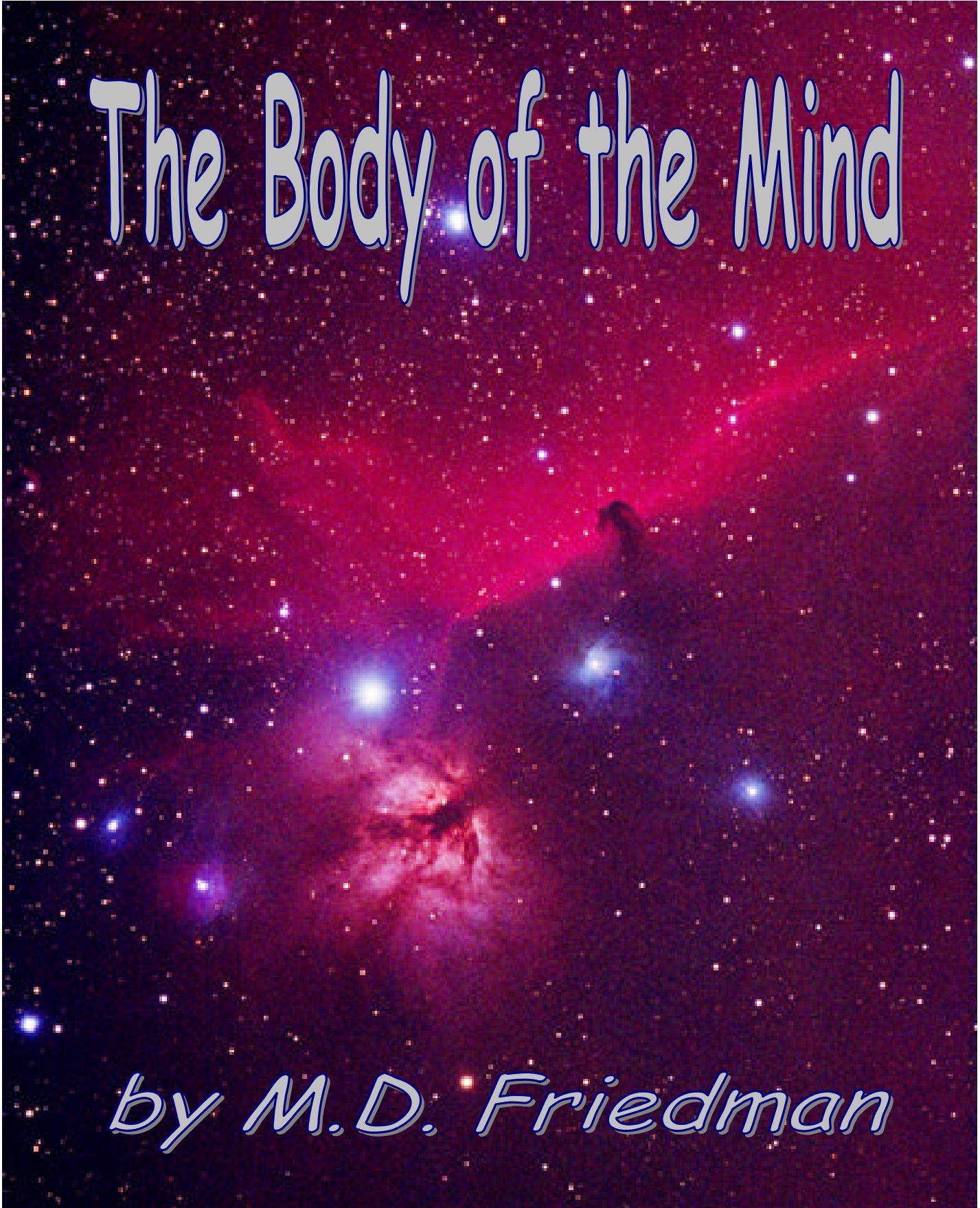


The Body of the Mind



by M.D. Friedman



♦ Special thanks to all those who have taken
the time to know me and help me on my way.

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Part I: Earthen Seeds



The Body of the Mind

Eyes are sown
in flesh of hands.

The palms can breathe
the air of night.

Feet can hear
the marbled
dawning
of the mind of life.

The tongue does chase
the tail of self
around in circles
through the fields.

Ears do smell
the colored flowers
blooming
after many years.

March 21, 1994

I sit in the equinox,
on a water
worn log
by the dreaming river.

