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## GIUSEPPE DE LORENZO AND HIS “BUDDHIST” READING OF SHAKESPEARE

### The road to overcoming pain lies in pain itself

The following assumption is one of the pivotal points of Giuseppe De Lorenzo's reflection on pain: “Solamente l'umanità può attingere dalla visione del dolore la forza per redimersi dal circolo dalla vita”,<sup>1</sup> as he wrote in the first edition (1904) of *India e Buddismo antico* in affinity with Hölderlin's verses: “Nah ist/Und schwer zu fassen der Gott./Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst/Das Rettende auch”,<sup>2</sup> and anticipating Giuseppe Rensi who wrote in 1937 in his *Frammenti*: “La natura dell'universo la conosce non l'uomo sano, ricco, fortunato, felice, ma l'uomo percorso dalle malattie, dalle sventure, dalla povertà, dalle persecuzioni. Solo costui sa veramente che cos'è il mondo. Solo egli lo vede. Solo a lui i dolori che subisce danno la vista”.<sup>3</sup>

If pain really is this anexperience in which man questions himself and acquires the wisdom to free himself from the state of suffering it is clear why suffering “seems to be particularly essential to the nature of man [...] Suffering seems to belong to man's

<sup>1</sup> “Only humanity can draw the strength to redeem itself from the circle of life through the vision of pain”. Giuseppe De Lorenzo (Lagonegro 1871-Naples 1957) was a geologist, a translator of Buddhist texts and Schopenhauer, and a great reader of Shakespeare, Byron and Leopardi. Friend and student of Karl Eugen Neumann, he translated into Italian (using the German translation of Neumann himself and comparing it with the original in Pāli) the *Majjhimanikāyo* (*Discorsi di Gotamo Buddho del Majjhimanikāyo, translated for the first time from the text pāli*, Laterza, vol. 3, Bari 1907-1927) which remains the only existing Italian version to date. The five editions of *India e Buddismo antico* (1904-1926) are definitely the most famous works of Giuseppe De Lorenzo. The volume represents a unique attempt to spread Buddhism in the Italian publishing scenery of the early twentieth century. Between 1928 and 1930 he translated the Appendix and the volume of Supplements for the series “Classici della filosofia moderna” by Laterza, faithfully reproducing, even in its division into two volumes, the 1859 edition of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* by Arthur Schopenhauer (*Il mondo come volontà e rappresentazione*, Laterza, Bari 1928-1930. Voll. 2, the first volume in collaboration with Paolo Savj-Lopez). For a complete picture of Giuseppe De Lorenzo's thought and biography see A. Salvati, *Giuseppe De Lorenzo e il Buddismo*, OXP, Napoli 2016.

<sup>2</sup> F. Hölderlin, *Tutte le liriche*, a cura e con un saggio introduttivo di L. Reitani, Arnoldo Mondadori, Milano 2001, pp. 314-315.

<sup>3</sup> “The nature of the universe is known not to the healthy, rich, lucky and happy man, but to the man affected by diseases, misfortunes, poverty and persecution. Only this man really knows what the world is. He alone can see it. The pains he suffers give sight only to him”. G. Rensi, *Frammenti d'una filosofia dell'errore e del dolore, del male e della morte*, Orthotes, Napoli 2011, p. 71.

transcendence: it is one of those points in which man is in a certain sense »destined« to go beyond himself, and he is called to this in a mysterious way”.<sup>4</sup>

For Giuseppe De Lorenzo, pain is not inevitable, as it is in the *metafisica del tragico*.<sup>5</sup> He finds the claim voiced by the Chorus in *Ajax* unacceptable: “Why still grieve at events that are past and done? These things could not by fate be other than they are.” On the other hand, the moment of pain cannot be considered merely *bearable*, as it is in the Judeo-Christian principle of retribution enshrined in the *teologia del patto*.<sup>6</sup>

For De Lorenzo, the experience of pain becomes “particularly essential” precisely for avoiding the “irremediable” and wiping out any notion of destiny or predestination. Through the experience of pain, man is impelled to wonder about the truth of existence. This was the case for Job in the Old Testament who managed to “talk to God” precisely because he was struck by the experience of pain, unlike his friends who, as mere spectators of their friend’s pain, were only forced to “talk about God”.

It is true that the point of arrival (or departure) of De Lorenzo’s reflection could be easily confused with ancient Buddhism. In the same way, Buddha’s thought: “I say unto you that in this body eight palms high, endowed with consciousness, is contained the world, the origin of the world, the end of the world and the way that leads to the end of the world” (*Samyuttakanikāya*, II, 3, 6) could be easily superimposed on the contents of Giuseppe De Lorenzo’s speculation about pain and the experience of it. But, although he recognized and paid his debt to Buddhist studies, De Lorenzo *went one step further*. In his work as ascientist, having understood and adopted the principle of pain-surpassing bipolarity, he investigated the manifestations of this such principle wherever it appeared to him including in his work as a geologist. Once he had elaborated a theory on the nature of earthquakes, he took care to verify it wherever these phenomena occurred, and concluded by assuming a substantial unity in the earth’s crust.

