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**A Would-be Whig Ascendancy of Fashion:
Francis J. Grund's *Aristocracy in America*
as a Satirical Account**

Far from the straightforward "travel account" which it is usually taken for, Francis J. Grund's *Aristocracy in America* is actually a principled and partisan satire on the very possibility of an American aristocracy. It superficially bears the marks of that popular early-nineteenth-century genre in which Europeans presented observations on life and manners in the United States, and a number of American historians have relied on it in precisely that fashion.¹ Others, however, have seen more in the work without fully recognizing Grund's intent. George Probst, who edited the work's first American edition in 1959, considered it an engaging and perhaps exaggerated conversational commentary illustrating the impossibility of inequality in American life, while Robert Berkhofer, Jr., maintained that in the form of an orthodox travel account it expressed Grund's disappointment with the Democratic Party under Martin Van Buren.²

But *Aristocracy in America* is a complex and witty book that straddles many boundaries. Travel accounts of the early nineteenth century, as Berkhofer has noted, were part of a larger European dialogue about liberalism and reform, a dialogue in which Grund's place is only now beginning to be appreciated.³ A committed democrat, he produced two such works. The first of these, *The Americans in their Moral, Social, and Political Relations*, he published in England, Germany, and the United States in 1837, while *Aristocracy in America* saw print two years later only in England and Germany.⁴ Both works were intended to counter accounts by English conservatives. In addition, Grund was engaged in American political dialogue as a partisan politician and journalist—a pro-Jackson Democrat when he wrote these two books—and he closely identified his domestic Whig opposition with the self-selected would-be aristocracy upon which English writers relied for information. *Aristoc-*

racy in America speaks to both of these dialogues simultaneously through its stinging critique of Grund's political enemies.

On occasion, in orthodox travel account fashion, Grund does offer some observations on key topics, including the nature of the American political system and anomalies in relations between men and women that had, he thought, a corrosive effect on American life. Far from forming the bulk of the book, however, these reflections take little space. The book's central purpose, guided by his understanding of American politics, is to skewer the self-proclaimed American aristocracy through satire. Using the observations of a fictional Author and the Author's reported conversations, both overheard and with jaundiced observers, Grund mounts a vicious attack on his enemies. One of his major satiric thrusts, striking at a point of particular concern in Jacksonian America, aims at the undue prominence of women and skewed domestic relations among the "aristocracy."

Grund's background is important in understanding *Aristocracy in America*. He was one of the relatively small number of German-speaking intellectuals who migrated to the United States before 1848. The son of a Catholic furrier, he was born in the Bohemian mountains northeast of Prague in 1805.⁵ As a young man, probably between about 1822 and 1825, he studied mathematics and philosophy at the Vienna Polytechnikum and the University of Vienna and was particularly gifted in languages and mathematics. His views on aristocracy and the proper role of women in polite society, an implicit counterpoint to the American would-be aristocracy's practice throughout *Aristocracy in America*, clearly owe much to his knowledge of such society in Austria. Sometime in the mid-1820s Grund left Vienna for the New World; one source places him in Rio de Janeiro in 1825.⁶ Upon his arrival in the United States in 1827, Grund earned his living by teaching mathematics and modern languages in Boston, and he published several school textbooks between 1830 and 1834.

He first tasted political life in October 1834, when he spoke to a crowd of German voters in New York—by his own account, an electrifying performance—in favor of William Seward, the Whig candidate for governor. Within seven months, however, he changed his allegiance. He later campaigned among the German community for Martin Van Buren, the Democratic nominee for president and heir apparent to Andrew Jackson. A German-language campaign biography of Van Buren numbers among his efforts in that direction, and his two commentaries on American life date from Van Buren's administration. Shortly before publishing these works Grund had forsaken education for a full-time career in politics; in about 1834 or 1835 he took up political journalism, and from about 1846 he served as a Washington correspondent for newspapers in Philadelphia, where he had moved in 1836 and lived for most of the year, and in Baltimore. During his political career he switched parties and factions several times in an apparent effort to gain government offices. In 1840 he turned his support back to a Whig candidate once again, favoring William Henry Harrison (whom he had campaigned against in 1836), and four years later changed parties for a

third time. This time he remained a Democrat until 1863, although deeply involved in factional politics within the party. In 1863 he dramatically renounced his political allegiance and joined the Republican Party.⁷

This behavior recently led two historians to label him a "political weathervane" and to excoriate him as "a prototype of the chameleon or trimmer" and "blood brother" to the Vicar of Bray.⁸ But Grund's party-switching was no more extreme than that of many others in the period, and it has recently been argued that his own views remained consistent while the parties' positions on important issues changed. In any case, party loyalty by itself was no virtue for Grund, who wrote that political action was only "the shortest distance between two given points."⁹

In his broadest political principles, the commitment to a liberal self-governing republic, he seems very close to those of other German-speaking liberals such as Francis Lieber and Charles Follen, for whom Boston and Boston society were a magnet in the period. He differed from the others in his enthusiastic embrace of American partisan politics and mirrored the bulk of German-Americans by affiliating mainly with the Democratic Party. His vigorous support for slavery also set him apart from fellow intellectuals and increasingly from the German-American community, which turned to the new Republican Party during the crisis of the 1850s.¹⁰

It is important to bear in mind that both *The Americans* and *Aristocracy in America* are products of a partisan journalist's first years in the trade, and moreover appeared during his brief first affiliation with the Democratic Party. He arranged to have *The Americans* published during a trip to Europe in late 1836 and 1837. It appeared in 1837 in Europe and the United States and received favorable notices in Britain and from Charles Sumner in the *North American Review*. *Aristocracy in America*, completed sometime after the spring of 1838, was published late in 1839 in London and in Germany, but was never published in the United States in Grund's lifetime.¹¹ Both of these works, but especially *Aristocracy in America*, bear strong marks of his affiliation with the Democratic Party. Choosing, for whatever reasons,¹² to side with the Whigs in 1840, Grund could afford to let *The Americans* pass as old news, and during that campaign season he worked as an editor for two Philadelphia Whig newspapers and also wrote a German campaign biography of Harrison. But he could not even contemplate releasing the other work because of its vituperative attacks on Whigs. As a partisan political journalist he had unleashed tremendous satirical energy in this second book.