A fingerprint of wind
presses on the riv-
er's waxen skin
glittering off the watered edge.

Slow
and sliding,
dark and clear,
I awaken.

Between this crusted snow
and the sun
dried rocks,
what is this spilling forth?

Is there a force
beyond
what life creates
and death destroys?

Does this pull
within
the light flow
behind the shadow?

Or is the liquid sun
smoky water rounded
rock and touch of
wind welded by whim?

Life Cycle

The quick eye sees through what's left behind:
What mummers and flows beneath the snow,
what glimmers and drifts within the wind,
what quickens and grows inside wet shadow.

The water is lost in a flow of its own:
Life eating life in dark holes below.
On the surface, it wrinkles with the wind,
twisting, splintered with sunlit diamonds.

Suckling this cool flap of wind, I stride arms wide:
I offer a flat embrace for what's flowing by.
This final twitch, a hollow shudder as I am swallowed by the rest.
Through swarming flesh and pulsing dust I drag my breath.

I run long within the colored swirl of life:
I hum electric, shiver like a tuning fork.
Back fused to cold stone,
I melt into a quiet pocket of pure sunlight.

The First Snow

Ice claws the knit cap
pulled snug over ears and hair
that spring through loops and frizzle
wild as weeds cracking concrete
the mind empties like a dandelion in a yawn of wind.

Ice spit sputters in the bitter electricity of mouths.
As teeth shatter in a tinfoil scream
white
flakes off
whirls into myriads of colors

Under the liquid blue skin of night
eye seeds bleed silver.
Those that do not shiver
freeze and glitter as they fall
into cool crystal.

Through cold moans I drift
dazzled and numb.
I lay my head swirling
on a gleaming breast of ice
and dream I am warm.

◆ Part II: Circus of Mirrors



Highway 93 As KFML Goes Off Of The Air, 1975

no new neon
fooly cool jewels
this way
but snow blows
and she-frog
sings lung-tongued
through the wizard's gizzard.

she dog.
me dogged cat.
I hear fear air.
click off. no more frantic static.
no more satanic
her hum.
only ME sing song through sway way.

she's black cat back now
with high beams steaming.
she's yo yo mean screams
with blind eyes blinding!
ME SCREAM!!
lights fight
brights on/off
ice highway

twinkle twinkle

quiet sky

Time For Gertein Strude
- for Gertrude Stein

We know how little we know when we know how little time there is.

Time is there when we don't know.

Time is when we don't know how little time is.

Time is little when we know when time is.

Time is when we don't know when.

How little we know when we don't know.

How little time there is when we don't know.

How time is there we don't know.

We know a little about what we don't know.

We know there is a little to know about time.

Maybe time knows what we don't know.

We know we don't know what time knows.

We know we don't know how little there is to know.

We know we don't know how little there is.

We know we once knew how it is to be little.

We know there is little.

Time is when we know little.

Time doesn't know what we know.

Time doesn't know we are not time.

Time doesn't know how little time is when we know.

The Door

There is a door in my mind
that will not open.

It is liquid.

To look at it
is to stare into a mirror.

As I walk through I become
drenched in silver,
seen by night as only a shimmer,
seen by day as stained glass:
my shadow dizzy with colors
as full of life as warm pond water.

Yet I live a life
as normal as any poet.
No one notices
any difference. Maybe all poets
go through this.

When I die,
the door will splatter.
A wind as dry as fire,
as cold as space,
will bear me away.

Those behind the door
(who speak as one)
will offer me a job.
I will become famous.
I will be able to live
off my poetry.

Circus Of Mirrors

I paint my face with laughter and tears.
The clown I am to myself
thinks he runs the show,
lives in a circus of mirrors.

I pay for my tickets,
twisted strips of red
changing hands as smoothly
as the tools of a surgeon.

I come and go in fear.
Not sure which side is real,
I loose myself
in mirror after mirror.

I live my reflection
over and over.
I fear the revenge of light
when it discovers the trap.

I watch the back and forth clown
prancing through the land he thinks his own.
His face glistens and bloats
with the heat of the day.

He moves as musically as water,
as silently as light,
in a hurry to nowhere.
He does not believe I am real.

He wears the make up of my pain,
and yet he always smiles.

His words tinkle as joyously
as breaking glass.

His face floats over the evening.
It follows me as I try to leave
like a lonely Mylar balloon
attached by an invisible string.

He aches in my dreams, steals warmth from my sleep.
My cover is as thin as a sheet
of aluminum foil. I awake shivering and alone.
It is quiet.

