Victorian Freaks
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PART III

Empire, Race, and Commodity

This section takes up a triad of related concerns: empire, race, and economics. While the essays in this section also speak to the “marketing” strategies of part I and the scientific discourses of part II, they are brought together here around the theme of empire making. Marlene Tromp’s essay looks at the place of the Indian freak exhibits in England, proposing that we must read Indian performers in the social context of empire and English-Indian relations. Kelly Hurley’s essay on the Victorian mummy obsession points to the ways that the anxieties over great ancient nonwhite civilizations were managed through the uncanny double of the white mummy—a figure revealing a commodity and sexual fetish that, like the cultural management of the freak, balms fears of racial degeneration or disappearance provoked by imperial activity. Rebecca Stern’s discussion of Julia Pastrana, the hair-covered “Bear Woman,” suggests that anxieties about empire were addressed in negative prescriptions for womanhood embodied in this famous masculinized/feminized performer. In all of these essays, the political and social implications of empire are laid against the freak show performer or the metaphor of the freak to enrich our understanding of both in their British context.
Performers in the Cultural Context

The published scholarship on freaks and freak shows in the nineteenth century has been dominated by studies of the American context, and for this reason, there has been little written on the question of freakery with regard to the colonial relationship between England and India. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has argued that we must read every Victorian text as a commentary on imperial relations since those tensions were so fundamental to the nineteenth century.¹ Tales and texts about Indian freak performers in England would certainly demand such an analysis. This essay explores one manifestation of the colonial relationship by looking at two freak performers who exhibited themselves from the mid-century to its end: Mohammed Baux, the thirty-seven-inch-tall “Miniature Man of India,” and Laloo, the “Marvellous Indian Boy,” who had a parasitic twin embedded in and emerging from his torso. What the promotional materials of these two performers suggest is that, during a significant period in English-Indian relations, freakery was one of
the many discourses that helped construct—as well as destabilize—the rhetoric of empire and, further, that the discourse of freakery was as profoundly marked by those of race and power relations as the rest of the culture.

Both Mohammed Baux and Laloo were billed as and marketed by more than the most overt aspect of their physical freakishness—although, of course, those bodily differences featured prominently in their advertisements. Their race and ethnicity were profound markers of their perceived dissimilarity from the English viewing audience, in spite of the fact that—if normalcy is determined by predominance—those who were ethnically Indian would then, and now, be far more “normative” than their Anglo counterparts in terms of sheer numbers. However, power relations are also a part of how we understand and define normalcy and freakishness, and the Indianness of these two performers underscored their difference and inevitably the thematics of British-Indian relations as well as its attendant power structures. Sara Suleri has noted the ways in which British narratives of India often displaced images of Indian beauty or personhood with a “horrified reading of the Indian body as out of control, swelling with an internal evil or wearing evil on its skin in a hideous reminder of the grotesquery encoded within the colonial will to aestheticize.” In this way, she argues that such narratives attempt “to read bodily mutation as a purely Indian property, in order that the infection of India can be confined to the Indian race.”

Indeed, much of the energy of the narratives surrounding these performers reifies imperial sensibilities and marks Indians as the inferior object of observation. I explore these themes—as well as the failure of such gestures of containment—as they are manifested in both an explicit and a more subtle understanding of social, political, and economic aspects of the narratives surrounding Baux and Laloo.

The potential value in such a course of inquiry is evidenced by the scholarship on former slaves and Asians who were exhibited in the United States simply because of this aspect of their identity. African Americans and East Asians were staples of American freak shows. P. T. Barnum’s first great success, Joice Heth, was a former slave who was billed as the 161-year-old one-time nurse of the infant George Washington. Heth had no “disability” or disfigurement. She was simply an elderly black woman—and that was enough to make her marketable to a white, middle-class American audience. Her presence in Barnum’s traveling show both spoke to and exploited the ongoing anxieties about the history of slavery and race relations. Critics such as Benjamin Reiss
and James W. Cook have identified the Heth exhibit as an index of contemporary American social issues. Other scholars have recognized the role of what Edward Said has called “Orientalism” in the American freak show as well. John Kuo Wei Tchen has examined “classical freaks” like Chang and Eng, the “Siamese Twins,” but he has also highlighted performers who took to the stage simply because of their Asian identity or dress, as in the case of “Afong Moy.” Tchen argues that the characterization of these performers, as well as responses to their exhibits, was based on American ideologies of race and difference. Certainly, race and power relations with regard to former slaves and the influx of Chinese laborers into the United States created a social landscape in which being black or Chinese enfreaked an individual enough to justify his or her exhibition on stage.

