rhetoric, society and literature in the age of jefferson

john s. martin

Between the Revolution and the appearance of Washington Irving's *Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, Gentleman,* Americans were in quest of a literature worthy of the principles of their national life. Each year Fourth of July orators had told of how America's correct political, social and economic principles would bring about a new and great cultured civilization. However, despite the constant re-iteration, a gap remained for a long time between the rhetoric of orators and an esthetic literature. It would seem that rhetoric was not at all the handmaiden of the new literature and was even the chief obstacle to the development of literature in the new nation. As the nation sought to establish its unprecedented political and social institutions, polemicists spoke of the wonderous "futurity" that would be America's if all kept the faith, and if the immediate reality was hard, the more need Americans had of rhetoric to smooth over their path to that "futurity." But this explanation of the retarded development of an indigenous belletristic literature overlooks the fact that in the last half of the eighteenth-century, rhetoric in America had undergone a change in function and definition as radical as the Revolution itself.

Throughout most of colonial history rhetoric was tied to "typology," which was the "logic" of using "archetypes" to determine a course of action in regard to a present problem. These "types" were drawn in the seventeenth century from "archetypal" experiences of the Bible, if the "speaker" was a Puritan,[1] or from the "prototypes" of classical mythology, if the "speaker" were a Humanist.[2] While this latter typology continued into the eighteenth century, the major typology was based either on the new scientific views of nature as a process or on an emerging view of human experience repeated in history often enough so as to constitute a theory of "the cycle of nations."[3] In all versions of typology, the speaker had the role of interpreting a present problem through the filter of the "types," and thus he conceived of himself as being merely an agent for the "types," or the real subject matter of his discourse. In seventeenth-century America, such interpretations agreed with the understandings of

an "audience" which was either the Elect or persons with a high status in society,[4] and what the "speaker" told them was already known through an intellectual grasping of the "types" by the audience. If the "audience" was the Elect of Puritan churches, an "exegesis" of the Bible not only uncovered the covenantal dialectic that formed the base of church doctrine but also gave a "plain speech" to "archetypes" to point out the course for present action. If that "audience" were an educated one, then "interpretation" of a present matter by means of the metaphors and analogies of classical learning was a constructing of a similar plan of present action. In both cases, however, the "authority" of present action was supposedly rooted in fixed concepts of the good, just, and true.

It was natural, therefore, that until late in the eighteenth century, rhetoric should be conceived as primarily a means of conveying truths by words that echoed a fixed subject matter of what was good, true, just. But as this rhetoric which was adequate for the Elect or the upper social classes failed, for one reason or another, to maintain control over the responses of the growing numbers of the uninitiated who were excluded from being parts of the proper "audience," a new awareness developed of the need to utilize the "experiences" of anyone who would hear rather than to continue to rely on "types" as the medium of the "thing talked about." Perry Miller tells us that the crisis of society caused by the Great Awakening also accounts for this new way to speak to men of "truth" so that the emphasis was not on what explained things in terms of the abstract "types" but on truth as manifested in their own concerns and reactions to "experience."[5] This widening of the "audience," broke down the old forms of "typology" and the breakdown in turn made men conscious, says Perry Miller, that words are not true because they point to such real "types" but are instruments for conveying the "ideas" of the "speaker" to the "audience."[6] Words, in short, had the job, in themselves and through figures of thought, of forming a symbolic construct that would gain the assent of the "audience" to the "ideas" of the "speaker." Thus while Jonathan Edwards emphasized that the "new light" of "experience" confirmed the workings of grace upon his heart, this "idea" of grace was inexpressible until words could elicit a similar response in the "audience." One notes that his *Personal Narrative* mentions two "conversions," that of 1723 and that of 1737, and while the first is a mere "vow," the latter is a reality expressed in terms of landscape imagery which shapes the desired response of the "audience" as a bee is led to "sweet" honey. In sum then, the role of the "speaker" is that of an ideologist, for he is burdened with what he considers to be "ideas" and he must present words that would suggest those "ideas" rather than use words which refer chiefly to things in themselves or to "types." Unlike the rhetoric of typology that looked to "ideas" as past truths usable in the solution of present problems, the rhetoric of ideology was a structuring of the present according to "ideas" that represented a distant future goal, as if in knowing that what ought to

