

Cavafy, Baudelaire & Rimbaud: *Voyage, Ephemerality and the Pursuit of Meaning*

Melanie Tang
King's College London

Cavafy's 'Ithaca' (1911) has most often been read through the lens of Dante's *Inferno* and Tennyson's 'Ulysses'.¹ In this paper, I will suggest another less common entry point into 'Ithaca' — namely, through Baudelaire's 'Le Voyage' (1857) and Rimbaud's 'Le Bateau ivre' (1871). In 1907, Cavafy wrote a note in which he claimed not to have been overly impressed with Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*.² However, it is very probable that Cavafy was underplaying the extent to which Baudelaire informed his work. The book on Baudelaire that Cavafy mentions in this note was likely Arthur Symons' *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, wherein Rimbaud also features. The influence of Symbolists Baudelaire and Verlaine on Cavafy has been more widely acknowledged, while any connection with Rimbaud seems almost not to have been considered at all. Rimbaud's 'Bateau ivre', as Lawler argues, can be read as an 'answer' to Baudelaire's 'Le Voyage'.³ It is not unlikely that Cavafy would have had Rimbaud's rendering of the poetic voyage in mind when he took up this theme for himself. As Robinson observes, 'fragmentation of time, intensity of ephemeral experience' and the 'instability of values' are all concerns that 'the Greek poet shared with his French predecessors'.⁴ All three poems explore the relationship between transience and the pursuit of lasting ideals. I will firstly examine how Baudelaire and Rimbaud deal with these themes, before considering how Cavafy both draws from and diverges from them. I will then analyse the role of memory in both Baudelaire and Cavafy's conceptions of the elusive ideals that drive each voyage, offering

¹ Jusdanis, 1987: 143.

² Cavafy in Jeffreys, 2015: 28.

³ Lawler, 1992: 13.

⁴ Robinson, 1988.

an interpretation of what, perhaps, 'Ithacas really mean' to Cavafy.⁵ Finally, I will discuss the ways in which Cavafy's deviations from Baudelaire in this respect can be compared with Rimbaud's.

Throughout *Les Fleurs du Mal*, two conflicting forces engage in a continual struggle: 'Spleen et idéal'.⁶ The latter 'induces the poet's imagination to soar', while the former 'reenforces his sense of human limitations'.⁷ 'Le Voyage' can be read as the volume's 'culminating effort' to 'work out' this antithesis.⁸ Within the first stanza, Baudelaire establishes one of the poem's main concerns — the tension between infinite desire and finite experience. The child is driven by a 'vaste appétit' into a world that appears boundless in the eye of his imagination, but this world becomes all too 'petit' in the eyes of the adult who has experienced its reality.⁹

Paradoxically, this same hunger that fuels the child's desire for adventure also causes the voyagers of the poem to search endlessly for a resting place: an 'Eldorado', an 'Icarie', or a 'Lotus-land of *eternal* afternoon'.¹⁰ Baudelaire's poem, like Cavafy's, deals with the 'problem of homecoming' — the Homeric *nostos*.¹¹ Despite this ostensible disparity, the 'utopian search' and the child's 'vaste appétit' both reveal a yearning for an infinity or an eternity beyond the finite conditions of their lives.¹² However, the banality of the world consistently returns to thwart the voyager's aspirations, as each 'Icarie' turns out only to be a rock.¹³ The figure of 'le Juif errant', doomed to a tortured eternal wandering, is invoked to portray the frustration of this ongoing search.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the ending of the poem complicates a strictly disillusioned reading: the call to end the search and retire to the Lotus-land only leads, paradoxically, to a

⁵ Cavafy, 2007: l. 36.

⁶ Baudelaire, 1993: 8.

⁷ Worthington, 1971: 387.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Baudelaire, 1993: ll. 1-4.

¹⁰ Baudelaire, 1993: ll. 32-38, l. 141.
Leakey, 1969: 307.

¹¹ Worthington, 1971: 399.

¹² Putnam, 1997: 203.

¹³ Baudelaire, 1993: l. 36, ll. 96-120.

¹⁴ *ibid.*: l. 129.

renewed aspiration towards the 'nouveau'.¹⁵ The same circularity by which the voyagers are continually disappointed seems also to fuel a persistent revival of the imagination.