Aristocracy in America combines straightforward evaluation of certain aspects of American life with a biting satire of the pseudo-aristocracy, and is the more complex and interesting of the two books. In part, however, it elaborates on themes and statements put forward in the earlier work. In *The Americans*, Grund addressed himself to several misconceptions about America, and by implication about a reformed Europe, arising from the narrow view that certain English travelers expounded; his particular *bêtes noires* were Mrs. Trollope, Basil Hall, and Thomas Hamilton, who berated Americans as narrow, uncultivated, and

money-minded.¹³ Grund defended Americans not by pointing to the youth of their society, which he thought a spurious argument, but by pointing out differences between the United States and Europe that the others overlooked.¹⁴

One major difference he noted was that American society was much more varied because of its extent and its origin: "Society, in America, is composed of a great number of heterogeneous elements, and the conventional standard, therefore, is less fixed than in any part of Europe" (TA, 1:2). Attempts to fix or make judgments according to a single standard, as pseudo-aristocrats did, he therefore thought ludicrous.

In addition to this geographical distinction, Grund asserted a more far-reaching socio-political difference. The United States was a nation of middling people:

America is really what Hamilton calls the city of Philadelphia—*médiocre par excellence*; her political institutions depriving her of the splendour of a throne—the focus of polite society in Europe; but, at the same time, saving her from the pernicious influence of an idle and turbulent mob—the destruction of public morality and virtue. The manners of Americans, therefore, are as far removed from the elegance of courts, as they are from the boorishness of the lower classes in Europe; and, perhaps, equally free from the vices of both. (TA, 1:4)

Although it had no aristocracy or court, the United States equally lacked Europe's desperate poverty, a happy circumstance often overlooked by Tories. This "mediocrity" was the key to understanding American manners. It, along with democratic government and institutions stemming from English origins, accounts for many of the traits which other travelers objected to. Such characteristics include Americans' conceit about their system of government, their seriousness, their hyperactivity, and above all, "their unhallowed custom of talking about trade and traffic" (TA, 1:14).

But the European critics who had not recognized this central fact of American life were not merely mistaken in their assessments, they had been actively misled. They had drawn their conclusions from the conversation of a particular set of Americans who boasted of their aristocratic ways. If "it has always been the fault of European writers to compare American manners, and especially those of the coteries styled 'aristocratic,' to the polished ease of the higher classes of Europe," and thereby to reflect negatively on American life, they had been encouraged by those very coteries to do so (TA, 1:3). Moreover, their opinion of the people at large derived from those coteries and was in fact nothing more than "the stale reiteration of some evening's conversation, coloured by the partisan spirit of politics and religion" (TA, 1:26).

Grund saw these coteries as very pernicious groups. They claimed to be aristocratic, but in America, where primogeniture had been abolished and wealth was impermanent, no genuine aristocracy ever could develop. Without hereditary wealth, special privileges, or legal power to

direct the lower classes, aristocracy was impossible, and people were foolish to think it could exist in the United States of Grund's time.

Nevertheless, a certain group of people persisted in claiming that "there was a great deal of aristocracy" in the country which Europeans habitually missed seeing. Grund's rejoinder is worth quoting at length:

Now I have remained nearly fifteen years in the United States; but I have never been able to discover this aristocracy; nor its trappings, power, influence, or worshippers. I have, assuredly, known a variety of fashionable coteries,—at least what in America is called fashionable;—composed of highly respectable merchants, literary and professional men, politicians and others, who, it was evident, considered themselves the nobility and gentry of the land; but they never had the courage of avowing their sentiments and pretensions in public; and have, of late, been as much excluded from the government of the country, as they avoided being confounded with the rest of their fellow citizens. (TA, 2:391)

Mere pseudo-aristocracies, then, these coteries lacked real power and instead tried to counterfeit it through the power of fashion.

Women were a major force within fashionable coteries; where pretension flowered, it was tended by them. As Grund elaborated,

Coteries there always were, and always will be, in large cities; but they need not necessarily be connected with power. In America, moreover, they exist, principally, among the ladies; there being, as yet, but few gentlemen to be called "of leisure," or exclusively devoted to society. The country is yet too young . . . to leave to the fashionable drawing-rooms other devotees than young misses and *elegants* [sic] of from fourteen to twenty years of age. (TA, 1:21-22)

Fashionable society—Grund's coteries—involved largely women and boys. Its pecking order was not based on power, learning, or any real distinction but on fashion; he later pictured this group as morbidly afraid to mix with the lower classes because of ". . . the total absence of any exterior distinction between themselves and the lower orders, which could point them out as objects of particular respect and reverence" (TA, 1:51).¹⁵ The conversation and bearing of these fashionable circles claiming a bogus aristocracy, which had so influenced the British travel writers, would be Grund's targets in his next book. There, he would mount a spirited satirical attack against these would-be aristocrats.

Aristocracy in America is a complex and engaging book whose principal aim Grund states with tongue in cheek, clearly signaling his satirical intent, at the beginning of his "Introduction." Posing as the "editor," he explains that he wants merely to correct a grievous oversight:

Numerous works have already been published on "American Society;" but its peculiar tendency towards *Aristocracy*, its talents, resources,

and prospects, have never been more than generally and superficially dwelt upon. . . . This is a great fault. The Americans have, as they repeatedly assure Europeans, "a great deal of Aristocracy," and, in general, a very nice taste for artificial distinctions

The Author of these pages seems to have made it his study to bring those hidden gems to light, in order to vindicate his adopted country from the reproach of *equality* and *barbarism*, indiscriminately heaped upon it by the Tories of all countries, and especially by the *great* Tories of England. (AA, 3)

A comparison of this passage with those cited from *The Americans* is instructive and clearly signals the central satirical thrust of the book.

