

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

SPOKEN TEXT

1.

The Dream of Eugene Aram

by Thomas Hood

'Twas in the prime of summer-time
An evening calm and cool,
And four-and-twenty happy boys
Came bounding out of school:
There were some that ran and some that leapt,
Like troutlets in a pool.

Away they sped with gamesome minds,
And souls untouched by sin;
To a level mead they came, and there
They drave the wickets in:
Pleasantly shone the setting sun
Over the town of Lynn.

Like sportive deer they coursed about,
And shouted as they ran,—
Turning to mirth all things of earth,
As only boyhood can;
But the Usher sat remote from all,
A melancholy man!

His hat was off, his vest apart,
To catch heaven's blessed breeze;
For a burning thought was in his brow,
And his bosom ill at ease:
So he leaned his head on his hands, and read
The book upon his knees!

Leaf after leaf he turned it o'er
Nor ever glanced aside,
For the peace of his soul he read that book
In the garden eventide:
Much study had made him very lean,
And pale, and leaden-eyed.

At last he shut the pond'rous tome,
With a fast and fervent grasp
He strained the dusky covers close,
And fixed the brazen hasp;
"Oh, God! could I so close my mind,
And clasp it with a clasp!"

Then springing to his feet upright,
Some moody turns he took,—
Now up the mead, then down the mead,
And past a shady nook,—
And lo! he spied a little boy
That pored upon a book.

"My gentle lad, what is't you read —
Romance or fairy fable?
Or is it some historic page,
Of kings and crowns unstable?"
The young boy gave an upward glance,—
"It is 'The Death of Abel.'"

The Usher took six hasty strides,
As smit with sudden pain, —
Six hasty strides beyond the place,
Then slowly back again;
And down he sat beside the lad,
And talked with him of Cain;

And, long since then, of bloody men,
Whose deeds tradition saves;
Of lonely folk cut off unseen,
And hid in sudden graves;
Of horrid stabs, in groves forlorn,
And murders done in caves;

And how the sprites of injured men
Shriek upward from the sod. —
Ay, how the ghostly hand will point
To show the burial clod:
And unknown facts of guilty acts
Are seen in dreams from God!

He told how murderers walk the earth
Beneath the curse of Cain, —
With crimson clouds before their eyes,
And flames about their brain:
For blood has left upon their souls
An everlasting stain!

"And well," quoth he, "I know for truth,
Their pangs must be extreme, —
Woe, woe, unutterable woe, —
Who spills life's sacred stream!
For why, methought last night I wrought
A murder, in a dream!

One that had never done me wrong —
A feeble man and old;
I led him to a lonely field,
The moon shone clear and cold:
Now here, said I, this man shall die,
And I will have his gold!

"Two sudden blows with a ragged stick,
And one with a heavy stone,
One hurried gash with a hasty knife, —
And then the deed was done:
There was nothing lying at my feet
But lifeless flesh and bone!

"Nothing but lifeless flesh and bone,
That could not do me ill;
And yet I feared him all the more,
For lying there so still:
There was a manhood in his look,
That murder could not still!"

"And lo! the universal air
Seemed lit with ghastly flame;
Ten thousand, thousand dreadful eyes
Were looking down in blame:
I took the dead man by his hand,
And called upon his name!

"O God! it made me quake to see
Such sense within the slain!
But when I touched the lifeless clay,
The blood gushed out again!
For every clot, a burning spot
Was scorching in my brain!

"My head was like an ardent coal,
My heart as solid ice;
My wretched, wretched soul, I knew,
Was at the Devil's price:
A dozen times I groaned: the dead
Had never groaned but twice!

"And now, from forth the frowning sky,
From Heaven's topmost height,
I heard a voice — the awful voice
Of the blood-avenging sprite —
'Thou guilty man! take up thy dead
And hide it from my sight!'

"I took the dreary body up,
And cast it in a stream, —
A sluggish water, black as ink,
The depth was so extreme:
My gentle boy, remember this
Is nothing but a dream!

"Down went the corse with hollow plunge,
And vanished in the pool;
Anon I cleansed my bloody hands,
And washed my forehead cool,
And sat among the urchins young,
That evening in the school.

"Oh, Heaven! to think of their white souls,
And mine so black and grim!
I could not share in childish prayer,
Nor join in the Evening Hymn:
Like a Devil of the Pit I seemed,
'Midst holy Cherubim!

"And peace went with them, one and all,
And each calm pillow spread;
But Guilt was my grim Chamberlain
That lighted me to bed;
And drew my midnight curtains round
With fingers bloody red!