Rimbaud meets Baudelaire's image of the wandering Jew with a contrasting image of total freedom in his 'Bateau ivre'. The poem begins as the boat emancipates itself from 'les haleurs' and is free to dance 'sur les flots'.¹⁶ What follows is a 'dérèglement des sens' as described in Rimbaud's "Lettres du Voyant".¹⁷ In the letters, Rimbaud had 'formulated a poetic credo of which *Bateau ivre* would be the first successful illustration'.¹⁸ He aspires to become a 'voyant' through this 'dérèglement' of the senses; to attain a vision of the divine through disorder and chaos.¹⁹ As Symons wrote: it is 'for the absolute' that Rimbaud seeks.²⁰ It is in this way that Rimbaud's drunken boat pursues meaning. After it has liberated itself, it comes to meet the sea, where a litany of oneiric visions unfold. This is 'the boat's discovery of the universe: of its splendour, its gigantism, its violence'.²¹ All extremes meet in one divine incantation of contrasting and chaotic images. The boat sees a low hanging sun, spotted with 'd'horreurs mystiques', its violet rays extending across the water like the silhouettes of ancient actors. It dreams of green polar nights and yellow singing phosphorus, rainbows and waves resembling mother-of-pearl, as well as terrible giant serpents, hysterical cows, and 'les lointains' cataracting towards the abyss.²² Various boundaries are broken down. The sea penetrates the hull of the boat, entering into and fusing with its very being.²³ Boundaries between subject and object are unclear from the beginning as the first-person 'Je' speaks for both poet and boat. The poem seems to project its images into an objective space, achieving what Rimbaud

¹⁵ *ibid.*: l. 156.

¹⁶ Rimbaud, 1966: ll. 1-14.

¹⁷ Rimbaud, 1966: 302.

¹⁸ Fowlie, 1946: 47.

¹⁹ Rimbaud, *ibid.*

²⁰ Symons, 1908: 70.

²¹ Fowlie, 1946: 50.

²² Rimbaud, 1966: ll. 33-56.

²³ *ibid.*: ll. 17-24.

had termed 'la poésie objective'.²⁴ This is further accomplished through the 'immediacy' with which each 'kaleidoscopic vision' is evoked.²⁵ Images are described in paratactic succession, with 'no particular principle' governing 'the order of their appearance', and though each one is only a 'fleeting presence', their fragmentation is overcome by the engrossing intensity with which each vision is conjured.²⁶ The poem thus creates the sense of an all-encompassing present: the definitions of past and future, subject and object melt away as the boat bathes in the all-embracing sea. This oneness is further emphasised by how images of extreme beauty and horror are brought together under the symmetry and musicality of the *abab* rhyme scheme. The 'oxymora become all embracing: stars unite with sea, greenness with blueness ... death with life'.²⁷ All things are brought to a pantheistic one in the symmetry and harmony of the prosody. Eventually, however, the boundaries are reinstated. The boat returns to a puddle, a circumscribed body of water like the river from which it originated.²⁸ The poem also moves away from its intoxicated present to an awareness of past and future: 'Je regrette l'Europe aux anciens parapets!', 'ô future Vigueur?'.²⁹ The fragmentations of sequential time return, along with the boundaries between subject and object as the 'enfant accroupi' becomes a separate being from his 'bateau frêle'.³⁰ The poem ends on a disenchanted note, with a threefold negation: 'Je ne puis plus ... Ni traverser ... Ni nager'.³¹ The ephemerality and fragility of the boat's vision is underscored in the image of the 'papillon de mai'.³² Nevertheless, within this very image is captured the very ambiguity of the poem: intertwined with fragility, transience and bathos are the frail yet redolent remnants of wonder and beauty.

²⁴ *ibid*: 302.

²⁵ Hackett, 1981: 30.

²⁶ Frohock, 1963: 113.

²⁷ Lawler, 1992: 23.

²⁸ Rimbaud, 1966: l. 24.

²⁹ *ibid*: ll. 84-8.

³⁰ *ibid*: ll. 95-6.

³¹ *ibid*: ll. 94-100.

³² *ibid*: l. 96.