Similarly, the Indian Colonial Exhibition and the “India in London” exhibition made India a sideshow for British public consumption. In Britain, inhabitants of the colonies had a relationship to their white colonizers that echoed the race relations between powerful white Americans and both former slaves and Asian immigrants. Thus, like these racialized “others” in America, Indian performers in Britain were particularly marketed with regard to racial and social relations in their advertisements. These facts make the case of a performer such as Mohammed Baux, the thirty-seven-inch-tall “Miniature Man of India,” an intriguing study. One of the things that set Baux and other Indian performers apart from other traveling show people was their race and political identity. In Baux’s case, the exhibition of his colonized and racially other body gave him a potential advertising edge over the dozens of other performing little people. Of the thirty-one different handbills and pitch cards for “dwarves” in the John Johnson Collection of Printed Emphemera at the Bodleian—the largest single category of freak performers in the collection—only a small percentage is for nonwhite performers, and all of these highlight their “foreignness” as a key feature in their pitch and often in their names. For example, Lucia Zarate, a small Mexican woman, is introduced with the explanation that she comes from a “swarthy people of Spanish or mixed Spanish and Indian race. . . . Lucia is rather like a monkey: she is dark of complexion, and her features are of the Aztec type.” Her darkness, perceived animality, and racial otherness—here, tamed for presentation to a polite audience—mark her more dramatically in the advertisement than her size. Similarly, another handbill begins: “Just Arrived! The 8th Wonder of the World!! Don Santiago de los Santos, From Philipina Island, near
China, Being the Smallest Man in Existence is King of All Dwarfs.” His geographical origins are an identifying feature (though they appear in a smaller typeface than his name, which also provides an indicator of his ethnic difference). Other freak performers, too, bore these national/ethnic markers, such as “The African Lion-Faced Lady, Madame Howard,” and “The Spotted Indian from Kingston, Jamaica.” In all of these cases, the color of the performers’ skin and its relationship to their identity was key in the narratives offered about them. A newspaper advertisement of Baux, for example, highlighted his Indian origins and offered a woodcut image of him with dark skin, accentuated by a white high-collared shirt. It was, in part, his darkness and Indianness that made him an object of interest to his English audience, and—as I will explain below—the very fact that he was a dwarf underscored these thrilling aspects of his identity.

**Race and the Dwarf**

Baux’s size likely amplified his Indianness for both the scientific and popular audience. Dwarves were often perceived to be a particularly racialized group, in spite of the fact that “dwarf” was an umbrella term that encompassed three categories of small people: homologous communities later known as “pigmies”; apparently small individuals within “normal” racial groups; and people whose growth was stunted as a result of disease. While individuals whose bodily difference was the result of rickets were less frequently identified along racial lines (though class played a key role in understanding this phenomenon), the boundaries were blurred between the other two groups—“pigmies” and genetically small individuals in a larger community of those who were not dwarves. This confusion of boundaries is evident in journals such as *Chamber’s, Nature, Science,* and *Popular Science,* which were filled with speculation on the possibility of “dwarf races,” who were typically believed to be particularly fierce, “extremely courageous and wonderfully active,”7 or—at the worst—no better than “murderous savages.”8 This blurring often marked the individual dwarf as “racialized” and potentially threatening, a fact that marked Baux’s identity as both a dwarf and an Indian.

Dwarves were often identified as a potentially “prehistoric race,”9 and physically small nonwhite individuals who lived in a homologous community were considered genetic throwbacks to this race. They were imagined to have either “Mongolian eyes, yellow, broad square
faces . . . and red hair” or “broad faces and mahogany-colored woolly hair”—features that were characteristic “of dwarf races everywhere.”\textsuperscript{10} Another writer described the “reddish complexion which [was] characteristic of almost all dwarf races, and which one of [his] informants describe[d] as ‘like that of the Red Indians of America.’”\textsuperscript{11} While some writers acknowledged that there could be no dwarf race “in purely scientific terms” because dwarves were “anomalies,”\textsuperscript{12} racial dwarves were still believed to exist in areas such as southern Africa, North Africa (particularly Morocco), and India, or simply, the “East,”\textsuperscript{13} and inquiries regarding searches for them pepper the popular scientific journals.

The perceived, and largely uncritically accepted, relationship between race and dwarfism ramped up the social valence of Baux’s perceived racial identity and made his enfreakment particularly raced. When we understand that Africans and Asians were enfreaked simply by virtue of their ethnic background, we can see the ways in which nonwhite dwarves were doubly enfreaked. The apparent race and ethnicity of a performer could add another layer to his or her freakishness. So entrenched was this racialized way of thinking about dwarves that white European little people were considered by many to be explicitly “non-racial” dwarves who could not transmit their condition to their offspring\textsuperscript{14}—in spite of the fact that European dwarves often evidenced the hereditary quality of their condition through the close relatives with whom they shared their condition. Particularly well known to Europeans were the eighteenth century’s famous Count Joseph Boruwlaski and his sister Anastasia.

When Anglo dwarves toured, their whiteness became a “normalizing” characteristic, emphasizing their relationship to the audience and providing the thrill of proximity. Stereotypes of dwarfish savagery were muted, unless the individual’s class visibly marked him or her. Whereas the handbills and accounts of nonwhite dwarves were often characterized by a kind of grotesque wonderment, General Tom Thumb—whose wealth was popularly noted—and Londoner Princess Lottie were praised for their physical attractiveness, genteel attainments, and the “simple” miniaturization of a beautiful Anglo norm that they seemed to offer. Anglo dwarves were depicted as living dolls, formed to enchant the public but evoking the human nonetheless. Edwin Calvert, a well-known little person, was described as “sharp and intelligent . . . a clever performer on the violin; a great mimic of birds and animals [who] could dance some of the most fashionable ancient and modern dances.”\textsuperscript{15} Princess Lottie was admired for her “blonde, blue eye[d, and] delicate”
beauty. These individuals, like Count Boruwlaski before them, catered to the court’s and the middle-class public’s “pennant” for “men in miniature,” even donning “court dress” to charm their audience. White dwarves were often feminized or infantilized, and the focus of the gaze drawn away from any element of strength or power and turned to the “perfect [miniaturized] models of symmetry and beauty” that they were believed to represent. Marriages were often celebrated with great fanfare between Anglo dwarves, “normalizing” their lives even further—and turning a pretty profit. The “American Midgets,” General Mite and Millie Edwards, were married in Manchester and garnered a full-page spread in the *London Illustrated News* in June of 1884, and the marriage of Tom Thumb (Charles Stratton) and Lavinia Warren, who was described as a “perfect beauty” with “faultless form,” had a similarly impressive presence in the society pages.

