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 clockwork…and they are cooly 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 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. 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 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 Khaufpuri,
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
Khaufpuri 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

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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 Khaupur before the night of the chemical plant explosion because the factory’s presence made the Khaupuris 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 Khaupuri citizens. But they experience some of the more troubling health effects years later. Khaupuri 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 Khaupuris, or why the multinational corporation must pay amends for the Khaupuri 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 Jamalis, names Phuoc, I am talking to the eyes that are reading these words
Now I am talking to you [sic]. (12)

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). 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 ruminations point 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 ensnared 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” (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 Mileti 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.
Bibliography


Notes

1 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 Eisenzwieg, 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). Eisenzwieg 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).

2 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).