Disillusionment is present, then, in both Baudelaire and Rimbaud. Nonetheless, there is a substantial degree of ambivalence, which Cavafy draws upon in his wholly more optimistic 'Ithaca'. As in Baudelaire, an elusive goal drives the voyage. Ithaca is the 'perfection never attained', the 'ideal towards which one strives', but which becomes, in the end, subsidiary to the voyage itself.³³ Cavafy responds to Baudelaire with the assertion that Ithaca 'has not deceived you' even if you should 'find her poor', because it was Ithaca that provided the motive for the journey.³⁴ The ephemeral experiences of the journey are not treated with a sense of loss, as in Rimbaud, or as part of a vicious circularity as in Baudelaire, but as a collection of things to be celebrated. However vague and elusive, Ithaca does seem to be something that the voyager eventually arrives at — although, what is finally arrived at is a *meaning*.³⁵ That experiences are portrayed as things to 'acquire' implies that rather than being lost to time, they are *cumulative* and their sum is the meaning finally attained.³⁶ Thus, there is a symbiotic relationship wherein the pursuit of lasting meaning gives rise to the transitory experiences that, in the end, finally define the attainment of that meaning. In this way, Cavafy reconciles the two.

In 'Le Bateau ivre', the boat loses its materiality and departs the physical world as it enters into a dream. Contrastingly, Cavafy foregrounds the physical materiality of meaningful experiences, representing them as 'fine wares', 'mother-of-pearl and coral, amber and ebony'.³⁷ Rimbaud's boat seems to transcend the earthly world in order to attain its vision. Cavafy undermines this by grounding meaningful experiences in material life, displaying a frankness about their physicality and privileging human experience over transcendence. This frankness also comes through in the stylistic differences between 'Ithaca', 'Le Voyage' and 'Le Bateau ivre'. Cavafy replaces Baudelaire's thirty-five alexandrine quatrains and Rimbaud's twenty-five with his own five increasingly succinct stanzas. 'Ithaca' is markedly more compressed and

³³ Hartigan, 1983: 69.

³⁴ Cavafy, 2007: l. 34.

³⁵ *ibid.*: l. 36.

³⁶ *ibid.*: l. 18.

³⁷ *ibid.*: ll. 18-9.

candidly put together. It abandons the ebb and flow musicality of the prior poems' rhyme schemes, and changes to a second-person 'didactic monologue'.³⁸ Consequently, it comes across more direct, practical, distanced and sober. 'Ithaca' not only shows a greater deal of restraint in its formal construction, but is less occupied in its content with intoxication than 'Le Bateau ivre' or 'Le Voyage'. That being said, the 'emphasis of the poem is on the sensuous', and intoxication is certainly still present.³⁹ The poem reaches its climax of sensuous ecstasy or poetic inebriation in the repeated mention of 'sensuous perfumes'.⁴⁰ However, this is far more understated than in Baudelaire or Rimbaud. The perfumes can be read as an allusion to Baudelaire's 'Parfum exotique', wherein the perfume is entirely transportive.⁴¹ In Baudelaire, perfumes are often overpowering in effect. In 'Ithaca', however, they are just one part in a larger scheme of events; the fleeting nature of the moment of sensual intoxication is emphasised. That the voyager is no longer completely overwhelmed by this intoxication ties in with Cavafy's subversion of transcendence. While Cavafy in no way suggests that we suppress our desires, he implies that our experiences are subject to our human desire and will, rather than vice versa.

Along with transcendence, Cavafy rejects absolute societal values. He 'rebels against what he sees as the unholy alliance between nature and society: to be free is to contravene laws and conventions, whether these be natural or social'.⁴² In 'Ithaca', experiences are subject only to the will of the voyager and not to any external ideals. Rather than an external destination, as it is in the *Odyssey*, Ithaca is now something to keep 'in mind'.⁴³ Cavafy's interest in portraying transient love affairs and sexual encounters has been well documented. Although 'Ithaca' does not explicitly mention any sexual encounters, the ephemeral experiences mentioned herein can be read in light of his whole oeuvre, particularly since the 'repeated adjective describing

³⁸ Keeley, 1976: 37.

³⁹ Capri-Karka, 1982: 57.

⁴⁰ Cavafy, 2007: ll. 20-1.

⁴¹ Baudelaire, 1993: 48.

⁴² Mackridge, 2007: xxi.

