

## **Myth and Significance in Colleen Murphy's Randa Rushdy Kamel Helmy (\*)**

### **Abstract**

The present paper attempts to explore the functional use of the German myth of *The Pied Piper of Hameln* in the Canadian dramatist Colleen Murphy's (1954--) *The Piper*, (2002). In the selected play, Murphy exhibits a serious and important social issue namely, child neglect: its aspects, causes, and negative repercussions on the child, and on the future of the society at large. Murphy's *The Piper* presents the parents and adults of the Corporate Democracy of Hameln as completely preoccupied with the affairs and enterprises of the Corporate, thereby ignoring the good rearing of their children. It becomes essential, therefore, that the study refers to various theories on child care and child psychology. The study also points out to Murphy's use of the myth of the *Pied Piper* in portraying an ill-functioning society on the social, economic, and political levels. Consequently, the use of myth in evoking a deteriorated society will be dealt with. Murphy's employment of the technical devices of satire, irony, and symbolism in dealing with the inter-related significance of myth will be tackled. Finally, the study examines the instrumentality of myth in transmitting warning messages that might hinder the establishment of a well-balanced, and well-functioning society. It tries to explore the ubiquity of myth that allows it to transcend its regional implications, and reach universality.

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## الأسطورة و المغزى في مسرحية "عازف المزمار" لکولین مرفي

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### ملخص

يتناول هذا البحث الأسطورة والمغزى في مسرحية "عازف المزمار" لکولین مرفي. تبني مرفي أحداث المسرحية على الأسطورة الألمانية "عازف مزمار هاملين" لكي تُعالج موضوعاً مهماً وجداً ألا وهو إهمال الطفل وذلك من حيث مظاهر هذا الإهمال وأسبابه وأثاره السلبية التي تقع على الطفل وعلى مستقبل المجتمع بأسرة. تصور مرفي أن السبب في ابتعاد آباء "الدولة الديمocrاطية المتحدة لهاملين" عن أطفالهم هو اشغالهم بشؤون الدولة و مشروعيتها. و على ذلك يصبح من الضوري ان يتناول البحث نظريات علم النفس المختصة بالتربيـة السليمة و الصحيـة للأطفال لتنشـيـتهم أعضـاء فـاعـلين و مؤـثـرين في المجتمع. على أية حال، فإن أمور و مشاريع الدولة التي يشغل بها آباء و كبار دولة هاملين في المسرحية تصبح مجالـاً للسخـرـية. فـهـنـاك فـشـلـ في الأداء عـلـى المستـوـيات الإجتماعية و الإقـتصـاديـة و السـيـاسـيـة. هذا بدورـه يـحـثـ البـاحـثـة عـلـى تـأـنـاـلـ استـخدـام مرـفـي لـلـأـسـطـورـة فـي إـثـارـةـ المعـانـيـ التي تـظـهـرـ هـذـاـ الفـشـلـ الأـدـائـيـ. كذلك يـتـناـلـ الـبـحـثـ الأـسـالـيـبـ المـسـرـحـيـةـ المستـخـدـمـةـ منـ سـخـرـيـةـ وـ رـمـزـيـةـ فـيـ التـعـالـمـ معـ المعـانـيـ المـتـدـاخـلـةـ لـلـأـسـطـورـةـ. وـ أـخـيرـاـ يـكـشـفـ الـبـحـثـ عـنـ أـهـمـيـةـ الـأـسـطـورـةـ وـ مـعـانـيـهاـ فـيـ إـرـسـالـ رسـائـلـ تحـذـيرـ لـلـآـبـاءـ وـ الكـبـارـ لـكـيـ يـنـتـبـهـوـاـ إـلـيـ الـأـسـبـابـ الـتـيـ تـؤـدـيـ إـلـيـ إـنـهـيـارـ الـجـمـعـ بـدـايـةـ مـنـ إـهـمـالـ الطـفـلـ وـ مـرـورـاـ بـنـدـهـورـ الـأـدـاءـ فـيـ الـمـجـالـاتـ الإـجـتمـاعـيـةـ وـ الإـقـتصـاديـةـ وـ السـيـاسـيـةـ. يـمـكـنـ القـوـلـ أـنـ ذـلـكـ يـنـطـبـقـ عـلـىـ أيـ مجـمـعـ يـعـانـيـ مـنـ تـلـكـ الـأـسـبـابـ الـتـيـ بـدـورـهـاـ تـؤـدـيـ إـلـيـ التـدـهـورـ الـمـجـمـعـيـ.

