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“Peculiar Insanity”: Hereditary Sympathy and Americanism
in Twain’s *The American Claimant*

Jared M. Pence

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Frank Q. Christianson, Chair
Dennis R. Cutchins
Brian Russell Roberts

Department of English
Brigham Young University

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ABSTRACT

“Peculiar Insanity”: Hereditary Sympathy and Americanism
in Twain’s *The American Claimant*

Jared M. Pence
Department of English, BYU
Master of Arts

This thesis identifies a claimant narrative tradition in nineteenth-century American literature and examines the role of that tradition in the formation of American national identity. Drawing on Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The American Claimant Manuscripts* and *Our Old Home* (1863) as well as Mark Twain’s *The American Claimant* (1892), I argue that these writers confronted the paradoxical nature of claimant narratives—what Hawthorne called a “peculiar insanity”—which combined a hereditary sympathy between the United States and Britain with exceptionalist rhetoric about American republican values. Hawthorne’s ambivalence toward the claimant tradition identified the paradox, but his writing merely pointed out inconsistencies, while Twain censured with satire and direct social criticism. America’s British sympathies persisted in later decades, and remained a popular subject of fiction throughout the century, making it ripe for parody by the time Twain wrote his own claimant story. Claimant narratives reinforced class differences in the United States even as they appeared to reject them. The transnational framework of Twain’s novel affords a pointed critical view revealing the latent cruelty of democracy when coupled with attitudes of exceptionalism.

Keywords: Mark Twain, Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The American Claimant*, Anglophilia, Americanism, claimant tradition, hereditary sympathy, nationalism, realism, transatlanticism, transnationalism

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“Peculiar Insanity”: Hereditary Sympathy and Americanism
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Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because Fiction is obliged to
stick to possibilities; Truth isn’t.

—Pudd’nhead Wilson’s New Calendar, *Following the Equator* (1897)

After writing these now famous words, Mark Twain proceeded to elaborate on the case of the Tichborne Claimant, the legal trials surrounding an Australian’s assertion that he was the rightful heir to an English baronetcy in the 1860s and 70s. The Tichborne Romance (as Twain sometimes referred to it) captivated the attention of Europeans and Americans in part because the circumstances were so bizarre that the case seemed more likely to appear in a novel than in newspapers. Certainly the Tichborne case was peculiar enough to attract the interest, support, and skepticism of thousands of people; after all, it wasn’t every day that an Australian butcher was able to convince members of an aristocratic family that he was their shipwrecked son and garner vast public support for his claim. The case caught the attention of Americans¹ in particular, with reports in American newspapers from April 1867 in San Francisco through the duration of the scandal and beyond, “Tichborne” becoming a household reference to describe imposters (“The Tichborne Baronetcy Case—An Immense Fortune and Extraordinary Family Case,” “The Tichborne Claimant”). The widespread reports of the Tichborne case indicate its universal appeal, but the wide circulation of claimant narratives like the Tichborne case had

¹ Throughout this thesis, the terms “America,” “American,” and “Americans” are used in various ways but almost always broadly, omitting valuable distinctions and groups of people both inside and out of the United States whom these terms fail to adequately describe. No doubt the use of such terms is limiting in its generalizations, particularly for minorities living in the United States. However, while there are certainly complex and varied expressions of the claimant tradition that differ from what this explores, its focus is with the primary strand of the claimant tradition which grows out of the Anglo-American relationship.

particular resonances for Americans.² A foreign claim to an English peerage was a common fantasy among Americans who were used to seeing claimant stories in their literature. These claimant narratives played into a fantasy of sudden wealth and status and played upon the possibility of hidden, age-old nobility buried in the genealogies of a new, immigrant nation with little history of its own. Claimant narratives served Americans' need for stability and rootedness by emphasizing their lineage. These narratives helped them believe that their past was part of time-honored institutions. These narratives also reinforced the belief that there was something exceptional about Americans, albeit a different sort of exceptionalism than their belief in uniquely republican values and potential for improvement in the United States. Claimant narratives suggest that Americans' ties to England and to English nobility meant they were, at least potentially, privileged heirs to extraordinary fortune and rank, making hereditary sympathy a sort of exceptionalist backup plan for when the American Dream failed to occur. Claimant narratives reflected an attraction for England even during the nineteenth century when the United States was internally focused on dealing with dissension leading up to the Civil War and with consensus in its aftermath. The great experiment in democracy that was the United States was being tested by regional and political strife and was under intense scrutiny from much of the rest of the world that wanted to know if republican and egalitarian governments could succeed. Yet Americans were perversely drawn to monarchical England and their English hereditary ties (whether real or imagined) to define themselves, at least in their imaginations.

By Twain's day, the claimant narrative was well-established in American culture. The narrative conventionally takes an American of low position and little wealth who, once they are

² Similarly, Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan of the Apes* (1914) and its many sequels tell the story of Tarzan coming to the realization of his inheritance as Lord Greystoke. Burroughs was American and his stories were popular among American readers.

made aware of their noble European ancestry, save themselves from economic and social hardship and, in the process, save their aristocratic relatives from class prejudice and bigotry. The tradition began at least as early as Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798) in which Theodore Wieland's brother-in-law encourages him to return to England, take up the lands they will inherit, and cure his impending insanity. Washington Irving's *Bracebridge Hall* (1822) contains the sketch "Dolph Heyliger" wherein the titular character is visited by an ancestral ghost who reveals that he is heir to the wealth from their Dutch estate. Variations of the tradition would carry on through Nathaniel Hawthorne's posthumously published claimant manuscripts ("The Ancestral Footstep" [pub. 1882-83] and "Doctor Grimshawe's Secret" [pub. 1882]), Henry James's "A Passionate Pilgrim" (1871), Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1885-86), Mark Twain's *The American Claimant* (1892), and others. Hawthorne's claimant, Ned Etheredge, uncovers a villainous imposter and discovers the true heir to the estate. James's Clement Searle is a generous gentleman whose distant cousin refuses to relinquish Searle's share of the inheritance and then fortuitously dies in an accident. Burnett's claimant Cecil Errol (who ironically almost loses his inheritance when a pretender not unlike the Tichborne Claimant also claims to be the heir) helps his grandfather, the Earl of Dorincourt, to develop compassion on his dependents. The claimants in these narratives invariably embody egalitarian values and prove it by helping their English relatives see the wrong-headed nature of the English class system and the value placed on rank.

Claimant narratives formed a singular tradition in American literature during the long nineteenth-century, uniquely emphasizing the United States' relationship with Europe and Britain in particular. The U.S.'s yearning for hereditary ties to Europe invariably informed questions of national self-definition, especially for Americans who were increasingly aware of

their cultural and political instability in the period leading up to and after the Civil War. From the creation of the republic to the Civil War, Americans emphasized their revolutionary spirit as a defining aspect of national character, even when what constituted the “nation” was uncertain because of fluid and shifting national boundaries and regional loyalties. But the revolutionary spirit that characterized American cultural nationalism was threatened during the Civil War when political disunity made “revolution” less welcome as the defining feature of the nation. After the close of the Civil War, the United States had to redefine itself and imagine a new basis for national solidarity—one that would ideally value unity and stability over previously cherished notions of revolution. The ways in which the U.S. had defined itself waivered during and after the Civil War as Americans sought out stabilizing markers of national unity in response to the prospect of disunion. In his *Global Remapping of American Literature*, Paul Giles notes this vitality of national identity making, calling the years after 1865 a “nationalist phase” in American history that is marked by coherence, particularism, and difference from other nations (9). Thomas Peyser describes the post-bellum phase of American self-making as unprecedented:

The half century following the Civil War has with justice been seen as the era in which America’s national identity seemed to consolidate itself as never before, thanks in part to conscious efforts to reforge a cultural and political union from the sectional shards of the mid-century calamities, and in part to the effects of railroads, telegraph, and the rise of massive trusts and syndicates operating across great swaths of the continent. (6)

In addition to pointing out the infrastructural and political conditions that made the years following the Civil War ripe for increased nationalism, Peyser argues that nineteenth-century emphasis on nationalism coexisted with and complimented an emphasis on transnationalism.

