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Lisabetta and Lorenzo's tomb

(on *Decameron* IV 5)

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Abstract: This paper suggests a new interpretation of the tale of Lisabetta da Messina (*Decameron* IV 5) in the light of a fact which has thus far been disregarded by scholars: namely, that in both medieval culture, and its basis in Roman law, an individual cannot have more than one grave. In case of dismemberment, the burial place is considered to be the place where the head is interred. Therefore, the pot of basil in Boccaccio's tale is Lorenzo's tomb, and Lisabetta beheads her dead lover in order to be able to perform suitable funeral rites. Taking this into account, her behaviour as well as other aspects of the tale take on new meaning.

Keywords: Boccaccio, *Decameron* IV 5, Lisabetta da Messina, beheading, burial, severed head¹

— Je veux le voir, lui dit-elle.

Fouqué n'eut pas le courage de parler ni de se lever. Il lui montra du doigt un grand manteau bleu sur le plancher ; là était enveloppé ce qui restait de Julien.

Elle se jeta à genoux. Le souvenir de Boniface de La Mole et de Marguerite de Navarre lui donna sans doute un courage surhumain. Ses mains tremblantes ouvrirent le manteau. Fouqué détourna les yeux.

Il entendit Mathilde marcher avec précipitation dans la chambre. Elle allumait plusieurs bougies. Lorsque Fouqué eut la force de la regarder, elle avait placé sur une petite table de marbre, devant elle, la tête de Julien, et la baisait au front. . . .

In the fifth tale of the fourth day of the *Decameron* a young woman handles and kisses the severed head of the man who was once her lover, just like in the opening quotation. The reason behind the choice of epigraph, however, is less apparent. Mathilde de la Mole's actions in *Le rouge et le noir*'s ending are in fact only truly comprehensible in the context of the events that took place "en place de Grève" "le 30 avril 1574", narrated thirty-five chapters earlier (in chapter XL) and here as elsewhere in the novel only alluded to. Likewise, the behaviour of Lisabetta, the protagonist of Giovanni Boccaccio's tale, can be better understood through a datum which seems to have escaped the notice of the dozens of studies that examine this tale, not least of which is *Il testo moltiplicato*, the 1982 collection of five different readings of this single text, carried out with different methodologies.²

The datum in question cannot be extracted from any other passage of the *Decameron*, even less so from Lisabetta's succinct tale. However, it is useful to recall a brief excerpt.

dove men dura le parve la terra quivi cavò; né ebbe guari cavato, che ella trovò il corpo del suo misero amante in niuna cosa ancora guasto né corrotto: per che manifestamente conobbe essere stata vera la sua visione. Di che più che altra femina dolorosa, conoscendo che quivi non era da piagnere, se avesse potuto volentier tutto il corpo n'avrebbe portato per dargli più convenevole sepoltura; ma veggendo che ciò esser non poteva, con un coltello il meglio che poté gli spiccò dallo 'mbusto la testa. . . .

There is no need to summarise the plot. As many scholars have observed, Lisabetta's action is disconcerting to the modern reader; and furthermore, it is not easily explicable – the tale is the first in a series of occurrences of the theme, thus there is no earlier episode to be employed for an interpretation.³ However, why Lisabetta beheads Lorenzo's body becomes clear in the light of passages such as the following:

Religiosus dicitur iuxta leges et instituta Romanorum omnis locus, in quo sepelitur corpus hominis siue caput tantum. Caput ideo dico, quia nullus homo potest habere duas sepulturas, sed ubi caput, ibi dicitur esse sepultura eius (Beleth 304).

This extract comes from *capitulum* 159 (*De officio mortuorum*) of the *Summa de ecclesiasticis officiis* by Jean Beleth (also known under other titles: *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, *Rationale divinorum officiorum*...). This twelfth-century work was well-known during the Middle Ages (there are around one hundred surviving witnesses), and the concept expressed above can also be found in *capitulum* 2 of the same text (*De locis uenerabilibus et eorum diuersitate*):

Locus religiosus dicitur, ubi hominis cadauer integrum sepelitur vel caput tantum. Truncus enim sine capite locum religiosum non facit (6).