De Lorenzo started the same kind of research when he approached Shakespeare’s works. It was not an attempt, as it might appear at first glance, to find traces of Buddhism in the works of the English playwright or, of the greats of Western thought and literature<sup>7</sup> in general. It was, rather, a scientific demonstration of a concept of

<sup>4</sup> Giovanni Paolo II, Apostolic Letter *Salvifici doloris* (11<sup>th</sup> February 1984), n. 2.

<sup>5</sup> See S. Natoli, *L’esperienza del dolore*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1986, p. 48.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 184.

<sup>7</sup> The introduction and the substantial system of notes to the text that De Lorenzo edited for the Italian translation of *Cain, a mystery* by Byron (*Caino*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1922, traduzione di F. Milone) is remarkable in this sense. Byron, according to De Lorenzo, understood pain’s essential role for man kind. “Percio Byronn on impreca controla natura, masirivolgesempre esoloall uomo; sia che con tragic torza nel Caino mostri di che lagrime grondi e di che sangue, o che nel Don Juana gettis su di lui, siu suo pregiudizi, sui suoi pretesi ideali, su tutta la sua vita quello schemo feroce, dicui Goethe congragione dicevachecounsolrigo diessosipotrbbeavvel enaretuttoildolcettimis-della Gerusalemme del Tasso”

pain and of attempts to overcome it that was to transcend geographical and socio-cultural differences.

*Shakespeare e il dolore del mondo*<sup>8</sup> can be considered De Lorenzo's first organic attempt<sup>9</sup> to "read", in the works of the greatest Western poets and thinkers, an idea that has "come base comune la visione del dolore nel mondo".<sup>10</sup>

Written partly in Naples and partly in Maratea, in an annex of Villa Nitti named "Casetta De Lorenzo", the work of the English poet and playwright was subjected to an original and above all unorthodox analysis, which had as its objective "di cercare e mostrare come nell'opera di Shakespeare esista, *in nuce*, quella visione del dolore del mondo, che è alla base della dottrina di Buddho e di Schopenhauer".<sup>11</sup>

Of course, the method used by De Lorenzo in this analysis was strongly influenced by his Buddhist studies:

Se si analizzano [...] le commedie, le istoria, le tragedie, nonché i sonetti ed i poemi, si trova, che sempre Shakespeare rappresenta la vita con quelle costanti caratteristiche, con le quali la rappresenta Gotamo Buddho: cioè di non appartenerci, non essere propria, *anattam*; di essere impermanente, caduca, mutabile, *aniccam*; e di consistere in dolore, *dukkham*.<sup>12</sup>

Yet the research was not simply devoted to the identification of a Buddhist "seed" in Shakespearean tragedies<sup>13</sup> but rather to researching the idea of pain in the world

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(*op. cit.*, pp. 20-21). In addition to the aforementioned study and translation of Schopenhauer's works, it is important to mention his admiration and profound criticism of Leopardian thought. His admiration was clearly expressed in the course of his studies (*Leopardi e Schopenhauer*, Ricciardi, Napoli 1923; *Il sentimento della natura in Leopardi*, Napoli, Ricciardi, 1937 and the notes published in the Rendiconti dell'Accademia di Scienze Fisiche e Matematiche di Napoli: "Concezioni cosmiche di Leopardi" 1952, later included in the collection *Scienza d'Occidente e sapienza d'Oriente* and "Tempo e spazio nel pensiero di Leopardi" of 1954), when De Lorenzo recognized Giacomo Leopardi as the perfect poet of pain. On the other hand, his deep criticism is related to Leopardi's discovery of pain, which, according to De Lorenzo, was never accompanied by any search for a way to overcome suffering.

<sup>8</sup> G. De Lorenzo, *Shakespeare e il dolore del mondo*, Zanichelli, Bologna 1921.

<sup>9</sup> Previously De Lorenzo had written only some series of notes and articles analysing the works of Michelangelo, Schopenhauer and Shakespeare.

<sup>10</sup> "As common ground the vision of pain in the world". G. De Lorenzo, *Shakespeare e il dolore...*, p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> "To seek and show how in Shakespeare's work there exists, in the beginning, that vision of the pain of the world, which was the basis of the doctrine of Buddho and Schopenhauer". Ivi, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> If we analyze [...] the comedies, the histories, the tragedies, as well as the sonnets and the poems, we will find that Shakespeare always represents life with the same constant characteristics with which Gotamo Buddho represents it. Namely: not belonging to us, not being one's own, *anattam*; being impermanent, caducous, mutable, *aniccam*; and consisting in pain, *dukkham*. Ivi, pp. 14-15.