Within the overarching framework of partisan satire, which will be discussed below, Grund as the "Author" allows himself direct observations on several topics in the manner of orthodox travel writers. Many of them reflect on his own career, while some were first explored in *The Americans*. Two of particular importance are those on American women and relations between the sexes, and those on political principles. Both are seen principally from a European perspective.

Like many other Europeans, Grund saw fundamental distortions in relations between the sexes of respectable Americans, and his Author speaks directly to the reader about them rather than through his more usual device of reported conversations. Remarking the utter awkwardness of men when women are present, he lays the behavior to "something radically wrong in the composition of American society" that puts both sexes on a false footing with each other. Social convention, he notes, puts women in a totally opposite position in public to that in their own homes and families, and one which also forbids any "exercise of discretion" by men. Ladies in public had to be waited on incessantly: helped into carriages, helped with their boots, their shawls, their shoelaces, led up and down stairs, have candles lit for them. "On every occasion they are treated as poor helpless creatures who rather excite the pity than the admiration of men," and because men were obliged to attend on women in the normally servantless social world, they naturally found feminine company "irksome." Grund would far prefer that men could exercise discretion and pay special attention only to those they liked; this lack of allowable discretion made women tyrants in public.

Because of the rules requiring indiscriminate attention, "an American *salon* exhibits nothing but generalities of men and women, in which no other merit is recognized but that which belongs to the sex." Specifically, "whenever an American gentleman meets a lady, he looks upon her as the representative of her sex," who receives his attentions as such and not for herself. Most unfortunately this pattern prevails within marriage as well, making true friendship or companionship between man and wife impossible. "How seldom is she the intimate friend of her husband, the repository of his secrets, his true and faithful counsellor," he laments. In sum, "American ladies are worshipped; but the adoration consists in a species of polytheism, in which no particular

goddess has a temple or an altar dedicated to herself" (AA, 39-40). Grund as a European finds this convention of polite society repugnant and as a Jacksonian Democrat finds it dangerous, as will be seen below.

Another important set of observations, those on the American political system, appear repeatedly throughout the book and underlie Grund's political satire. Some of those observations serve Grund's own career view; an example is his assessment of Washington, D.C., as an intellectual capital. In every other city talk revolves around business and the views expounded are very parochial, but in the national capital these limited horizons expand, and talent and intellect, rather than money, rule society. "Literary and professional men . . . find their level only in Washington," where "the mass of property is really so small in proportion to the intellect that governs it, as to leave a large balance in favour of the latter" (AA, 252). An intellectual *engagé* like Grund could feel at home nowhere else in America, despite his own view that politicians as a group had little knowledge of or interest in the principles of republican government as against any other. A party leader could not worry about right and wrong, but only about the public's understanding of right and wrong; "when a new question is proposed, he thrusts out his *feelers*, to feel the public pulse" (AA, 243).

No leader could, however, rely on newspapers either to sound or shape public opinion. Newspapers act only as partisan instruments and achieve an effect by their sheer numbers rather than through well-reasoned argument. Paradoxically, given the partisan bitterness of American newspapers, "there is scarcely a paper in any of the large cities of the United States which has a decided political character—advocating some great historical principle" and making an intellectual appeal to that political principle as well as to the emotions (AA, 192). Unpopular truths must find men of independent means as champions, but editors, who rely on advertising revenue rather than subscriptions, can hardly fit that description (AA, 193-94). Perhaps for this reason, political journalism, as a correspondent informs the Author in conversation, is an amusement, not a trade, and the fun consists in being on the winning side. "There is such fun in being on the side that beats. . . . To carry a whole State "smack, smooth, and no mistake!"' " But no one enjoys losing, and so " 'if you study our politics, you will always find that our most "talented men" desert a party just before it is going to break up' " (AA, 228). It would be hard to find a more convincing rationale for Grund's own career trajectory: Unable to make a living by arguing for grand principles, he could form tactical alliances with either party as the need arose.

On one prime article of Democratic faith *Aristocracy in America*, paralleling *The Americans*, makes no compromises. Once again Grund presents the issue as the Author's own reflections rather than as a reported conversation. Grund's author sees a self-selected "aristocracy" of wealth persistently attempting to capture the government for its own ends:

The old Federalists have not given up *one* of their former pretensions . . . they have become more cautious . . . because they now *fear* the people . . . the wealthy classes are in no other country as much opposed to the existing government; and . . . no other government can be considered as less permanently established, or more liable to changes, than that of the United States. And this state of danger the soft speeches of the Whigs try to conceal from the people by directing their attention almost exclusively to the financial concerns of the country. (AA, 131)

Federalists-turned-Whigs, attempting to capture the government for a monied would-be aristocracy, rely on their wealth as a means of rewarding talent and turning it to their purposes; "talent loves to be rewarded, and in republics, as well as in monarchies, naturally serves those who are best *able* to reward it." They also use ridicule (often in the partisan press) and exclusion from fashionable society as weapons against the "cause of democracy." Against this array of weapons, Democrats have only the public offices at their disposal, and so Whigs attack public patronage viciously. Grund's Author trusts to the good sense, wisdom, and moral outlook of the people to prevent the triumph of mere wealth (AA, 132-33).