be man's proper condition was enlightening of the means to solve a present problem. It was a plan for action based on future expectations. All that was needed to make Edwards a true ideologist was for Edwards to realize, as Perry Miller says Edwards actually did, that the welfare of men in society was the ideology that ought to structure the make-up of society at the moment of present speech.[7]

This revolution in American rhetoric can be illustrated by a brief comparison of perspectives in two "autobiographical" writings. William Bradford's *History of Plymouth* was inspired by the author's doubts about whether his plantation was going to succeed in a wilderness. Bradford was reacting to the immediate condition of his experience, but in order to understand and master his condition, he looked at his experience through the language of "types" that made his experience similar to that of Moses when the Patriarch witnessed the Pisgah sight into the future land of the Israelites; and the appropriateness of that "type," in turn, made his own work as a leader similar to the anagogical "type" of Moses, who was Paul. The "types," of course, intimated the course of the future, but only as the "types" gave Bradford an identity could he be sure of the future. In contrast, Franklin's *Autobiography* was an instance of a man who used an ideology of furthering man's welfare as a citizen in society to structure his own identity and his view of his present and past experiences. If Franklin spoke in Part One (1771) of his tradesman origins, it was only to point out how one becomes a leader of American policy in 1771; if he spoke of himself in Part Two as a "naive philosopher," it was because he thought he was quite able to discern the goals and methods of rational men in the Court of Versailles in 1784; and if he in Part Three gave evidence of being the "busy Philadelphian" between the years 1732 and 1757, it was because in 1788 he wished to picture the man who ought to make the decisions in the society of the new republic.[8] Thus, on each occasion that he wrote a portion of his *Autobiography,* in order to understand how he got to be the person he was, Franklin used expectations of the future welfare of society as his explanation for the decisions and acts of his previous life. In terms of the revolution of rhetoric, Franklin's instance of ideology in the early years of the Age of Jefferson shows how the "idea" of welfare was to be a mandate for status in republican society, and that by it, certain persons were to justify their present decisions and actions. Rhetoric thereby ceased to be a means of explaining the present in abstract terms unrelated to the mobility of republican society.

In the context of this revolution of rhetoric, the political Revolution made all Americans a potential "audience" and a source of potential "speakers." Thomas Jefferson's *First Inaugural Address* was a model oration of the new rhetoric. It did not make a statement or proposition that the "audience" was to examine as a "type" which they were to accept or reject according to preconceptions of proper goals. Rather it presented

experiential situations that were to test the resolution of the "audience" to follow means which supposedly would bring about the desired goals of all Americans. Thus Jefferson urged unity in place of "party strife" (which he himself earlier helped to institute) since, as he said, "every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle," and he had wanted to appear as only correcting "opinions"—that is, perspectives—rather than arguing for real principles that would imply the need for a lengthy discussion of the non-experiential "types." Jefferson "identified" his own beliefs with those of the "audience" when in the first paragraph of the *Address,* he touched on the clichés surrounding the concept of a "rising" nation:

> A rising nation spread over a wide and fruitful land, traversing all the seas with the rich productions of their industry, and engaged in commerce with nations who feel power and forget right, advancing rapidly to destinies beyond the reach of mortal eye—when I contemplate these transcendent objects, and see the honor, the happiness, and the hopes of this beloved country committed to the issue and the auspices of this day, I shrink from the contemplation and humble myself before the magnitude of the undertaking.