"All night I lay in agony,
In anguish dark and deep,
My fevered eyes I dared not close,
But stared aghast at Sleep:
For Sin had rendered unto her
The keys of Hell to keep!

"All night I lay in agony,
From weary chime to chime,
With one besetting horrid hint,
That racked me all the time;
A mighty yearning, like the first
Fierce impulse unto crime!

"One stern, tyrannic thought, that made
All other thoughts its slave;
Stronger and stronger every pulse
Did that temptation crave, —
Still urging me to go and see
The Dead Man in his grave!

"Heavily I rose up, as soon
As light was in the sky,
And sought the black accursed pool
With a wild misgiving eye:
And I saw the Dead in the river-bed,
For the faithless stream was dry.

"Merrily rose the lark, and shook
The dewdrops from its wing;
But I never marked its morning flight,
I never heard it sing:
For I was stooping once again
Under the horrid thing.

"With breathless speed, like a soul in chase,
I took him up and ran;
There was no time to dig a grave
Before the day began:
In a lonesome wood, with heaps of leaves,
I hid the murdered man!

"And all that day I read in school,
But my thought was elsewhere;
As soon as the midday task was done,
In secret I was there:
And a mighty wind had swept the leaves,
And still the corse was bare!

"Then down I cast me on my face,
And first began to weep,
For I knew my secret then was one
That earth refused to keep:
O'er land, or sea, though he should be
Ten thousand fathoms deep.

"So wills the fierce avenging Sprite,
Till blood for blood atone!
Ay, though he's buried in a cave,
And trodden down with stones,
And years have rotted off his flesh, —
The world shall see his bones!

"Oh God! that horrid, horrid dream
Besets me now awake!
Again—again, with dizzy brain,
The human life I take:
And my red right hand grows raging hot,
Like Cranmer's at the stake.

"And still no peace for the restless clay,
Will wave or mould allow;
The horrid thing pursues my soul —
It stands before me now!"
The fearful Boy looked up, and saw
Huge drops upon his brow.

That very night while gentle sleep
The urchin eyelids kissed,
Two stern-faced men set out from Lynn,
Through the cold and heavy mist;
And Eugene Aram walked between,
With gyves upon his wrist.

3.

Song for a Child's Headache

by V.H. Friedlaender

Snowdrops, daffodils, primroses and violets -
Cool word, clear word, dewy word and sweet;
Think them and see them; say them over drowsily;
Feel them on your hot head
And dabble with your feet!

White-hooded snowdrops
White & gold & apple green
Wet, wild daffodils tossing by the stream
Daffie's wings to fan you and was there ever anything
Cool as a snowdrop, even in a dream?

Spilt in the young grass
(like a fairy paper-chase)
Primroses twinkle; add them to the cure,
With one white violet, like a garden far away,
First you think you smell it-and then you're not so sure!

Snowdrops, daffodils, primroses and violets-
Heap them on your pillow together anyhow;
Cool hooded snowdrops...wet, wild daffodils...
One white violet...and is it better now?

4.

The Stolen Child

by W. B. Yeats

Where dips the rocky highland
Of Sleuth Wood in the lake,
There lies a leafy island
Where flapping herons wake
The drowsy water rats;
There we've hid our faery vats,
Full of berrys
And of reddest stolen cherries.
Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Where the wandering water gushes
From the hills above Glen-Car,
In pools among the rushes
That scarce could bathe a star,
We seek for slumbering trout
And whispering in their ears
Give them unquiet dreams;
Leaning softly out
From ferns that drop their tears
Over the young streams.
Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Away with us he's going,
The solemn-eyed:
He'll hear no more the lowing
Of the calves on the warm hillside
Or the kettle on the hob
Sing peace into his breast,
Or see the brown mice bob
Round and round the oatmeal chest.
For he comes, the human child,
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than he can understand.

5.

La Belle Dame sans Merci

by John Keats

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
So haggard and so woe-begone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.

I see a lily on thy brow,
With anguish moist and fever-dew,
And on thy cheeks a fading rose
Fast withereth too.

I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful—a fairy's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

I set her on my pacing steed,
And nothing else saw all day long,
For sidelong would she bend, and sing
A fairy's song.

I made a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
She looked at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan

She found me roots of relish sweet,
And honey wild, and manna-dew,
And sure in language strange she said,
I love thee true.

She took me to her elfin grot,
And there she wept and sighed full sore,
And there I shut her wild, wild eyes
With kisses four.