In contrast, nonwhite dwarves, while they were sometimes feminized by virtue of their size, were frequently marked as savage, even subhuman. While white dwarves clearly experienced social oppression—particularly evident in the cruelly dismissive representations of unrequited love with “normal” folk—they suffered a different kind of dehumanization than most nonwhite dwarves did. Like Lucia Zarate, who was described as a “monkey,” the Chinese dwarf Chung or Chang-Mow, who toured England from mid-century through 1865 with a Chinese giant, was described as in stark contrast to the most famous Anglo dwarves, his failure to achieve the same beauty as the white dwarves particularly emphasized. Chung was “not so well-proportioned a figure as Tom Thumb”; he was instead a “wretched little dwarf” and an “unfortunate little mannikan.” The perceived racial inferiority transformed them from attractive human miniatures into potentially dangerous and unquestionably inferior figures of only marginal humanity.

**Managing Indian Danger: Mohammed Baux**

Mohammed Baux’s advertisement evoked the thrill and novelty of difference through his Indianness and his racialized enfreakment. This alone, given the cultural context into which he entered, would have situated him as a potentially threatening or anxiety-producing figure. This anxiety would have certainly been enhanced by the fact that Baux made his tour of England just three years after the “Indian Mutiny” or First Indian War of Independence, and English anxieties about the impossibility
of containing and controlling the colony and its subjects reverberated through the announcement of Baux’s arrival and his exhibition in the country—alongside attempts to manage those anxieties. Baux’s advertisement remembers Cawnpore, the site of the infamous Indian Mutiny. In the wake of decades of abuses and outrages, a group of Sepoys held more than a hundred English women and children in close quarters in an empty house for two weeks, ran them through with swords, then dragged the few survivors and dead out of the house, stripped them, and threw them down a well. This event, which shocked and horrified the English public, became a “public symbol of . . . Indian atrocity,” an indicator of the culture’s barbarity, lack of civilization, and antagonism (characteristics that had also been particularly associated with dwarves). In the framework of Cawnpore, Indianness itself was atrocity. These perceptions justified to many English the extension and increased force of imperial control and brutal retaliation against the Indian people, just as the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon justified, for many, a retaliatory invasion of Iraq.

Baux’s pitch narrative exploits his size, his Indianness, and the events in India to make him a saleable show. His body provided a material and visually charged link to the events at Cawnpore. Indeed, “curiosities” such as Baux may have been the only living representation of Indianness that many nonmilitary English at mid-century would have encountered. Moreover, Baux was, himself, the “son of a Sepoy”—a description bound to trigger some consternation. The racialized notions of non-white dwarves as savage and of dwarves in general as “irascible” may have increased these anxieties. Popular belief in moral depravity as an inherent characteristic of nonwhite or working-class dwarves was often underscored in the scientific discourse, which suggested that “personal deformity [could be in] singular unison with . . . moral depravity.” As the flesh and bones, so went the soul. These beliefs paired neatly with the many of the social values that buttressed imperialism, like the conviction that the English were the necessary civilizers of the Indians. Assessments about the social significance of Baux’s physical stature and his attendant moral, emotional, and intellectual capacity could only have underscored sensibilities about people already perceived as morally incomplete or dwarfed.

More than simply “justifying” imperialism, however, Baux’s advertisements also offer qualifiers that attempt to mitigate the tensions produced by such intense cultural anxieties and memories. Baux’s notice indicates that his father was “discharged as being unfit for duty,” a
description that suggests that he was not fit for service and distances him from the Indians’ violent and ultimately effective resistance to English rule. In addition, while it is uncertain what Baux wore during his performances, he appears in the woodcut advertisement in a British military officer’s mess dress: with a cutaway-style frock coat with vest, ribboned epaulettes, gold lace, gold-trimmed cuff flaps, white shirt, and black bow tie; an officer’s forage cap (and perhaps also gloves) sit on the chair beside him—not the turban worn by the Sepoys (figure 7.1). His apparent abandonment of Indian dress for English military attire suggests an effective martial management of Baux, as well as his fealty to the British. While his appearance in an English uniform could have also evoked anxieties about an Indian usurpation of English power, mitigating gestures can be read as attempts to “[reify] colonial terror into the safety of the collectible thing,” as Sara Suleri describes it. To alleviate some of the anxiety inevitably produced by the evocation of Cawnpore, the smallest Indian, neatly contained in English military dress, appears at the pleasure of his betters.

