

## Disaster's Face: What Human Bodies Reveal about Catastrophe

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### Abstract:

The global mass media in general depicts disasters as a spectacle for an audience of consumers. As a result, the individuals depicted effectively become generic victims, not fully developed human beings with distinct needs and interests (Drake, Tierney). In Sinha's novel, however, the chemical plant explosion, though drastically noxious to Khaufpuri citizens, is not restricted to harming only Khaufpuris. In fact, *Animal's* narrative conveys visual punctual violence on a Western audience, as well as the Khaufpuris. He reminds his Western audience that there are exposed human bodies in specific geographic locations. This essay investigates the corporeal experience *Animal's* audience has with disaster because of his narrative style. I argue that *Animal's People* rhetorically constructs a Western audience, and in doing so, reorients the Western audience's relationship with disaster and disaster victims. Put another way, this essay argues that Sinha's novel discloses both non-Western *and* Western human beings amidst catastrophe by deconstructing the fantasy that Westerners are far removed and invincible from disaster.

Bangladesh...formerly India...generations wiped out as regularly as dockwork...and they are coolly aware that when you talk about apocalypse...they are leading the way in that particular field. The facts of disaster are the facts of their lives. (Smith 176)

### Introduction

Do Westerners feel as if they are "leading the way" in accruing casualties because of disasters (176)? Westerners can believe that they are relatively invulnerable from disasters. The Westerners experience with disaster is not the same relationship that Indians faced because of unnatural reasons. On the night of December 2, 1984, forty thousand tons of methyl cyanide spewed from a chemical tank over the Indian city of Bhopal, flooding the city with chemicals denser than air, and now, thirty-one years later, over 600,000 Bhopali citizens suffer from both physical and mental illnesses (Mukherjee 37). Indra Sinha's novel *Animal's People* depicts a fictional town called Khaufpur that is closely based on the actual events that took place in Bhopal, India. A nineteen year

old boy named Animal narrates the entire story. In the novel *Animal's People*, these toxic chemicals corrode Animal's back, and because of this, he must walk on his hands and feet. This essay investigates the corporal experience *Animal's* audience has with disaster because of his narrative style. I argue that *Animal's People* rhetorically constructs a Western audience, and in doing so, reorients the Western audience's relationship with disaster and disaster victims. Put another way, this essay argues that Sinha's novel discloses both non-Western *and* Western human beings amidst catastrophe by deconstructing the fantasy that Westerners are far removed and invincible from disaster.

The chemical disaster that *Animal's People* displays showcases the ways in which the Khaufpuri citizens are vulnerable politically, economically, and environmentally. In contrast, the global mass media depicts disasters as a spectacle for an audience of consumers. Phillip Drake and Kathleen Tierney argue, first, that mass media frames

vulnerable people groups as generic victims for Western audiences to observe, and second, that it does not depict disaster survivors as fully developed human beings with distinct needs and interests (Drake 84, Tierney 57). In Sinha's novel, however, the chemical plant explosion, though drastically noxious to Khaufpurī citizens, is not restricted to harming only Khaufpuris. In fact, *Animal's* narrative conveys visual punctual violence on a Western audience, as well as the Khaufpuris. He reminds his Western audience that there are exposed human bodies in specific geographic locations. He includes the reader (primarily a Western audience) in the text by calling the reader "Eyes," and speaks to the reader, constructing the spatial environment the reader fills (Sinha 7, 13, 27). In this paper, punctual violence<sup>i</sup> refers to harm manifested on individual human bodies (Eisenzweig 34-35, Favret 618-619, Moudelino 35). Punctual violence in *Animal's People* draws attention to personal and unique hardships and trauma faced by disaster victims.

A margin of the field of disaster studies primarily addresses questions of cultures' function in rendering human populations vulnerable to disaster. Cultural analysis is a fringe movement within disaster studies with respect to other approaches grounded in sociology and in the physical sciences. In the past, those who suffered from the effects of disasters were understood to be made vulnerable by chance, accident, or divine will, whereas today there is a sense that vulnerability is determined by social dynamics, even exploitation. Ulrich Beck charts this shift in modern society's conception of disaster in his article *Living in the World Risk Society*. His research stakes territory for new questions to emerge about the threats human beings face living in modern society, and contains theoretical models to conceptualize disaster.

