

**The Dogs (Δαωγς)**  
by **Christie and Michael McGoodwin**  
Translation from the original Greek by **Willmond Parkimore**

## **Notes about the Play**

The Dogs is understandably one of Aristophanes's least known and most obscure plays. It is one of his few plays about which almost nothing was subsequently written—though Diogenes of Sinope is said to have enjoyed it greatly. It appears to have been written after the Peloponnesian War ended, apparently when Aristophanes was quite elderly, but an exact date cannot be determined from the available fragments. The title Δαωγς has been variously translated as The Dogs or The Shaggy Dogs, though the word is not otherwise found in extant classical Greek texts. The date of its performance (if any) is also unknown. It may have been intended for performance at the Lenaia [January] or the Country Dionysia [December-January] in view of the wintry conditions depicted. The only known manuscript was unearthed near Eleusis while excavating a cemetery in preparation for a new freeway. Regrettably, it was in severely deteriorated condition, wrapped around some partly chewed bones and itself badly chewed up. All that survive are a partial *dramatis personae*, fragments of the *parados*, a *parabasis*, and some *scholia*.

It is regrettable that most of this play is lost—perhaps if more were to be discovered, its merits would be more apparent. The fragments of the play that remain seem strangely lacking in Aristophanes's characteristically zany humor, perhaps reflecting the outlook of an aging old man. What we have remaining, however, suggests his play was a satire contrasting loyalty, generosity, and altruism with disloyalty, greed, and selfishness. It portrays the struggle of valor versus cowardice, honesty versus corruption, and traditional aristocratic education and values versus sophistry and pragmatic education.

## **Characters of the Play (several characters are missing)**

PENELOPE, *wife of an Attican warrior missing in action for many years*

EURYKLEIA, *her old servant*

ANTINOUS, *an Athenian lecher*

MYRRHINE, *a flute-girl*

VARIOUS MAIDS, SLAVES

SEMI-CHORUS OF COUNTRY DOGS:

ARGOS, *the First Koryphaia, Penelope's old decrepit hunting hound*

PHOKIS, *a mangy dog, grandson of Xanthippus's dog Salaminia*

STUMPY, *Alkibiades's shaggy-haired dog*

HUSKY, *A thick-furred old dog from Hyperborea*

VARIOUS OLD LACONIAN HUNTING HOUNDS, MOLOSSIANS, ETC.

SEMI-CHORUS OF CITY DOGS:

KUNIKOS, *the Second Koryphaia, Antisthenes's street-smart hound*

KUNOPHRON, *Kleon's dog*

PORKY, *Kleonymos's fat dog*

KUON, *Myrrhine's dog*

VARIOUS URBAN MONGRELS AND LAPDOGS

## The Text in Translation

. . . . . [text of prologue missing] . . . . .

*Argos, an old and decrepit dog, slowly and painfully shuffles into view.*

PENELOPE

*Seated with her knitting, she looks up from her work and sees Argos. She speaks with a pained expression.*

Poor Argos, he can barely get around now and I can barely afford to feed him—I just don't know how much longer we can keep him.

*Perking up for a moment.*

But every time I see him, I always remember how much my poor husband loved him so. If only he would return... maybe he wouldn't even recognize this old hound anymore.

ANTINOUS

*Seated beside her, he eases closer, and with a leer.*

Spare me your mournful memories—why don't I just fix that mutt once and for all. Then we can get down to more serious business.

PENELOPE

*Pulling away.*

No, not yet. I just can't bear to part with him. And besides, I haven't even finished this dog sweater I'm knitting for him to shield him from the cold.

*She rises and quickly walks inside, with Antinous following closely on her heels.*

*Argos seems to have been unaware of them, instead he is looking around for his own kind.*

ARGOS

Gather together and listen here  
O dogs of Attica and neighbors near,  
We've got to run in packs these days  
The loner role no longer pays

*Parados: The other country dogs slowly shuffle in from both sides. They are for the most part rather scruffy, with shaggy, dirty, unkempt coats, and all are poorly fed. Their noses are dry and they are very arthritic. They have old tattered collars (if any at all), and they tend to stare wistfully into space.*

COUNTRY DOGS SEMICHORUS

*Panting and whimpering.*

The glory's gone from hunts of old,  
O'er hills and valleys we raced so bold,  
The boars, the hares, the fox and deer,  
We chased them all without a fear.

