

# THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN (DER RATTENFÄNGER VON HAMELN)

AS A MOTIF IN EUROPEAN POETRY

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The German dramatist Carl Zuckmayer once claimed for the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin a preeminent position among legends that have been influential in both folklore and literature.<sup>1</sup> Even those who question Zuckmayer's view might find good grounds for reviewing the legend's history in folkloric and literary tradition. In 1984 the town of Hameln (Hamelin) in Germany celebrated the seven hundredth anniversary of the Pied Piper's appearance in Hamelin (The figure is referred to in German as "the Ratcatcher of Hamelin", "der Rattenfänger von Hameln"). On one of the walls of the so-called Rattenfängerhaus in the town, an inscription states that on the 26th day of June 1284, the Day of Saint John and Saint Paul, a piper dressed in many colours led one hundred and thirty Hamelin children to Calvary near Koppen, where they were all lost.<sup>2</sup>

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There has been much discussion of the historical origins of the story. Was the Piper a ratcatcher cheated of his just remuneration? Was he a recruiting agent for a military campaign? Was he the instigator of an emigration to Rumania, the German colonies in the Baltic region or the Holy Land? <sup>3</sup> That no one has as yet found conclusive evidence for any of these contentions may well point to the secret of the legend's appeal to both the popular and the poetic imagination; through the centuries the legend has shown itself open to reinterpretation without losing its identity as a nexus of associations based on a common theme. The story links myth and history, the supernatural and the world of daily experience.

Closely related to the question of the legend's origins is the problem of ascertaining which of the known variants of the story preceded the others. The earliest written documentation of the story is found in a chronicle of events in the Hamelin area dating from the middle of the fifteenth century. It should be noted that there is an inevitable time lag between the genesis of a legend in folkloric tradition and the first time it is recorded in writing. Carl Zuckmayer, whose last play, *Der Rattenfänger*, presents a modern interpretation of the Pied Piper, argues that the story as told by the inscription on the Rattenfängerhaus antedates all other extant versions.<sup>4</sup> His view is consistent with the following considerations. First, no other version of the tale refers to so early a date as the 26th of June, 1284. (The source Browning drew upon when composing "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" makes reference to the 22nd of July, 1376). It is interesting to speculate whether Browning knew of the date cited in the first story, as the year in which he composed this poem is a numerical anagram of 1284. Second, myths and folktales commonly grow from simple fables to complex stories incorporating strands derived from various sources. Research indicates that the story of a ratcatcher who rid Hamelin of its troublesome rodents goes back to the time of the Black Death. In his article "A Plaguey Piper" in *The Lancet*, D. Wolfers suggests that the Pied Piper's "gipsy coat of red and yellow" in Browning's famous poem points back to the skin discolorations produced by the bubonic plague.<sup>5</sup> By the late Middle Ages the Piper had merged with the figure of Death as the leader of la danse macabre or the Dance of Death. Prosper Mérimée betrays his awareness of the Piper's negative associations in his historical novel *Chronique du règne de Charles IX* (1829).<sup>6</sup> A gipsy girl retells the story of the Pied Piper to a company of German soldiers bound for Paris, where trouble is brewing. The tale ominously portends the massacre on Saint

Bartholomew's Eve in August, 1572. Is it a coincidence that both MerimÃ©e's story and the original tale recount what happened on a saint's day?

The present essay is, to my knowledge, the first to take a global view of the figure of the Piper in both folklore and literature. A global approach allows us to determine the constants and variables at play in multifarious versions of the central motif. We have seen that the figure of the Piper was identified with Death in the late Middle Ages. However, in what is probably the original version of the story, that told by the inscription on the RattenfÃ¤ngerhaus any value judgement as to the Piper's intentions is withheld. Even the nature of the children's fate is left open to conjecture. Did they perish or simply disappear? The word "lost" leaves both possibilities open. The versions of the tale written in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries present the Piper as an evil musician and seducer of the young. The first volume of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, an anthology of German folksongs which Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano published in 1806, includes a ballad in which the Piper is depicted as a malicious and sinister fellow who steals children from their parents and disrupts the most basic social ties. Any literal interpretation of the story must present the Piper as a kidnapper. Treated metaphorically, however, the figure may be cast in a positive light. It was significantly in the wake of the Romantic movement that a fundamental change in attitude towards the Piper, the gipsy and the outsider took place. At the same time the legend of the Piper passed from the domain of the folktale and derivative prose narratives such as those written by G. Schott, Dr. J. Wier and R. Verstegen, to that of literature proper.<sup>7</sup> Thereafter, treatments of the legend expressed the particular poetic vision of such poets as Blake, Goethe, Browning and Apollinaire. After a survey of the basic symbolic associations common to the legend and all works subject to its influence, a poem by each of these authors will be examined.