<sup>13</sup> The concept of pain in the world was the aspect that most fascinated De Lorenzo when he was engaged in reading and analyzing the works of the English playwright but it was not his only, one point of interest. De Lorenzo, also recognized Shakespeare's love and admiration for ancient Rome. Cymbeline, although victorious over the Roman army led by General Caius Lucius, decides to continue to be a tributary of Rome which aroused the admiration of De Lorenzo, who did not hesitate to say that: "A tanto dunque giunge l'ammirazione di Shakespeare per Roma antica, da farlo persino sorvolare sull'amore

as well as finding a purely ethical way to lead man out of a state of suffering. "Come dalla visione diretta della vita e del mondo grandi spiriti, quali Buddha e Cristo, hanno tratto la conclusione del dolore e della redenzione dal dolore, così dal mondo dell'opera di Shakespeare si può trarre, io dico, la stessa conclusione".<sup>14</sup> As we shall see, this way is diametrically opposed to the Greek and Judeo-Christian worldview.

De Lorenzo's research lasted almost twenty years. *Shakespeare e il dolore del mondo only*, became available in 1921, while the eloquently titled *Buddhist Ideas in Shakespeare* was published in Rangoon in September 1903 in the magazine "Buddhism. An illustrated Quarterly Review". In this paper, which contained some themes that were then expanded on and developed years later, De Lorenzo explained that the presence of some "Buddhist" themes in Shakespeare did not mean that the English playwright was familiar with the philosophy of Buddha. He validated these conceptual similarities with the theory of "spontaneous germination" of themes very similar to those stated about two thousand years beforehand.

Sarebbe follia voler identificare la visione di Shakespeare del dolore del mondo con quella di Buddha. La visione di Buddha informa una concezione filosofica, o teorica, del mondo, messa come base fondamentale ed incrollabile di una colossale costruzione di morale pratica, o religiosa, della vita: la visione di Shakespeare illumina invece una pura opera d'arte e di pensiero. Ma non v'è, sulla terra, opera d'arte, tranne per alcuni lati, quella di Leopardi, che più si accosti, per tangente, alla visione del dolore del mondo, data da Buddha, di quel che vi si accosti l'opera di Shakespeare.<sup>15</sup>

And again: "Dolore è il motivo principale di ogni tragedia, antica e moderna. Ma nessuna tragedia, nessun poeta, nessun pensatore ha rappresentato con tanta ricchezza di forme e di suoni, come ha fatto Shakespeare, l'immensa varietà di rami, di foglie, di fiori, di frutti dell'unico tronco del dolore, che con la sua ombra aduggia la vita".<sup>16</sup>

According to De Lorenzo, the experience of pain makes the gaze free to scrutinize life in depth for what it is. There is no destiny and there are no whimsical games of divinities, just as there is no expectation of a future reward for the pain suffered here

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e l'orgoglio della patria britannica, che egli aveva pur così potentemente e fieramente espresso nelle storie del *Riccardo II* e dell'*Enrico V*" (G. De Lorenzo, *Il sole del Gange*, Zanichelli, Bologna 1925, p. 61).

<sup>14</sup> "From the direct vision of life and the world, great spirits, such as Buddha and Christ, have drawn the conclusion of pain and redemption from pain. The same conclusion can be drawn from the world of Shakespeare's work, I say". G. De Lorenzo, *Shakespeare e il dolore...*, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> "It would be madness to want to identify Shakespeare's vision of the pain of the world with that of Buddha. Buddha's vision informs a philosophical, or theoretical, conception of the world, which lays down a fundamental and unshakable basis for a colossal construction of practical, or religious, moral of life: Shakespeare's vision instead enlightens a pure work of art and thought. But there is no work of art on earth, except in some ways Leopardi's, that more closely approaches the vision of the pain of the world given by Buddha than the work of Shakespeare". Ivi, p. 394.

<sup>16</sup> "Pain is the main reason for every tragedy, ancient and modern. But no tragedy, no poet, no thinker represented the immense variety of branches, leaves, flowers, fruits of the only trunk of pain, over-shadows life, with as much richness of forms and sounds as Shakespeare did". *Ibidem*.

and now. From this perspective, the result of the meditation on pain is identifiable in the same way in the art of both Buddha and Shakespeare:

è la realizzazione del sorridente occhio del mondo. Tale sorridente occhio del mondo è quello che guarda l'universo, senza velo di nubi personali, e ne contempla la superficie e ne scruta le profondità e ne rappresenta tutte le forme ed i fenomeni con la stessa straordinaria forza di arte, culminante in una idealissima realizzazione, libera d'ogni maniera tradizionale.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, the experience of pain becomes essential to man. It is what characterizes him. Shakespeare was also aware of this, since he brought not models of morality but men of flesh and blood to the stage. They were never totally good or perfect, but on the other hand, they were never totally bad. Here are two examples among many. Julius Caesar, much admired by the English playwright, is portrayed as full of vices and defects, both physical and moral: deaf in one ear, a victim of a fever attack and epilepsy, full of prejudices. Then there's Macbeth, ready to shed blood to satisfy his thirst for domination also in this case, Shakespeare did not stage a moral caricature but a man poised between the desire to affirm his existence at any cost and the path of goodness and compassion. Indeed, Lady Macbeth points out just this in scene Act I, Scene V, when she says to her husband: "Yet do I fear thy nature: it is too full o' the milk of human kindness to catch the nearest way: thou wouldst be great, art not without ambition, but without the illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly, that wouldst thou holily, wouldst not play false".<sup>18</sup>

