CHAPTER 4

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF GROWING BLIND: NARRATIVE SUBJECTIVITY IN HULL

In writing about the narrative subjectivity of John M. Hull (1935-2015) as a blind person in two chapters, I shall be exploring a movement in his self, and in his understanding of it as evident in his two diaries – or two editions of a single diary – – Touching the Rock: An Experience of Blindness (1990), and On Sight and Insight: A Journey into the World of Blindness (1997). The latter is “an enlarged and revised edition” (On Sight xi) of the former diary. He developed the books out of recordings he had made “on cassette [of] my daily experiences” (Touching the Rock ix) over a period of “three years” (x) as stated in Touching the Rock and “three or four years” (xi) in the case of On Sight and Insight. As the words “In reading this book, you . . . want to know what it is like to go blind, and to be blind” (addressed directly to the reader) suggest, the diarist describes an evolution in his selfhood over the period covered by his diaries. He characterises it as a “transition from being a sighted person who could not see to being a blind person.” It is clear that these words signify a shift from one way of being-in-the-world to another as well as understanding that change in his reality. Comprehending “the truth of being blind” (Touching the Rock ix), that is, one’s existence, is tied up with reflecting on one’s “daily experiences.” This demonstrates the dynamic connection existing between maintaining the cassette diary, and realising his condition of being blind. Recording his daily experiences1 not only plays a therapeutic role, enabling him “to monitor my own reactions to blindness, and thus to keep some sense of balance and control in what was a deeply disturbing period of my life” (On Sight xi), but also leads to the development of the self and self-knowledge, or in Bruce Merry’s words,

1. This means that he maintains an audio diary, an important medium for a blind person.
“discovery of self” (4) as a blind person. However, as Hull states, this process of self-discovery is neither straightforward nor easy for him: “Interpretation takes time. This process of reinterpretation is piecemeal; sometimes there are moments of dawning realisation; often there are long periods of apparent stagnation. Sometimes the wound of the original loss seems never to heal. At other times one feels that the terrible gift has been received and assimilated” (On Sight xii). This uncertain psychological process, which does not have a pattern as such, is complemented by, or necessitates, the fragmentary form of the narrative sections that make up the two diaries. In talking about a movement in Hull’s being and self-conception, then, we should be careful also to pay adequate attention to the fragmentary form of the narrative. This is because the author has used the said narrative form to record and deal with the gradual nature of the movement in his selfhood, with its gains and setbacks.

4.1. The Narrative Form of the Diaries

Hull describes a person’s entry into the world of the blind with a self-constitutive statement: “[T]hose who live in that world have a new consciousness.” Thus, when people who have sight lose their vision and become blind, there is a movement in their selfhood: “Entry into this consciousness, for those who lose sight,” says Hull, “is experienced as a fall. At first, the fall is out of consciousness, into the dreaming life, into the darkness. Later on, in my own case at any rate, the fall was discovered not to be out of consciousness but into it.” The form of his diaries, with their cumulative effect, is well-suited to describe and examine this process of leaving one kind of consciousness, and experiencing the birth of a new consciousness. He states, “I can only describe that consciousness and the way to it through the presentation of a
series of fragments. The thing itself is not fragmented but the path to it is experienced
fragmentarily” (On Sight xiii). The foregoing quote provides an answer, at least in the
case of Hull, to Jochen Helbeck’s question, “Which mechanisms bring an individual's
reflections about self and time into place and account for the very fact of his/her diary?”
(623). Thus, the narrative sections of Hull’s diaries reflect on what it is to lose one’s
sight, and become blind by dwelling on his daily experiences. They show the difficult
process of growing into the self of a blind person. It is appropriate at this point to state
that I will be drawing from Hull’s interpretative text on the Bible – In the Beginning
There was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversations with the Bible (2001) – which is
written from a blind person’s standpoint.

In the foreword to On Sight and Insight, Hull says, “I had the recorded diary
turned into a print transcript, and arranged it into chapters” (xi). The task was
accomplished by gathering, assembling, and editing the recorded fragments on
blindness (xiv). The book was published in order to further one of the main objectives
of maintaining the cassette diary: “I kept the diary . . . partly in an attempt to
communicate with sighted people. For me, going blind had been an experience of
isolation and marginalisation, and I wanted to explain myself to the sighted world. I
wanted the changes which had come over me and my life to become intelligible to my
friends by helping them to have insight into blindness” (On Sight xi). It becomes
evident from the above statements about Hull’s aim of keeping the diary and the

2. The only change the author and editors effected in the text when they converted the cassette
diary into a manuscript was that they arranged the recorded and dated fragments in titled chapters and
narrative sections. From the point of view of genetic criticism, unlike other texts such as long fiction,
short stories, or even autobiographies, a diary does not have an “avant-texte” or previous versions of a
finished text.
creation of the manuscript that ‘atmakathana’ or narrating the self, which introduces retrospection as a feature of the text, is important in his narrative sections.

The fragmentary form of the narrative sections not only highlights the elements of retrospection, “immediacy[,] and the fragmentary character of this experience” (On Sight 232), but also draws attention to the reflective nature of the diaries. In the introduction to his translation of Aristotle’s Poetics (2006), Joe Sachs discusses the importance of imaginative reflection in relation to action or “praxis” (2):

[T]he worth of poetry is even greater if action can become visible nowhere but in an image. An action is stretched out in time, so that even in life, we can comprehend it nowhere but in the imagination. And its origin, in the act of choice, is interior, and never available to us in another person except by an act of interpretation. Even our own choices are not always recognized when they are made, but only evident to us retrospectively. (3)

3. I adopt this term from a brief discussion I had with Professor D. Venkat Rao about the concepts of knowing the self and narrating the self as elaborated in Indic philosophical literature in Sanskrit. This followed Professor Rao’s lecture on J. M. Coetzee, which he delivered on Monday, February 24, 2014 at the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad as part of a day-long workshop entitled “A Day Seminar on J.M. Coetzee: Pain, Body, Society, Desire, and Animal.” While the two above-mentioned concepts regarding the self are clearly distinguished in the Indian philosophical tradition, post-structuralist thought conceives of the self as being constituted by ‘writing.’ On October 5, 2015, Professor Rao explained to me this concept of writing as follows: “Jacques Derrida does not use ‘writing’ in the colloquial sense of the term. His notion of archi-writing, or foundational writing if you like, is not reducible to the colloquial sense of writing. Archi-writing precedes and constitutes both speech and writing as we understand them colloquially. . . The structure of writing is identical to the structure of speech. . . So there must be something that enables these colloquially differentiated communicative forms to be constituted. . . Whatever you may want to talk about, be it memory, intelligence, or intellectual capability, you can do so only through the intervention and mediation of a ‘communication system’ [that is to say] only if you articulate it or give it a form, either verbal or scribal. Derrida calls those finite [‘concatenated chain’ of] markers elements of archi-writing. Without archi-writing intervening, communication itself is unthinkable. . . As far as the relation to the self is concerned, you can understand that any conception of self or any attempt to figure out self is inescapably enmeshed with ‘communication systems,’ whether it is visual or verbal, scribal or oral. The conception of self or figuration of self is contingent upon the materiality of communication” (Personal interview). Thus, language is the limitation as well as the condition of knowledge and therefore of subjectivity. This is, then, “a language-dependency position” (Hagberg 122) on selfhood.
The above words serve as a commentary on Hull’s reaction to blindness, which encompasses reflections on his experiences as recorded in the diaries.\(^4\) Thus, in each of the narrative sections (all of which constitute an imaginative, interpretative response to blindness), he reflects on an experience or experiences that he has had in the recent past in dreams and in waking life. Moreover, these fragments record a slow and halting transformation in his selfhood, as is clear from his words about the difficult process of interpreting newly-acquired blindness, and of understanding himself as a blind person (\textit{On Sight} xii). Further, he states that “In this book I have gathered together a number of aspects of the life of this particular blind person so as to form a sort of mosaic which seeks to interpret the blind condition” (\textit{On Sight} xiii). These words attest to the fact that he (and the editor) prepared the book manuscript in such a way that the narrative as a whole would constitute an interpretation of “the blind condition.”

The “Preface” (ix-x) to \textit{Touching the Rock} and the “Foreword” (xi-xiv) to \textit{On Sight and Insight}\(^5\) demonstrate why the retrospective character of the diaries is important: the two opening sections may be read as the latest in the narrative entries forming the diaries. The dates recorded at the end of both entries make it clear that the author has written them with the publication of the books in mind, after turning the diary on tape into “a print transcript,” and arranging the recordings into clear-cut chapters. From the wistful character of the words concerning blindness (which are from the “Preface”) – “It would be nice to be able to say that there was a happy ending, that a miracle happened, but it didn’t” (\textit{Touching the Rock} x) – we may infer that Hull experiences blindness as a loss and a cause for sadness. This means that even after he

\(^4\) They also illuminate the interpretative exercise undertaken in this thesis.

\(^5\) Hull writes (or rather dictates) the former in July of 1989, and the latter in April 1997; that is to say, just before the manuscripts went for publication.
has made the (difficult) transition from the conception of himself as “a sighted person who could not see” to that of a blind person, he still regards blindness as an undesirable state. In the “Foreword,” on the other hand, we see that he has settled into the blind condition:

[T]he life of a person who is blind is experienced as a whole. Losing one’s sight is not quite like losing a limb. The blind person does not always remain conscious of something missing. The personality regroups; there is a process of healing and reintegration which leaves the life of the blind person complete and entire although smaller than it was before. . . . A new consciousness was born. (On Sight xii-xiii)

This passage presents a self-conception that wholly incorporates blindness.

