

Anastasia S. BORISOVA

PhD in Philology, Senior Lecturer, Department of Japanese Philology
Institute of Asian and African Countries, Lomonosov Moscow State University,
Moscow, Russia

Buddhism and Buddhist Philosophy in the Novel “Dogra Magra” by Yumeno Kyusaku

ABSTRACT

Dogra Magra, a novel by Yumeno Kyusaku, one of the most famous Japanese avant-garde writers, was published in 1935 and is notable for combining various traits of surrealism and psychological detective fiction. Yumeno himself took an interest in Buddhism since his youth and even spent a few years in a Zen monastery, so there are many allusions to Buddhist mythology and philosophy in his works.

The plot is centered on the amnesiac protagonist's attempts to recall his memories and his missing identity, and the main intrigue is presented in Buddhist light according to the Zen philosophical tradition. Main issues and questions of the story include the illusory nature of reality, passion and hereditary karma as the main reasons for not only human sins but also suffering in general. The protagonist's quest is shown as a metaphor of striving for enlightenment to quit the circle of reincarnation.

Reincarnation has an important role in the plot (and as the unexpected ending shows it, the protagonist is yet to be born) as the events take place in the psychiatric ward described as an image of Buddhist afterlife and hell where the dead get judged to pass on to their next incarnation. The dispute of two psychiatrist professors, one of whom is shown as a mythological afterlife judge while the other has traits of both bodhisattva and eccentric Zen master, is actually a debate over the protagonist's (and other people's) ability to reach satori (Buddhist enlightenment) and get free from the chain of family karma that ties him to samsara. The double-coded image of madness is also shown in a Buddhist way: on one hand, everyone is mad because no one has perceived the real nature of all things; on the other hand, the Zen sacred madness as denial of worldly sense can help to break out of the circle.

Buddhist ideas in the novel are revealed not only through Buddhism-inspired plot turns but also through many allusions to sacred texts and characters and entities from the Buddhist legendarium. This is true for even parts of the story inspired by mass literature tropes and popular psychological theories of the period. In general, the avant-garde novel's main message is shaped by religious and philosophical ideas of Zen Buddhism even considering the multitude of diverse interpretations of the story.