And there she lullèd me asleep,
And there I dreamed—ah! woe betide! —
The latest dream I ever dreamt,
On the cold hill side.

I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
They cried—'La Belle Dame sans Merci
Thee hath in thrall!'

I saw their starved lips in the gloam,
With horrid warning gapèd wide,
And I awoke and found me here,
On the cold hill's side.

And this is why I sojourn here,
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

6.

Fairy-Land

by Edgar Allan Poe

Dim vales—and shadowy floods—
And cloudy-looking woods,
Whose forms we can't discover
For the tears that drip all over.
Huge moons there wax and wane—
Again—again—again—
Ev'ry moment of the night—
Forever changing places—
And they put out the star-light
With the breath from their pale faces;
About twelve by the moon-dial,
One, more filmy than the rest
(A sort which, upon trial,
They have found to be the best)
Comes down—still down— and down
With its centre on the crown
Of a mountain's eminence,
While its wide circumference
In easy drapery falls
Over hamlets, and rich halls,
Wherever they may be—
O'er the strange woods—o'er the sea—
Over spirits on the wing—
Over every drowsy thing—
And buries them up quite
In a labyrinth of light—
And then, how, deep! —O! Deep!
Is the passion of their sleep!
In the morning they arise,
And their moony covering
Is soaring in the skies,
With the tempests as they toss,
Like— —almost any thing—
Or a yellow Albatross.
They use that moon no more
For the same end as before,
Videlicet a tent—
Which I think extravagant:
Its atomies, however,
Into a shower dissever,
Of which those butterflies,
Of Earth, who seek the skies,
And so come down again,
(The unbelieving things!)
Have brought a specimen
Upon their quivering wings.

8.

Queen Mab

by Thomas Hood

A little fairy comes at night,
Her eyes are blue, her hair is brown,
With silver spots upon her wings,
And from the moon she flutters down.

She has a little silver wand,
And when a good child goes to bed
She waves her wand from right to left,
And makes a circle round its head.

And then it dreams of pleasant things,
Of fountains filled with fairy fish,
And trees that bear delicious fruit,
And bow their branches at a wish;

Of arbors filled with dainty scents
From lovely flowers that never fade;
Bright flies that glitter in the sun,
And glow-worms shining in the shade.

And talking birds with gifted tongues,
For singing songs and telling tales,
And pretty dwarfs to show the way
Through fairy hills and fairy dales.

But when a bad child goes to bed,
From left to right she weaves her rings,
And then it dreams all through the night
Of only ugly, horrid things!

Then lions come with glittering eyes,
And tigers growl, a dreadful noise,
And ogres draw their cruel knives
To shed the blood of girls and boys.

Then stormy waves rush on to drown,
Or raging flames come scorching round,
Fierce dragons hover in the air,
And serpents crawl along the ground.

Then wicked children wake and weep,
And wish the long black gloom away;
But good ones love the dark, and find
The night as pleasant as the day.

9.