Contrasting his book on blindness with the “more than twenty autobiographies of people who had gone blind” that he read after losing his “own sight” in the early 1980s, Hull says that those books were literary in character: “they had a beginning, a middle and an end. They were like novels, with an interesting style, a climax or a resolution” (Touching the Rock ix). Clearly, those accounts of blindness were fashioned according to Aristotle’s precepts about the dramatic structure of a literary work, which consist in “the inherent connections that constitute a well-made story” (Sachs 3). Writing about the “common structure” typically followed by memoirs that deal with “psychological problems like addiction” – which are similar to illness narratives or memoirs about disability experience, Abigail Gosselin criticises such works for adhering to “a plotline that has a clear beginning, a dramatic middle, and a tidily resolved ending.” Such narratives, she continues, “offer sensationalistic drama that safely contains the pain, messiness, and monotony of actual experience, and they often provide moral lessons as
well.” Her objection to this narrative aesthetic is that it simplifies experience and “does not reflect the lived reality of most people” (Gosselin 133). Hull shares this concern, which is seen in his words about the literary autobiographies which failed to speak to him: they did not offer “an account of blindness as I knew it. . . . All I can say is that the books I did read did not write about the aspects of blindness which were more significant to me.” So he decided to maintain his own cassette diary and publish it as a fragmentary narrative – a form which he favoured as the narrative structure that was most-suited to record his changing condition.

Thus, his assertion that his “book is not like that” (Touching the Rock ix), that is, like the literary accounts on blindness that he read, finds support in the fragmentary form of his diaries and in the statement, “It [his book] has no particular ending, because blindness has no ending” (Touching the Rock x). The aforementioned quote foregrounds “the non-terminal character of subjectivity” (George Personal interview). Hagberg indicates the rich potential of this kind of subjectivity when he writes on the necessity of continuously extending our effort to understand the self through the statement, “And it is literature that affords an opportunity to reflect upon, to extend, to reweave, and . . . to create those self-constitutive relations of psychological association and meaning-contributing connotation” (136). As Hull grapples with his blindness, he achieves understanding only gradually, with repetition in the issues that he faces and continual reversals. He says, “If there is repetition, it is because the same problems and the same experiences went round and round, interpreted from many aspects” (Touching the Rock x). Thus the reflection on and extension of “relations of psychological association and meaning-contributing connotation” that Hagberg talks about are crucial for the very process of constituting the self.
Hull begins *Touching the Rock* by saying that a “couple of years” after losing his sight, his interest “in blindness” is aroused. Prompted by his scholarly bent of mind, he reads many first-hand accounts of blindness. His objective in reading the books is to learn about life in the blind condition, and about how it would affect him. Those blind people’s stories amaze him because “they were often full of humour, courage and ingenuity.” However (as we have seen above), he says, “I did not find what I was looking for: an account of blindness as I knew it” (*Touching the Rock* ix). As he reads those stories, “focusing on a coherent collection of described characteristics to the exclusion of others,” asking himself as a reader “to what extent, and in what precise ways” he is “similar to and different from them” (Hagberg 131), he increasingly comes to realise that the books do not speak to his experience of blindness. He finds them unsatisfactory because he does not, as Danto would put it, recognise any aspect of the self in those novelistic autobiographies. As metaphoric mirrors, then, those works do not show Hull “the aspects of blindness which were more significant to me.” He finds it necessary to fall back upon his own resources to figure out, in a way that corresponds to the uniqueness of his self, “what it is like to go blind, and to be blind” (*Touching the Rock* ix). Therefore, we may say that Hull’s cassette diary results from the (unsatisfactory) reading on blindness that he engages in.

Hull uses the words “sub plot” and “plot” where “plot” is a common translation of Aristotle’s term “muthos” to refer to the entries which deal with dreams in the diaries: “The dream narratives form a sort of sub plot, *if it can be called a plot*, since the conscious material shows how the unconscious mind struggled with the problem” (emphasis added, *Touching the Rock* x). The above words show Hull’s uncertainty

6. Here I draw on ideas that Danto deals with (63-4) in the essay entitled “Philosophy and/as/of Literature” (52-67).
about the use of the term “plot” to describe the narrative sections that deal with “the unconscious life of dreams” (*Touching the Rock* 70; *On Sight* 59). Sachs criticises the rendering of the Greek word “muthos” as “plot” in English translations of the *Poetics* because this diminishes the critical importance of “story” which, according to him, is the correct translation of the word (3). He explains, “The word ‘plot’ may suggest a skeletal framework of events onto which a poet can impose an illusion of life, but stories are genuine wholes that already have a life of their own” (Sachs 4). The translation of the word “muthos” as “story” (rather than as “plot”) helps us consider the dream narratives in Hull’s diaries as forming a subsidiary part of the main story, which sheds important light on his emotions and activities in conscious life.

4.2. Life and (Diary) Text

In his “Introduction” (*Touching the Rock* 1-12; *On Sight* 1-9) to both diaries, Hull gives a brief autobiographical account of himself, covering in a few pages his life from his birth “on 22 April 1935 in Corryong, a town in North Eastern Victoria” (*Touching the Rock* 1; *On Sight* 1) to the point when he knew that he had finally lost his eyesight. He “registered blind” (*Touching the Rock* 11; *On Sight* 9) in 1980. He says that he found himself facing “a curious situation” (*Touching the Rock* 12; *On Sight* 9) one day in September of that year: when “I returned to my office [at Birmingham University where he taught] from the eye hospital” (*Touching the Rock* 11; *On Sight* 9), he was confronted with a host of problems relating to his blindness. These included a fast-approaching, new teaching term at the university, and “files of notes representing
years of work, all of which was now inaccessible” (*Touching the Rock* 12; *On Sight* 9). He goes on to say:

The solving of these problems occupied the years 1980 to 1983, and might be the theme of a book in itself. *Touching the Rock* does not describe these years but deals instead with the years 1983-86. In 1983 the last light sensations faded and the dark discs had finally overwhelmed me. I had fought them bravely, as it seemed to me, for thirty-six years, but all to no avail. It was then I began to sink into the deep ocean, and finally learned how to touch the rock on the far side of despair. (*Touching the Rock* 12; *On Sight* 9)

Although, as he puts it, “[i]n 1970 I began a decade of failing vision” (*Touching the Rock* 10; *On Sight* 8), and lost his sight almost completely by 1980, he began maintaining his cassette diary only “In June of 1983” (*Touching the Rock* ix). This passage of two and a half years between recognition of blindness and the commencement of recording accounts for the retrospective nature of the diaries. The reasons for this delay are clearly stated in the previous long quote: first, it was in 1983, when “the last light sensations faded and the dark discs had finally overwhelmed me,” and his fight against advancing blindness in the form of medical care and a series of

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7. This situation in which Hull cannot read (or visually access) any written material is strikingly similar to the one faced by Borges in 1955 when he lost his sight, and was made the director of the National Library of Argentina. Borges says, “There I was, the center, in a way, of nine hundred thousand books in various languages, but I found I could barely make out the title pages and the spines” (*Selected Non-Fictions* 475). As mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3, the “Poem of the Gifts” speaks of this irony.

8. Thus the transition in Hull’s selfhood actually consists of two movements covering three main conceptions of the self: an initial movement from the first state of being a sighted person to the second one of “being a sighted person who could not see,” and then a further movement from the second position to the third state of “being a blind person.” As is clear from the previous discussion, the two diaries deal, to a large extent, with the second movement.
surgeries over “thirty-six years” had failed, that he finally started to realise the nature of the blind condition and “began to sink into the deep ocean . . . of despair.” Secondly, he was kept busy for “about two and a half years” (*Touching the Rock* ix) from 1980 to 1983, solving many of the problems that he confronted as a blind person. In the light of the foregoing discussion, we can describe Hull’s cassette diary as “an expression of being,” which was motivated by “the existential urges grounding the act of writing” (Helbeck 626), where for a blind person “the act of writing” means the act of recording. Helbeck’s words show the personal importance to the diarist of writing (or keeping) his diary, and suggest that there is a “direct, substantive interaction [between life and text]” (626-27).

When Hull reflects on blindness and his experiences in the entries of his diaries, he is narrating the self in the sense that he is reflecting on the recent experiences that he has had. As Jibu Mathew George explains, “That one experiences something is not necessarily an evidence of some core identity, but when there is a subject which reflects on the past, the reflecting self can be cited as an evidence” (Personal interview). This means that when Hull records his diary, it is the present position from which he is creating the diary through reflection that constitutes the evidence of the self. This amounts to saying that the narration begins from an initial position of what the self means to the author:

There is a provisional understanding of the self with which one begins . . . 
. . . and of the assumptions on which one bases judgements about the past. 
. . . There is very less focus in literary criticism on the dynamics of writing. Writing is a temporal process, and many things happen in time;
there is something artistically critical about the very dynamics of writing which cannot be underestimated. (George, Personal interview)

This is an accurate description of what happens to Hull’s self-conception in the course of the two diaries, as well as in his book on the Bible, as I intend to show in this chapter and the next. He starts off with an initial notion of the self as a sighted entity in his diaries. He has lost his sight when he begins keeping the cassette diary, but he still conceives of himself as a sighted person who cannot see. The diary records with a deep sense of loss, repeated setbacks, and understanding achieved along the way – a slow evolution towards a conception of himself as a blind person.

4.3. Dreaming and Waking Life

As suggested earlier, the life of dreams forms a major theme in the diaries, reflecting on which Hull makes sense of his blindness. The importance to him of interpreting dreams in relation to his journey into the blind condition may be understood from the words “I was interested in what would happen to my dreams” (Touching the Rock X). It is also clear from the fact that he begins the book with a narrative section dealing with dreaming. “Dreaming 1 June 1983” (Touching the Rock 13-4; On Sight 10-1) continues to reflect on the idea articulated in the above quote. The diarist asks, “How long do you have to be blind before your dreams begin to lose colour [and pictures]?” He contrasts a few significant experiences (where his vision is rather tenuous) he has had over the last three years as a family man with his dreams during the same time, and wonders about the vivid visual character of the latter.9 For example, he

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9. He uses the phrase “colourful freedom” (Touching the Rock 13; On Sight 10) to describe his sense of freedom while dreaming, which indicates his attitude to his blindness. It cuts him off from the world, and forces him to feel imprisoned within himself.
narrates a visual dream he has of his two-and-a-half-year-old son, Thomas, and then describes his birth, which took place soon after his own “final eye operation”: “A lot of the time I did not know what was happening.” He is puzzled that although he has been “a registered blind person for nearly three years,” and “totally blind” for a few months, his dreams continue to be colourful. This presupposes utilisation by the dreaming mind of images stored in Hull’s memories. So there is a conflict between the conscious and unconscious states of the self, which is brought out by the question, “Has blindness, then, made any impact upon my dreams at all?” (Touching the Rock 13; On Sight 10). The relationship between waking and dreaming is, therefore, the theme of this entry.

