

A RECOMBINATION OF

CITIES OF THE DEAD, AN EXCERPT OF INVISIBLE CITIES BY ITALO CALVINO  
& REPEATED PHRASES IN STRANGER THINGS BY THE DÜFFER BROTHERS

# CITIES OF THE DEAD





## THE VANISHING OF WILL BYERS

At Melania, every time you enter the square, you find yourself caught in a dialogue: the braggart soldier and the parasite coming from a door meet the young wastrel and the prostitute; or else the miserly father from his threshold utters his final warnings to the amorous daughter and is interrupted by the foolish servant who is taking a note to the procuress.

### We just made out a couple times (2)

You return to Melania after years and you find the same dialogue still going on; in the meanwhile the parasite has died, and so have the procuress and the miserly father; but the braggart soldier, the amorous daughter, the foolish servant have taken their places, being replaced in their turn by the hypocrite, the confidante, the astrologer.

### I can't believe you (2)

Melania's population renews itself: the participants in the dialogues die one by one and meanwhile those who will take their places are born, some in one role, some in another.

### Ninety-nine out of one hundred (2)

When one changes role or abandons the square forever or makes his first entrance into it, there is a series of changes, until all the roles have been reassigned; but meanwhile the angry old man 80 goes on replying to the witty maid-servant, the usurer never ceases following the disinherited youth, the nurse consoles the stepdaughter, even if none of them keeps the same eyes and voice he had in the previous scene.

### You wanna know the worst thing (2)

At times it may happen that a sole person will simultaneously take on two or more roles-tyrant, benefactor, messenger--or one role may be doubled, multiplied, assigned to a hundred, a thousand inhabitants of Melania: three thousand for the hypocrite, thirty thousand for the sponger, a hundred thousand king's sons fallen in low estate and awaiting recognition.

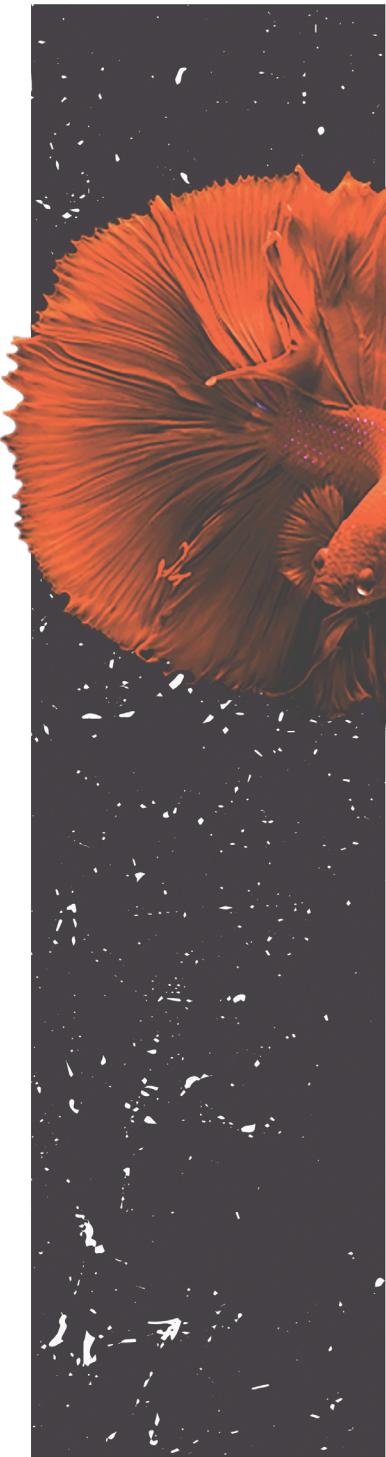
### Look at this one (2)

As time passes the roles, too, are no longer exactly the same as before; certainly the action they carry forward through intrigues and surprises leads toward some final denouement, which it continues to approach even when the plot seems to thicken more and more and the obstacles increase.

### I know it was his breathing (2)

If you look into the square in successive moments, you hear how from act to act the dialogue changes, even if the lives of Melania's inhabitants are too short for them to realize it.