Of course, most Americans wished a similar destiny for their country, but in such lines, Jefferson's humility is not merely "lip-service" to the will of the people which he solicits. Rather, this effort early in the *Address* "identifies" the "speaker" with the "audience." What Jefferson presents is not simply a statement that "futurity" will be evidenced by a commercial prosperity and a "high civilization" whose morals would shame the corruptions present in the feudalistic nations of Europe, but rather a group of "transcendent objects" of which Jefferson speaks as if they were an actual scene or picture, and thus able to be "contemplated" disinterestedly. Jefferson's "shrinking," therefore, is not merely a gratuitous gesture but a fundamental "experiential" reaction to a picture or scene that is not immediately present. Jefferson's admission that he "shrinks" is a means of using the gesture to confirm the reality of the "transcendental objects" and to imply that he thus has the sensibility to be overwhelmed by them, the goals of Americans. In clarifying the gesture of "shrinking," one ought to note that Jefferson's voice in these lines is not so much that of Thomas Jefferson, third President, but that of a persona attuned to an ideology.

Jefferson's *Address* shows instances of the literary techniques and conventions that were developing in response to the ideological rhetoric of the Age. The new rhetoric, since it was not dealing with fixed abstractions, required that the "audience" be led to its own discovery of the truth of experience. In view of this intention, the "speaker," although he had the important role of shaping the audience's discovery, could not himself intrude directly. The "speaker," as a result, enters the discourse of the Age primarily through the observing eyes of a persona who views a

landscape or an idea represented in pictorial terms, and what the persona sees, in turn, is symbolic of those "ideas" which the "speaker" wishes to express. When the persona speaks to the reader, he does not merely record what he sees, but interprets and shapes the scene so that the underlying symbolic construct is suggestive of the moral meaning of history and human nature which ought to compel the assent of the "audience." Thus, the very "futurity" of which the polemicist spoke was a form of the moral meaning of human history that made the words of the persona into a model response for the "audience" to follow. David Hume had critiqued man's assumption of an analytical reason, but the Scottish Common Sense philosophers such as Thomas Ried answered him by assuming that the Lockean empirical construct of reality was yet true when experience itself is conceived of as a sensational motivator of men's moral nature, which in turn reacted to principles based on a grandiose interpretation of human history and the so-called "meaning" of history. Simply put, what was "futurity" to the ideological rhetorician was "sensibility" to the literary ideologist.

This important similarity existing between ideology and the literary conventions of "sensibility" tends to mar any facile distinctions between public rhetoric and literary genres of the Age. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1784), Jefferson addressed himself to the French intellectual community to explain how despite outward differences the "experiences" of Virginians in reality corresponded to the rationalist standards of the Enlightened European. Without this correspondence, life in Virginia might seem provincial and quite "accidental," and in convincing his "audience," Jefferson reconstructed a series of landscape scenes which were intended to offer a "neutral" scene through which the "audience" arrived at the same convictions as the apparent "speaker" or persona had. In that situation, what is ideology to the political Jefferson is "sensibility" to the seemingly scientific Jefferson, for when the rhetorical moment of truth appears in this essay, it often appears with the force of what the esthetic critics called the "sublime." On one occasion, in describing the confluence of the Potomac and James Rivers, Jefferson calls the landscape a "scene" that "is worth a voyage across the Atlantic" and thus implies that it is a natural "monument of a war between rivers and mountains" equal to the man-made monuments of outworn Europe: to arrive at that conclusion, the "audience" is led by the speaking persona who asks the reader to imagine "one of the most stupendous scenes in nature." Because Nature echoes the cycle of nations, the sublimity of the scene speaks to the members of the "audience" who have a true ideological insight. For these persons, the "first glance" of the "scene" "hurries" one from the "foreground" to the "distant finishing" whose "placid and delightful" aspect contrasts with the "disrupture and avulsion" of the "foreground," suggesting, according to the convention of the sublime, that ideology is not only a concept of "human nature" and history but also is present in

"sensations" of real experience to which men governed by proper sensibility respond. Through this persona Jefferson shuns direct responsibility for shaping the responses of his "audience."[9]