⁴³ Cavafy, 2007: l. 24.

perfume ... links their sensuality to sexuality'.⁴⁴ Capri-Karka also points out that 'Ithaca' was written at a time when Cavafy had started 'speaking more freely' about his own sexuality, defying the societal judgements that he had expressed anxiety and frustration about in poems written before 1910.⁴⁵ That 'Ithaca' coincides with Cavafy's own increasing confidence in contravening the societal institutions of marriage and heteronormative love makes sense, especially since traditionally, Ithaca had represented precisely this: Odysseus's return at long last to Penelope. In relocating Ithaca in the 'mind' and furthermore, reframing it as a motive to engage in transient sexual experiences, Cavafy subverts the external ideals that it traditionally designated.⁴⁶ In this way, Cavafy undermines the Homeric *nostos*: the ideals by which we voyage — that is, by which we live our lives — are now internally decided ambitions rather than external institutions such as marriage. Cavafy's affirmation of transgression has echoes of both Baudelaire and Rimbaud. Both poets have an interest in 'l'inconnu', in *going beyond*.⁴⁷ For Baudelaire, this involves going beyond the notions of 'Enfer ou Ciel', transcending religious absolutes.⁴⁸ Rimbaud, too, describes himself as 'un autre' — a dissident *other* to society's rules and conventions.⁴⁹ His boat attains vision through an escape from the ordered life of society into the chaos and freedom of the sea. Both poets can also be seen to privilege the imagination over that which is external to it: Rimbaud through his dreamlike vision and Baudelaire who from the outset depicts inner desire to be vaster than the outside world.⁵⁰

Imagination and memory are linked, particularly in Baudelaire and Cavafy. Both 'Le Voyage' and 'Le Bateau ivre' involve shifts into retrospective perspective. In my view, this informs Cavafy's own: 'Ithaca gave you the wondrous voyage'.⁵¹ The role of memory in Cavafy can be

⁴⁴ Robinson, 1988: 4.

⁴⁵ Capri-Karka, 1982: 19-22.

⁴⁶ Cavafy, *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Baudelaire, 1993: l. 156.
Rimbaud, 1966: 302.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Rimbaud, 1966: 304.

⁵⁰ Baudelaire, 1993: ll. 1-4.

⁵¹ Cavafy, 2007: l. 31.

illuminated through firstly looking at 'Le Voyage'. Both 'Ithaca' and 'Le Voyage' draw upon the *Odyssey* and appropriate the *nostos* in ways that undermine the traditional homecoming. It is important to remember that *nostos* involves not just the prospect of future homecoming, but *nostalgia* for that home as a point of origin. It is therefore memory that drives the voyage. 'Le Voyage' works on many levels: within the broader narrated voyage is *another* voyage, and another set of voyagers who travel vicariously through the memories of the first set.⁵² This creates a parallel between the more literal voyage and the mnemonic voyage. There is also a connection made between memory and death when the voices of lost loved ones — 'nos Pylades' — call out to the voyagers.⁵³ These voices beckon the voyagers towards death, and thus, towards 'trouver du nouveau'.⁵⁴ Paradoxically, it is therefore figures of the past who beckon them towards the future. Moreover, the image of a canvas on which a voyage is mapped appears twice: once at the very beginning — 'Pour l'enfant, amoureux de cartes et d'estampes', and once at the beginning of the voyagers recollections — 'Passer sur nos esprits, tendus comme une toile'.⁵⁵ This draws a further parallel between memory of the past and imagination of the future. This weblike entanglement of death, memory and the past, imagination and the future will become clear in my subsequent discussion. It is also significant that death is personified in 'Le Voyage': 'Ô Mort, vieux capitaine'.⁵⁶ This personification, paradoxically, attributes *being* to something that is essentially a state of nonbeing, and so the presence of death at the end is actually a presence of absence. This presence of absence is characterised as the 'capitaine' of the ship: death is not just the 'final conclusion' of the voyage but the driving force which steers it from the beginning.⁵⁷

Regueiro Elam's assertion that Baudelaire privileges 'objects which derive their power from the disintegration time has wrought upon them' is here very relevant. The disintegration of

⁵² Baudelaire, 1993: ll. 53-7.

⁵³ *ibid*: ll. 145-8.

⁵⁴ *ibid*: l. 156.

⁵⁵ *ibid*: ll. 1, 55.

⁵⁶ *ibid*: l. 149.

