



THE WELLERMAN SONG

How an old sea shanty encourages our modern world-
wie ein altes Seemannslied unsere moderne Welt aufmuntert

[speech project in Q2 English A-level course by RG, April 2021]

There once was a ship that put to sea
The name of that ship was the Billy o' Tea
The winds blew up, her bow dipped down
Blow, me bully boys, blow (huh)

Soon may the Wellerman come
To bring us sugar and tea and rum
One day, when the tinguin' is done
We'll take our leave and go

Wellerman, Wellerman... What does that mean?
Doing well – „weller“ – „wellest“??- Na, just kiddin'.
Doing well – better – best, that's for sure-
Is Wellerman bringing a better future?

Well, at least there's this very popular Scottish song on top of the German chart-list right now...

Thus I asked my students to write a speech in which they state their own opinion on why this old sea shanty has become extremely famous all of a sudden. Having done so, some students figured they'd like to share it with you.

Enjoy reading!

(If you like to comment on it, feel free to write an email to me (stefanie.rossberg@luo-darmstadt.eu) and I forward it to the student responsible.)

We wish you all just the best – and stay healthy!

RG and her tutorial students

Quellen:

Bild verändert nach: in_einem_boot_corona-psychologie_.jpg (300x225) (medizin-im-text.de)

Lyrics: Songtext von Nathan Evans - Wellerman Lyrics (songtexte.com)

A) An old sea Shanty covered by a Scottish postman hits the global charts

Hi everyone!

Most of you already know me - my name is Dominik. I'm the one who always wears shorts in school all day long. I guess you folks are all familiar with the catchy song that went viral within weeks and still hits the charts now! Yes, it's the famous Shanty song "Wellerman"! I'm here to talk to you about this extraordinary song and how it became so viral! ... Why? Because I hear this song every day and I'm asking myself: What makes this song so exceptional?

We first made acquaintances with it when a Scottish mailman called Nathan Evans published a rather odd cover of this long-lost sea Shanty song. The legend says that a sea Shanty is a 'call and response' song. The shanty leader chants a verse whereas the crewmates follow him with the chorus.

Evans' intention wasn't to start an unexpected social media domino effect! He himself quotes that he would never have thought that his version would blow up on TikTok. He only wanted to keep up hope during the Corona pandemic and put a smile on people's faces. But this wasn't his only intention. Right? As you know the song repeats the chorus every second verse over and over again which is very, very catchy after hearing it several times. But exactly this chorus is so captivating, interesting and exciting regarding its message.

The message is clear: The song's topic appeals to our society's current situation. Especially when it comes to the pandemic and isolation. Evans wants people to come closer again and cheer each other up by responding to his song's calls.

Ending that, this extraordinary, catchy shanty song actually has a quite remarkable impact on you, myself, the Scots and all the lonely people in isolation dying from boredom...

So here's what I say everyone:

Listen to Nathan Evans' song if you feel lonely in isolation and need a call to respond.

B) One day we'll take our leave and go

Dear people,

most of us know the Wellerman song, whether from TikTok or YouTube – it doesn't matter. There is a reason why it became so popular, well definitely not through the music video -but surely due to its epic, hopeful and light tunes. But most importantly, people can relate to the song. But why?

Why a song about a strange Wellerman?

Why a song in which some whales get randomly tongued?

People 'saw through' the lyrics and their meaning: Some say it's about Brexit and devolution that come with it. Some say it's about the self-isolation in corona times.

The big and great EU, which is almost as great as a whale, holds England back from developing itself – some say.

The whole world looks at England, obviously. That's why they need to take a step back

so they can turn into another – a better – the 'only' right direction....

But it is not only Brexit which troubles people, but also a 'small' disease which isn't really worth mentioning... I mean it only killed hundred thousands of people and forced us to go into self-isolation and have almost zero social contact – just like the Wellerman on his ship..

However, it won't stay long – just been there for a year, they say...

The last thing I can say is that one day we'll take our leave and go. Literally.

C) The mystery of the "Wellerman -blare"

Dear Classmates,

Every one of us has heard of the "Wellerman"- sea shanty- song by Nathan Evans. Every one of us has, but we are definitely not the only ones. How has this song become so popular all of a sudden? It started out as a TikTok song, becoming more and more popular, until it reached the top charts. How come?