Baux’s small size, one of his most “saleable” features in terms of its materiality and the metaphor it offered, may have also been read as comfortingly manageable. Baux’s size, of course, features prominently in the handbills because it is one of the central points of difference that drew paying audiences—but the language with which this feature is described did more. In contrast to the savagery imputed to nonwhite dwarves, his size may also have worked to defuse the threat implied in his Indianness, marking him as emotionally and socially submissive. Indeed, these very characteristics are underscored in his description. He was often, we are told, “invited by the most distinguished native and British residents [in India] to their houses, where he was always a welcome visitor from his amiable conduct and pleasing manners.” His passivity and politeness are highlighted in the wake of the advertisement’s discussion of the events at Cawnpore. Baux explains, “in his own words,” that he was only saved from destruction during the massacre “because he was a dwarf, and never did any harm, and could fight nobody.” Remarkably, unless we read Baux himself (or his Indian brother, with whom he was traveling at the time) as English, there is no reason why he should have been targeted during the initial rebellion at Cawnpore where the colonizers were the victims of the violence. Were he a British loyalist, mentioning this fact would seem the most direct means of refuting his involvement in the violence, though it still would mark him as a figure with the potential for such savagery. However, the strange claim that
Baux’s stature, passivity, and unwillingness to fight saved him—strange because children, who were no less small or defenseless, were, in fact, slaughtered at Cawnpore—shifts his identity from dangerous rebel to “English subject” and subject to the English, moves that would certainly have made him more attractive to an English audience. If we imagine his comments to refer to the British retaliation at Cawnpore, then we
are called upon to read him as so extraordinarily passive and powerless as to be beneath notice in the military response—a significant and politically comforting characterization of Baux (and Indians in general) given the sweeping, brutal repression that followed.

Such narratives would have certainly participated in the sociopolitical reclamation of the event, just on the heels of its occurrence, emphasizing Baux’s identity as the “good Indian”—mastered by and humbled before his “betters,” even while his presence evoked the anxieties embedded in his Indianess. Indeed, he becomes the kind of Indian described in Macaulay’s “Minute on Indian Education”: English speaking and genteel by English standards, in spite of his Indianess. The group Macaulay imagined would be a “class [of] interpreters between us [the English] and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.”

Baux’s advertisement describes his “unembarrassed manners,” his ability “to converse in English,” his “remarkable . . . gentlemanly deportment,” and his “mental qualities[, which are] rather above than below the ordinary standard.”

A general perception of Indian passivity and weakness stood alongside the narratives of Indian barbarity and savagery and served to temper English anxieties about the colony and its people as well as to provide justification for empire. These tales were embodied in representations of Indian dwarves in general. One scientific journal identifies a group of racial “Hindoo dwarfs” as wholly passive and emasculated. These men were “in speech and intelligence . . . indistinguishable from ordinary natives of India. . . . They marry ordinary native girls, and the female children grow up like those of other people. The males, however, though they develop at the normal rate until they reach the age of six, then cease to grow, and become dwarfs. These stunted specimens of humanity are almost helpless, and are quite unable to walk more than a few yards.” This narrative suggests that this group of Indian males, “indistinguishable from ordinary natives of India,” is incapable of achieving masculine maturity, evoking a common British metaphor for the colonized nation as “helpless” and stunted. In spite of the physical and sexual maturity indicated in their ability to produce offspring, they are depicted as lacking the virility or power to live in the world as adult males; they are feminized and reduced.

Suleri explains that “the feminization of the colonized subcontinent remains the most sustained metaphor shared by imperialist narratives from ethnographic, historical, and literary fields. . . . The ‘strength’ of
the colonizer is always delineated against the curious attractions of the colonized race’s ‘weakness.’ . . . While colonized effeminacy ostensibly indicates whatever is rotten in the state of the colony, the hysterical attention that it elicits provides an index for the dynamic of complicity that renders the colonizer a secret sharer of the imputed cultural characteristics of the other race.” The enfreaked Indian becomes a metonymy of English-Indian relations, an embodiment of the simultaneously threatening, enthralling, and starkly feminized characterization of the nation and its people. As Edward Said argues, narratives of India were dominated by “on the one hand, surveillance and control over India; on the other, love for and fascinated attention to its every detail.” The spectacle of the freak allowed for a surveillance of the Indian that offered a pleasing fantasy of control; it also permitted a fascinated and often eroticized attention to the Indian body and culture. The impossibility of the nation’s management and control evidenced in Baux’s case is underscored in Laloo, another performer who made his mark in the last decades of the century. The abundance of materials surrounding Laloo also demonstrates the failure of narrative containment, as well as the increasing discomfort with imperialism as the century progressed.

Social Parasites and the Empire: Laloo

Laloo, the “Marvellous Indian Boy,” was highly popular both on the public exhibition circuit and in the scientific community in the 1880s and beyond. On the landscape of Laloo’s overdetermined and “doubled” body, we find both justifications of and anxieties about empire. Laloo had a parasitic twin embedded in and protruding from his chest (figure 7.2). The twin’s arms, torso, and legs extended out of the autosite’s body just above his waistline. His highly medicalized “pitch” offers a detailed discussion of the “half body” (the “parasite”) in relation to “the Boy” (the “autosite”). Described as a “double monstrosity” in many of the medical discussions of his case, Laloo evokes the multiplicative layering of deformity and race seen in Baux’s case. Like Baux, Laloo’s ethnicity and national origin, highlighted by his “very dark complexion” and regular references to his Indianness, feature prominently in descriptions. Laloo was dehumanized like other nonwhite performers, being unreflectively compared to both a spider monkey and a “coconut” in one report on his case in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) and to a sideshow “foetal pig” in another. These starkly Orientalist
Figure 7.2
characterizations render him even more enfreaked, more animalized, more distant from both his viewing audience and the scientific community. Further, the BMJ, while overtly rejecting the cause in his particular case, acknowledged the belief that Indianness often served as the very source of deformity when it explained that “early Oriental marriages” were often regarded “as the cause of monstrosity” such as Laloo’s.  