The book's first section ends with a further Authorial reflection on the pseudo-aristocracy of wealth.¹⁶ He retires for the night with this train of thought in his mind, and dreams that a conquering army from the Western states has overrun New York or Philadelphia and established laws "written in blood." Pseudo-aristocratic "leading citizens" attempt to buy the "gallant leader's" clemency, but he sternly rebukes them, saying

"Fools that ye were to wish for artificial distinctions! Know that the origin of every aristocracy is the sword, not the purse. . . . You have claimed the purse for yourself, and now the sword shall take it!" (AA, 135)

These reflections give the partisan satire of *Aristocracy in America* its center, energy, and bite.

The essential argument underlying Grund's satire can be stated relatively baldly. It holds that the United States was historically and essentially a democratic nation ruled by public opinion, which the Democratic Party represented best. Resisting this fundamental principle of political life, groups of wealthy men and women persistently sought to install a government on different and opposed principles. Their claim to distinction and aristocracy was part of this effort. However, because they did not and never could possess real attributes of aristocracy, they were no more than snobbish coteries, both ludicrous and vicious, and founded merely on evanescent mercantile wealth or even on speculative credit. The new Whig Party of 1834 was merely the current incarnation of aristocratic principles formerly embodied in Federalism and National Republicanism, and deserved scourging to protect the common people and their political democracy.

The partisan satire, aimed at undercutting both the bogus aristocracy and the European conservatives who relied on and criticized it, begins in the book's "Introduction." Grund as "the editor" writes that he has come to issue the Author's book after running into his old acquaintance, the seventh (and non-inheriting) son of an obscure Westphalian baron, early one morning. Recognizing each other, the two decide to chat at a Turkish coffee shop. The formerly impecunious, now prospectively rich, nobleman had written some sketches during an earlier political career. Since then he got rich in the China trade, married the daughter of an insurance executive ("the young lady having fallen in love with him at a party"), and became respectable. "He has since had two children by his wife, and a clerkship by his father-in-law," and has sworn to write no more except in the line of business or to his father-in-law. The gentleman wants Grund to publish his sketches without letting anyone else know. As he declares, "I am a married man, related to one of the most aristocratic families in town, with the prospect of inheriting a fortune. I must not quarrel with my bread and butter.'" He especially wishes to have his flirtations excised, not particularly for his wife's sake, "'but my father-in-law, and the public—.'" Grund gallantly agrees and refuses all talk of recompense, commenting that "'it will be as much as you can do to pay your wife's mantuamaker'" (AA, 4-7).

Besides providing an amusing and sarcastic rationale for the book itself, the introduction also showcases Grund's skill in creating fictitious conversations and the characters he needs to advance various positions. The German nobleman "was once a sporting character; but is now a sedate, moral, religious man, scarcely to be told from a real American." But he is in mufti, and really takes a detached, if not jaundiced, view of Americans when he lets his hair down with Grund. Readers can be prepared for more of the same in the book itself, and they have the advantage of knowing that their supposed Author is or was a true aristocrat "whose family dates back to the eighth century" and can therefore observe the American "aristocracy" from a position of knowledge, but one who has not scrupled at marrying for American money. No one can seriously doubt, however, that the seventh son of the Baron von K-pfsch-rtz, so perfect for Grund's purposes, did not exist (AA, 3).

The fictional quality of Grund's characters and of the book's many conversations, though not usually recognized, is important to his overall satirical strategy in pursuing his argument.¹⁷ No one can seriously believe in either "the Author" or Grund's reported conversation with him. Similarly, no one can seriously believe in the Author's conversants, who materialize all too conveniently. In the first part of the book, an account of fashionable society in New York, the Author shares observations with a pair of Southern gentlemen, both of them trenchant observers and critics of Northern society. Later, in Boston, the Author meets by chance a native Bostonian who entrusts him with his ironic view of life there, but only when the two are alone; a Bostonian must be careful of his reputation, after all. Still later, having just mentally praised the Southern gentry, our diarist is treated to a Carolinian of similar temperament who remembers him from a stagecoach ride between

Baltimore and Washington, and the two commiserate on Bostonians' mealy-mouthed public behavior. Other characters are equally just beyond the limits of believability, but serve Grund's purposes.¹⁸

Similarly, the conversational strategy itself allows him a great deal of freedom; it lets him convict the pseudo-aristocracy directly and indirectly while slightly softening the blows. It allows him to demonstrate the fatuity of his subjects by having their conversations expose their own venality all unaware. It also enables him to put some of his most stinging critical remarks in the mouths of Americans, albeit "outsiders;" the only sustained criticism made by the author in reported conversation concerns economic affairs. Self-indictment might seem more convincing to European readers, and criticism from Americans more palatable to American readers. Grund uses this strategy to plant satirical barbs in two primary ways. In one, his Author converses with interlocutors who are detached enough from wherever they are to offer judgments on local society. In the other, the Author quotes overheard conversations among the "aristocracy" very much like the conversations Grund believed earlier English observers had been involved in.

The first two chapters, centering on a trip to Staten Island, serve as an introduction to the American pseudo-aristocracy, to Grund's methods in satirizing them, and to the major themes of his criticism. He excoriates their hatred of the United States and its institutions, their slavish imitation of European fashions, their kowtowing to foreign aristocracy, their love of artificial distinctions, and their disdain for the "lower classes" to whom they are actually so close. Women appear prominently in his satires as over-powerful figures.

A discussion of the first episodes will convey the flavor of Grund's attack. Chapter one opens with the Author strolling along with two Southern friends down Broadway one hot summer morning; they proceed to the Bowling Green where cool breezes await them. This locale provides the occasion for a conversation on the willingness of fashionable New Yorkers to throw away comfort in order to imitate foreign fashion; they have lately moved to the West Side, where the air and views are far less pleasant. As one of the Author's companions observes, "This our people imagine to be a successful imitation of English taste" because fashionable Londoners live in the West End. American aristocrats also fear contact with ordinary people, again to their own detriment. "The people follow their inclination, and occupy that which they like, while our exclusives are obliged to content themselves with what is abandoned by the crowd" (AA, 10).