“Dreaming of the White Cane 3 June 1983” (Touching the Rock 14-5; On Sight 11-2) sharpens the focus of the issue of the relationship between Hull’s blindness and his dreams when he says, “This is the first time I have dreamt of myself as being a blind person.” We have seen above that he treats his dreams as subsidiary narratives (Touching the Rock x). This particular narrative portrays him as forgetting his “white cane on the train,” and then “using [a long metal tube] to explore my path,” thus demonstrating that his unconscious mind recognises him to be a blind man. However, he points out a number of “unresolved contradictions” in the dream, such as the following one: when he is walking along near the station, sweeping the metal tube from side to side in order to make sure that the path is safe, he notices “that the people in the area around the station were looking at me curiously.” Hull being a blind man who requires to tap his cane as he walks, it is indeed curious that he is able to “see the reactions of the people around me” to his presence. He also “examine[s] the map to see

10. I mean by this a dream where the self portrayed in the story experiences the sequence of incidents as being visual in character.
where the station was.” So, in representing a blind Hull, who is “dependent upon a [substitute] cane” (Touching the Rock 15; On Sight 11) to find his way, but who can nevertheless see things (or perceive visual images), the dream evidences a gap in the diarist’s unconscious mind. This gap may be perceived between his present reality of total blindness (portrayed as a blind man in the dream narrative), and his mode of dreaming in the medium of visual images.

In “Dreaming 1 June 1983” and “Dreaming of the White Cane 3 June 1983,” Hull is able to vaguely connect his dreams to experiences (which he only alludes to) he has had “[a]bout six months ago” (Touching the Rock 13; On Sight 10), and about “a year or so before our [Hull and his wife Marilyn] wedding” (Touching the Rock 14; On Sight 11), which makes it five years earlier (thus in 1978), respectively. By contrast, in “I Can Still Manage 8 June 1983” (Touching the Rock 17-8; On Sight 13), he is able to say with fair certainty, “My dreams seem to be lagging about six years behind reality” (Touching the Rock 18). This statement comes after he describes a dream “in which I was walking along a river valley” while “on a walking holiday.” In it, he is represented as being a partially-sighted man who “found that I could get a sufficient sense of the place to move freely and to enjoy the scenery.” This means that although his unconscious mind has recognised him as a blind person in the dream recorded previously, blindness has not yet sufficiently influenced it for the latter to bring into its activity in dreams experiences that the blind typically have when they are awake, such as touching objects and hearing voices and sounds. When Hull characterises the dream under discussion as being “a beautiful, refreshing dream,” he is talking about the vivid, colourful freedom he experiences (as a still-sighted person who cannot see) in the world of his (current) dreams. He goes on to relate the words “‘can still manage’” to his
identical waking thought which he says he has “been having . . . for at least ten years”
(Touching the Rock 17; On Sight 13). This period of time roughly corresponds to the
“decade of failing vision” that he began in 1970 (Touching the Rock 10; On Sight 8).
This shows that the loss of Hull’s eyesight was gradual, like that of Borges. 11

The diaries contain complementary pairs and, sometimes, even a cluster of
entries that deal with one idea or a similar topic. This is despite the fact that days,
months, and, in a couple of cases, even years intervene between one entry and another.
This sustained reflection upon a theme means that it receives the diarist’s attention from
various perspectives over the period of time that it interests him. This, in turn, lets the
reader mark the changes in Hull’s selfhood. One pair of dreams narrated in two
recording sessions that are separated by twenty days may be read in the entries entitled
“Sinking 16 September 1983” (Touching the Rock 31-3; On Sight 28-9) and “The
Waterfall 6 October 1983” (Touching the Rock 39-40; On Sight 35). Hull interprets both
dreams as metaphorical ‘stories’ of how he is coping with blindness. In the former, he
narrates a visual dream where he sinks into the dark ocean. So we may link this dream
with the words that close the introductory chapter: “[I] began to sink into the deep
ocean” (Touching the Rock 12; On Sight 9). First, he finds himself “struggling towards
the stern” of an ocean liner with another person (from the beginning, he uses the plural
pronoun ‘we’), possibly a woman because he says that “it could have been Marilyn”
(Touching the Rock 31; On Sight 28). The dreamer receives no explanation for being

11. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, Manguel states that Borges’s “blindness [was] expected since
his birth” (16). Coincidentally, in Hull’s case too, as the following words show, his blindness was
expected long before he lost his sight totally: “The curious thing is that I myself at the age of nineteen,
having conceived a desire to enter the ministry of the Methodist church, was enormously distressed to
find that the church authorities were reluctant to accept me because of the poor state of my own sight, and
the threat of blindness which was already hanging over me” (On Sight 116). This incident would have
occurred in 1954. It would be another twenty-nine years before he started grappling with the reality of his
blindness.
forced to make his way along with his companion, with difficulty, to the rear of the ship. Since for Hull, this “ship that moves away with its light and speed [represents] the world of the sighted” (*Touching the Rock* 32; *On Sight* 29), we may interpret this as suggesting that his exit from the vessel (or the visual world) with his companion is meant to occur. Thus, as the diarist continues, they are “transported over the stern of the ship and now I found myself with two [unknown] women on another ship.” This second ship is sinking in a sea that is not wild but sullen, while the other ship is “going away, leaving us further and further behind.” He finds that they are “clearly marooned” (*Touching the Rock* 32; *On Sight* 28) in the vessel that is sinking fast. He interprets the dream by enlarging on the collective impact of blindness upon not only himself as a blind person, but also upon his family:

> My family, my loved ones, and I are pushing our way through it [the first, well-lit ship which is departing]. We are stranded, increasingly cut off. We are immobile, waterlogged. I am being dragged down and down into something unimaginable from which there will be no return. One world will disappear. The world into which I am being dragged with my loved ones will engulf us. There will be no return. Blindness is permanent and irreversible. (*Touching the Rock* 32-3; *On Sight* 29)

He realises that his sighted self will cease to exist along with the disappearance of the world of sight, and that he and his “loved ones” will be engulfed by the “unimaginable” world of blindness. The passage makes it clear that blindness deeply affects not only the person who is (becoming) blind, but also his/her loved ones. This realisation brings to the fore the fact that we are members of a social group (or groups), and are all affected by something that happens to each one of us. Hull understands this dream – which fills
his mind with a “terrible sense of dread and hopelessness” (*Touching the Rock* 32; *On Sight* 28) – to be an indication that his “dreaming self is, after all, not deceived” (*Touching the Rock* 33; *On Sight* 29). Hull’s dreaming self knows that momentous changes are taking place in his consciousness. Here, the phrase “after all” perhaps alludes to the visual character of his recent dreams despite his total blindness for many months.

In the visual dream, strikingly different from the previous one, narrated in “The Waterfall 6 October 1983,” Hull finds himself and Marilyn “in a religious house, some kind of retreat centre . . . high in the mountains.” From a “very lofty, very peaceful” chapel, they view “a majestic waterfall” consisting of a “great bank of water ['reddish brown . . . with silt'] shooting over from the top.” Then they walk “beside the sea,” and watch “mighty ['brown'] waves” pounding upon “the seawall, along the promenade” beside (or at the base of) which is dug a “huge moat” (*Touching the Rock* 39). The diarist says that the “atmosphere of this dream was peaceful and refreshing” (*Touching the Rock* 40). The powerful waters forming the towering waterfall and the mighty sea, instead of washing him away or submerging him under their terrible weight, appear to him as visions of great beauty and sublimity. Comparing his previous and present dreams, Hull says:

> I awoke with a sense of having received a revelation, of having been in an awe-inspiring presence. Could this dream *be a foil to* the ominous one about the sinking vessel? There, the waters were sullen and heavy. Here, although no less powerful, they are cascading with movement, energy and control. In one dream I am being submerged. In the other, I am
being elevated and renewed. I feel that these are big dreams. (emphasis added, Touching the Rock 40; On Sight 35)

This passage shows the direct connection between dreaming and waking, in that Hull wakes from the dream refreshed because it leaves him “with a sense of having received a revelation” from God. This religious interpretation is supported by his presence in the dream in a beautiful, peaceful chapel. In fact, he and Marilyn discuss in the dream “the possibility of spending a longer time there, or even living there” (Touching the Rock 39; On Sight 35). As we saw above, the diarist acknowledges the link between the dream related in “Sinking 16 September 1983,” and the one dealt with in the present entry. He even feels “that these are big dreams” in his journey because he gets motivated to go on despite difficulties and occasional despair.

The entry entitled “Playing the Recorder 30 November 1983” (Touching the Rock 43-4; On Sight 39-40) is of significance to the diaries as a whole for two reasons: first, in it, Hull introduces a principle of analysis that can be applied to his dreams throughout the text. And secondly, through the “musical dream” narrated here, he shows that his dreaming self recognises for the first time the disruptive impact (he uses the phrase “the cause of a crisis”) that blindness has on his life. Therefore, the dream “marks an important step.” He describes two visual dreams in the entry. In the first dream, he is a musician who plays the recorder in “a small orchestra.” The orchestra is about to begin playing the music, and he finds himself “in a terrible state because I could not read the music. I was blind. I had no idea what I should play. There was a part for the solo recorder, and I was very nervous about what I would do when it came to this part. . . . For the first time I am in a situation where blindness is recognised to be the cause of a crisis” (Touching the Rock 43; On Sight 39). Phrases such as “a question
of competence,” “a public disgrace and . . . letting one’s colleagues down,” and “a terrible panicky feeling of helplessness” (Touching the Rock 43-4; On Sight 39) all make it clear that he interprets the dream as representing the negative effects that blindness has on the performance of his duties.