As with other nonwhite performers, Laloo is alternately feminized and marked as threatening. His effeminization, studied at length by Nadja Durbach, echoes the feminization of other freak performers, a move that certainly evokes the “Orientalist paradigm in which the colonizing presence is as irredeemably male as the colonized territory is female.” Durbach has located a discussion in the Indian Medical Gazette regarding an unnamed figure that is almost certainly Laloo, which clearly elucidates the sexual and gender blurring that fed into social and political rhetoric regarding India. The buttocks of the parasite are described as bearing a “[striking] resemblance . . . to those of a female.” In spite of the evident, though “stunted,” penis on the parasite, the smell of the parasite’s genital area is described as being “similar to that of female organs,” and elevations on the area are described as resembling the labia majora. Even the integument between the parasite and autosite is described as having “mammae.” In the last decades of the century, during which there was a keen cultural awareness of India’s resistance to empire and an increasingly explicit cultural articulation of the social tensions regarding imperialism, this rhetoric clearly works to feminize Indianness, offering metaphors that mitigate imperial anxieties about the potential masculine power of their “inferiors.”  

In Laloo’s case, the depiction of physical differences features more subtle markers of this process than those in Baux’s. Here, we can read Laloo’s “autosite” and “parasite” as metaphors for England and India, respectively. Political and social commentary depicted England as the supplying host and India as the vampiric parasite—a diversion of valuable resources in terms of both money and manpower, particularly in the wake of the Sepoy Rebellion in the 1850s. Parliamentary and public debates were rife with the argument about the costs of “maintaining” the colony. Patrick Brantlinger’s Fictions of State points to the ways in which empire grew with and was read against English national debt and economic need. The “uncontrolled micturation” of the parasite can be read as a sign of the autosite’s inability to control itself, an index of the finances being “pissed away” on the colony. This interpretation of India persisted in spite of the fact that England was drawing enormous
natural and human resources from the nation.\textsuperscript{45} As Emily Haddad has argued, economic questions served as a justification for empire and “a necessary point of contact between capitalist desire and the civilizing mission.”\textsuperscript{46} Moreover, medical reports suggestively described the parasite as “accessory parts,”\textsuperscript{47} as an unnecessary appendage (though the physicians acknowledged that to remove the parasite would likely end the life of the autosite). Similarly, the English government often regarded India as an excess appendage in spite of its economic interrelationship with the nation. So apt is this comparison that one article on Laloo refers to the relationship between the autosite and the parasite as a “commonwealth,” language that quite explicitly evokes the national relationship between England and her colonies.\textsuperscript{48}

These relations were often figured through parallel metaphors of maternity and economic expense, both of which resonate in the discussion of the relationship between autosite and parasite. Frequently, England was read as maternal, nurturant, of its colonies,\textsuperscript{49} and India was described as parasitic on the crown. Bill Ashcroft has noted that the “trope of the child . . . absorbed and suppressed the contradictions of imperial discourse itself.”\textsuperscript{50} Colonized people were often read as childlike—in need of the nurturing, civilizing force of the colonizing nation. Sudipta Sen fleshes out this familial metaphor, citing one used by Reverend William Tennant. “Providence,” he indicated, “had cast ‘many millions into [Britain’s] arms, for their protection and welfare.’”\textsuperscript{51} Under-scoring the Kantian roots of this sentiment, Sen notes that “everyone regard[ed] the Commonwealth as the maternal womb.”\textsuperscript{52} It is significant then that Laloo, around whose neck the arms of the twin are frequently wrapped, is described as having the appearance of a “mother holding her babe for the purpose of suckling.”\textsuperscript{53} Laloo becomes the mother country, and his twin, the breastfeeding colony. In this one complex Indian body, English notions of “care” and feeding for the parasitic colony, as well as the colony’s supposed leeching of British resources, emerge.

Moreover, the favorable rhetoric used to describe the autosite highlights the imagined cultural and intellectual dominance that under-girded much of the ideology of empire. Just as the maternal metaphor suggested superior strength, maturity, and power of the mother figure as compared to the child, the autosite’s ascendancy over the parasite generates a figure of imperial power. The autosite’s “body [is] properly developed, and [his] head remarkably well formed. He is very intelligent, and good-looking, and his health is excellent.” The parasite, on the other hand, is referred to either in medical terms, or in language
that points to its passivity and impotence: the upper extremities “[lie] flabbily over the left half of the abdomen of the boy” and the lower limbs, and the lower limbs are described as a “mass hang[ing] slantingly downwards.” The hands of the parasite lack the “humanizing” opposable thumb on the right hand and the joints are small and ankylosed, mobile only at the behest of the autosite. Again, like the mother managing her burdensome and demanding child and the nation its demanding colony, the stronger autosite still “complains of feeling the weight [of] the Half Body.”

