

CHAPTER 3:

THE HAT ON THE LETTER O:
MAJOR THEMES

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The present chapter attempts to study Hasluck's short stories in his collection *The Hat on the Letter O and Other Stories* from the thematic point of view. The main approach in the present chapter, however, is to bring into focus the major themes such as brotherly involvement, betrayal, violence, love, friendship, patience, and childhood etc. that the author touches on in his short stories. The themes, therefore, are discussed one after another in the following manner:

THE THEME OF BROTHERLY INVOLVEMENT:

The theme of brotherly involvement has most dominantly been developed in the short story 'My Brother's School'. The story is a fair example of love, understanding, respect, care and brotherly attachment of the two brothers. Colin, the narrator's elder brother, does his best to settle in the narrator at Deakin Grammar School without bloodshed and tears. Though the narrator is reticent, unsure and confused, Colin makes such attempts that others would be friendly with his younger brother. Colin, from the start, establishes good reputation of the narrator and spreads the news that his brother is a star at tennis. Therefore, Ted Dunn, the school champion at tennis, George Vitos, Peter Newman and others

become friendly with the narrator within a short time and, so, the narrator has no occasion of being lonely, displaced or as if outsider at school. Colin also sees that his younger brother participates in other activities as well, he recruits him in swimming team of which he is a captain. Colin makes him to participate in the annual debate against the girl's school. This has left a mark apparently and develops his skill of argumentation which gives him confidence and sets his aim of being a lawyer in future. When the narrator, inspired by Gene Krupa, becomes a drummer in the Red Hill mod, Colin encourages him further and assures that they are worth managing and even includes them in the programme at the school concert. The narrator listens to music with his brother and other friends and even enjoys a film show on every Saturday. He has a lot of fun with his friends and they tease one another in the class. This gives no feeling of loneliness to narrator and he feels that they are very witty. He has previously been a devotee of Australian Rules, so he takes up Rugby. He also goes on trip to Jervis Bay to play the naval Cadets.

It is, thus, obvious that every act of Colin is directed at goodness of his younger brother. This displays the real love, respect, care and attachment for the younger brother. Colin makes all possible efforts to make the stay of his brother at school

pleasant, enjoyable and memorable. The narrator also equally realises the goodness in the heart of his brother. He realises the tender heartedness of his brother when, once, their mother comes to visit them at school. Colin goes straight up over the wire fence jumping to the ground on the far side and reaches her in less than a minute. He, then, expresses his love for her caring the bruise below her knee. This incident makes the narrator once again see the true and loving nature of his brother.

The story, thus, depicts the brotherly involvement, especially the elder brother's love, respect and care for the younger brother. The narrator has been at that school for less than a year but still very vividly he remembers everything even after many years: grand welcome given to Princess Alexandra at Manuka Oval; eating cakes with his friends beside the small bell-tower, and all that. He recalls:

I haven't been back to the school for many years, not since it lost its name, and I don't know whether the bell-tower is still there in the afternoon sunlight. For me, it is.¹

Thus, these pleasant and memorable feelings the narrator enjoys due to his brother, Colin.

Again, the theme of brotherly involvement which finds expression in the story 'My Brother's Movie' has two different dimensions. The brotherly involvement between the narrator and his brother is directed towards the good cause and aims at producing

something better creatively whereas the Clarke brothers, Tom Clarke and John Clarke, come together for bad cause and violence and agitation in the society. In the first place, the brotherly involvement between the narrator and his brother intends to create something better and better with fruitful discussion. The narrator's brother has planned a movie and, so, he invites the narrator time and again to contribute to the script. The narrator has done months of legal research and points out the controversies in the script. He reminds everyone that they cannot ignore the facts. He proves that the case against John Clarke was weaker than the case against his elder brother Tom Clarke. According to him it is necessary to take into account some facts to make the movie convincing. In the end, however, everything is worked out with his brother's final opinion as it is his brother's movie, taking into account financial problems of the investor.