It is not particularly important to determine whether the work was known in Italy during Boccaccio's time. Another relevant passage appears in the *Mitræ sive Summa de officiis ecclesiasticis* by Sicard of Cremona, not much later (IX 50, *De exsequiis mortuorum*).

Alius religiosus, ubi secundum statuta Romanorum corpus integrum aut caput hominis sepelitur; caput ideo dico, quia truncus sine capite locum non efficit religiosum; quia nullus duas sepulturas potest habere, sed ubi caput, ibi sepultura eius dicitur esse, siue sit Iudæus siue paganus (Sarbak and Weinrich 672-673).

The very same concept can also be found in the *Rationale divinorum officiorum* by Guillaume Durand (Guillelmus Duranti senior, also known as Speculator; the book was composed between 1290 and 1294⁴). It was one of the most widely read and transcribed texts of the Middle Ages, as is made manifest by the number of copies that have been transmitted to us (there are at least two hundred extant witnesses of the various versions⁵).

Religiosa sunt ubi cadauer hominis integrum uel etiam caput tantum sepelitur quia nemo potest duas sepulturas habere, corpus uero uel aliquod aliud membrum absque capite sepultum non facit locum religiosum.⁶

Religious places are those where an intact human cadaver, or at least a head is buried; since no one can have two sepulchers, a body or any other members buried without the head does not constitute a religious place (Thibodeau 54).

Ending his treatise, Durand explicitly declares that he has made use of a multitude of sources. The most interesting for the subject at hand is a text whose manuscript tradition is of the same order of magnitude as that of Dante's *Commedia*: Justinian's *Digest* (11.7.44).

PAULUS libro tertio quaestionum Cum in diversis locis sepultum est, uterque quidem locus religiosus non fit, quia una sepultura plura sepulchra efficere non potest: mihi autem videtur illum religiosum esse, ubi quod est principale conditum est, id est caput, cuius imago fit, inde cognoscimur. cum autem impetratur, ut reliquiae transferantur, desinit locus religiosus esse.

PAUL, *Questions, book 3*. When a burial has been performed in more than one place, the places are not both made religious, because one burial cannot produce more than one tomb. In my opinion, the place which is religious is the one where the head is buried, that is, the head from which likenesses are made, by which we are recognized. But when a request for the transfer of the remains is granted, the place ceases to be religious.⁷

Boccaccio openly quotes the *Digest* in his *Genealogia*, recalling that in the book which he refers to as *Pandecta pisana* (the oldest manuscript of the *Pandects*, during that period held in Pisa)

sono registrati dei versi di Omero, intrecciati alle “leggi dei Cesari” dagli estensori di quell’opera “per rendere” quelle leggi “degne di maggiore venerazione e rinforzarle con qualche sacrosanta testimonianza”

indicating with precision where these verses can be found in the book.⁸ Greek passages of this venerable codex had been translated, on commission of Pisa's government, by Leonzio Pilato, who was assigned by Boccaccio to translate another text from the same language: Homer. Work on the *Pandects*, in all likelihood abruptly interrupted in May 1362 when diplomatic relations between Pisa and Florence were severed,⁹ was probably carried out during a time when the collaboration of the Calabrian monk with the author of the *Decameron* had been suspended; it is hypothesised that the latter's knowledge of the *Pandects* had been mediated by the former.¹⁰ However, no such process need be conjectured regarding the cultural datum of interest in this work. Lucia Battaglia Ricci has drawn attention to Boccaccio's legal training in canon law at the Neapolitan *Studium*;¹¹ and considering that we can find it in several of the most widespread works of the Middle Ages, we can assume that the idea that people lie where their head is buried was prevalent in Western culture for centuries without hunting for other passages where the concept is only implicitly present.¹²

