This chapter is divided into five parts that document the development of the "Pied Piper" folktale as the most well-known legend of Germany. The first part registers the earliest account of the exodus of the children from Hamelin and then shows by means of several historical documents how the migratory tale of a piper taking away rats was attached as a raison d'être for the departure of the youngsters. The few selected accounts span a time period from the early fifteenth through the eighteenth century.

In 1812, the Brothers Grimm published their version of the by then well-established narrative. It quickly became the standard text in Germany, finding its way into folktale collections and school books. But as this second part of chapter two illustrates, the Grimms were well aware of the fact that rat-catcher legends without the part about the children remained in oral circulation. A number of them varying greatly in length are presented in the third part. Most of them were recorded from oral sources in the nineteenth century, but more modern collections of folktales have registered newer variants as well, including one that does contain the rats as well as the children. The fourth part presents the history of the "Pied Piper" narrative in the English language, starting with Richard Verstegan's first account from 1605 and concluding with a modern version recorded in a German-English language mixture. Finally, this chapter also includes a section on the tradition of the "Pied Piper" legend in four folk songs, again covering several centuries. All of these folkloristic texts are clear indications that the folktale has survived for over 700 years in oral and written tradition, a truly impressive state of affairs for such a short tale that has spread into most European languages and has gained worldwide distribution through the modern lingua franca of English.
EARLY VARIANTS OF "THE PIED PIPER"

The earliest account of children leaving the medieval town of Hamelin stems from the fifteenth century and was found in 1936 by the "Pied Piper" scholar Heinrich Spanuth in the northern German city of Lüneburg. The short tale was added by an unknown hand to the back of the last page of a manuscript of the fourteenth-century Latin chronicle Catena Aurea (The Golden Chain) by the monk Heinrich of Herford. The Latin text (here given in English translation) was most likely written into this "Lüneburg manuscript" between 1430 and 1450, and it reports the exodus of the children, mentioning the exact date, the number of children, and a young man with a silver pipe:

Here follows a marvelous wonder, which transpired in the town of Hamelin in the diocese of Minden, in the Year of Our Lord 1284, on the Feast of Saints John and Paul. A certain young man thirty years of age, handsome and well-dressed, so that all who saw him admired him because of his appearance, crossed the bridges and entered the town by the Weser Gate. He then began to play all through the town a silver pipe of the most magnificent sort. All the children who heard his pipe, in number around 130, followed him to the East Gate and out of the town to the so-called execution place or Calvary. There they proceeded to vanish, so that no trace of them could be found. The mothers of the children ran from town to town, but they found nothing. It is written: A voice was heard from on high, and a mother was bewailing her son. And as one counts the years according to the Year of Our Lord or according to the first, second or third year of an anniversary, so do the people in Hamelin reckon the years after the departure and disappearance of their children. This report I found in an old book. And the mother of deacon Johann von Lüde saw the children depart.


The chronicle from the town of Bamberg, written by Hans Zeitlos in 1553, contains the first written German report of the legend, with several new additions. Zeitlos calls the pipe player a "spillmart" (musician) and gives him a magical if not devilish nature, stating that he might return three hundred years later to fetch more children. For the first time there are also two children who return, but since both of them is blind and the other mute, they cannot really report what exactly happened. Rather than adding plausibility to the account, they make matters even more mysterious as "witnesses" being unable to communicate their knowledge. Notice also that the year of the exodus is off by one number, showing perhaps the effects of oral communication:

There is also a mountain which lies approximately a rifle shot away from this town, called Calvary, and the townspeople say that in 1283 a man was seen, possibly a musician, wearing clothing of many colors and possessing a pipe, which he played in the town. Whereupon the children in the town ran out as far as the mountain, and there they all disappeared into it. Only two children returned home, and they were naked; one was blind and the other mute. But when the women began to look for their children, the man said to them that he would come again in 300 years and take more children. 130 children had been lost and the people of this place were afraid that the same man would come again in 1583.


The Pomeranian theologian Jobus Fincelius provided the first printed German version about three years later in his book Die Wunderzeichen (1556). Here the piper is described as a devil, and the children's abduction is interpreted as a sign of God's anger about human sin. The evil character of the townspeople in later variants of the legend is foreshadowed here, with the piper becoming a figure who brings severe punishment by taking the innocent children away. One again there is a change in date, which this time is the Feast of Mary Magdalene (July 22) of the year 1376, a date that was picked up by Robert Browning in his "Pied Piper" (1842) poem, after he had found it in Richard Verstegan's English version of 1605 that is based on Fincelius' text:

I wish to report here a true story concerning the devil's power and evil nature. About 180 years ago it happened in Hamelin on the Weser in Saxony, that the devil, on the Feast of Mary Magdalene, appeared on the streets in men's clothing. As he went he piped, enticing many children, boys and girls; and he led them out of the town to a mountain. When he arrived there he disappeared with the children, who numbered very many, so that no one knew where the children went. A young girl, who had followed them afar, told her parents this, and shortly thereafter the painstaking search began, on land and on sea, to discover whether the children had perhaps been stolen and led away. But no one found any trace of where they had gone. This greatly saddened the parents, and it serves as a frightful example of God's anger over sin. This report is recorded in the Municipal Report in Hamelin, and many people have read and listened to it.

(cited from Jobus Fincelius, Die Wunderzeichen. Jena: Christoph Rödiger, 1556, vol. 1)
Parallel to these and other accounts of children being abducted, there were plenty of narratives describing a professional rat-catcher ridding towns from these and other rodents. We will most likely never know who joined these two stories and when, but one thing is for certain: The earliest recorded version of the legend that contains a rat-catcher who first leads the rats and then the children of Hamelin away was found in the so-called Zimmer Chronicle of 1565 by Count Froben Christoph von Zimmer of Swabia and his secretary Johannes Müller. Here the rat-catcher is a stranger from a foreign land, with somewhat the same low social status as the musician in Hans Zetllos's slightly earlier account of 1553:

Since I am again returning to matters concerning rats, I cannot neglect to mention a miracle of God, which in identical form was reported many years ago in the town of Hamelin in Westphalia concerning the banishment of rats; which story, because of its unusual nature, is definitely worth remembering, and there to conclude, that the Almighty created some odd creatures, without instilling in them human reason.

Several hundred years ago the inhabitants of the town of Hamelin in Westphalia were plagued with such a large quantity of rats, that it became unbearable. It so happened that a foreigner, an unknown or traveller, much as the travelling students of long ago, came into the town. Hearing the troubles and complaints of the burgheers, he proposed whether they would consider a reward for him if he were to remove the rats from the town. They were overjoyed with such news and for his offer they promised to pay him a sum of several hundred guilders. With that he went through the town with a little pipe, which he then placed to his mouth and commenced to play. Immediately all the rats in the town came running out of the houses and in unbelievable numbers began to follow at his feet as he walked out of the town. He banished them to the nearest mountain and no more rats were seen in the town. This accomplished, he demanded his promised reward. But they had hidden it away, confessing that although they had been in agreement with the sum, that since the matter had caused him no difficulty, but rather he had dispensed with his task so easily, not by hard work, but by an unusual art; therefore, they felt that he should not ask for so much, but lower his sights and take less. The stranger, however, insisted on keeping the original agreement and he persisted in seeking the sum promised him, and if they didn't give it to him they would rue it. The townspeople, however, stayed with the opinion that this was far too much money; and they no longer wished to give it to him. When he realized that he was not going to receive anything, the stranger began to walk through the streets with his pipe as before. There the majority of the children in the town under eight or nine years of age congregated, and they followed at his feet and out of the town to the nearest mountain. This mountain miraculously opened up and the stranger and the children went inside. Immediately afterwards it closed up again and neither stranger nor children were ever seen again. Now there was a great waiting throughout the town and the people could do nothing but commit themselves to God and admit their guilt. The town reported this wondrous story in all its correspondence as an eternal reminder and added the right number on the date according to the birth of Christ; on the end, however, they added the departure of the children in such and such a year. One cannot be too amazed, for we know that it is customary in Trier, that when the new year begins, one doesn't write it according to the year of Christ's birth, which is the custom everywhere, but one writes after the year in which Christ became man, and that year began on the day of the Annunciation.