Even more striking is Jefferson's depiction of the Natural Bridge as a "scene" that will "overwhelm" the viewer with sensations that enable the person with true ideology to transcend ordinary realities. During the first part of Jefferson's description, however, most of the terms used are not suggestive of the "sublime" as they are drawn from architecture—such as the measurements, the terms "semi-elliptical form," "axis of the ellipsis," the "cord [*sic*] of the arch," "the transverse," "parapet." When these words are used, they suggest a neutrality of observation in keeping with the convention of the mask of the impersonal persona. But their real function is that their usage implies man's understanding of the otherwise unfathomable craft of nature, for immediately after introducing these terms of "the beautiful" (as distinct from the terms of the convention of the "sublime")—which pertains to man's world of art—Jefferson moves towards the "experiential" qualities of the "sublime" that transcend the merely beautiful. Now, looking over the "parapet" through the eyes of the impersonal persona, the "audience" is able to note in the "abyss" below him an "awful [i.e., wonderous] and intolerable" sensation and that when the Natural Bridge is seen from below, the view gives a "delightful" sensation. At this point, Jefferson's emphasis is not on the object itself but on the "emotions arising from the sublime," as if the rational "beauty" of the perfect arch is actually a means of stimulating the "rapture" by which the "spectator" transcends "up to heaven," and thus leads to a plausible confirmation of the ideological view that the architecture of nature in America is quite the equal of any arch present in the effete countries of Europe.[10]

Besides Jefferson, other writers of the Age used the conventions of the persona to structure images, experiential situations, and scenes of the "sublime" in a way that truth became superior to man's arguments about truth. From the time of the Renaissance and Reformation until the modern age, Western man has been engaged in the devising of means of extending his consciousness into the world of actualities, and as the power of the written word to chart a path in those actualities began to falter and diminish, the power of the image, experience, and the scene of the "sublime" became increasingly important. The world of actualities was, after all, the scene in which real predicaments challenged men and which offered Western man a means of bettering his life. It is significant that as man extended his consciousness, consciousness itself in the Age of Jefferson was noted by the conventions of the persona and the "sensibility" that responded to the apparent actualities of the world in an orderly, rational and, above all, moral manner.[11]

The Age of Jefferson marked, for Americans, a time when the modern techniques for positing a persona against an image of nature was being

developed into a fully conventional rhetoric. Thomas Paine as early as his 1776 *Crisis I* indicated the trend of the ideological rhetoric in the Age by avowing that he could "bring reason to your ears, and in language as plain as A, B, C, hold truth to your eyes." If he motivated the "feelings" of the reader in order to gain assent to his ideology, he considered his use legitimate since a true "idea," when properly seen in the terms of Lockean sensationalism, is motivational and persuasive. Paine thus could insist that if his words were persuasive, it was because he had picked out those words and symbols of the "world's furniture" which actually corresponded to true ideologues. But more importantly in his *Age of Reason* (1794), Paine flatly negated all language not based on his "high abstraction"[12] which made "experience" indicative of his ideology. Paine had denied Revelation the ability to structure man's thinking because a "right idea of things" presupposes not only the "unchangeableness" of truth but also the "utter impossibility of any change taking place . . . in the word of God," and since language is subject to progressive change, "the word of God" can only exist in something other than Revelation. In short, one cannot tell another person of the will of God by using the medium of Scripture, for to believe in words is not to have "fidelity" to the will of God in unchanging Nature. Paine makes a brilliant confirmation of his faith in Nature by using experiential images of nature to show how sterile are the words of Scripture.

> As to the Christian system of faith, it appears to me as a species of atheism—a sort of religious denial of God. It professes to believe in a man rather than in God. It is a compound made up chiefly of manism but with a little deism, and introduces between man and his Maker an opaque body, which it calls a Redeemer, as the moon introduces her opaque self between the earth and the sun, and it produces by this means a religious or an irreligious, eclipse of light. It has put the whole orbit of reason into shade.

