Journey to the West

An outstanding English writer of the 19th century Jonathan Swift (1667 - 1745) won the world fame by his satirical novel “Journey to the West”. The book is based on the Chinese folklore about the adventures of the Monkey. The Buddhist monk travels around India, making a legendary pilgrimage. It is an adventure story, which allegorically represents a group of people, who travel in search for the enlightenment.

This fascinating history tells about the journey of the Buddhist monk Xuanzang (Tripitaka), the Monkey King Sun Wukong, the magic hog Zhu Ba-tsze’s, the monk Sha-sena and a white horse dragon to India for the sacred sutras. The novel is full of the fantastic adventures and battles with werewolves. “Journey to the West” is the most popular Chinese plot which is widely known not only in China, but also worldwide.

The Swift’s novel “Journey to the West” became the beginning of the genre of the fantastic epic. The Swift’s narration about the adventures of Sun Wukong - the king of monkeys - became one of the most favorite in China and one of the most known abroad.

The main hero of the novel is Monkey, who is a very powerful and colorful personage. In this vividly described book the writer cruelly derides and castigates a state system, public orders and customs of the ancient China. He convicts parasitism and hypocrisy of the ruling classes, cruelty, self-interest and egoism of the rich men. The oppression of people by people, impoverishment of the workers, a harmful power of the gold existed, certainly, not only in China. Therefore, the Swift’s satire had s wider value.
The novel “Journey to the West” is based on the national legends about the travel of the monk Xuanzang to India in the 7th century. Gradually the plot acquires the additional details, becoming more and more similar to the magic fairy tale - there are the additional plots and new characters, which are not connected with the main subject. The monk has “magic assistants” - the king of Monkeys Sun Wukong, sent to the earth for the alarm arranged by him in the Heaven palace, and a pig, also sent from the heavens for the faults.

Sun Wukong is a heroic character, Zhu Bajie is comic. Together with the monk Xuanzang they form a very interesting group, differently reacting to reality. Sun Wukong defeats the enemies while the monk Xuanzang speaks of the overall virtues and evils. Sun Wukong, like Gulliver, is the symbol of a vital force and rebelliousness.

Sun Wukong (the king of Monkey) is the main character of “Journey to the West”. He was born from a stone and has a supernatural strength. He rebels against Heaven and is imprisoned in a mountain by the Budha. After that he starts a journey to obtain the Buddhist sutras in India. He is very strong, fast and can do 72 transformations. These transformations allow him to transform either into the objects and animals or into other people. He can fight skillfully, and is very powerful.

Five hundred years later Sun Wukong is liberated by Xuanzang, the monk going to the West. In the gratitude for his liberation, Sun Wukong becomes Xuanzang’s pupil and starts to protect him. However, the fact that Sun Wukong kills the robbers who attacked him, causes the indignation of the monk. Due to the arisen quarrel, Sun Wukong throws the teacher, but then repents and returns.

Each time when the monk starts to read a special mantra, the hoop is compressed, causing in an intolerable headache at Sun Wukong. Upon the termination of travel, in an award for
diligence, the Buddha of Western Paradise appoints Sun Wukong to be the all-conquering Buddha. Sun Wukong serves to Xuanzang for the whole his life.

Castigating the Chinese bourgeoisie represented in the images of dirty, greedy monkeys, Swift opposes it the noble pilgrims, not knowing a lust for adventures. Swift declares not once that he hates a human nature and considers it vicious. The people, whom the king of monkey meets, are mean, insignificant, and not so powerful as he is - the prototype of people. The vices, peculiar to Sun Wukong, represent the caricature description of the human and social vices. They are affected by avarice, aggressiveness, self-interest and power.

The theme of the Gods is also touched by Swift. However, Swift is hostile to the aristocratic atheism. The religion should be cleared of dirt and nonsense; it should be “natural”, and then it can play a role of a known moral bridle. Swift shares his purely deistic thoughts about the God - the primary engine of the Universe - with his readers.

Monkey in “Journey to the West” is a brilliant social satire, but not on the mankind in general, but on the so-called “mass society”. This concept is used by the sociologists on the west to designate the standardized world of mass production surrounding them and mass consumption where there is a disturbing process of deleting of any identity and depersonalization of people.

The hero of Swift tries to make impossible - to stop being a human being, realizing his social nature in a pure view. In fact, social animals need only the organized structure. If there is more prestigious structure, satisfying the growing vanity of an individual, he will easily leave the former and try to enter the one.

Being guided only by the norms and rules thought up by our mind and dictated by a public need, people can support only short-term social balance. The reason easily counts a momentary benefit, but is not capable to estimate the size of expenses. The mind is not so cold: it
is overflowed by emotions. The mind is not so independent: it is subordinated easily by human arrogance; this program of self-destruction is put in people.

Thus, the civilized society allowing people to stand apart from the environment more and more, to live more convenient and more freely from the daily household cares, in any way does not change our human nature. Rescuing from a natural chaos, the civilization itself produces the processes which cannot be managed.

Therefore, it is possible to say that Swift refers to the role of a personality in his novels. He believes that the role of personality is exceptional in “Journey to the West”. Therefore, the actions of the people and other fantastic creatures occupy the central place in the novel.

The well-known satirist recognizes the conditionality of behavior of a personality as a historical context and a spirit of the age, and also education, origin, and often religion. There are the traces of the preferences of Swift in the field of culture, mythology and attitude to the Gods. Jonathan Swift recognizes the uniqueness of a definite historical situation These or those designs (political, state, religious) are effective and functional in specific conditions.

According to the Swift’s representations, the main functions of a historical science are educational and information (depending on the addressee). The historical and cultural researches are as useful as obvious the lessons follow from them.

The Swift’s lesson, of course, does not cause enthusiasm among the modern adherents of the humanistic ideals persistently continuing believing in the omnipotence of a human reason and scientific and technical progress.

After all, the author of “Journey to the West” ascertains with bitterness: there is a social beginning in each of us; it generates the civilization and can destroy it. It can also lead to the universal wildness - a consecutive cutting off of all channels connecting the corporal and spiritual forms of a human nature.