Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=315&v=fZmYv6kDutw>

Lyrics:

The Fields of Athenry

Pete St. John

By a lonely prison wall

I heard a young girl calling

Micheal they are taking you away

For you stole Trevelyn's corn

So the young might see the morn.

Now a prison ship lies waiting in the bay.

Low lie the Fields of Athenry

Where once we watched the small free birds fly.

Our love was on the wing we had dreams and songs to sing

It's so lonely 'round the Fields of Athenry.

By a lonely prison wall

I heard a young man calling

Nothing matters Mary when you're free,

Against the Famine and the Crown

I rebelled they ran me down

Now you must raise our child with dignity.

Low lie the Fields of Athenry

Where once we watched the small free birds fly.

Our love was on the wing we had dreams and songs to sing

It's so lonely 'round the Fields of Athenry.

By a lonely harbor wall

She watched the last star falling

As that prison ship sailed out against the sky

Sure she'll wait and hope and pray

For her love in Botany Bay

It's so lonely 'round the Fields of Athenry.

Low lie the Fields of Athenry

Where once we watched the small free birds fly.

Our love was on the wing we had dreams and songs to sing

It's so lonely 'round the Fields of Athenry.

Essay:

**P1:** The Fields of Athenry is an Irish Ballad written by Pete St. John in the 1970s and is set in the Irish town of Athenry found in Galway, during the Famine. Pete St. John’s beautiful ballad portrays the story of the fictional “Michael” an Irishman who has been imprisoned by the British authorities for stealing food during the Famine in the hopes of feeding his starving family. The song is immortalised in Irish culture and is widely known, whilst also being extremely popular with the Irish people, most notably at sporting events.

**P2:** The ballad begins in a morose and whimsical tone by describing an imprisoned man who is standing beside a wall in the prison in which he is held captive, when he all of a sudden hears the calls of a young girl.

***“By a lonely prison wall, I heard a young girl calling”***

The young girl now commences to tell us the story of Michael who was arrested by the British authorities and placed in prison.

***"Michael, they have taken you away,”***

We quickly learn that Michael was arrested due to the fact that he stole corn belonging to a certain “Trevelyan.”

***“For you stole Trevelyan's corn,”***

However, the ownership of the corn in question was in fact metaphorical, as it did not truly belong to Trevelyan, it instead symbolises the corn owned by the British Authorities. The corn was sent to Ireland in the guise of an alternative crop to ease widespread food shortage and tackle the hunger epidemic. However, the idea was fundamentally flawed as the farming population had little or no experience with the cultivation of corn and also it was very expensive for the peasant Irish population. Furthermore, Trevelyan is none other than Sir Charles Trevelyan who was charged with and headed the majority of the relief effort of the British government in Ireland during the Great Famine. The young girl now explains the motivation behind Michael’s criminal act, which was, to feed his young children who could not survive the pain of the Famine for much longer.

***“So the young might see the morn.”***

Next, the young girl allows the reader to know that Michael is not facing a jail sentence in Ireland, he will in fact be transferred by a prison ship to another unknown destination

***“Now a prison snip lies waiting in the bay."***

**P3:** The Ballad now moves to a very moving chorus which is repeated throughout the ballad. The chorus presumably describes Michael and the young girl’s memories together in the town of Athenry.

***“Low lie the fields of Athenry”***

As the song writer Pete St. John mentions on his website, the beautiful low-lying fields of Athenry can be seen as you approach the town, and it is here that Michael and the young girl imagine and reminisce of. They now describe how when they were there they would watch the small free birds fly, perhaps jealous of the freedom that these birds had in comparison to themselves under the oppressive British Crown.

***“Where once we watched the small free birds fly”***

In the next line, there is the beautiful image of

***“Our love was on the wing”***

which perhaps compares their love as something free and graceful as that of a wing of a bird. We now see them tell us that they many “dreams” together and that that they sang “songs” in blissful happiness.

***“We had dreams and songs to sing”***

However, unfortunately the chorus ends on a sad and forlorn note as the girl states that she is now alone in the fields of Athenry without Michael.

***“It's so lonely round the fields of Athenry”***

**P4:** As we move into the second verse of the ballad the perspective now changes to that of the young girl, who can now hear Michael calling from the other side of the prison wall.

***“By a lonely prison wall, I heard a young man calling”***.

The repetition of “lonely prison wall” is used to impress upon the reader of the loss and sorrow that this couple is suffering due to their separation. We now learn the name of the young girl to be Mary, after Michael begins to call to her.

***"Nothing matters, Mary, when you're free”***

Michael explains to Mary that there is nothing to worry about if you are in a position a freedom. In addition to this, Michael states that he fought,

***“Against the famine and the crown,”***

however, his rebellion and attempt to steal the food was ultimately short lived as the British authorities quickly apprehended him.

***“I rebelled they cut me down.”***

The use of the words “cut me down” would indicate that it was a violent arrest of Michael, although, it would not have been particularly difficult for the British forces to subdue him as none of the Irish population would possess any weapons or artillery that could pose a significant risk to them, other than any normal day tool found during that time.

Moreover, it would not be for another seventy years until the Irish were organised or armed well enough to truly rebel and fight for Independence. As the verse concludes, Michael now consoles Mary and tells her that she must remain strong and rear their child with decency.

***“Now you must raise our child with dignity.”***

Unfortunately, a lot of parents in Ireland during this time would have been forced to raise a family as a single parent, due to the high mortality rate that was present. Therefore, Michael and Mary’s heart breaking situation was not an isolated case.

**P5:** In the final verse we at long last learn of Michaels terrible and earth shattering punishment. The setting of the ballad changes, as the eloquent lyrics paint a picture of a harbour by the Sea at night.

***“By a lonely harbor wall, we watched the last star fall”***

The continued use of the adjective “lonely” and the mention of the “last star” falling gives us the impression of a desolate and mournful scene. Irrefutably, this is proven to be true as we learn that the prison ship holding Michel prisoner for a pretty minor crime is now leaving the coast of Ireland.

***“As the prison ship sailed out against the sky”***

The songwriter now reveals to us Michaels destination of captivity to be that Botany Bay in Australia and that he.

***“For she lived to hope and pray for her love in Botany Bay”***

This changes the whole significance of this Famine inspired ballad, as it not only pays homage to the suffering and despair of the Irish people during the Potato bight, it also pays tribute to the human tragedy that was the deportation of Irish lawbreakers to Australia. In the final line of this iconic and incredible ballad we are one again reminded of Mary and her sorrowful loss after the cruelly extreme extradition of her husband to Australia.

***“It's so lonely round the fields of Athenry”***

**P6:** To summarize and conclude, this incredibly moving ballad may have been written about a fictional family and talk about events that did not occur. Yet, it should be noted that it in

unquestionably influenced by the harrowing events of the Great Irish Famine. Furthermore, it is wholly believable that this story did occur in some way or form, when people were at their most desperate and in need of food during that famine-time horror that existed in Ireland during these terribly dark years.