This argument makes a kind of common sense. Peyser writes, “the universalizing forces of globalization stimulated a reactionary assertion—sometimes anxious, sometimes cynical—of national particularism” and that the focus on national identity “may be understood as a reaction to supernational realities, rather than as the expression of some purely domestic cultural dynamic” (16-17). Or as sociologist Roland Robertson has written, “*the idea of nationalism (or particularism) develops only in tandem with internationalism*” (103, emphasis in original). The invention of nations and national traditions was dependent on other nations.

As the image of the United States as an agrarian nation diminished in the wake of escalating industrialization, ties with other countries, particularly Britain, were strengthened. Kevin O’Rourke and Jeffrey Williamson explain how late nineteenth-century transportation infrastructures and more open trade policies led to convergence of economic inequality gaps nationally for different regions in the United States and internationally for different nations around the Atlantic ocean. They argue that these unprecedented changes increased the similarities between the United States and Britain’s economic conditions (14-16). In his *Creating American Civilization*, David Shumway argues that conceptions of nationalism were concurrent with notions of literature, civilization, and culture, and acknowledges the way Americans looked to Britain in forming their own cultural nationalism. He writes, “The claim to membership in British civilization might answer the first problem [the lack of connection of America to the glories of the past]” and that “insofar as America was civilized, it was like Europe; its differences from Europe seemed to render it uncivilized” (18, 17). Even as Americans were seeking to distinguish themselves from Europe and Britain in line with increasing nationalism (and corresponding internationalism), Americans were drawn towards them, continuing to turn to hereditary sympathy with England in the process of national self-definition. Perhaps American

sympathy for English ancestry felt stabilizing for an individual's identity and implied that since England had had relative political stability, the United States' English heritage would likewise provide it with political stability. Claimant narratives, which imagined genealogical connections between Americans and their English ancestors, could potentially reinforce the United States' ties with England, and in so doing establish American cultural identity as more stable and unified. However, American cultural identity has long been wrapped up in self-determination based on its own espoused ideals. This defense of the nation's ideals, or Americanism, is a kind of exceptionalism that proclaims the United States unique for its self-government, political equality, freedom of expression, and potential for progress. Michael Kazin and Joseph A. McCartin define Americanism as "both what is distinctive about the United States...*and* loyalty to that nation, rooted in a defense of its political ideals" (1, emphasis in original). My use of the term "Americanism" is a short hand way to express the patriotism and sense of identity associated with the republican values in the United States—that is, not so much what *is* distinctive about the United States as what Americans *believe* is distinctive. Comparing hereditary sympathy with Americanism foregrounds the role of English affiliation rather than internal sources in the discourse of national self-definition. For Americans, national identity was often conceived of in relation to the identities of other nations: defining themselves was done through a transnational lens.³

Even though Americans continually wrote and consumed claimant narratives throughout the nineteenth century, not all those narratives coincided with the tropes. Nathaniel Hawthorne's experiences in Liverpool published in *Our Old Home* (1863) included many references to his

³ See Amy Kaplan's article about Twain's transnational exploration of national identity in *Following the Equator*, as well as Stephen Tuffnell's "Uncle Sam is to Be Sacrificed" which emphasizes the significance of Anglo-American relations in forming national identity during the late nineteenth century.

encounters and frustrations with Americans making claims to British peerages, a phenomenon he referred to as a “peculiar insanity” (23). Hawthorne’s admissions of the conflicts surrounding claimants in *Our Old Home* reveal that the values espoused by claimants were paradoxical and his *American Claimant Manuscripts* stand as evidence for his difficulty in coming to terms with that paradox. Forty years later, Mark Twain composed his own version of a claimant narrative, a parody that took the genre to its laughable conclusions. Readers of Twain’s *The American Claimant* (1892) (which Peter Messent calls “the most neglected of Mark Twain’s novels” [1]) encounter Americans making claims to a British peerage in a comical parody which, through its dual plot structure, disparages the way claimant narratives encouraged Americans who simultaneously celebrated claims to English nobility and claims of American exceptionalism. Hawthorne and Twain’s claimant stories contrast with the majority of claimant narratives that innocuously celebrate hereditary sympathy and American exceptionalism, problematizing what other writers overlooked. Comparing Hawthorne and Twain also emphasizes the problems with hereditary sympathy and highlights Twain’s pointed criticism of American self-conceptions in contrast to Hawthorne’s unresolved issues with Anglophilia and Americanism.

The modest amount of scholarship on *The American Claimant* is generally composed of unrelated readings of particular aspects of the text. Scott Michaelsen reads the central character, Colonel Sellers, as a representation of the unstoppable growth of corporations at the turn of the century (201-02); Takuya Kubo sees the novel as representing a failure and critique of American masculine education (86-91); and Nathan Wolff focuses on the depiction of Sellers as insane in his study of the controversy over insanity pleas after the assassination of President James A. Garfield (186-90). In Susan Gillman’s *Dark Twins: Imposture and Identity in Mark Twain’s America* (1989), she counts the novel as one of Twain’s “dream writings” that represent his

obsession with invention and spiritualism (149-56). Howard Baetzhold's *Mark Twain and John Bull* (1970) points out how Twain's family had their own claimant story and, like Roger Salomon who mentions the novel in his *Twain and the Image of History* (1961), assesses that *The American Claimant* "unquestionably reflects the conviction that as long as human nature is what it is, attempts to reform institutions are all but useless" (Baetzhold 171, Salomon 127-32). Most of these scholars reference Clyde Grimm's 1967 article that compares the novel to the collaborative play *Colonel Sellers as a Scientist* that Twain wrote with W. D. Howells. Grimm argues that "because it reiterates with little ambiguity political and social themes which recur throughout Twain's work, the novel provides a clearer as well as more mature statement on cultural issues with which Twain had been concerned for years" (86). In comparing it with the play, Grimm asserts that Twain "had radically altered his view of the story material and its significance and had transformed it from meaningless farce into thoroughgoing political and social satire" (90). One reason *The American Claimant* has remained largely obscure, even for academics, is its relatively unpolished plotting and style. Grimm called it "a hastily and crudely fabricated novel" that "suffers from Twain's haste" and that the satire "is heavy-handed, as Twain's telling predominates over his showing" (90), and Everett Emerson used the novel as evidence to argue that Twain had become a pessimist and "was an American writer who had lost his focus" (174). Despite its shortcomings, Twain's work stands out as one of his clearest criticisms of the exceptionalist tradition and, thanks to its dual plot structure, brings a transnational perspective to the claimant narrative tradition.