### **A Brief History for Disaster Studies and its Implications in *Animal's People***

Recent scholarship in disaster studies tends to address broader concerns about populations rendered vulnerable because of socio-political exploitation. Of this trend in contemporary disaster studies, Beck writes, "The principle of deliberately exploiting the vulnerability of modern civil society replaces the principle of chance and accident" (329). Beck contrasts contemporary conceptions of disaster and risk with religiously affiliated ideology held before the Enlightenment Era. Beck is not alone in observing transformations in the ways people conceptualize disaster over time; rather, he falls within a critical tradition of Enlightenment thinkers who lambaste the idea that the wrath of God caused the disaster. For example, the destruction from the Lisbon earthquake on November 1, 1755 fueled Enlightenment thinkers' opposition in part because it ironically fell on All Saint's Day, and more importantly, because the city of Lisbon symbolized cultural strength and stability. Yet, in under ten minutes the city fell, and its rubble crushed thirty thousand people (Fleming 183). Voltaire responds to this catastrophe by scrutinizing the axiom, "Whatever is, is Right." His opposition to chance, accident, and divine cause is most clearly seen when he writes,

And can you then impute a sinful deed  
To babes who on their mothers'  
bosoms bleed?  
Was then more vice in fallen Lisbon  
found,  
Than Paris, where voluptuous joys  
abound? (Voltaire 186)

Religious elements such as "sinful" and "impute" set the tone for the lines that follow. Voltaire calls dramatic attention to religious zealots who interpret the disaster as divine judgment. The helpless object of imputation

shocks and horrifies because it is not a criminal damaged by falling edifices, but a babe dying and bleeding, cradled in its mother's arms. A critique of religious rhetoric pervades the poem as Voltaire construes a comparison of two great cities into a question. Upon asking, is there more vice in Lisbon than in Paris, the answer is clearly no, and Voltaire hints at his conclusion; attributing divinity, chance, and accident to disaster is unsatisfyingly obtuse. From Enlightenment thinkers' posture of doubt to contemporary research like Beck's inquiry into power and vulnerability, new questions emerge about the threats human beings face living in modern society.

Sinha's *Animal's People* raises a question of great importance concerning any disaster in the contemporary world: will those in power recognize the guilty parties and hold them accountable, while also giving victims appropriate assistance? The Khaufpuri citizens wait for justice for nearly twenty years (Sinha 152). As an educated leader of the Khaufpuris, Zafar organizes the citizens and advances their pleas for justice. He challenges the multinational corporation called Kampani that released methyl cyanide throughout their city to finally make amends to those devastated by the chemical disaster. In a non-violent protest against the Khampani, he abstains from food and water during Nautapa, a time when "heat is so fierce it fries any part of you that touches the ground" (278). After seeing Zafar transported away, the entire Khaufpuri community believes he died from starvation. Animal links Zafar's possible death to the oppressive presence of the Khampani. He then returns to the factory (the site that began their suffering) and ruminates on the unobservable cause of Zafar's possible death. Of course food would be the most pertinent cause, but a process of violence inflicts itself on the Khaufpuris in silent and out of sight ways. The question of who or what is to blame dictates

much of the discourse that takes place in *Animal's People*.