The little group takes the ferry to Staten Island and there joins a roomful of men who happen to represent different parts of the Union and different aristocratic professions. Besides the German and his two Southern friends, there are a Baltimorean, a lawyer/litterateur, a Bostonian, a New Yorker, a Philadelphian, a Virginian, and a young man just returned from France. This cast of characters exhibits a veritable showcase of pseudo-aristocratic faults. They condemn politics and politicians, despise abolitionists, Thomas Jefferson, and universal suffrage, and cannot abide living in the United States. The Philadelphian

blames Jefferson for "introducing that vilest of curses, universal suffrage," which forces them to mingle with the lower orders. As the *New Yorker* declares, "Who the d-l would scramble up among a parcel of ragamuffins in order to exercise a privilege shared by every pauper! I would as lief do common militia duty." They much prefer society in England and France, though in England, unlike France, they would have to "put up with the society of the middle classes" (AA, 15-16).

Nor do these men care for American women, whom they castigate as pretentious, imperious, and vapidly interested only in amusing themselves. The returnee from France, however, is willing to put up with one woman who "is worth a hundred thousand dollars if she is worth a cent; and she has sworn never to marry, except an European or an American who has remained enough in Europe to become civilized." The dandy prepares for half an hour for his assignation, even over-tightening his tie in order to give color to his complexion! The lawyer, too, is revealed as a drone incapable of earning a living, as are most of his group; "all the law business is done by half-a-dozen vulgar upstarts who come here from the country, and whom the public, God knows why, is taking into favour." At this juncture the Author, stepping out of his reporter role, reflects on the remarkable fact that men in a society ruled by chance should lust for "aristocratic distinctions" more than in countries which have a historical aristocracy (AA, 20-22).

Opportunities for further observation present themselves on the ferry ride back to Manhattan. The ferry stops to board and land passengers of a ship newly arrived from London, and the ferry riders evaluate the ship's cabin passengers, disparaging some and fawning over the titled English. The women aboard the ferry are the most active in drawing social distinctions. Remarks begin as a gentleman aboard the ferry asks the ship's captain who is aboard his ship; the man's wife comments on the social standing of those the captain names. Mrs. ***, for example, is "The wife of that vulgar auctioneer that wanted to outdo everybody," while an unrelated Mr. *** is "that grocer who made fifty thousand dollars in a coffee speculation, and has ever since been trying to get into the first society; but did not succeed on account of that blubber-faced wife of his."

English voyagers are subjected to the same appraisal. The collected company gasps in appreciation of Lady *** and her daughter, the men even using binoculars for a better view, and duly appreciates Captain ***. Lord ***, a single young nobleman, likewise draws favorable notice, even though he is judged to be a liberal because he was seen talking to the ship's engineer. But several gentlemen of Manchester, Liverpool, and London, all in the cotton business, are not worth knowing. As the appraising wife declares, "business people, I presume,—full of pretensions and vulgar English prejudices." Dismissive of cotton magnates, the party equally fears contact with the ship's steerage passengers and forms tight groups, with women packed in the center, to intimidate them as they walk on deck. One with the temerity to speak to an American cabin passenger is humiliated, and the American, trying to impress Lord *** with his refinement, finds himself

quietly but firmly upended by the aristocrat. The exchange culminates with the American's assertion that the United States is young but that it "can challenge history for a comparison," only to be met with the reply, "Just so" (AA, 23-28).

This performance provides the German nobleman and his companions abundant opportunity for comment on Americans' treatment of aristocrats, which follows as soon as the ferry lands. All agree that fashionable people fawn. When the German tries to defend them by pointing to the novelty of real aristocrats, a companion replies, "If their wonderment and toad-eating were confined to dukes and earls, I would willingly pardon them; but . . . by continually talking about nobility, they imagine themselves to belong to it'" (AA, 29). Common people, they agree, sometimes react too negatively to aristocrats, but all three find that more palatable because more in keeping with an unfolding national character.

The themes explored here recur through much of the book as the Author travels in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington and presents a barbed satire of those who would be aristocrats in a democratic nation. Fatuous and vicious conversation of these self-proclaimed aristocrats combines with jaundiced appraisals by outsiders and reflections by the Author. Informants are almost always ironically detached, while the Author himself is straightforwardly sincere and disarmingly candid until part three, in which he becomes extremely partisan in his appraisal of parties and politicians. In many of these caricatures, women play a leading role as purveyors of the bogus aristocracy.

Pseudo-aristocratic hatred for democratic American institutions laces the conversations. In after-dinner talk in New York, for example, the author quotes a Bostonian lawyer who excessively admires English ways and manners and therefore holds the rest of American high society in contempt. Fashionable Americans, he maintains, are well-known throughout Europe as enemies of liberal institutions. "Their presence in any country can only serve to chill the ardour of the liberals Our fashionable society is capable of curing the maddest [European] republican of his political distemper'" (AA, 50). In another instance, a fashionable New York City lady attempts to woo an upstate Democrat to the other side. Declaring her pride in America's republican institutions, she nevertheless complains that "our people go too far in their liberty" and hopes that the assemblyman does not represent the rabble who act on a "ridiculous notion of equality." Unable to budge him from this defense of democracy, immigrants, and General Jackson, she cuts him mercilessly as a buffoon: "I want no better proof of the justice or injustice of either principle *than the comparative respectability of the men who advocate it.*" This woman, like other Whig aristocrats, could not abide the institution of democratic equality (AA, 106-11).