In exploring Hawthorne and Twain's attempts to come to terms with the cultural and literary phenomenon of American claimant narratives, I will explain the uneasy relationship of English hereditary sympathy with Americanism and exceptionalist rhetoric, how those narratives

reinforced class differences in the United States even as they were antithetical to them, and finally, how transnational perspectives reveal the latent cruelty of democracy when coupled with attitudes of exceptionalism.

Hawthorne's Anglophilia

Nathaniel Hawthorne begins *Our Old Home* with a few dedicatory pages to Franklin Pierce, the President whose election led to Hawthorne's appointment as U.S. consul in Liverpool during the duration of Pierce's presidential term. In those opening pages, Hawthorne reveals his complicated sentiments towards England when he says, "I never stood in an English crowd without being conscious of hereditary sympathies. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that an American is continually thrown upon his national antagonism by some acrid quality in the moral atmosphere of England" (x), that "acrid quality" being a prejudice based on social class. On the one hand Hawthorne felt connected to England for his hereditary ties, but on the other, he was repulsed by the degrading classism he witnessed. Hawthorne's divided feelings toward England is one example of the impulses that fed claimant narratives: Americans who dreamed of making good on ancestral ties to prosperity and position while claiming to abhor the inherent class discrimination that such inheritances depended on.

During the opening years of the Civil War, Hawthorne made several attempts at a romance centered on an American's claims to an English peerage.⁴ The plot centers on the protagonist Ned Etheredge, an American politician whose childhood guardian Dr. Grimshawe tells him that his past involved an aged estate with mysterious gothic chambers. After failing to

⁴ As with much of his other work, this attempted novel has a touch of autobiography in it. Hawthorne wrote a letter to James T. Fields, his Boston publisher, "I wish you would call on Mr. Savage, the antiquarian, (if you know him) and ask whether he can inform me what part of England the original William Hawthorne came from. He came over, I think, in 1634....Of all things, I should like to find a grave-stone in one of these old church-yards with my own name on it" (*The Letters, 1853-1856* 123-24).

be elected to a seat in the House of Representatives, Ned travels to England in search of his family heritage, hoping to claim his peerage. His identity shaken, Ned turns to his love of England to reestablish a sense of stability and order, with Ned functioning as a metonym for the widespread American Anglophilia that characterized nineteenth-century hereditary sympathies. Upon arriving in England, Ned “began to feel the deep yearning which a sensitive American—his mind full of English thoughts, his imagination of English poetry, his heart of English character and sentiment—cannot fail to be influenced by,—the yearning of the blood within his veins for that from which it has been estranged” (*The American Claimant Manuscripts* 147). Hawthorne’s description of Ned suggests that Americans—at least sensitive Anglo-Americans—couldn’t help but feel an affinity for England. When Americans are unsure about their identity (personal identity in the case of Ned Etheredge), they turn to England.

Hawthorne was never satisfied with his manuscripts and abandoned the project, leaving them unpublished. Edward Davidson and Claude Simpson believe that “Hawthorne’s original impulse may have been to write a narrative which would emphasize the common ground between England and America,” as a way for reconciling his hereditary sympathies and fervent American patriotism; however, they argue that “the longer he lived abroad, the more he came to resent English condescension, though never himself its victim” (492). Pieces of Hawthorne’s claimant romance were posthumously published by his son Julian, and are now compiled as *The American Claimant Manuscripts* in *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*. According to James Hewitson, Hawthorne’s novel was “initially intended as a defense of American republican values” (36); the manuscripts were trying to do what most claimant narratives did: showcase American values at the expense of European. But Hewitson argues that Hawthorne’s could not be written because Hawthorne kept finding more to criticize about the

United States than to defend. Hewitson writes that despite Hawthorne's initial intentions, "the *American Claimant Manuscripts* ultimately became an examination of the psychological factors motivating various Americans to seek alternative identities" (36). As Hewitson points out, Hawthorne's claimant narrative that was supposed to be a gothic romance became fundamentally about questions of identity. American yearning for England and its culture changes the source of national identity from an internal one based on U.S. political structure and history to a comparative one that highlights England's role in American identity. Although the United States claimed uniquely republican values as the basis of their national identity, venerating English genealogies and inheritances was fundamentally un-republican. Hawthorne ambivalently defined himself by both his ties to and repulsion for English society as well as his American ideals. But a divided identity between England and the United States proved to be irreconcilable.

Elisa Tamarkin explores Hawthorne's motivations in writing *The American Claimant Manuscripts* in *Anglophilia*, her book which takes up questions about antebellum American identity, when she broadly asks, "how do democracies constitute themselves?" (xxii) and then more specifically explores what brings a nation like America together absent the customary sources of social unity such as the central authority of a monarch and the associated classism that comes with it. Tamarkin defines Anglophilia as the expression of reverence for and approval of the traditions and customs of England, whether they be political or cultural, which she details throughout antebellum American society from written admissions of what she terms "monarch love" (1) to the often unconscious incorporation of English collegiate culture into American universities. Tamarkin's conclusions are counterintuitive—why would a nation become more unified if they are turning with admiration to another nation, particularly one that supposedly cherishes many of the values Americans claimed to denounce? And yet, Tamarkin finds evidence

that Americans were enamored with England and discovered unity and “social feeling” (xxiii, xxvii) rather than division in what England symbolized. She cites Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The American Claimant Manuscripts* as evidence that claimant narratives were part of the project of establishing a unified “emotional terrain of nationalism” (xxvi). Tamarkin finds it remarkable that Hawthorne is able to express Anglophilia in his manuscripts without compromising his Americanness. She writes, “Hawthorne can sound like Hawthorne when insisting that loyalty toward England is no apostasy for the devotedly American” (81), and then goes on to quote Hawthorne who said, “I hope I do not compromise my American patriotism by acknowledging that I was often conscious of a fervent hereditary attachment to the native soil of our forefathers, and felt it to be our own Old Home” (*Our Old Home* 48). Tamarkin reads Hawthorne’s acknowledgment of hereditary attachment as evidence that Anglophilia was not in conflict with Americanism. She continues, “Hawthorne seems to confirm, there is something about Anglophilia that accommodates, that allows for these confessions of loyalism (for even a prince fetish) while taking no toll” (81). Tamarkin argues that Anglophilia could coexist with sentiments of American patriotism and exceptionalism in claimant narratives, and yet by apologetically confessing that his love of England might betray his Americanness, Hawthorne himself suggests that there is something inconsistent with Anglophile sympathies and American patriotism. Tamarkin sees an accommodation in Hawthorne’s hope that he would not compromise his patriotism with pronouncements of Anglophilia, but in the dedication to *Our Old Home* he admits that “some of my friends have told me that they evince an asperity of sentiment towards the English people which I ought not to feel, and which it is highly inexpedient to express” (x). Hawthorne’s writing (especially in *Our Old Home*) suggests that rather than being at peace with conflicting Anglophilia and American patriotism as Tamarkin suggests, his

experience was more complicated. Taking a closer look at more of his writing in *Our Old Home* shows that in the end Hawthorne asserts republicanism at the expense of his English sympathies in order to uphold his belief in the principles that he believed the United States stood for.