Coming back to Boccaccio's tale and re-reading the above-quoted passage in the light of what we have seen, Lisabetta's actions take on a new meaning. She wishes to give her lover a worthier burial place; she cannot transport his whole body elsewhere; therefore, she decides to sever his head, take it with her and by burying it give Lorenzo more fitting obsequies. This is precisely what she goes on to do. Considering that, not only on a symbolic level but on a legal one, a person lies where his head is buried, for Lisabetta to wash her lover's head with her tears is tantamount to the ritual washing of the dead body; the *bel drappo* she wraps his head in is a shroud; and the pot of basil is Lorenzo's grave.

Widening the perspective, this assessment of Lisabetta's choices allows us to interpret differently other passages of the tale. The “apparentemente ellittica” sentence which Maria Antonietta Terzoli points to (218) acquires a more determinate meaning.

E per usanza aveva preso di sedersi sempre a questo testo vicina e quello con tutto il suo disidero vagheggiare, sì come quello che il suo Lorenzo teneva nascoso. . . .

In Lisabetta's oneiric vision, Lorenzo tells her that he has been killed by her brothers, and instructs her not to search for him anymore, although he indicates to her where she can find his dead body. In returning to this passage, it is now possible to better appreciate one of the narrative kernels included in Boccaccio's tale: the theme of the unburied dead who appears in a dream to have his body retrieved and buried in order to find peace. In traditional cultures, the idea that the deceased maintain some form of life and the idea that they present a danger can be combined in different configurations, serving as the source for the figure of the "living dead". And so, among the functions of funeral rites is that of exorcizing the possibility of a return and facilitating the passage to the afterlife, allowing the deceased to rest in peace.¹³ The belief is traditional, and it is therefore not pertinent to search for a precise source for this theme, though it surfaces for instance in Tertullian's *De anima* (ch. 56; Menghi 206-208):

Creditum est, insepultos non ante ad inferos redigi, quam iusta perceperint, secundum homericum Patroclum funus in somnis de Achille flagitantem, quod non alias adire portas inferum posset, arcentibus eum longe animabus sepulorum.

It was believed that the unburied dead were not admitted into the infernal regions before they had received a proper sepulture; as in the case of Homer's Patroclus, who earnestly asks for a burial of Achilles in a dream, on the ground that he could not enter Hades through any other portal, since the souls of the sepulchred dead kept thrusting him away (Tertullian 232).

Another classical source, different to Homer, and by far more widely known during the Middle Ages is quoted in Augustine's *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* (624): Virgil's *Aeneid*.

Neque enim credendum est, sicut apud Maronem legitur, insepultos a navigando atque transeundo inferno amne prohiberi: quia scilicet

Nec ripas datur horrendas, nec rauca fluenta
Transportare prius, quam sedibus ossa quierunt.

For we should not believe, as we read in Virgil, that the unburied are prohibited from navigating and crossing the infernal river. For indeed

To none is given to pass the horrid banks and roaring streams
Until the bones have sunk to rest in peace.¹⁴

In an attempt to refute it, Augustine evokes this belief in several passages of the same work:

opinionem, quod infernum fluuium insepulti non poterant transmeare . . . (638).

the belief that unburied men may not cross over the river in Hades . . . (Thompson, § 11).

Among them is of special interest section X. 12 (639-641), in which it is the unburied dead that appears in a dream asking to be inhumed, again drawing on Virgil's *Aeneid*.