It should be noted that the Zimmer Chronicle existed in but two manuscripts that were published only in 1881. This would mean that when Augustin von Mörsperg included the dual legend in yet another chronicle in 1592, he must have come across it in oral tradition. Besides, his account differs enough (he does include the year 1284!) that he almost definitely did not have access to one of the Zimmer manuscripts. He also includes the first colorful illustration of the Pied Piper leading the children away from Hamelin:
Hamelin is a great town along the Weser governed by the duke of Braunschweig. I heard all sorts of adventures from this town. So I wanted to see and hear it for myself. It was not only confirmed to me by the most noble councillors and preachers that 308 years ago, as reported, on John and Paul Day of 1284, a piper and musician in colorful attire arrived in this town. Supposedly he performed many miracles there with his playing, for after a short while he led all the rats and mice by way of his piping out of the town and to the Weser. There he brought them onto a ship and drowned them all. There were an unbelievable number of them and they all died.—However, the town wanted to give him inadequate pay, or even less, and jeered at their previous promise. They offered him thirty gold coins, which he promptly refused to accept. Soon thereafter, on a Sunday, whilst the townspeople were in church, he let his playing be heard once again so that a large number of children who had stayed at home began to follow him. 130 children from various streets in the town followed his piping out the town gates and towards Cavalry Mountain. The mountain opened up and the piper, together with the children, entered, all except for one which had lagged behind. However he was mute and could only point to where the other children had gone. These children disappeared in tears and fright and no one has ever heard where they went.

And this fact and date were written into the town chronicle which was shown to me by the noblest councillors and preachers. The incident took place on the day of John and Paul in the year 1284 and little else is known. This story can be found in many places in town such as the town hall, churches, pubs and restaurants, as paintings and stained glass windows. I had replicas made of the windows that I saw.

From then on the town and the council used this date as the basis for all their documents stating the year and the following phrase: after our dear children's departure. This has been the custom ever since. And still today no music is allowed in the streets and would be punished severely. All this I have witnessed because I stayed there for three days and have experienced everything first-hand.


The marketability of the folktale as a didactic story was already recognized in 1622 when someone produced a broadsheet about the Hamelin incidence in rhymed couplets (unfortunately not in maintained my translation) and a detailed illustration. The legend is supposed to "be an example" to avoid similar tragedies, and this cautionary purpose continues to play a role to this day in literary adaptations and the numerous children's books based on the "Pied Piper" narrative:

A terrible marvel for the eyes / And as one can read as well
Took place in the town well known / Called Hamelin in Saxony.
A wondrous man, completely unknown / Walked around / as one wrote
The year twelve hundred eighty-four / On the day of John and Paul / The twenty-sixth of June / Clothed in pied attire
Yellow/green and other colors / And he came across the river /
Into the beautiful town / Playing pipes and skipping splendidly
Which pleased the foolish children / Who ran over to him en masse.
Which were in total number / One hundred and thirty in all.
Hurriedly away he led / The good children through the town.
Through the East Gate by way of an alley / Which is still called Bungloß Street / Up to Calvary Mountain. Where two stones still stand. And on the same date
Over a hole there occurred a fall / As water flowed from somewhere / And surrounded them all
Except for two young boys / Who returned home. One was mute / the other blind / Who showed or spoke quickly. That their playmates perished / So that one could see them no more Whereupon the parents began to search / Where their children could be / But even at this hour / No place could yet be named. But the news was clear. And two boys came back.

"THE PIED PIPER" AND THE BROTHERS GRIMM

When the Brothers Grimm printed their version of the legend in their famous collection of *Deutsche Sagen* (1816; *German Legends*), it had long been established in oral tradition. Folklore scholars as they were, they cited nine sources, with the earliest one dating back to 1573. They are now all reprinted in Hans Dobbertin's invaluable collection of 140 historical texts assembled in his book *Quellensammlung zur Hameiner Rattenfänger-Lied* (1970). Their own text of the "Pied Piper" legend is a conglomerate of these various sources, but it is this published version that became the primary German text from then forward. Most native German speakers become acquainted with the folklore through the Grimm account, just as they know such fairy tales as "The Frog Prince," "Little Red Riding Hood," "Cinderella," "Snow White," "Sleeping Beauty," and others through the Grimm versions. Regarding the Anglo-American tradition of the "Pied Piper," it must be remembered that the legend collection by the Grimms was not translated in its entirety until 1981 by the American folklorist Donald Ward, whose superb translation follows here with some of my own modifications:

The Children of Hamelin (1816)

A wondrous man appeared in the town of Hamelin in the year 1284. He wore a coat of many bright colors from which he is said to have acquired the name Pied Piper. He proclaimed himself a rat-catcher, and he promised to rid the town of all mice and rats in exchange for a certain sum. The townspeople accepted his offer and promised him the requested amount of money as his reward.

The rat-catcher then drew out a small pipe and began playing. The rats and mice immediately came creeping out of all the houses and gathered around him. When he was certain that none remained behind, he began marching out of town with the entire horde following after him. He led them down to the Weser River where he rolled up his clothes and marched right into the water, followed by all the creatures, who then drowned.

After the townspeople had been delivered from this plague, they regretted having promised so much money. Using all kinds of excuses, they denied the man his reward, and he departed in bitterness and anger. Then, on the morning of June twenty-sixth, St. John's and St. Paul's Day—some say at seven o'clock, others say at noon—he reappeared as a hunter with a terrifying countenance, wearing a strange red hat.

Once again the sounds of his pipe were heard in the streets and alleys. This time, however, instead of rats and mice came children. Boys and girls from four years of age on ran after him in great numbers, among them the great daughter of the town mayor. The entire group followed him as he played, and they led them outside the town gates. In front of the town drummers beat a slow beat. And when they reached the Weser River, the children were drowned.

A nurserymaid with a child in her arms, who had been approaching the town from afar and witnessed all this, brought the report to the town. The parents ran en masse to the gates, seeking their children with grieving hearts. All the mothers were weeping and wailing. Messengers were sent out in all directions by land, sea, and river to discover if anyone had seen or heard of the children—but all in vain.

Altogether, one hundred and thirty children were lost. Some people say that two of them returned some time later, but one was blind and the other deaf. The blind one could not point out the place but was able to tell how they had followed the Piper, and the deaf one could point out the place though he had heard nothing. One child joining the others was in his nightshirt and turned around to get his coat. He thus escaped the tragedy, for when he returned, the others had already disappeared into a cave in the hillside, which people still point out today.

The street on which the children marched out through the gate was still called—in the middle of the eighteenth century and probably still today—the Silent Street because no dance could be held and no musical instrument could be played there. Indeed, even when a bride was led to church in a procession, the musicians had to cross that street in complete silence.

The mountain near Hameln where the children disappeared is called Mt. Poppen. Two stone crosses have been erected to the right and to the left of the mountain. Some say the children were led into a cave and emerged again in Transylvania.

The townspeople of Hameln recorded the event in their town register, and ever since have been in the habit of dating all their announcements from the day that their children were lost.

According to Seyfried, the date recorded in the town register was the twenty-second, not the twenty-sixth, of June. The following lines are inscribed on the Town Hall:

In the year of our Lord 1284 from Hameln were led away, 130 children who here were born, lost by a piper inside the mountain.

And on the new gate are the lines:

Centum ter, denos cum magnus urbem pueri

In 1572 the town mayor had the entire story illustrated in stained glass windows for the church with an accompanying text inscription. This, however, has become largely illegible. A coin commemorating the event was also printed.