Tamarkin sees in both Hawthorne and his character Ned an Anglophilia that actually reinforces a sense of American national unity. Hawthorne's character is joining "an already available phantasmagoria of the blood ties and kin ships, the 'half-fanciful' reunions, that antebellum America had been inventing for years" (82). Anglophilia affected Hawthorne's characters questioning their identities, but also affected Hawthorne himself. Tamarkin writes, "Somewhere between apostrophes to the Earl of Warwick and his love for beef, we realize that Hawthorne, like Ned, is 'enthralled'—certainly he croons at a singing of 'God Save the Queen'—and that this account of the Actual is just a Romance by other means, one more confused American's claim to England" (79), suggesting that Hawthorne's "Actual" experiences in England as U.S. consul in Liverpool recorded and published as *Our Old Home* were the romance he hoped his *American Claimant Manuscripts* would become. She positions Hawthorne himself as an American claimant making claims to English ties in *Our Old Home* since his fictional *American Claimant Manuscripts* were abandoned.

Tamarkin's analysis of Hawthorne's *Claimant* manuscripts is coupled with an examination of *Our Old Home*. Comparing the attempted romance and the published essays draws on Hawthorne's explicit references to his "abortive project" that was *The American Claimant Manuscripts*, but also leads Tamarkin to argue that Hawthorne was not just fascinated with England, but rather that he used the American tradition of Anglophilia to respond to the civil strife that was threatening the Union, "Hawthorne's turn to England feels surprisingly tactical. His likings, even regret for his likings, are rehearsed in the same historically specific

language of affinities... which read, all over this period, like a deliberate and suggestive response to the problems of Union” (80). According to Tamarkin, as Americans fostered their love of England they revived feelings of “deeply sentimentalized loyalty” for Britain and her crown, which bolstered the loyalty they felt for their steadily dismantling nation that was dividing North and South. Americans’ tendency to seek out ties and connections with England, says Tamarkin, provided Hawthorne with a framework in which he could write about the Civil War and resist sentiments of disunion. Of course, Hawthorne’s “surprisingly tactical” use of Anglophilia in the *Claimant* romance manuscripts and in *Our Old Home* would only have a unifying effect if Anglophilia was a widespread cultural phenomenon. Tamarkin argues that such a phenomenon did exist and that Hawthorne was aware of it. “Hawthorne’s subjects in 1861 and 1863, respectively, had so much to do with what he saw as ‘American’ at the time—and with a roundabout, but nonetheless enduring, symptom of national life” (81), that symptom being Anglophilia. Tamarkin believes that Hawthorne saw Anglophilia as culturally unifying, but Hawthorne was uncertain about identity (both his and the United States’) when he tried to write a claimant narrative. What Tamarkin fails to see is that expressions of Anglophilia served only to confound writers like Hawthorne. Anglophilia reminds Americans of their ties with Britain, and as they realize they are more similar than different, exceptionalist sentiments lose their validity.

For Hawthorne, claimant narratives did highlight the conflict between love of English aristocracy and claims of American democracy. The reality that, “No community worships hereditary rank and station like a democracy” (52), as George Templeton Strong wrote in his diary in 1860, is troubling for writers like Hawthorne. Hawthorne believes that while the hereditary attachment between the United States and England is real, it is also something that can never be realized. In *Our Old Home*, Hawthorne writes about some of the estates he had visited

and says,

Such homes as Nuneham Courtney are among the splendid results of long hereditary possession; and we Republicans, whose households melt away like new-fallen snow in a spring morning, must content ourselves with our many counterbalancing advantages, for this one, so apparently desirable to the far-projecting selfishness of our nature, we are certain never to attain. (222)

That such hereditary possessions were “certain never to [be] attain[ed]” was not clear to the many American visitors whom Hawthorne met with: people claiming that they were the rightful heirs of a British peerage. For Hawthorne, these claimants were symptomatic of a cultural lack Americans experienced and that they felt could be compensated for by emphasizing dreams of English inheritances. These claimant stories were just as real as the hereditary attachment that Hawthorne himself felt, and in Hawthorne’s mind, just as unattainable. His admission that Americans “must content” themselves with their “many counterbalancing advantages” proves that Hawthorne believed Americans could not be both democratically American and aristocratically English. They had to be content with one or the other because the two impulses were incompatible.

In *Our Old Home*, Hawthorne tells about the time when “a queer, stupid, good-natured, fat-faced individual” came to visit him while he worked as American consul in Liverpool and who, “like a great many other Americans, had long cherished a fantastic notion that he was one of the rightful heirs of a rich English estate” and “had shut up his little country-store and come over to claim his inheritance” (20-21). Hawthorne describes this man and his claim as “fantastic,” completely unrealistic and unattainable. And yet, there were a “great many other Americans” who had similar claims. How could so many Americans believe in something that was so

completely out of reach and out of reality for them? Hawthorne tries to explain that as well. He mentions again that there were many such claimants and then goes on to write:

The cause of this peculiar insanity lies deep in the Anglo-American heart. After all these bloody wars and vindictive animosities, we have still an unspeakable yearning towards England....Nationally, there has ceased to be any peril of so inauspicious and yet outwardly attractive an amalgamation. But as an individual, the American is often conscious of the deep-rooted sympathies that belong more fitly to times gone by, and feels a blind pathetic tendency to wander back again, which makes itself evident in such wild dreams as I have alluded to above, about English inheritances. (23-24)

Hawthorne finds this hereditary sympathy powerful, even in himself, but also realizes the ridiculous way that it contradicts the Americanism of the people whose minds it pervades.

Tamarkin argues that “nowhere are the resonances of Union so great as in the antebellum mania for genealogies, in which even the most avid Americans sought the distinction of British ancestry by adjusting their names or appropriating coats-of-arms” (69), but Hawthorne sees such mania as “foolery” that corrupts an “honest republican.” What Tamarkin sees as evidence for “resonances of Union,” Hawthorne sees as “peculiar insanity.” Even though it makes sense for Americans to want principles of union and stability to define them, Anglophilia could not be the source of those values because, from Hawthorne’s point of view, Anglophilia defied more fundamentally American principles of equality and merit-based wealth and rank. Carrying on his description of the “wild dreams...about English inheritances,” he writes about the “coincidence[s] of names” and proliferation of dubious objects that were “potent enough to turn the brain of many an honest Republican” toward such peculiar insanity (24-25). The plethora of claimants leads him to

declare that “There is no estimating or believing, till we come into a position to know it, what foolery lurks latent in the breasts of very sensible people,” and that such claims left Americans “guilty of some unsuspected absurdity” (*Our Old Home* 25). Hawthorne’s feeling towards American claimants could be described as disdainful; he calls the notions of American claims “insanity,” “pathetic,” “wild,” “foolery,” and “absurdity” (23-25). For him, there is no realistic way to talk about American claimants. Yet he cannot deny that the tendency toward hereditary attachment is powerful and real. For Hawthorne, however, hereditary attachment is at odds with republican character, even if individually Americans can’t help but feel drawn to England.