The story of the Pied Piper or "der RattenfÃ¤nger" links the idea of music (usually but not always played on a pipe) with the image of a child. This linking goes far to elucidate the reason Å for the legend's appeal to poets from the Romantic period onwards. M.H. Abrams stresses in *The Mirror and the Lamp* that music was to the Romantics what the pictorial arts were to their predecessors--a metaphor most suited to express the quintessential nature of poetry. As to the child motif, the mere mention of such poets as Blake and Wordsworth will recall its great significance as a symbol of innocence and rejuvenation. The Piper himself takes on positive childlike qualities. Another association evoked by the Piper which is perhaps less obvious than those of music and childhood is his association with time.

The mysterious disappearance of the children of Hamelin inevitably prompts thoughts about the end of childhood, whether caused by premature death or by the transition from childhood to adulthood. In this connection it is interesting to note a clear reference to the Pied Piper in Dylan Thomas' celebrated poem "Fern Hill," namely the lines:

And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows

In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs

Before the children green and golden

Follow him out of grace.

"Time" in "Fern Hill" is an ambivalent figure, both merciful and sinister. Indeed, Thomas' poem is itself pervaded by a mood of ambivalence in its evocation of the happy days of childhood and yet its anticipation of the coming of death. The child in the poem is both "green and dying." The Piper's association with death goes back to medieval times. Once we identify the Piper with time, his dual association with childhood and death, the opposite ends of life's spectrum, will be understood as the expression of time's double aspect as both creator and destroyer. In Browning's poem, all things "under the sun" are subject to the Piper's irresistible powers. Time may be associated with music no less than with life and death. Musical rhythms, song, dance and poetic metre all depend in various ways on the human being's inborn sense of time.

For many centuries, mankind's sole means of measuring time was by observing the heavens and the seasons. Though the early versions of the story of the Pied Piper differ as to the date of his arrival, they agree that he appeared in the town during the summer. In Northrop Frye's categories of genres, the story of the piper belongs to the mythology of summer and, therefore, constitutes a "romance," i.e. that genre which reveals the sun or sun-figure as the victor over winter and death.<sup>8</sup> One aspect of the Piper's symbolic referentiality has been virtually ignored. According to the early versions of the tale, the Piper led the children to Calvary or Koppen (Koppen, meaning "head" or "skull," is also suggestive of "Golgotha"). In Christian belief, Calvary marks the victory of Jesus over death and evil in a manner analogous to the victory of the sun in the seasonal cycle. The original versions of the tale are also very specific as to the date of the Piper's arrival. Religious historians suggest that Christianity outlived the various myth-based religions with which it competed in Roman times because it asserted that mythical or supernatural events took place in historical time. In similar fashion, the figure of the Pied Piper differs from its Classical antecedents, Pan and Orpheus, in that the Piper's appearance in Hamelin is presented as historical event with a precise date.

Having considered the basic symbolic fields of reference which are inseparable from the story of the Pied Piper, we now embark on an examination of four poems to be discussed in chronological order:

William Blake's Introduction in Songs of Innocence; J. Wolfgang Goethe's "Der Rattenfänger"; Robert Browning's "The Pied Piper of Hamelin/A Child's Story" and Guillaume Apollinaire's "Le Musicien de Saint-Merry".

In what way do these poetic treatments mark a departure from tradition? First, we note a fundamental shift in point of view. The third person narrative yields to the dramatic monologue and to forms which allow us to hear the voice of the Piper and the people influenced by his music. Second, the poets give themselves much greater scope in changing the story than was considered possible by the purveyors of the folkloric tradition, including not only the anonymous bearers of the oral tradition but those, such as Verstegen and Grimm brothers, who sought faithfully to record that tradition. In Goethe's "Der Rattenfänger," for example, women and girls constitute a third class of those induced to follow the Piper and in Apollinaire's "Le Musicien de Saint-Merry" it is only women who follow him. These changes are not so much breaks with tradition as interpretations of the basic theme. Third, in the poems to be discussed we may speak of a union libre where tradition and individual creativity meet. In one regard the poets interpret the symbols contained in the story. In another, the story served as a vehicle of expression allowing the poets to encapsulate their essential poetic art. I shall therefore treat these poems as typical of the respective authors' poetic work.

William Blake may not have had the Pied Piper specifically in mind when he composed Introduction, the first poem in the cycle Songs of Innocence, published in 1789. Yet "the Piper," who figures in the poem as the lyrical "I", resembles the Pied Piper in being able to embody the interlinked symbolic motifs of music, the child and the poet as the Christlike mediator between the divine and the human.

The year 1789 was not only a year of political upheaval, it also marks one of the great turning points in the history of poetry, a revolution affecting the way poets looked at themselves and their art.<sup>9</sup> The treatment of the Piper motif in "Introduction" reflects and demonstrates this change, for it represents the Piper as one serving to mediate between the source of divine truth, pictured as a child upon a cloud, and humanity in general. The message or song transmitted by the Piper changes in form from melody (the language of feeling) to song (melody and words) and from song to a poem in pastoral vein written down for posterity. From a pastoral poem it is ultimately transformed into the prophetic "Word of the Bard" in the poem, also entitled "Introduction," which opens Songs of Experience in 1794; by then the (politically) innocent hopes of five years earlier had all but evaporated. The child encountered in Introduction has the august attributes of the Christ Child. It is the Piper who obeys the Child, a significant reversal of the relationship between the Pied Piper and the children of Hamelin.