dal cozzare di questi caratteri di selce e di ferro sprizza in scintille la visione del dolore del mondo, cui può dare lenimento solo la forza superiore della pietà [...] come in tutte le tragedie e le istorie di Shakespeare, la miseria prepondera e il dolore geme tra i fiumi di sangue, mentre la vita segue, oltre il dolore, imperturbata il suo corso senza principio né fine.<sup>19</sup>

For Shakespeare, this worldview was not a kind of *scenography* created to make his works even more *tragic*. De Lorenzo emphasized this aspect with force: "anche il mondo delle sue istorie, quello dei suoi drammi romantici e delle sue commedie, il

<sup>17</sup> "It is the realization of the world's smiling eye. This smiling eye of the world looks at the universe without a veil of personal clouds, contemplating its surface and scrutinizing its depths and representing all its forms and phenomena with the same extraordinary force of art, which culminates in an ideal realization, free of any traditional manner". G. De Lorenzo, *Shakespeare e il dolore...*, p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> The English text of the mentioned tragedies is taken from *Teatro completo di William Shakespeare*, ed. G. Melchiori (vol. 9, Mondadori, Milano 1976-91).

<sup>19</sup> "From the collision of these flint and iron characters, the vision of the pain of the world, which can only be soothed by the superior force of compassion, spurts out in sparks [...] as in all Shakespeare's tragedies and stories, the misery will abound and the pain will groan among the rivers of blood, while life follows, unperturbed, its course beyond the pain, without beginning or end". G. De Lorenzo, *Shakespeare e il dolore...*, pp. 20-21.

mondo epico dei suoi poemetti ed il mondo lirico dei suoi sonetti: tutti sono animati e pervasi dallo spirito di questa prima verità del dolore del mondo”.<sup>20</sup>

If pain is constitutive of the character of the human being, the origin of suffering must be sought in man himself. De Lorenzo explained this when he wrote:

Leopardi cerca l'origine del dolore non nell'intima essenza dell'uomo, ma nell'esterna natura, dura nutrice, madre di parto e di voler matrigna, che per uccider partorisce e nutre [...] Questo stesso potere esterno, datori di mali produttore di dolori, gli antichi tragici greci lo chiamarono fato; i cristiani, fino ai più grandi, come Calderon de la Barca, lo identificarono col destino e volere divino e gli diedero a reggere le sorti degli uomini.<sup>21</sup>

This does not happen in Shakespeare. The suffering of his creation always comes from their own, intimate, human nature which is why the English playwright criticizes, using the sharp weapon of satire, the Greek world in *The Tragedy of Troilus and Cressida* a world represented by the many heroes camped under the Trojan walls and considered “bellissimi, ma con troppo sangue e troppo poco cervello”.<sup>22</sup>

They suffer because of their unfulfilled desire to affirm their will to dominate, their unfulfilled sexual desires, or simply – as Bernardine says from the straw bed of a cell – because they want to live, live and keep living. It is in this inveterate criminal, a character in the tragicomedy *Measure for Measure*, that De Lorenzo saw the paradigm of the suffering man: not because of condition of prisoner on the verge of his execution, but because, in the moment of suffering, he was not able to find the *wisdom* that could lift him from that state. So much so that his cell, the logs, and Bernardine himself can be considered as a metaphor for the condition of those who do not understand, or flee from the experience of, pain.

When the executioner knocks on his cell to inform him that the time for execution has come, he replies exclaiming: “You rogue, I have been drinking all night; I am not fitted for ‘t”. And yet, faced with the comforts of the spirit, he says: “Friar, not I. I have been drinking hard all night, and I will have more time to prepare me [...] I will not consent to die this day, that’s certain”. And to reiterate this concept: “No one is going to convince me to die today”. In other cells, there are prisoners who acquire an ability to perceive reality as it is thanks to the moment of suffering they are

<sup>20</sup> “Also the world of his stories, the world of his romantic dramas and comedies, the epic world of his poems and the lyrical world of his sonnets: all of them are animated and pervaded by the spirit of this first truth of the pain of the world”.