In *Our Old Home* Hawthorne chides Americans for their insistent claims to English inheritances, but at the same time he also chides the English for the way class prejudice has robbed them of humanity. In his chapter on the “Outside Glimpses of English Poverty,” Hawthorne is shocked by how dirty the English poor are: “Dirt, one would fancy, is plenty enough all over the world...but the dirt of a poverty-stricken English street is a monstrosity unknown on our side of the Atlantic” (320), noting the United States’ comparative cleanliness. He describes the pitiful state of the people he encounters, but has little good to say for how they are treated by wealthier Englishmen. When encountered by the poor, Hawthorne says that “the English smile at him, and say that there are ample public arrangements for every pauper’s possible need, that street charity promotes idleness and vice, and that yonder personification of misery on the pavement will lay up a good day’s profit, besides supping more luxuriously than the dupe who gives him a shilling” (334). The upper-classes feel no impulse to help the poor and instead influence Hawthorne to resist any inclination to help them. After observing the miserable wedding of a poor couple compared to the prospect of a large and comfortable estate that an aristocratic couple would be entering upon their marriage, Hawthorne asks, “Is, or is not, the

system wrong that gives one married pair so immense a superfluity of luxurious home, and shuts out a million others from any home whatever?" (357). Hawthorne's examination of some of the poor of England reinforced for him the inequality inherent in England. Like other travel narratives common in the nineteenth century, Hawthorne's displacement as an American in England granted him additional perspective. Where English travelers such as Frances Trollope or Charles Dickens wrote and published their disappointment with the United States, Hawthorne's travels revealed to him the darker side of class differences in England. It was clear to Hawthorne that English distinctions of class and rank lead to poor treatment of the nation's poor, and it appears that he believed the United States was innocent of similar distinctions and treatment. Forty years after Hawthorne, Mark Twain also drew upon the claimant tradition to point out the paradox of Anglophile sympathies and exceptionalism, but in Twain's view, Americans were just as cruel and dehumanizing towards their poor as the English were towards theirs. Comparing Twain's novel with Hawthorne's descriptions in *Our Old Home* demonstrates that while concerns about national identity in the face of the paradox between hereditary sympathy and Americanism was not new when Twain wrote his novel, Twain's directness and satire makes the criticism more pointed.

Twain's Parody of the Claimant Narrative

With a title that resembles Hawthorne's *The American Claimant Manuscripts*, Mark Twain published *The American Claimant* first serially in several American newspapers and the English *Idler* magazine and then in novel form in April 1892. *The American Claimant* confronts the uneasy American relationship of nineteenth-century obsession with English inheritance along with adherence to Americanism, but it also parodies the conventional claimant narrative. Twain holds American exceptionalism under a harsh light as he exposes the way Anglophile sympathies

persist in the United States, overlapping with and leading to an American system of rank and class. *The American Claimant*, like earlier works by Twain, points out the flaws and fallacies of American exceptionalism, just as *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) critiqued the chivalric fantasies of American society, *The Gilded Age* (1873) satirized American obsessions with wealth and commerce, and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) addressed the inconsistencies between American ideals and sociopolitical realities.⁵ The traditional claimant narrative upholds American exceptionalism in comparisons between American and European characters, but Twain's narrative uses comparisons of the United States and Europe (significantly from a British point of view) to undercut exceptionalism by highlighting the similarities between British class prejudice and American class prejudice. In parodying the conventional claimant narrative, Twain underscores the paradox of Anglophilia and exceptionalism to show that Americans are no better off than the English in their treatment of the poor.

Twain works within the familiar mode of caricature in depicting a claimant who demonstrates the extremes of both American exceptionalism and Anglophilic yearning for wealth and position. Twain's claimant, Colonel Mulberry Sellers, is an eccentric American inventor who, through the lineage of a runaway Lord decades earlier, believes he is the rightful

⁵ The claimant tradition plays a role in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as the duke and the king fraudulently claim to be the Duke of Bridgewater and heir to the French throne respectively; conning the others into respecting them. The duke's story utilizes many of the tropes of the typical claimant narrative, "My great-grandfather, eldest son of the Duke of Bridgewater, fled to this country about the end of the last century, to breathe the pure air of freedom; married here, and died, leaving a son, his own father dying about the same time. The second son of the late duke seized the titles and estates—the infant real duke was ignored. I am the lineal descendant of that infant—I am the rightful Duke of Bridgewater" (188-89).

heir to the Earldom of Rossmore.⁶ When Sellers discovers his kinsman Simon Lathers is dead, he takes it upon himself to write to the current Earl of Rossmore, inform him that he is a usurper, and assert his own claim to the Earldom. Sellers covers his walls with chromolithographs of famous Americans who “through labeling added by a daring hand” now represent his line of inheritance, asks that his wife refer to him as “your lordship” in public, and begins referring to his humble home as “Rossmore Towers.” In short, Sellers dons the accoutrements of what he perceives English nobility to be. The standard claimant narrative would have Americans take up their rank and status with humble reticence, but Twain’s claimant bombastically asserts himself and his privileges, lampooning an inconsistency between repulsion for aristocratic privilege and willing acceptance.

While on the one hand *The American Claimant* parodies standard elements of the claimant narrative, it also includes a secondary narrative with the story of a British Lord who is inspired by an idealized image of American democracy. Lord Berkeley is the son of the Earl of Rossmore (Sellers’s “usurper”) and, to his father’s dismay, travels to the United States to experience a land where “all are free and equal” and where inherited class distinctions don’t exist. In this sense, Berkeley, too, is the titular referent: though Sellers is an American who claims an inheritance, Berkeley is a foreigner claiming America as he seeks out ennobling republican values. To Berkeley’s consternation, he finds that Americans are obsessed with rank and nobility and fail to live their espoused values. *The American Claimant*’s dual plot contrasts an American who loves British nobility and a British noble who loves the United States’ egalitarian values.

⁶ Like Hawthorne, Twain’s own family sought to establish inheritance connections with England. Twain based Colonel Sellers on one of his actual uncles, James Lampton, who believed himself to be an English earl. “The bare mention of the Tennessee land sent him [Lampton] off into figures that ended with the purchase of estates in England adjoining those of the Durham Lamptons, whom he always referred to as ‘our kindred,’ casually mentioning the whereabouts and health of the ‘present earl!’” (qtd. in Paine 23). In the 1880s, Twain began receiving letters from his “cousin” Jesse M. Leathers who wanted financial support to establish his claim as rightful Earl of Durham. (*Twain Howells Letters* Vol. 2 869-870).

The former takes American Anglophilia to a humorous extreme while the latter openly and, at times heavy-handedly, illustrates the flaws in exceptionalist thinking. The dual plot juxtaposes two kinds of American claiming—Americans claiming English inheritances and claims that America has risen above class and status—and exposes both as problematic.

Twain's claimant Colonel Sellers exposes the inconsistencies of American Anglophilia as he highlights the deference, distinctions, and discrimination of English aristocracy, buying wholly into all that is untenable about arbitrary class stratification. When Sellers discovers that Simon Lathers is dead, he comes home with the dramatic proclamation, "Oh, mourn with me my friend...death has smitten my last kinsman and I am Earl of Rossmore—congratulate me!" (52). Sellers continues to simultaneously bemoan his deceased relative and celebrate his inheritance far into the novel, although he immediately affects his "altered position" by urging his wife to "remember—noblesse oblige," and referring to his daughter Sally as "Lady Gwendolen" (54, 52). Without inhibition, Sellers adopts all the trappings of his view of nobility, even though titles and class distinction typically grind against Americanism. To his wife the colonel instructs, "please do not forget who you are, and who I am; remember your own dignity, be considerate also of mine. It were best to cease from using my family name, now, Lady Rossmore" (52), arguing that "we must live up to our altered position and submit with what grace we may to its requirements" (53). The colonel's Americanism should have lead him to disparage aristocratic traditions, but the colonel has wholeheartedly accepted his title of nobility and insists that they ought to live up to "its requirements." His attitudes towards his claimed inheritance oppose republican values.