The circus is a mere memory.
The mirrors in my house
are as still as they were
when no one was home.

There are bits of torn
paper in my pockets
which could have been a poem.
I try to piece them together.

They are slivers of silvered glass,
shards of captured light,
now each a vicious side show,
a jagged living tear.

My hands bleed
all over them.
It is the story
of my life.

✿ Part III: Owls in the Light



Owls In The Light

Look for what you cannot see.

Listen to what you cannot hear.

A Chinese sage on a black rock
still in the luminescent sea,
Wisps of his white beard
stretched out on the wind,
like a withered finger pointing to nothing.

Four times now owl has come into my life:
The first time was in the fall. He sat
in a cottonwood on the yellow edge of a prairie lake.
I nestled in damp leaves watching the sunset.
Our gazes locked as the darkness deepened.

Through the winter shadows of pine forest,
owl came again. Tufts raised, eyes narrowed, he
swooped through a tunnel of limbs,
suddenly swallowed up
by the quivering branches above.

The next time was in a dream.
It was spring. We were returning
on a buckboard to our cabin.
The evening air was sweet with the sweat of horses.
Patches of iridescent green were eating through the mud.

A small, ghost-faced owl
slammed headfirst into my chest.
With a thud I was flat on my back.
I awoke wide-eyed,
pinned to the white of my sheets.

This midsummer morning
an owl
on a twisted stump
was silhouetted against
a dawn-cracked lake

framed against the rutilant mountains.
As the water opened to the light
like a shining flower bud, he rose
a dark sun
over a land streaked with blood.

From the owl I have learned:
This ragged rock is my body, and the pulsing sea, my breath.
I am the old man still. I have learned
nothing. I only remember again
what I have always known.

Look for what you cannot see.
Listen to what you cannot hear.

Letter to J.P. White

I know you will ask
what makes the night sweat,
but it is hard to say.

I don't think it is
the blood of me spilling my guts,
but rather the wanton tears

of a pervasive desire for human connection.

Too often poetry is more like
masturbating than making love.

Yet the words come in concentric circles,
popping open like mushrooms
somehow tangled together below ground.

I do not know how to plainly touch the other human,
yet as I grow, I open again and again,
nurtured by the sweat of night.

The King of the United States

“I am the King of the United States,
and we can fix this mess,”
Dad proclaimed from his nursing home throne.
“It is good to walk,” I replied.

We carefully negotiated
the splintering rafters that had fallen over
where the dark water had seeped in.
Pieces of his life bobbed idly in the brackish pools.

Fear and anger swelled up inside him.
The black springs were riddled with reflections,
rippling with the unseen edges
of the lives all around us.

We picked our way across the broken web of timbers
and through the dribbling brine to the outside.
He enjoyed the grapes and chocolate I had brought
and offered to make me the Minister of Trade.

The Last Time He Opened His Eyes

These eyes, the color of fog,
blind as night,
reaching out of the driftwood of his body
in place of the arms he could not move,

they held me in a way no arms could.

He, who has given so much,
gave me now this final gift,
this last time together.

This lover of sunsets and old trees,
his face now a shadow cast down by disease,
lay rough and limp as parchment,
an old map washed ashore by time.

In every dark wrinkle,
through each drawn crease,
and over the strangely smooth hollows of his cheeks,
flowed the gentle kindness that marked his life.

As this, his last sunset
broke in exquisite sadness,
there were no colored clouds
to share the waking dusk.

All his strength went into his breathing,
all his will to open these eyes
the color of fog
heavy with the last light.

■ Part IV: Fetishes of the Night



Words For The Roses | Never Sent

I live to feel
your silk bud open
not to pick or press
but to see your sun-touched petals glisten
to smell you in my skin.

When the wild tears break from the hive
and swarm warm as blood from your eyes,
like a moth who fans the night alone
I long to fill the hollow white fire
that throbs against your thorny bone.