However, despite not being able to “read the music” due to blindness, he does “have a very distinct visual impression of the photocopied, handwritten transcript of the words, the lyrics which somebody was to sing,” and (in a second dream) even has “the most vivid impression of his [Thomas’s] features. [Hull sees] his face with the utmost clarity” (Touching the Rock 43; On Sight 39). It is from the above discrepancy between being blind in the dream, and nevertheless being able to see things vividly therein, that the diarist derives a principle or method of analysing his dreams. He distinguishes “between the way that blindness affects the process of dreaming, and the way it affects the contents of the dream” (Touching the Rock 44; On Sight 39). This distinction serves to explicate how “[t]he personality re-groups” (On Sight xii) after he loses his sight. In the dream dealt with in this entry, blindness influences “the contents of the dream” because the dream pictures him as being blind. Thus, it is an example of “the way in which the actual story of the dream recognises blindness, whether in the dream I encounter the problems of blindness, or know myself as being blind.” However, a gap exists between the contents of the dream, and the way he dreams about people and places for which he has no visual images and details like colour (Touching the Rock 44; On Sight 40). Despite his inability to “make anything out at all of the music itself” (Touching the Rock 43; On Sight 39) due to blindness, he perceives some vivid visual images in this dream. Tracking this distinction (and gap) through the successive dream narratives of the diaries will give us a sense of the changes in his selfhood over time. In
Touching the Rock, he articulates such an understanding: “I was interested in what would happen to my dreams. . . . The relationship between dreaming and waking, and the nature of consciousness itself, is one of the persistent themes of the book” (x). Thus, he believes that, by means of this rigorous interpretation of his dream life, he can gain a fuller understanding of the blind self which was once sighted.

The next two entries about dreams (separated by three months) that we are going to look at deal with Hull’s blindness in relation to his family members. The first of the two follows two months after the entry last discussed. “Loss 2 February 1984” (Touching the Rock 56-7; On Sight 49-50) relates a vividly visual nightmare in which Hull’s daughter Elizabeth, who is nearly two years old, is dead and buried. This is unknown to the diarist. As he reports in the following words, he is broken and furious: “I grabbed her [Marilyn] by the shoulders, and shook her fiercely, shouting out, ‘What do you mean? How dare you! Is she not only dead but buried, and I not even told?’” He even sees the “slow” funeral procession moving over a “grassy plot” as well as “people’s clothes, the green of the grass and the bright colours of the flowers” (Touching the Rock 57; On Sight 50). If we analyse the dream narrative according to the distinction “between the way that blindness affects the process of dreaming, and the way it affects the contents of the dream,” we perceive immediately that it displays “no trace of blindness.” It is clear that, on both counts (“the process of dreaming,” and “the contents of the dream”), it does not refer to Hull’s altered sensory life. However, he does connect it to this theme through the experience of loss. In the process of portraying a story of terrible loss, the dream combines in Hull’s reflection “the many faces of loss” including those that he considers to be brought about by blindness, and the ones resulting from his first, broken marriage: “Was it Imogen who was dead, lost first
through divorce and distance and lost again through the isolating effect of blindness?” 
(Touching the Rock 57; On Sight 50). Thus, blindness makes it necessary for Hull to grapple not only with the consequences following from the lack of sight, but also with other sorrowful events in his life.\(^{12}\)

“Making Love in the Pub 1 May 1984” (Touching the Rock 84-5; On Sight 74) continues to dwell on the theme of loss, because the dream narrated in the entry presents a situation where “his [Hull’s] wife and daughter have been involved in an accident,” and he cannot “get to them fast enough” (Touching the Rock 84). More specifically, the dream emerges from Hull’s “fear of losing Marilyn through blindness,” which is allayed at its end. The statement which closes the entry, “This is a dream about blindness as well as a blind person’s dream” (Touching the Rock 85; On Sight 74), clearly shows that the distinction between the way that blindness influences the mode of dreaming, and the way it affects the story of the dream is of significance to this dream narrative as well. When Hull says that it “is a dream about blindness,” he means that “the contents of the dream” figure him as a blind man; that is to say, “the actual story of the dream recognises blindness” (Touching the Rock 44; On Sight 40). He explains, “In this dream I hear myself described as a blind man, I see myself holding a stick, I once again sense the panic of not being able to get quickly enough to loved ones in distress” (Touching the Rock 84; On Sight 74). The words “a blind person’s dream” suggest “the way that blindness affects the process of dreaming.” Although the diarist uses the words “scene” and “image” to describe a shift in his dream from the couple making love in the

\(^{12}\) I am grateful to Dr. Ravi S. Bhat, who is a psychiatrist, for this insight. Hull does make the link between different kinds of loss. But the following psychological experience, which Dr. Bhat explained to me, helped me understand this entry better: when a person becomes blind late in life, they grapple not only with the shock of the disability, but also with other losses that they have suffered in life. The latter return to such a person’s mind with a renewed power to cause suffering.
pub “to the crowded bar,” and himself respectively, none of these details are significantly visual. *Instead, he first hears himself “described as a blind man”* (emphasis added), and then has “an image of myself, holding the white cane, hearing the notice, stupefied with anxiety.” The description is dominated by auditory details such as the repeated notice about the accident, “a scream” of anguish from Hull, and his relieved talk in the dream with his wife and daughter Imogen at the end of the distressing experience (*Touching the Rock* 84; *On Sight* 74). Thus, the gap between the story of the dream, and the process of dreaming is small, in that blindness does shape both elements.

We have had occasion before to note that Hull uses the metaphor of “sink[ing] into the deep ocean” to talk about starting (in 1983) to grapple with the reality of being blind. In fact, he makes use of the sea or ocean as a symbol in several successive entries throughout the books, in the course of which its symbolic meaning gradually morphs. Following the use of the symbol through the text of the two diaries may serve to throw light on the movement in the diarist’s selfhood. His words in the entry “Darkness is as Light with Thee 27 February 1984” (*Touching the Rock* 65-70; *On Sight* 56-60) illustrate this point by correlating blindness, the sea, and the “world of the unconscious depths”: “I may, perhaps, live beneath the sea, in that world of the unconscious depths” (*Touching the Rock* 67; *On Sight* 58). “Above and Below the Sea 2 March 1984” (*Touching the Rock* 71-2; *On Sight* 60-1) explores the above-mentioned interconnected issues when it presents “[a] most powerful, frightening and impressive dream” which is set at sea. The action takes place “on board a huge ship,” which is in the process of being overwhelmed (or sunk, which is significant in the case of Hull) by “[g]iant waves” (*On Sight* 60), as well as on a submarine which is deployed “on some kind of
mission” (*Touching the Rock* 71). The narrative is striking for the vivid visuality of the imagery used to describe the experiences that Hull undergoes in the dream. The words “Above and below blindness” (*Touching the Rock* 72) show that the adventure he has (along with known and unknown others) above the sea alludes to his past sighted life, and the one that he has “under the water” (*Touching the Rock* 71) acts as a symbol of blindness. Further, the words that end the entry, namely “loss,” “failure,” “incomprehensible,” and “irresistible” (*Touching the Rock* 72; *On Sight* 61) are all used to express the diarist’s grief and shock both at going blind, and at having the frightening experiences in the dream. So the dream narrative has only a symbolic connection to Hull’s blindness.

The entry which appears under the title “Submarine 13 August 1984” (*Touching the Rock* 119-22; *On Sight* 108-10) narrates an entirely visual dream in which Hull sees “no trace of blindness” but a cinematic narrative display “in beautiful, impressive colour” (*Touching the Rock* 120; *On Sight* 109). He closes the entry analysed in the previous paragraph, “Above and Below the Sea 2 March 1984” with a question, “is there to be a meeting with something down there [in the ocean]?” (*Touching the Rock* 72; *On Sight* 61). The dream in the present narrative, which is “set entirely in the depths of the ocean” with nothing “above the surface” (*Touching the Rock* 119; *On Sight* 108) being shown, suggests an answer to Hull’s question at least on three metaphoric levels. First, it depicts a huge underwater vessel which is “rather like a gigantic, elongated, flying saucer equipped with jet engines,” a craft possessing “vast power” “travelling through the depths of the ocean” (for which two-fold reason the title “Submarine” is appropriate). The situation portrayed in the dream, with “the crew trying to interpret their instruments” (*Touching the Rock* 119-20) and not knowing “whether the craft was
travelling forwards or backwards,” leads us to understand that the submarine is to all purposes blind. The fact that the dream is “divided between scenes of the outside of the submarine and those of the inside” (*Touching the Rock* 119) heightens the impact because, despite its detailed visuality, the dream’s power to depict is contained by the ocean’s depths. Hull actually recognises this when he writes that both the submarine and the ocean symbolise his blindness. While the process of dreaming does not recognise the dreamer’s blindness (the images projected are vividly visual), the content of the dream does so only metaphorically. Hull interprets the dream to mean that his difficulties ‘in blindness’ are understood by “the depths”: “The submarine is blind, and sees as I do. But the ocean is also blind, and the submarine moves through it, trying to find direction and contact. Now I am the ocean; now I am the submarine. I am also the submarine and the ocean at the same time. The dream is me and yet it is greater than me” (*Touching the Rock* 120; *On Sight* 109). Here, he declares his oneness with the ocean. His words suggest that he thinks of the ocean, which “is also blind,” as God and life at the same time. Both of these, it is clear, are “greater than me [himself].” There is, in the entry, an element of deep mysticism, expressed especially in the words “my lifelong love affair with God.” This sense is strengthened when we read the following words: “Visiting my parents always makes me aware of the connection between my faith in God and my relationship with them. I have no doubt that my lifelong love affair with God is, at least partly, an expression of my lifelong attempt to know and love my father, and to be known and loved by him” (*Touching the Rock* 121; *On Sight* 110). The foregoing mystical reflection suggests that the “meeting . . . down there” is with his blind self, which is nourished by his God.
The two words “direction and contact” (Touching the Rock 120; On Sight 109) in the passage (quoted in the previous paragraph) about the blindness of both the submarine and the ocean lead us to the second and third levels of meaning that emerge when the dream is analysed. Describing the dream as a visual treat (which he compares to a film), Hull states, “The outside world seldom comes home to me with such vividness” (Touching the Rock 120; On Sight 109). This points to a major problem that he faces after losing his sight. He feels – for a long time, “finds that he is” correctly describes his view – cut off from the outside world because he cannot see all that surrounds him (more about this later). Take, for instance, the following statement from the entry appropriately entitled “A Body without a World and a World without a Body 5 February 1985” (Touching the Rock 155-56; On Sight 136-37) which not only expresses his view about the state of his knowledge, but also about the ontological status of the blind person: “I, as a blind person, tend to be enclosed within my body, to be conscious primarily of it, and to be cut off from the world” (Touching the Rock 156; On Sight 137). He has this thought more than a year and a half after beginning the diary. The indication here is that he, at the time of recording this particular entry, regards his blindness as a condition that separates him from the outside world. This means that he has not yet realised fully, despite having reported in earlier entries experiences of doing so, that he can establish meaningful contact with his surroundings through the other sense faculties.