Sellers himself serves as a kind of allegory for the American paradox between Anglophilia and exceptionalism. His assumption of titles and pretentiousness emphasizes his Anglophilia, but he also embodies certain exceptionalist values. Sellers's friend Hawkins asks

Sellers why he always wants to come up with a scheme that makes millions when he'd be perfectly happy with much less money. Sellers outrageously replies, "I am going to buy Siberia and start a republic," going on to explain the portability of his American exceptionalism:

The minute I organize that republic, the light of liberty, intelligence, justice, humanity, bursting from it, flooding from it, flaming from it, will concentrate the gaze of the whole astonished world as upon the miracle of a new sun; Russia's countless multitudes of slaves will rise up and march, march!—eastward, with that great light transfiguring their faces as they come, and far back of them you will see—what will you see?—a vacant throne in an empty land! It can be done, and by God I will do it! (186-87)

Not only does Sellers believe the American political system to be the solution to Russia's problems, he believes he is the person who can bring democracy to the Russian masses. Sellers's belief in American exceptionalism runs so deep that he believes it can and should be exported throughout the world.

Colonel Sellers epitomizes the paradox between Americanism and hereditary attachment, creating humor in Twain's parody. Sellers paradoxically claims to be two different conflicting things when he says, "I being a democrat by birth and preference, and an aristocrat by inheritance and relish—," (188). His sentence is interrupted, but already it is clear that Sellers enjoys his belief that he is in fact the rightful claimant to the Earldom of Rossmore.⁷ The similarities between "birth" and "inheritance" as well as "preference" and "relish" humorously

⁷ Twain himself admits that there is nothing instinctual about democracy. In words not so different from Sellers, Twain describes his own feelings about the relationship between aristocracy and democracy: "There are princes which I cast in the *Echte* (genuine) princely mold, and they make me regret—again—that I am not a prince myself. It is not a new regret but a very old one. I have never been properly and humbly satisfied with my condition. I am a democrat only on principle, not by instinct—nobody is that" (*Mark Twain's Notebook* 357).

demonstrates Sellers's irrational identity. Twain has taken the peculiar insanity of claimants to its absurd conclusions: an American who simultaneously exhibits impossibly opposite values for nearly identical reasons. The same paradox can be found in Sellers's daughter Sally, and he speaks of it admirably:

She's a brick...just her father all over: prompt to labor with head or hands, and not ashamed of it; capable, always capable, let the enterprise be what it may; successful by nature—don't know what defeat is; thus, intensely and practically American by inhaled nationalism, and at the same time intensely and aristocratically European by inherited nobility of blood. Just me, exactly: Mulberry Sellers in matter of finance and invention; after office hours, what do you find? The same clothes, yes, but what's in them? Rossmore of the peerage.
(67)

Sally Sellers is able to be simultaneously American and European, practical and aristocratic. Sellers and Sally epitomize the peculiar insanity of espousing an affinity for both Anglophilia and exceptionalism. Those characteristics, when portrayed by Hawthorne through Ned Etherege, are a sincere effort to be two things at once, but Twain's characters take it to preposterous extremes that showcase the comical incompatibility of Anglophilia and Americanism. But while this dichotomy is humorous in the case of Colonel Sellers, Berkley's discovery of the dichotomy exposes a darker side of hypocritical exceptionalism.

All the democratic values that Sellers sees in himself and his daughter are similarly ascribed to the United States by Lord Berkeley who travels there to experience them firsthand. At the outset of the novel Berkeley is himself an American claimant, coming to the United States to claim the life of a democrat and egalitarian. He is making claims on America's exceptionalist

values. Berkeley articulates the exceptionalist ideal when he leaves to “go to America, where all men are equal and all have an equal chance” (22), only to discover that Americans venerate social distinction and class difference. In his journal Lord Berkeley writes, “I am astonished and pained to see how eager the most of these Americans are to get acquainted with a lord, and how diligent they are in pushing attentions upon him” (72), and when the boy at the telegram office becomes suddenly more respectful upon discovering that Berkeley is sending a telegram to the Earl of Rossmore, Berkeley says to himself, “It’s no real merit to be in correspondence with an earl, and yet after all, that boy makes me feel as if there was” (141). Getting acquainted with a lord and corresponding with an earl are admirable fascinations for Americans who admire aristocratic position and titles, even though everything Berkeley had heard about America told him it would be otherwise. He tells one woman, “The fact is, I came away from England to get away from artificial forms—for artificial forms suit artificial people only—and here you’ve got them too. I’m sorry. I hoped you had only men and women; everybody equal; no differences in rank” (111). Berkeley’s claims for an exceptional America prove to be unfounded and disappointing.

Berkeley is not only frustrated to find that Americans do actually value status, but also that American freedom can be quite limiting. When Berkeley arrives in the United States, he says to himself, “Now I breathe my first breath of real freedom; and how fresh and breezy and inspiring it is! At last I am a man! a man on equal terms with my neighbor; and by my manhood, and by it alone, I shall rise and be seen of the world, or I shall sink from sight and deserve it” (76). Like many nineteenth-century English travel narratives by the likes of Charles Dickens and Frances Trollope as well as Harriet Martineau and Frederick Marryat, Berkeley embarks with high expectations; however, just like those travel narratives—which invariably address the downsides

of democracy such as social disorder, crass materialism, and others—Berkeley finds the reality of freedom in the United States to be less “fresh and breezy” than he imagined. “During the first few days he kept the fact diligently before his mind that he was in a land where there was ‘work and bread for all’ ...but as time wore on the fact itself began to take on a doubtful look” (104), and what began as a “doubtful look” was completely eradicated when “he had hunted everywhere for work, descending gradually the scale of quality, until apparently he had sued for all the various kinds of work a man without a special calling might hope to be able to do...and had got neither work nor the promise of it” (105). When he can find neither a job nor a way to join a trade-union to increase his chances of getting a job, Berkeley concludes that “there is an aristocracy of position here, and an aristocracy of prosperity, and apparently there is also an aristocracy of the ins as opposed to the outs, and I am with the outs. So the ranks grow daily here and only one that I belong to, the outcasts” (130-31). Leaving England for the United States was supposed to be his escape from aristocracy, but to his dismay, American aristocracies abounded, albeit of different sorts than what he was familiar with in Europe. Berkeley leaves his father in England because, he says, “I wish to retire from what to me is a false existence, a false position, and begin my life over again—begin it right—begin it on the level of mere manhood, unassisted by factitious aids” (21) and yet he finds in the United States a replication that was not all that different from the aristocracy of position he attempted to escape. But for Berkeley, unrealistic American claims are not just erratic or humorous, they are sinister fronts for a society as deeply entrenched with class stratification as any European society.