Goethe's "Der Rattenfänger" was composed in 1802, a year in which Goethe travelled through Hamelin. It is a dramatic monologue with the ratcatcher as the first speaker. In the opening couplet he introduces himself as the celebrated and much-travelled ratcatcher:

Ich bin der wohlbekannte SÄnger,  
Der vielgereiste RattenfÄnger.

I am the renowned singer, the much travelled ratcatcher

We find no mention of Hamelin in the poem, only of "this city famous from of old." The musician has no pipe but plays a stringed instrument, such as a harp or lyre. There is nothing to associate the term "RattenfÄnger" with any particular kind of musical instrument. In any case, not even the most adept musician can blow and sing at the same time.

The song was originally part of the children's opera or masque presented at the court theatre at Weimar. It is not surprising, therefore, that the ratcatcher's more sinister associations are suppressed in this song, though Goethe was doubtless aware of them. We learn from Goethe's rough notes that he considered placing the ratcatcher in Faust Ä Part 1, where the figure would have appeared as a good friend and servant of Mephistopheles.<sup>10</sup> The three strophes of the poem treat in turn the three classes of those the minstrel's voice and music induce to follow: rats, children and the girls and women of the town. In thus departing from the story as laid down by tradition, Goethe exercised a freedom unknown to previous tellers of the tale. Yet his innovation was not arbitrary, for it reflected a positive evaluation of children and women that emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century to become an essential characteristic of the romantic movement. The child and the woman now symbolized the intuitive and emotional side of human nature, the very opposite of male rationality. The musician in the song is at one with the child and the female on the basis of a common intuitive nature, an affinity of being. A parallel instance is found in Goethe's influential novel Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, for here the figure of Mignon unites the child, the artist and femininity; Mignon sings to the musical accompaniment of a mysterious harpist, a figure comparable to the minstrel in "Der RattenfÄnger".

Browning's "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" has not received the attention and respect it deserves. After Walter Bagehot's discussion of the poem in his essay "Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning: or Pure, Ornate and Grotesque Art in English Poetry", what is probably Browning's most popular work has attracted little attention in critical circles.<sup>11</sup> However, two articles in scholarly journals published within the last twenty years have focused on the underlying seriousness of the poem. In "Poet and Burgher: A Comic Variation of a Serious Theme", published in Victorian Poetry (7, 1969), Milton Millhauser argues that The Pied Piper of Hamelin marks a turning-point in Browning's early poetic career, since the theme of conflict between the poet, whom M. Millhauser equates with the Piper, and the burgher (Hamelin represents Victorian England) had merely been hinted at in Browning's earlier works.<sup>12</sup> The author of the article also stresses the importance of the parallel treatment of the visions experienced and described by the surviving rat and the lame boy who is left behind. Since these visions are Browning's inventions, they are particularly significant elements in the poem's economy. Parallelism is also discernible in the uncanny resemblance between the rapacious rats and the greedy elders of Hamelin identified as "the rich". There is an allusion to the saying of Jesus that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter Heaven. M. Millhauser discerns a less explicit Biblical reference in the words "prime pottage", which connote Esau's renunciation of his birthright for the sake of a tasty meal, and by extension, the preference of a material good over a spiritual benefit. Had M. Millhauser pursued this line of enquiry further, yet greater discoveries might have awaited him, but he is restrained from doing so by his belief that the poem is based on a story of "trivial" and "innocent" origins!

In "Browning's 'Pied Piper of Hamelin': Two Levels of Meaning", Wolfgang Franke shares M. Millhauser's view that "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" poses a profound critique of Victorian society and its antipathy to artistic values.<sup>13</sup> Franke, however, sets the poem in its historical and social context and in so doing refers to such specific issues as the massive emigration from Britain and the passing of the Copyright Act in 1842. Though their approaches differ, Millhauser and Franke reach similar conclusions about the poem's underlying seriousness and concern with social and cultural issues. Franke's historical-contextual approach and Millhauser's method of examining the poem with reference to its structure and other intrinsic features provide a sound basis for further research and study. Methods, however, are subject to adaptation and revision. When defining the context of the poem, we have not only the general historical background of the early Victorian era to consider but also the poem's relationship to Browning's other works, to his philosophical and religious attitudes and, not least, to the tradition constituted by all works that take the motif of the Pied Piper as their theme.

Browning composed "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" on the approach of his thirtieth birthday, an important psychological threshold in his experience. In earlier years Browning had contended with three periods of crisis, each of which has a bearing on "The Pied Piper of Hamelin".