The Grimms were quite aware of the fact that the first part of the "Pied Piper" folktales is but one variant of many tales dealing with the amazing powers of rat-catchers. As an example, they added the following rat-catcher legend after the account about Hamelin:

The Rat-Catcher (1816)

The rat-catcher knows how to blow a certain tone on his pipe, and when he pipes it nine times, all rats follow him wherever he wants to take them—into ponds and puddles.

Once a certain village could not get rid of all the rats, so they finally called for the rat-catcher. He prepared a hazel branch in such a fashion that all the rats would be held spellbound by it and would have to follow whoever picked up the stick. The rat-catcher waited until Sunday and then placed the stick outside the door of the church.

As people returned home from services, a miller who was among them saw the stick lying there and said to himself, "That would make a fine walking stick." So he picked it up, walked through the village, and headed for his mill.

As he did so, a few individual rats came out of their corners and holes and began to run, jumping across the fields, coming closer and closer. When the unsuspecting miller came to the meadow still holding onto his stick, all the rats dashed out of their holes, and ran after him across the fields and meadows. Soon, they were all around him, some even running before him, and they arrived at his house before he did. Thereafter, they remained in his home as an intolerable plague.


LATER VARIANTS OF THE FOLKTALE

What follows are a few more rat-catcher variants from different German and Austrian towns to show that there is an abundance of such accounts. While these examples of this migratory tale (with variants existing in most European languages) show the folk's fascination with the powers of these "suspicious" if not "devilish" pipers, they also serve as proof of the uniqueness of the "Pied Piper of Hamelin," who does not stop by ridding the town of rats. Do notice, however, that there is one very short account in which a piper abducts children and one that might be a reference to children leaving by way of the St. Vitus' dance craze. The second to the last text, entitled by its editor in 1944 as "The Rat-Catcher from Magdalenagruen," is of special interest, since it clearly has transposed the Hamelin account to the small town of Korneuburg not far from Vienna. But it is doubtful that this variant would have its own historical origin. Finally, a modern variant recorded in the twentieth century in Westphalia concludes this selection. It also contains both the exodus of the rats and the children, and it serves as an illustration of the fact that the "Pied Piper" folktales in its traditional form is still very much in oral communication today. As expected, it varies little from the account that the Brothers Grimm had offered in 1816:

The Rats in Neustadt-Eberswalde (1839)

It is very noteworthy that there are no rats at all in the town of Neustadt-Eberswalde. The explanation is as follows:

In earlier times there were a great many rats there, especially in the town's grain mill, where they caused much damage. In about the year 1607 or 1608 a certain man presented himself to the council and offered to get rid of these vermin, claiming that no rats would return to the mill as long as it should stand. He did not ask for even the slightest payment until one year after he had done away with the rats. At that time his charge would be ten thalers, which was promised to him. The magistrate had him paid two thalers in advance.

The man then placed something in the mill and something else in a secret place. The following day the people saw with amazement how the rats left the mill in a great swarm and swam out into the Finow River that flows by there. Not a single rat was left behind.

A year later the man returned to collect the eight thalers that were still owed him, and he was paid. From that time forth no trace of a rat has been seen there, neither in the mill, nor in the town.


The Island Rattenort (1840)

West of the island Rügen lies a small island, called Ummann, and south of this an even smaller islet, Rattenort (Ratplace). Concerning this place the following story is told: At one time there were so many rats on Ummann, that the inhabitants could no longer bear it. There appeared a stranger on the island, and for a fee he drew all the rats together with a charm and drove them through the water to the village of Wuss. Since that time Wuss has been called "Rattenort." On Ummann there have been no more rats since that time just as there have been no more moles on the island of Wittow.

Hurdy-Gurdy Player Aducts Children (1848)
A man with a hurdy-gurdy once came to Brandenburg. He played and played, and such wonderful tones came out of his music box that all the town’s children followed after him in a great swarm. He went out the gate to Marienberg (Mary’s Mountain). It opened up and the man went inside with all the children. They were never seen again.

The Dancing Children of Erfurt (1868)
In the year 1257 a miraculous event occurred in the town of Erfurt. More than 1000 children assembled there, and then all together they left the town, dancing and singing. They went through the Löber Gate and along Steiger Way. They finally arrived at Arnstadt, where the townspeople there took them in. The people of Erfurt did not know where their children were until the people of Arnstadt notified them. Then the people of Erfurt brought their children back in carriages. No one ever discovered who had led them away.

The Expulsion of Rats from the Island of Ummanz (1903)
Many years ago there were so many rats on the Island of Ummanz that the inhabitants could not find refuge from the vermin. Then a sorcerer from abroad presented himself, offering—for a large sum of money—to drive all the rats from the island. The people of Ummanz agreed to pay this very high price, even though he stated from the beginning that he would be able to ban the rats only for the lifetime of the population that currently lived there. Then the sorcerer drove all the rats to the southwestern point of Ummanz and into the water. This region is thus called the Rott even today.
They say that the soil from this area formerly could be used as protection against rats. People who were plagued with rats would go to Ummanz and get a sack of soil from the Rott. A small handful of this soil placed into the rat holes would be sufficient to drive the rats away within a few hours. All this was credited to the foreign sorcerer.
More recently, however, following the death of the earlier population and after many outsiders had come to Ummanz, rats found their way back to the island, and since then not even soil from the Rott will help to drive them away.

The Rat-Catcher of Grünau (1932)
Between Grünau and Scharnstein there were a lot of rats, they even came into the stables and dwellings, so that the people were entirely driven to despair. One day a tired traveler came along. When he saw the many rats, he pulled a small pipe out of his pocket and walked whistling down to the brook. There, next to a lilac bush, was a large hole in the ground. The rats followed the man and crawled into the hole, and none ever appeared again.
(cited from Adalbert Depiny, Oberösterreichisches Sagenbuch. Linz: R. Pirngruber, 1932, p. 57)

The Rat-Catcher of Freistadt (1932)
One time in Freistadt the rats and mice became so rampant that people were at their wits end. A shepherd came to town to rid it of the vermin. He stood in the town square and blew into a horn. Out of basement windows and holes in the walls, rats and mice came running. When enough had emerged, he left the town still blowing his horn and they followed. He led them out of the town to a pond and waded in as far as he could, the animals following him. Finally he stopped playing and the rats and mice all drowned.

The Rat-Catcher from Magdalenagrun (1944)
The town of Korneuburg adjacent to Vienna was conquered by the Swedes during the Thirty Years’ War in 1646. However, following an occupation of six months it was taken back by the imperial forces. The town had by that time expanded substantially, but many of its buildings lay buried in rubble. Vermin, especially rats, multiplied below the ruins of the destroyed buildings until no cellar and no food storage room was safe from their devastation. Neither cats, nor traps, nor poison could bring them under control, and the town’s inhabitants felt forced to flee.
A public meeting of the town council was held to decide once and for all whether to attempt the continued but futile resistance against the animals or to simply abandon one’s belongings, which in truth were no longer belongings at all.
There were spirited arguments back and forth when suddenly and unexpectedly a man stepped before the judge’s bench and stated that he possessed the means to put an end to the town’s plague. No one knew him, but his offer was accepted with loud acclaim. Everyone looked forward with fond anticipation to the next morning, when
the promised rescue was to take place. In return for his deed the rescuer was to be paid a large sum of money.

As the cock crowed the man did indeed enter at the gate. He was wearing an unusual hunting outfit and carrying a very large hunter's bag. He pulled from the bag a small black transverse flute, upon which he played mournful melodies. Hoards of rats and mice followed the pipe's sound, emerging in great masses from their holes in every corner of every house in the town. They followed the flute player, who walked directly toward the Danube. There he stepped into a boat and—continuing to play the flute—rode to the middle of the stream. Irrisistibly attracted to the music, the rats attempted to swim after him, but they all drowned in the river's raging current. Thus Korneuburg was saved.

