

experience. Thus this novel can be seen as a popular American tradition of self-reliant individual victory and success in an orderly moral universe.

✓ Q. 10. Account for the universal popularity of 'The Old Man and the Sea'.

Or

'The Old Man and the Sea' is a classic. Give your views about this statement.

Or

How far do you agree that 'The Old Man and the Sea' is a literary masterpiece?

Ans. A classic is a work of art which pleases all and pleases always. Such a work is appreciated and approved by the readers and critics in all the ages. A classic possesses the qualities exhibited by the greatest literary works of the past. These qualities are estimated in terms of form as well as spirit. In other words, we have to see whether the work posses-

see the same form which the literature of the past possessed, and whether it approximates to the spirit of that great literature of the past. Seen from this point of view *The Old Man and the Sea* is certainly a classic. It is surely a great work of fiction in point of its structure, its vision of life, its character-portrayal, its realism and its style. Let us analyse its qualities separately.

#### Its structure

This novel is compact, clean and neatly organized. The story is swiftly told without any long background or interruption. There is nothing superfluous. Every detail tells the story. It is the story of the old Cuban fisherman, named Santiago, who after continuous failure for eighty-four days, decides to venture far out into the ocean. Anyhow he succeeds in hooking a marlin bigger than he had ever seen in his life. After an ordeal lasting two days, he manages to harpoon it and then lash it to his boat. However, before he can bring it to his home, a group of ruthless sharks attack his catch, and get their fangs into the carcass of the marlin, and despite Santiago's vigorous attempts to save the marlin, the sharks eat away most of the flesh of the marlin, leaving hardly anything except its skeleton. Santiago's attempt thus turns to nothing and he returns empty-handed.

The novel is not divided into chapters. But distinctly the book can be studied in four parts. The first part introduces us to the old man and the boy Manolin; the central part describes the old man's struggle with the giant marlin and his victory; the third part describes the fight of the old man with the fierce sharks and his defeat; and the last part, the epilogue, tells us about the old man's return to his cottage and his talk with the boy. Apparently, the novel is the story of the old man's adventure on the sea and his victory over the marlin, but his defeat at the hands of the preying sharks. Symbolically, the novel deals with the theme of the undefeated man, or the man facing the heavy odds of life and winning a moral victory even though defeated in a physical or material sense. Hemingway has made a deft use of imagery in the form of the boy, the sharks, the lions, DiMaggio, etc. The imagery of the Crucifixion is also used by the novelist to heighten the heroic effect in the novel. Thus, in this novel Hemingway has been able to show himself a skilled craftsman.

#### The vision of life

*The Old Man and the Sea* is a novel of affirmation of the supreme human values like courage, endurance, humility, patience and self-realization. This novel marks a departure from Hemingway's earlier work which is characterised by disillusionment and negation. It constitutes an epic metaphor of man's struggle against the overwhelming and impossible odds of life. This struggle inevitably plunges man into the moral questions of right and wrong, but in the face of the struggle itself, even these eternally important questions pale into insignificance. In this aspect, this novel is different from his other novels. Santiago is not a

permanently 'wounded' hero as was Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises* and Lieutenant Henry in *A Farewell to Arms*. In fact, this novel is reminiscent of the great Greek epics and tragedies in which men fight against odds and finally win a moral victory, even though on the material plane their struggle may prove disastrous.

There are various interpretations of the theme and the vision of life as reflected in this novel. According to one view the novel has as its theme social concern and mutual interdependence. No doubt, Santiago has been presented as a lonely old man, but even in his loneliness he draws support and comfort from his thoughts of the boy Manolin, he is in a way a dependent on the restaurant-owner and the wine-shop owner. Even the baseball champion, DiMaggio provides the old man essential vigour and support. Thus the story can be studied as a document of interdependence and fellow-feeling.