Hatred for their own country's institutions is balanced by a slavish devotion to European fashion, or what passes for it. In Boston, the Author's guide, his "cicerone," directs his attention to a concert. The performers are all said to boast extravagant approvals from the capitals

of Europe, a claim the Author recognizes as absurd puffery. His guide agrees but assures him that these claims are the rule in Eastern cities, "the judgment of the higher classes in matters of taste confirming, without a single exception, the verdict pronounced by the connoisseurs of Europe," actual or claimed (AA, 159). At an earlier New York performance of "Othello" the fashionable part of the audience can talk of nothing but the superiority of English actors. Asking who is playing Iago, a woman in one of the boxes is told, "'Only one of our *ordinary Americans*. We have not had a decent *Iago* since Kemble left us.'" The latter, an Englishman, knew how to play "tipsy gentlemen, while our actors only play the part of drunken blackguard," according to the lady. Forest, the American in the title role, has "much improved" through a tour in England (AA, 77).

Closely related to the rage for European fashion is the kowtowing to titles. One recommendation in Forest's favor, for example, is that "the first nobility went to see him" (AA, 77). After-dinner conversation in New York dwells on this trait, introduced by the Anglophilic Bostonian. Both English and Americans fawn excessively on royalty, "but the American will outdo the Englishman. He will be twice as humble before ribands and stars" (AA, 47). This view meets with general recognition, even as involving speakers and men of letters; as an English doctor declares, "however fiercely they may extol republican institutions in their writings, they all sink the republican in company with lords and ladies" (AA, 57).

Grund inserts a running joke on this theme revolving around use of the aristocratic particle "de" (which was used by many Germans when giving their names in English). Early in the book, the Author is introduced "without the 'de,'" to a circle of fashionable New York girls, who continue talking without taking any real notice of him (AA, 34). Arriving in Boston later, he receives a polite but distant welcome because of his own request that letters of introduction omit the offending particle (AA, 151). At a Washington hotel he gives his name as Mr. ***, "taking care to omit the 'De'" so as not to pull rank, and must of course share his room (AA, 226). Finally, despite his best efforts, he is introduced at a Washington party as "*Monsieur DE ****," upon which the young debutantes begin eyeing him appraisingly and speculating about his marriageability and wealth (AA, 270-71).

Pseudo-aristocratic subservience to European fashion and titles reflects a deep hunger for artificial distinctions which manifests itself throughout fashionable society. Women and girls work hard to maintain these distinctions. At a party in New York, a new girl becomes the butt of audible remarks when she enters with a country boy. One girl declares, "'I never saw her before in my life, I am sure; do *you* know her?'" while another remarks of the girl's dress, "'I am sure it's not worth seventy-five cents a yard.'" Other comments follow about her rural swain, and the exchange culminates when one fashionable girl declares, "'I hope she isn't going to dance; if she does, I shall leave the room'" (AA, 85).

The gnawing hunger for artificial distinctions extends far beyond the first circles of respectable society, and married women work very hard to satisfy it. Fashionable wives and daughters of even modestly successful men are particularly anxious for status; as described by the Anglophilic Boston lawyer, they must have their own carriages, live in more expensive houses than they can afford, give lavish parties without inviting old friends, cultivate officers and aristocrats, and tour the fashionable springs. Daughters cajole their parents into overdressing them so they can rise in the fashionable world and leave their origins behind after seventeen; a young lady's debutante party marks "the commencement of her formal separation for life from all her early friends, relatives, and often her own parents'" (AA, 44-46). All social circles with pretensions to gentility make elaborate calculations of rank, according to the Bostonian "cicerone" (AA, 188-89). And such distinctions extend even into the churches, as the Author instances directly. In New York, the respectable Roman Catholics maintain their own small church in order to exclude poorer Catholics, often their own servants; "those poor devils who cannot afford to pay for a pew must be content to seek the Lord elsewhere *among their equals*" (AA, 89).

Beneath this search for artificial distinction, or coordinate with it, the Author emphasizes the bogus aristocracy's powerful disdain for ordinary people and for the notion of equality with them. Echoing sentiments quoted earlier, the Author's Southern friend in New York parodies the love of genteel Americans for the presence of royalty. "What privilege," he quotes them as saying, "is it to shake hands with the President of the United States?—every blackguard, dressed in boots, can do the same," as any "journeyman mechanic" in ordinary work clothes can attend a White House party (AA, 56). Such reflection, as above, is often pointedly partisan and targets the Whigs by name. Men of this party, explains the "cicerone," though they are "just one or two steps removed from the masses, think themselves beset by dogs, and are continually kicking for fear of being bitten'" (AA, 170). The Author himself observes that Whigs, invited to Democratic banquets in Boston and Philadelphia, happily downed the food and drink but strode off muttering "It's no use for these people to imitate *us*; you cannot make a gentleman out of a democrat'" (AA, 102). And fashionable behavior in itself often expresses this "aristocratic" disdain for common people, as with the fashion for moving to Manhattan's West Side in imitation of London. In reflecting on the dance scene mentioned above, in which the unknown girl is mercilessly cut, the Author recalls a vivid earlier instance of this fear of contact with the masses which injured him to that pitiful scene. Girls of fashion in Philadelphia wait before taking their walks "until the dinner-hour of 'the common people,' when they would be sure of having the sidewalk to themselves" (AA, 89).

Thus Grund has his Author and other characters mock the American pseudo-aristocracy for several aspects of its behavior, and the criticism of fashion is a form of partisan journalism, for the Whig Party, according to the Author and to Grund himself in *The Americans*, represents the political expression of a would-be aristocracy of money attempting to

establish its rule by controlling fashion. Making their craving for fashion ludicrous undercuts their political ambitions and their stature as reliable sources for European readers. The bulk of *Aristocracy in America* is made up of such reported incidents and conversations designed to satirize this group from a Jacksonian Democratic perspective.