The Pied Piper of Hamelin

by Robert Browning

Hamelin Town's in Brunswick,
By famous Hanover city;
The river Weser, deep and wide,
Washes its wall on the southern side;
A pleasanter spot you never spied;
But, when begins my ditty,
Almost five hundred years ago,
To see the townsfolk suffer so
From vermin, was a pity.
Rats! They fought the dogs and killed the cats,
And bit the babies in the cradles,
And ate the cheeses out of the vats,
And licked the soup from the cooks' own ladle's,
Split open the kegs of salted sprats,
Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,
And even spoiled the women's chats
By drowning their speaking
With shrieking and squeaking
In fifty different sharps and flats.
At last the people in a body
To the town hall came flocking:
"Tis clear," cried they, "our Mayor's a noddy;
And as for our Corporation--shocking
To think we buy gowns lined with ermine
For dolts that can't or won't determine
What's best to rid us of our vermin!
You hope, because you're old and obese,
To find in the furry civic robe ease?
Rouse up, sirs! Give your brains a racking
To find the remedy we're lacking,
Or, sure as fate, we'll send you packing!"
At this the Mayor and Corporation
Quaked with a mighty consternation.
An hour they sat in council,
At length the Mayor broke silence:
"For a guilder I'd my ermine gown sell,
I wish I were a mile hence!
It's easy to bid one rack one's brain--
I'm sure my poor head aches again,
I've scratched it so, and all in vain.
Oh for a trap, a trap, a trap!"
Just as he said this, what should hap
At the chamber door but a gentle tap?
"Bless us," cried the Mayor, "what's that?"
(With the Corporation as he sat,
Looking little though wondrous fat;
Nor brighter was his eye, nor moister
Than a too-long-opened oyster,
Save when at noon his paunch grew mutinous
For a plate of turtle, green and glutinous)
"Only a scraping of shoes on the mat?
Anything like the sound of a rat
Makes my heart go pit-a-pat!"
"Come in!"--the Mayor cried, looking bigger:
And in did come the strangest figure!
His queer long coat from heel to head
Was half of yellow and half of red
And he himself was tall and thin,
With sharp blue eyes, each like a pin,
And light loose hair, yet swarthy skin,
No tuft on cheek nor beard on chin,
But lips where smiles went out and in--
There was no guessing his kith and kin!
And nobody could enough admire
The tall man and his quaint attire.
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!"
 He advanced to the council-table:
 And, "Please your honors," said he, "I'm able,
 By means of a secret charm, to draw
 All creatures living beneath the sun,
 That creep or swim or fly or run,
 After me so as you never saw!
 And I chiefly use my charm
 On creatures that do people harm,
 The mole and toad and newt and viper;
 And people call me the Pied Piper."
 (And here they noticed round his neck
 A scarf of red and yellow stripe,
 To match with his coat of the self-same check;
 And at the scarf's end hung a pipe;
 And his fingers, they noticed, were ever straying
 As if impatient to be playing
 Upon this pipe, as low it dangled
 Over his vesture so old-fangled.)
 "Yet," said he, "poor piper as I am,
 In Tartary I freed the Cham,
 Last June, from his huge swarm of gnats;
 I eased in Asia the Nizam
 Of a monstrous brood of vampire-bats:
 And as for what your brain bewilders--
 If I can rid your town of rats
 Will you give me a thousand guilders?"
 "One? Fifty thousand!" was the exclamation
 Of the astonished Mayor and Corporation.
 Into the street the Piper stept,
 Smiling first a little smile,
 As if he knew what magic slept
 In his quiet pipe the while;
 Then, like a musical adept,
 To blow the pipe his lips he wrinkled,
 And green and blue his sharp eyes twinkled,
 Like a candle-flame where salt is sprinkled;
 And ere three shrill notes the pipe uttered,
 You heard as if an army muttered;
 And the muttering grew to a grumbling;
 And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling;
 And out of the houses the rats came tumbling.
 Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,
 Brown rats, black rats, gray rats, tawny rats,
 Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,
 Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins,
 Cocking tails and pricking whiskers,
 Families by tens and dozens,
 Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives--
 Followed the Piper for their lives.
 From street to street he piped advancing,
 And step for step they followed dancing,
 Until they came to the river Weser
 Wherein all plunged and perished!
 Save one who, stout as Julius Caesar,
 Swam across and lived to carry
 (As the manuscript he cherished)
 To Rat-land home his commentary:
 Which was, "At the first shrill notes of the pipe,
 I heard a sound as of scraping tripe,
 And putting apples, wondrous ripe,
 Into a cider-press's gripe:
 And a moving away of pickle-tub-boards,
 And a leaving ajar of conserve-cupboards,
 And a drawing the corks of train-oil-flasks,
 And a breaking the hoops of butter-casks:
 And it seemed as if a voice
 (Sweeter far than by harp or by psaltery
 Is breathed) called out, 'Oh rats, rejoice!
 The world is grown to one vast dry-saltery!