During early adolescence, when the first of these crises occurred, Browning was acutely aware of the transient nature of human existence and at the same time he was hypersensitive to criticism, especially of his poetry. Thus it was that Browning destroyed all traces of his first volume of poetry, *Incondita*, with the exception of two poems which were accidentally preserved, "The First-Born of Egypt" and "The Dance of Death." These poems attest to the young Browning's anguished sense of mortality and obsessive concern with the vulnerability of youth to the ravages of death and pestilence. As noted above, the story of the Pied Piper is closely linked with the Dance of Death in medieval tradition and with the loss of children. The humorous, ludic quality of Browning's "Pied Piper" belies its concern with deadly serious matters; humour often serves as a defense mechanism (cf. Goethe's "Der Rattenfänger"). Browning's second crisis, this time of an intellectual nature, resulted from the clash of rival ideologies. After reading *Queen Mab*, Browning wholeheartedly embraced Shelleyan idealism and for a time rejected Christianity or, more precisely, the Evangelical version of the religion which his devout mother had instilled in him. When Browning did return to the Christian faith, it was not unquestioningly as in his earlier days but with a mind that sought to reconcile the claims of faith and reason. Thus some of his poems concern the problems raised by Higher Criticism as to the literal truth of the Bible. In "An Epistle . . . of Karshish", for example, an Arab physician living in New Testament times sceptically sifts evidence he has received that the leader of a religious movement has risen from the dead after being crucified. These words attributed to the speaker in Browning's early poem *Pauline* suggest that Browning himself sought to circumvent the challenge of rationalism by identifying himself on a poetic level with the risen Jesus:

Yet thro' my wandering have I seen all shapes  
 Of strange delight, oft have I stood by thee,  
 Have I been keeping lonely watch with thee,  
 In the damp night by weeping Olivet,  
 Or leaning on thy bosom, proudly less--  
 Or dying with thee on the lonely cross--  
 Or witnessing thy bursting from the tomb! (848-854)

Another important aspect of Browning's religious outlook is his sympathetic attitude to post-Biblical Judaism. It would not be an exaggeration to say that there is an element of Proto-Zionism in "Holy Cross Day" and other poems treating the theme of the return of the Jews to the Holy Land and analogous spiritual journeys. On a more general plane, the motif of

the journey in Browning's work metaphorically expresses his typically Victorian belief in Man's moral progress towards an ideal state. The third crisis of Browning's early poetic career concerns his quest for a style suited to his own needs yet accessible to a wide range of readers. It was *Sordello*, one of his longer and more difficult works, that earned Browning his reputation as a confusing and obscure poetic writer. "The Pied Piper of Hamelin," on the other hand, signalled a welcome breakthrough in the area of popular verse. Yet it is difficult for a deeply serious poet to detach himself from his profundity of vision even if he makes a conscious decision to do so. What are the indications that Browning's famous poem has more to say than critics generally assume? Relevant to this question is the problem of Browning's so-called "reticence."

In her monograph entitled *Browning's Poetry of Reticence*, Barbara Melchiori argues that Browning's "reticence," his compulsive desire to conceal or camouflage meaning, resulted from a tension between "his wish to jealously guard his own thoughts and feelings, and the pressing necessity he was under to reveal them."<sup>14</sup> It is also possible that Browning derived a certain pleasure from making his readers work hard to probe beneath the surface meanings of his poetry. Barbara Melchiori advises readers of Browning to pay special attention to individual words, for these may provide clues or pointers to deeper levels of meaning. As we have noted, Millhauser applied such a method when considering the implications of the word "pottage" in "The Pied Piper of Hamelin." This technique applies to verbal clues that we shall shortly consider. With earlier discussions of the poem and Browning's situation in 1842 in mind, we shall go on to examine particular motifs and individual words in the poem itself.

In the final lines of *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* a reference is made to "Willy," whom the speaker enjoins to keep his promises, especially to pipers. Browning gave the script of his poem to the convalescent son of William Macready Senior, the theatre manager who had staged a number of Browning's plays. It is probable that the moral of the story was addressed to Willy's father, as the formerly cordial relations between Browning and the stage manager had soured. The deterioration in their relations was itself symptomatic of a more general estrangement Browning felt between himself and his social environment in London and beyond. To make matters worse, one of Browning's closest friends, Alfred Dommett, emigrated to New Zealand in April 1842 and Browning himself considered leaving the country. Browning, on the point of reaching his thirtieth birthday without having secured for himself financial independence or unequivocal literary fame, doubtless infused his poem with feelings of resentment. We should beware however of unreservedly equating the Piper with Browning's self-image as "the poet." The Piper is depicted in the poem as one capable of transcending distance and time and compelling all creatures to obey his will. There is nothing in the poem to suggest that the Piper is a poet or even a singing minstrel. He is a musician (in "Abt Vogler" the view is expressed that among artists, the musician is closest to God). Whereas in Blake's *Introduction* the Piper is a musician, a singer and a poet, Browning's Piper shows little inclination to bridge the arts. However, through his music he makes poets of others. The only truly lyrical section of the poem is the utterance of the lame boy as he describes his feelings on hearing the Piper's music. In the following lines he echoes the millennial vision of Isaiah's prophecy that Nature shall attain a state of peace and harmony:

And everything was strange and new;  
 The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here,  
 Their dogs outran our fallow deer,  
 And honey-bees had lost their stings,  
 And horses were born with eagles' wings. (244-248)

The operative word in this passage is "new". The vision the Piper's music induces in the lame child's mind is of a new creation. It is prophetic, that is, oriented to the future, with no trace of nostalgic regret at the passing of a lost paradise. For Browning, the terms "poet" and "prophet" were virtually synonymous, a point stressed in Judith Berlin-Lieberman's dissertation *Browning and Hebraism* (Jerusalem, 1934).<sup>15</sup> The reason that the lame child could not follow the Piper beyond Koppelberg Hill lay in his physical disability (in Grimm's *Deutsche Sagen*, two other children stayed behind, one of whom was blind). To Browning anything which could be classed as an imperfection implied a positive possibility.