If we consider another statement, this time one that the diarist records eight years after starting to grapple with his blindness, we see that he still believes he is severed from the conversational flow taking place in the sighted human world. In the entry significantly entitled “Can Sighted and Blind People Understand Each Other? 15
June 1991” (*On Sight* 209-11), reflecting on conversations that sighted people engage in “around the dinner table” (*On Sight* 209), he says, “I am necessarily cut off from almost all of this. It happens through facial expression, body language.” So he experiences alienation when he finds himself in social gatherings. He does not seem to consider it possible for him to participate in conversations with sighted people by relying on the skills of speech and audition because, as he points out, not each and every spontaneous feeling in the flow of conversation can be expressed vocally: “Not everything can be turned into an ‘ooh’ or an ‘oh’, a grunt or a laugh.” Curiously, he uses the figure of a submarine to describe his situation on these occasions: “I am like a submarine, remorselessly ploughing along, having surfaced or just about surfaced especially for this occasion” (*On Sight* 210). The phrase “remorselessly ploughing along” reminds us of the submarine (appearing in the dream recorded on 13 August 1984 under the eponymous title) moving with great power in the depths of the ocean without its crew knowing the direction of its passage. As it happens, he makes a statement about his alienation from people in that entry as well: “I still find the experience particularly difficult and distressing, to be cut off in this way from the people one loves most” (*Touching the Rock* 121; *On Sight* 109-10). This means that although he may be present at a family or social gathering, he cannot be an active member of the group and, therefore, cannot help his wife in dealing with the reactions of sighted persons to his own blindness.

The third strand of meaning that we can follow in the dream recorded in “Submarine 13 August 1984” relates to the author’s visit with his family in the summer of 1984 (during the months of July and August, inferring from his diary entries) to his childhood home in Melbourne, Australia. (In fact, he makes this diary entry when he is
staying in that city.) He writes, “Melbourne is where my childhood lies. Here, I always have a strange experience of encounter with that past” (*Touching the Rock* 121; *On Sight* 110). He describes the visit in minute detail in the entry (recorded a few days earlier than “Submarine”) called “Visiting Melbourne 29 July 1984” (*Touching the Rock* 113-18; *On Sight* 101-5). Coming to the country that was his boyhood home, as a blind man, gives rise to a harrowing conflict in his mind between the “visual memories” of well-loved sights, remembered views of important landmarks, memories of the people of his youth, and his current blindness. He writes, “To be suddenly plunged back as a blind person into a world so full of remembered visions made me feel most unhappy.” He also fears having to face mobility problems because he would be “deprived of my routine for so many weeks” (*Touching the Rock* 114; *On Sight* 102). A little later in the entry, he yearns to interact with loved people through the modality of sight:

I longed for a more immediate recognition of loved ones than the rather slow, day-by-day building up of impressions, histories and voices which blindness seems to require. . . . I want to be in the immediate presence, to have the same person again. I want to be greeted by the person I love in his or her remembered form. Not being able to experience this is a cause not only of frustration but of grief. (*Touching the Rock* 115; *On Sight* 103)

In this passage, the diarist deals poignantly with the way blindness confounds him, prevents him from coming directly and spontaneously into contact with his loved ones. We must also note his recognition that the self existing in the blind condition has to
build a world separate from that of the sighted (“the rather slow, day-by-day building up of impressions, histories and voices”), which is necessitated by blindness. In the same entry, he reports a dream set in a “beautifully furnished old college” (*Touching the Rock* 116) in Cambridge, which is called Gonville and Caius College. In the dream, he is required to take an examination which he should not actually have to attempt. He interprets this situation as suggesting the ‘blameworthiness’ of his blind self: “[I] was being judged in a context full of associations of a beautiful past which was, however, misunderstanding me, and to which I could probably not now gain access. I am blaming myself for being blind, accusing myself of being on the margin, critical of myself for not doing more for my parents, my wife and my children” (*Touching the Rock* 117; *On Sight* 104). All this exposes him to deep anguish at a time when he has been coming to terms, however gradually this might be, with the loss of his sight.

The alternation of narrative sections that deal with dreams and entries reflecting on events, activities, knowledge, and relationships in the diarist’s conscious life is noteworthy. This suggests, as noted by Hull (*Touching the Rock* x), that a deep, subtle interaction takes place between the two realms of human existence, namely the conscious and the unconscious life. The narrative structure of the diaries makes use of this alternation in recording the gradual, halting change in Hull’s selfhood. We can see this interaction occurring in two entries, both of which are recorded on the same day (the only time this happens in his diaries), namely 21 August 1984. The first one is entitled “Seeing Lizzie” (*Touching the Rock* 125; *On Sight* 113), and it narrates a vividly visual dream; and the second one, which is entitled “‘Can’t You See Colours’” (*Touching the Rock* 125-26; *On Sight* 113-14), reports two incidents where Hull and his young son Thomas have exchanges relating to blindness. The former entry deals with
the psychology of a dream wherein the diarist sees his little daughter Lizzie. He writes, “In the dream, I knew that I had been blind, and that this was the first time I had been able to see her. I stared at her, full of wonder, taking in every detail of her face as she stood there wreathed in smiles, stretching out her hands to me. It was like a revelation.” It is clear that he regards the loss of his sight as being responsible for cutting him off from his loved ones. So he says, “I had a wonderful sense of a renewal of contact, as I felt that she was amazed as she realised, in some way, that there was something different about me, that I was responding to her in a new sort of way” (Touching the Rock 125; On Sight 113). In fact, not being able to exchange smiles spontaneously with others is something that gives Hull great pain, and he repeatedly returns to “the breakdown which blindness causes in the language of smiles” (Touching the Rock 203; On Sight 184), as in the entry entitled “‘Between You and Me, a Smile 21 March 1986’” (Touching the Rock 202-03; On Sight 184). There he gets a rare opportunity to share a smile with the four-year-old Lizzie. The little girl remarks on this fact, and her father writes, “I cannot describe my emotions as I reflected upon the fact that she had had so many experiences of smiling at me, but that the in-between smile was, for her and me, not only a great rarity, but a puzzle” (Touching the Rock 203; On Sight 184).

While the story of the dream in “Seeing Lizzie” recognises that the adult person portrayed in the situation – the “I” who gazes at Lizzie – had been blind – “In the dream, I knew that I had been blind,” he is no longer so, and the process of dreaming offers a vivid, colourful image of the toddler who is “radiant with grace.” Hull cites “the archetype of the divine child” (more about archetypes will follow later), which is investigated by Carl Jung. According to Jung, this archetype is “a kind of dream [that comes to the dreamer] when a new self was at the point of birth” (Touching the Rock
Although the diarist debates the significance of the dream, the foregoing words suggest his thought that it indicates the emergence in him of a new self.

The title of the second entry mentioned in the previous paragraph, “‘Can’t You See Colours,’” presents the significant question asked by the little boy, Thomas. The contents of the two entries recorded on 21 August 1984 offer a sharp contrast between the unconscious and conscious parts of Hull’s self. While “Seeing Lizzie” portrays, in a dream, a sighted Hull who has been blind before but is not so anymore and can see his daughter Lizzie in vivid colours, “‘Can’t You See Colours’” depicts the blind man in conscious life, interacting with his young son on the subject of colour in relation to blindness. Until his father explains it to him, Thomas does not realise that being blind entails the inability to see colours. Hull clarifies:

> The concept of being unable to see has so many fragments. The child does not put these together into one global idea, any more than the adult does. Many adults do not immediately grasp the fact that it is no use saying to a blind person that something is over there. The words ‘here’ and ‘there’ have to be used in a different way with blind people. We may say that such an adult has not realised the linguistic implication of blindness. (Touching the Rock 126; On Sight 114)

This is not the first time in the diaries that Hull deals with the “many fragments” that constitute the “one global idea” of the “concept of being unable to see.” In the entry entitled “Rapunzel Revisited 31 March 1984” (Touching the Rock 76-7; On Sight 68-9), which is recorded over four-and-a-half months before the present entry, Thomas asks his father, “‘Can’t you see the pictures?’” (Touching the Rock 77; On Sight 68). This
question comes up when the boy is trying to understand the fact that Hull is blind. Regarding the question of language (linguistic misunderstanding) as it relates to communication between the blind and the sighted, entries such as “Nice Day? 5 June 1983” (Touching the Rock 16; On Sight 12-3) and “‘I See What You Mean’ 1 September 1983” (Touching the Rock 28-9; On Sight 25-6) are good examples. In the former entry, Hull says, “Sometimes when I greet people by saying ‘Nice day!’ they remain unresponsive or even appear surprised.” This is because he (as a blind person) and the sighted whom he greets do not share the same conception of a nice day. The description of what a pleasant day is has changed for Hull after losing his sight: “[T]he wind has taken the place of the sun, and a nice day is a day when there is a mild breeze.” This is because the wind not only “brings into life all the sounds in my environment,” but it also feels good “in my hair and on my face, in my clothes.” For the sighted, however, usually, “[t]he idea of a nice day is largely visual. A nice day occurs when there is a clear, blue sky. The sun will be shining and it may be reasonably warm.” Since Hull bases his appreciation of a nice day on whether “a mild breeze” is blowing or not, and the sighted rely on the sun and a blue sky, the possibility of a misunderstanding between the two is high (Touching the Rock 16; On Sight 12). In order to close the gap in communication between himself and the sighted, Hull has to abandon conventional greetings. Instead, he has to be more specific in his use of language.