Berkeley is disillusioned with the common man in America when he sees how the poor are treated. For Colonel Sellers, the conflict of Americanism and aristocratic illusions is a point of humorous parody, but for Berkeley that conflict is more serious. When Nat Brady (a fellow

boarder who is poor and out of work) is treated harshly by the other boarders and the landlord, Berkeley says to his friend Barrow,

Well, here in this very house is a republic where all are free and equal, if men are free and equal anywhere in the earth, therefore I have arrived at the place I started to find, and I am a man among men, and on the strictest equality possible to men, no doubt. Yet here on the threshold I find an inequality. There are people at this table who are looked up to for some reason or another, and here is a poor devil of a boy who is looked down upon, treated with indifference, and shamed by humiliations, when he has committed no crime but that common one of being poor. Equality ought to make men noble-minded. In fact, I had supposed it did do that. (122-123)

The Berkeley plot functions as a series of corrections, destroying Berkeley's wide-eyed perceptions that the United States is exceptionally equal, fair, and classless. While the Sellers plot parodies the traditional claimant narrative, the Berkeley plot unveils American inequality and takes Twain's novel from the level of a caricaturizing comedy to a critical evaluation of U.S. social issues.

Because of the ostensibly classless society in the United States, people are rewarded for their labors and have control of their wealth and station in life based on their merit. But meritocracy produces its own kind of inequality, one that enables the poor to be blamed for their poverty. Nat Brady could be "looked down upon, treated with indifference, and shamed by humiliations" (123) because unlike the entrenched class system in Europe, where individuals are born into poverty, the constructed class system in the United States places the source of poverty at the individual's own feet. Thus the inequality based on bloodlines and inheritances in Europe

was different from the United States, not because the United States had no inequality, but because American inequality could be blamed on individuals rather than on a class system. While equality is professed in the United States, inequality is the reality and its evils are perhaps more dehumanizing than those in Europe. Station in life dehumanized the poor of Europe, but Twain dramatizes how Americans dehumanize each other and in their cruelty can easily strip themselves of their own humanity. The hatred towards Brady is such a vivid depiction of economic and social inequality that Berkeley questions his beliefs about the United States further. He informs his diary, “There is deference here, but it doesn’t fall to my share. It is lavished on two men...The deference paid to these two men is not so very far short of that which is paid to an earl in England...It does rather look as if in a republic where all are free and equal, prosperity and position constitute *rank*” (129, Twain’s emphasis). In Europe, class distinction was a function of genealogy, while in the United States, class distinction grew out of a person’s current circumstances. But while the source of class distinctions in Europe and the United States was different, the outcome was the same: distressing treatment of the poor. Although there were fundamental differences between rank in Europe based on blood and rank in the United States based on merit, the perpetuation of social hierarchies was apparent and surprising for Berkeley who had believed the United States free of any class distinction.

Even in the Sellers plot which generally prioritizes parody over social commentary, American cruelty towards the poor is evident. When Colonel Sellers sends a telegram to Sally at Rowena-Ivanhoe College (a nod to Walter Scott who Twain suggests—perhaps ironically—is

responsible for the Civil War),⁸ Mrs. Sellers knows it will cause a stir because of the way the wealthy girls have treated Sally. She says, “She’s so poor and they’re so rich, of course she’s had her share of snubs from the livery-flunkey sort, and I reckon it’s only human to want to get even” (54-55), emphasizing the way wealth has created distinctions, even classes, just like those in England. Sally and the other girls at her school do their best to imitate English nobility and class distinction, and the source of their classism is found in their claims to English heritage. As she informs her parents of the attention she gets when she receives their telegram, she writes, “And do you know, the very first girl to fetch her tears and sympathy to my market was that foolish Skimperton girl who has always snubbed me so shamefully and claimed lordship and precedence of the whole college because some ancestor of hers, some time or other, was a McAllister” (58). Sally relishes her chance to now look down on the other girls as she was once looked down on, upholding distinctions as much as possible and demonstrating that thanks to their Anglophilia, Americans have their own versions of status-based division.

Certainly the cultural landscape of the United States altered during the forty years between Hawthorne and Twain’s two claimant narratives, but what remained largely unchanged is the prevalence of Anglophilia and the persistence of American exceptionalism, despite their paradoxical relationship. The conventional claimant narrative is dependent on that paradox because the occasion for celebrating the republican values of the United States is their encounter with Europe brought on by Americans discovering their inheritances of rank and wealth. Claimant narratives are drawn to the static social system of Europe with its promise of unearned property and position, but the narratives use that backdrop to reinforce that Americans, while

⁸ “Sir Walter had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in great measure responsible for the war. It seems a little harsh toward a dead man to say that we never should have had any war but for Sir Walter; and yet something of a plausible argument might, perhaps, be made in support of that wild proposition” (*Life on the Mississippi* 250).

heirs to such privilege, are above it. Examining Berkeley's American experience exposes the reality that living with these paradoxical ideals fostered indifference to the poor and the unemployed, since they lived in an egalitarian society based on merit, meaning the unfortunate actually deserved or merited their station in life. More than just being disappointed with the America he had left England to come and claim, Berkeley discovers Americans to be as heartless and unkind as his conceited father, but harder to come to terms with. Berkeley's father, Lord Rossmore, is cruel and thoughtless towards others because he has more money and privilege than they do; the Americans that Berkeley encounters are cruel and thoughtless towards others because the subjects of their cruelty did not merit better treatment. Intense Americanism fosters high expectations for individual citizens which, when unmet (as they almost always are), leaves citizens more hardened and unforgiving. By pointing out the paradox of hereditary sympathies and exceptionalism, Twain reveals not only the peculiar insanity of claimant narratives, but also the thoughtless cruelty that persists because of exceptionalist attitudes.

Twain employs the Berkeley plot (an outsider looking in) to challenge the way Americans see themselves. Twain's primarily American readers are presented with a character who, parallel to the Anglophile Sellers, is enamored with the United States. Colonel Sellers loves Englishness for the privilege and distinction afforded to its upper class, while at the outset of the novel Berkeley loves the United States for the equality granted to all regardless of socio-economic class. In his book *Love-Hate Relations: English and American Sensibilities*, Stephen Spender compares European and American writers, emphasizing the cultural inferiority complex that shaped American attitudes, "They were very conscious of not having the cities, statues, great paintings, ruins, ancient social institutions of Europe" (xvii). Spender goes on to argue that conventional methods of Anglo-American comparison typically perceived European thinking as

more objective and American thinking as more subjective:

This sense of individual consciousness reaching to surrounding objects and lives was more intensely felt by Americans than by Europeans, because of the lack of an American past. The unexplored continent spoke in the present tense. Europe spoke in the past tense. It offered values, experience, culture, but together with them it recommended attitudes which put the traditionless American into a position of seeming inferiority. Worse than this, it inhibited American self-realization. A great deal of that past which the American might acquire through the English language and through his European ancestry laid shackles of convention, the dead and social caste on his Americanism. (15)

Spender's mention of the "unexplored continent" hearkens to the way Americans have often looked West to the frontier to define themselves, although that didn't stop Americans from also looking East to Britain and Europe. The position of seeming inferiority that Spender mentions could explain both why Americans would look inward for a sense of identity and why Americans would place a higher value on a European point of view. The outsider looking in was not foreign to Twain, who employed a similar device in *The Innocents Abroad* (1869) by refracting images of America through a European traveler. Twain describes an imaginary Roman who comes to the United States as a tourist. The Roman, as an outsider, is better able to make comparisons with the United States, allowing Twain to both critique and celebrate the American way of life. Speaking of the United States, the Roman says, "in that singular country if a rich man dies a sinner, he is damned; he cannot buy salvation with money for masses" (197), a problem for the Roman and his audience, but really a compliment to American religiosity that is free from the fundraiser-style salvation that Twain sees in Europe. In the same "Roman" passage, Twain also condemns

some aspects of American national character. He writes that while money does nothing for Americans in the afterlife as it does for a Roman, it is very useful to Americans in this life. Says the Roman, “there, if a man be rich he is very greatly honored, and can become a legislator, a governor, a general, a senator, no matter how ignorant an ass he is” (197). Thanks to the device of the foreign observer, Twain can address the crass materialism of American national character. The Roman in *The Innocents Abroad* plays a similar role to that of Lord Berkeley in *The American Claimant*, one who is able to more authoritatively assess American achievements and limitations.