A very significant element of Grund's satire is its emphasis on the role of women as fomentors and supporters of aristocratic pretension. Women offer cutting social appraisals, attempt to seduce well-meaning country representatives into the Whig Party, demand extravagant styles of dress and home, and mercilessly mock a new arrival. The prominence of such reported behavior in satirical contexts indicates that this picture of women's role was not straightforward reportage. Rather, Grund meant to use the central participation and leadership of women, one of the major sources of dislocation in "aristocratic" society, as a weapon. One major charge against the Whigs as portrayed in *Aristocracy in America* was that women were in charge.

To a certain extent, Grund's view of women in these coteries reflected and spoke to a European perspective. His central contention that the United States could not have any real aristocracy only makes sense from that point of view, so that when his Author or a conversant criticizes female extravagance, the criticism derives partly from the view that a middling class ought not to deny its own identity and source of prosperity, those "simple, manly, moral, industrious habits of the great mass of the people,—habits which alone have won them the respect of the world" (AA, 87). And the contrast between these women and those of a true aristocracy could only weaken this group's claims to preeminence in European eyes.

But in a fundamental and very powerful sense Grund's expressed views on pseudo-aristocratic women are also highly partisan and speak to a central concern in nineteenth-century American life. The family, many have recognized, occupied a special place in an increasingly threatening world. Even as it lost economic purpose it gained psychic importance as a refuge, and women's place in this order became increasingly problematic.¹⁹ But, as Michael Paul Rogin has argued, a central aim of the era's voluminous literature on the subject was to preserve the authority of men within the family and ultimately in society at large.²⁰

Grund's attention to aristocratic women speaks to that fear. As viciously as he caricatures their behavior, he is careful to lampoon only the women of the coteries. Other groups of women, particularly in the West, merit approving mention rather than scorn. At a New York dinner, for example, the author's Southern friend carefully circumscribes his strictures. "I do not speak of the great mass of our women . . . much less of the wives and daughters of our Western settlers, who, Heaven knows, are as busy and industrious as the best German housewives'" (AA, 53).

One particular incident, small in itself, describes the Author's ideal of the proper role of women in a good democratic family, and thereby offers an explicit counterexample to that of coterie women. Traveling in

the Mississippi Valley, with the nearest inn an hour or more away, the Author and a cousin pass the house of a farmer and his wife who are just setting out to buy stores at a market town. Although the travelers do not wish to put the farming couple to any trouble, the latter insist on preparing and serving dinner as a duty of hospitality; as the farmer declares, "'Oh, I assure you, gentlemen, I never suffer myself or my wife to be troubled either by strangers or friends; we merely discharge our duty.'" Once having served them, the couple must leave, and the farmer orders his daughter to tend to their guests (AA, 87-88).

This scene of "sincerity, honesty, confidence, frankness, and unostentatious hospitality" presents a tableau of democratic domestic relations. The family shares freely without grudging or calculation, expecting no return or obligation on the travelers' part despite having taken extraordinary pains. The farmer, making all decisions for his wife and family, interrupts their activities and plans and commands the labor of his wife and daughter on his sole authority. His wife prepares dinner without demur at his offer, although apparently with his help, and his daughter attends to his guests as bidden. Moreover, except for a final farewell offered after her husband's own, the wife does not speak; her farmer husband speaks for both of them.

While this scene's immediate contrast is with a wealthy New Yorker's parodied hospitality, the visible pattern of domestic relations contrasts sharply with that of the would-be aristocracy. In this unpretentious idyllic household the woman submits to her husband's decisions and pronouncements, as the daughter submits to her father. The reader knows without being told that this household boasts no frippery and that the farmer tolerates no rudeness. These people are what they are, without apology and without fancied attempts at fashion. They form a complete contrast with the class at the center of the book, and one of the most telling differences is that the women of this family speak only when appropriate and do as they are bidden; male authority remains secure.

Grund's attention to the problem of woman's place meshes with the other themes of his satire to present a strong indictment of Jacksonian America's bogus aristocracy of money and fashion. His wish to savage this group—coming as it did from a European liberal and an American Democrat—stemmed from his knowledge of its false status and of the damage its pretension and ambition could do to his favored cause in both the United States and Europe. *Aristocracy in America*, building on *The Americans*, blends Grund's two perspectives in a telling satire.

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Notes

¹ Francis Joseph Grund, *Aristocracy in America: From the Sketch-Book of a German Nobleman* (London, 1839; New York, 1959). It was published simultaneously by Cotta as

Die Aristokratie in Amerika: Aus dem Tagebuch eines deutschen Edelmanns (Stuttgart and Tübingen, 1839). All further references, abbreviated AA, are to the 1959 Harper Torchbook edition, the first American publication, and will be included in the text. All italics are in the original.

For citations see, among others, Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven and London, 1982), 62, 116, 195; Edward Pessen, *Jacksonian America: Society, Personality, and Politics*, rev. ed. (Urbana and Chicago, 1985), 10, 13, 17, 25-28; Frederick Jackson Turner, *The United States 1830-1850* (New York, 1963), 350. Fred Somkin recognizes the fictional status of the Authorial character, but accepts his concerns as derived from genuine experience, in his seminal *Unquiet Eagle: Memory and Desire in the Idea of American Freedom, 1815-1860* (Ithaca, 1967), 37.

² George Probst, "Introduction," AA, vii-xiii; Robert Berkhofer, Jr., "Introduction" to the reissue of Grund's *The Americans in their Moral, Social, and Political Relations*, 2 vols. (London, 1837); 2 vols. in one (Boston, 1837; repr. New York, 1968).

There are several likely reasons for the book's neglect, beginning with its contemporary publication only in Europe. In addition, Grund's reputation in the United States as a partisan political writer considerably outweighed his reputation as an impartial observer; few European authors of travel accounts involved themselves as deeply in American politics. In those battles, Grund generally rubbed fashionable circles the wrong way for reasons that will become apparent. Another factor in the book's neglect is probably its classification by librarians under the rubric "Social life and customs," where it is grouped with travel books.