On the contrary, the brotherly involvement of the Clarke brothers is shown to cause disturbance to the social peace and harmony. Tom Clarke and his gang have made the Braidwood district lawless. There seems to be no stopping Tom Clarke and his gang. These bushrangers have better guns and faster horses than the regular police. In addition, the network of friends, relatives and sympathizers keeps them constantly forewarned of danger. Tom

Clarke is also joined by his younger brother, John Clarke, and then, they are riding high. The Clarke brothers have raided properties, held up travellers, outwitted their pursuers. As a consequence of the Nerrigundah raid, Tom Clarke is outlawed under the Felons Apprehension Act. This indicates the worst nature of their crimes in the society. They even kill the special detectives very mercilessly and give, through this, warning to bounty hunters. Tom Clarke is charged with nine robberies of mails and thirty-six of individuals. Most of the other members of the gang are killed in shoot-outs and, finally, the Clarke brothers are hanged till death. Their brotherly involvement, thus, comes to an end with the end of their lives. The story, 'My Brother's Movie', thus, shows two different dimensions of brotherly involvement.

The theme of brotherly involvement is also seen in the relations between the narrator of the story and his brother in the story entitled 'Storyteller'. The narrator is always inspired to think on different creative levels by his elder brother. After reading a novel or a story the narrator's brother would ask such questions that would provoke his thinking and imaginative power. The narrator's elder brother even further fires the narrator's imagination with the promise of making journey to the factual-cum-fictional places. He wants to be a successful film-maker and so he is always on the lookout for fresh

material, new ways of telling a tale, means of turning fact into fiction, of letting one story into another as Faulkner did. The narrator's brother, unfortunately, dies without ever making journey to Dixieland, the land of their dreams. The narrator's subsequent act of exploring the fabled south, the fictional Yoknapatawapha Country of William Faulkner, by himself can be seen as the wish-fulfilment of his brother. In addition, the story has autobiographical overtones. The narrator can be identified with the author whose brother also died early. Hasluck, here, seems to express his intense grief at the death of his brother. The narrator, so also Hasluck, develops his personality and attains success due to inspiration from his brother. Hasluck's leisure pursuit of bushwalking also can be seen in the narrator himself.

The brotherly relations depicted in the story 'The Whole Truth' can be looked as one more aspect of the theme of brotherly involvement. The narrator, the journalist by profession, comes to know that the Editor is toying with the idea of doing a series of features on scandals in public life. Immediately, he has something more ambitious in mind-- a unifying view-point, an inquiry into the need for candour in public life, a synthesis of the elements common to various betrayals of trust, et cetera. He, therefore, leaves to the South coast to the bungalow of his friend to work in a peaceful

atmosphere. He tries his best to get the things he had initially in mind on to the paper but the strange mood of lassitude brings his work to standstill. One day laying there in the sun by the swimming pool the narrator has a thought about his two brothers, one full-fledged lawyer and the other articled clerk. Both have very high opinion about their brother, the narrator. The lawyer is very confident about his brother's work and he can prove the same with progress chart. Similarly, the articled clerk is fond of describing his brother, the narrator, as a "great facts man". This brings forth the love, attachment and high regard for each other among brothers. The narrator imagines that the thought that he failed to produce the projected manuscript reaches his brothers disturbs him further. The whole matter is too much for the narrator and he gives up thinking about it. The thought of brothers, thus, reminds the narrator of his work and the need to complete the same giving up the feeling of lassitude. The story, thus, depicts the friendly and loving relations among the brothers.

THE THEME OF BETRAYAL:

'Flowstone' deals with the theme of betrayal. The feeling of being betrayed grips the mind of Jesus, the narrator. Jesus recalls the particular holiday he had spent with Karen in her flat. The image of the room with all its features lingers in his mind. He had been

there on that fine afternoon and the two had been enjoying the warmth of each other's body in the bed. Someone, suddenly, knocks on the door. Though Karen assures him that the one who is knocking must, probably, be Danielle, her girlfriend, but Jesus doubts and distrusts her profoundly. He feels that the visitor is not Danielle and that, then, sooner or later he will be in the position of the one who is obliged to knock fruitlessly or to leave the place. He is filled with an overwhelming sadness and sympathy for the three of them concerned. He feels that he, like the stranger outside the door, is also betrayed. He says:

I am again stirred by the rage which seized me at first plea for admission, being certain that, at some time before I leave, an occasion will surely come when I myself will find the door locked against me; when I myself, alone on the exposed gallery which surrounds the courtyard at this level of the block of flats, will be obliged to stand there empty-handed, visualizing the inhabitants of the room at their love-making, knowing that I, the visitor, will be discounted by them with some idle banter; that I, the intruder, will be sent on my way, having heard no sound from within, but being aware, nonetheless, that I am the object of some frivolous ridicule.²

