

5.6 Mirror Mirror (1999)

Hello false friend, familiar face.
We've had a drink or two.
I'm so at ease with you –
can we get closer to myself through you?
See through this dull unanimated eye?
Vis-à-vis with any other face,
so intimate, there'd flow
a certain electricity: if only I
could look afresh,
see something I had never seen before –
I even find my head inclined
as if to catch me unaware.
But that's not it: I have to search
for clues to what goes on behind, to focus
on the self behind the brain behind the eye.
This mask is something interposed,
this barely navigable map – which we have come to use
to read and write
our subtlest messages, to kiss,
to laugh, to fear, to dominate –
is just a living interface,
a compact box of pathways
to and from the brain, a mobile
interactive, multi-medic set – no more.

If I could only set aside this mask,
strip bare the intellect,
if I could watch the pulsing brain
and see if that would help me understand – of course
it won't: it has no tools,
we cannot comprehend the unexpressed
however much we know it's there. And
even if I could I know that's
just a front as well – the
master, atman, self resides behind:
his coachman cracks the whip
to drive the steaming horses on:
behind the curtain atman secretly conducts
his dialogue with brahman –
God – yes! – is in my head
and in my understanding: he doesn't sit outside,
he knows, as David said,
my downsitting and my uprising,
he understands me long before,
because he's part of me. In short,
however hard I try,

I'll not discern the smallest clue to all of this
behind that interface: I'm
handicapped, my power to penetrate
and see behind is neutralised.
I slowly come to realise
that subject, object both are compromised;
I'll find out nothing new about myself
this way, however much I am
at ease with you, my useless friend.
Begone, turn out the light!
Goodnight.

Boston – December 1999