According to his "Theory of the Imperfect," that which falls short of perfection admits the possibility of further development towards perfection." 16 For this reason Browning was a Pre-Raphaelite in the realm of art, preferring those "naive" Italian painters who depicted Man as he is rather than as he should be according to a perfect aesthetic model. Browning's "Theory of the Imperfect" also found expression in his manner of treating his heroes, Sordello, Paracelsus and Saint John the Divine, as those who experience their greatest visionary insights when their sense of human frailty is greatest, at the point of death. Underlying the motif of the vision before death is the paradigm of Moses surveying the Promised Land which he may not physically enter. This vision of Moses is, in fact, the subject of Browning's poems "Pisgah Sights 1&11." It is not death but his physical handicap which prevents the lame child from entering a domain comparable to the Promised Land. It is surely significant that the words "promised" and "land" are found in close proximity in the lines:

I can't forget that I'm bereft  
Of all the pleasant sights they see,  
Which the Piper also promised me,  
For he led us, he said, to a joyous land. (237-240)

As Browning's "Theory of the Imperfect" directly impinges on his concept of progress, it is important to define Browning's understanding of progress. It meant for him a universal process involving all living creatures and spanning all ages. Mankind in its present state has advanced through the stage of animal existence; it must continue to advance in the future towards its ultimate spiritual goal ordained by God. As Millhauser noted, the parallelism between the elders of Hamelin, who represent mankind in its present state, and the rats, who have human characteristics, significantly affects the poem's structure. Moreover, the parallelism elucidates Browning's view of the relation of mankind to the animal kingdom in the great chain of progress. In "A Death in the Desert," we read that Man is:

Lower than God who knows all and can all,  
Higher than beasts which know and can so far  
As each beast's limit, perfect to an end,  
Nor conscious that they know, nor craving more. (578-581 )

If the Piper's music brought out the lyricist in the lame child, it brought out the satirist in the surviving rat. The rat poetically describes the best of all possible worlds to one who is totally consumerist in attitude. The quest for the gratification afforded by material things ends in death, while the quest for a spiritual good is not subject to death's power. Another contrast in Browning's treatment of the rats and the children is evident. The children are led to the brink of the Weser, the "deep and wide" river symbolic of death, before he changes direction. For a terrible moment the children's parents fear that their children will suffer the fate of the rats. The Weser is thus the divide between life and death, like the waters of the Red Sea, or like water in the symbology of baptism where the Old Adam perishes and the New Adam rises to enter a life of the spirit. 17 Since the origins of the Pied Piper legend lie in medieval religious mysticism, it is not surprising that Browning found it a suitable vehicle for his own religious vision.

As the poem's subtitle states, "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" is "a Child's Story." This subtitle implies more than the poem's suitability as reading material for children. Since the poem contains a reference to the passage in the New Testament which describes the rich man's difficult path to Heaven, the subtitle may recall other words in the New Testament which state that those seeking the Kingdom of God must "become as little children." If, as A. Dickson's research indicates, Browning had read any of the early Latin or German versions of the tale, he would have noted the traditional association

of Koppelberg with Calvary.<sup>18</sup> If he had, it is strange that Browning's poem should include a reference to the moral teachings of Jesus but none at all to the Crucifixion. It seems to me that Browning, in a manner quite typical of him, did plant a number of veiled allusions to Calvary in his poem. The following quotations from the text illustrate his method:

a) "He never can cross that mighty top". (223)

It is plausible that the word "cross" not only denotes the action of traversing but also connotes the Cross as a religious symbol. A study of Browning's contextualization of "cross" in "By the Fire-side" provides evidence that, in one instance at least, Browning plays on the double meaning of the word by juxtaposing an appearance of the word in the substantive form (denoting a cross on a church altar) with three appearances of the word as a declined verb. <sup>19</sup> The Piper's words "put me in a passion" (183) may be considered in a similar light.

b) "And what's dead can't come to life I think". (166)

In their immediate context, these words spoken by the Mayor of Hamelin reflect his confidence that, with all the rats drowned, no further trouble from that quarter is to be feared. Outside this context, the words state that there is no survival after death, and thus they could reflect the disbelief of the Sadducees in the resurrection of the dead. There is an unmistakable reference elsewhere in the poem to this idea:

"Quoth one: It's as my great-grandsire,  
Starting up at the Trump of Doom's tone,  
Had walked this way from his painted tombstone!" (67-69)

c) The poetic speaker passes on the information that, according to hearsay, the children may have "risen" from a subterranean prison and found their way to Transylvania (290-299).