<sup>21</sup> “Leopardi seeks the origin of pain not in the intimate essence of man, but in the external nature, both strict nurturer and stepmother who, in order to kill, gives birth and nourishes [...] The ancient Greek tragedians called this same external power, cause of agony and pain, Fate; all Christians, even the greatest, as Calderon de la Barca, identified it with destiny and divine will and entrusted the lot of men to them”. *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> “Beautiful, but with too much blood and too little brain”. Ivi, p. 228.

experiencing. This Shakespearean awareness is expressed by the young Claudio, who is ready for the executioner: "Our natures do pursue, like rats that ravin down their proper bane, a thirsty evil; and when we drink we die".<sup>23</sup>

In this clear vision of existence, there is no room for destiny, since it is clear that the individual is identified by his action. This is the case for Macbeth who, after the murder, exclaims: "I am afraid to think what I have done; look on't again I dare not". Actions mark man, and water cannot clean the blood on the hands of the future King of Scotland, who wonders: "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?" A few scenes further on, the levil Lady Macbeth answers him and, faced with the weight of their misdeeds, finds the strength to exclaim: "What's done cannot be undone".<sup>24</sup>

Therefore, life is pain and man continues to drink his bitter goblet with desperate force. How can this tragic spell be broken? Embracing death is the Roman answer, repeated several times by Shakespeare who made Posthumus, a character in *Cymbeline* who is ready to climb to the scaffold, say: "I am merrier to die than thou art to live".<sup>25</sup>

De Lorenzo realized that in Shakespearean reflection even death was not a definitive solution to the thirst for existence. Hamlet states this clearly in his famous soliloquy:

To die, to sleep; no more? And by a sleep, to say we end the heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to. 'Tis a consumation devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep. To sleep – perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub. For in that sleep of death, what dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil must give us pause. There's the respect that makes calamity of so long life.<sup>26</sup>

For the Danish prince, who is not afraid to say that "I do not set my life at a pin's fee",<sup>27</sup> the meditation on pain is continuous and also takes on tragicomic connotations. This is the case when his usurper uncle asks him what happened to Polonius. The prince replies that he is at dinner not where he eats, but where he is eaten. The horrified king can get the joke and understand that Hamlet killed Polonius until Hamlet continues to speak, petrifying him: "We fat, all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service – two dishes, but

<sup>23</sup> The connection is clear: in order to kill the mice, give a poison that causes compulsive thirst; they cannot find peace until they drink, and so they drink until they burst just like the man who keeps suffering and clinging to his life without understanding that it is this very clinging the reason for his suffering. (*Measure for Measure*, I. ii.).

<sup>24</sup> *Macbeth*, V. i.

<sup>25</sup> In this sense, the dialogue between the jailer and Posthumus, Imogen's husband, is enlightening. He is ready to face the gallows and indeed even impatient to offer his neck to the executioner., Posthumus answers the jailer's pressing and sometimes nervous questions calmly and serenely. *Cymbeline*, V. iv.

<sup>26</sup> *Hamlet*, III. i.

<sup>27</sup> *Ivi*, I. iv.



to one table. That's the end".<sup>28</sup> This meditation soon turns into contemplation, just like in the famous scene of Act V, where Hamlet is with his friend Horatio in a cemetery while a gravedigger sings and works with a spade. He's preparing the grave of Ophelia, who has committed suicide.

"That skull – says Hamlet – had a tongue in it, and could sing once. How the knave jowls it to the ground, as if it were Cain's jawbone, that did the first murder. This might be the pate of a politician, which this ass now o'erreaches. One that would circumvent God, might it not?"

If even death cannot represent a definitive solution to suffering, then the solution must be found, once again, in wisdom experienced in the moment of pain. And yet in Shakespeare there is an intermediate step: *asceticism*, symbolized by the Franciscan friars who were very present in his works. Not only the friars but also several other characters decide or are invited to take the path of asceticism. Such is the case of the melancholic Jacques in *As you like it*. He prefers not to follow his friend the Duke because he wants to live a hermit life with Duke Federico, who has already been redeemed: "To him will I," - he says at the end of Act V, Scene IV," – out of these convertites there is much matter to be heard and learned".<sup>29</sup> This is also the case for Ophelia, whom Hamlet implores:

Get thee to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? [...] We are arrant knaves, all; believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. [...] Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery go; and quickly too.<sup>30</sup>

This is what the beautiful Isabella does in *Measure for measure*, this time by vocation. She embodies, in all her beauty, the goodness of the ascetic choice. So much so that she also asks for "a stricter rule for the Poor Clares, the nuns of Saint Clare".<sup>31</sup> De Lorenzo explains that:

Ella ha il carattere fermo e deciso e l'intelligenza lucida e vivace delle creature a lei più affini: la Giulietta amante di Romeo e la Porzia del *Mercante di Venezia*; solo che in lei l'intelligenza s'è fermata sullo spettacolo di vanità e di dolore del mondo, piuttosto che sulle attrazioni di esso, e ha quindi provocato in lei, invece che una passione d'amore, il rinnegamento della volontà di vivere, l'estinzione della sete dell'esistenza, la rinunzia al mondo.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *Ivi*, IV. iii.

<sup>29</sup> De Lorenzo in *Shakespeare e il dolore del mondo* (p. 208) writes: "Si comprende ora perché Schopenhauer si sia servito, nel capitolo 48 del secondo volume del *Mondo quale volontà e rappresentazione*, proprio di questi versi di Shakespeare, come documentazione alla sua teoria del rinnegamento, in senso francescano e buddhista, della volontà di vivere. E quindi del superamento del dolore del mondo".