During the Corona crisis everyone is sitting at home in isolation, lockdown or home-office. The sea shanty gives us hope, motivation and faith to not stop believing that there is an end to all of this suffering.

Not only the older people are at home at the moment listening to the radio, also we, the young generation are at home and on TikTok in between or during our classes. This catchy sea shanty got our attention, because of the beat which occurs throughout the whole song, as well as because of the chorus, which is stuck in our heads after listening to it even once.

The "Wellerman"-song actually has a story and meaning behind the lyrics, other than lots and lots of other songs. These lyrics focus on Scottish history. Scots have their own history (different from the English). And they are still seeking for independence. That is also why the song is so popular even among Scottish citizens.

Other than the young generation, the older generations listen to this song as well. That is because they know the original, the old version. So now listening to the new, modern version, they get a nostalgic feeling, remembering their old life and their young selves when they first listened to this sea shanty.

Overall, the "Wellerman"-song by Nathan Evans makes the old and the young turn up the volume of their radio player.

D) The Rebirth of Shanty

“I ‘ve never thought this song would storm the whole world” – a quote from the ‘Wellerman song’-performer Nathan Evans. But what is the reason for this song’s sudden success?

For weeks, even months, this song has been thrilling listeners whether old or young on all streaming platforms and on the radio.

The fact that you learn something about the hard work of whale hunting at sea hardly made the song a viral hit... But there is a clear link between the isolation of young people being whalers in the 19th century and that (of young people) due to the COVID pandemic.

For a year now the world has only known one topic of conversation.

For a year now, we’ve been living in a pandemic.

For a year now, people around the world have been dying every day due to the corona virus which severely restricts our freedom.

The song thus reflects the hope that the time of confinement due to the global pandemic may soon be over. The sailors back then must also have experienced and felt such a pressure out there, on the rough merciless sea.

When does it finally stop? When will the sad, scary spook eventually end?

The melody, which addresses both young and old, has something tremendously comforting, which encourages the audience to feel a kind of “cohesion” - even in this crisis.

Almost forgotten, a shanty (i. e. an actually very old music genre) is now taking part in the German charts.

Another parallel can be found, when one considers that England has left the EU partly because of free fishing rights - hoping they will then be able to catch much more fish than they are allowed under EU law today.

However, the song must also be viewed critically, as it deals with the topic of brutal whaling, which especially in Japan increases again at the moment. Countries like Japan, Iceland, Norway, but in a figurative sense the English, too, tend to disregard this critical view – because they are no longer in the EU.

With regard to the current Brexit topic, the sailors could stand for the Scottish who are waiting for the ‘wellerman’ to arrive. The ‘wellerman’ could then be interpreted as Europe since many Scots want to belong to the EU again. The captain, who stands for England, however wants to continue to catch whales and must therefore be independent of the EU...

All in all, the success of the song is justified because it is a community song from sailors. That means that people who like the song, who listen to it, congregate like the sailors did several hundred years ago and draw positive energy and hope from it.

And obviously because of its “earworm” guarantee.

E) The Wellerman parabola

“Soon may the Wellerman come, to bring us sugar and tea and rum”....

2021 and everyone knows the lyrics of the old Scottish traditional song “Wellerman”.

But why? And: What even is a “Wellerman”?

They are supply ships, named after their owners, the Weller brothers. These ships brought goods for the whalers working on the coasts, who were often rewarded with tea, sugar or rum instead of money. Not a very modern topic, isn’t it? Unless you are not a fisherman that can relate with the situation on a ship, the song seems rather irrelevant.

However, suddenly, 150 years later, “Wellerman” is popular like never before. And that’s because of the social media platform Tik Tok. More precisely, a video that was uploaded and viewed millions of times within a very short time. The 26-year-old postman from Scotland, Nathan Evans, who created the video was more than surprised. With his version he conveyed a feeling of freedom, peace and silence.

Freedom, peace and silence. Somehow, Evans seems to have hit a nerve. The sailors endured a long time on the boats in isolation and were looking forward to finally leaving when the job was done.