The pipe now returned and asked for the agreed payment. Someone asked him who he was. "I came here from Vienna," he said, "because I heard of your need. My name is Hans Mousehole, and I am the official rat killer of Magdalena grund [a former suburb of Vienna, now part of the Mariahilf district]."

"Any fool can say that," answered a most wise councilman. "We know full well that your help is not of this world. Are you in league with the Evil One? Now see here, there is no obligation to keep one's word with black magicians or kobolds, so just take your leave, or we will turn you over to a witches' court."

"My dear people," replied the rat-catcher, "your sense of honor is remarkable, for it seems to be directed at saving you money. But hear me out. You have no right to question the means by which I saved your town from the plague. It is sufficient that it is free. I have no intention of allowing myself to be chased out of your town, and I am even less inclined to reveal to you the inner workings of my deeds, which seemed so miraculous to you. Take note that there are not merely evil, but also good higher powers. I used the latter to do good for you, for good things can come only from those which is good. But if you ungrateful people cheat me out of my well earned pay then you will come to know the evil powers as well. Thus take heed of my final word. In your town there is a recess in the wall of the house not far from the church and at its right side. Place the payment we agreed upon there before the next dawn. If you fail to do so, I will find my own reward."

He departed, followed by the loud and derisive laughter of the councilmen.

It should come as no surprise that the next morning there was no money lying in the niche.

With the sun's first rays Korneuburg experienced its own drama. Hans Mousehole, dressed in a purple-red robe and playing a golden flute, stood at the marketplace in front of the town hall. The melodious tunes that he evoked from his instrument must have sounded like music from heaven to the children, for they gathered about the mysterious musician with joyful haste. Still playing, he walked toward the Danube, where a large and handsome ship awaited him.

Led by the flute player, the procession boarded the ship. Its sails billowed, and it floated out to the middle of the stream.

This time the rat-catcher did not return. To the contrary, the ship sailed further and further from the town, and neither it nor any who were aboard were ever seen there again.

Many years later the horrified citizens of Korneuburg received news that in that same year a large number of children had been placed up for sale in the slave markets of Constantinople. They had no doubt that the children were theirs, and they rued their lack of honor, but too late.

History has recorded that Korneuburg was freed of rats at the time stated above and by a rat-catcher from Vienna in the manner described. Until not long ago there was a small rectangular marble plaque on a house in Pfarrgasse Street. On it could be seen an upright rat, a weathered gothic inscription, and the designation of a year, of which only the number IV could be made out. Also—in remembrance of the event—herdsmen from the area called their cattle and sheep together by cracking a whip instead of blowing on a cow horn.

Rats returned to the area with the great flood of 1801. Since then herdsmen have given their signals with a horn, as they had done ages ago.

The story of the abducted children, which bears a close resemblance to the legend of the Rat-Catcher of Hamelin, is undoubtedly based on a factual event. It may well be that during the sad times of the Thirty Years' War a flashy army piper incited the town's youth into military service and led them away with him, and that none of the recruits returned, for they met death on the battlefield.

(cited from Friedrich Umbaut, Sagen und Geschichten aus Alt-Wien. Stuttgart: Loewes Verlag Ferdinand Carl, 1944, pp. 97-100)

The Pied Piper (1978)

In 1284 a wondrous man showed up in Hamelin. He was wearing a multicolored coat, which is why he was called Pied Piper; claimed he was a rat-catcher and promised to rid the town for a certain sum of all the rats and mice. The townspeople agreed with him and assured him a set reward. Accordingly the Pied Piper pulled out a small pipe and began to play, soon all the rats and mice in the town crawled out of all the houses and gathered around him. When he thought there were none left, he left and the entire bunch followed him, so he led them to the Weser; he pulled up his clothing and walked into the water, and all the animals followed and promptly drowned.

After the townspeople were freed from this nuisance, however, they regretted the promised reward and refused to give it to him, making up all sorts of excuses so that the man left the town embittered and angry. On the twenty-sixth of June, John and Paul Day, at seven o'clock in the morning, according to others at noon, he appeared again, this time dressed as a hunter, with terrifying face and a strange, red hat and played his pipe through the streets. Straightaway, instead of rats and mice, children,
boys and girls from the age of four on, including the already grown-up daughter of the mayor, came running in large numbers. The whole swarm followed him, and he led them out to a mountain, where he disappeared with them. A nanny who had followed at a distance with a child in her arms had seen him and ran back to the town to report this story. With heavy hearts the parents searched at all gates; the mothers began a pitiful wailing and crying. Messengers were sent at once to nearby towns via land and water to find out if any of the children had been seen, but it was all in vain. All in all one hundred and thirty were lost. Two children apparently had been delayed and came back to town, however one of them was blind and the other deaf, so the blind one could not have seen the place but give an account of how they followed the Piper; the deaf child could have shown the way yet had not heard anything.

The mountain by Hamelin, into which the children disappeared, is called Koppenberg, to the right and left of which two stone crosses were erected. Some say the children disappeared into a cave and will emerge again in Transylvania.

(cited from Leander Petzoldt, ed. Deutsche Volksagen. München: C. H. Beck, 1978, pp. 48–49; this variant was recorded in Westphalia, Germany)

THE ENGLISH "PIED PIPER" TRADITION

The English tradition of the "Pied Piper" folktale begins with the account that Richard Verstegan included in his book A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence in Antiquities, which appeared in 1605. His source most likely was the German version that Jobus Fincelius had published in 1556, since both Fincelius and Verstegan have the date of July 22, 1376, for the exodus of the children. It was Robert Browning who in 1842 obviously relied on Verstegan's account when he also cites this particular date, which does not correspond with the usually cited date of 1284. It should also be noted that Verstegan is, of course, also the first to refer to the rat-catcher as a "pyed pyper" and that he introduces the lame boy that is left behind. Even more importantly, it is Verstegan who includes for the first time the possibility that the children were taken to Transylvania. In fact, he bases this on the idea that similar German names as those found in Hamelin had been reported in Transylvania, something that "Pied Piper" scholar Wolfgang Wann subsequently proved to have been the case. For the bibliophiles there now exists a special 24-page edition of Verstegan's "Pyed Pyper" account with beautiful illustrations: The Pyed Pyper, a passage extracted from: A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence in Antiquities . . . by the studie & trouaille of Richard Verstegan: 1634, with woodcuts & Linocut images & an afterword by Angela Lemaire (Llandogo, Monmouthshire: Frances & Nicolas McDowall, The Old Stile Press, 2002):