Paine, therefore, concludes that Christianity is a body of doctrines supposedly based on the exegesis of the Bible but is actually only an "opaque body" separating men from the natural "light" of "reason" that one discovers in Creation. When asked about the nature of God, however, Paine shows that the natural chain between the stimulus of Nature and man's "reason" is actually not intellectual but an ability in the reader (or observer) to "live more consistently and morally than by any other system." There is an implied code of morality in nature and only the person whose sensibility responds to nature is able to "transcend" the physical reality to arrive at such principles which make one speak with a conviction, unlike the "infidelity" of the Christian, to profess real beliefs. As Paine concludes, one may know that God exists, but one cannot know "the Almighty to perfection." God is "incomprehensible" as a being and yet what the true believer knows is that nature shows evidence of "a God of moral truth" who desires men to practice such truths. In short, one must

practice a "moral duty" and "this cannot be done by retiring ourselves from the society of the world and spending a recluse life in unselfish devotion." Paine imagines that if he has been given a mandate by God through his sense of an undefined "moral duty," he is to spell out truth to men and is to lead them.

Freneau's poems of romantic "fancy" are important illustrations of how the conventions of the "sensible" persona, mythic nature and the "sublime" structured poetry in the Age. The "fancy," for Freneau, is what man sees as he views nature, but it also goes beyond the ordinary reality of the everyday world. In a series of poems on the power of "fancy," Freneau termed the creative force a stimulant of the sensibility of the beholder. In his "Power of Fancy" (1786) he called "fancy" the "promethean fire" which man has received and has used throughout his long progress from the state of being a savage brute to that which makes him a member of the "immortal race" of the Gods:

> This spark of bright, celestial flame,
> From Jove's seraphic altar came,
> And hence alone in man we trace,
> Resemblance to the immortal race.

Because of "fancy," man is able to explain the "higher" purposes of life by the medium of his perceptions, and men's words based on this "promethean fire" are able to fathom historical events. "Fancy" as such is not an idle diversion or a threat to judgment, but is man's recognition of a moral plan for the universe. The emotional response of the persona to the world he describes, therefore, is a model for the response which is elicited from the "audience" to confirm the validity of those "fancies" by subsequent actions.

There are numerous possible examples of how this assumption of an ideological moral plan provides the reader with a model for the required "sensibility" to confirm the reactions of the persona. Timothy Dwight's 1784 poem *Greenfield Hill* presents a picture of the daily experience and social structure of a community free from ostensible institutions, a community intended to be a model for society of the newly-founded nation. What structures the status order of men in this society is what might well be termed "sociability," for Dwight imagines that the interrelations and conversation of men in society gives Providence the opportunity to implement its moral plan through discourse and manners without the notice of men:

> It [sociability] is, in decent habit, plain and neat,
> To spend a few choice hours, in converse sweet;
> Careless of forms, to act th'unstudied part,
> To mix in friendship, and to blend the heart;
> To choose those happy themes, which all must feel,
> The moral duties, and the household weal,
> The tale of sympathy, the kind design.
> Where rich affections soften, and refine;

T'amuse, to be amus'd, to bless, be bless'd,
And tune to harmony the common breast;
To cheer, with mild-good-humor's sprightly ray,
And smooth life's passage, o'er its thorny way;
To circle round the hospitable board,
And taste each good, our generous climes afford;
To court a quick return, with accents kind,
And leave, at parting, some regret behind.
Such, here the social intercourse is found;
So slides the year, in smooth enjoyment, round.

Inspired by his sense of morality, Dwight's persona specifies the attributes of a "natural" society and indicates the kind of leadership necessary to preserve the social processes by which Dwight, for one, ought to lead. In contrast to this ideal, the social "outsiders" seek worldly approbation by their dress, mannerisms and "trappings" in order to impose their "authority" on others for purposes of personal power; however, in the end, Dwight says, they

Lose the rich feast, by friendly converse given,
And backward turn from happiness, and heaven.