In the entry called “‘I See What You Mean,’” the diarist draws our attention to the daily use of language, and an annoying kind of linguistic misunderstanding that he experiences while talking with some of his sighted friends because that language is burdened with “images drawn from sight.” So when he uses expressions such as “‘Nice
to see you again” or “I see what you mean” (Touching the Rock 28; On Sight 25), his friends reply in surprise that surely he does not mean that, since he cannot see them. Although their attitude annoys him, he recognises that the problem arises from the nature of everyday language use: “The whole structure of our ordinary, everyday conversation presupposes a sighted world. . . . So when the sighted person draws attention to a little oddity in the use of a visual metaphor by a blind person, beneath this lies a subtle shift in the whole character of communication between sighted and blind people.” This suggests that when a blind person converses with the sighted, the very “structure of our ordinary, everyday conversation” highlights his/her corporeal difference. Hull believes that the disabled should nevertheless use all the resources of language, even if they should include metaphors “of the disability from which they suffer” in order to prevent the imposition of “a new, linguistic disability upon people already disabled” (Touching the Rock 29; On Sight 26). This reflection upon language use demonstrates Hull’s keen awareness of the modalities of human interaction.

The next entry about a dream, “A Secret Door 4 February 1985” (Touching the Rock 154-55; On Sight 136), comes nearly five and a half months after the previous dream narrative, “Seeing Lizzie.” Hull begins the present narrative on a gloomy note with the words “Trying to work in my office one weekend I fell into a heavy, depressed sleep,” because difficulties relating to his (lack of) knowledge of what is going on around him as well as to interacting with his children weigh heavily on his mind. This mood contrasts with the “strange and deeply moving” dream (Touching the Rock 154-55; On Sight 136) he has while sitting in his office. He interprets the dream as follows:

[T]he dream describes the various kinds of frustrations and possibilities which blindness, the necessary avenue of communication between my
interior and the world, poses. There is a strange hope in the mysterious, tightly closed but previously unnoticed door. There is always more to a familiar place than you realize. In the most intimately loved situation, if you look closely, there is often another door. (*Touching the Rock* 155; *On Sight* 136)

This dream is set in Hull’s office, which is also its subject. Therefore, that familiar space which – as described in other entries (*Touching the Rock* 53; *On Sight* 21, 46) – he regards as a sanctuary symbolises “the most intimately loved situation.” If we read the dream narrated in this entry as being connected with the difficulties he faces in interacting with his children and having a fulfilling relationship with them – dealt with in the entry which immediately precedes this one (*Touching the Rock* 150-54; *On Sight* 133-36), the mysterious door which he has never noticed before holds the promise of “a strange hope” in this matter. This hope somehow lies in his blind, sensate body, which not only causes “various kinds of frustrations,” but also holds “possibilities.” His recognition of blindness as the necessary avenue of communication between himself and the world is a self-constitutive thought. He connects the story of the dream to the question of his blindness through the idea of “the relationships between various kinds of interiors” (*Touching the Rock* 155; *On Sight* 136), which are alluded to in the dream.

While in the previous entry, both the process of dreaming and the contents of the dream deal with Hull’s blindness only metaphorically, the next dream narrative (which comes more than six months later) offers a deeply unsettling connection (for the diarist) between himself and the self portrayed in the dream. For this reason, the two narratives form an unusual pair. In “Waking Up and Going Blind 8 August 1985” (*Touching the Rock* 181-83; *On Sight* 158-60), when Hull falls asleep in his office one
weekend, he dreams “that my colleague, Michael, knocked on my door to tell me that he was finishing work and going home” (Touching the Rock 181; On Sight 158). This occurrence, which opens the dream, is auditory in character. Michael’s knocking on his office door, his spoken words, and finally his closing the door and walking away are all heard by the self portrayed within the story of the dream. Then the latter regains his sight. Hull writes:

Then an unbelievable thing happened. My room was flooded with light. With incredulity, I gazed at the walls and saw the rows of books, filing cases and labelled boxes, all in bright colours and standing out clearly and neatly with an amazing simplicity of line, form and colour. I couldn’t believe my eyes. The whole room was aglow with objects. I daren’t blink in case it should disappear. I got to my feet, terrified lest the change of position should suddenly make me realise this was a dream. (Touching the Rock 181; On Sight 158)

As we see here, the dreaming self knows that he has been blind but has now regained his sight. This self also recognises that the vivid world he is experiencing may, at any moment, fade away, leaving him blind. As the narrative progresses, he does, in fact, wake up and go blind. As the diarist observes, the awareness of his blindness haunts the dream narrative: “Within this dream there is a consciousness of being blind, since I am a blind person who, in the dream, regains sight and loses it again. The curious feature is that, although the regaining of sight is part of the dreamed story, the loss of sight is not, so to speak, something I dream about” (Touching the Rock 182; On Sight 159). This consciousness of being blind appears in the “dream story” as the anxiety of the protagonist expressed in the closing words of the previous long quote.
Further, blindness leaves a strong trace in the psyche of the sighted self who walks in the dream: “As I hurried towards the lift, I was moving my hands side to side as if I was waving my stick. . . . The thought crossed my mind, ‘There’s no need for me to do that now. Now that I can see. But how hard it will be to throw off that habit of moving my hand from side to side’” (Touching the Rock 182; On Sight 158-59). Clearly, although he wonders about this sudden recovery of sight, he is very happy about it. His thought about his no longer having to use the white cane to walk suggests his mood. So, as he walks, he thinks about the effort needed to switch from a blind person’s mode of doing things to that suitable for a sighted person. When he wakes up, the full force of being blind, which is strengthened by the ironic state of affairs in the dream that prompts the thought just quoted, numbs him: “The reality of it all was completely overwhelming, and the movement back from the dream-reality to the actual reality left my mind numbed, as with a blow. It was not merely the realisation again that I am blind, but the strange sense of passing from one reality to another, as if my mind had become derailed” (Touching the Rock 183; On Sight 159). The power of the dream narrative, “Waking Up and Going Blind,” lies in representing to Hull, in reverse and with irony, the radical nature of his transformation in actual life from being a sighted person to being a blind person who uses the cane.

The foregoing narrative and Hull’s reflection on the dream forcefully highlight his desire not to be blind. The dream narrative communicates this wish despite his awareness that he is “a blind person who, in the dream, regains sight and loses it again.” We may infer one of the main reasons for the strength of this desire from his observation about the state of his knowledge. He remarks sadly, “The vivid distinctness of perceived objects was now exchanged for the feel of my body and clothes on the
armchair, the smooth edge of the desk at which I was sitting, the knowledge that all I knew was confined within the reach of my fingers. Everything else had gone again” (Touching the Rock 183; On Sight 159-60). Thus, it is clear that in the face of the beauty of the world available to sight, all else fades into something less appealing. This concern about knowing the world as a blind person runs persistently through the text of the diaries.

The next two dream narratives involve the sea, and form a pair because of the contrast in the stories they portray. The first, “Lost Children 3 October 1985” (Touching the Rock 190-91; On Sight 166-67), tells the story of the sea taking away two of the diarist’s children – Thomas and Lizzie – by means of a “huge wave” (Touching the Rock 190; On Sight 166). Another consequence of the flood is that the depths of the sea swallow up Hull’s former, sighted life. He interprets the dream thus:

The dream is basically about the loss in family relationships which blindness causes. Thomas and Lizzie, who are just learning to understand blindness, are drowned beneath it. Imogen was born before the shock and Gabriel after it. The dream also suggests that fragments of my old life, my conscious, sighted life, are sliding and crashing down all around me into the all-engulfing world of blindness. (Touching the Rock 191; On Sight 166-67)

It is clear that the dream presents the sea as a symbol of Hull’s blindness. It is with this understanding of the all-engulfing waters that the diarist interprets the drowning of Thomas and Lizzie. He also recognises that whatever fragments are left13 “of my old

13. This recalls The line “These fragments I have shored against my ruins” (431) from The Waste Land (1922), by T. S. Eliot.
life, my conscious, sighted life” are being shattered and swallowed up by “the all-engulfing world of blindness.” This tumultuous image suggests his irrevocable journey into the blind condition. The concern that blindness has resulted in “the loss in family relationships” runs through the diaries. Another important feature of the narrative is the language in which Hull records it. Although it is a visual dream, full of action and vivid with despair, we find few images which can be thought of as being exclusively appreciable through sight. This constitutes the link between the blindness of the narrator, and symbolic blindness in the dream.

The second entry in the pair, “Navigating through the Storm 3 March 1986” (Touching the Rock 201-02; On Sight 183-84), which narrates “a sea dream,” offers a contrast to the previous one (as mentioned above) in two ways. First, the experience that the self has in the dream thrills Hull, and makes him happy. Secondly, the character of the dream is refreshingly visual in his view. He describes it as “a beautiful night of dreaming . . . a long series of most exciting adventure stories, all in full technicolour” (Touching the Rock 201) in which his “mind had been renewed, had been on holiday, had been in open spaces, knowing the freedom and excitement of living in a visual world” (On Sight 183). Thus, he experiences for a little while in dream reality, the ‘exhilarating freedom’ of being sighted. He regards the dream, then, as a “blissful” escape (Touching the Rock 202; On Sight 184) from “the all-engulfing world of blindness.” As we saw above, the previous dream symbolically presented blindness as overwhelming him.

According to the diarist, a sighted person lives “in the world” as against the blind person, who always lives “in consciousness” (Touching the Rock 202; On Sight 184). He deals with the latter state of existence in the earlier entry entitled “To Accept
or not to Accept 8 January 1984” (Touching the Rock 51-4; On Sight 45-7). In it, he explains the way in which blindness imposes an “inflexible kind of life . . . upon people” by restricting them to a rigid routine: “Familiarity, predictability, the same objects, the same people, the same routes, the same movement of the hand in order to locate this or that: take these away, and the . . . world which remains [to the blind person] is then one’s own body, the introspective consciousness” (Touching the Rock 53; On Sight 46). He experiences this enclosed, blind life “in consciousness” as a trap because he does not have access to the wide expanses of the world he used to have as a sighted person. We may mention here another dream narrative, “Two Daughters 22 June 1986” (Touching the Rock 211-12; On Sight 192-93), in which he records “two separate dreams.” Each of these involves “a recovery of sight, and each a daughter.” This pair of vivid dreams in which the “I” portrayed regains “perfect vision” (Touching the Rock 211; On Sight 192) expresses “‘[a] fantasy of perfect vision’” (In the Beginning 45). Hull says there that persons who have lost their sight late in life and, who can, therefore “remember vividly the colour and movement, the excitement and spontaneity of that [earlier] life” (In the Beginning 46), inevitably have the hope that one day their sight might be restored.