Jesus tries to distract his attention from the thought of being betrayed and focuses on each feature of the room. He looks at the heavy ashtray which is a bizarre curio about the size of a half-brick, the curtains which are pulled back so as to reveal the placid waters of the bay below. He also looks at the picture of a man in bushman's

clothes on the opposite wall. Jesus and Karen both try to interpret the feelings of the man. Jesus, finally, agrees with Karen's opinion that the man is not thinking of anything but he is just enjoying the warmth of the day. The feeling of being betrayed, however, never leaves his mind. When the knocking resumes, he whispers:

Sooner or later I'll be the one in his position. I'll be the one on the doorstep. The one obliged to knock fruitlessly or to leave.³

Jesus thinks time and again that whoever it is will soon go. Thus, the thought that he is, like the stranger outside the door, betrayed haunts Jesus all the time.

'Bert', one more story in the collection *The Hat on the Letter O and Other Stories*, also deals with the theme of betrayal. Andy, the protagonist, is accused of two wilful assaults on the two women, Jenny, his wife, and Betty, his sister. He, for some time, was working at Burragine for Mrs Taylor. Then, he comes back to Seven Chain with his wife and children. On a Saturday when Andy returns home after a drink in a pub, the squabble starts between the husband and the wife. It is a big fight and, then, Jenny declares that she wanted to run off to Tullawarra with Bert. Andy feels betrayed and this provokes him further. In anger Andy hits Jenny with a lump of wood, however, at the same time Betty comes in between and is also hit in the course of the general confusion. Andy leaves home

and, then, comes back half an hour later with a hatchet and hits Jenny. The two women, serious with lacerations, are admitted and treated at District Hospital. Andy is arrested and, thus, is charged with two aggravated assaults. He, then, confesses his offence and pleads for being guilty. The lawyer defends Andy's action and points out in the court that the real cause of the quarrel between the husband and the wife was the presence at the camp of a man called Bert who was trying to entice Andy's wife away from the camp. He further adds that Andy, the Accused, now regrets what he did. He, therefore, requests the Magistrate to make an order that will permit the Accused to return to his own people. He also calls the old man, the lessee of the property at Seven Chain, as an evidence to the general background and character of the Accused. The Magistrate, like the Prosecutor, also finds it difficult as who is to blame in such a domestic squabble. He, finally, puts the Accused on a Bond to be of good behaviour for a period of twelve months.

The story, thus, moves around the domestic squabble and its aftermath. However, at the centre of it, there is the betrayal of the husband by the wife.

The theme of betrayal is also depicted in the story entitled 'The Old Days'. Cleary, the protagonist enjoys a pool side party at a bar alongwith his friends including Tony, Brackets and Frank

Corbett. All these friends alongwith three girls from the office gather at a bar. Helen has betrayed them telling a lie that her husband has gone for the weekend. Helen's Husband, however, returns and forces them all out. In commotion, Tony deliberately bumps Frank Corbett off-balance and topples him into the pool. Frank, already drunk, flounders to the edge of the pool somehow and Cleary manages to drag him out. On their return journey in a car they blame and abuse Helen for betrayal.

Similarly, Cleary also betrays the faith of Betty with whom he lives now. He tells a lie that he just went to have a quiet beer. Betty, however, knows that he must have been at party with office girls because Cleary used to tell the same thing to his wife when he was with Betty. Cleary realises that she has got the secret and he prefers to remain silent. The story, thus, depicts the betrayal of faith.

THE THEME OF VIOLENCE:

The theme of violence is the major theme in 'The Blindfold Horse'. The violence, at its worst, is seen in the bull-fight. The narrator, in his visit to Arles, is surprised and tempted by large posters out on a billboard near the entrance of the amphitheatre showing a thick-set truculent bull charging through dust towards the swirling uplifted cape of a slim matador. He enters the amphitheatre to see the bull-fight, for it was a relief to see such a spectacle on the

particular afternoon. As the gates to one tunnel swing open, six matadors with their assistants march into the ring in formation. They are followed by two men on horseback. The leading matador, then, salutes a dignitary in the stands. The bull also comes galloping into the centre of the ring and, then, paws the sand twice and stops. One of the banderilleros dangles his pink cape over the barricade, shaking it slightly. The bull moves a few steps in that direction. When the bull charges, the man skips nimbly aside, and let it pass under his cape and runs frantically to the other side of the ring. This continues for a few minutes; first one and then the other banderillero tempting the bull into action.