Thus the expectations of the "audience" confirm the seemingly self-evident truths of the persona.

John Trumbull's *Progress of Dulness* (1772) begins with Dwight's assumptions of a "natural society" which ought to exist, and Trumbull expected his reader to possess those true values in order to uncover, confirm, and clarify his satirical view of the actual unnatural status order that had Americans enthralled. Tom Brainless who seeks the professions of teacher and minister to be safe from criticisms of his fellows, Harriet Simper who marries because of her failing beauty, and Dick Hairbrain who manipulates people without a firm faith, all follow a false sense of values which leads men to use money to gain status in order to impose "authority" on others.

The previous analyses of narrative poetry point up the fact that the problems of the new society demanded and created a new rhetoric of ideology. But they also shaped the limit and conventions of the literature of the new nation. Literature was a means akin to rhetoric in its intent of defining the proper values for an individual in the new democratic society. But while authors early in the Age were sure of ideology in the new society, society itself became in time increasingly ambiguous, for it was both an idealized form of community and a reality of individualism that countered those ideals.

The rhetoric of fiction especially shows the ambiguous characteristics of society in the Age of Jefferson. Charles Brockden Brown's *Arthur Mervyn* (1798-1800) has a series of narrations within narrations which suggest that the real facts of Arthur's adventures are not in the possession of any single character but are to be inferred by the reader himself. The good Dr. Stevens who finds Arthur suffering from the plague in Phila-

delphia (in 1793) is the first persona, and he initially is dubious of Arthur's motivations since Arthur tells the doctor that he wants only an "occupation" that does not take too much time from his "leisure." When Arthur himself explains to Dr. Stevens why he wishes a disengagement from city life and a return to the country, he tells of the aristocratic Welbeck who also desired "leisure" to live as a gentleman. But when Welbeck tells Arthur of his past, the reader learns directly of the kind of selfish desire for "leisure" which is not the same as Arthur's. From this point on, Arthur seems to the reader more of a person who wants to use his "leisure" for humanitarian pursuits, such as the directing of a hospital and in engaging in intellectual pursuits befitting his native abilities. In retrospect, therefore, Arthur seems to desire "leisure" not as a form of indolence or false "authority" but as a means of reforming a society that is no longer "traditionalistic" as rural life was in his youth nor yet based on "sensibility." Thus Brown's use of the shifting narrators introduces the main persona whose reactions are under scrutiny as well, and more importantly, uses Arthur and other personae as models structuring the reader's proper responses in the ambiguous society of Jeffersonian America.

From the perspective of literature as a structuring of social ideals, the consummate work of fiction in the Age is Washington Irving's *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, Gentleman.* In this series of essays, there is a persona who holds together all scenes, landscapes and situations, and his responses are a model for the responses of the "audience." The sensibility of the persona supports Irving's ideology that ought to resolve the pressing questions of Americans in 1819. What Americans feared most at that time was the mobility and indeterminateness of the status order in America which Brown, Trumbull and Dwight had earlier exemplified. The problem of mobility existed because the forty years since the Revolution had given Americans an apparent social climate quite different from what they expected in undertaking the War of Independence. The rhetorical situation that seemingly offered any effective "speaker" a mandate to direct men in society had become a threat to the belief that only a true ideology ought to be able to have such power. Jefferson had complained in a number of letters to John Adams in 1813 that an unrestrained mobility made it possible for the "artificial aristocracy" of birth and wealth to gain such power as to hinder the rise of a "natural aristocracy."[13] Irving seconded this belief and the implication of this opinion, and thought that only men of true ideology ought to lead. In his *Sketchbook,* such true ideology is represented by the man of "sensibility" who is able to transmute the actual moment into an experience of "sublime" truths. Geoffrey Crayon's return to England, therefore, is a symbolic representation of a man who moves in space in an attempt to go back in time to true principles. In doing so, Geoffrey's experience leads the reader to a similar experience that confirms the notion that institu-

tions and traditions are needed to control social mobility in America for ideological purposes.