The choice of the verb "rise" suggests a parallelism between the Piper, the sun and the Risen Christ. The mystical significance of the number three (cf. "on the third day") is established in the poem by the three introductory notes produced on both occasions when the Piper played his instrument.

The double connotation of the word "risen" suggests an association, reinforced elsewhere in the poem, of the Piper with the sun. The Piper claims that he can draw all creatures "living beneath the sun" after him. He leads the children from south to west. The colours of his coat are red and yellow. Under the influence of his music, the surviving rat experiences a vision of a giant pumpkin which has the appearance of "a great sun" (141-144). It may be assumed, therefore, that Browning, mindful of the traditional association of the Piper with the summer, conflated solar imagery with his religious motifs. A knotting together of these motifs, indicated by colour or the use of a verbal clue, is to be found in the Fifth Book of Paracelsus.



"Dear Mihal! See how bright St. Saviour's spire  
Flames in the sunset; all bright figures quaint  
Gay in the glancing light: you might conceive them  
A troop of yellow-vested Jews  
Bound for their own land where redemption dawns." (342-346)

Apollinaire's "Le Musicien de Saint MÃ©ry," first separately published in 1914 in a literary magazine and later incorporated in *Calligrammes*; (1918), is an example of a poem in the Modernist style and thus marks a break not only from earlier poetic tradition but also from Apollinaire's adherence to conventional forms.<sup>20</sup> This poem juxtaposes elements which are not combined by any obvious connection in logic or theme.

They consist of the central narrative referred to in the title concerning the appearance of a mysterious piper in Saint MÃ©ry, references to distant geographical locations and an excerpt from French history relating to the attempted escape of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette from the French capital. The voice of the poet sporadically breaks into the poem lamenting his separation from the one he loves. The apparent incongruity of the elements which make up the poem reflects a mode of poetic expression associated with the term "simultaneisme," a conception of universality freed from conventional ideas of time and space.

As a young man on the threshold of his poetic career, Apollinaire spent a considerable time in the Rhineland; he took the opportunity to learn much from Germany's folkloric heritage, whence he drew a good many motifs that appear in this poetry. The piper in "Le Musicien de Saint Merry" is clearly modelled on the Pied Piper of Hamelin and betrays a strong affinity with Goethe's "Rattenfänger." The figure's transportation from Hamelin to more homely and familiar surroundings, from the author's point of view, is the logical result of the poet's close personal identification with the figure of the Piper. The poet sings of himself and his potentialities, as the following citation from the text makes clear:

Je chante toutes les possibilités de moi-même hors de ce monde et des astres. (I sing of all possibilities of myself beyond this world and the stars)

The Musician of Saint MÃ©ry's appearance is not set in a remote historical period but on May 21st, 1913, a time close to that of the composition of the poem. Again we note the motif of the piper's arrival on a particular date. The mysterious figure has no recognizable facial features and he is attended by a swarm of flies. To the playing of his flute, women and girls stream from their houses and jostle after him. As in "The Pied Piper of Hamelin," an element of satire enters the poem, for the procession of women has all the appearance of women at a department store sale. The musician leads his followers down Glassworks Street, through a courtyard serving as a delivery zone for merchandise and finally into an old building with broken windows. Here the musician and the womenfolk of Saint MÃ©ry vanish completely. Only two people are left outside the house, the narrator and the parish priest of Saint MÃ©ry. It is nightfall and the angelus rings.

The poem offers a classic example of "surnaturalisme," a technique favored by Apollinaire of setting a supernatural event in a familiar context. There is a distinctly ominous note in the poem which ends with the image of rows of sullen guards who witness the return of the King and Queen after their arrest at Vincennes. The mood of the poem captures the atmosphere of France and Europe shortly before the outbreak of war. The inexplicable disappearance of the carefree

women of Saint MÃ©rry symbolically points to the nihilism of an age without a vision of the future. Again, a literary treatment of the Piper captures the Zeitgeist. The millennial vista which Browning evoked in a more optimistic philosophical climate finds no trace in "Le Musicien de Saint MÃ©rry."

The Musician of Saint MÃ©rry and his followers disappear at the close of day to the sound of angelus, the bell which is a daily reminder of the Incarnation. From the time of its origin the story of the Piper made references to Calvary and therefore to Jesus. How do we then explain the more sinister associations of the Piper with death and evil forces? A possible answer lies in the fact that the Piper does not invariably represent Good or Evil but the potentialities of Good and Evil, both the proper use and the abuse of religion. If we extend the term "religion" to denote ideology in general, Carl Zuckmayer's play *Der Rattenfänger* (1975) presents a further treatment of the Piper's ambivalence. The Piper or Bunting (this name derives from folkloric tradition and plays on the word "bunt" meaning brightly coloured) is the medieval equivalent of the modern freedom-fighter or (depending on one's point of view) terrorist. Through his charismatic appeal Bunting gains the allegiance of Hamelin's propertyless and disaffected classes. After political agitation has brought him into conflict with the town's patrician establishment, Bunting is taken to be hanged at a place of execution bearing the significant name of Calvary. He is saved at the last minute by his followers, who have taken a number of children hostage and are thus able to apply pressure on the authorities. At the end of the drama Bunting persuades a group of followers to leave Hamelin in the hope of establishing a new life beyond the pale of social oppression. They and he vanish, both metaphorically and literally, into the mist. The audience must decide for itself whether Bunting was Jesus or Bar- Abbas.

