wealth* where Father Abraham cites poor Richard as saying, "there will be sleeping enough in the grave" (517) and "diligence is the mother of good luck" (518), but wealth refers to financial independence rather than being or becoming idly rich.

Excessive freedom leads to bondage because “extravagancies” deplete wealth and make a man a servant of his creditor.

⁶ Although the educated politician, Captain Farrago, and Hugh Henry Brackenridge (by implication through the educated politician) seem hesitant about manual labors and the general public becoming politicians, Madeline Sapienza points out in *Modern Chivalry in Early American Law* that Brackenridge believes the jury of common people presents “democracy at the grass-roots level” and that Judge Brackenridge praises the “Pennsylvania jury’s intelligence” and “allows the jury a certain right to creativity” in awarding monetary damages (117). Sapienza also points out that the jury’s mistake in the trial of the madman of *Modern Chivalry* Part II (430-434) “exemplifies one of the rare instances in either *Modern Chivalry* or *Law Miscellanies* where Brackenridge acknowledges an outright mistake made on the part of the jury (48).

⁷ Part I, Volume I, Book I, Chapter V.

⁸ We should note that Brackenridge was excited about his duty as schoolmaster in Somerset County, Maryland, where students could earn an education for a low cost. Those who want to learn can, if they can spare the time. The transformational imagination became monetarily possible for students who attended this school. Brackenridge’s attitude can be contrasted with that of the poet Philip Freneau, who loathed his job at the academy, saying the students “prey” upon him “like Leaches” (qtd. in *Life* 25). The difference between

Brackenridge's positive view of the school and that of Freneau may be due to the fact that Brackenridge made more money at this academy and received more respect, especially from aristocratic families (*Life* 25-26). Lewis Leary's *That Rascal Freneau* discusses Freneau's opinion in more detail.

⁹ He encourages the transformative imagination when he writes his purpose statement for his *United States Magazine* and when he says he hopes *Modern Chivalry* will become a school book to help people learn the language and become part of a more informed electorate.

¹⁰ Brackenridge seems to believe that a person's worth depends on his having an "improvable intellect," even when that person is his son Henry Marie Brackenridge. Newlin says Brackenridge "gave little attention to the boy" after his first wife died and that he placed him in the residence of a cobbler. Brackenridge's attention increased after Henry Marie returned from a church service and imitated the preacher. His ability to speak the words of the clergyman and imitate his actions proved to Brackenridge "that the boy had 'an improvable intellect' and was worth attention" (107-108).

Chapter III

¹ The government's distance and the ensuing distortion may be best explained in *Modern Chivalry* when Farrago meets the Indian treaty-maker. The treaty-maker proves that the Indians can be falsely represented, implying that at

that distance, the frontiersman can become victims of similar false representatives (55-60).

² This "Observation" appears in Part II, Volume II (1805).

³ *Modern Chivalry* is America's first picaresque novel according to Alexander Cowie's *The Rise of the American Novel* (43). Frederick Montaser says in *The Picaresque Element in Western Literature* that Charles Brockden Brown's *Arthur Mervyn* is the first novel to display picaresque elements, even though he argues that *Modern Chivalry* is the most directly picaresque work of the period (77), and despite his own "Chronological List of Works" that correctly dates *Modern Chivalry* as having been published in 1792, a year earlier than *Arthur Mervyn* (132).

⁴ *Of Plymouth Plantation* was first published in 1856, but was probably written between 1630 and 1650.

⁵ The *Mayflower* sailed from Southampton, England to Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1620.

⁶ *The New English Canaan* (1635), Baym 196-205.

⁷ Morton refers to Miles Standish not only as Captain Shrimp but also as Don Quixote. The latter reference compares the attempt to knock down the Maypole with Quixote's attacks on the windmills (*New English Canaan* 203).

⁸ Morton resembles Dionysus as he appears in Euripides's *The Bacchae* because the god of wine and revelry represents the antithesis of human law and

Pentheus' attempt to establish order in Thebes. Also, like Dionysus whose revelries include or conclude with violence, Morton poses a threat to his religious neighbors not only because he engages in pagan rituals but also because he trades liquor and guns for the natives' furs. It is also interesting that the worship of Dionysus was poetic ritual and that Dionysus' myth also explains the changing of seasons. Morton's group attached a poem to the Maypole that "puzzled the Separatists" (*New English Canaan* 199), and their May Day revelry celebrated Spring's agricultural renewal.

