

Why did the mayor of Hamelin not pay?

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Abstract. This paper presents an explanation for why the mayor of Hamelin did not pay, by means of a fiction. It is probably influenced by films or children's television that I have forgotten.

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The mayor of Hamelin made an agreement with the Pied Piper to get rid of the rats, but the mayor did not pay afterwards. Why did he not pay? I imagine that the Pied Piper was quite an annoying fellow. Here is a conception of their first meeting.

The mayor of Hamelin says, "You understand that we have a problem with rats. Can you get rid of them?"

The Piper says, "I can get rid of anything. Anything you want rid of, I can get rid of it." Then he bursts into a brief song, "Anything, anything, anything, and anything." And he plays a little tune from his pipe.

The mayor says, "Yes, but our problem is specifically with rats. Can you get rid of rats?"

The Piper says, "Rats?"

The mayor says, "Yes, rats."

The Piper says in a louder tone, "Rats?"

The mayor says in a slightly louder tone as well, "Yes, rats."

The Piper says in an even a louder tone, "Rats?"

The mayor shouts, "YES, RATS."

The Piper says, “Well, why didn’t you say so before?!” Then he bursts into song again, “Rats, rats, rats, I can get rid of the rats. Rats, rats, rats, I can get rid of the rats.”

I imagine the Piper returning for his money and singing a song about money. The mayor does not raise his voice this time. “I am afraid we cannot pay,” he says calmly. The whole experience with this stranger has been very noisy. My proposal is that the mayor of Hamelin does not pay the Piper in order to shut him up and have an experience of silence. But an experience of silence here is not just an experience of the absence of noise. Someone can be looking for a blank sheet of paper to draw something on, then he finds one; but one can also have an aesthetic experience of the beauty of a blank sheet of paper, of its blankness, or some people can. An experience of silence here is more like that. When the Piper leaves the mayor’s office, the mayor savours the quietness. Then he hums an old tune of Hamelin.

As the Pied Piper leaves the town after not being paid, he hears someone laughing at him and saying, “He can get rid of anything, but he has been paid nothing. Can he get rid of nothing? Cannot get rid of nothing now, can you?”

I confess I imagine Martin Heidegger as the mayor of Hamelin. Although these last lines are influenced by an article I once read about him, which I cannot now locate, I imagine them uttered by a slightly less famous Nazi philosopher (see Zheng 2016). No swear words here!

Reference

Zheng, Q. 2016. *Carl Schmitt, Mao Zedong and the Politics of Transition*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.