Though Animal can certainly identify and touch the origin from which all noxious chemicals spewed, the people responsible are evanescent; Animal cannot definitively describe them because they are part of a corporation. Rob Nixon explains the bewilderment that Animal faces in trying to identify them because of "leakages," and goes on to describe their fluid identity as "porous border[s] and permeable membranes, the living who are semi-dead and the dead who are living specters" (458). Attempting to give an account of this experience, Animal says, "[I] put my ear to [the pipe's] rough surface and listen. Inside are voices and it's like they are screaming" (274). The voice Animal makes distinct in this scene is not his own, but represents the moans from victims of the chemical disaster. Although Animal's encounter with the victims complicates whose thoughts are voiced, it suggests that the victims are acutely aware of a guilty party. Animal evokes incinerated somatic images before speaking on their behalf: "It's their bones and ashes crying out in rage against their murderers" (274). Animal speaks of their sense for deserved justice by interpreting that "Once the earth has tasted blood it craves more, now the killers must be killed" (274). But what remains veiled is who exactly they seek to kill. Put another way, who are the killers? Bernard Adeney-Risakotta, studies the comparable and divergent attitudes and actions of Indonesian Muslims and Christians in response to a tsunami and earthquake that hit Yogyakarta in 2006. His study isolated five common questions raised by disaster victims. The two most pressing questions for individuals are, "Who did this? Who is to blame?" (Adeney-Risakotta 230). The short answer is that blame is distributed across political, economic, and environmental lines. *Animal's People* conveys these spheres of

tension through the chemical factory (274), corrupt local governments (284), and poisoned ground water (107); all of them inadvertently damage Animal's body and dehumanize him.

Before scholars like Rob Nixon began exploring disaster as a process, the ways of systemic injustices within society had limited investigation, and did not clearly reveal the actors that extort populations. He recently developed a concept called "slow violence" which helped to reconceive and reconstruct disaster (Nixon 2). Slow violence removed event-based conceptualization of disaster towards a political-processual orientation, and is neatly articulated as "delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space" (2). For example, slow violence was occurring in Khaufpur before the night of the chemical plant explosion because the factory's presence made the Khaufpuris vulnerable. Living within a stone's throw of a methyl cyanide production plant can never be done without risk. The chemical plant explosion acutely represents picturesque damage of the Khaufpuri citizens. But they experience some of the more troubling health effects years later. Khaufpuri citizens collect polluted water, drink it, and the poisons coalesce in their bodies (Sinha 108). Meanwhile, individual signs of still born births (237), asthma (230), shorter life expectancies (108), and body deformity (5) can indicate that chemical exposure persists up to twenty years after the chemical explosion. These bodily signs, however, exist across a broad sample of humans, span great lengths of time, and obscure cause-effect relationships. But *Animal's People* interprets for the reader the processual harm being done to the subjugated Khaupuris by a multinational corporation with the assistance of corrupt local politicians. Because of this, the answers to questions such as how the hazardous conditions from chemical exposure persistently inflict the impoverished Khaufpuris, or why the

multinational corporation must pay amends for the Khaufpuri health issues years after its chemical plant disaster are clear to the reader. *Animal's People* attempts to debunk the myth of the vulnerable non-Western poor which Gregory Bankoff describes as "a paradigm for framing the world in such a way that it effectively divides it into two, between a zone where disasters occur regularly and one where they occur infrequently" (25-26). Thus, *Animal's People* challenges the idea that the poor in India are naturally more at risk than Westerners.

In addition, *Animal's People* contains a plethora of encounters with human bodies that experience punctual violence in various manifestations, places, and times. Punctual violence focuses on the uncomfortably strange nuances disaster entails that individuals recognize because of the damage inflicting their bodies and minds. Punctual violence depends on slow violence's conceptualization of disaster as a process, spanning geographical, temporal, physical, and testimonial lines. In other words, punctual violence might be referenced as a stage within slow violence. For instance, once the chemical plant exploded, thousands of human bodies experienced punctual violence in a multitude of ways, in a variety of locations, and at various times. The toxic chemicals mutilated Animal's spine which forced his torso toward the ground and his rear end upward (15). Even as a baby, however, Animal was not the youngest harmed. Fetuses experienced severe trauma to the point of death. One child's body, once delivered from its mother's womb, showed deformity because a cyclops-like eyeball grew in the middle of its head (236). While some spawned extra limbs, others did not develop vital sensory body parts like noses and mouths (236). In the days and months following the chemical plant explosion, initially unharmed mothers unknowingly gathered poisoned water to drink.