But there is also the other view of the picture. Some critics find the novel a study of human isolation. It marks the culmination of Hemingway's search for disengagement from the social world and his entry into the natural world. The effort to get out of society and its artificialities is not motivated by a desire to 'escape' but by a desire for liberation and such an effort is no act of cowardice. To be true to oneself demands getting out of society and returning to the lost world of nature. *The Old Man and the Sea* illustrates the liberation of the human spirit from the shackles of the society and enacts Santiago's lonely drama in the bosom of nature. Any of the views may be accepted or rejected, the truth remains that *The Old Man and the Sea* is an important work of Hemingway. It is the novel in which the novelist has said the finest things. It is certainly a powerful book, its power lies in the presentation of the individual heroism and its reverence for life's struggle. The vision of life it seeks to present is the universal vision of life. It is the heartening vision. Hemingway at last finds himself in a world where he feels at home. It is a world which may apparently break into pieces but in this world men like Santiago go on and assert their existence.

#### Realism

The novel is also remarkable for the element of realism. It presents a starkly realistic picture of life, in physical as well as psychological terms. The story has nothing of the marvellous or fantastic in it. Hemingway's precise description of the sea, its swell, the weeds floating on it, the fishes sporting in it, the manner in which the marlin rises and seems to hang above it for a moment before plunging into the depths, the old man himself, the old man's boat and its condition during and after the journey—all this is accurate and realistic enough to leave a lasting impression upon the minds of the readers. It is indeed a highly convincing and deeply moving story, even if the old man's killing the giant marlin single-handed seems a bit unnatural. On the psychological plane the character of Santiago is highly credible. He carries conviction at every stage in the novel. His courage, humility, endurance, patience and resolution inspire our

deepest admiration. He comes to life even more completely when he contemplates on the problem of sin. He is a simple fisherman who takes natural pleasure in talking to the boy Manolin. In the company of Manolin we find Santiago an intensely human figure. Not only are the human characters convincing and credible, but the marlin, the porpoise, the man-of-war bird, the green turtles, the flying fish and the sharks, all are vividly described and the description shows the author's first-hand knowledge of these creatures. Thus, the novel is a fine piece of realistic art.

### Style

Hemingway has been regarded as an originator of a new style. As an artist he has practised restraint, judicious selection and has undertaken trimming and pruning of superfluous material. His interest in truth has led him to enshrine the external details, 'the sense of fact, the sense of place, and the sense of the scene'. He has also attempted to describe the inner process in accurate words. He considers prose an architecture. He makes certain remarks about writing that when writing a novel, a writer should show what he is writing about, and what are the things which should not find place in the body of the essay. Hemingway further observes, "If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about, he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them." *The Old Man and the Sea* is written in the characteristic style which Hemingway originated. It is simple, unembellished and crisp, stripped of all superfluity and excess, and economical and laconic in the extreme. Another important feature of the style of the novel is its colloquial quality not only in its dialogues but also in the description of the character's thoughts and musings. It is also a concrete style with nothing abstract about it.

### Conclusion

*The Old Man and the Sea* is undoubtedly a classic. It can very well be compared with other classic from Homer's *Odyssey* to *Lord Jim* of Joseph Conrad. This novel has close links with other American classics in that we find in it a concentration on the struggle for survival of an individual set against the background of a community from which he is estranged. Like several other heroes of American novels, Santiago also experiences spiritual renewal away from the village and in the midst of a wholly natural environment. Numerous American heroes, like Natty Bumppo, Huck Finn, Jake Barnes, escape to nature to preserve their self-respect and their vital freedom. Santiago clearly derives physical and spiritual strength from his intimate relationship with the sea. In this he stands not alienated but as a symbolic ideal for his community. In other words, Hemingway, like Cooper, Thoreau, Twain and Faulkner, celebrates a primitive intimacy with nature as a means of spiritual strength. But with all this *The Old Man and the Sea* cannot be considered as an achievement of the same high order as some other American or British works. How-