

# Literature review on francisco cruzado

[Art & Culture](#), [Symbolism](#)



## Paper #2 - Draft

### Life's Journey

The poem 'Ithaca' by Constantine Cavafy written in Greek in 1910 and first published in its original language in 1911, is a dramatic monologue written in five stanzas and characterized by its lyricism, rhyme in its original language version, and symbolic meaning. The poet addresses his audience in second person, thus making the poem easily accessible to and individually adopted by his readers, talking immediately to their souls. The thematic core of the poem is the journey that every individual is to fulfill in his / her own life, having chosen or drawn his/her own path. Deriving from the Ancient Greek myth of Odysseus, in which Odysseus, the king of Ithaca, a Greek island in the Ionian Sea, spends ten whole years before he reaches his destination, which is his kingdom and birthplace, 'Ithaca' talks allegorically about the nature and significance of such a journey. Constantine Cavafy emphasizes what the journey itself has to offer, apart from the obvious satisfaction of arriving at one's destination.

'Ithaca' is the main symbol of the poem and Cavafy appears to treat it in an innovative way. In the above mentioned Greek myth of Odysseus 'Ithaca' symbolizes the significance of a destination for one's journey. In Cavafy's poem, it is a destination holding a different symbolic meaning for any potential traveler in life's adventures. 'Ithaca' here turns into the destination which gives importance to the journey itself. Odysseus sacrifices everything to reach his destination, the source of his strength, helping him to endure the tortures during those ten years of his adventures. But Cavafy's 'Ithaca' is not the ultimate and only goal in life. On the contrary, the poet seems to

advise his reader(s) to treat 'Ithaca' as the motivation they need in order to sail the ocean of their lives and explore the most they can. Cavafy believes in all humans being travelers, keeping inside them a hidden Odysseus. He believes that they all flirt with the idea of exploring the hidden paradises or hells of their lives. What differentiates people is the nature of their personal commitment to the goal of their exploration. Others may be courageous, others may hesitate or get tired, but the journey alone is of priceless value, since it offers valuable knowledge about life itself and themselves. Each one has his own 'Ithaca', his own goal, and each one treats its achievement differently. Reaching 'Ithaca' symbolizes the achievement of one's goal. Cavafy appears to believe that the journey to 'Ithaca' is more important than reaching it. 'Ithaca' is the key symbol used by the poet to signify the importance he gives to the journey, to the experiences one goes through in order to achieve his / her goal.

A number of subsidiary symbols are used to indicate the meaning and nature of this journey. In the first stanza the poet refers to Laistrygonians, the Cyclops and the Angry Poseidon. Odysseus met these mythological creatures, described as gigantic cannibals, along with the vengeful Ancient God of the Sea, during his adventures. In the original myth they are Odysseus' enemies, the ones who fight against his efforts. In the poem they are used to symbolize the difficulties entailed in life's journey. Here they symbolize the external conflicts that individuals are faced with, during their own personal adventures. These conflicts need not worry travelers devoted to their journey, though, because they are directly bonded to internal fears and agonies. No external conflict can affect people unless they have firstly

lost their self-confidence, their belief in their power to cope with any difficulties or problems encountered. It is this personal loss which generates fear of the unknown dangers which “ you will never encounter / if you do not carry them within your soul / if your soul does not set them up before you” (lines 10-12). If travelers don’t have any fear in their souls for the unknown, then no matter the dangers they may encounter, they will never lose their faith in their strength.

Summer mornings, ports, Phoenician markets and Egyptian cities are four more symbols used in the second stanza to serve Cavafy’s main aim. There are various joys entailed in the travelers’ journey since “ you will enter ports seen for the first time / stop at Phoenician markets / and purchase fine merchandise / as many sensual perfumes as you can; / visit many Egyptian cities” (lines 16-22.). When travelers set out for their journey, there are not only enemies waiting to meet them. Sunny summer mornings fill the travelers’ souls and minds with joy. Ports also keep their visitors fascinated. It is the air of multiculturalism that ports have which makes travelers breathe this vivid, original, unique aura of theirs, feeling alive and kicking. Phoenician and Egyptians are widely acknowledged for their trade, their mystical Eastern personality, appealing to all other nations due to the magic and power of their civilization. All these exotic locations represent life’s luxuries and Cavafy advises his readers not to be afraid to enjoy them, when they find them. When beauty finds you it is not bad to enjoy it. It may even be considered as a necessary step in a personality’s evolution and development. Phoenician markets symbolize art, beauty and culture while Egyptian cities are the symbol of educational opportunities. Special

reference ought to be made to Egyptian cities since Cavafy himself spent his life in Alexandria, the center of civilization in Egypt with its famous library. It is his personal experience that leads Cavafy to use Egyptian locations as a symbol in his poem. He appears to use Egyptian cities as the means to express his personal point of view concerning education. Cavafy seems to believe that education is not only what one learns within a school environment. Education is an ongoing procedure, a life-long process. Cavafy urges his readers to travel in their lives looking for education, seeking for any opportunity which can help them be educated. So the “scholars” are the educational opportunities through which travelers are given the chance “to learn” (line 23). The “long road” (line 13) is the duration of the journey which hopefully will be long enough so that the most experiences possible, are to be gained.

In the 3rd, 4th and 5th stanzas of the poem, ‘Ithaca’ comes again as the main symbol. Cavafy reminds his readers that arriving ‘Ithaca’ is “ultimate goal” (line 25) but they should always keep in mind that it is the journey itself that counts. “The riches” (line 30) which ‘Ithaca’ will offer may not be what the travelers first had in mind when they began their journey. There are lots of times in life when our expectations prove to have been treated in exaggeration. When people treat their expectations in such a way, then they fall in the danger of losing all the benefits they gained while they were trying to meet their expectations.

‘Ithacas’ are the goals travelers set and the efforts they put in them being fulfilled. But their fulfillment is meaningless if they come without effort, courage and personal commitment. The poet says that even “if you find her

poor, Ithaca has not deceived you. / Wise as you have become, with so much experience / you must already have understood what Ithacas mean.” (lines 34-35-36). ‘ Ithacas’ are invaluable because their symbolism, that is setting goals, is invaluable. Goals and dreams provide people with double benefit. Not only do goals and dreams motivate travelers to go after them, thus giving meaning to their route in life, but they also offer them self-knowledge. When travelers go after their dreams, they live experiences. And these experiences contribute significantly in learning themselves. The efforts they put in the accomplishment of their dreams turn out to be the way to get to know themselves.

Travelers find the meaning of their lives when they dream, they define destinations, and they dare to conquer unknown or desired castles. If their life’s journey is not experienced as an exploration towards their surroundings and their inner world, it is just another typical, boring route of no special benefits. The poem uses Ithaca as a symbol of life’s destination. Cavafy reminds his readers that life is the ultimate present they are given and emphasizes on their route to Ithaca which ought not to be left unexplored. Ithaca is the lighthouse which sheds light on all dark moments of the journey. If travelers never lose sight of their destination then they will definitely enjoy to the most their efforts in reaching it. Cavafy seems to urge his readers to never neglect the benefits of travelling to their destinations. Whatever the journey offers them is what keeps the value of their destinations untouched.

## **Works Cited**

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