The premise of the entire *Sketchbook* is given in the chapter entitled "The Author's Account of Himself," where the persona's identity is linked with a need to make his special voyage, a voyage that would appeal to the "audience" which seeks knowledge of that social order which might bring the blessings of "futurity." In that chapter, the "commonplace realities of the present" in America are said to be connected with "the shadowy grandeurs of the Past" but that the "sensibility" of a special sort of reader alone can interpret the message. That person alone can conquer the invidious influence of the "commonplace realities" which have diverted men from the true ideals of a humane society and permitted only an opportunistic individualism. If the reader will look at the model of the persona as the key to that rich past that saves, he will find, implies Irving, that the "rural landscape of England" is a guide that solves moral dilemmas in a manner best suited to achieving "futurity." Then the reader might understand how "character" is a moral operative that preserves the social status of Mr. Roscoe who faces financial failures; or how, as with Rip Van Winkle, the past may give an identity which otherwise he could not have. In short, Irving builds up through the convention of "sensibility" the supposition that the true imagination is able to defeat the mutability of time and the chaos of social mobility which seem at odds with a nation that professed correct political, social and economic principles. In so doing, Irving implies that America, far from being on a unique course in the history of the world, was in fact leading the rest of mankind to a New Order based on certain Anglo-Saxon "moral" characteristics, and, furthermore, an irreversible progress was assured for Americans despite the superficial disorders of their society.

This goal of eventual order is an idealogue intended to solve present fears of the ambiguities in American society, an ambiguity central to the sketch of "English Writers on America." In that essay, after linking the "moral" causation of America's prosperity with the "moral" causation of England's traditions, Irving sees America's isolation from England as an occasion through which America was developing its own "national character." By that belief, America could be assured that its society would eventually manifest "moral" attributes through its social processes, even though for the moment America ought to observe the compulsion of manners and traditions akin to those of England in order to be sure that its own processes were correct.

If the America of 1819 was different from the America of the earlier decade, it was because by that time all Americans were engaged in an opportunistic individualism. In late years of the Age, "sensible" people knew that they were fulfilling a transcendental purpose in keeping control over their society.

Through the conventions of sentimentality, "sensibility," and the persona, Irving gave to America a form of literature that in essentials endured until the 1850's, the decade of the American Renaissance. Irving, whose talent was a spontaneous rhetorical response to the problems of himself in his society, solved the problem of finding a natural status order that might replace institutions by using the differences existing between England and America to make his "audience" respect formal English traditions of a class-conscious society as a guide for the "sensibility" of a "natural aristocrat." Irving as an ideologist had told his "audience" that the American gentleman, of whom Geoffrey was the perfect model, had come to his proper place in American society because of the inherent "moral" character of his mundane enterprises. The English gentleman, who gave Christmas dinners that brought out the people and thereby reminded them through dress and manners of who was the leader of English society (see the sketches of Christmas), had no need to engage himself in social and economic projects as did his American counterpart who was to find through productivity a means to accomplish the American "future." The English gentleman was influenced involutarily by the "moral" character of English traditions, institutions and landscapes, but the American version continually dirtied his hand with activities unknown to the traditional gentleman. The question of how a "gentleman" could be sure of the justification of his position by involving himself in a sphere of concern that seemingly threatened his impartial judgment, the trait above all which a gentleman ought to possess, was answered by Irving's perspectives of handling his persona. That is, the true English gentleman might be a model for the would-be gentleman in America, but only the American gentleman could ever show himself to possess a truly impartial judgment since in his mundane activities there were innumerable occasions on which he had to possess a transcendent "moral sensibility" and "taste" of a superior character in order to continue to occupy his place in the status order. In short, what the American gentleman did, was often what he had to do to fulfill his obligation to a superior code that made history meaningful. As a true ideologist among ideologies, the American gentleman had to control society from above and yet know that in doing so, he served the "reason" of history. In such a series of assumptions laid out in public rhetoric and literary exposition, American society apparently had attained that stage in the cycle of history when, for the first time since Independence, an orderly process was possible for filtering out mere opinions from what was more and more manifestly the "true" ideology of Americans.