They noticed that their children suffered birth defects, and that their neighbor's babies also had physical or mental disabilities (108). Some survivors lost their voices, while others developed schizophrenia (220, 57). Punctual violence is the trauma that the Western audience of *Animal* undergoes because his narrative implicates them in the disaster.

### **Geographical Exposure**

Every particular geographical location is seen because *Animal* includes a spectator intermittently throughout the telling of his story, a projected Western audience he calls "Eyes" (14). As *Animal* begins telling his story in the second of twenty-three tapes, he explains his own recognition that his story will be edited and printed by a publisher. He correctly predicts the journalist is not the only Westerner to imbibe his particular accounts of the chemical disaster in Khaufpur and the hardships that followed. Rather, *Animal* clearly understands the productive aim for his story the journalist has in mind: to print translated copies of *Animal's* account for a Western audience to read. *Animal* declares the intended audience of his story:

I am no longer talking to my friend the  
Kakadu Jarnalis, names Phuoc, I am  
talking to the eyes that are reading  
these words  
Now I am talking to you [sic]. (12)

*Animal* inserts Western readers into the story. More importantly, how he includes the Western audience disrupts the privileged scales of power-asymmetries that they can experience toward non-Westerners because they deem them vulnerable. In this way, *Animal* rhetorically presents himself as the storyteller, while the Western audience becomes the one that is objectified.

*Animal's People* develops how geographical challenges hinder the ability to map harm done to individuals because they generally remain unaccounted for. *Animal's People*, however, warrants the Western audience to see how the disaster still plagues the Khaufpuris. It depicts scenarios which allow the Western audience to see disaster harnessed on particular Khaufpuris' bodies in particular residencies. For example, *Animal* leads Elli, the reader, and a government doctor through a wood-paneled corridor into a courtyard far off the beaten path (106). The courtyard holds a young woman who presses milk from her breasts (107). Although *Animal* routinely walks through the wood-paneled corridor and enters the private lives of suffering Khaufpuris, Elli and the reader would not have entered this closed off space of their own volition. In fact, both the disaster's broader circumstances and potent harm done to the Khaufpuris would have remained closed off to Elli and the reader were it not for *Animal* allowing them to enter into the inner lives of the Khaufpuris. Without the initial guidance of *Animal*, and the interpretation of events he later gives to the voice recorder, the woman's experience with disaster would never be properly understood by both Elli and the reader.

*Animal's People*, however, confronts a bias in Western aid institutions because they focus on the effects of disasters, and work with mixed agendas. Bankoff argues that Western aid institutions depict the non-West as diseased, underdeveloped, or vulnerable to justify interventions that favor Western political and economic interests (28). As a result, the West initiates funded rehabilitation and recovery projects. *Animal's People* includes the presence of Western aid through Elli, a female doctor. The news of perpetual physical maladies propels her to go and help the Khaufpuris with her medical expertise. *Animal*, however, desires to cast off two of Elli's

assumptions so that he might forecast a broader framework of violence that damages the Khaufpuris. First, he confronts some of Elli's assumptions about the inherent goodness of her work. And second, he probes her idea of how much the Khaufpuris need her help. He wants to widen the horizon of which Elli views the events in Khaufpur in order to give her a stronger understanding of her role as part of a Western aid institution, in particular, and as joined to Western political and economic biases, in general. In order to do so, *Animal* leads her down Paradise Alley as she comes across a disturbing and peculiar sight: a mother pressing milk out of her breasts onto the ground. *Animal* depicts "Elli...standing still like she's hoodwinked by the light. The mother, not looking up, continues to spill her milk to the dust. At last Elli says softly, 'Poor thing. How did she lose her child?'"(107). Elli assumes the Khaufpuri woman lost her child. The assumption behind Elli's question, "How did the woman lose her child?" stems from a subconscious Western bias which informs her interpretation of the evidence. She sees a Khaufpuri woman who lives in the slums, and knows that successful birthrates are low. This leads her to believe that because the child is not immediately within sight, then the child must have died. The child, however, is with their grandmother in another room. And the mother presses the milk from her breasts onto the ground because her milk is poisoned by the ground water. Elli's assumption implicates the gambit of Westerners who look on the uncanny acts of vulnerable people groups and configure a truth from a misinterpretation. On one side, this moment shows how Elli's medical training has a Western bias. The medical knowledge, instead of allowing her to initially address the woman with a series of medical questions, is undermined by relegating the mother within a category of one who experiences child loss. On the other side, this