The Berkeley plot offers a series of educational moments in which expectations about American values adjust as he observes the attention given to status and wealth when Americans claimed to care more about equality. One particular passage in *The American Claimant* that demonstrates how Twain uses Berkeley’s point of view to ridicule the claimant tradition is in a discussion between Berkeley and his friend Barrow. Barrow has just taken Berkeley to a Mechanics’ Club Debate where the speaker denounces Europe for the way its aristocracy unfairly lords over the masses. After the meeting Berkeley is shocked when Barrow claims that even that speaker would gladly accept an English earldom. Confused, Berkeley asks, “I don’t know that I quite get the bearings of your position. You say you are opposed to hereditary nobilities, and yet if you had the chance you would—” “Take one?” interrupts Barrow. “In a minute I would. And there isn’t a mechanic in that entire club that wouldn’t. There isn’t a lawyer, doctor, editor, author, tinker, loafer, railroad president, saint—land there isn’t a human *being* in the United States that wouldn’t jump at the chance!” (149, Twain’s emphasis). They carry on the conversation with Berkeley seeking clarification for how an American could possibly be so accepting of hereditary nobility. Getting exasperated, Berkeley finally asks, “But look here, I

really can't quite get the hang of your notions—your principles, if they are principles. You are inconsistent. You are opposed to aristocracies, yet you'd take an earldom if you could" (151). Sellers, of course, is the representative American who would take an earldom if he could, in fact, he believes he has a right to it.

Because Twain positions Berkeley's plot alongside Sellers's, he is able to take a comic exaggeration of a claimant narrative, and point out its inherent dichotomies from a British point of view. In this example, Berkeley's incredulity at the paradox between American values (or at least American rhetoric) is understandable. Yet the whole escapade works towards Twain's humorous purposes because so many Americans have no problem with the paradox. Like Hawthorne's experience with the "peculiar insanity" of American claimants, Barrow understands that on principle the nation could never endorse hereditary sympathy for England because of its exceptionalist view of itself, but in practice an individual could never resist it. Colonel Sellers is one of those individuals.

The irony in the end of the novel is that Sally falls in love with Berkeley and, believing him to be a poor artist, trusts that such love is her cure to the peculiar insanity of her father's role as claimant. She says to Berkeley, "Forty-eight hours ago I was privately proud of being the daughter of a pinchbeck earl, and thought the proper mate for me must be a man of like degree; but to-day—oh, how grateful I am for your love which has healed my sick brain and restored my sanity!—" (231). It is ironic and humorous to the reader because Berkeley really is the son of an earl and Sally's insistence that she will never marry an earl's son leaves him devastated. In the end, the Americans have not changed in the slightest. Colonel Sellers is happy to discover that his daughter is marrying into a noble family (even if they are usurping nobility) and Sally finds herself attracted to the upper class inadvertently. Their noble lineage pulls through as they indeed

inherit the accoutrements of nobility—in a way that reinforces class, they end up where they were meant to be. Lord Berkeley is the only character who changes in the novel, although his change is not a pleasant one. Berkeley goes from naively accepting American exceptionalism to learning the truth and discrediting exceptionalism entirely. The pathways to class stratification were less permanent in the United States than in England, but for Berkeley they were shockingly influential in how Americans treated one another. He finds that Americans love English nobility and that although it is different, they have as much emphasis placed on rank as any European class stratification.

In employing the claimant narrative, Twain works with a tradition that had always been asking questions about American national identity, but in utilizing that tradition he shows how the claimant narrative actually reaffirms the value of rank and status and questions American exceptionalism. Claimant narratives sought to reaffirm American exceptionalism with unusually good and generous characters, but rather than gallant character traits coming from American principles, their position as heirs to English aristocracy suggests that their noble blood may be the true source of such admirable integrity. If Colonel Sellers is a joke about the nobility of exceptional Americans, the punchline could be that such nobility is inherited. Because Sellers is an heir to English nobility, his positive character traits might just as likely be based on blood ties with England rather than on his Americanness. Twain capitalizes on the trope of claimant narratives (like other Victorian plots of heritability such as Dickens's *Oliver Twist* who ends up living with a middle class family because he was rightfully born into it) where people end up in their rightful place designated by birth, even and especially American claimants who perhaps are good because they are heirs to European nobility, rather than because of their exceptional republican values. Rather than creating a sentiment of cultural identity based on the egalitarian

morals of Americans, claimant narratives (perhaps inadvertently) reinforced the significance of class, rank, and status to a person's identity.

Twain's claimant joins the narrative tradition, but rather than trying to promote the dichotomy between exceptionally moral Americans and their aristocratic heritage, he draws attention to it. Hawthorne's struggle over the claimant tradition revealed the incompatibility between hereditary sympathy in claimant narratives and exceptionalist rhetoric about American values. But where Hawthorne merely pointed out inconsistencies, Twain censured with satire and direct social criticism. The problem of the United States' British hereditary sympathy persisted in later decades, but while little changed in the intensity of that sympathy between the 1850s and 1890s, claimant narratives were riper for parody by the time Twain wrote his satire. Hawthorne's antebellum America was still coming to terms with its new political system and cultural inferiority complex and the claimant tradition seemed a real possibility that Americans sought with sincerity. Twain's postbellum America had withstood a bloody war and with its gilded age pomp and arrogance, claimant narratives were prime for parody. Both authors brought attention to the paradox, but it played a different role in Twain's 1890s discussion of national self-definition. Twain points out that Americans, like their British counterparts, perpetuate the importance of status, rank, and title in society despite their rhetoric of freedom and equality and that American exceptionalism is a national fantasy. Because Lord Berkeley is English and an outsider looking in, he is able to realize what the Americans fail to see. Through the parody plot of Colonel Sellers and the educationally corrective plot of Berkeley, the novel demonstrates that the story of Americanism is the story of hereditary sympathy. The fiction of *The American Claimant* is not so much the American claims of nobility (which the novel suggests are possibly valid) but is instead the fiction that America is somehow exceptional in their morality or

uniquely better off than the English when in reality their attitudes toward rank and equality are no different. Stranger than those fictions is the truth that, as Berkeley puts it in Twain's *American Claimant*, "Equality is *not* conceded here, after all, and the Americans are no better off than the English. In fact, there's no difference" (112, Twain's emphasis). Rather than reinforcing American exceptionalism, claimant narratives show that the United States fails to live up to its ideals and fosters a similar system to Europe where the aristocracy is privileged above the common people.

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