“Town Hall 26 July 1986” (Touching the Rock 213-14; On Sight 193-95) is an important section because it narrates a dream, and gives a holistic interpretation of its visual character. It records a shift in Hull’s understanding about the self through the comprehension of the unconscious life of dreams. It describes a dialectic from language to imagery, or expressed in logical terms, from sentences about the blind subject’s abstract knowledge in conscious life concerning his surroundings to vivid images in the unconscious that his dream portrays. The transmutation that the dreamer performs of
linguistic statements into “symbolic or image-like impressions and snatches of memories” (Touching the Rock 213; On Sight 194) succeeds in encompassing Hull’s past sighted life and his present blind life.

Let us recall here a distinction that Hull makes concerning the relation between blindness and his dream life in the earlier entry called “Playing the Recorder 30 November 1983.” As mentioned earlier in the chapter, there he distinguishes “between the way that blindness affects the process of dreaming, and the way it affects the contents of the dream.” Since Hull acknowledges himself to a great extent “as a blind person in these recent dreams” (Touching the Rock 213; On Sight 194), he accounts for the visual nature of “the contents of the [present] dream” by distinguishing between the dream as well as the dreamer, both of which see everything, and the blind “I” seen by them:

It is not I who see the auditorium, but the dreamer. . . . The sleeping dreamer, who is sighted, admits that the waking person, who is dreamed about, is blind. This does not mean that my subconscious does not acknowledge my blindness, for one always dreams of what one knows, what one senses, or images. . . . In the dream . . . the sequence of sentences, the running tide of thoughts expressed in language, which more or less fills waking time, is suspended in a series of images, events and emotions in which what is known is directly experienced, not mediated through the abstractions of language. (Touching the Rock 213-14; On Sight 194)

When the diarist offers this elegant interpretation of his knowledge and dream life, he integrates the contradictory facets of his selfhood. However, in stating that he “cannot
remember having dreamed about people’s faces for a long time” (*On Sight* 194) and wondering if one day “the dreamer will discover ways of knowing that people are scattered around in space, here and there, without representing them bodily, as blobs of coloured presence” (*Touching the Rock* 214; *On Sight* 195), he does retain the earlier distinction between the process of dreaming, and the contents of the dream. He is curious to know if, one day, the influence of blindness will close the gap between the two. This would mean that he would, at that point of time, have become a profoundly blind person whose dreams represent no visual images, and also recognise him as being blind.

Towards the close of the entry entitled “Your Image on the Far Side 13 October 1984” (*Touching the Rock* 141-44; *On Sight* 126-28), Hull reflects on knowing the self in its journey through time by means of visual memories, which he expresses as “my relationship with myself.” The question of visual knowledge of the self results in the diarist having (what he calls, drawing from psychology,) “a sense of cognitive dissonance” about himself: “On the one hand, I know that I am such and such a person, with certain features. On the other hand, I know myself as someone who probably no longer looks like that.” The asymmetry between the memories he has of himself, and his present appearance troubles Hull. So he says, “[I] cannot witness the work of time upon my own face.” This conflict (based on visual knowledge), which is brought about by the passage of time, produces in him “a double relationship with myself” (*Touching the Rock* 144; *On Sight* 128). We may read the following two dream narratives in the light of the above conflict in Hull’s relationship with himself through time.

Interestingly, the dream narrative “In the Public Library 23 December 1983” (*Touching the Rock* 44-5; *On Sight* 40) succeeds the entry “Playing the Recorder 30
November 1983,” which (as we have seen in the foregoing pages) plays an important role in Hull’s hermeneutics of the relationship between dreaming and waking life. “In the Public Library” presents a fascinating division of the self into two blind men. It is noteworthy that although the observing self in the dream is blind, and that he faces a few difficulties in the library due to his blindness, he observes the other blind man, reads with his eyes, and sees the rest of the library vividly. However, the fact that the observed man cannot see is clear from the narrative. A more telling difference between the two is that the former reads printed books, while the latter listens to recorded books. Thus, while the observing blind self infers, “I could tell he was blind because he was carrying big boxes of what appeared to be books on tape” (*Touching the Rock* 44; *On Sight* 40), somebody watching the first blind man might mistakenly infer that he is sighted because he reads printed material. This point is crucial since just in the previous entry, Hull has recorded a dream where for “the first time . . . blindness is recognised to be the cause of a crisis” (*Touching the Rock* 43; *On Sight* 39). So we may interpret the present entry as an occasion in which the diarist’s unconscious mind generates a dream where the blind person who can see has an encounter with a self (in his future) that lives and works comfortably in the blind condition. Thus, although the dream recognises Hull to be blind, it is full of colourful images. This makes for a contradictory reading experience.

Hull builds the narrative entry “A Fall into Consciousness 12 March 1991” (*On Sight* 197-98) from a dream which contrasts with the one analysed in the previous paragraph. In it, one man witnesses the death of another man who throws “himself through the window and [falls a long way down] to his death on the coast.” We may infer from the last statement of the entry (see below) that the “living consciousness”
that watches the “sheer descent” on to the seashore of the “border-line consciousness” 
("On Sight" 197) is Hull’s blind self; and that the observed consciousness which is falling 
and gets extinguished is his old self, “a sighted person who cannot see” ("Touching the 
Rock" ix; "On Sight" 36). The reason for the demise of the old self is, he says, that “it fell 
on the border” “between the earth and the ocean, the world of light and air, and the 
world of depth and darkness” ("On Sight" 197). Therefore, he calls that man “after all, 
someone else” ("On Sight" 198). The diarist interprets the two men pictured in his dream 
as doubles of his self. He suggests this in the “Foreword” when he says with clear 
reference to the dream under discussion, “I was prompted to start collecting new 
material when I had a dream in which I was falling from a high tower and landing on 
the shore, crushed between the land and the sea, yet alive” ("On Sight" xi). The fact that 
in this dream he is “crushed between the land and the sea” due to his fall “from a great 
height” ("On Sight" 197) but is still “alive” shows the doubled character of his self. 
Through his reflection in the entry, he paradoxically suggests that a new self is born. So 
he closes the entry by saying, “Losing sight has meant a fall into consciousness” ("On 
Sight" 198). The expression “a fall into consciousness” indicates Hull’s awareness that 
he can live happily and without fear of the unconscious as a blind man.

Hitherto in the diaries, the ocean has symbolised the dark, smothering world of 
blindness as well as Hull’s unconscious mind that teems with images and the visual 
memories of his past, sighted life. However, in this dream, he explicitly states that his 
unconscious “is no longer an abyss, an oceanic depth into which I sink, endlessly and 
remorselessly, a border upon which I must be crushed and lost” ("On Sight" 198). This is 
an allusion to the “someone else” who threw himself to his death from a great height, 
his double who is now dead on the margin of the dark deep. The image presented in the
foregoing quote also reminds us of the scenario described in the dream narratives “Sinking 16 September 1983.” His other self, the living consciousness, is blind, alive, and well. The dream is, however, vividly visual. We may interpret this point in accordance with the distinction\footnote{14} between the sighted dreamer and the blind waking person “who is dreamed about.” Therefore, the following statement is valid for the dream narrated in the present entry: “The fact that I am seen by the dream, and, indeed, that everything in the dream is seen by the dreamer, is no failure to acknowledge that I, who appear as part of the content of the dream, am blind” (Touching the Rock 213; On Sight 194). The confident knowledge that he can live life as a blind person is symbolically presented by his unconscious in the form of a dream story in which the birth of a new self is recognised through the death of an old one. It is, in this way, I think, that his unconscious has been transformed into “my refreshment space which I fill; it is the proportions of my body, no larger than my body;” and it is made up of “warm waters” passing through which he is “reborn” and baptised.\footnote{15} The phrase “the proportions of my body” leads directly to Hull’s description of his unconscious, which refreshes him, as “my coffin, made for my body,” of which he is “not afraid” (On Sight 198). In this paradoxical wise is Hull’s living, blind self born. The figuring of his unconscious as a coffin may suggest the dissolution of this self and the possible birth of another, new one – an acknowledgement of the changing nature of the self.

\footnote{14} Hull makes this distinction in the entry “Town Hall 26 July 1986,” which was recorded more than four and a half years before “A Fall into Consciousness.”

\footnote{15} We may present here a thought from Planet of the Blind, which expresses a similar liberating acceptance of blindness: “When one is returned to life” (175) after having grown up “wearing chains like Houdini, trying to pull off a magic trick” (178), Kuusisto says, “everything is compelling” (175).
4.4. The Self-Constitutive Power of Archetypes

Let us now turn to a matter which is closely related to the life of dreams and its impact on conscious existence: potent images and archetypes of blindness as well as of religion which possess self-constitutive power. Coming twenty days after the early dream narrative “The Waterfall 6 October 1983,” the entry entitled “Reaching into Clouds 27 October 1983” (Touching the Rock 40-1; On Sight 36) presents “a sort of daydream” or “fantasy” which figures Hull’s blindness and abruptly alters his self-conception. He imagines that a veil of sooty smoke covers first his children, then his wife, eventually his house, and finally the whole world, thereby taking all these from his sight and enclosing them “within a black cloud” (Touching the Rock 40). When he discovers that friends of the family “can see through these black clouds,” and that only he cannot do so, he realises that “The black clouds are in me,” and not outside, surrounding everybody and everything. Thus, the black clouds metaphorise the blindness within him, and he conceives of it as a “mysterious curse” (Touching the Rock 41) that he is under. This imagined experience forces him to realise that he is a blind person as opposed to a sighted one: “This fantasy troubles me. I have been thinking to myself that I am not a blind person, but a sighted person who cannot see. In this fantasy I have to realise that the blindness is inside me. The black cloud is in my brain. It surrounds my consciousness” (Touching the Rock 41; On Sight 36). We may understand these self-constitutive words in the light of his reference to the “passage over the frontier” (On Sight xi) between sight and blindness. In this entry, he begins to make the transition, which move is prompted by his realisation of the untenability of the self-conception that he has been harbouring until now.