The bull, at first, is full of energy; however, it is unable to get to grips with its opponents but gains confidence. The bull, at last, rounds on the less courageous of the two banderilleros and gores and gores him again. The matador, hence, comes quickly to the aid of his assistant and approaches the bull shouting, distracting it and tempting it away with his cape. He is joined by the picador. The bull, however, immediately rounds on the horse and charges it with a solid thud. The two animals, in consequence, lock against each other and stagger across the ring. But, the picador hits and buries his spear in the shoulder of the bull, deep in the hump of muscle. The narrator, finally, is seized by a kind of horror to see the spear

pushing deeper and deeper into that bull flesh until the entire flank of the bull is running with blood. The matador also jabs two darts into the hump of the bull. Four more darts are, then, jabbed into the bull in the same way. The bull keeps fighting against its opponents, however, finally, it stands up motionless, tired. The bull is, thus, defeated and, in the end, according to the ritual, the matador raises the sword and plunges in the blade and the bull crumples lifeless there in the sand. The narrator ponders:

I found myself concentrating not upon the outcome but upon the purity of the ritual. There was an undoubted fascination in the spectacle of a man testing his own courage with acts of calculated recklessness until, at last, it seemed, the man was doing battle with himself. Indeed, I became pretentious and purported to assess the merits of each bullfighter's performance; my eyes attracted to the dexterity of the red cape until, like the foolish bull, I tended to forget the sword concealed in the folds of that deceptive garment which was never made for wearing.⁴

The bull, is thus, killed very violently and mercilessly, with deception, in the bull-fight.

The theme of violence is also reflected in 'Bert'. Andy, an aboriginal defendant, was responsible for the violence to the two women, Jenny, his wife, and Betty, his sister. The violence, however, is provoked by Bert, perhaps a drifter, who tries to entice away Andy's wife. In the course of a big quarrel Jenny declares that she wanted to run off to Tullawarra with Bert. Andy, provoked by her

behaviour, strikes her with a lump of wood lying nearby. Betty, however, comes in between the two and Andy hits her in the course of the general confusion. In this quarrel, Jenny and Betty are badly injured with cuts and lacerations. Then, Andy, the Accused, is arrested and is charged with two wilful assaults. The violence, thus, disturbs the family peace and life.

'My Brother's Movie' is one more story that deals with the theme of violence. The Clarke brothers, Tom Clarke and John Clarke, represent the violence in the society. They have raided properties, held up travellers and outwitted their pursuers. On one occasion, they take the troopers prisoner and escape with the party. Tom Clarke, exclusive of murders, is charged with nine robberies of mail and thirty-six of individuals. As a consequence of the Nerrigundah raid he is outlawed under Felons Apprehension Act. It seemed that there is no stopping to the violence of Tom Clarke and his gang. The violence, at its height, of the gang can be seen in its brutal killings of the Special detectives that one of the Special detectives had been shot dead in a kneeling position—as if begging for mercy. The violence is apparent in other scenes of the story. Billy Noonang, a part Aborigine, is also shot dead violently and brutally by someone and, then, his body is weighted down with a bag of stones. This indicates that violence is deep-rooted in the

society. The Clarke brothers, the celluloid bushrangers, at last, were hanged. Therefore, while passing the judgement, the trial judge says:

Thomas Clarke, exclusive of murders, you stand charged with nine robberies of mails and thirty-six of individuals. But where is the value of this course of violence? You have not one shilling in the world to call your own. And yet you bushrangers, the scum of the earth, the lowest of the low, the most wicked of the wicked, are occasionally held up for our admiration. It is the old leaven of convictism not worked out. You should be hanged, not as retribution, but because your deaths are necessary for the peace, order and safety of society.⁵

THE THEME OF LOVE:

The theme of love is dealt with in the short story entitled 'Medley'. The story deals with parents' love and concern for a son. Rowe, the owner of a firm, and his wife, Joan, wait for a long time for their son, Bob, to return from the party. As soon as Rowe puts out the bedside lamp, the phone begins ringing. When he picks up the receiver, he finds Jenkins, one of his employees, on the other end. Jenkins goes on complaining about the firm and its management. He, in particular, has a complaint about Rowe's son, Bob, who is given a position with a desk and some files and authority to countersign cheques within a short time. This gives Jenkins, as he worked many years for the firm, the feeling of being belittled and humiliated. He, therefore, wants to settle the matter

once and for all. He follows the advice of his wife and rings immediately without bothering about the midnight. Rowe tells him that they will talk about this on Monday. He feels very anxious for his son to call at this time. But, Jenkins does not seem to stop at all. He goes on talking about his wife's views in this matter. He makes the point about the pay rise. He further expresses the need to have automatic typewriter in the office so as to make his work more easy and fast. When Rowe expresses the financial problems of the firm, Jenkins mentions Rowe's affair with the girl from the Courier Service and the points relating to the money spent on her. Rowe gets very much angry and tells Jenkins to stay off the line. Joan thinks that the bastard Jenkins should be dismissed from the job. They wait very anxiously for their son to call. However, Jenkins, to their irritation, calls again to tie up the loose ends. Jenkins' wife makes the point that what they, he and his boss, were talking was the firm's business and it should be on the firm's time. As Jenkins, again, does not seem to stop at all, Rowe gets very much angry and tells Jenkins to get off the line and to stay off it. Joan also gets very much angry with Jenkins and, then, she expresses her concern about Bob. Rowe tries to induce sleep from the familiar image. He, however, is interrupted by Joan's voice telling him to go and get their son. But, Rowe feels that Bob should learn to cope for himself.

He expects that Bob should have that much understanding.

The story, thus, deals with the theme of love, particularly the parents' love for their son.

Another story 'The Hat on the Letter O' also deals with the theme of love, however, the love in this story remains unexpressed. Jesus, the widow, recounts here her first encounter with John, a Canadian. Her mother, sister and brother all feel that she must get married and start afresh her life once again. She, therefore, is forced to meet this man called John or Jean. She recalls her very first visit to his flat. She feels that the whole thing was a fiasco from the start, for she went from confusion to other confusions. First, she feels it really depressing when John fastens the seat belt on her in a car without touching her once. She feels as if she is sitting there like a plague. She feels amused and bewildered when John tells her to wash up. She, however, sorts it all out after a couple of hard minutes during the course of their conversation. She comes to know that John is a French Canadian and, so, he says that way. She makes a mistake while referring to John's flat that it looks like a pigsty, which makes John look a bit sheepish. After they had finished off hamburgers, they talk about languages and different customs between countries and so on. John tells her his grief, then, he talks about his teacher at school. Jesus, however, does not show

any interest and actually hates him. Jesus also recalls the day when John was brought to their house by her brother. Everybody talks about John as a very sweet and good man. She, however, thinks otherwise. She likes John's look and feels that he has friendly eyes and quite sexy too. Afterwards, John comes to their house on weekends. He plays with the kids of Jesus out in the garden and takes them swimming and off to movies. Jesus, however, feels vexed at his good manners, for he never touches her once even on their way back to her house. John never makes a pass at her, that is too depressing for Jesus. She points out that in their relationship John only ever kissed Jesus once. The truth, however, was that it was more Jesus kissing John than he kissing her. Jesus, owing to vile mind, could not make it out that he loved her, nor could John, owing to his shy nature, express his love. Jesus says:

I don't know what to think. I never found out whether he liked me. I think he did. I hope he did. He must have to some extent. He kept coming round. Perhaps I scared him off. Perhaps I was looking peaky. I know I talk too much. But how can you stop being what you are? He was such a gentle man, really. With his friendly eyes and handshaking and everything. A shy man, I suppose. Perhaps we never got to know each other properly.⁶

Their love, thus, remains unexpressed.

THE THEME OF FRIENDSHIP:

The theme of friendship is also one of the significant themes in 'The Old Days'. Cleary and his friends including Tony, Frank Corbett, and Brackets make most out of their friendship. They, once, enjoy a pool side party with three girls from the office. Their joy, however, is marred when Helen's husband returns home and pushes them out of the house. In commotion, Frank Corbett, already drunk a lot, is pushed into the pool. He struggles to come to the edge of the pool and Cleary manages to drag him out. On their way back home in a car, all make fun of Frank. Frank, however, was serious about what he was going to say when he gets home. Cleary, trying to keep the mood of fellowship alive, suggests Frank that he should tell at home that he was trying to walk on water. They, at last, give Frank a way out that he should tell he was helping his mates. They, thus, enjoy each others' company.