exemplifies the rhetorical work *Animal's People* performs to combat common narratives about vulnerable people groups by letting us see what is truly happening. The Khaufpuri woman, however, interprets the texture and viscosity of her milk to mean that the disaster, long from being over, still manifests within her body. These observations lead to further examinations of how human bodies touched by disaster create terrifying experiences for others who look on them.

### **Animal's Rhetorical Creation of and Power Over a Western Audience**

*Animal's People* showcases power-asymmetries: vulnerable communities that are typically objectified become the meaning-makers, while the Western audience is portrayed as deaf, dumb, and paralyzed because *Animal* includes them in his story as merely "Eyes" (14). For example, media's interpretations of events, such as Hurricane Katrina, promote a relation of the viewer with a spectacle; one watches the television while the other is televised. Kathleen Tierney argues that myths about disaster, "looting", "social disorganization", and "deviant behavior," perpetuate because, in general, mass media frames peoples' post-disaster response towards those ends (57). In this way, mass media, and not local citizens experiencing the disaster, have withheld the power to shape the meaning of the disaster (Tierney et. al 57). *Animal* typifies what Michel Foucault calls the "intelligible body" and the "useful body" because his body for a Western audience symbolizes disaster's mayhem (Foucault 136). Because of the appalling curves shaping his body along with his Indian nationality, Western audiences would neither merit him the status of an intellectual, nor credit him the time to speak to them (Butler, Samuels).<sup>ii</sup> *Animal's* body, to the Western audience, signifies voiceless, visceral, and visual violence. In

Animal's case, however, he not only reorients those who produce knowledge, but also calls attention to the possibility that he is conveyed as a spectacle to his Western audience. Animal grapples the Western audience's framing of disaster victims, like himself, by limiting their voice, and announcing his own. He adamantly maintains that "You are reading my words, you are that person. I've no name for you so I will call you Eyes. My job is to talk, yours is to listen. So now listen" (14). A matrix of Animal's body and his overpowering narrative usurp the Western audience's authority to speak. By interjecting the Western audience as "Eyes", Animal forces them to admit an uncomfortable reality (14). They objectify genres of damaged human bodies and complacently receive interpretation from the media coverage of people like Animal in the global south.

*Animal's People* demonstrates the narrative authority of Animal over his Western audience as he forces them to face stories they otherwise would avoid. This is clearly seen as he tells a story of a young and sick Indian girl named Aliya who is his close friend. She suffers from an infection in her lungs due to prolonged chemical exposure (150). In addition, Aliya is approximately seven or eight years old when she dies, though she was born twelve or thirteen years after the chemical plant explosion. Without Animal calling attention to her, the harm punctual violence causes her would never be known. Animal first mentions Aliya by including a short memory of her calling to him to play, but his ebullient account quickly falls away into a meditative narrative. He alludes to her phantasmal voice, recounting, "[Aliya's] voice is suddenly faint like it's caught away by wind, or whispered on the moon, or lost in the crackling of a great fire" (21). Animal eloquently describes one troubling issue about Aliya: her trauma dissipates the moment of her death. Animal's

rumination points out the relative weightlessness of Aliya's story as if her story does not matter, and might be "caught away by the wind" (21). No one may discern the quietness of Aliya's whispers coming from the moon. But, however soft Animal believes Aliya's story to be, his Western audience hears her story fully developed. Though Animal sadly conveys Aliya's voice as "faint like it's caught away by wind," because of Animal's narrative authority, each reader accesses intimate depictions of Aliya poisoned (150), her parents' vexation over her (180-82), friends' sacrifice for her (279-81), and Aliya's own thoughts (101, 179, 279). Far from Aliya's story being "lost in the crackling of a great fire," the pervasive damage punctual violence ensued on her can neither be avoided nor forgotten by Animal's Western audience (21).