³ Berkhofer, "Introduction," *The Americans*, v-vi. For Grund's role, see Maria Wagner, "Francis J. Grund neu betrachtet," *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 21 (1986): 115-26.

⁴ *The Americans* was also published by Cotta: *Die Amerikaner in ihren moralischen, politischen und gesellschaftlichen Verhältnissen* (Stuttgart and Tübingen, 1837). Further references to the 1837 London edition, abbreviated TA, will be included in the text.

⁵ Sources on Grund's life include H. A. Rattermann, "Francis Joseph Grund," *Gesammelte Ausgewählte Werke* (Cincinnati, 1910), 10:69-80, in which his birthplace is stated as Klosterneuberg, a town near Vienna; *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York, 1933), 23:131, which gives his birthplace as simply "Germany"; *Dictionary of American Biography* [DAB] (New York, 1944), 21:362-64, which repeats Klosterneuberg as his birthplace. His birthdate is variously given as 1798 or 1805. Grund himself was deliberately foggy on these details, but Holman Hamilton and James L. Crouthamel have established 1805 and Reichenberg (now Liberec, Czechoslovakia) beyond reasonable doubt in their "A Man for Both Parties: Francis J. Grund as Political Chameleon," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 97 (October 1973): 465-84.

⁶ *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, 23:131.

⁷ This party switch indirectly cost him his life, as biographers report in varying manners. Shortly after he announced it, a demonstration for the prospective Democratic candidate General George McClellan ended at McClellan's mother's house nearby. Because the paraders also stopped at his own house to vilify him, Grund apparently feared the mob would attack him and dashed to a police station. The fright and exertion led to a fatal stroke that night. See Hamilton and Crouthamel, "Man for Both Parties," 481; DAB, 21:363; Berkhofer, "Introduction," TA, xxi-xxii.

⁸ Hamilton and Crouthamel, "Man for Both Parties," 466.

⁹ Wagner, "Grund neu betrachtet," 116-17; Grund to Georg Cotta, 20 January 1846, *ibid.*, 117 ("der kürzeste Weg zwischen zwei gegebenen Punkten"). On the general question of partisan behavior of political figures during this period see Edward Pessen's discussion in *Jacksonian America*, 171-96.

¹⁰ On the reception of German liberals and liberalism in Boston see Frank Freidel, *Francis Lieber: Nineteenth-Century Liberal* (Baton Rouge, 1947), 50-57. On Lieber's own views, see Freidel, *Francis Lieber*, *passim*; Lieber, *Manual of Political Ethics*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1838-39). Most pre-1848 German intellectuals' politics were Whiggish but not all were politically active; Lieber, primarily known as a political philosopher and reformist, was solidly allied with Whigs but only gradually became active in partisan politics beginning in the 1840s. Follen took up abolitionism, which placed him much closer to reformist Whigs

than to the Democrats. It is possible that Grund's relations with the German and pro-German intellectuals of Boston had some bearing on his switch to the Jacksonians.

¹¹ It could not have been finished earlier because the text refers to Daniel Webster's 12 March 1838 speech on the sub-treasury (AA, 170; *Works of Daniel Webster* [Boston, 1851], 4:424-99).

¹² Wagner suggests that Grund disagreed fundamentally with Van Buren's positions on the questions of federal finances and Texas annexation ("Grund neu betrachtet," 116).

¹³ Basil Hall, *Travels in North America, in the Years 1827 and 1828*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1829); Thomas Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1833); Frances M. Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, 2 vols. (London, 1832).

¹⁴ *Aristocracy in America* grants that youth excuses the Western settlements, but maintains that the general concentration on money-making in the Eastern states is directly chargeable to the tastes of leading people. Given the wealth of these areas and their contact with European centers of science and literature, any deficiencies in refinement "can only be because there is no real taste for them, and because other pursuits are more sure of securing the respect of society" (253).

¹⁵ The balance of *The Americans* discusses Americans' relations with foreigners in their own country, the arts, education, Americans' peculiarly idealistic and personal form of patriotism, the West, commerce and transportation, the South, the defense establishment, and politics. The chapter on the South includes a spirited defense of slavery, and the final chapter enunciates a manifest destiny argument for American expansion into Texas and South America.

Grund's praise for Jackson and the Democratic Party is fulsome, based on the proposition that Democratic principles accorded best with the national character, and "consisted in making every power of the state immediately dependent on the people" (2:385). He continued in a later passage:

The democratic party have developed more union and strength than any previous one in power. They have reconciled the south with the north, and preserved the integrity of the union. They have in every instance upheld the law and subjected states and individuals to the proper authority of Congress. They have, at the same time, abstained from any undue and unconstitutional interference with the internal regulations of the states, and procured justice for all that were injured. (2:392)

¹⁶ It is likely that this scene ends the first volume of the London edition as well; the Torchbook edition is all in one volume.

¹⁷ Probst, in his introduction to the Torchbook edition, seems unsure just how literally to take the book. He refers to Grund's talents for observation and social satire while seeming to recognize the conversation format as an artifice, but also labels Grund "The Jacksonian Tocqueville" (implying an independent and reflective chronicler sympathetic to the Democrats), and seems content to view the book as a lampooning of an overly self-important class, but without other purposes in mind ("Introduction," vii-xiii). Somkin, as mentioned, recognizes the Author as a fictional character throughout (*Unquiet Eagle*, 37).

¹⁸ Southerners: AA, 9-135; Bostonian: 140-90; Carolinian: 195-201.

¹⁹ See esp. Nancy F. Cott, "The Cult of Domesticity" in *Root of Bitterness: Documents of the Social History of American Women*, ed. Nancy F. Cott (New York, 1972), 113-77, and Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1830* (New Haven, 1977); Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966): 151-74; Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New Haven, 1973).

²⁰ Michael Paul Rogin, *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (New York, 1975), esp. 63-72, 274-79.