So munch on, crunch on, take your nuncheon,
 Breakfast, supper, dinner, luncheon!"
 And just as a bulky sugar-puncheon,
 All ready staved, like a great sun shone
 Glorious scarce an inch before me,
 Just as methought it said 'Come bore me!
 -- I found the Weser rolling o'er me."
 You should have heard the Hamelin people
 Ringing the bells till they rocked the steeple.
 "Go," cried the Mayor, "and get long poles!
 Poke out the nests and block up the holes!
 Consult with carpenters and builders
 And leave in our town not even a trace
 Of the rats!"-- when suddenly, up the face
 Of the Piper perked in the market-place,
 With a, "First, if you please, my thousand guilders!"
 A thousand guilders! The Mayor looked blue;
 So did the Corporation too.
 For council dinners made rare havoc
 With Claret, Moselle, Vin-de-Grave, Hock;
 And the money would replenish
 Their cellar's biggest butt with Rhenish.
 To pay this sum to a wandering fellow
 With a gypsy coat of red and yellow!
 "Beside," quoth the Mayor with a knowing wink,
 "Our business was done at the river's brink;
 We saw with our eyes the vermin sink,
 And what's dead can't come to life, I think.
 So, friend, we're not the folks to shrink
 From the duty of giving you something for drink,
 And a matter of money to put in your poke;
 But as for the guilders, what we spoke
 Of them, as you very well know, was a joke.
 Beside, our losses have made us thrifty.
 A thousand guilders! Come, take fifty!"
 The Piper's face fell, and he cried,
 "No trifling! I can't wait! Beside,
 I've promised to visit by dinnertime
 Bagdad, and accept the prime
 Of the Head-Cook's pottage, all he's rich in,
 For having left, in the Caliph's kitchen,
 Of a nest of scorpions no survivor--
 With him I proved no bargain-driver,
 With you, don't think I'll bate a stiver!
 And folks who put me in a passion
 May find me pipe to another fashion."
 "How?" cried the Mayor, "d'ye think I brook
 Being worse treated than a Cook?
 Insulted by a lazy ribald
 With idle pipe and vesture piebald?
 You threaten us, fellow? Do your worst,
 Blow your pipe there till you burst!"
 Once more he stept into the street
 And to his lips again
 Laid his long pipe of smooth straight cane;
 And ere he blew three notes (such sweet
 Soft notes as yet musician's cunning
 Never gave the enraptured air)
 There was a rustling that seemed like a bustling
 Of merry crowds justling at pitching and hustling,
 Small feet were pattering, wooden shoes clattering,
 Little hands clapping, and little tongues chattering,
 And, like fowls in a farm-yard when barley is scattering,
 Out came the children running.
 All the little boys and girls,
 With rosy cheeks and flaxen curls,
 And sparkling eyes and teeth like pearls,
 Tripping and skipping, ran merrily after
 The wonderful music with shouting and laughter.
 The Mayor was dumb, and the Council stood
 As if they were changed into blocks of wood,

Unable to move a step or cry,
 To the children merrily skipping by--
 And could only follow with the eye
 That joyous crowd at the Piper's back.
 But how the Mayor was on the rack
 And the wretched Council's bosoms beat,
 As the Piper turned from the High Street
 To where the Weser rolled its water's
 Right in the way of their sons and daughters!
 However he turned from South to West
 And to Koppelberg Hill his steps addressed,
 And after him the children pressed;
 Great was the joy in every breast.
 "He never can cross that mighty top!
 He's forced to let the piping drop
 And we shall see our children stop!
 When, lo, as he reached the mountain-side,
 A wondrous portal opened wide,
 As if a cavern were suddenly hollowed;
 And the Piper advanced and the children followed,
 And when all were in to the very last,
 The door in the mountain-side shut fast.
 Did I say all? No! One was lame,
 And could not dance the whole of the way;
 And in after years, if you would blame
 His sadness, he was used to say,--
 "It's dull in our town since my playmates left!
 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,
 Joining the town and close at hand,
 Where waters gushed and fruit-trees grew,
 And flowers put forth a fairer hue,
 And everything was strange and new;
 The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here,
 And their dogs outran our fallow deer,
 And honey-bees had lost their stings,
 And horses were born with eagles' wings:
 And just as I became assured
 My lame foot would be speedily cured,
 The music stopped and I stood still,
 And found myself outside the hill,
 Left alone against my will,
 To go now limping as before,
 And never hear of that country more!
 Alas, alas for Hamelin!
 There came into many a burgher's pate
 A text which says that heaven's gate
 Opens to the rich at as easy rate
 As the needle's eye takes a camel in!
 The mayor sent East, West, North and South,
 To offer the Piper, by word of mouth
 Wherever it was men's lot to find him,
 Silver and gold to his heart's content,
 If he'd only return the way he went,
 And bring the children behind him.
 But when they saw 'twas a lost endeavor,
 And Piper and dancers were gone forever,
 They made a decree that lawyers never
 Should think their records dated duly
 If, after the day of the month and year,
 These words did not as well appear:
 "And so long after what happened here
 On the twenty-second of July,
 Thirteen hundred and seventy-six;"
 And the better in memory to fix
 The place of the children's last retreat,
 They called it the Pied Piper's Street,
 Where any one playing on pipe or tabor
 Was sure for the future to lose his labor.

Nor suffered they hostelry or tavern
 To shock with mirth a street so solemn,
 But opposite the place of the cavern
 They wrote the story on a column,
 And on the great church-window painted
 The same, to make the world acquainted
 How their children were stolen away,
 And there it stands to this very day.