### he has nothing to do with this (2)



## The Weirdo on Maple Street

Never in all my travels had I ventured as far as Adelma.

### What kind of danger (2)

It was dusk when I landed there.  
**to the front door and (2)**

On the dock the sailor who caught the rope and tied it to the ballard resembled a man who had soldiered with me and was dead.

### Did you see him (2)

It was the hour of the wholesale fish market.

### Do you know where he is (3)

An old man was loading a basket of sea urchins on a cart; I thought I recognized him; when I turned, he had disappeared down an alley, but I realized that he looked like a fisherman who, already old when I was a child, could no longer be among the living.

### Papa! Papa! Papa! Papa! Papa (2)

I was upset by the sight of a fever victim huddled on the ground, a blanket over his head: my father a few days before his death had yellow eyes and a growth of beard like this man.

### I mean, he was -- (2)

I turned my gaze aside; I no longer dared look anyone in the face.

### I don't know (11)

I thought: "If Adelma is a city I am seeing in a dream, where you encounter only the dead, the dream frightens me. If Adelma is a real city, inhabited by living people, I need only continue looking at them and the resemblances will dissolve, alien faces will appear, bearing anguish. In either case it is best for me not to insist on staring at them."

### I don't want to (2)

A vegetable vendor was weighing a cabbage on a scales and put it in a basket dangling on a string a girl lowered from a balcony.

### I got it (3)

The girl was identical with one in my village who had gone mad for love and killed herself.

### I just need you to (2) ---

The vegetable vendor raised her face: she was my grandmother.  
**--She knows about Will (2)**

I thought: "You reach a moment in life when, among the people you have known, the dead outnumber the living. And the mind refuses to accept more faces, more expressions: on every new face you encounter, it prints the old forms, for each one it finds the most suitable mask."

### My mom will answer and (2)

The stevedores climbed the steps in a line, bent beneath demijohns and barrels; their faces were hidden by sackcloth hoods; "Now they will straighten up and I will recognize them," I thought, with impatience and fear.

### **last night (5)**

But I could not take my eyes off them; if I turned my gaze just a little toward the crowd that crammed those narrow streets, I was as sailed by unexpected faces, reappearing from far away, staring at me as if demanding recognition, as if to recognize me, as if they had already recognized me.

### **the last (6)**

Perhaps, for each of them, I also resembled someone who was dead.

### **I didn't get a good look at him (2)**

I had barely arrived at Adelma and I was already one of them, I had gone over to their side, absorbed in that kaleidoscope of eyes, wrinkles, grimaces.t

### **Oh, no, no! No! No (3)**

I thought: “Perhaps Adelma is the city where you arrive dying and where each finds again the people he has known. This means I, too, am dead.” And I also thought: “This means the beyond is not happy.”

### **let me know, should I stay or should I go (2)**



## The Upside Down

No city is more inclined than Eusapia to enjoy life and flee care.  
**to get out of here (2)**

And to make the leap from life to death less abrupt, the inhabitants have constructed an identical copy of their city, underground.

### **Get the rocks, get the rocks (2)**

All corpses, dried in such a way that the skeleton remains sheathed in yellow skin, are carried down there, to continue their former activities.

### **[panting] (2)**

And, of these activities, it is their carefree moments that take first place: most of the corpses are seated around laden tables, or placed in dancing positions, or made to play little trumpets.

### **What the hell (3)**

But all the trades and professions of the living Eusapia are also at work below ground, or at least those that

the living performed with more contentment than irritation: the clock-maker, amid all the stopped clocks of his shop, places his parchment ear against an out-of-tune grandfather's clock; a barber, with dry brush, lathers the cheekbones of an actor learning his role, studying the script with hollow sockets; a girl with a laughing skull milks the carcass of a heifer.

