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HIST-120

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**Exam 2 Monkey King**

1. Based on what you have read so far in Monkey King: Journey to the West, what is the novel about?

So far the novel seems to be about the journey of a magical monkey through ancient china. The overarching story of the monkey king seems to be a commentary on the different religions of the region. The most important and powerful of which (in the mind of the author) is Buddhism, as no one else can subdue the crafty monkey king. This is especially true at the end of the monkey king’s journey as he is unable to jump out of the hand of the Buddha, even though he successfully goes to the end of the universe. There he finds five pillars and graffitis and pees on them but then later finds out these were just the fingers of Buddha and therefore is defeated because he was unable to escape. This whole novel so far and that story, in particular, seems to illustrate that while the other religions in china at the time are unable to tame this crazy monkey the Buddha can do it by simply holding out his palm. This is an impressive feat and firmly establishes Buddhism as the strongest and most capable religion at the time according to this book.

1. Describe Monkey’s development as a character.

The monkey begins with his birth from a rock that turns into an egg at the beginning of the story. His birth occurs on flower fruit mountain where he begins his life hanging out with all of the other monkeys on the island. He eventually becomes the king of the monkeys by jumping through a waterfall and finding a cave on the other side. Two hundred years later the monkey begins to get anxious about his mortality and so decides to go learn from a monk how to attain immortality. The monk does this but only after about 7 years along with teaching him other useful tricks like flying and shapeshifting. Along with these abilities, he gains a new name, Sun Wukong. After being kicked out of the temple for his craftiness he goes back to the monkey kingdom. There he fights a demon that has been terrorizing his people and defeats him without a problem. He also picks a fight with other creatures including some dragons at the bottom of the ocean, stealing the needle that keeps the seas calm as his new weapon.

As he attracts all of this attention to himself the jade emperor takes notice and offers him a job as the heavenly stable boy. This he accepts initially but then gets angry about since it’s not a very good position. He gets angry and so the Jade emperor decides to give him a better position so he doesn’t cause any more trouble. Sun Wukong is now in charge of tending the heavenly peach orchard but instead, he eats all of the peaches (being a monkey) and gains immortality again. He then attends a heavenly party he wasn’t invited to, steals all the wine, and becomes immortal again. Now that he’s drunk he goes over to someone named Lao Tzu’s house and steals his pills of immortality making him immortal again. After having thoroughly made everyone angry they all attempt to capture and kill him. Failing this the emperor is forced to ask the help of the Buddha who handles the situation with ease by challenging the monkey to jump out of his hand. Unable to do this the Buddha turns his hand over trapping Sun Wukong under a mountain for the next five hundred years.

1. How does the novel represent the religion of Ming dynasty China? The lecture by Sarah Schneewind might be helpful

This novel, as mentioned in question one, is a commentary on the various religions in Ming dynasty China at the time. Specifically, the top three religions are Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. The author favors Buddhism over the other religions at the time as the Buddha is the only character who can defeat and subdue the monkey king. Everything else anyone tries to do only makes it worse but the Buddha can defeat him with one simple challenge. Illustrating the superiority (in the author’s mind) of the Buddhist religion over the others. Especially the bureaucracy of the Confucians at the time which is illustrated in the book by the jade emperor and the bureaucracy of heaven

1. How does Monkey’s name change throughout the novel, especially up to the point that he gains the name Sun Wukong?

The monkey, through the story, makes a rather large transformation. He starts the story by being born from a rock and being content with his normal life as a monkey. Then when he proves his bravery and impulsiveness he is given the new name monkey king. His name changes again when he decides that he needs to pursue immortality. In this case, the monk gives him the name Sun Wukong. This name he keeps until his final name change to the Great sage equal to heaven. This is a name that he initially gives to himself but is eventually granted to him by the jade emperor to attempt to stop his craftiness.

1. Describe any passage of your choosing in the novel. It could be a complete chapter or part of a chapter that you think is significant for understanding the novel or the character of Sun Wukong.

I would like to describe the first chapter of the novel since I feel that it’s important for laying the groundwork for the rest of the story. In the first chapter the monkey is born from an egg that came from a rock, he goes out into the world and lives happily among the other monkeys for many years. Eventually, the monkeys come upon a waterfall which they are too afraid to go near. The monkey from the rock decides to jump through it finding a cavern and being named the monkey king. As the monkey king, he rules the others for hundreds of years until he learns of death. Afraid of this he decides to try to find a teacher who can show him how to be immortal. He sails across the sea in search of this teacher and finally finds a person who is quoting immortals. This man points the monkey in the direction of the immortal who lives on top of a mountain. Climbing this mountain he meets the immortal who names him Aware-of-vacuity because he was born out of an egg from a rock.