Moreover, in the discussion of the gestation of Laloo, mention of Laloo’s biological mother is largely absent—her presence is treated as irrelevant, as if Laloo was self-generated. Even in a discussion of his “monstrosity,” scientific researchers described the production of Laloo as beyond the power of his parents, collectively, and his mother, independently. We might read the erasure of Laloo’s mother—except as an origin of his Indianness—as an emblematic dismissal of the relevance of Indian history or cultural context, except for the ways in which it figured into Britain’s contemporary relationship to the colony. It appears, in fact, that Laloo himself is the progenitor for both the autosite and parasite—as Britain was seen as responsible for the civilized rebirth of the Indian nation. Indeed, Laloo’s “whole” body (the autosite) is described as more favored and “normal,” the very source of life for the partial—headless, mindless—parasitic body attached to the whole. The parasite is essentially without head and heart, mind and morality, and these functions are supplied by the superior body of the autosite, as they were imagined to be provided by the colonizing nation.

What is, of course, most striking about this delineation of the “two” bodies is that treating them as entirely separate entities makes little sense, something the pitch narrative highlights when it notes that “on pricking the skin over any part of the Half Body it is sensitive, as the pain is complained of by the Boy.” Further, these are twins—not just of similar but identical genetic material—and are “developed from the same ovum.” The biological correspondence and connection implied in these remarks underscores the intimate relation that interrupts the rhetoric of difference. Indeed, it is the fact that the two embryos were inadequately separated that creates the double-bodied structure of Laloo in the first place. Inevitably embedded, then, in this narrative of difference is one of sameness and kinship, a theme that interferes with and undermines the rhetoric of superiority. Homi Bhabha has argued that imperial narrative always bears the marks of such undermining tensions and that “disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also
disrupts its authority.”

A closer study of the body of text surrounding Laloo demonstrates that although many of these elements I have described seem a simple recapitulation of imperial rhetoric—equating the “whole,” life-giving, and intellectual portion with the imperial state and the “attached” and parasitic portion to the colony—equally present is a critique of colonial power, which marks the power as a (potentially unethical) seizure of resources by the “stronger” of the two bodies. The pitch book describes at length the biological formation of the bodies and in this way demonstrates these disruptions: “One placenta pushes back the weaker one, and thus interferes with, or impedes, the circulation of the less favored foetus. . . . Notwithstanding this change, the circulation in the less favored foetus . . . still goes on. It is insufficient to nourish or develop the upper parts of the body, as the head and trunk, but the lower extremities fully, and the upper limbs partially share the supply, and go through imperfect development and growth. Thus the less favored foetus receives its nutritive supplies from the normal foetus.”

The “interference” of the stronger fetus seems selfish, almost barbaric; it “pushes back the weaker one”—language that implies bullying mistreatment, not a generous, maternal care. Indeed, in this account, the elimination of all intelligence and rationality and the focus on the body of the “less favored” fetus is caused by the seizure of resources and uneven distribution of those resources by the stronger fetus. The “imperfect” development of the twin is an outcome of the excessive consumption of supplies by the larger placenta. This language was also present in the socially circulating tensions about British rule, evident in parliamentary debates about the politics of imperial engagement and appearing alongside the rhetoric that seems to praise colonial power. Reading the “head” as underdeveloped and the body as “imperfect” as a result of the intervention of the stronger fetus speaks to the ways in which the colonies might have been dwarfed and damaged by the intervention of the imperial state. Moreover, the autosite, while legible as a metaphor for imperial power, was, of course, himself Indian, a fact that also destabilizes the binary of superiority.

A tension thoroughly imbricated in imperialism, as Laloo’s pitch book suggests, is the role of economics and class in relation to the abased other. Whereas American culture (and freak show sensibility) were founded upon a “faith in individualism[,] progress,” and upward mobility, the British had a different consciousness of the class system. The “self-made man” was an American construct that shaped much of the social construction of the working freak and of the managers
and exhibitors of freaks. Tchen suggests that American culture and the performances such as those he discusses were shaped by a cultural belief structure “infused with . . . faith in individualism and progress [in which] the ethic for individual self-improvement unleashed the pursuit of individual desires and the cultivation of one’s own abilities.” Indeed, this was dependent, in part, upon articulating “the nation’s contradictory mix of not being like Europe: individual egalitarianism, pluralist consumerism, white supremacy, and cultural admixture.”

While differences (and similarities) in the conceptions of class between the United States and Britain are manifold and complex, the American celebration of consumer capitalism was more muted in Britain. Indeed, if a novelist such as Anthony Trollope could have his popularity undermined by explaining in his autobiography that economic need drove much of his writing, and if Spiritualist mediums were derided as frauds unless they were unpaid or could achieve distance from the production of income, we can perhaps understand the ways in which it was vital for anyone with pretensions to class mobility to do the same and why it would be distasteful to the public to see performers evidence the economic drive that undergirded their exhibition, even if this need was evident. For example, it was after Joseph Merrick, the Elephant Man, was removed from the public circuit by Frederick Treves (literally from a “shop”) and transplanted to a hospital that he could begin a round of visits with the privileged.