⁹ "Introduction" to *A Hugh Henry Brackenridge Reader*.

¹⁰ The book's scope resembles Brackenridge's plan for his *United States Magazine* when he promises it "will comprehend a great variety of matter on a great variety of subjects" (Preface and Introduction 72). Acknowledging this broadened scope, Alexander Cowie says, "The term novel must be stretched considerably to accommodate *Modern Chivalry*, a bulky, episodic, almost plotless book." Like Hoffa, Cowie believes *Modern Chivalry's* departure from the traditional novel provides strength rather than weakness because "[...] the history of fiction clearly shows that whereas a good plot may be the bait which first attracts readers to a novel, in the long run, it is by no means the most important element of fiction" (43).

¹¹ In *The Crucible*, Arthur Miller finds a similar source for the conflict between order and freedom, equating the European witch-hunts with "the

Dionysiac forces [...the Church believed] it had crushed long before" (81). To Miller and Hoffa, the Dionysian forces represent a disorder in opposition to, as Hoffa says, 'apollonian' order, with Dionysus representing a more individual freedom in opposition to order. When Miller says the "balance has yet to be struck between order and freedom," he implies that such a balance would modify the excess, which is tyranny in the one case and chaos in the other. He does not, however, separate order and freedom in terms of good and evil. Similarly, Friedrich Nietzsche says, "Apollo found it impossible to live without Dionysos [translator's spelling]. The elements of titanism and barbarism turned out to be quite as fundamental as the Apollonian element" (224). Nietzsche believes that art owes its existence equally "to the Apollonian-Dionysiac duality, even as the propagation of the species depends on the duality of the sexes, their constant conflicts and periodic reconciliations" (419). While individuals will align themselves with one side or the other, Nietzsche, Like Brackenridge, understands that both order and freedom are necessary for the imagination's development.

¹² Patterson probably does not use "breeding" to mean that a potential politician should be born of high or aristocratic social class. *Modern Chivalry* and *The Modern Chevalier* consistently reject this idea, and such a prerequisite would exclude Brackenridge himself.

¹³ William Findley was a weaver who became a Republican representative in Pennsylvania. Findley ultimately beat Brackenridge in the election that ended his career as a politician and inspired his writing *The Modern Chevalier* that would later become *Modern Chivalry*.

¹⁴ Patterson's explains the difference between virtual and direct representation in terms of metaphor, whereby representation changes forms and *virtually* represents, and metonymy, whereby the representative *directly* represents the people's will.

¹⁵ Madeline Sapienza notes that Joseph Dennie (1768-1812), a popular journalist, was known as "the Lay Preacher." His numerous essays included a series titled "Farrago" (71).

¹⁶ The Lay Preacher quotes *Judges 21:25*, the last verse of this book of the *Bible*.

¹⁷ Part I, Volume I, Book I, Chapter III, Pages 13-17.

¹⁸ Part II, Volume II, Book III, Chapter V, Pages 486-492.

¹⁹ I added the italics to the Latin phrase.

²⁰ The false preacher enters in Part I, Volume II, Book III Chapter I, Pages 99-101.

²¹ Part I, Volume I, Book IV, Chapter III, Pages 49-51.

²² Part I, Volume II, Book III, Chapter I, Pages 99-101.

Chapter IV

¹ Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* was published in 1957. In John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley* (1962), the author travels with his dog in a vehicle named Rocinante after Don Quixote's horse. William Least Heat Moon's *Blue Highways: a Journey into America* was published in 1982.

² See Newlin's "Introduction" to *Modern Chivalry*, xxi-xxiv.

³ Although Brackenridge is probably represented by the educated politician and Findley by Traddle, I agree with Madeline Sapienza who says that "[...] to view the entire framework of *Modern Chivalry* as vengeful or spiteful is inaccurate." Sapienza says the tone does not lend itself to Newlin's belief in the novel's vengeful purpose (3-4). Furthermore, if Brackenridge wanted revenge against the populous or against Findley, he would not satirize the educated man as he does in Book I, Chapter III.

⁴ The politician obviously resembles Brackenridge in that he seems to be losing an election to a less educated weaver, and his rhetorical snobbery also resembles that of the author when the politician attempts to fix the weaver in his "natural" place, a tactic Brackenridge often uses to attack his political rivals. Even in college, Brackenridge fought satirically against his rivals by saying they should take up other trades or fight rather than write (*Life* 11-12).