Our knights were brave, yet kindly then,  
They fed us, stroked us, knew just when,  
to throw a bone for us to gnaw,  
So strong yet just—we were in awe.

Acharnians, Paeonians, hunters all,  
They knew each forest bird by call,  
And though they spoke with rustic drawl,  
With them we'd never have to crawl.

Alas they're gone, mere shades so dim,  
In Hades depths, a fate so grim,  
And we? We're left with bits and scrap,  
New masters now don't give a crap!

We pray somehow they would return,  
Forever will our hearts so burn,  
In dreams they come: erase our loss,  
We make our prayers, with lifted paws.  
For now we can but dolefully wait,  
The final sleep—our lonely fate.

STUMPY

*Shivering, he lets out a soft howl.*

AAEEOOOOOWAAAA

Brrrrrr, look at me, what a mess and freezing besides. But at one time I turned the eyes of all the dogs—my lustrous fur, my beautiful tail—even my master, who paid seventy whole minas for me, loved me best of all his dogs. Alas, in a fit of pique, he cut off my tail to spite his foes. You'd think I would have forgotten him a long time ago, but no, I'll stay loyal to him to the bitter end. It's just how we old dogs were taught. He may be gone for now but he'll return—I just know it.

PHOKIS

*Affectionately.*

Yes indeed, Stumpy, you took the prize for beauty all right—you and that turncoat master of yours. But beauty's only fur deep—it's what's inside that really counts. Me, I come from even better stock than you—from a long line of heroic dogs, in fact. You remember my grandsire Salaminia, don't you? He was so loyal that he refused to be left behind when his master sailed to Salamis. He swam along side the trireme all the way to that island, and

when he finally dragged himself ashore, he died on the spot—the place we now call Dog’s Mound. What a feat!

*Shivers.*

Just thinking about it makes me colder—wish I had some of his blubber to keep me warm.

STUMPY

*Scratching at his ears .*

His fur must have been a salty mess—full of seaweed and sand—but I agree, it’s the noble deed that counts the most, even if your fur’s not very pretty.

*Looks away dreamily.*

Still, I wish I could afford to buy a new full-length long-haired coat like they’re selling at the agora.

HUSKY

The length of your fur isn’t all that matters—you’ve got to consider how thick it is as well. We Hyperboreans need all the warmth we can muster to survive our long Arctic winter nights, what with all that rain and snow.

*Looking North.*

You take a cozy yurt with a flickering fire in the center, a full tummy, and a nice plump furry mat-mate, and you’ve got real doggy heaven. I’d really wag my tail for that right now. Somehow I wandered off the snow-covered trail—and landed up here! When spring returns I’m following the Little Bear home... if I’m still kicking, that is.

ARGOS

But enough of this whimpering. I know what we should do: let’s all bundle together and keep each other warm—together we can survive the night and keep alive our hope for better days to come.

*Kunikos saunters in.*

KUNIKOS

*Eyeing the country dogs with suspicion, growls menacingly.*

What are you old mongrels doing here, plotting to take over the Akropolis? Why don’t you just get lost and spare us all from having to look at your pitiful carcasses. Don’t you know they’ve passed a law against harboring fugitive fleas in this town—your masters could be sued if the truth were learned. Make way for progress. We’re the New Generation—you’re just the Old Degeneration. I heard you whining for your master’s return —fat chance of that.

*The rest of the city dogs bound in from both sides. They are nimble, street-smart, well-fed, some are even overweight. Their noses are moist and their fur lustrous. They have flashy jewel-studded collars and some have colorful sweaters but appear somewhat like gangsters—and they are constantly looking around for action.*

CITY DOGS SEMICHORUS

*Snarling and growling at the Country Dogs.*

So what’s your point? Your pitiful cries bemoaning master’s sad demise?

They'd kick you out, were they still here,  
and slam the door right on your rear.

A lot of good your loyalty's proved,  
The men these days are not so moved,  
They think of only Number One,  
To get the gold's the only fun.

We city dogs have seen the light,  
We know the tricks to win this fight,  
No social arts make us uptight,  
Our simple motto: Might is right!

Your Aischylos—he's such a bore,  
Euripides is king of gore,  
For us tradition lacks appeal,  
Such maudlin drivel—we've hearts of steel!

And see how great we've done by this,  
Our bellies full, our nights of bliss,  
Our coats shine brightly in the sun,  
And believe you me, we have some fun!  
Our collars set with Persian jewels,  
So greed is good—self-interest rules!