<sup>30</sup> *Hamlet*, III. i.

<sup>31</sup> *Measure for Measure*, I. v.

<sup>32</sup> "She has the firm and determined character and the lucid and lively intelligence of the creatures closest to her: the Juliet who loved Romeo and the Portia of the Merchant of Venice; but, in her, the intelligence stopped at the spectacle of vanity and pain of the world, rather than at its attractions, and



Isabella therefore accepts Hamlet's advice, and her request for a harder rule is not to be interpreted as the result of a bigoted fundamentalism, but as the awareness of the need for a method capable of integrating passions and thus eliminating the cause of suffering. This is also clear when the libertine Lucio underlines, in front of Isabella and despite his character particularly prone to joking, the respect he has for her choice to abandon what he is the best "representative of":

I would not, though 'tis my familiar sin with maids to seem the lapwing and to jest, tongue far from heart, play with all virgins so. I hold you as a thing enskied and sainted, by your renouncement an immortal spirit and to be talked with in sincerity, as with a saint.<sup>33</sup>

The road is clear, but at the same time fraught with danger, given the misinterpretations that have been and are being made. Shakespeare himself, well aware of the dangers of false asceticism, ridicules it in the comedy *Love's Labour's Lost*. But what is this false asceticism? De Lorenzo said:

Esso è dato dall'erronea credenza, che si possa liberarsi dal dolore del mondo e conquistare poteri superiori, mediante pratiche esteriori ed un distacco parziale da alcune funzioni della vita, restando per altre a girare nel circolo della vita stessa, si individuale che sociale. [...] Di fronte a questo falso ed inutile ascetismo, da cui non è mai sorto alcun frutto duraturo, sta il vero ascetismo, insegnato da Buddha e da Cristo, secondo cui la vittoria e la pace dello spirito si possono conquistare solo col completo distacco dall'esistenza, con la perfetta rinuncia al mondo, con la totale estinzione della sete della vita.<sup>34</sup>

The action of *Love's Labour's Lost* is based on a clear example of false asceticism. The King of Navarre obtains the oath of his three barons: for three years, they will have to think of nothing more than studying, without dating women, with only one day off per week and no more than three hours of sleep per night. It is easy to imagine the commotion caused by the news of the arrival of the Princess of France along with her ladies in court.

therefore this provoked in her, instead of a passion for love, the denial of the will to live, the extinction of the thirst for existence, the renunciation of the world". G. De Lorenzo, *Shakespeare e il dolore...*, p. 247.

<sup>33</sup> *Measure for Measure*, I. v.

<sup>34</sup> "It is given by the erroneous belief that freeing oneself from the pain of the world and conquering higher powers would be possible through external practices and a partial detachment from some functions of life and, as for the others, by continuing turning oneself in the circle of life, both individual and social. In contrast to this false and useless asceticism, from which no lasting fruit has ever arisen, there lies the true asceticism, taught by Buddha and Christ, according to whom victory and peace of spirit can be achieved only through a complete detachment from existence, the perfect renunciation of the world, the total extinction of the thirst for life". In this passage from *Shakespeare e il dolore...* (p. 47). De Lorenzo also lists some examples of false asceticism to clarify his thinking: "Ciò (il falso ascetismo) hanno insegnato molte scuole bramaniche nell'India, Lao-tse in Cina, le scuole orfiche, pitagoriche e neoplatoniche in Grecia ed Italia, alcune sette maomettane nel mondo islamico, i protestanti nel mondo germanico, fino alle ultime prediche pseudo evangeliche di Tolstoj, senza contare le manifestazioni ed aberrazioni dei cosiddetti vegetariani e teosofi, di entrambi gli emisferi, tra la fine del diciannovesimo e il principio del ventesimo secolo".

Yet asceticism represents an intermediate step to freeing oneself from pain. According to De Lorenzo, what counts in Shakespeare is the experience gained in the moment of suffering: experience that brings about wisdom capable of *lifting* the suffering man from his state. An example is Prospero in *The Tempest* who, for De Lorenzo, was “l'uomo di ordine superiore, in cui Shakespeare adombra la sua vera visione del dolore e della vanità del mondo. Egli, pur essendo duca di Milano, aveva già cognizione di un mondo migliore di quello del semplice dominio terreno ed abbandonò la reggenza di questo al fratello Antonio, dedicandosi ad una vita superiore di contemplazione e di meditazione”.<sup>35</sup>

It should be noted that *The Tempest* is also Shakespeare's last tragedy. It is almost as if the works of the English playwright represented many different *stages* of the experience of pain and his vision of it.

