

DOG  
AS A  
METAPHOR  
FOR THE  
SOUL



REFLECTIONS BY MIKE FINLEY

D O G

As a Metaphor  
for the

S O U L

poems by Mike Finley

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# Table of Contents

## The Soul Does Not Know It Is Dying<sup>1</sup>

until very late  
until then every day is a day  
every step is the way forward  
no worries and no regrets

it is only toward the end  
that it withdraws so as not  
to be a bother, and there may  
be a moment of perplexity

why aren't I able to do this

but it is a question asked  
as if from afar  
because night is coming  
then glorious day

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<sup>1</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## Pet and Peasant <sup>2</sup>

He has no identity  
except for the property  
he lives on, hence the name.

When the land goes,  
he know he goes, too.  
It's always the same.

How many times  
the master confessed crimes  
he could not help committing.

The old resident confides  
He had no real choice,  
there was never any quitting.

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<sup>2</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## Sometimes the Soul Will Hotfoot It Away<sup>3</sup>

And you will not know what set it off.  
A smell, a movement in the brush,  
you don't know, but there he goes,  
and you begin the long list of tasks you must  
perform when he takes off.  
Calling him sweetly, waiting patiently,  
then turning foul as hours pass and you see no sign.  
You told yourself you could weather this storm  
But in fact you can't, and you stomp around  
cursing his name and his sire and dam,  
so ungrateful for all the things you do  
so disobedient in the face of your goodness.  
You are nearly weeping when he trots back to you  
And you know you are not even entitled to ask  
where he has been, what he has been up to,  
It is the mystery of the relationship,  
and all you can do is sigh and let him  
clamber back into the back seat.

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<sup>3</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## Zeppo\*

At 6: 30 a.m. Daniele releases you  
From her bedroom  
And you traipse upstairs to me.  
I am writing, but  
You don't care.  
You plead with your midget's grimace:  
My canines are floating!

I stand from a now-unfinishable poem  
And descend two flights, and  
swing open the back door,  
You lift your leg against the barbecue  
And are framed by the early light  
And the first green blades of spring  
And steam rises from your pee  
Like a prayer released straightway to God.

---

\* Zeppo was Daniele's dog – an odd, unreliable, but loving Rhodesian ridgeback dachshund mix. He chased cats up trees then followed up. Daniele got him after her first attempt, and their bond was so strong I imagined he would keep her alive until we found an answer. It still stuns me that she left him. Him, of all people.

## The Soul Flies Straight to God<sup>4</sup>

Think only of naps  
and salutes to the sun  
and you mistake  
the deeper ambition.

It is saving up fire  
like a crack gone cold  
hoarding its energies  
for a single exertion.

Hang heads who thought  
there was no flight  
and gravity is destiny,  
that old age clips gray wings.

Behold one ancient angel  
Tripping down stone steps,  
leaping into the arms  
of the faithful beloved.

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<sup>4</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## The Soul's Analogy<sup>5</sup>

The soul is to its body  
as a worker to the farm

The soul wants to please  
and it wants to be retained,

not get let go into the cold  
to lick the frozen bowl

it wants a good relationship  
and will work to maintain it

it is willing to learn and to adapt  
but it has its limits, too

just to be there, and to breathe  
your farty air is heaven to hm

problem is the soul is made  
of muscle and fur, it is real

while the body seeks limited liability  
for the day it sends the soul away,

the body cannot stem corruption  
because it is just a corporation

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<sup>5</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## The Soul Does Not Countenance Tragedy<sup>6</sup>

The soul does not countenance tragedy  
It knows how little there is at stake

if its tail caught fire and burned it down  
Life is life, and if a switch gets flipped

then you go on with something else.  
The world doesn't value individuals

You inhale, you exhale,  
the smile need never leave your lips.

Even if you vanish in your sleep,  
whatever's next must be some kind of gift.