Narrantur uisa quaedam, quae huic disputationi non neglegendam uideantur inferre quaestionem. feruntur quippe mortui nonnulli uel in somnis uel alio quocumque modo adparuisse uiuentibus atque ubi eorum corpora iacerent inhumata nescientibus locisque monstratis admonuisse, ut sibi sepultura quae defuerat praeberetur. haec si falsa esse responderimus, contra quorundam scripta fidelium et contra eorum sensus, qui talia sibi accidisse confirmant, inpudenter uenire uidebimur. sed respondendum est non ideo putandum esse mortuos ista sentire, quia haec dicere uel indicare uel petere uidentur in somnis. nam et uiuentes adparent saepe uiuentibus dormientibus, dum se ipsi nesciant adparere, et ab eis haec quae somniauerint audiunt dicentibus, quod eos in somnis uiderint

agentes aliquid uel loquentes. si ergo me potest aliquis in somnis uidere sibi aliquid quod factum est indicantem uel etiam quod futurum est praenuntiantem, cum id ego prorsus ignorem et omnino non curem, non solum quid ille somniet, sed utrum dormiente me uigilet, an uigilante me dormiat, an uno eodemque tempore uigilemus ambo siue dormiamus, quando ille somnium uidet, in quo me uidet: quid mirum, si nescientes mortui nec ista sentientes tamen a uiuentibus uidentur in somnis et aliquid dicunt, quod euigilantes uerum esse cognoscant? angelicis igitur operationibus fieri crediderim, siue permittatur desuper siue iubeatur, ut aliquid dicere de sepeliendis corporibus suis uideantur in somnis, cum id penitus nesciant, quorum illa sunt corpora. id autem aliquando utiliter fit siue ad uiuorum quaecumque solacium, ad quos pertinent illi mortui, quorum adparent imagines somniantibus, siue ut his admonitionibus generi humano sepulturae commendetur humanitas, quae, licet defunctis non opituletur, culpanda tamen inreligiositate neglegitur. aliquando autem fallacibus uisis homines in magnos mittuntur errores, quos talia perpeti iustum est. uelut si quisquam uideat in somnis, quod Aeneas uidisse apud inferos poetica falsitate narratur, et ei cuiuspiam non sepulti adpareat imago loquaturque talia, qualia fertur locutus illi fuisse Palinurus, et cum euigilauerit, ibi corpus eius inueniat, ubi iacere inhumatum, cum somniaret, audiuit, admonitus et rogatus, ut sepeliret inuentum, et quia id uerum esse comperit, credat ideo mortuos sepeliri, ut eorum animae ad loca transeant, unde insepultorum animas inferna prohiberi lege somniauit. . . .

Stories are told of certain visions, which might seem to bring into this discussion a question which we should not overlook. It is said, namely, that dead men have at times either in dreams or in some other way appeared to the living and pointed out to them the place where, unknown to the living, their bodies lay unburied and encouraged them to give them the burial they were lacking. If we were to respond that such things were untrue, it might be thought we were shamelessly contradicting the writings of certain faithful men, and the senses of those who assure us that such things have happened to themselves. But we must answer, that it should not be thought for that reason that the dead have some sense of these things just because they appear in dreams to say or show or ask for such things. For those who are alive also often appear to the living as they sleep, even though they themselves are not aware that they are appearing, but they are told by the others what they had dreamed, namely, that in their dream the speakers saw them doing or saying something. So what if a person should see me in a dream showing that person something that has happened or even foretelling something that is about to happen, while I am totally ignorant of it and have no business at all in the matter – regardless of whether he is asleep, or he is awake while I am asleep, or he is asleep while I am awake, or whether we are both awake or asleep at one and the same time while he has the dream in which he sees me. How marvelous if the dead are unconscious and insensible of these things and yet still are seen by the living in their dreams, and say something which after they awake turns out to be true! Therefore, I should think that this happens through the working of angels, whether permitted or commanded from above, so that they seem to say something in dreams about the burying of their bodies, while those in whose bodies they are seen are totally unconscious of it. Now this is useful sometimes to provide some solace for the living who have a connection with the dead whose likenesses appear to them in dreams, and at other times as admonitions to humanity that they might have regard for the burial of humans, so that even though burial does not help the departed, yet there is still some guilt when one impiously neglects to do it. Sometimes however, false visions which lead people into great error are seen by men who deserve to suffer this. It is as if one might see in a dream what Aeneas is said to have seen in the world below (although what the poem said was untrue), and the likeness of some unburied man should appear to him who would speak the same words as Palinurus is said to have spoken to him; and when he awakes, he would find the body in that place where in his dream he was told it lay unburied, and which he was encouraged and asked to bury when found; and because he finds this to be true, he believes that the dead are buried so that their souls will pass to places from which in his dream the souls of the unburied are prohibited by a law of the underworld. . . .¹⁵