I think I am not wrong, when I say: Everyone wants to finally be free again. Everyone wants to pack their bags and leave. Everyone wants this crisis to end. And that, I believe, is specifically the reason why the song is so successful.

The isolation of sailors as a parabola for isolation in times of corona contact barriers.

F) Sea Shanty as spiritual fuel

Good Afternoon everyone!

So recently I heard this song on the radio and I was wondering, why it sounded so familiar. Turns out it was all over Tik Tok and people really enjoyed listening to it.

However it's easy to see why the "Wellerman song" went viral on that app and became an instant hit, even charting at number one on the UK Charts. The catchy beat and the memorable lyrics made it an earworm, that took over the internet at the beginning of the year.

But why exactly did the sea shanty stick with us and what made it so special? Well it seems as if most of us can relate to the lyrics. Despite it's simplicity, the isolation of the ship "Billy o' Tea" from the rest of the world reminded us of our very own situation right now. We can't leave, we're stuck at home and have nothing to do. In the song the people on the boat are anticipating the arrival of the Wellerman and are waiting for them to bring sugar, tea and rum. This would obviously refer to us waiting for the people working on the vaccines so they can deliver them and we can finally take our leave and go meaning that we would be able to go outside without the constant fear of catching the virus and possibly affecting others. On their journey, the fishermen are struggling to fight a whale, which would symbolise our battle against corona and that it could take a long time for us to come out as winners. However they are also singing for each other and showing the solidarity and support they have for one another during their hard time, which is very similar to our situation right now, where we take care of our elders and the affected/sick ones by wearing masks to protect us and others. Sea shanties fueled the spirits of the sailors for hundreds of years and were work-oriented, helping the workers to coordinate tasks that required synchronized pushing or pulling. While this song's origin lies in labour, it also evokes a sense of camaraderie and "brotherhood", something that can be seen around the world. In some way this sea shanty was able to bring us all together, which is probably its appeal and seemed to be just the perfect song we needed in order to connect us again and to bring us hope in the darkest of times.

The song itself leaves considerable room for interpretation and can be perceived in different ways. Who else wants to leave right now and has been insisting on doing so for the past 5 years? The UK of course! At first glance, many may not see a connection to Brexit, but there are definitely some parallels. Like the "the winds blowing up" referring to the heated negotiations and arguments about the UK's parting and the verse "one day, when the toungin' is done, we'll take our leave and go" implying that when they finally come to an arrangement and formulate a contract, they'll leave the EU. The captain would be the Prime Minister leading the whole operation and later his struggles are further explained, where he can't decide to stay or go and he's torn between Britain and the EU. At the end the song explains how the fight is still not over which is a clear reference to the differences still going on between the two sides and that their problems will continue existing.

Nevertheless we can all agree that no matter how you understand the song, it's a great one to say the least that deserved its hype and seeing another older song being remade and going viral in the future would certainly not surprise any of us anymore.

G) WELLERMAN SONG

Dear students and Mrs Rossberg,

We all listened to the Wellerman song in class which suddenly became really popular and is known by people from all over the world. But why did the song become that famous in such a short time? Is there maybe something extremely special about it? And what does the song tell us?

I personally believe that the song mainly appeals to young people who made the song a hit by liking and sharing it on social media platforms like TikTok. The reason for this might be that the song, especially the chorus, is mostly about topics like the demand for speedy redemption, freedom and the looking forward to better times. Especially teens, but older people too, can identify themselves with the song during corona-times because they crave the same things: freedom and getting the control back over their lives. Therefore Nathan Evans addresses all the people who are suffering during these hard times. I presume that he wants to give them hope and to explain that you should never give up your hopes and stay fighting exactly like the captain did.

The song could also refer to the current Brexit in the UK. Thus the whale could be a representation for the actual Brexit and the captain could stand for Scotland or Northern Ireland because both countries seem to be not really convinced by the UK leaving the EU.

Additionally, I believe that even other reasons for the sudden popularity of the song are the catchy beat, the interesting lyrics and the way the song is sung. This might create a welcome change from basic love songs that might become boring over time.

Thank you for listening