---

<sup>6</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)





## To the Soul Every Day Is the Sabbath<sup>7</sup>

No toil shall undo it  
neither on Monday nor on Tuesday.  
No task can distract it from its purposes  
of a Wednesday or a Thursday.  
It keeps Friday holy  
and takes Saturday off  
and on the seventh day it rests  
just like all the other ones.  
The loss for the workworld  
is a gain for the sofa,  
just gentle praying  
that sounds like snoring.

---

<sup>7</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## The Reason We Are<sup>8</sup>

For God to be alone  
all those years in the dark  
and to suddenly have us  
swarming all over him

Not made in his image  
but kissing and kissing  
despite the mistakes we  
may make on the carpet  
it was so lonely before

---

<sup>8</sup> Desalinization (2010)

## The Soul Followeth Its Nose<sup>9</sup>

Where we would think a problem through,  
pausing till deep furrows sprout,  
our friend shuffles along,  
hardly thinking but inhaling in the most  
considerate way.

And what it ponders rises from the earth  
and bobbing in on every freshet  
one may wonder what becomes  
of all this research, what application  
it leads to but what is  
and must remain a mystery  
to us finds satisfaction  
in the breathing being  
which knows, knows, knows  
the path it trods because  
it goes and thus goeth  
to God.

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<sup>9</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## It Likes to Roll In Unspeakable Things <sup>10</sup>

the holier it is the more drawn  
it is to deer crap and tuna fish

oh sponge me in nard  
like the bride at a funeral

because sometimes a soul  
needs to dive deep down

where the muck and crepuscence  
put the anus on all of us

and the supercomputer  
investigates the turd

to the maw and the paw  
extend every dignity

but the flesh of the dead  
is the meat of this world

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<sup>10</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## The Soul Is Not Perfect, Gets Set in Its Ways <sup>11</sup>

And even when you personally  
are struggling to change  
It may lie there, with a dazed expression,  
expecting you to serve it.  
You must be firm sometimes with the soul!  
Otherwise it will suspend  
in its halo of laziness  
And you will be stuck like that  
for a long time.  
You want to see the soul shake a leg,  
You want to rouse it from the pupa stage?  
Bang a paper sack beside its ear  
And it will make that face it makes  
Like, Why don't you just leave me alone.  
Say, You belong to me,  
now get to work.

---

<sup>11</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## The Soul Is Wedded to the World <sup>12</sup>

Habit leads one to suppose  
all it thinks about is heaven,  
it is the one thing on its mind  
the unimprovable place  
the out there the not here the sublime.

And you can see when it lies sleeping  
it wants to move out of here,  
it is running as fast as it can,  
it is galoopigating to a better realm  
that is always snapdragons and pie.

But the soul is too dumb  
to be anywhere but here.  
Behold the furrows folding in  
on themselves, behold  
the stuporous stare.

Even in its dreams it is rooting in the now,  
it is a digging a channel to get to where it is  
it is roaring out at the speed of thought  
because movement prevents it from thinking.

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<sup>12</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## The Soul Has Good Days and Bad <sup>13</sup>

And the bad are characterized  
by outward deeds  
generated from fear  
which seeks to esophagate the soul

Every opportunity for good  
is also temptation  
Every couch is a banquet  
Every shoe a summons to bop

It is a bender for the soul  
and it washes up on the shore  
of the next day  
mortified with its error

No newspaper tells this tale  
rolled up or otherwise.  
It is the same as it ever was,  
the stumble then the crawling back

and where does the soul  
find solace save  
from the scent of forgiveness  
on the back  
of the Master's right hand?

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<sup>13</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## The Soul Stands Watch <sup>14</sup>

The soul knows it is standby equipment.  
Some days for it are not days at all,  
because it stays in its box,  
uninvited to the world.

The soul has suffered all it can stand  
And it has promised itself,  
the next time you betray it,  
watch out.

But the soul stands now by your grave for you  
and all that waiting is forgotten  
it only knows it misses you  
and it howls.

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<sup>14</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## The Soul Is Not Perfect, Gets Set in Its Ways<sup>15</sup>

And even when you personally are struggling to change  
It may lie there, with a dazed expression,  
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You must be firm sometimes with the soul!  
Otherwise it will suspend in its halo of laziness  
And you will be stuck like that for a long time.