The Piper recently entered the domain of the video-screen in the film version of Carol Amen's short story *The Last Testament*.<sup>22</sup> The film (entitled *Testament*) shows how the inhabitants of Hamelin, a small town in California, suffer the slow but deadly after-effects of a nuclear attack. The children of the town enact the story of the Pied Piper as a school play, and one of the adults in the audience comments that the world is no longer a place fit for children. Once again the Pied Piper serves as a reminder of the choice to be made between life and death, eros and thanatos, Good and Evil.

## NOTES

1 "Stoff und Quellen" in Carl Zuckmayer, *Der Rattenfänger / Eine Fabel* (Hamburg: S. Fischer Verlag, 1975), p. 158.

2 The inscription on the Rattenfängerhaus runs: Anno 1284 am Dage Johanni et Pauli, war der 26. Junii, CXXX Kinder verledet, binnen Hamelen geborn dorch einen Piper, mit allerlei Farve bekleidet gewesen to Calvarie bi den Koppen verloren.

3 There is at least one example in literature to relate the story of the Pied Piper to events that are historically plausible. Such a treatment is found in Wilhelm Raabe's story *Die Hamelschen Kinder* (1863), according to which a protagonist for the Hapsburg cause induces a number of young men from Hamelin to follow him on a disastrous military venture.

4 "Stoff und Quellen" in Carl Zuckmeyer, *Der Rattenfänger / Eine Fabel* (Hamburg: S. Fischer Verlag, 1975), p. 158.

5 D. Wolfers, "A Plaguey Piper," *The Lancet*, April 3 1965, 756- 757.

6 The story of the Piper is told by Mila, a gipsy girl, in the latter section of the first chapter in the novel *Les Reîtres* ("Les Reîtres"). A suggestion of Merimee's influence on Browning might be inferred from the fact that the Pied Piper in Browning's poem wears 'a gipsy coat of red and yellow.'

7 Arthur Dickson, "Browning's Source for the Pied Piper of Hamelin," *Studies in Philology*, XXIII (July 1926), 327-337.

8 See the subsection 'The mythos of Summer: Romance' (Third Essay), in Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957).

9 It is often forgotten that in 1789 the spirit of revolution was in the air before the storming of the Bastille. Britons celebrated the centennial of the Glorious Revolution of 1689.

10 See: "Paralipomena zu Faust 1," 3G (Walpurgisnacht) and 47 (Blocksbergkandidaten), in Johann Wolfgang Goethe: *Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche*, 28. August 1949, ed. Ernst Beutler (Zurich: Artemis-Verlag, 1950), V: p. 548, p. 550.

11 Walter Bagehot, "Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning: or Pure, Ornate, and Grotesque Art in English Poetry," in *The Works and Life of Walter Bagehot*, ed. Mrs. Russel Barrington (London, 1915), IV.

12 Milton Millhauser, "Poet and Burgher: A Comic Variation on a Serious Theme," *Victorian Poetry*, 7 (1969), 163-168.

13 For a discussion of the sociological context in which Browning wrote "The Pied Piper", see Wolfgang Franke, "Browning's 'Pied Piper of Hamelin': Two Levels of Meaning," *Ariel*, 2 (1971), 90-97. 14 Barbara Melchiori, *Browning's Poetry of Reticence* (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1968), p.1.

15 Judith Berlin-Lieberman, *Robert Browning and Hebraism*, (Diss. Zurich; Jerusalem: Ariel Press, 1934).

16 Browning's optimism on the possibility of Man's moral progress through history finds clear expression in his poem "A Death in the Desert" and in *Paracelsus*, Part V, 769-777.

17 Browning may well have been struck by the parallel to be drawn between the exodus of the children of Hamelin and

that of the Children of Israel from Egypt. In the earliest version of the poem in *Bells and Pomegranates* (1842), there is a reference to "Children" in line 277; the capitalization was subsequently suppressed. See: *The Complete Works of Robert Browning with Variant Readings and Annotations*, ed. Roma A. King (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1971), 111, p.258. It is a matter of incidental interest that the locusts which plagued Egypt were swept into the Red Sea by the west wind according to Exodus 10:19.

18 In "Browning's Source for the Pied Piper of Hamelin," A. Dickson suggests that the following sources were probably consulted by Browning: Dr. Johann Wier's version in *De Praestigiis Daemonum* (imprint Basileae, 1583); G. Schott's version in *Physica Curiosa* (1622). These versions are in Latin and refer to "Calvary" as "Calvariae montem" or "ad Calvariae locum" with the alternative German names of "Käppfelberg" or "Koppen".