The theme of friendship is reflected in the story entitled 'Pete the Rat's Stew'. Les remembers his friends at Oxford during the course of casual talk with Vernon who is just back from Oxford. Vernon and Les meet in the party at Colin's house. Les, as he had been at Oxford for some time, recalls those days and enquires about various things there. He particularly remembers the day when he was offered a plate of brownish looking muck at Pete the Rat's

flat. He explores the contents of his plate with caution, for he was not sure of what the type of dish it was. At that time, fortunately, Clement, his friend, his mentor, a man experienced in these matters, comes to his rescue. Clement explains to Les that it was a stew. Thus the casual talk between Les and Vernon brings back the memories of friendship of Les.

'My brother's School' also deals with the theme of friendship. The narrator, though reticent, becomes friend of Ted Dunn, George Vitos, Peter Newman and other classmates. He enjoys his school days and had a lot of fun. These friends especially enjoys the Biology class with their experiment on the rat. They also tease one another all the time. The narrator feels that they were very witty. He also becomes a drummer in the Red Hill mob. It was his friendship with George Vitos that helps him set his aim of being a lawyer in future. The narrator, thus, highlights his pleasant stay at Deakin Grammar School due to his friendly relations with others

THE THEME OF PATIENCE:

The theme of patience has been mainly developed in the short story entitled 'Orlick'. Bowra's failure to realise the importance of patience is responsible for his failure to learn anything in life. Bailey, the narrator, and Bowra joined the city law firm as articled clerks on the same day. Bowra, being too much ambitious, seems to

be impatient and expects so many things in a short time. He complains of boredom and demands more responsible work. He criticises the things continuously due to his restlessness. He also once threatens the firm with a pay claim. He is, further, suspected to have relation with the senior partner in a rival firm, Bowra, Cambell and Co. He is also said to be unsteady and lacking in character. He is, therefore, at last, placed under the supervision of the managing clerk's secretary and the exact scope of his duties is unspecified. As Bowra is left with little work he becomes objective about his misfortune and transforms his experience into art. He, consequently, works out several dramatic dialogues which are an oblique commentary on the surroundings. He seems to be indulged in imaginary world. While dealing with the clients, he takes too lightly and depends much on Orlick, an omnipotent law clerk. He, thus, overreaches himself, for Orlick is not the sort of man to remain an underpaid and insignificant research hack in the basement forever. Orlick's intelligence and easy charm quickly sets him apart from his fellows. Most importantly, Bowra has ceased to care and, then, eventually, his supply of work from above steadily diminishes until finally he is left to his own devices. He is even not permitted to assist Bailey in carrying documents to the land registry. He, therefore, has no alternative but to resign. Bailey, on the contrary,

steps up the every rung of the professional ladder very slowly and steadily. Unfortunately, unfavourable comparisons are drawn between Bowra and Bailey. This, however, strengthens the view that Bailey has some future in the law. He gets promotion and, thus, success in the profession. Bailey's patience is finally rewarded when he listens to James C. Hubble talking to him as assuming Bowra. He, at first, tries to interrupt and tell Hubble who he is but with no success he listens calmly. While giving worldly lessons, Hubble says:

A lot of you young fellows come straight out of university and expect too much too quickly. I see it happens dozens of times. But one lesson you must learn in the law is patience. Clients have to learn it. Why shouldn't lawyers have to learn it too?⁷

He further tells his own example and explains that even menial work of picking up a bundle of his master's clothes from the laundry then had taught him the lesson in human relations. He points out to him that any work, though menial, may prove beneficial for him in future. He also tells him that our approach and attitude towards people should be friendly. Bailey, thus, with little patience, learns some more valuable lessons of life from Hubble. Had he stopped Hubble, he would have missed worldly lessons. These lessons from Hubble will definitely help him further attain success in his life.