It is not my intention to hypothesise that Boccaccio's tale derives directly from a classical source or from Augustine, nor to claim that Lorenzo appears to Lisabetta primarily to indicate to her where his body lies to obtain a more adequate burial place. The quoted passages serve instead to frame a theme which nevertheless, as noted above, is merely a kernel, absorbed and completely reworked by Boccaccio in his tale. The identification of this kernel and the consideration of the fact

that Lorenzo is actually buried in the pot of basil help nevertheless to explain why his head, which Lisabetta finds incorrupt like the rest of his body, starts to decompose once inside the pot of basil – that is to say, once inhumed.

Maria Antonietta Terzoli has also drawn attention to the “particolare davvero sconcertante” of the preternatural intactness of Lorenzo’s body, comparing it to the “conservazione miracolosa del corpo morto” of saints and martyrs (216-217¹⁶). The absence of decay of their mortal remains can be linked to their privileged spiritual condition, considering their corpses a symbol of their soul;¹⁷ but it can also be seen in a much more ambivalent way, reflecting upon the fact that the natural decomposition is suspended or deferred while waiting for the retrieval of the body by the faithful, for the obsequies.¹⁸ Just as the – temporary – incorruptness of Lorenzo’s body, it can in sum be related to the atavistic beliefs according to which death is not an immediate and definitively irreversible change of state, but a process, like decomposition,

un processo che forse, anche in abito cristiano – nonostante l’irrisolto tentativo agostiniano di separare radicalmente, opponendosi a credenze millenarie, la sorte dei morti da quella dei viventi, e di neutralizzare così le potenze infauste gravitanti intorno al cadavere –, veniva ancora oscuramente avvertito come legato a una condizione intermedia e rischiosa dello spirito del morto in attesa di approdare allo status pacificato della nuova condizione di defunto (Canetti 145).

As I evoked earlier, transitional funeral rites serve the purpose of excluding the deceased from the community of the living and integrating them into the world of the dead. They complete a process, which like others, includes phases, and intermediate stages. It is plausible to imagine that a delay in one of this intermediate phases due to failure to carry out the prescribed rites, will result in suspension of all concomitant processes. However, during the Middle Ages, a corpse which had not decomposed was far from being a good sign.

On ne conçoit pas au Moyen Age une conservation totale des cadavres *ad vitam eternam*, reflet d’une action diabolique.

Il semble donc que pour s’assurer l’entrée du Paradis, il faut se fondre dans la terre chrétienne pour enfin ressusciter. . . . Le pourrissement est, nous le savons tous, la continuité naturelle de la vie et par extension au Moyen Age l’œuvre de Dieu dont les lois régissent le cours des choses. De fait, les cas de conservation sans intervention de l’homme ont souvent été assimilés à une action diabolique. Les chrétiens pensaient en effet que le Diable suspendait la putréfaction des apostats, des sorciers et des non-baptisés. La formule d’excommunication prédisait d’ailleurs : *Après ta mort, ton corps restera éternellement incorruptible comme la pierre et le fer*.¹⁹