And now hath one digression drawn on another, for beeing by reason of speaking of these Saxonis of Transilvania, put in mynd of a most true and maruellous strange accident that happened in Saxonie not many ages past, I cannot omit for the stranges thereof briefly heer by the way to set it down. There came into the town of Hamel [sic] in the country of Brunsweyc an od kynd of compagon, who the fantastical cote which hee wore becoing wrought with sundry colours, was called the pyed pyper; for a pyper hee was, besides his other qualities. This fellow forsooth offered the townsmeun for a certayne somme of monye to rid the town of all the rats that were in it (for at that tymes the bougers were with that vermin greatly annoyed.) The accoord in fyne becoing made; the pyed pyper with a shrill pype went pypping through the streets, and fourth with the rats came all running out of the howses in great numbers after hym; all wh ich hee led vnto the riuer of Weaser and therein drownen them. This done, and no one rat more perceaued to bee left in the town; he afterward came to demaund his reward according to his bargain, but becoing told that the bargain was not made with him in good earnest, to wit, with an opinion that euer hee could bee able to do such a feate: they cared not what they accorded vnto, when they imaginad it could never bee desereued, and so neuer to bee demanded: but neuerthelesse seeing hee had done such an unlkyt thing in deed, they were content to give him a good reward; and so offfed him far lesse then hee lookt for: but hee therewith discontented, said hee would haue his ful recompence according to his bargain, but they vterly denying to give it him, hee threatened them with reuenge; they bad him do his wurst, whereupon he betakes him again to his pype, and going through the streets as before, was followed of a number of boyes out one of the gates of the cite, and coming to a little hil, there opened in the seide thereof a wyde hole, into the whch himself and all the children beeing in number one hundred and thirty, did enter; and beeing entred, the hil closed vp again, and became as before. A boy that beeing lamen and came somewhat lagging behynd the rest, seeing this that hapned, returned presently back and told what hee had seen; fortoeith ben began great lamentation among the parents for their children and men were sent out with all dilligence, both by land and by water to enquirie they could possibly use, nothing more then is aforesaid could of them bee vnder-stood. In memorie whereof it was then ordained, that from thence-fourth no drum, pype or other instrument, should bee sounded in the street leading to the gate through which they passed; nor no osterie to bee there holden. And it was also established, that from that tymen forward in all publyke wrtyings that should bee made in that town, after the date therein set down the years of our Lord, the date of the years of the going forth of their children should bee added, the which they
haue accordingly ever since continued. And this great wonder hapned on the 22. day of July, in the years of our Lord one thousand three hundred fourteen, and six.

The occasion now why this matter came unto my remembrance in speaking of Transilvania, was, for that some do reporte that there are divers found among the Saxons of Transilvania to haue lyke surnames unto dietes of the burgers of Hamel, and will seem thereby to inferre, that this sugler or pyed pyper, might by negromancie haue transported them thether, but this cariethe little apperence of truth; because it haue bin almost as great a wonder unto the Saxons of Transilvania to haue had so many strange children brought among them, they knew not how, as it was to those of Hamel to lose them: and they could not but haue kept memorie of so strange a thing, yt in deed any such thing had there hapned.


Sixteen years after Verstegan’s English account, Robert Burton (1577–1640) includes a short reference to the incident in Hamelin in his celebrated *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). However, he speaks only of the abduction of the children by the devil disguised as a Pied Piper, and he accidently changed the date from 1284 to 1484 (perhaps a misprint). His short description serves the purpose of illustrating the evil powers and doings of the devil:

[... ] How farre their [the devil’s] power doth extend, it is hard to determine, we finde by experience, that they can hurt our fields only, cattell, goods, but our bodies and minds. *At Hamel in Saxony*. A 1484. 20. Junij, The Dwell in the likeness of a pied piper, carried away 130. children, that were never after scene. Many times men are aflight out of their wits, carried away quite sometimes, and severally molested by his meanes.


About two decades later James Howell (1593–1666) picked up the story in a letter from 1645. He must have relied on Verstegan as well, since he states that the departure of the children from Hamelin happened some 250 years ago, a time reference that is much closer to 1376 that 1284. He also tells both parts of the legend, but his account did not have the influence that Verstegan’s book publication had in the English language:

This made me think upon that miraculous passage in Hamel [sic] a Town in Germany, which I hoped to have past’d throu when I was in Hamburg, had we returned by Holland; which was thus (nor would I relate it to you, were there not some ground of truth for it). The said Town of Hamel was annoy’d with Rats and Mice: and it changeth, that a piec-ed coate Piper came thither, who covananted with the chief Burgers for such a Reward, if he could free them quite from the said Vermin, nor would he demand it till a twelvemonth and a day after: The agreement being made, he began to play on his Pipes, and all the Rats and the Mice followed him to a great Laugh hard by, where they all perished; so the Town was infected no more. At the end of the year the pied Piper return’d for his reward, the Burgers put him off with flightings, and neglect, offering him some small matter, which he refusing, and staying some days in the Town, one Sunday morning at high Mass, when most people were at Church, he fell to play on his Pipes, and all the Children up and down followed him out of the Town, to a great Hill not far off, which rent in two, and opened, and let him and the Children in, and so closed up again. This happened a matter of two hundred and fifty years since; and in that Town they date their bills and bonds, and other instruments in Law, to this day, from the year of the going out of their Children: Besides, there is a great Pillar of stone at the foot of the said Hill, whereon this story is ingraven.


Another 35 years later, Nathaniel Wanley (1634–1680) retells the legend in his *The Wonders of the Little World or a General History of Man* (1678), and he does cite the “official” date of June 26, 1284, as the precise day of the exodus:

At Hamel [sic] a Town in the Ducket of Brunswick, in the year of Christ 1284, upon the 26. day of June, the Town being grievously troubled with Rats and Mice, there came to them a Piper, who promised upon a certain rate to free them from them all; it was agreed, he went from street to street, and playing upon his Pipe, drew after him out the Town all that kind of Vermin, and then demanding his wages was denied it. Whereupon he began another thun, an there followed him one hundred and thirty Boys to a Hill called Koppen, situate on the North by the Road, where they perished, and were never seen after. This Piper was called the pyed Piper, because his cloathes were of several colours. This story is writ and religiously kept by them in their Annals at Hamel, read in their Books, and painted in their Windows, and in their Churches, of which I am a witness by my own sight. Their elder Magistrates, for the confirmation of the truth of this, are wont to write in conjunction in their publick Books, such a year of Christ, and such a year of the Transmigation of the children, etc. It’s also observed in the memory of it, that in the streets he passed out of, no Piper be admitted to this day. The street is called
the Burgelosestrafie; if a Bride be in that street, till she is gone out of it there is no
dancing to be suffered.

(cited from Nathaniel Wanley, The Wonders of the Little World or a

Interestingly enough, George Sinclair (died 1696) is rather imprecise in
his account of 1685. In fact, he once again speaks of the devil taking on
the disguise of the Pied Piper, and he simply states that this happened 250 years
ago. He clearly was not looking for historical truth but rather wanted to show
how the devil continues to perform his evil deeds:

A marvellous prank played by the devil at Hamelen [sic], a town in Germany.

This town was annoyed with rats and mice, it happened that a pied-coated piper,
came thither, who conueneted with the chief burgers for such a reward, if he could
free them from the said vermine, nor would he debeing made, he began to play on
the pipes, and all the rats and mice followed him to a great laugh hard by, where they
all perished; so that the town was infested no more. At the end of the year the piper
returned for his reward; the burgers put him off with flightings and neglces, offering
him some small matter; which he refused. And staying some days in town, on sunday
morning, at high mass, when most people were at church, he fell to play on his pipes,
and the children up and down out of the town to a great hill not far off, which rent
in two and let him and the children in; and closed up again. This happened about
two hundred fifty years since. And in that town they dat their bills an bonds, and
other instruments in law, to this day from the jar of the going out of their children;
besides, there is a great pillar of stone erected, at the foot of the said hill, where this
story is ingraven.

(cited from George Sinclair, Satan's Invisible World Discover'd.
Edinburgh: John Reid, 1685, pp. 165–166; Hans Dobbertin is
incorrect in dating this text from 1790; see Dobbertin
1970, p. 117)

One hundred years later, the well-known British translator and editor
of folktales, Andrew Lang (1844–1912), included the story of "The Rat-
Catcher" in his The Red Fairy Book (1890). His version is a translation of
a French nineteenth-century adaptation of the legend by Charles Marelles.
Lang's "The Rat-Catcher" is considerably longer than all versions men-
tioned thus far, and he also included direct discourse to add a dramatic
immediacy to the folktale. Since Lang's books gained a large readership
in the Anglo-American world, this account had its influence, but it was

Robert Browning’s poetic rendering that had a much greater effect in the
long run:

The Rat-Catcher (1890)

A very long time ago the town of Hamel [sic] in Germany was invaded by bands of
rabs, the like of which had never been seen before nor will ever be again.

