



Gilligan Unbound: Pop Culture in the Age of Globalization

Paul A. Cantor

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In *Gilligan Unbound*, a distinguished Shakespeare scholar and literary critic proves once and for all that popular culture can be every bit as complex, meaningful, and provocative as the most celebrated works of literature—and a lot more fun. Paul Cantor analyzes and interprets a wide variety of classic television programs with the same seriousness, care, and creativity as he would *Hamlet* or *Macbeth* to reveal how dramatically America's image of itself has evolved from the 1960s to the present. Cantor demonstrates how, during the 1960s, *Gilligan's Island* and *Star Trek* reflected America's faith in liberal democracy and our willingness to project it universally. *Gilligan's Island*, Cantor argues, is based on the premise that a representative group of Americans could literally be dumped in the middle of nowhere and still prevail under the worst of circumstances. *Star Trek* took American optimism even further by trying to make the entire galaxy safe for democracy. Despite the famous Prime Directive, Captain Kirk and his crew remade planet after planet in the image of an idealized 1960s America. With the end of the Cold War and the onset of unprecedented globalizing forces, faith in the American way of life has wavered. Contrary to the claims of those unacquainted with the cartoon, Cantor shows why *The Simpsons* is actually a powerful defense of the nuclear family and local communities, which has grown out of our growing disillusionment with national politics. In *The X-Files* we witness the treacherous workings of a government conspiracy, conveying the geopolitical anxiety that has emerged with the collapse of the clear-cut ideological polarities of the Cold War. By observing such trends in American popular culture, Cantor concludes that what had originally appeared to be the ultimate triumph of liberal democracy may in fact signal the beginning of a new phase of history, in which traditional forms of political organization have become obsolete and are being replaced by new global networks. *Gilligan Unbound* is a celebration of the profound possibilities offered by the study of pop culture. Cantor, without condescending to either his readers or his subject matter, rescues the serious study of popular culture from academic jargon and incomprehensible prose. See for yourself why his award-winning essays on professional wrestling and *The Simpsons* have attracted worldwide attention, and why the *National Enquirer* calls him a 'top prof.'

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