You want to see the soul shake a leg,  
To want to rouse it from the pupa stage  
Band a paper sack beside its ear

And it will make that face it makes  
Like, Why don't you just leave me alone.  
Say, You belong to me, now get to work.

---

<sup>15</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## The Soul Shits Itself <sup>16</sup>

not out of self-hatred  
but because the devil  
in his wiles  
sets snares in our path

And this goes to the heart  
of pride  
that a son of heaven  
drags evidence of the world  
like a list of sins  
that cannot be forgiven

Except that they can,  
though the eyes roll back  
humiliatedly  
and the water rolls down  
like holy grace  
from a garden hose  
and lots of liquid Joy

---

<sup>16</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## The Reason We Exist <sup>17</sup>

For God to be alone  
all those years in the dark  
and to suddenly have us  
swarming all over him

Not made in his image  
but kissing and kissing  
despite the mistakes we  
make on the carpet

It was so lonely before

---

<sup>17</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## The Soul Gets Caught Up <sup>18</sup>

The soul returns to you  
entangled in bad ideas.  
It has been rummaging in  
the hedges again.

There are no shortcuts  
for this deprogramming.  
Each burr of thought  
must be excised  
individually.

You berate it with  
the wisdom you have obtained.  
This curiosity  
is not your friend.

The mind does not know  
what it knows.  
But souls do not  
compromise.  
It is all or nothing  
with the likes of them.

The scent of information  
draws them on,  
the foolish heart  
has no recourse  
except follow

---

<sup>18</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## The Soul Thinks You Belong to It <sup>19</sup>

It's got it all backward,  
that you are an appendage to it,  
and not the other way around.

But it's absurd you say,  
How can you be in charge?  
I'm the practical one, I open the doors.

But it explains how it can be so demanding.  
Of course it bellows when you are gone.  
Because that is not what it wants.

Of course it goes out of its mind when you leave.  
Why would you ever want to leave,  
how could you?

And all this time you thought you were caring for it  
and a thin leash connected you,  
looped around your head.

---

<sup>19</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## The Soul Isn't Especially Smart <sup>20</sup>

There are so many things it cannot do.  
It cannot do your taxes.  
It cannot read or type.  
It can't quote from Lord Russell.  
It cannot be wry, it is not in its nature.  
It will never discover a cure for anything.  
It lacks irony, drollery, duplicity  
In word and thought.  
It is unable to say one thing  
while meaning another.  
This thing is so thick  
it can't carry a grudge.

---

<sup>20</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## Soul <sup>21</sup> \*

like the hart that panteth for the brook  
you letteth me love you, thanks  
for not dying and taking me with

it is not always so bright  
and bumptious as a child  
or a wagging tail knocking

the dish from the coffee table  
or walking in and tracking up the carpet  
there is a tendency to underestimate

how lucky you are because it is there  
outside your window there its peep  
among the crickets and frogs

let it in, let it sleep at your feet  
like it likes to  
though departing occasionally

it circles the rug  
with a yawn

---

<sup>21</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

\* I must explain a series of poems titled *DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul*. It began as a conceit: that dogs show us what our souls are like, something very different from the usual spiritual literature ... and also, that the dog is a kind of soul, like a guardian angel. The conceit waxes and wanes in these poems, and I should have done more to make these lyrics clearer to people.

## Old Man Mountain Climbing\*

The old man begged not to begin the ascent,  
but we looped a rope around his head and dragged him up,  
gasping.

Oh, don't be so negative we called back to him, staggering  
And admit it, you need exercise, use it or lose it!

Halfway up he collapsed on the rocks, his eyes rolling  
bloodshot red. Come on, old feller, we tugged at the rope,

I must admit he did his level best, on those shaky pins wobbling  
His breath wheezing out like an asthmatic accordion

And when we dropped him off at his place,  
we winked to each other

You know he's going to have a good sleep now!