In Laloo’s case, as in that of many other Indian performers, the economic exigencies of his self-exhibition served to debase him further, a tension underscored by the economic relations between England and India that I have already described. The BMJ demonstrates this in one short piece that, while not referring to Laloo by name, has been identified by Durbach as discussing his case. This piece, though explicitly about the “posterior dichotomy” in Laloo’s body, almost exclusively discusses the finances of Laloo as an “extraordinary spectacle.” It announces that “several thousand rupees were collected” when Laloo was exhibited in Bombay and that “an enterprising Parsee gentleman has advanced the lad’s father a thousand rupees in expectation of the success” of his exhibition. Indeed, Laloo is ultimately conflated with both the economics of display and the marketplace in which he appears when the author indicates that a “report of the Sudder Bazaar case, drawn up by a competent anatomist, would be of great interest.” To refer to Laloo himself by the name of the bazaar in which he exhibited and to describe the Bazaar case as the body that requires examination
renders Laloo almost entirely as a financial interest rather than a human being. Similarly, relations with Indians were often treated and debated as questions of economic interest rather than as those of a nation of human beings. One of the concerns associated with Laloo’s appearance in England was the claim that he was prohibited from appearing in the Indian Exhibition “owing to some question of the right of his guardians to make a show of him.”66 This commodification of the heavily raced Laloo happens much more unabashedly than that of most other freak show performers and degrades him further.

Ultimately, meditations on the colonial relationship, including these economic aspects, are depicted as vexing and vexed. The most damning discussion of the economic relations appears in the work of Bland Sutton, a teratological expert and an expert on Laloo himself. In his report, Bland Sutton fleshes out the economic exploitation of a body such as Laloo’s, along with the implications of such a relationship. “Parasitic [twins] are almost in all cases so extremely valuable as sources of gain in fairs, shows, and large cities that the parents, or the unscrupulous individuals who get possession of these children, will not permit operative interference” or surgical “normalizing” of the body. Moreover, “the children rarely survive the interference.”67 The overt recognition that union between the parasite and autosite produces great wealth is paired with the notion that it would be a form of unwelcome “interference” to disrupt the relationship between the two and that it could potentially cause the death of the autosite, as well. This illustration of the biological and economic interdependence implicates England in the financial exploitation of Laloo. Ultimately, the language of “double monstrosity” that permeates discussions of Laloo suggests that both Britain and her colony become monstrous—though profitably so—when connected. It implies that the autosite (Britain, in my argument about this metaphor) would not be whole without the parasite, and, without the interference of the autosite, the parasite (India, in this discussion) might have formed into a whole and healthy individual on its own.

This is not the only representation of the potentially poisonous aspects of the imperial relation for the mother country that we may read as a metaphor offered in discussions of Laloo. Another is embodied in the discussion of Laloo’s intestines. This revealing metaphor expresses worries about the potential dangers that lie in the exchanges between the autosite and parasite, particularly in terms of their effect on the autosite. These concerns suggest the perceived hazards—economic and social—of imperial relations. The scientist-author laments that the
parasite, for which he indicates there is “distinct evidence [of] an intestine, . . . would be a source of danger to an autosite, especially should the parasitic diverticulum be to the least degree pervious where it joins the autosite’s intestines.” Since the parasite in Laloo’s case had no anus but only a “dimple,” this meant that it could not pass excrement as it did urine. The concern was that the parasite utilized food energy and that with no place for passage of feces, this structure would require the movement of the excrement back to the autosite. This would be most threatening in the case that there existed some perforation or permeability in the connection between the autosite’s and parasite’s intestines and thus would cause the internalization of the parasite’s feces in the body of the autosite. As a metaphor for imperial relations, this language seems to suggest that damage done or “waste” created in the relationship between Britain and her colonies from the British expenditure of resources would rebound on the British themselves, circulating in the interconnected exchange of material and social structures.

Empire and the Freak

I have suggested, in the case of both Mohammed Baux and Laloo, that we must follow Spivak’s admonition to understand the way in which narratives of the period comment on imperial relations. Here I have argued that dwarves, like Baux, entered into a social fabric that already had a particular understanding of dwarfishness and that this understanding was complicated by cultural perceptions of Indianness and of the imperial relationship. Baux’s materials express both a desire to contain the colonial other and anxieties about the inability to do so. These contradictory impulses were apparent in many kinds of narratives that spoke to England’s empire. The tensions in this narrative point to the way in which there was, increasingly, discomfort with the work of empire in the world. Decades later, we see this discomfort amplified in the uniquely positioned body of Laloo. Unlike Baux, who had a relatively common and well-known bodily difference, Laloo’s singular body was of exceptional scientific and social interest. In Laloo, the metaphoric parallels to the imperial relationship are more complexly embodied, but they reveal what might be described as a more profound degree of general dis-ease with the engagement between Britain and the Indian colony, especially as it regards the use and distribution of economic and other material resources. In this way, both Baux and Laloo demonstrate how freakery
emerged as one of the discourses that spoke to imperial relations. It also demonstrates the way in which freakery must not be perceived as marginal to Victorian culture or irrelevant to mainstream social issues. The rhetoric of freakery expresses tensions that were integral to the culture and was certainly a part of the way in which the culture worked through them. More thorough investigation and explication of freakery on tour in England will help us flesh out international relations and understand the rhetorics of difference and disability that helped make them possible.

Notes


3. Her exhibition spoke in complicated ways to American racial politics. While it was her body (her race and age) that were figured as the center of her draw, the thematics of her appearances on stage were also significant. Her exhibition yoked slavery and American patriotism, rather than tragedy, through her fond remembrances of the first president in her performances. Her remarkably “long” life, her animated engagement with the audience, and her public success seemed to suggest that her life—and by extension, perhaps those of others—had not been hindered by her enslavement. Still, her very identity as a sideshow freak undermined the rosier picture painted on the surface.