Besides (and perhaps more than) this cultural element, it is narrative motives which lie behind the fact that Lorenzo’s mortal remains first are preserved and then wither. After all, Boccaccio probably shared his contemporaries’ viewpoint in many regards noted here – like the answer to the question which it seems no modern scholar has yet posed, that is, where Lorenzo is actually buried. In all likelihood, however, he would have not acknowledged as his own some of the beliefs that nevertheless seem to reverberate in his tale. They probably derive from one of his sources, perhaps already there re-emerging as relicts. In addition to the poem quoted by Filomena at the end of her narration, in composing Lisabetta’s tale Boccaccio must have been inspired by other texts: various influences become amalgamated in the tale, leaving some not completely invisible seams. For instance, it seems possible to me that the idea of the pot-grave was born from the song quoted at the end of the tale crossed with the custom from the classical world of putting the mortal remains of the

deceased in urns. This can be seen in the *Teseida*, where an urn serves as Arcita's final resting place, and is coherent with the many elements of classical culture that can be found in *Decameron* IV 5.²⁰

Toward the tale's conclusion, Lisabetta cries over the pot of basil; since it is Lorenzo's grave, in wetting it with her tears she is mourning the loss of her lover at his tomb. It does not seem therefore appropriate to speak of a "culto feticistico".²¹ Several studies on the novella appear to bear this undertone, reprehending the protagonist for her behaviour. Such disapproval can be found in one of the most recent texts: "Lisabetta sviluppa un culto segreto e patologico, una devozione assoluta, esclusiva e malata per il vaso, il "testo", dove tiene nascosta la testa del suo Lorenzo"; "culto segreto e morboso (. . .) verso il vaso-urna di basilico, tutto chiuso nella sfera personale e privata al punto da condurre la protagonista all'auto-isolamento e all'ossessione".²² To take away from her the object of her morbid fixation could at this point seem a reasonable (even compassionate) action on her brothers' part – while Lisabetta's suffering, illness and death would be the outcome of an irresponsible and unreasoning inability to get over what happened. But, as many have already noted, the girl's full-blown illness begins after the pot has been confiscated. Thus, it occurs after her mourning has been impeded, on the one hand; and on the other, her grief has been amplified by not knowing the fate of the tomb – the most she could arrange for her beloved Lorenzo – though full well able to imagine what will indeed come to pass.

When, after having taken the pot of basil from Lisabetta, her brothers pour out the earth to uncover the pot's contents, they are *de facto* profaning a tomb, and therefore performing yet another execrable action.²³ In this perspective, the delayed putrefaction of Lorenzo's body fulfils the twofold function of attenuating the sensation of macabre for the beheading that took place in the "luogo molto solitario e rimoto" and to increase the reader's revulsion at the brothers' actions. The brothers who, according to "l'ipotesi narrativamente più congrua" (Picone 2010: 50), in addition to murder, betrayal of a trusting person, and profanation of grave, are also guilty of having abandoned their ill sister to her mortal fate. Thus, she is instead the object of Filomena's sympathy²⁴ – and therefore, we can hypothesise, of the reader's.²⁵ Indeed, beginning the narration of her novella "piena di compassione" for the unfortunate protagonists of the previous one, Filomena declares that she will recount one that "non sarà men pietosa".

¹ Results incorporated in this standard have received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 665790.

² The reference is to *Il testo moltiplicato. Lettura di una novella del 'Decameron'*, ed. and prefaced by Lavagetto and containing readings by Baratto, Serpieri, Segre, Nencioni, Cirese. Other studies dealing exclusively, or at least substantially, with *Decameron* IV 5 are Cannizzaro, Zumbini, Russo, Devoto, Sanguineti 1976 and 1982, Usher, Mazzamuto 1983 and 1992, Mazzarino, Faithfull, Caprettini, Marcus, Poole, Grossi, Barillari, Güntert, Porcelli, Picone 2001 and 2010, Terzoli, Crivelli, Fenu Barbera, Eross, Sebastio, Marchesi, Rando, Cardini, Tufano, Ciccica, Sciacovelli, Natali, Papi, Civitarese, Leech, Di Salvatore, Piacentini. Segre and more recently d'Agostino review different interpretations the tale has received in the history of criticism. The passages of the tale are quoted from Boccaccio 2013.