They were large black creatures that ran boldly in broad daylight through the
streets, and swarmed so, all over the houses, that people at last could not put their
hand or foot down anywhere without touching one. When dressing in the morn-
ing they found them in their breeches and petticoats, in their pockets and in their
boots; and when they wanted a morsel to eat, the voracious horde swept away
everything from cellar to garret. The night was even worse. As soon as the lights
were out, these untiring nibblers set to work. And everywhere, in the ceilings, in
the floors, in the cupboards, at the doors, there was a chase and a rummage, and so
furious a noise of gnawers, pinceas, and saws, that a deaf men could not have rested
for one hour together.

Neither cats nor dogs, nor poison nor traps, nor prayers nor candles burnt to all
the saints—nothing would do anything. The more they killed the more came. And
the inhabitants of Hamel began to go to the dogs (not that they were of much use),
when one Friday there arrived in the town a man with a queer face, who played the
bagpipes and sang this refrain:

"Qui vivra verra:
Le voilis,
Le preneur des rats."

He was a great gaull fellow, dry and browned, with a crooked nose, a long rat-tail
moustache, two great yellow piercing and mocking eyes, under a large felt hat set off
by a scarlet cock's feather. He was dressed in a green jacket with a leather belt and red
breeches, and on his feet were sandals fastened by thongs passed round his legs in the
gipsy fashion.

That is how he may be seen to this day, painted on a window of the cathedral of
Hamel.

He stopped on the great market-place before the town hall, turned his back on the
church and went on with his music, singing:

"Who lives shall see:
This is he,
The rat-catcher."

The town council had just assembled to consider once more this plague of Egypt,
from which no one could save the town.
The stranger sent word to the counsellors that, if they would make it worth his while, he would rid them of all their rats before night, down to the very last.

"Then he is a sorcerer!" cried the citizens with one voice; "we must beware of him."

The Town Counsellor, who was considered clever, reassured them.

He said: "Sorcerer or no, if this bagpiper speaks the truth, it was he who sent us this horrible vermin that he wants to rid us of to-day for money. Well, we must learn to catch the devil in his own snares. You leave it to me."

"Leave it to the Town Counsellor," said the citizens one to another.

And the stranger was brought before them,

"Before night," said he, "I shall have despatched all the rats in Hamel if you will but pay me a gros a head."

"A gros a head!" cried the citizens, "but that will come to millions of florins!"

The Town Counsellor simply shrugged his shoulders and said to the stranger:

"A bargain! To work; the rats will be paid one gros a head as you ask."

The bagpiper announced that he would operate that very evening when the moon rose. He added that the inhabitants should at that hour leave the streets free, and content themselves with looking out of their windows at what was passing, and that it would be a pleasant spectacle. When the people of Hamel heard of the bargain, they too exclaimed: "A gros a head! but this will cost us a deal of money!"

"Leave it to the Town Counsellor," said the town council with a malicious air.

And the good people of Hamel repeated with their counsellors, "Leave it to the Town Counsellor."

Towards nine at night the bagpiper re-appeared on the market-place. He turned, as at first, his back to the church, and the moment the moon rose on the horizon, "Trurir, trur!" the bagpipes resounded.

It was first a slow, caressing sound, then more and more lively and urgent, and so sonorous and piercing that it penetrated as far as the farthest alleys and retreats of the town.

Soon from the bottom of the cellars, the top of the garrets, from under all the furniture, from all the nooks and corners of the houses, out come the rats, search for the door, fling themselves into the street, and trip, trip, trip, begin to run in file towards the front of the town hall, so squeezed together that they covered the pavement like the waves of flooded torrent.

When the square was quite full the bagpiper faced about, and, still playing briskly, turned towards the river that runs at the foot of the walls of Hamel.

Arrived there he turned round; the rats were following.

"Hop! hop!" he cried, pointing with his finger to the middle of the stream, where the water whirled and was drawn down as if through a funnel. And hop! hop! without hesitating, the rats took the leap, swam straight to the funnel, plunged in head foremost and disappeared.
"And how many were they?"
"Nine hundred and ninety thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine."
"Well reckoned?"
"Well reckoned."
"Then go and join them, old sire, and au revoir."
Then the old white rat sprang in his turn into the river, swam to the whirlpool and disappeared.

When the bagpiper had thus concluded his business he went to bed at his inn. And for the first time during three months the people of Hamel slept quietly through the night.

The next morning, at nine o'clock, the bagpiper repaired to the town hall, where the town council awaited him.

"All your rats took a jump into the river yesterday," said he to the counsellors, "and I guarantee that not one of them comes back. They were nine hundred and ninety thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine, at one gros a head. Reckon!"

"Let us reckon the heads first. One gros a head is one head the gros. Where are the heads?"

The rat-catcher did not expect this treacherous stroke. He paled with anger and his eyes flashed fire.

"The heads!" cried he, "if you care about them, go and find them in the river."

"So," replied the Town Counsellor, "you refuse to hold to the terms of your agreement! We ourselves could refuse you all payment. But you have been of use to us, and we will not let you go without a recompense," and he offered him fifty crowns.

"Keep your recompense for yourself," replied the rat-catcher proudly. "If you do not pay me I will be paid by your heirs."

Thereupon he pulled his hat down over his eyes, went hastily out of the hall, and left the town without speaking to a soul.

When the Hamel people heard how the affair had ended they rubbed their hands, and with no more scruple than their Town Counsellor, they laughed over the rat-catcher, who, they said, was caught in his own trap. But what made them laugh above all was his threat of getting himself paid by their heirs. Ha! they wished that they only had such creditors for the rest of their lives.

Next day, which was a Sunday, they all went gaily to church, thinking that after Mass they would at last be able to eat some good thing that the rats had not tasted before them.

They never suspected the terrible surprise that awaited them on their return home. No children anywhere, they had all disappeared!

"Our children! where are our poor children?" was the cry that was soon heard in all the streets.

Then through the east door of the town came three little boys, who cried and wept, and this is what they told:

While the parents were at church a wonderful music had resounded. Soon all the little boys and all the little girls that had been left at home had gone out, attracted by the magic sounds, and had rushed to the great market-place. There they found the rat-catcher playing his bagpipes at the same spot as in the evening before. Then the stranger had begun to walk quickly, and they had followed, running, singing and dancing to the sound of the music, as far as the foot of the mountain which one sees on entering Hamel. At their approach the mountain had opened a little, and the bagpiper had gone in with them, after which it had closed again. Only the three little ones who told the adventure had remained outside, as if by a miracle. One was bandy-legged and could not run fast enough; the other, who had left the house in haste, one foot shod the other bare, had hurt himself against a big stone and could not walk without difficulty; the third had arrived in time, but in hurrying to go in with the others had struck so violently against the wall of the mountain that he fell backwards at the moment it closed upon his comrades.

At this story the parents redoubled their lamentations. They ran with pikes and mattocks to the mountain, and searched till evening to find the opening by which their children had disappeared, without being able to find it. At last, the night falling, they returned desolate to Hamel.

But the most unhappy of all was the Town Counsellor, for he lost three little boys and two pretty little girls, and to crown all, the people of Hamel overwhelmed him with reproaches, forgetting that the evening before they had all agreed with him.
What had become of all these unfortunate children?
The parents always hoped they were not dead, and that the rat-catcher, who certainly must have come out of the mountain, would have taken them with him to his country. That is why for several years they sent in search of them to different countries, but no one ever came on the trace of the poor little ones.
It was not till much later that anything was to be heard of them.

About one hundred and fifty years after the event, when there was no longer one left of the fathers, mothers, brothers or sisters of that day, there arrived one evening in Hamel some merchants of Bremen returning from the East, who asked to speak with the citizens. They told that they, in crossing Hungary, had sojourned in a mountainous country called Transylvania, where the inhabitants only spoke German, while all around them nothing was spoken but Hungarian. These people also declared that they came from Germany, but they did not know how they had chanced to be in this strange country. "Now," said the merchants of Bremen, "these Germans cannot be other than the descendants of the lost children of Hamel."