10. Ibid.

11. Haliburton, 80.
18. Seaver, 209.
21. Ibid.
22. This characterization was carried over in cases in which the dwarf was perceived as working class. For example, an 1889 pathological study of a man executed for the attempted murder of his wife and child in 1819 (Jonathan Hutchinson, “An Account of the Skeleton of the Norwich Dwarf,” Transactions of the Pathological Society of London 40 [1889]: 229–35) suggested that the dwarf’s “personal deformity was in singular unison with his moral depravity.” The dwarfish body was perceived as an index of moral development, which was linked intimately to class or race. As the pathologist remarked of the Norwich dwarf, “a general impression is formed that he was a man of very inhuman character. This fact becomes of great interest in connection with the singularly brute-like formation of the bones of his extremities” (230).
24. “Mohammed Baux, the Miniature Man of India” advertisement, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, John Johnson Collection, Human Freaks, Box 1. All quotations are from this advertisement.
25. G. H. L, 150.
27. Suleri, 95.
30. Suleri, 16, emphasis added.
31. In another twist in this tautological construction of identity, the vexed quality of the dwarfishness becomes a metaphor for Anglo-Indian relations in another narrative of the Indian Mutiny. Though the British engaged in a brutal military retaliation, there were Indian survivors, many of whom were sent to an island penal colony. This island was inhabited by a reportedly savage, cannibalistic “dwarf” race. As Preston indicates, “When the Indian Mutiny of 1857 had been suppressed and
justice overtook some of its principal instigators . . . the mutinous Sepoy regiment was condemned to be transported to the Adaman Islands, in the Bay of Bengal. The men were horror-stricken. They would much rather have been shot. And no wonder. It seemed, indeed, that their fate would be terrible. The islands were not far away; barely six hundred miles from the Gufli mouth of the Ganges, but little was known of them except that they were inhabited by a race of murderous savages, and that the malarious climate made health impossible and speedy death certain" (307). The violence of the “dwarf race” becomes one way to manage the dangers of the mutinous Indian subjects. Baux, like Macaulay’s ideal Indian, becomes a representative from the savage place to embody the subdued savage.

33. I am deeply indebted to Nadja Durbach, whose essay on Krao appears in this collection, for sharing with me her insights on Laloo from her as-yet-unpublished essay, “Two Bodies, Two Selves, Two Sexes: Siamese Twins and the Double-Bodied Hindoo Boy,” which offers a fine discussion on sexuality, identity, and freakery.
38. Durbach, “Two Bodies.”
40. Ibid.
42. As Suleri has argued, “the Indian subcontinent is not merely a geographic space upon which colonial rapacities have been enacted, but is furthermore that imaginative construction . . . from which colonial and postcolonial imaginations have drawn . . . their most basic figures for the anxiety of empire” (5).
43. See especially debates such as those over military expenditure that appear in the London Times (e.g., H. W. Norman, “Military Expenditure in India,” Times [October 31, 1871]: 4, col. E).
44. “Parasitic Foetus,” 437.
45. One particularly disturbing Rudyard Kipling short story, “At the End of the Passage,” offers a capsule of the debates that were carried on in Parliament regarding the cost of the colony. A group of officers in India discuss a newspaper clipping about these parliamentary debates. The article in the clipping complains that “the masses . . . get [nothing] from [India], which [England has] step by step fraudulently annexed. . . . [The aristocracy] take good care to maintain their lavish scales of income . . . while they themselves force the unhappy peasant to pay with the sweat of his brow for all the luxuries in which they are lapped” (in Victorian Ghost Stories, ed. Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert [New York: Oxford University Press, 1993], 330). The men complain that they have no luxuries and get very little.
51. Sudipta Sen, Distant Sovereignty: National Imperialism and the Origins of British India (New York: Routledge, 2002), 86. While noting the domestic dynamic and paternalistic rhetoric implied here, Sen does not speak to the maternal quality of this passage, which is certainly suggested by its gendering.
52. Ibid., 88.
53. Interesting Treatise, 6.
54. Ibid., 4, 5, 8.
55. “One can entirely understand deformities being transmitted from the parents—indeed the subject is beyond question; but although nearly everyone, I think, will acknowledge that maternal impressions produce birth marks and other deformities, still it is hard to believe that such impressions would cause excess of paris” (“Monstrosity,” 221, emphasis in original).
56. While the Treatise describes the biological necessity for the fact that the twins’ bodies are the same sex (6), Laloo’s handbills describe the twin as a girl: “BOY and GIRL Joined Together” (Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, John Johnson Collection, Human Freaks, Box 2). This phenomenon evokes Sara Suleri’s fascinating thesis in The Rhetoric of English India. It also echoes the sexualization of the Indian body and the relationship between the social work of imperialism and the social work of gender as described in Anne McClintock’s Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest (New York: Routledge, 1995).
57. Interesting Treatise, 5, 6.
59. Interesting Treatise, 7.
60. Even narratives (such as Rudyard Kipling’s Gunga Din and Kim) that discussed wholly “normal” Indians betrayed what Mathew Chacko calls an “imperial ethnographic impulse, like an effort to categorize an alien species” (personal communication, August 4, 2005), a feature that laid the groundwork for the exhibition of Indian bodies (in the way that Tchen describes of Chinese in America).
61. Tchen, xvi.
63. Tchen, xvii, xix.
65. Ibid., 405, emphasis added.