### **This is crazy! This is crazy (2)**

To be sure, many of the living want a fate after death different from their lot in life: the necropolis is crowded with big-game hunters, mezzosopranos, bankers, violinists, duchesses, courtesans, generals-more than the living city ever contained.  
**listen to me, listen to me (2)**

The job of accompanying the dead down below and arranging them in the desired place is assigned to a confraternity of hooded brothers.

### **what do you know (2)**

No one else has access to the Eusapia of the dead and everything known about it has been learned from them.

### **What the hell was that (5)**

They say that the same confraternity exists among the dead and that it never fails to lend a hand; the hooded brothers, after death, will perform the same job in the other Eusapia; rumor has it that some of them are already dead but continue going up and down.

### **I'll be right back (2)**

In any case, this confraternity's authority in the Eusapia of the living is vast.

### **I love you so much (3)**

They say that every time they go below they find something changed in the lower Eusapia; the dead make innovations in their city; not many, but surely the fruit of sober reflection, not passing whims.

### **the rocks (4)**

From one year to the next, they say, the Eusapia of the dead  
becomes unrecognizable.

#### **the thessalhydra (5)**

And the living, to keep up with them, also want to do everything  
that the hooded brothers tell them about the novelties of the  
dead.

#### **[monster screeching] (4)**

So the Eusapia of the living has taken to copying its under-  
ground copy.

#### **Get, get, get Come on, kill (2)**

They say that this has not just now begun to happen: actually it  
was the dead who built the upper Eusapia, in the image of their  
city.

#### *you son of a bitch (5)*

They say that in the twin cities there is no longer any way of  
knowing who is alive and who is dead.

#### *You need to leave (4)*



## The Body

What makes Argia different from other cities is that it has earth instead of air.

### **the wall (2)**

The streets are completely filled with dirt, clay packs the rooms to the ceiling, on every stair another stairway is set in negative, over the roofs of the houses hang layers of rocky terrain like skies with clouds.

### **me out! Pull me out, pull me out! Pull me out (2)**

We do not know if the inhabitants can move about the city, widening the worm tunnels and the crevices where roots twist: the dampness destroys people's bodies and they have scant strength; everyone is better off remaining still, prone; anyway, it is dark.

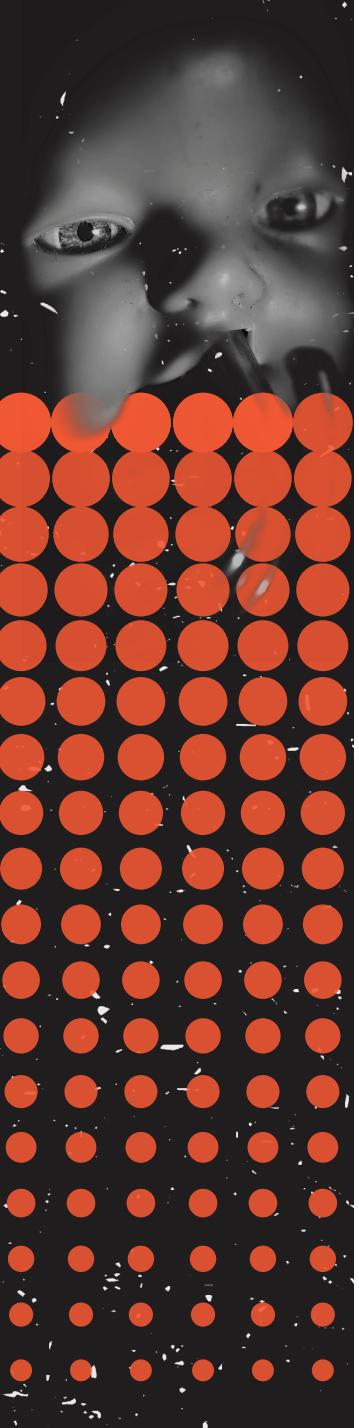
### **came out of the wall (5)**

From up here, nothing of Argia can be seen; some say, "It's down below there," and we can only believe them.

### **What'd he look like (4)**

The place is deserted. At night, putting your ear to the ground, you can sometimes hear a door slam.