When American society arrived at that semblance of orderly processes in the later years of the Age of Jefferson, its ideological and literary conventions of "sensibility" attained a similar maturity. Initially fearful of institutions associated with the feudal past, Americans had had a need for a substitute restraint to structure its status order. In the vacuum of

ostensible leadership, ideological rhetoric had led Americans into a "future" in which opportunistic individualism might operate in harmony with the common welfare if the men who shaped the goals were given the mandate to use power in a way that the solution to present problems would conform to their ideals. If public rhetoric changed the lives of people as it conferred the leadership on the effective "speaker," so literature served a similar rhetorical end since in the days before the professional authorship of Poe and Hawthorne, a writer wrote out of the inspiration of personal beliefs and sought to use the medium of esthetic responses to clarify and support his own social and moral beliefs. As Irving's *Sketchbook* illustrates so aptly, the men who were to lead because of the possession of values that ought to bring about the desired form of American life were also those men who were attempting to institutionalize their power—economic, social and political—in the name of the entire community. In retrospect, however, ideological rhetoric and literature had given Americans two major benefits. First, in a time of great problems, it gave Americans the capacity for the necessary changes without disrupting a composite "national character" that was to endure as an unchanging ideal. Second, just because of that capacity for change, it provided Americans with a means of ascertaining their personal identity in an "institutionless" society, for it gave power to those persons who imputed to their acts and those of their compatriots the values of the "national character." When the Age of Jefferson drew to a close, Americans were prepared for further changes by a rhetoric of "the Jacksonian persuasion"[14] that gave many of the wealthy individuals political power in the name of the "common man," and a literature that made social manners a test of the moral "sensibility" and the main theme of fiction and poetry until the time of the American literary Renaissance.

University of New Mexico

footnotes

1. Charles Feidelson, *Symbolism and American Literature* (Chicago, 1953), 77-118, and Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Boston, 1961), 327-330.

2. Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth Century Background* (Garden City, New York, 1953), 219-222, and Richard M. Gummere, *The American Colonial Mind and the Classical Tradition: Essays in Comparative Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), *passim.*

3. Stow Persons, "The Cyclical Theory of History in Eighteenth Century America," *AQ*, VI (1954), 147-164, and H. Trevor Colbourn, *The Lamp of Experience: Whig History and the Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1965), esp. 185-193.

4. The English background of rhetoric is discussed by Wilbur Samuel Howell in *Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500-1700* (Princeton, 1956), 10-11.

5. Perry Miller, "Jonathan Edwards and the Great Awakening," in *Errand into the Wilderness* (New York, 1964), 162.

6. Perry Miller, "The Rhetoric of Sensation," in *Errand into the Wilderness*, 181.

7. Miller, "Jonathan Edwards and the Great Awakening," *ibid.*, 164-165.

8. Robert F. Sayre, "Benjamin Franklin and American Autobiography," in *The Examined Self: Benjamin Franklin, Henry Adams, Henry James* (Princeton, 1964), 3-43.

9. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (New York, 1964), 16-17.

10. *Ibid.*, 21-22.

11. Herbert Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* ([Toronto, 1962]), and *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York, 1965).

12. Feidelson, *Symbolism and American Literature,* 92. The phrase "high abstractionism" is that of Alfred North Whitehead, used in his *Science and the Modern World* (New York, 1925) to describe eighteenth century efforts to conceive of the world in terms of empiricism, and is an early form of ideology.

13. Lester J. Cappon, ed., *The Adams-Jefferson Letters* (Chapel Hill, 1959. 2 vols.), II, 350-400.

14. Marvin Meyer, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief* (Stanford, 1957), esp. chapters I, II.