If the vision becomes clear, through the experience of knowledge brought by pain, the reality can only appear *anicca*, impermanent. “Quando grazie alla saggezza una persona percepisce: ‘Tutti i coefficienti sono transeunti (*anicca*)’, allora essa si disincanta dal dolore. Questo è il sentiero della purezza (*Dhammapada*, 20.5 [277])”.<sup>36</sup> A clarity of experience that leads Prospero to compare life to a dream:

These our actors, As I foretold you, were all spirits and are melted into air, into thin air: and, like the baseless fabric of this vision, the cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces, the solemn temples, the great globe itself, Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve, and, like this insubstantial pageant faded, leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff as dreams are made on; and our little life is rounded with a sleep.<sup>37</sup>

If life is a dream, what is the point of revenge? Prospero thus decides to forgive those who relegated him to an island by usurping his kingdom. And he tells Ariel, the airy spirit, at the beginning of Act V: “Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th' quick, get with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury do I take part: the rarer action

<sup>35</sup> “The man of a higher order, in whom Shakespeare overshadows his true vision of the pain and vanity of the world. Although he was Duke of Milan, he already knew of a better world, better than the one of mere earthly dominion, so he abandoned his regency to his brother Antonio, devoting himself to a superior life of contemplation and meditation”. G. De Lorenzo, *Shakespeare e il dolore...*, pp. 387-388.

<sup>36</sup> “When, thanks to wisdom, a person perceives that: ‘All coefficients are transient (*anicca*)’, then he becomes disenchanted from pain. This is the pathway of purity”.

<sup>37</sup> *The Tempest*, IV. i. This description, writes De Lorenzo, “potrebbe essere confrontata con il discorso LIV del *Majjhimanikāya*, in cui lo Svegliato dice: ‘Così come quasi, padre di famiglia, se un uomo vedesse in sogno un bel giardino, una dolce selva, un sereno paesaggio, un chiaro lago, e, svegliato, non scorgesse più nulla: or così anche appunto, padre di famiglia, un santo discepolo riflette in sé: “Simili a visioni di sogno sono le brame, ha detto il Sublime, piene di dolore, piene di spasimo, la miseria prepondera”; ed egli vede così il mondo conforme a verità con perfetta sapienza; e la visione, che cerca molteplice molteplicità, quella egli rinnega; e la visione, che cerca unica unità, nella quale ogni attaccamento al fango del mondo è interamente svanito, sì, questa visione egli realizza”». G. De Lorenzo, *Shakespeare e il dolore...*, pp. 389-390

is in virtue than in vengeance". There can be no room for anything but a continuous meditation on life and death. Retreat and meditate to free yourself from pain:

Prospero nell'ultimo atto della Tempesta, dopo aver esposto la vita come un sogno, pieno di spasimo, pieno di dolore, in cui la miseria prepondera, annunzia, che egli ricondurrà alla vita gli uomini, desiderosi di continuare a godere ed a soffrire tale sogno della vita, e quindi egli stesso si ritirerà a Milano, dove ogni terzo pensiero sarà la sua morte e la sua fossa.<sup>38</sup>

Almost as if he wanted to embrace the invitation of his Prospero, Shakespeare retired to Stratford, where he died in 1616. "Per lui era così finito il mondo – writes De Lorenzo – ma di lui vive e vivrà ancora il mondo".<sup>39</sup>

De Lorenzo's aim, declared from the first pages of *Shakespeare e il dolore del mondo*, was to find in Shakespeare's work "anche se semplicemente squadrate e sbazzate, le quattro pietre angolari della dottrina di Buddho, le quattro sante verità: del dolore, dell'origine, della fine, e della via per la fine del dolore".<sup>40</sup> A search ended with a consideration: "Queste quattro sante verità, che sono come i quattro quadranti del compiuto cerchio della visione del dolore del mondo buddhista, si trovano, più o meno adombrate, anche nel cerchio della visione e concezione del mondo di Shakespeare".<sup>41</sup>

According to De Lorenzo, Shakespeare always saw life as a theatre of pain, realising its origin in the thirst for existence and understanding and indicating its end in the extinction of the thirst to live, although certainly not with the methodological clarity of Buddha.

It is not enough, and this is a point shared by De Lorenzo himself, to intellectually understand pain, its cause and its (possible) extinction. It is necessary to have a method, an orthopraxis, because it is impossible to achieve liberation using the rational paths of a mind that, in the end, should discover the impermanence of the external vision and also the 'non-existence' of the mind which produces it. It is no coincidence that in Buddhism. De Lorenzo saw first of all a *method* "così semplice, chiaro e determinato, che non ha bisogno di alcun'altra spiegazione, chiarificazione o comment".<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup> "In the last act of the Tempest Prospero, after exposing life as a dream, full of spasm, full of pain, in which misery abounds, announces he will bring back to life the men eager to continue to enjoy and suffer from this dream of life, and after that he will retire to Milan, where every other thought will be his death and his grave". G. De Lorenzo, *Shakespeare e il dolore...*, p. 390.

<sup>39</sup> "And so, the world ended for him, but the world still lives and will live on him". G. De Lorenzo, *Shakespeare e il dolore...*, p. 390.