THE THEME OF CHILDHOOD:

The theme of childhood is the main theme in the first story entitled 'Storyline' in Hasluck's collection *The Hat on the Letter O and Other Stories*. The child's sense of curiosity, wonder, imagination, excitement, fear, adventure, fun and satisfaction can be seen in experiences of the narrator, the protagonist, of the story. The narrator always looks with curiosity at things even at a double row of houses on the Stratford side of Newbold, 'The wharf' for the local people. He, sometimes, imagines of going there and wishes to see the things across the fields to Meon Hill. When his family comes to live at Ilmington, he and his brother start at the Vicar's school in Newbold. When they are on their way home, they are, sometimes, invited by Old Ernie who lives in a tumbledown cottage near The Wharf. Old Ernie, a servant of the farmer, is the first person to tell the narrator and his brother about The Wharf. He says :

See thaat wot you think's a hedgerow?
Thaat there going off across country? Thaat not
be a hedgerow at all! Thaat be the Stratford to
Moreton tramway! All grown over now. All gone.
Afore you was born.⁸

They, the narrator and his brother, however, do not know whether to believe what Old Ernie told them, so, they ask their mother about the Wharf, the tramway. The mother laughs and points out a folly. Then, she goes on to explain how the line was opened up in the

1850s--- a tramway with horse-drawn carriages which took passengers for a while, then goods, but never made a profit. It had to be closed down. The Wharf and other stations and houses along the way are sold off. Eventually the tracks and sleepers are broken up and used for building, leaving only an unnaturally straight line of trees printed on the landscape. The narrator, then, realises that Old Ernie was right. The mother takes them into the drawing room and shows the photograph of their grandfather who used to ride it. It is what the narrator's mother told him that day stayed with him all the time. He, therefore, could always imagine those horses, especially on the down slopes: resting on their haunches in horse-boxes, sipping tea, having a cigarette, watching the scenery coast by--- making the most of it until they had to start work at the foot of the next hill.

The narrator also experiences and enjoys the feeling of an excitement when his brother and he take to walking home from school along the abandoned tram track which was a short cut across the farmer's field. They would push through a break in the hedgerow on their hands and knees. They would, then, pause for a moment and listen cautiously wondering whether anyone had noticed them. They climb over a pile of uprooted sleepers as quickly as possible so as not to get trapped there. The narrator feels that he

could not forget those days. He also remembers vividly the day they sneaked home from school early, taking the hidden route. They pass, on their way, the people working on Taunton Farm without being noticed by the people. They could hear the farmer talking to Mr. Sutton, the seed merchant, near the pond. The journey through the hedgerow gives the narrator unforgettable experience. He says:

In that moment, when we crossed the open ground, being there, but still invisible, I felt majestic; as though I could do anything, go anywhere, coast homewards on a down slope like the horses. The pond and golden fields seemed full of sunlight, and made for me.

I tried to tell my brother how I felt but he became embarrassed, so I had to keep it to myself, that feeling, a sense of something special in the landscape, in the air.⁹

The narrator, thus, can not forget the sense of fun and enjoyment of the childhood days. His parents take them to Robert Dover's Cotswold Games on the hill overlooking Chipping Campden. He feels greatly embarrassed when the farmer mentions about the day he sneaked home from the school early to his father. Fortunately, that conversation between his father and the farmer went no further. The narrator, then, delights to see the tug-of-war game. The narrator and his brother enjoy greatly the games on the hill and they pester their parents to stay longer. They are also amazed at the aviator's flight in a balloon. The wind, however, was not strong and the aviator could not quite bring it off and his balloon

plunged into the trees. Then, all the people had the march into Chipping Campden. The aviator was, finally, rescued safely. Then, at dark, all people light their candles and move off towards the township in the valley. Someone, then, start singing and the narrator could hear those around him singing, even his father and mother too. The narrator knows the song but he does not join them because he wanted to listen to it. He, therefore, lets the words of the ballad run through him. He feels great delight and he says to himself:

It will always be there, that story, rising and falling, slowly evolving, welling up out of the darkness; it will always be with me, biding its time.¹⁰

The story, thus, revolves around the happy childhood experiences of the narrator. The narrator feels that he could not forget those experiences and he will always remember all the incidents very vividly and will enjoy the feelings of those happy childhood days.

Thus, in this collection Nicholas Hasluck handles the variety of themes with his masterly skills and unique treatment of the subjects. The collection, thus, establishes Hasluck as one of the greatest short story writers in the history of the Australian literature.

REFERENCES :

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3. Ibid., p.80
4. Ibid., p.70
5. Ibid., p.93
6. Ibid., pp.118-119
7. Ibid., p.48
8. Ibid., p.12
9. Ibid., p.15
10. Ibid., p.17