Black dogs are a type of spectral entity that, according to legend, have been haunting the British Isles for centuries. While the legends have many regional variations, the common feature remains a large black dog, often with eyes "large as saucers" or sometimes, flaming, who appears and then disappears, often without a trace. In many of the legends, the black dog is malevolent: assaulting travelers, frightening livestock to death, attacking other dogs, haunting graveyards and gibbets, and heralding death or disaster. In other versions, however, the black dog acts as a protector to those in need, warding off disaster with its presence. This project is an analysis of black dog legends, answering the primary research question "What do the descriptive and narrative differences between "friendly" and "unfriendly" types of black dog legends reveal about how society views dogs in relation to people?"

By examining characteristics of "friendly" and "unfriendly" black dogs that are consistent across most black dog narratives, it can be extrapolated that "friendly" or "true" black dogs are considered more dog-like than "unfriendly" ones. The behavior of such "friendly" black dogs, then, may tie into wider trends in Western culture of viewing dogs as "man's best friend;" useful, protective, and trustworthy; while also implying that creatures who do not have these characteristics cannot be classified as "true" dogs despite their appearance. This conclusion has wider implications for human/canine relations.

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