The people of Hamel did not doubt it; and since that day they regard it as certain that the Transylvanians of Hungary are their country folk, whose ancestors, as children, were brought there by the rat-catcher. There are more difficult things to believe than that.

Merely four years after Andrew Lang's inclusion of the "Pied Piper" in one of his popular books, Joseph Jacobs presented a variant in his edition of *More English Fairy Tales* (1894) that transplants the basic account of Hamelin to Newtown. The title is still "The Pied Piper," but by moving the plot to England, it really is not a German story any longer. Nevertheless, the account illustrates that the plot can easily be attached to any other town, just as there are various German legends that speak of similar incidents of getting rid of rats or taking children away from different towns. Variation is part of folklore, and all of the variants presented here serve as proof that the "Pied Piper" legend is in fact part of traditional verbal folklore:

**The Pied Piper (1894)**

Newtown, or Franchville, as 't was called of old, is a sleepy little town, as you all may know, upon the Solent shore. Sleepy as it is now, it was once noisy enough, and what made the noise was—rats. The place was so infested with them as to be scarce worth living in. There wasn't a barn or a corn-rick, a store-room or a cupboard, but they ate their way into it. Not a cheese but they gnawed it hollow, not a sugar punchen but they cleared it out. Why the very meat and beer in the barrels was not safe from them.

They'd gnaw a hole in the top of the tun, and down would go one master rat's tail, and when he brought it up round would crow all the friends and cousins, and each would have a suck at the tail.

Had they stopped here it might have been borne. But the squeaking and shrieking, the hurrying and scurrying, so that you could neither hear yourself speak nor get a wink of good honest sleep the livelong night! Not to mention that, Mamma must needs sit up, and keep watch and ward over baby's Cradle, or there 'd have been a big ugly rat running across the poor little fellow's face, and doing who knows what mischief.

Why did n't the good people of the town have cats? Well they did, and there was a fair stand-up fight, but in the end the rats were too many, and the pussies were regularly driven from the field. Poison. I hear you say? Why, they poisoned so many that it fairly bred a plague. Rat-catchers! Why there was n't a rat-catcher from John o' Groats's house to the Land's End that had n't tried his luck. But do what they might, cats or poison, terrier or traps, there seemed to be more rats than ever, and every day a fresh rat was cocking his tail or pricking his whiskers.

The Mayor and the town council were at their wits' end. As they were sitting one day in the town hall racking their poor brains, and bewailing their hard fate, who should run in but the town beadle. "Please your Honour," says he, "there is a very queer fellow come to town. I don't rightly know what to make of him." "Show him in," said the Mayor, and in he stepped. A queer fellow, truly. For there was n't a colour of the rainbow but you might find it in some corner of his dress, and he was tall and thin, and had keen piercing eyes.

"I'm called the Pied Piper," he began. "And pray what might you be willing to pay me, if I rid you of every single rat in Franchville?"

Well, much as they feared the rats, they feared parting with their money more, and rain would they have haggled and haggled. But the Piper was not a man to stand nonsense, and the upshot was that fifty pounds were promised him (and it meant a lot of money in those old days) as soon as not a rat was left to squeak or scurry in Franchville.

Out of the hall stepped the Piper, and as he stepped he laid his pipe to his lips and a shrill keen tone sounded through street and house. And as each note pierced the air you might have seen a strange sight. For out of every hole the rats came tumbling. There were none too old and none too young, none too big and none too little, to crowd at the Piper's heels and with eager feet and upturned noses to patten after him as he paced the streets. Nor was the Piper unmindful of the little toddler ones, for every fifty yards he'd stop and give an extra flourish on his pipe just to give them time to keep up with the older and stronger of the band.

Up Silver Street he went, and down Gold Street, and at the end of Gold Street is the harbour and the broad Solent beyond. And as he paced along, slowly and gravely, the townsfolk flocked to door and window, and many a blessing they called down upon his head.
As for getting near him there were too many rats. And now that he was at the water's edge he stepped into a boat, and not a rat, as he shoved off into deep water, piping shrilly all the while, but followed him, plashing, paddling, and wagging their tails with delight. On and on he played and played until the tide went down, and each master rat sank deeper and deeper in the slimy ooze of the harbour, until every mother's son of them was dead and smothered.

The tide rose again, and the Piper stepped on shore, but never a rat followed. You may fancy the townsfolk had been throwing up their caps and hurrahing and stopping up rat holes and setting the church bells a-ringing. But when the Piper stepped ashore and not so much as a single squeak was to be heard, the Mayor and the Council, and the townsfolk generally, began to hum and to ha and to shake their heads.

For the town money chest had been sadly emptied of late, and where was the fifty pounds to come from? Such an easy job, too! Just getting into a boat and playing a pipe! Why the Mayor himself could have done that if only he had thought of it.

So he hummed and ha'ad and at last, "Come, my good man," said he, "you see what poor folk we are; how can we manage to pay you fifty pounds? Will you not take twenty? When all is said and done, 'twill be good pay for the trouble you've taken."

"Fifty pounds was what I bargained for," said the Piper shortly; "and if I were you I'd pay it quickly. For I can pipe many kinds of tunes, as folk sometimes find to their cost."

"Would you threaten us, you strolling vagabond?" shrieked the Mayor, and at the same time he winked to the Council; "the rats are all dead and drowned," muttered he; and so "You may do your worst, my good man," and with that he turned short upon his heel.

"Very well," said the Piper, and he smiled a quiet smile. With that he laid his pipe to his lips afresh, but now there came forth no shrill notes, as it were, of scraping and gnawing, and squeaking and scurrying, but the tune was joyous and resonant, full of happy laughter and merry play. And as he paced down the streets the elders mocked, but from school-room and play-room, from nursery and workshop, not a child but ran out with eager glee and shout following gaily at the Piper's call. Dancing, laughing, joining hands and tripping feet, the bright throng moved along up Gold Street and down Silver Street, and beyond Silver Street lay the cool green forest full of old oaks and wide-spread beeches. In and out among the oak-trees you might catch glimpses of the Piper's many-coloured coat. You might hear the laughter of the children break and fade and die away as deeper and deeper into the lone green wood the stranger went and the children followed.

All the while, the elders watched and waited. They mocked no longer now. And watch and wait as they might, never did they see their eyes again upon the Piper in his parti-coloured coat. Never were their hearts gladdened by the song and dance of the children issuing forth from amongst the ancient oaks of the forest.

(cited from Joseph Jacobs, More English Fairy Tales, illustrated by John D. Batten. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1894, pp. 1–6; the illustration is from p. 3)

Finally, there is this modern retelling of the “Pied Piper” folktale in a rather amusing mixture of German and English as told to Dave Morrah by his grandfather in the middle of the twentieth century. It is a rather general retelling of the Hamelin folktale, but it is clearly based on the story from 1284. Many centuries have passed, but here we have a somewhat humorous German-American version that shows that the legend is very much alive in the modern world:

Der Tootlen Und Der Ratz (1948)

Hamelinburg ben ein smaill villager geswarnen mil ratz. Ober und beneathen der houers, outrinsider und insider, der ratz ben gerunnen mil stealen der fooden und scaren der frauleins.
The Pied Piper of Hamelin (1840)

Who is the colorful man in the picture?
He's surely up to no good,
He whistles so wildly and deliberately;
I would not have brought my child to him.

In Hamelin, rats and mice were fighting
With cats in broad daylight,
There was much distress; the council contemplated
With what craft to manage it.

Thus arrived a wondrous man,
Clothed in colorful attire,
Piped at rats and mice without count,
Drowned them all in the Weser.