19 In strophes XXXIV, XXXV and XXXVI of "By the Fire-Side" in *Men and Women*, there are the following occurrences of "cross": "Silent the crumbling bridge we cross". (166) "The cross is down, the altar bare," (174) "We stoop and look in through the grate,/ See the little porch and rustic door,/ Read duly the dead builder's date; / Then cross the bridge that we crossed before" (176- 179). In terms used by the Russian Formalist Jurij Tynjanov the noticeable repetition of a word within the same passage, however irksome this may be in non-literary language, implies that underlying individual occurrences there is a factor he describes as "lexical unity" centred in "the word" itself, transcending any context. This almost mystical supposition is uncannily like the second hermeneutic principle of traditional rabbinical exegesis.

20 Guillaume Apollinaire, *Calligrammes* (first published in 1918), trans. by Anne Hyde Greet; intr. by S.I. Lockerie and comment. by Anne Hyde Greet and S.I. Lockerie (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 384-386.

21 A.P. Rossiter relates Shakespeare's Richard III to the Pied Piper's associations with the medieval Dance of Death tradition. See: "Angel with Horns: The Unity of Richard III", in *Shakespeare: The Histories*, ed. Eugene M. Wraith (New York: Prentice Hall, 1965), p. 77. According to Rossiter, it is Margaret who plays the fatal tune that compels so many to dance their way to damnation. It could equally well be argued that Gloucester should be identified with the Piper in his aspect of pseudo-messiah. He feigns piety to win adherents and on several occasions utters the oath "by Paul" The historical Richard III did actually gain power on June 26th 1483. Evidently Shakespeare found this fact significant. Would he also have known that the Piper appeared on this day according to the first version of the story? Whether or not this is the case, a number of parallels between Richard and the negative associations of the Piper as one who takes the young to a place of death come to mind. Richard inveigles the young princes into the Tower of London and has them killed. At his instigation two murderers drown his brother Clarence in a butt of wine, a fate Clarence anticipates in the telling of his fearful underwater vision of death. Furthermore, in his famous opening soliloquy Gloucester speaks of "this weak piping time of peace" and we find throughout the play many references to the sun, the clock and the Tower as a symbol of time. He proves that he has a way with women when he woos Anne, the widow of a man he has murdered. Richard is finally vanquished by Richmond of the House of Tudor, which laid claim to a lineage going back to King Arthur and the House of David.

22 *Testament*, a video-recording by Paramount Pictures, Hollywood, California (copyright 1984). The film is based on the story "Last Testament" (Ms 10: 72-74, Aug. 1981) by Carol Amen There is no reference to the Pied Piper in this story. Back to Jonas Kuhn's Pied Piper homepage

Update by author:

In recent years I have visited Hamelin and the neighbouring town of Coppengge.

I was struck by the name of Coppengge as it reminded me of the reference to "Koppen" in the original inscription on the Rattenfängerhaus. Subsequent research has confirmed my hunch that this connection was no mere coincidence. Herr Gernot Hsam, the director of the Burg Museum in Coppengge found a document proving that a nearby height known as the Oberberg, also referred to as the Ith, was called the 'Koppan' at the time of the Piper's first reported appearance. His informed interpretation of Augustin Märsperg's picture of the Ratcatcher (1592) substantiates the view that the three Spiegelberg brothers, counts resident in Coppengge at the end of the thirteenth century, crushed midsummer celebrations of pre-Christian origin by enslaving and exiling the young devotees of forbidden practices or even murdering them in the rocky heights of the Koppen. An excerpt from a recorded interview with Herr Hsam can be viewed in the DOWNLOAD section of this website. A transcript of this interview in German and an English translation may be read on this website and elsewhere. Those interested should search for "Pied Piper Coppengge and Gernot Hsam" on a search engine such as those provided by Google and Yahoo.,

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Video Contributions on YOU TUBE concerning the Pied Piper (some in German)

<http://www.youtube.com/user/Julianselkant#p/u/4/ATP37vklc1c> (German) Herr Hsam, then director of the Burgmuseum in Coppengge, gives an interview on his theory concerning the origin of the Pied Piper story. (excerpt)

[http://www.writing.com/main/view\\_item/item\\_id/275686-Interview-with-Gernot-Hsam](http://www.writing.com/main/view_item/item_id/275686-Interview-with-Gernot-Hsam) Ä Ä Transcript of above mentionedÄ interview in English translation:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6PNhBkUpZEA> Ä Ä Ä Exodus or Exitus? While both Herr Spanuth and Herr Hsam agree that the von Spiegelberg brothers played a central role in the events leading to the disappearance of Hamelin's children, they differ on the question of the means employed to rid Hamelin of its wayward youth

<http://www.youtube.com/user/Julianselkant#p/u/17/hTD9wKU5uY> (English) An interpretation of Augustin von Märsperg's picture of the Pied Piper based on a theory proposed by Herr Gernot Hsam.

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ly7vBEIhtfo> 'Fern Hill' by Dylan Thomas identifies 'time' with the Pied Piper as one who leads 'the children out of grace'.

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Sources of accounts of the Pied Piper story:

[http://www.julian-scutts.de/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=68&Itemid=1](http://www.julian-scutts.de/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=68&Itemid=1)