

## INTRODUCTION



Hugh Henry Brackenridge

(1748-1816)

Hugh Henry Brackenridge, a precursor of Mark Twain, wrote the still-funny satire *Modern Chivalry* (1792-1815). He graduated from Princeton with the later President James Madison, collaborated with poet Philip Freneau on a patriotic commencement poem called “The Rising Glory of America” (1771) and became a chaplain in the Revolutionary War. Afterward he settled in the frontier town of Pittsburgh, where he practiced law, founded a newspaper, and established the first school and the first bookstore. He became a leader in the political party later led by Thomas Jefferson and in his last years was a justice of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

Brackenridge ran in an election for representative from his district to the first Constitutional Convention in 1787, by far the most qualified candidate, but was defeated by an illiterate weaver. Dismayed and bitter, he wrote *Modern Chivalry* in installments, reversing the roles of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza in a picaresque narrative illustrating what can go wrong in a democracy. His Neoclassical prose style is rational like his hero, easy to read and consistently humorous. Cervantes satirized a dying Romantic tradition of the upper classes since the Middle Ages, whereas Brackenridge satirizes the Romanticism--or plain stupidity--of the uneducated lower class in a contemporary democracy.

Michael Hollister (2015)

“His behavior in court was reportedly eccentric. Even on the rough and ready frontier of western Pennsylvania, his dress was considered careless. His one suit of clothes was often disheveled, and he is reported to have shown up in court more than once unshaven, with his shirt open, and without stockings. He was often seen giving instructions to the jury with his bare feet resting on the bar of justice. According to legend at least, he was once seen riding naked in the rain with his clothes folded under his saddle. When asked for an explanation, he is said to have replied, ‘the storm you know, would spoil the clothes, but it couldn’t spoil me’.”

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(Brucoli Clark Layman 1988) 242  
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