---

\* Again, I must be writing late at night with no regard for the reader. I called my dog "Old Man," and he was indeed old at the writing of this poem. But he still liked to accompany me on walks. As he huffed and puffed, I thought, "What if we treated actual old men like this?" I have never treated a senior in this manner.

## The Soul Is Judge and Doctor <sup>22</sup>

The soul believes  
it is sufficient  
to itself

thus licks  
and licks  
the anxious wound

thus flesh  
becomes glue  
and soul laid bare

it needs a bandage  
or the collar  
of a clown

it hurts to see  
it exposed  
to every passing fly

never mind  
how clean  
they say it is

it needs the  
correction

of another opinion

---

<sup>22</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## The Master's Hand <sup>23</sup>

He underestimates its importance,  
the touch of him on the skull  
the patting and the scratch.

But he can be so blase  
with that effortless speaking  
which tumbles out like silk

Whereas I am a dumb angel  
braying and bawling  
the uncomprehending hark

How is it he does not know  
how beautiful he is  
the endless kisses I wipe him with

When he and I are one  
it is as if I could live forever  
as famous as the night

He is the running rabbit of peace  
When his heart beats  
my own beats twice

---

<sup>23</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## The Soul Doesn't Know If It's Dying<sup>24</sup>.....

and has no anxiety on that account.  
If you were to say to it,  
What if you were to lose everything you have,  
life, pleasure, fulfillment,  
it might let out a skull-cracking yawn.

Nothing we say makes sense to it  
yet it tolerates us and the delusion  
we call the unarguable truth,  
but it doesn't call anything anything,  
which is the rudest denial of all.

It doesn't care the way we care  
Yet when the soul is within reach  
it peers into us like a face from beyond  
not stupid like it usually is  
but knowing beyond all that we know

And it says I kiss you and I greet you  
from the deepest dark of earth  
where things that were together forever  
break into the crumbs of what they are  
and the whole is ever while

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<sup>24</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## The Soul Is Annoyed By Your Fidgeting<sup>25</sup>

It confronts you saying  
Haven't you learned anything  
from all our time together?

What do we do,  
we snuffle about  
and when we grow tired we nap.

It's a simple business really  
to love and be loved  
but to do it you must cut out the agitation

Turn off the radio, take  
A long breath, tell yourself  
to stop telling yourself things

Why listen to the chattering monkey  
when it is what brought you  
to this place

Let it go, say goodbye,  
Assist the clown climbing into the car  
And drive away dragging cans

Obligations are bobbling away  
like depleted chrysanthemums  
all that remains is to

shut up and sing

---

<sup>25</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## It Laid Down Its Life<sup>26</sup>

You wonder if it's true  
the thing that people say

that this selfish thing  
dozing on its throne

would lay its life  
down for you.

Conjure scenarios –  
the attacker on the street,

the bullet headed for your heart,  
the soul leaping into the gap

The music swells  
and out come the hankies

but the truth is  
more homely

the soul laid down its  
life for you

the moment that you met

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<sup>26</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

The Soul Thinks  
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that you are an appendage to it,  
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Of course it goes out of its mind when you leave.  
Why would you ever want to leave,  
how could you?

And all this time you thought you were caring for it  
and a thin leash connected you,  
looped around your head.

---

<sup>27</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)

## When the Soul Is Young It Knows Everything<sup>28</sup>

A thousand exclamation points embedded in the brain  
This will happen and this and this, then this  
And the world steps back because a soul is in its bliss  
And only a troll would interrupt with truth  
Which after all is the truth of disappointment  
And don't you do what I have done  
And let me spare you the greater pain  
By placing this in the secret space between your ribs  
O soul your burst of energy is a miracle to witness  
It is testimony to every impossible thing  
And one never knows whether it is one's job  
To join hands in ring-a-rosie with you  
Or pillow it to sleep

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<sup>28</sup> DOG As a Metaphor for the Soul (2008)



# Kraken Press

1841 Dayton Avenue  
Saint Paul MN 55104  
651-644-4540

[mfinley@mfinley.com](mailto:mfinley@mfinley.com)

Visit us at [mfinley.com/kraken](http://mfinley.com/kraken)