³ As Terzoli 213 remarks, "la prima occorrenza registrata nei grandi repertori di tipi e motivi narrativi è proprio questa novella"; consulting the more recent Ceserani the situation remains unchanged.

⁴ Cf. Gaudemet.

⁵ Cf. Davril and Thibodeau, CXL B 211-217.

⁶ I, V, 3; Davril and Thibodeau, CXL 58.

⁷ Mommsen 256. Beyond the remarkable number of attestation of all these works, their success is such that data like the one on which we are focusing in all likelihood should have been common knowledge also when the work itself was not directly known: for instance, the very same chapter containing the passage quoted earlier from Sicard of Cremona's *Mitralis de Officiis* is explicitly quoted in Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden legend* (that has around one thousand witnesses): cf. Iacopo da Varazze 1262-63.

⁸ Cf. *Genealogia deorum gentilium* XIV xix 7-8; Battaglia Ricci 120 (from which the previous quote is drawn).

⁹ Cf. Falzone.

¹⁰ Cf. Battaglia Ricci 120-121.

¹¹ Cf. Battaglia Ricci 116-133, and concerning the presence of Boccaccio's legal culture in the *Decameron* Conetti (both also for further bibliography).

¹² The choice to take away Lorenzo's head has been justified by critics in different ways, and apparently nobody has related it to what was stated by the law concerning burial places: see for instance Natali 145 and note 37 (which reviews the opinions of other scholars; and cf. moreover Caprettini 124-125 and 125-127, which also has remarks about the closeness between the theme of the basil in Boccaccio's tale and the motif of the tree growing on the grave, already noted in both Sanguineti's contributions and now more comprehensible).

¹³ For an introduction and bibliography on the subject, cf. Weiss-Krejci, Cardini and Fiori, and Mattalucci. For a more in-depth look at the theme cf. Schmitt, in particular 15: "Dans la société médiévale comme dans bien d'autres sociétés traditionnelles, la forme particulière d'existence que l'on prête aux défunts dépend du déroulement du "rite de passage" de la mort: les morts reviennent de préférence quand les rites des funérailles et du deuil n'ont pas pu s'effectuer normalement, par exemple si le corps d'un noy a "disparu et n'a pu être enseveli selon la coutume . . ." (on this, see also the following note 18).

¹⁴ Thompson, § 3. I extend Augustine's quotation including vv. 325-328 of book VI: "Haec omnis, quam cernis, inops inhumataque turbast; / portitor ille Charon; hi, quos vehit unda, sepulti. / Nec ripas datur horrendas et rauca fluenta / transportare prius, quam sedibus ossa quierunt. . . ." – "All this mob you observe is the helpless folk, the unburied. Charon's the ferryman; those who have tombs are conveyed on the waters. Statutes forbid transportation of souls beyond these banks of horror, Over these torrents of groan, till their bones receive proper interment" (Ahl 138). The whole episode of Palinurus, immediately following, revolves around this theme.

¹⁵ Thompson, § 12. This passage is also reported (with an Italian translation) by Balestrero 21-23, that focuses on the value of the revealing vision in Lisabetta's dream. According to Balestrero 25-26, appearing to his beloved, Lorenzo "desidera che la fanciulla non lo accusi ingiustamente e smetta di piangerlo, e, indicandole il luogo dove è nascosto il suo corpo, implicitamente le chiede di seppellirlo degnamente." But as the scholar does not take into account the cultural datum from which this work stems, she believes that Lorenzo's "implicit request" has not been fulfilled. On the contrary "Lisabetta, conservando la testa dell'amante nel vaso di basilico, si rende colpevole proprio di quel tipo di atteggiamento idolatra che il santo [Agostino] biasima."

¹⁶ See also Picone 2010: 48; Sanguineti 1982: 320-321.

¹⁷ So for instance Finucane 276.