⁵⁷ Putnam, 1997: 202.

time is encapsulated already in the first stanza of 'Le Voyage', which takes within its scope the span of a life.⁵⁸ These 'objects ... mediated by time ... have no authenticity other than the transformation they have undergone'.⁵⁹ This temporal disintegration, in 'Le Voyage', is symbolised by the 'vieux capitaine', death. Death represents not just the mortality by which we will eventually die but the mortality at whose hand we disintegrate across time: the intrinsic mortality of our being, or rather our *lack* of any intrinsic being. The presence of spectral characters in the poem can be read as intimations of this phantomlike existence. Death is a captain because it is this very phantom existence which drives the voyage: while 'ennui' is translated by McGowan as boredom, it would be more accurate to characterise it as a returning sense of emptiness or lack that drives the individual to want for more.⁶⁰ Ennui and death can be read as two metonyms for this same returning emptiness, which grows out of the lack of a stable or intrinsic reality that can be attributed to the self, since it is subject to that ever metamorphosing 'ennemi', 'Le Temps!'.⁶¹ It therefore makes sense that both the child's desire for infinity and the voyager's longing for an eternal, utopian homeland are essentially impulses that seek to escape from the finite conditions of life — an aspect of which is the ephemerality of each moment of our existence and the resulting absence of any timeless indelible self. That the child's yearning is characterised as a hunger, a 'vaste appétit', implies that his desire is like an internal void or empty space that wants to be filled. Thus, it is, from the outset, death that provides the driving force for the voyage of life.

This intermingling of life and death also occurs in 'Le Flacon'.⁶² Regueiro Elam's analysis of 'Le Flacon' is extremely useful to our understanding of what is at work in 'Le Voyage'. As aforementioned, Regueiro Elam posits that Baudelaire privileges objects that decay over time and therefore have no authenticity. These objects often act as 'souvenirs' — they evoke

⁵⁸ Regueiro Elam, 1987: 144.
Baudelaire, 1993: ll. 1-4.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Baudelaire, 1993: ll. 150.

⁶¹ *ibid.*: ll. 127-8.

⁶² Baudelaire, 1993: 98.

memory. Perfume frequently has this effect in Baudelaire. While we normally 'speak of bringing home a souvenir' as if 'the object held for us in compressed form' the 'experiences' of 'another place', the 'souvenir' for Baudelaire becomes an object that epitomises the 'absence' of the experience it represents.⁶³ When the 'souvenir' evokes memory, it 'offers itself as the cause it purports to represent ... so that behind or beneath' the souvenir 'there is an absence which Baudelaire terms "death"', hence the equation of perfume bottle and tomb in 'Le Flacon'.⁶⁴ Ergo, the 'past is not so much "restored" as it is *imagined as past* under the guise of souvenir'.⁶⁵ Memory is therefore 'paradoxically prolepsis' as it is an imaginative act wherein we 'invent what has no presence' and thereby reverse the normal sequence of time by creating the past after itself.⁶⁶ In light of this, the portrayal of memory in 'Le Voyage' as a chest of 'bijoux', a collection of souvenir-like gems, gains significance.⁶⁷ That objects are both disintegrative and evocative in Baudelaire is symbolic for the self which, similarly, has no intrinsic being and must *evoke* itself constantly via acts of memory and imagination that both grow out of and seek to fill the void of the self's ghostlike existence. It is for this reason that 'Le Voyage' is haunted not only with spectral presences but also littered with images of projection, reflection and illusion: 'Passer sur nos esprits, tendus comme une toile', 'plonger dans un ciel au reflet alléchant'.⁶⁸ It is also for this reason, as Regueiro Elam insightfully observes, that memory in 'Le Flacon' causes 'le Vertige', for to 'pluck' the flowers of memory involves 'a contemplation of the abyss' out of which they grow and into which they return.⁶⁹ This gives rise to a circularity of experience, a vicious cycle metaphorised by 'la toupie'.⁷⁰ There are many circularities in 'Le Voyage'. The child at home desires the sea, the voyager at sea desires a home; rest causes restlessness, the restless want for rest. Mossop argues that the architecture

⁶³ Regueiro Elam, 1987: 150.

⁶⁴ *ibid*: 149.

⁶⁵ *ibid*: 148.

⁶⁶ *ibid*: 145.

⁶⁷ Baudelaire, 1993: ll. 51-2.