⁵ Sue Vice explains that Bakhtin's classical cosmology includes the upper part of the body, Heaven, and all things higher. The grotesque includes the

lower half of the body, any part of the body that opens or mixes with the world around it, and any part that touches the ground. In general, classical refers to that which pertains to the celestial and the grotesque refers to anything on or low to the ground (154-156).

⁶ This chapter (IV) is ignored by many of the major critics, including Newlin. When other critics notice the scene, it plays a minor role in the critic's argument, as it does when Sapienza and Hoffa simply mention it without analyzing it or relating it to Chapter III. Although the scene is short, Brackenridge uses the scene to set up a debate, offering one viewpoint to be immediately followed by its antithesis. Part I of *Modern Chivalry* is less of an essay than a survey of opinions, as the contrast between chapters III and IV makes clear.

⁷ Part I, Volume I, Book V, Chapters I-III present and discuss an Indian treaty-maker who offers to transform Teague into an Indian Chief so that he may represent the tribe. The treaty-maker is able to do this because the government is so removed that it does not know the difference. This scene is discussed further in this chapter.

⁸ Michael Davitt Bell argues that James Madison had serious doubts about literature's purpose, but Bell believes Brackenridge has the same concerns. He says, "[...] Brackenridge never thought of himself primarily as a literary man," and that "[e]ven *Modern Chivalry* was not a literary indulgence but an effort to

discipline literature to the more serious purposes of political and moral instruction" (xx). If Brackenridge cares more about morality than about literature, it does not carry over to his imagination in transforming his son. Henry Marie Brackenridge says his father cared much less about his spiritual or moral education than he did about the purely intellectual and literary education (*Life* 194-195). Also, though not all of Brackenridge's words should be accepted as honest, the reader should accept that amusement is at least a part of his intention as he states many times in *Modern Chivalry*.

⁹ Much debate over authoritative voice originates from Newlin's statement in the introduction that "Captain Farrago [...] is the spokesman for Brackenridge himself" (xxiv). Hoffa believes Farrago is more of a parody than a spokesman, and "to see Farrago as Brackenridge's 'spokesman,' is to miss the subtleties and ironies of his characterization" (292-293). Furthermore, Dana Q. Nelson believes "[i]t [i]s difficult to find a clearly trustworthy vantage for 'the truth' of the novel" (35) and cites Emory Elliot's belief that "the narrator does not always speak for Brackenridge" (171-217). I do not believe the narrator always directly presents Brackenridge's opinion. In some cases, the narrator presents arguments that are either ironic or that contain easily refutable logic, and I have attributed to those observations an anonymous narrator. In some cases, the narrative voice speaks of writing or to Brackenridge's life, and in that case, I believe Brackenridge allows his own voice to come through unadulterated. The

passages that I attribute to Brackenridge resemble the writer character of *The Modern Chevalier* and may be the mad poet Farrago meets in the asylum. In either case, the passage from pages 491-492 is part of the end of a chapter and is not one of the "Observations" where the anonymous narrator speaks.

¹⁰ According to Arthur Miller, "No one can really know what [...the Puritans'] lives were like. They had no novelists – and would not have permitted anyone to read a novel if one were handy" (64).

¹¹ Part I, Volume I, Book V, Chapter I.

¹² Part II, Volume II, Book III, Chapter V.

¹³ The italics in Brackenridge's quotes reflect his emphasis.

¹⁴ In her otherwise valuable discussion of *Modern Chivalry*, Madeline Sapienza uses the novel as a spring-board for her manifesto against the perceived silliness of modern animal-rights activists (128-129). The novel and the hyperbolic scenario that allows animals to vote has no more relation to animal rights than does Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

¹⁵ This refers to Dr. Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802), Charles Darwin's grandfather.

¹⁶ Farrago continues the evolution debate by arguing that if they accept evolution as truth, the animals should continue to evolve in form before they can evolve in importance. The allegorical implication is that the voter should

transform himself into a more informed voter before he attempts to reform the government.

Chapter V

¹ Part I, Volume I, Book VI, Chapter I.

² This chapter (Part II, Volume IV, Book I, Chapter VII) presents an argument between two characters (the advocate and the adversary) who do not appear anywhere else in the novel.

³ Part I, Volume I, Book II, Chapter II.

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