



Fall 2019

FYS 101 Women Writing the World

Fall 2019

Like Dogs

Maddi Eary
Butler University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/fys_ww_f2019

Recommended Citation

Eary, Maddi, "Like Dogs" (2019). *Fall 2019*. 42.
https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/fys_ww_f2019/42

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the FYS 101 Women Writing the World at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Fall 2019 by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@butler.edu.

Maddi Eary

Like Dogs

Katherine Boo's book, *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, highlights the inhumane ways the residents of Annawadi are treated. On several occasions, the characters face the reality that their society and government believe they are less than human. Boo summarizes the ruthless relationship between Annawadians and the rest of Mumbai with the passage: "outside the courthouse, a city garbage truck rolled over a dog" (238). By breaking down these eleven words, the conflict of the entire book and the undercity's constant struggle to survive becomes unmistakable.

Boo begins the above passage by cleverly criticizing the Mumbai justice system. By describing the dog's untimely death happening outside of the courthouse, the corruption of the justice system is made visible (238). The police, who are meant to protect the lives of slum dwellers, consistently take advantage of them instead. Whether it be police brutality, bribery, or the acceptance of sexual favors, the Sahar Police rob Annawadians of their right to be treated as human beings.

One of the more blatant examples of the justice system's corruption is demonstrated with the passage, "officially, the Sahar Police precinct was among the safest places in Greater Mumbai. In two years, only two murders had been recorded in the whole precinct...perhaps there was a trick to this success rate: not detecting the murders of inconsequential people" (Boo 168). Here, the deaths of slum dwellers like Kalu are not only seen as irrelevant, but the police also take advantage of the shameful way Annawadians are viewed by society. The police remove themselves from the picture when the safety of Annawadians is threatened, making little effort to

investigate crimes. Justice stands by and watches as society bulldozes over the undercity residents.

In the eyes of law enforcement, Annawadians only have value when they can be exploited. The special executive officer on the Husains' case cared about lining her pocket rather than finding the truth (Boo 219). Boo writes, "The special executive officer seemed to be banking on the ignorance of the slumdweller: that the Husains wouldn't understand... that Fatima's husband didn't have the power to call [the trial] off, no matter how much the Husains paid" (219). This example demonstrates the reality that all aspects of Mumbai's judicial system are unjust. Those who have the power to enforce the law stand aside and observe the anguish of daily life in the undercity.

Boo further describes the cruel way Annawadians are treated by their government and society by writing: "a city garbage truck rolled over a dog" (238). In a city where opulence is obvious, the intense poverty of the undercity is unmistakable. Or, as Mirchi puts it: "everything around us is roses...[a]nd we're the shit in-between" (Boo xii). Mumbai is very aware of how the crippling poverty of Annawadi's residents reflects on its worldly image. India claims slumdweller are the characters of a success story, yet walls are still constructed around the community to keep tourists from seeing their constant struggle (Boo 6, 37). Their very existence is kept out of sight allowing for injustice to go unnoticed

By including the details of the garbage truck belonging to the city, Boo shows how this relationship affects the Husains, specifically. As Mumbai continually modernizes, the lives of the impoverished will become more dreadful. Trash sorters would no longer be needed as the country builds an infrastructure to deal with waste officially. The Husains and other scavengers

will be left with no way to provide for themselves or their families. The livelihoods of those in the slum will literally be “rolled over” to make way for progress. Annawadi will be destroyed to create room for airport expansion and lavish hotels which will “signify to the world that Indian leaders were making headway on their goal of a ‘slum-free Mumbai’” (Boo 224). Most of the people living in the undercity, however, will have nowhere to go. The slums will not disappear because their residents will still have to fight for their survival in a world where they are seen as less than human. Annawadians will always remain untouchable outcasts of society and as their community is demolished, their lives will be destroyed.

To Mumbai and its justice system, Annawadians are not human. Those working in the hospital refuse to touch them (103); their communities are purposefully hidden; and they are left to search through the waste of others to find the means to support themselves. Annawadians are, in a sense, treated like dogs (Boo 103, x). They make their livelihoods by scavenging other people’s trash to survive and are viewed as shameful to the city because of it. This idea is conveyed with the passage: “Annawadi boys broadly accepted the basics truths: that in a modernizing, increasingly prosperous city, their lives were embarrassments, and their deaths would matter not at all” (Boo 236). Annawadians are the dog in Boo’s sentence, trampled on and taken advantage of by the world around them.

This idea is reiterated when Sunil and Abdul reflect on Kalu’s death, the latter saying, “It was a dog’s death either way” (Boo 173). A few lines down, Mirchi told the other boys that Kalu was always going to be murdered because he stole other people’s garbage (Boo 173). The people of this community are all regarded as lesser beings and the fact that they see each other the way

the rest of the world does shows how the consistent maltreatment of their society and government leave them believing they are no better than dogs.

Boo eloquently depicts the hardships of living in the slums of a rapidly modernizing city like Mumbai in *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*. With her words “Outside the courthouse, a city garbage truck rolled over a dog,” (238) Boo summarizes the tumultuous relationship between Annawadians and the city bent on their oppression. Boo draws attention to the corruption of Mumbai’s justice system; the devastating impact of modernization on impoverished communities; and the blatant contempt society has for the poor by sharing the stories of those hidden behind walls. The struggle for survival in Annawadi is emphasized by the obvious dehumanization of its residents, suggesting a bleak future for impoverished communities in a modernizing world.

Works Cited

Boo, Katherine. *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*. Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2014.