<sup>40</sup> "Even if simply squared and drafted, the four cornerstones of the doctrine of Buddho, the four holy truths: of the pain, of the origin, of the end, and of the way to end the pain" G. De Lorenzo, *Shakespeare e il dolore...*, p. 15.

<sup>41</sup> "These four holy truths, which are like the four quadrants of the accomplished circle of the vision of pain in the Buddhist world, are also found, more or less overshadowed, in the circle of Shakespeare's vision and conception of the world". G. De Lorenzo, *Shakespeare e il dolore...*, p. 398.

<sup>42</sup> "So simple, clear and specific, that it does not need any other explanation, clarification or comment". G. De Lorenzo, *India e Buddismo antico*, Laterza, Bari 1926, p. 405.

What is only sketched with a light and barely perceptible line, in Shakespeare's 'Buddhist' reading, is the metaphysical aspect. And not for the lack of a speculative attitude, but because the vision of pain in the Shakespearean world is: "ridotta a materia di pensiero ed a forma d'arte da quel grande occhio del mondo".<sup>43</sup>

When the object of this analysis provided this possibility, De Lorenzo's metaphysical analysis was more pronounced. This was the case in his studies on Byron: the splendid monologue of Cain that opens Act I of *Cain* clearly delimits the *field* in which we would move soon after, that is to say only and exclusively the field of metaphysics.

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<sup>43</sup> "Reduced to matter of thought and art form by that great eye of the world". G. De Lorenzo, *Shakespeare e il dolore...*, p. 398.

GIUSEPPE DE LORENZO  
AND HIS "BUDDHIST" READING OF SHAKESPEARE

## Summary

Giuseppe De Lorenzo (1871-1957) was a geologist, a translator of Buddhist texts and Schopenhauer, a great reader of Shakespeare and senator of the Italian Kingdom since 1913. His multifaceted figure has been discussed and criticised over the years, but it keeps arousing great interest both in respect to the history of European culture in the early twentieth century and the history of Buddhism in Italy. *Shakespeare e il dolore del mondo* (published in 1921), can be considered De Lorenzo's first specific attempt to read into the works of major western poets and philosophers an idea of pain that is actualized as a constant dimension. The works of the English poet and playwright are subjected to an innovative and unorthodox analysis which has as objective "di cercare e mostrare come nell'opera di Shakespeare esista, in nuce, quella visione del dolore del mondo, che è alla base della dottrina di Buddho e di Schopenhauer" ("To seek and show how in Shakespeare's work there exists, in the beginning, that vision of the pain of the world, which was the basis of the doctrine of Buddho and Schopenhauer", *op. cit.*, p. 14). The research is devoted not only to the identification of a Buddhist seed in Shakespeare's tragedies, but primarily to the analysis of the idea of pain in the world as well as finding an ethical way to eliminate suffering - a vision that is diametrically opposed to the Greek and Jewish-Christian worldview.

**Keywords:** William Shakespeare, Giuseppe De Lorenzo, History of Religions, English Literature, Buddhism, Pain, Suffering

GIUSEPPE DE LORENZO  
I JEGO „BUDDYJSKA” INTERPRETACJA SZEKSPIRA

## Streszczenie

Giuseppe De Lorenzo (1871-1957) był geologiem, tłumaczem tekstów buddyjskich i Schopenhauera, wybitnym znawcą Szekspira i senatorem Królestwa Włoch od 1913 roku. Jego złożona postać przez lata była przedmiotem dyskusji i krytyki, mimo to ciągle wzbudza duże zainteresowanie zarówno w zakresie historii kultury europejskiej początków XX wieku, jak i historii buddyzmu we Włoszech. *Shakespeare e il dolore del mondo* (książka opublikowana w 1921 roku) może być uznawana za pierwszą szczegółową próbę poszukiwań w dziełach wielkich zachodnich poetów i filozofów idei bólu, który jest urzeczywistniany jako stały wymiar. Dzieła angielskiego poety i dramaturga poddane są nowatorskiej i nieszablonowej analizie, która ma za cel „di cercare e mostrare come nell'opera di Shakespeare esista, in nuce, quella visione del dolore del mondo, che è alla base della dottrina di Buddho e di Schopenhauer” („odszukać i pokazać, w jaki sposób w dziele Szekspira istnieje, na początku, ta wizja bólu świata, która była podstawą doktryny Buddy i Schopenhauera”, *op. cit.*, s. 14). Badanie poświęcone jest nie tylko identyfikacji buddyjskiego pierwiastka w tragediach Szekspira, lecz raczej ukierunkowane jest na analizę idei bólu na świecie, jak również odnalezienie etycznego sposobu eliminacji cierpienia. Wizja, która jest diametralnie różna od greckiego i judeochrześcijańskiego światopoglądu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** William Szekspir, Giuseppe De Lorenzo, historia religii, literatura angielska, buddyzm, ból, cierpienie