⁶⁸ *ibid*: ll. 55, 64-5.

⁶⁹ Regueiro Elam, 1987: 151.
Baudelaire, 1993: 98.

⁷⁰ Baudelaire, 1993: l. 25.

of the volume is characterised by a cyclical alternation between spleen and idéal.⁷¹ Within the relationship between memory, imagination and void in 'Le Voyage' we can see the culminating expression of this circular experience of striving for substance before falling back into the ennui or emptiness that always returns. Thus, it is death that drives the soul's three-master, but it is *nostos* that characterises the voyage, since the voyage is one of memory: the imaginative search for the homeland of the self, the self's perpetual creation of itself out of the void of its temporal decay.

There is a further parallel that I have yet to discuss between the voyage and the poem itself. The *abab* rhyme scheme mimics the ebb and flow of the ocean waves, and the sea and sky are 'noirs comme de l'encre', implying that the poem *is* the voyage.⁷² The poem is therefore self-reflexive. Like the prison-bound voyagers in stanza fourteen, the reader experiences the voyage vicariously through its narration. Hence, the poem is paralleled with the mnemonic second voyage within it, and memory and imagination are correlated with art and poetry. 'Le Voyage' examines, with often a very pessimistic eye, the experience of life wherein we are cyclically driven by a nostalgic impulse to create ourselves out of the temporal void of our being. At the same time, it self-consciously interrogates its own role in being a part of that creative process, its own limitations in its artistic attempts to give form and meaning in a world of temporal decay. In spite of the vicious cycle, it is worth noting that the most striking circular movement of the poem is one of renewal and hope: its final return to the childlike excitement of its beginning. It is also paradoxical that while death and ennui represent the same emptiness, in the end there is hope that death will allow the voyagers to *transcend* ennui.⁷³ This contradictory death-ennui relationship examines poetry, memory and imagination's entanglement with its own emptiness in conjunction with its ability to try to go beyond this emptiness, to cross the ever receding horizon. Thus, 'Le Voyage' displays ambivalence in its celebration yet condemnation of its own creative impetus.

⁷¹ Mossop, 1961: 17.

⁷² Baudelaire, 1993: l. 151.

⁷³ Baudelaire, 1993: ll. 149-56.

Cavafy's precious stones also read like a collection of souvenirs and could be interpreted as an allusion to Baudelaire's chest of jewels.⁷⁴ He also draws upon the *nostos* to suggest that memory acts as the voyage's driving force from beginning to end. Like in Baudelaire, memory in Cavafy is linked with the artistic impulse. Mackridge identifies a 'Platonic dimension' to Cavafy's poetry whereby fragmented experiences can be 'combined in memory' and made 'timeless, because they are fitted to an ideal pattern'.⁷⁵ Art, too, has this 'power'.⁷⁶ This has implications for the element of collection in 'Ithaca' previously discussed. Fleeting experiences may cumulatively add up to form the sum that is 'Ithaca' if Ithaca acts as the binding forces of memory and art. The poem's shift into retrospect, combined with the description of Ithaca as something in the 'mind' suggests that to reach Ithaca is to arrive at a perspective from which the cumulative ephemeral experiences of the past can be contemplated in memory's eye as a whole. 'Ithaca' is also the title of the poem, implying that the poem *is* Ithaca, and that the ideal that drives the voyage is an artistic one. Cavafy's poem is therefore also self-reflexive. 'Ithaca' is rounder, less meandering and more encapsulating than 'Le Voyage', substantiating Cavafy's notion of art as something that completes or gives form to fragmented life experiences. To Cavafy, art also motivates those experiences in the first place; the 'process is circular'.⁷⁷ Cavafy's appropriation of the *nostos* is therefore very clever: the incentive to embark on the journey from the very beginning is grounded in memory — the final binding memory of experiences that have yet to be lived. 'Ithaca' self-reflexively explores the relationship between art and life, and how meaning is found or rather constructed within this relationship.

Unlike 'Le Voyage', Cavafy's 'Ithaca' has a sense of finality to its ending. It is not an ongoing vicious cycle, nor is it a renewal. Ithaca is something that the voyager seems to be able to finally arrive at. Nevertheless, Cavafy still manages to leave the poem slightly open-ended with a 'slight shrug', at once 'ironic and reassuring': 'you will have come to know what Ithacas really

⁷⁴ Cavafy, 2007: ll. 18-21.