The foregoing fantasy connects with the narrative of Hull’s being trapped deep
in a mineshaft under a solid mountain. The diarist discusses this “persistent image” (Touching the Rock 47; On Sight 42) in the entry entitled “Panic in a Mineshaft 6 January 1984” (Touching the Rock 45-8; On Sight 40-2). When he has an asthmatic attack, the difficulty in breathing leads to a powerful feeling “that I was being strangled, suffocated by the blackness,” and gives rise to the oppressive image. It dramatises Hull’s experience of going blind in terms of a spatial movement, where he is remorselessly carried “in a little coal-truck . . . deeper and deeper into the hillside” further and further from the fast-diminishing “round window of light at the end of the tunnel” (Touching the Rock 47; On Sight 42). This image brings out Hull’s journey through time, away from his past, sighted life (Touching the Rock 140; On Sight 125). Thus, he is thoroughly isolated by his blindness. Then the mountain “hides the light, the day, the air” (Touching the Rock 47), and he knows “now that between me and the world there lies this mountain of rock, or this impenetrable mass of smoky veil which is heavy and hot like the rock itself” (Touching the Rock 47-8; On Sight 42). The “impenetrable mass of smoky veil,” which oppresses Hull, is akin to the “inky-black cloud” (Touching the Rock 40; On Sight 36) that engulfs his world in the fantasy discussed above. The important point to note with regard to this series of images is their power to fill the subconscious and conscious parts of Hull’s mind with a pervasive sense of despair. However, in the late section “Can Sighted and Blind People Understand Each Other? 15 June 1991,” the diarist offers the following remark

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16. I introduce this image in chapter 2 (71).

17. Hull reports in “‘It’s Like Going Down and Down’ 20 April 1986” (Touching the Rock 203-04; On Sight 184-85) that his little daughter Lizzie achieves an impressive “insight into the blind condition” when she compares going blind with the experience of “going down . . . to the bottom of a very . . . deep well where you can never get out” (Touching the Rock 204; On Sight 185). He recognises her remarkable understanding of his traumatic experience of great loss.
concerning the image of the tunnel: “The dark tunnel under the mountain holds no fears for me anymore; I am nestled within it like a bat that has learned to hang upside-down in this subterranean cavern” (*On Sight* 209). These words express his state of being accustomed to the world of blindness. Nevertheless, he and Marilyn are only too aware of the radical difference between their respective worlds. This is to say that Hull as a blind man and his wife as a sighted woman possess different consciousnesses.

It is important to emphasise at this point that the image of the tunnel appears repeatedly in Hull’s diary entries as a narrative device. The diarist describes “the dramatic realisation of the remoteness of [his] visual past,” which he comes to on his visit to Melbourne, by using the image of “turning the corner in a tunnel” (*Touching the Rock* 140; *On Sight* 125). He also employs the powerful figuration of the experience of going blind “as a journey into a dark tunnel” (*Touching the Rock* 141; *On Sight* 126) to dramatise “the strange poignancy and confusion” he experiences “in the presence of loved people whom once I saw but now no longer see.” This conflict consists in realising that, as he grows older in the blind condition, he moves further and further away from the remembered images of loved people. This means that he cannot hold on to their looks even though he might wish to do so, because as those people grow older, their appearances change. This state of affairs generates in Hull’s mind what he calls “cognitive dissonance” (*Touching the Rock* 142; *On Sight* 127). Besides illustrating the psychological power of the tunnel image, the foregoing discussion foregrounds the importance to Hull of human relationships.

In “To Accept or not to Accept 8 January 1984,” the diarist continues his reflection on “experiences of panic,” and takes his thought in a religious direction. He calls blindness “a kind of religious crisis” (*Touching the Rock* 51; *On Sight* 45). This
unacceptable reality makes him feel helpless, and leads to the linking of two powerful images (appearing in “Sinking 16 September 1983” as well as in the entry discussed in the previous paragraph) that represent his state of mind:

The sense of subterranean or subconscious weight oppresses me, and I link in my mind the dream image of the huge, water-soaked hulk being dragged down into the depths with my waking reverie about the little coal-truck being driven remorselessly deeper and deeper beneath the infinite weight of the mountain. The common feature is irresistible heaviness. (*Touching the Rock* 52; *On Sight* 45)

This mental response involving the conjunction of oppressive symbols reveals the origin of Hull’s agony as lying in his being forcibly removed from the midst of the world he has known until now as a sighted person and being plunged into the alien world of the blind. He theorises his experience by drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s explanation of why people who have lost their sight or the use of their limbs continue to live in past time, when their bodies were ‘whole.’ Not recognising their present reality, wherein their physical make-up does not include sight or (the use of) limbs, makes it very difficult for them ever to accept their selves completely. The distinction (or gap in the disabled person’s corporeality) between “the ordinary, habitual body” and “the actual body” (Merleau-Ponty 95; *On Sight* 175) results in conflicts in the person’s self-conception. Moreover, this dilemma generates the “poignant tension between past and present time,” which Hull describes as “the real heart of the emotions of disability” (*On Sight* 176). So he regards blindness as a calamity. He considers the constant performance of work as The antidote to the sense of helplessness that he experiences in the face of sight loss: adopting “tiny techniques which help one to do tiny things step by
step” (Touching the Rock 52; On Sight 45) provides his brain with a continuous series of tasks to perform (Touching the Rock 53; On Sight 46). Reflecting on these powerful symbols leads Hull to the archetypes of light and darkness, which generate what he describes as the archetype of blindness (On Sight 54).

Illustrating the strategy he adopts to combat his “sense of pointless desolation” (Touching the Rock 52; On Sight 45), Hull comes to realise, in a way similar to John Milton’s speaker in the poem “On His Blindness,” that he is “not expected to solve the problem of blindness.” So he declares to his God, “If I can take one step, it is yours” (Touching the Rock 52; On Sight 46). Every now and then in the diaries, he achieves a sense of peace with his blind self as in the foregoing words. However, he frequently experiences a deep oppression of spirit. In “Blindness as an Archetype 23 February 1984” (On Sight 54), he discusses why blindness is not regarded merely as a physical condition but is reduced to a metaphor: “Blindness is the archetype of the loss of consciousness. . . . In the blind person, one confronts the symbol of the loss of the ordered, intelligent life.” This statement explains why the blind person is reduced from his or her individual self to being a symbol of the human condition of unconsciousness. This is related to the metaphoric association of light, knowledge, and consciousness. Since darkness is one of the two terms in the binary of light and darkness, it symbolises ignorance, which ushers in the other associations described in the section. They bring to mind the image of Hull’s being trapped in a mineshaft under the weight of a mountain (Touching the Rock 47; On Sight 42). The following words explain the shift in self-conception and panic that a person who is becoming blind experiences: “The sighted person who goes blind confronts in his or her own person the actual presence of

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18. The reader will find indications of a de-symbolisation in Chapter 5 (179-80, 181-83)
the archetype which had been dimly feared. The archetype will now be activated, not by being confronted in a stranger, but by being a fact of one’s own daily experience” (*On Sight* 54). In the case of the person who is losing his/her sight, the dimly-feared archetype of blindness becomes a personal reality. This leads to depression and panic.

The section “Fighting Depression 24 February 1984” (*Touching the Rock* 62-5; *On Sight* 54-6) elaborates on the effects of the archetypes of blindness and light on Hull’s current self-conception. Although the discussion is mainly about depression, he refers to both depression and panic, thus connecting the two ways in which he goes “to pieces” (*Touching the Rock* 63), or experiences the dissolution of the self. Thus, he says, “I am dissolving” (*Touching the Rock* 64; *On Sight* 55). He undergoes these experiences in social situations, especially when he is involved “in playing with the children” (*Touching the Rock* 62; *On Sight* 54). It is at such times that the oppressive archetype of blindness assaults his selfhood. For Hull, self-dissolution is fundamentally connected to his inability in blindness to see his body, and know his image (*On Sight* 55). His appeal to the archetype of light in the Biblical passage of “the Aaronic Blessing” (*Touching the Rock* 64; *On Sight* 56), which dispels the darkness of the archetype of blindness, is ultimately deceptive because the world of light is locked to the blind person. So he says, “By obliterating the darkness, it obliterates me” (*Touching the Rock* 65; *On Sight* 56). In this realisation, we see that Hull is on the threshold of making a transition.

This happens in “Beyond Light and Darkness 26 February 1984” (*Touching the Rock* 65; *On Sight* 56) when Thomas’s words, “‘Thomas needs the light. Daddy doesn’t need the light’” prompt an epiphany in Hull by reminding him of the equality of light and darkness to God as dealt with in Psalm 139.12. (He reflects on this psalm in two
more sections which succeed “Beyond Light and Darkness.”) Thus, he discovers the alternative archetype “which transcends and unifies at a higher level” (Touching the Rock 65; On Sight 56) the two opposing archetypes of darkness and light. Both archetypes negate his existence as a blind person: one by making him “feel as if I have become nothing” (Touching the Rock 62; On Sight 54); and the other by oppressing him “by the brightness of its contrast” (Touching the Rock 65; On Sight 56). However, the above-mentioned psalm describes, with a deep spiritual power that moves Hull, “the religious experience of the blind person” (On Sight 58). It clarifies that the light is not necessary for God “to know and the darkness cannot prevent him from knowing” (On Sight 59). So God knows Hull, and makes “himself known to me in the manner which suits my condition.” “He will not show himself to me,” says the diarist, and continues, “He will remember my blindness” (Touching the Rock 68; On Sight 58). So God will take Hull by the hand, and guide him. The diarist feels blessed because he is known by his God (Touching the Rock 68-71; On Sight 58-60). Thus, Hull’s blindness enables him to achieve fresh contact with, and nearness to, the divine being.

By writing at length about Hull’s dream narratives, which come at regular intervals, as well as about sections dwelling on archetypes in his diaries, I have tried to illustrate his interpretation of the links that he considers to exist between his conscious and unconscious life. He asserts this in the following words, just before the manuscript went for publication: “[I]t is through the dreaming life that the changes in the relationship between consciousness and unconsciousness are first realised” (On Sight xiii). Further, I have attempted to indicate the major issues that inform with urgent power his evolving thinking about his blindness. This allows the reader to follow the movement in Hull’s selfhood through time by means of his diary entries recorded over
four years and spanning eight years, from June 1983 to August 1991. In the next chapter, I will examine the interlinked issues of how Hull, as a blind person, knows the world and the self as he reflects on his interaction with his surroundings.