### **I don't know what it was (6) It didn't have a face (5)**



## The Bathtub

Like Laudomia, every city has at its side another city whose inhabitants are called by the same names: it is the Laudomia of the dead, the cemetery.

### Do you hear that? (2)

But Laudomia's special faculty is that of being not only double, but triple; it comprehends, in short, a third Laudomia, the city of the unborn.

### I'm right here with you. (2)

The properties of the double city are well known.

### I don't know (9)

The more the Laudomia of the living becomes crowded and expanded, the more the expanse of tombs increases beyond the walls.

### I don't feel good about this (2)

The streets of the Laudomia of the dead are just wide enough to allow the gravedigger's cart to pass, and many windowless buildings look out

on them; but the pattern of the streets and the arrangement of the dwellings repeat those of the living Laudomia, and in both, families are more and more crowded together, in compartments crammed one above the other.

### -- Out of the way (2) --

On fine afternoons the living population pays a visit to the dead and they decipher their own names on their stone slabs: like the city of the living, this other city communicates a history of toil, anger, illusions, emotions; only here all has become necessary, divorced from chance, categorized, set in order.

### Gone! Gone! Gone! Gone! Gone (2)

And to feel sure of itself, the living Laudomia has to seek in the Laudomia of the dead the explanation of itself, even at the risk of finding more there, or less: explanations for more than one Laudomia, for different cities that could have been and were not, or reasons that are incomplete, contradictory, disappointing.

### I need you to stay (3)

Rightly, Laudomia assigns an equally vast residence to those who are still to be born.

### I'm gonna find him (3)

Naturally the space is not in proportion to their number, which is presumably infinite, but since the area is empty, surrounded by an architecture all niches and bays and grooves, and since the unborn can be imagined of any size, big as mice or silkworms or ants or ants' eggs, there is nothing against imagining them erect or crouching on every object or bracket that juts from the walls, on every capital or plinth, lined up or dispersed, intent on the concerns of their future life, and so you can contemplate in a marble vein all Laudomia of a hundred or a thousand years hence, crowded with multitudes in clothing never seen before, all in eggplant-colored barracans, for example, or with turkey feathers on their turbans, and you can recognize

your own descendants and those of other families, friendly or hostile, of debtors and creditors, continuing their affairs, revenges, marrying for love or for money.

#### **my son is hiding (2)**

The living of Laudomia frequent the house of the unborn to interrogate them: footsteps echo beneath the hollow domes; the questions are asked in silence; and it is always about themselves that the living ask, not about those who are to come.

#### **son of a bitch (2)**

One man is concerned with leaving behind him an illustrious reputation, another wants his shame to be forgotten; all would like to follow the thread of their own actions' consequences; but the more they sharpen their eyes, the less they can discern a continuous line; the future inhabitants of Laudomia seem like dots, grains of dust, detached from any before or after.

#### **Shit, shit, shit, shit (2)**

The Laudomia of the unborn does not transmit, like the city of the dead, any sense of security to the inhabitants of the living Laudomia: only alarm.

#### **We're right here. (2)**

In the end, the visitors' thoughts find two paths open before them, and there is no telling which harbors more anguish: either you must think that the number of the unborn is far greater than the total of all the living and all the dead, and then in every pore of the stone there are invisible hordes, jammed on the funnel-sides as in the stands of a stadium, and since with each generation Laudomia's descendants are multiplied, every funnel contains hundreds of other funnels each with millions of persons who are to be born, thrusting their necks out and opening their mouths to escape suffocation.

#### **It's okay. (13)**

Or else you think that Laudomia, too, will disappear, no telling

when, and all its citizens with it; in other words the generations will follow one another until they reach a certain number and will then go no further.

#### **trust me (5)**

Then the Laudomia of the dead and that of the unborn are like the two bulbs of an hourglass which is not turned over; each passage between birth and death is a grain of sand that passes the neck, and there will be a last inhabitant of Laudomia born, a last grain to f.lli, which is now at the top of the pile, waiting.

#### **Go, go, go, go, go, go, go, go (2)**