In a similar fashion, Animal's Western audience observes numerous accounts of the word "twisted" which is used to describe Animal's physical makeup. For example, Animal depicts a history of how the toxic chemicals mangled his back, telling, "Now I could not even stand up straight. Further, further forward I was bent. When the smelting in my spine stopped the bones had twisted like a hairpin, the highest part of me was my arse [sic]" (15). He accounts for the chemicals that melted his spine as one of the physical causes of his deformity. The word "twisted," however, connotes more than a body's physical form. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "twisted" as, "Consisting of two or more threads, strands, or the like twined together" ("twisted"). Twisted does not allow for the possibility of a fundamental change of parts within Animal, as in wood undergoing a molecular transformation while it burns, but more closely resembles the act of stacking, or of adding trauma to the human that Animal is. In the case of Animal, when he speaks of himself as twisted, both mentally and

physically, what becomes clear to the reader is that traumatic pressures from political (284), economic (274), and environmental (107) institutions acted on him. For instance, Animal is subject to live in the chemical factory because the Indian government did not provide adequate measures of recovery for its victimized citizens. In turn, Animal can neither afford to leave Khaufpur, nor pay for another place of residence. Because the Western audience is the creation of Animal, and witnesses these aspects of Animal's life through his own storytelling, they receive a true account of the humans involved in the Khaufpur chemical disaster. They do not receive an account that facilitates any biases of Western mass media.

Because of his twisted body, Animal relates crudeness and disaster, or put another way, he describes the crudeness of human exposure in disaster. Animal's commentary depicts jarring images typically veiled by larger concerns about disaster. On a grand scale, Dennis Miletig argues that disasters entail populations rendered vulnerable by disrupting normal social functions (511). More particularly, *Animal's People* involves vile descriptions of bodily processes because the disaster bounds Animal to walk at the waist level of most humans. He interprets the disaster from waist height. In addition to the level of his head, two of the most private attributes of Animal persistently stand erect; his buttocks (15) and penis (126). While humans typically cover those body parts via pants or long shirts, Animal does not have the option to make those features unpronounced on his own body. On many occasions, Animal expresses discomfort, shame, or insecurity because he cannot control his erect penis. As a result, his erect penis displays itself to those that he encounters. These descriptions of illicit exposure suggest that disasters uncover humans, even the most private of their members.

### **The Western Audience Facing Disaster**

In order to further the extent to which his audience learns about the chemical plant disaster and its aftermath, Animal precisely establishes spatial markers. With his authority to speak, Animal isolates his audience, bidding them to join him while he walks through the site of disaster. Not only does Animal lead his audience, but also orients them in the chemical plant exactly as he wants. He rhetorically constructs the chemical plant for his audience, announcing, "Eyes, I wish you could come with me into the factory" (29). His audience, however, follows him stride for stride. Although the word "wish" presupposes that his audience cannot view the factory in the same way, his use of the word "Eyes" forces the audience to inhabit the chemical plant (29). Animal proceeds to construct the space he walks by appealing to four of his audience's senses – "no bird songs" (sound), "careful hands" (touch), "cobra" (sight), and "chemical stench" (smell) (30). To Animal, the site of the factory represents a storehouse of punctual violence. The factory walls are emblems to the beginning of the Khampani in Khaufpur, and to their placing of little value on the lives of the citizens of Khaufpur because they chose to run their factory below its safety standards. They also are a sign of the Indian government misrepresenting their citizens. The "strange forest" in the factory grounds conveys the end to both the Khaufpuris' hope in receiving economic aid and to the grass-roots movement for justice Zafar cultivates (30). The pipe where toxins spewed out over the city concedes blame for mutilating hundreds of thousands of Khaufpuris' lives, while the Kampani begins to disavow every relation to the disaster (33). The factory, holistically, develops a picture for the death of important social relations, like family, and the beginning of different social relations, such as missionaries rearing orphans (1). Additionally, the factory's decay casts incipient



images of citizens mourning because poison killed their children. Most particularly, the pipe symbolizes, to a degree, the end of Animal's humanity and his new life as an animal. Thus, Animal's use of the word "Eyes" forces the audience to inhabit the chemical plant, and just as Animal does, it forces them to feel the weight of the disaster from all that this locus of Khaufpur is burdened with. In this way, Animal materializes the punctual violence brought to bear upon his body onto his audience.