KUNIKOS

Look at those pitiful old grovelers, huddling together like so many sheep.  
Thank Hermes we don't need their shabby coats to stay warm. I just had an  
excellent rabbit au jus, topped off with a fine dry retsina (provided, of  
course, unknowingly by my local vintner),

*He eyes Kuon, with his tongue hanging out.*

and now I look forward to a little romp in the hay with Kuon.

KUON

*She licks her paws, slowly turns a seductive gaze on Kunikos, then flicks her tail from  
side to side suggestively.*

I might be willing to help you with your problem, you sly dog you, but first  
you'll need to wine and dine me, and treat me real lovin' to get me in the  
mood.

PORKY

*Yawning.*

There's more to a dog's life than making the two-nosed monster, and  
besides, you can get hurt doing that. If you ask me,

*Licking his chops and slobbering a little.*

you take a slab of well-marbled beef to gnaw on and you've got the makings  
of a truly fine night of bliss. Besides, I need to conserve all the energy I  
can—it's hard work keeping my master posted about all the comings and  
goings in this town, now that he's had to cut back doing all the work  
himself.

KUNOPHRON

*Contemptuously.*

Throw some water on that steamy stuff, you curs, and spare me the hymn to dead cows as well. What are you going to have left when your night of shameless indulgence ends? And is that all you really care about, anyway? Give a dog a bone and he eats for a day, but teach him to hunt and prowl and he eats for a lifetime. Porky, you'd probably have eaten those plague-infested corpses with gusto, the ones the rest of us wouldn't touch.

For my part, I want power most of all. Through guile and cunning and dogged persistence, I'll become the leader of the all the demes someday. All you city hounds will grovel and crawl before me. You'll lick my paws and do my bidding while I spout high-falutin' platitudes about the Rights of Dogs. And I won't stop with just Attica either. We'll take over dogdom from here to Laconia. That's my plan, and I'll maul any dog that stands in my way.

*Springing into action.*

So what do you say, let's leave these mournful fleabags to their ridiculous reveries and run up to the temple. Let's see what we can steal to fatten our war chest.

. . . . . [text missing] . . . . .

*Parabasis: Argos painfully comes forward, and directly addresses the audience*

ARGOS

Gentlemen and Sires of Athens (and Ladies and Bitches too):

You've not had much of our playwright's fare of late—he hasn't been around to receive your kicks. Instead, you've had to make do with moldy chow hardly fit for dogs in performance here (perhaps you couldn't tell the difference—neither could Eupolis or Plato). But be joyful now—we are blessing you with a bone from the Master—even if you don't deserve it.

Our playwright is a faithful but battered hound who just can't stay away. He was but a puppy when he first appeared underfoot at your banquet—was at your side as you marched forth to Babylonia—hunted with you in the fields and woods of Acharnia—stayed (though reluctantly) by your side through foolhardy Wars, and joyfully accompanied you during short-lived Peace—soared with you up to the clouds on high and trudged through the muck and mud to reach the Underworld—and still he returns to you for more! Through it all, he's been beaten and muddied, starved like a Megarian mutt, abused and sorely neglected too—yet he's come back again in hopes of receiving a small final token of your affection. He's never lost faith (well—not entirely) in your goodness and wisdom and judgment, though he's found plenty of reasons to become a cynic. Now you've got another chance to do the right thing for the old man: give this play First Prize—you'll see him prick up his floppy ears and wag his tail one more time.

Or if you don't love him still enough to want to do this, then do it for us dogs—for we are the truly unsung heroes of your battles past and present. We hunt your hares, we chase your sticks, we wag our tails for

scraps at your feasts, and we keep you warm at your side by the hearth. With Man's Best Friend, you're never alone or lonely. All that you have, we've made richer and better. You prize your sheep for meat and cheese and fleece, and yet you prize us even more for keeping them safe. We're truly godlike animals—for we proudly stand at Artemis' left side. It's true, sometimes we've bitten you, and you've had to make us wear that horrible wooden collar—and Kerberos has given you a concern or two. But you, in turn, have sacrificed us for our entrails, just to divine your uncertain futures. So grant this prize for us, if not for our playwright.

O Dionysus, hear our plea: keep their stony hearts beating just long enough to grant this fervent request. Amen

. . . . . *[Remainder of text missing]* . . . . .

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