⁷⁵ Mackridge, 2007: xix.

⁷⁶ *ibid*: xxi.

⁷⁷ *ibid*.

mean'.⁷⁸ This distinctly Cavafian tone of voice gives the impression of a meaning both shared and withheld. Despite his Platonic aesthetics, Cavafy still demonstrates an appreciation for the fragmentation of human experience. In his poetry, history is often refracted through the prism of subjective perception, and despite his belief in the perfecting powers of art, he is also aware of the 'variable' and 'ephemeral' nature of truth.⁷⁹ The poem's concluding transition from 'Ithaca' to plural 'Ithacas' conveys that although an artistic ideal has been achieved, this ideal is one that will find itself dispersed once again amongst the multiplicities of perception and time. In this one line, simultaneously reticent and communicative, Cavafy explores the symbiosis between art and life, their ongoing contraction and expansion between binding perfection and dispersing fragmentation. The curious synthesis of finality yet not finality reflects a contentedness with the limits of personal experience: a dramatic divergence from the more anguished self-reflection of 'Le Voyage'.

In this sense, Cavafy's response to Baudelaire shows affinities with Rimbaud's. In 'Bateau ivre', art also has the power to bind the fragmented parts of life into a unity. It is also self-reflexive: there is a poem within the poem, 'le Poème de la Mer'.⁸⁰ While the Poème de la Mer has the power to bring all extremes together in a pure and vivid present, the poem itself with which it is paralleled contains further oppositions that are less easily reconciled. The divisions of time bear down upon the grander scheme of the poem in ways that the Poème de la Mer is immune to. Ephemerality and loss ultimately weaken the artistic vision. That being said, the musical structure of the poem continues from start to end, and its nostalgic concluding note actually lends further beauty to its poetic register. The poem attempts to give harmonious form to the contrasting experiences of ecstasy and loss that it portrays in its content, and thus juxtaposes itself against its 'Poème de la Mer' in a self-conscious exploration of its own artistic powers and limitations. The ending of the poem is bathetic and yet, as Fowlie remarks, it is evocative

⁷⁸ Hadas, 1997: 168.
Cavafy, 2007: l. 36.

⁷⁹ Jusdanis, 1987: 111.

⁸⁰ Rimbaud, 1966: ll. 21-2.

in its poignant humility.⁸¹ After the climactic 'dérèglement', there is a sense of emotional depth and self-knowledge gained.⁸² Instead of 'Je' the poet-boat begins to say 'Moi qui', or 'I, who...'; indicating an increased self-awareness growing out of the retrospective vantage point that could only have been brought about by the transience of the visionary experience and its inevitable end.⁸³ The threefold negation of the poem's final stanza signifies disenchantment but also conclusiveness, and the image of the 'papillon de mai' conveys that while the voyage has been ephemeral, there is also something extremely vital that we are left with and can carry humbly to its end. 'Bateau ivre' therefore explores its own powers and limitations, and in the end can be interpreted, like 'Ithaca', as having come to terms with them.

To conclude, all three poems are self-reflexive. While there is disillusion in Baudelaire and Rimbaud, this is complicated by the self-consciousness of the poems: while they are aware of their limitations, they are also aware of their own artistic existence in the face of those limitations. Cavafy draws upon the ambiguities in each poem in his far less cynical but no less complex rendering of the voyage. 'Ithaca', too, is a self-reflexive poem that manages to demonstrate an awareness of its own limitations while still engaging in a wholehearted celebration of its relationship, as art, to life. Cavafy reconciles ephemeral and fragmented human experiences with the ideals that drive them to a fuller degree than either Baudelaire or Rimbaud. Ultimately, his examination of the relationship between lasting ideals and fleeting experiences is an intelligent rendering of the same explorations that have taken place in voyage narratives before his. I maintain that the extent to which 'Ithaca' interacts with poems and texts beyond Tennyson and Dante is infrequently considered — in its markedly more succinct form, 'Ithaca' manages nonetheless to acknowledge the wide scope of its predecessors and to bring a new perspective to age-old themes.

⁸¹ Rimbaud, 1966: l. 32.
Fowlie, 1946: 5.

⁸² Lawler, 1992: 17, 31.

⁸³ Rimbaud, 1966: ll. 69-84.

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