Song Of The Gentle Rapist

tears of milk and blood
I cry for you
glisten like the talk of
red maple leaf and moon
catch upon your hair
hover like the eyes of coyote
in the dark of our love

I cry from my bones for the touch of our love
cry for the kiss of your tears in my hair
I ache for always more of you
on a strange hot wind I rise
tumbling through the silky folds of night
finishing my raw animal dance
with a dry howling moan

eyes of milk and blood
burn and feed
upon our love
turn and open in the ashen light
I want you to the point
of hurting you
tears of breast and bone

Fetish Of Blackness

living
in absolute vacuum
we
poets of the space age
drench ourselves
with dark gasoline
invent the
scarlet raging
stars

collapsing
under the gravity of light
we
are peeled by flames
only charred bones
still stand
as the last
shattered embers
fall

wish upon the ash my love
bathe your breasts in the soot

hollow molten
glass cats
through brittle
black still glow
four feet
over their shadows
walk
further into
night

against my will

i lie down and my heart rises
like the moon from the edge of a field

corn stubbles collapse into shadows
my body ghosted in cool light

Part V: From Talking to Myself



My Will

I'll make a broken music, or I'll die. --Theodore Roethke

The music is already broken.
I stand tangled in flames and briars,
my body aching
against the warped metallic sky.
The wind comes
like jagged pieces of glass
and fills my ears.

I fear the music of the wind.
I fear the black edges of its lightening.
I know the crystal thunder that follows.
I know it comes as noiselessly
as fistful of daggers
flashing to its mark.
I hear it shatter against my heart.

All around me blink the green/white eyes of aspens.
Blink the fire/ice eyes that see in all directions.
And I too try a dance with the motionless sun:
I cry the song that tears into my throat
and slap hot rocks with feet.
It is no use. I am crushed like a fly against the glass
that keeps me from the world. There is no room to die.

I stand against the wind
suffocated by the air rushing in.
Like a small child I close my eyes to disappear.
I am blind. I am hiding. I am the fire that lives in the ashes.
There is no light here,
only this groaning heat.
This is not death. Why am I still pretending?

I prop my eyes open
with white slivers of hawk bone,
lie on my back in the brittle dust,
and stare into the sun,
and stare at the sky above me as it boils off,
and stare until I know all that surrounds me,
and stare until it all disappears.

As the cracked marbles of my eyes go out,
I gnaw at the acrid white flesh of the sun
and suck the open salt from its blood until there is no music,
until the whirlwind of color and life
falls through the black hole of my mind.
There is reason to die.
I give my song to the silence, my soul to the wind.

After Life

Alone,
(deafened by the din of inner silence)
I shiver beneath the black bell of night.
From the edge of sight flows the turning light.
It is as if all the stars
in the reverberating sky
are drawn into a single blazing sphere.

As am I drawn in.
Shaken from their silky mantle,
swollen drops of dream
glimmer and spin
into a glassy moon.
((All my moments of knowing
seem to converge.))

Soon again the magnetic humming,
the redundant buzz of green
unfolding in spring,
again the muted screams of birth
clangor through a metallic tunnel,
and always the perpetual echo

of thunder rumbling up the granite canyon
toward the ever resonating
(((gong))) of my heart.
Wisps of mist swirl darkly,
a crack of light above,
the glare of death
opens my skull.

My life has turned to this,
An empty hand reaching,
A pile of bones laid like blanched kindling,
The hollow ringing of flint on flint.
There is no spark now,
instead the burning of ice in light.
A cold steam rises into the still, dank air.

the land beneath the dream

awakening to this sweating night
as suddenly as a crack of lightening
crashes through the balmy blackness
I strike the hidden hallowed ground
at the dark edge of the wood

a field of flickering fireflies
opens before me
draws me from this heat of body
out through shivering flashes
into the molten cold of streaming light

my eye is full
my heart as whole as the rising moon
this peace unreal
as the fog of my breath
its air no longer mine

Simple Silence

I have walked a thousand poems to get here.
Past the dark fields pulsing with the long light,
where the late Yeats whispers
through a dying Roethke,
I fell into this land of living silence.

I have walked a thousand poems to get here,
and now I just want to scream,
but the further I open my mouth,
the more nothing comes out,
the louder the hollow pounding of my heart.

I have walked a thousand poems to get here,
but the thin print rests
quietly on the page,
and hums like a high power line
on a windless day.

I have walked a thousand poems to get here.
Here the words sing like serene sirens,
their eyes swirling pools
of simple silence
taking it all in.

I have walked a thousand poems to get here.
Here, when falling in a dream, we fall forever.
(When the waking noise hits,
a certain weightlessness endures.)
The unspoken ties us together in unheard of ways.

I have walked a thousand poems to get here.



The Body of the Mind is an interlocking medley of twenty of my most purposeful poems composed over a period of thirty years. The intent of this selection is to expand the boundaries of human connection through the use of language art and image. May this offering serve as libation for your own inward journey.