In *Animal's People*, the manifestation of disaster on Animal's body comes into focus. While guiding his audience through the factory, Animal speaks a verse that portrays the tension between disaster and human form. Animal lyricizes:

*The ghosts will get you, you'll never  
escape...  
the ghosts run away from my twisted shape  
(30).*

The ghosts Animal speaks about are victims of the disaster. Or interpreted another way, the ghosts are the disaster itself. In order to understand these verses, one might ask why the ghosts run away from Animal's twisted shape, even though the logical assumption is that Animal would run from the ghosts. Does Animal, in some way, control the ghosts and/or the disaster? The toxins disfigured Animal's body to such an extent that he no longer resembles a historically conditioned normal human body. The words, "you'll never escape," however, forecast a possibility that his audience could face destruction, much like disaster's devastating effects to the human body (30). Animal clearly positions himself as a "[person] of the Apokalis [sic]," meaning, "we are those who withstood the chemical disaster's plague" (366). Through this category, he identifies a newly coded relation to the

disaster. Where earlier, he understood his body as victimized in relation to the disaster, Animal now separates disaster's punctual effects from himself, and shifts disaster's contact to his rhetorically fashioned Western audience. Animal's twisted body becomes the very presence of disaster's punctual violence. Far from Animal fleeing disaster (the ghosts), disaster produced violently in him strikes fear into the hearts of those who encounter him. Hence, Animal inquires shortly after his lyrical verse, "Eyes, are you with me still?" (31). Animal wonders if his revenant-like audience he calls Eyes "r[a]n away from [his] twisted shape" (29). Punctual violence manifests disaster in Animal in such a way that when the Western audience comes into contact with Animal, they are coming into contact with disaster itself. Animal reorients the reader's understanding of disaster because they are now forced to look at a crippled human disaster, and be reminded of and re-experience the disaster in the flesh on Animal's terms.

## Conclusion

This essay argues that Animal rhetorically constructs a Western audience which results in the Western audience's integration into the novel, allowing them to experience disaster and disaster victims in ways that do not objectify the Khaufpuris. The argument begins by developing a historical conceptual framework that marks a re-formation in the study of disasters. The new framing disavowed nature or god as referents for disaster. Instead, concepts such as slow violence created a paradigm that considered political agents' purposefully gradual harm to populations. Further, punctual violence displayed damage enacted by disaster to human bodies. Animal's narrative positions the Western audience into particular geographical, temporal, and physical locales typically closed to Western eyes. The Western audience faces numerous humans

suffering because of disaster. In this way, his narrative re-interprets the Western audience's relation to disaster and disaster victims; when

they observe disaster victims, they perceive disaster itself.

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#### Notes

<sup>i</sup> Punctual violence, up until now, has not been developed to add to any particular field of research, nor has it been specifically defined. Rather, scholars such as Lydie Moudelino, Uri Eisenzweig, and Mary Favret use the term to elaborate a point made in a particular paragraph from their articles. Moudelino uses punctual violence once to describe acute damage done to one person in contrast to a war that later develops (35). Eisenzweig employs the term to portray violence done to individuals by individuals (34-35). And Favret utilizes the term to relate how harmful processes are the source for trauma (618-19).

<sup>ii</sup> I developed the observations entailing *Animal's* crippled body, his narration, and his Western audience from Ellen Samuel's argument that disabled bodies historically are relegated to social positions with little to no authority to speak (59). In addition, I drew from Judith Butler's observations about how the human body forms (or deforms) material norms which leads to positions of authority (or silence) (15).