

Gilligan's Isle Popsonnet Analysis

Comparison

Original

(http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/g/gilligans_island/gilligans_island_theme_song.html)

1. Just sit right back
2. And you'll hear a tale
3. A tale of a fateful trip,
4. That started from this tropic port,
5. Aboard this tiny ship.
6. The mate was a mighty sailin' lad,
7. The Skipper brave and sure,
8. Five passengers set sail that day,
9. For a three hour tour,
10. A three hour tour.
11. The weather started getting rough,
12. The tiny ship was tossed.
13. If not for the courage of the fearless crew
14. The Minnow would be lost.
15. The Minnow would be lost.
16. The ship set ground on the shore
17. Of this uncharted desert isle
18. With Gilligan,
19. The Skipper too.
20. The millionaire
21. And his wife,
22. The movie star,
23. The professor and Mary Ann,
24. Here on Gilligan's Isle.

Popsonnet

(<http://popsonnet.tumblr.com/post/134485725775/gilligans-island>)

1. Pray sit and hear this story I'll relate
2. of mariners heroic, brave, and sure:
3. the tale of a ship's captain and his mate
4. and how they did a tempest fierce endure.
5. Their modest craft did from its moorings sail,
6. their course laid for a simple three-hour trek;
7. but they were blown off-course by vicious gales
8. that left them all maroon'd, the ship a wreck.
9. Th' heroics of the captain and his crew
10. of one did save the others stranded there:
11. a wealthy lord, his wife an ingénue,
12. a man of learning, and a maiden fair.
13. — They now survive upon the wits and guile
14. in lands uncharted - there, on Gill'gan's Isle!

The Wellingtons, "The Ballad of Gilligan's Isle"

Popsonnet Analysis

Not surprisingly, the song *Gilligan's Isle* resembles closely the popsonnet version of the song. Although it is only half-a-century old (still young compared to Shakespeare, whose work is four hundred years old) its language is still very archaic compared to the loose English of the twenty-first century — this shows the drastic changes of the last few years, such as with pop songs like Cyrus's *Party in the USA* that make *Gilligan's Isle* seem so far from our reality and pop culture. Similarly, they are similar thematically in the old-fashioned sense of “journey,” the only difference between the two being that the Shakespearean version seems even farther from our current experiences and language.

The subtle details in language convey a similar story but a different tone, which therefore portrays a very different meaning. Many of the the terms are exchanged for more old-fashioned terms. For instance, “tiny ship” (song, 5) becomes “modest craft” (sonnet, 5); “you’ll hear a tale” (sonnet, 2) to “this story I’ll relate” (sonnet, 1); “tour” (song, 9) to “trek” (sonnet, 6); and “millionaire” (song, 20) to “wealthy lord” (sonnet, 11). A more extreme example is when they described the millionaire's innocent wife as “an ingénue” (sonnet, 11) in the poem, a word I was not remotely familiar with (and which, according to Google Ngrams, was popular in the early 20th century). Another slight change I noticed was the passive tone — when they say, “the ship a wreck” (sonnet, 8) or “a man of learning” (sonnet, 12) — and the common inverted syntax — when it says, “in lands uncharted” (sonnet, 14), or “how they did a tempest fierce endure” (sonnet, 4). This change in syntax makes it more poetic, but more difficult to read in everyday language and tone — again, it’s not the kind of language we modern humans are used to, and therefore it has a sense of “overly formal” and “distant.” For example, this is analogous the view of the “vocabu-lazy Americans” to Ella and the Nollopians in *Ella Minnow Pea*.

Although the tone is very similar, there is a sense of informality with the original song that makes it fun to sing. The aforementioned slight difference in words do not change the meaning of each individual word from the original song, but they change the feel of the poem. The original song is a little more sing-songy and upbeat, with “just sit right back” (song, 1) instead of “pray sit” (sonnet, 1), along with its buoyant tune. In addition, there is not as strict of a

rhyme scheme, with three rhyme patterns, five lines each, each with two rhyming lines; the last half of the song, however, does not rhyme. This is a rather irregular rhyming pattern: lines three and five, seven and nine, and twelve and fourteen rhyme. In addition to this, the lines vary in length and are very loose in their structure: for example, the first stanzas has lines of lengths four, five, seven, ten, six, nine, six, eight, six, and five syllables — this is in sharp contrast to the constant iambic pentameter present in the poem.

Presumably all of this disorder is intentional the song is meant to be sung, and with its cheery tune not much attention is paid to these stricter stylistic measures, which allows the song to be freer and happier in its attempts to describe Gilligan's (and his crew's) adventurous and optimistic courage. In contrast, when reading the poem, much of this cheery light is sucked out of it; although it is euphonious in verse, reading it with the passion in the song while sticking to the more rigid rhyme and syllable structure cannot be achieved.

This all relates to the main reason I chose this poem to analyze: it is a Barlow cross-country tradition to sing this song on the bus ride home after a meet, victorious or not. I hadn't ever considered the lyrics to this song (nor had I memorized them), but after analyzing the poem, it becomes much more clear to me how it is a motivating song, after comparing it to a relatively dreary version of the same song. Just a few slight changes in language and structure were both "subtle but significant" and greatly affected the overall tone and meaning of the story.

First of all, a quick word to why I chose this song: I'm surprised it made the list of "pop songs," because this was a song from the show from 1964, unlike many of the pop songs of today. I was not familiar with the song until last year, when I was introduced to the Barlow boys cross-country tradition of singing it on the bus ride home from a meet, and I hadn't really considered any true meaning of the song. This caught my eye and I thought I'll analyze it closer.

I found these two different versions of the same song, *Gilligan's Isle*, very similar. Because this is an older TV show (half a century old), it less resembles the modern era of the twenty-first century and is closer to Shakespeare's language. Although it is chronologically closer to today than the early seventeenth century (when *Othello* was written), its translation to a Shakespearean sonnet is actually surprisingly close to the original (versus the enormous difference between Shakespeare and a very recent song such as Cyrus's *Party in the USA*).

The first similarity between the two versions of this song I noticed was their length. A simple word count reveals that the original is 115 words and the sonnet is 111 — a mere *four* words difference! Of course, this is made possible by the brevity of the song (again, much shorter than many pop songs of today).

Another resemblance to the sonnet form is the rhyme scheme of *Gilligan's Isle*. Some of the lines rhyme, such as "trip" and "ship"; "sure" and "tour"; "tossed" and "lost." The first two stanzas of the original song have three five-line sections each with a pair of rhyming lines, very similar to the three four-line ABAB rhyming sections of the sonnet, but less strict and with less rhyme.