The council refused to award him
What had been promised,
They claimed it went far too easy
And might even have been a devil's trick.

'Try as he might to reason with the council,
They reacted with threats to his angry knocks,
At last he could only in a village
Be safe from the authorities.

The town, relieved from such distress,
Rejoiced in a great celebration,
All the people sat in the church
And the bells tolled loudly.

The children played in the alleys,
The wondrous man passed through the streets,
He came and quickly piped together
Well over a hundred pretty children.

The shepherd saw them go to the Weser,
And no one saw them since,
Lost they were on that day,
'To their parents' woe and grief.

In the current will-o'-the-wisps float,
The children refresh their limbs in it,
Then he whistles them back again to him,
So that he is paid for his skillful art.

You people, if you want to lay poison,
Protect your children against it,
The poison is likely the devil himself,
Who stole our dear children away.


A folk song collection from 1840 contains a variant of this song with but six stanzas. While it is still called "The Pied Piper of Hamelin," the town of Hamelin as well as the river Weser are no longer mentioned. But there is once again a small moralistic message at the end, declaring that people best stay home:

"PIED PIPER" FOLK SONGS

Whatever happened at Hamelin in 1284 has been kept alive by oral and written means, and it is especially in its folkloristic form of a folklore that the story has survived for centuries. However, verbal folklore comes in different genres, and it should not be surprising that the legend has also been handed down in the form of folk songs. The most important song version with the title "Der Rattenfänger von Hameln" ("The Pied Piper Of Hamelin") was included in Achim von Arnim and Clemens von Brentano’s famous collection Des Knaben Wunderhorn, published in 1806, 10 years before the Brothers Grimm presented their version. Parts of the song already appeared in Georg Rollenhagen’s satirical epic Der Froschwärmelser (1595), but Arnim and Brentano supplied the first, ninth, and tenth stanzas in order to add a moralistic and didactic tone to it. The Pied Piper of this song is interpreted quite negatively, with the town’s people getting little blame. In any case, the song basically retells the story in general terms and does therefore not refer to the date, Transylvania, etc.

(cited from David Morrah, Cinderella Hasenpfeffer and Other Tales: Mein Grossfeder Told. New York: Rinehart & Co. 1948, pp. 17–18)
The Pied Piper of Hamelin (1806)

There comes a wondrous man
Wearing colorful clothes
Rats and mice he pipes together,
Drowns them all in the river.

Yet the council refuses to give
Him that which is owed to him,
They think it had been way too easy,
And the piping was a devil’s trick.

The wondrous man comes with rage,—
Dressed as he was all colorful,
He played through the town—
In the church the council sat.

He plays up and down the street,
Then draws quickly to the stream,
A hundred and more children
Are moving away with him.

He plays them to a faraway land,
Of the type that is yet unknown,
Where milk and honey flow,
Thereto they advance cheerfully.

The pipe plays at all times,
The land—I don’t know where it is.
Oh you poor German youth,
How good it was at home.


But there is also quite a different folk song that was first recorded circa 1860. It is called the “Song of the Pied Piper” even though it does not really narrate the folk tale in its verses. Rather it is the Pied Piper who sings of his life as a professional rat-catcher who sometimes also enjoys catching young maidens. Part of this song might well be an allusion to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s poem “The Rat-Catcher” (1804; see chapter four in the section of “Pied Piper Poems”). Be that as it may, the Pied Piper moving around from town to town feels free and independent, even though he has no real home. But he loves his music and life, and he feels that some day he will indeed go to heaven in a decent fellow. This is quite a different image from the abductor of children! There is also no Hamelin in this song which can at best be considered as a slight reminiscence of the actual folk tale:

Song of the Pied Piper (ca. 1860)

Traveling, wandering through the beautiful world,
traveling, yes traveling is what I like best,
Tarrying here today and tomorrow there,
so my fate restlessly carries me along.

Playing and singing shorten the hours as faithful companions, I am never uneasy.
During the day the sun shines golden unto me,
at night the stars gleam upon me so sweet!

Examples and Texts

Refrain:

A traveling singer, known by nobody,
a Pied Piper, that is my profession.
Rats and mice I do catch,
better yet maidens, happy
I want to be.
Are they stand-offish at first, I play my
song,
as blissfully it reaches their hearts.

Refrain:

A traveling singer . . .
When some day I wander to the
kingdom of heaven,
I’ll knock at its gate, and it’ll open
instantly.
Angels faithfully keep guard
there, I’m welcome here even though
as way up here in these blessed heights.

Refrain:

A traveling singer . . .
(cited from Hermann Krone,
*Was die Wandervögel singen*. Berlin:
R. Birnbach, 1918, pp. 34–35; text by
Heinz Paul, melody by A. Neundorff)

As with folk tales and folklore in general, folk songs also circulate in variants, and this final example is clearly nothing more than a shorter version of the previous song with the identical refrain. It remains popular in Germany to this day as a song depicting the carefree yet lonely life of the traveling Pied Piper, who in this song is much more of a musician than a rat-catcher. In fact, rats are not even mentioned any longer! And yet, since the legend of the “Pied Piper” is so well known, people will doubtlessly think of the folk tale when hearing or singing this melancholic song:
The Pied Piper (1973)

Traveling, oh wandering over hill and dale,
Traveling, oh wandering here and everywhere.
Rushing on through the whole land,
never lingering long, known by nobody.
No home, no love were granted to me,
just moving on restlessly without bliss.
I know no sorrows, only play and song,
low spirits in the morning don't last long.

Refrain:
A traveling singer, known by nobody,
a Pied Piper, that is my profession.

If my strivings end, so ends my being,
since on earth I always stood alone.
Despite worries and sorrows my spirits were always up,
so I go with joy on the very last trip.
The gate of heaven that is watched by Peter
will be opened immediately with great joy.
Who are you traveler, what are your wishes?
Ay Peter, I will call, look who is coming here.

Refrain:
A traveling singer...
Part of this song has been included on a postcard sold in numerous stores in Hamelin)

If one acknowledges the likely fact that the Pied Piper of the legend was made into a scapegoat by the townspeople of Hamelin because of their guilty conscience at having been involved in one way or another in the departure of the children, then it is refreshing to find these folk songs showing the Pied Piper as a happy trooper at the end. In other words, he is not the evil devil any longer but rather a man who has coped well with his not always pleasant job as a recruiter, or metaphorically expressed, as a rat-catcher. In an ironic and folkloristic twist, the last two folk songs at least present quite a revindication of the victimized Pied Piper!

Three
Scholarship and Approaches

When one considers that the “Pied Piper” folktale is barely two printed pages long, it is truly amazing to find such a wealth of scholarship dedicated to this short narrative. The bibliography at the end of this book contains 119 books, dissertations, and articles on the legend, and scholars from various disciplines will surely continue to occupy themselves with this fascinating narrative and its ambivalent content. It is doubtful that many more historical documents will be discovered, but the legend is still open to innovative interpretations in art, literature, music, and the mass media of caricatures, cartoons, comic strips, headlines, and advertisements. All of this investigative and interpretive work can conveniently be divided into four groups: comprehensive studies, historical analyses, folkloristic investigations, and literary reconsiderations. There is no need to review or mention every publication listed in the bibliography, but what follows here is at least a survey of the most significant scholarship on the “Pied Piper” legend. Only the authors, titles, and publication dates will be listed in this discussion, with complete references being provided in the extensive bibliography.

COMPREHENSIVE STUDIES

There are at least nine comprehensive book publications on the “Pied Piper,” with the present book being the first major treatise on the folktale in English that is available in print. The German philologist, folklorist, and literary scholar Willy Krogmann published his still-valuable study Der Rattenfänger von Hameln: Eine Untersuchung über das Werden der Sage in 1934 (reprinted in 1967). It represents the first modern attempt to investigate the origin and history of this particular folktale. It appeared just in time