¹⁸ Just as Terzoli 217 observes. Hayes 20-21 recalls an episode of the *Miracles de Notre-dame de Chartres* (thirteenth century) where a canon who led a licentious life is buried in a dishonourable way after his death; yet as before dying he had privately repented of his sins, one month later the Virgin Mary appears to the dean of the church and reprimands him for the shameful treatment of the canon's body. Therefore, the following day the body, found to be incorrupt, is buried in a proper way. It must be noted that among the elements that made the canon's burial dishonourable was the fact that he had not even been covered with enough soil, and "Guibert of Nogent also suggests that a shallow burial indicated that the buried person was not respected" (in reference to the burial of the corrupt bishop of Laon: Hayes 21). This is also Lorenzo's predicament, as to retrieve him Lisabetta has little to excavate (cf. the first passage of the tale quoted).

¹⁹ Georges 381, 368; the second quotation is followed by examples of definitely negative reactions to the discoveries of corpses incorrupt centuries after death. In the introduction of *Il cadavere/The corpse* (10), André Vauchez recalls the decretal *Detestandae ferinitatis* issued by Boniface VIII in 1300, remarking that "pour le pape Caetani en effet, il y a dans le corps humain des puissances autodestructrices dont il faut respecter le rythme et un processus de passage de l'ici-bas à l'au-delà par étapes successives," and other more or less contemporary opinions following the same lines. The above-quoted decretal objected to the widespread practice of dismembering the corpses, that with others (evisceration, boiling so as to make it possible to remove the flesh from the bones, etc.) often intended to facilitate transportation of the deceased from the place of death to the desired burial place (cf. for instance the case evoked by Georges 381-382, note 3). In this context, the actions of the protagonist of *Decameron* IV 5 appear less upsetting than how a modern reader would react. (On the attitude toward corpses during the Middle Ages, cf. several works in the above-cited *Il cadavere/The corpse*, with additional bibliographic references).

²⁰ For which cf. in particular Baratto, Marchesi, and Balestrero pp. 19-21. In his annotations to the *Teseida* Boccaccio twice glosses *urna* as 'vaso': cf. Boccaccio 2015: 67, 363, annotations to II 74, 7 and XI 90,4.

²¹ Picone 2010: 49. Fetishism is a recurrent concept in the bibliography on the tale, at least since Segre 84: "non è difficile pensare, a proposito di questo vagheggiamento del vaso con la testa, a un atto di feticismo. Il feticismo è una

metonimia erotica.” See also Güntert 193; Marcus 392; among those using *feticcio* Natali 142; for Balestrero 26, “la giovane mostra tristezza per la perdita di Lorenzo, ma si lascia morire solo quando le viene sottratto il vaso, suo oggetto di devozione e di culto (. . .) raggiunge il culmine della disperazione solo quando perde quello che potremmo definire il suo totem-oggetto di venerazione e scopo del suo esistere.” Lisabetta’s obsession and “demenza” (Baratto 43) are recurrent themes as well, in studies about her tale, at least since Momigliano’s reading of it; see also the following note.

²² Piacentini 98 and 99. On this point, I note that in Ceserani Lisabetta’s tale is filed under the entry *Necrofilia* and mentioned in *Ossessione, mania*.

²³ Usher 58 describes the action thus: “they uproot the basil, violently desecrating Lorenzo’s grave.” From no other passage of his work, however, can we infer that the pot of basil is to be considered Lorenzo’s tomb, as proposed here: the burial is described as “concealing Lorenzo’s mutilated remains in a pot” (63), while the pot itself is compared to the receptacles where Guiscardo’s heart in IV 1 and Guglielmo Guardastagno’s in IV 9 are placed (66), and Lorenzo’s head is termed “a relic” (68).

²⁴ Cf. Cirese 111-119.

²⁵ “Non occorrono parole di solidarietà verso Lisabetta per farci comprendere che Boccaccio è tutto dalla sua parte”: Segre 85 (though Grossi disagrees).

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