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The present paper attempts to explore Colleen Murphy's (1954--) functional use of the German myth of *The Pied Piper of Hameln* in her play, *The Piper*, (2002). In the selected play, Colleen Murphy, the Canadian dramatist, exhibits a serious and important social issue namely, child neglect: its aspects, causes, and negative repercussions on the child, and on the future of the society at large. *The Piper* presents the parents and adults of the Corporate Democracy of Hameln as completely preoccupied with the affairs and enterprises of the Corporate, thereby ignoring the good rearing of their children. It becomes essential, therefore, that the study refers to various theories on child care and child psychology. The study also points out to Murphy's use of the myth of *The Pied Piper of Hameln* in portraying an ill-functioning society on the social, economic, and political levels. Consequently, the use of myth in evoking a deteriorated society will be dealt with. Murphy's employment of the technical devices of satire, irony, and symbolism in dealing with the inter-related significance of myth will be tackled. Finally, the study examines the instrumentality of myth in transmitting warning messages that might hinder the establishment of a well-balanced, and well-functioning society.

The German myth of *The Pied Piper of Hameln* recounts that the people of Hameln could find no rest because the town was infested by hosts of rats. One day, a Piper who had magical powers came to the town and offered to deliver the town from the vermin in return of five hundred guilders. When the townsfolk accepted and the Piper did his job, all the rats were drowned in the river Weser. However, the townsfolk went back on their word and did not pay the Piper the agreed upon sum of money, believing that he was a magician. The Piper went away but vowed vengeance, and on St. John's day, he reappeared and blew his pipe in a way that made all the children of the town follow him happily. He led them up a hill where a door was opened in the mountain-side and they were never seen again, except for a lame boy who could not get in before the door was shut. The boy lamented for the rest of his life that he could not share the same good luck of his comrades.

Wilfred L. Guerin argues that "myth is ubiquitous in time as well as place: it is a dynamic factor everywhere in human society; it

transcends time, uniting the past (traditional modes of belief) with the present (current values) and reaching toward the future (spiritual and cultural aspirations)" (Guerin et.al, 117). Drawing upon the broad outline of the *Pied Piper of Hameln* myth, Murphy's setting of the Prologue of *The Piper* takes place on the top of Mount Koppen where a chorus of ghostly children hovers in the distance. Tot, Ludwig and Dot's little son, is asleep on the ground. Significantly, the spirits of the dead children mingle with the living children, sharing the same problems, needs, desires and aspirations. The chorus of ghostly children starts addressing the audience as follows:

Chorus: We are here. Waiting. Lost in time, our dreamless eyes watch the sun rise and the sun set. We are here atop Mount Koppen, gazing down on our homes in Hameln, a town near Braunschweig by famous Hannover City—oh it's so pretty. Limp, listless, we drift through the centuries and hang suspended in the atmosphere, waiting to settle upon the only place we must, like a fine white dust---shhh.

(Prologue, 3)

The ghostly children are drifting through the centuries; their dreamless eyes are watching the sun rise and the sun set in order to settle upon "the only place" they must settle upon: their homes in Hameln. The image that Murphy creates here shows the children's great love to their parents, their homes, and their town that is near the "famous" and "pretty" Hannover City. The children are longing for settlement, but, unfortunately, they have been waiting for "centuries" and their spirits are hanging "suspended in the atmosphere" and no one notices them. This longing signifies an emotional desire that can be defined as "hunger" for being loved and appreciated by the adults.

Juxtaposing the children's longing for love and compassion, there is Kingsley's longing to be human. Kingsley, who is an "Introspective Rat", is the leader of the gang of rats in the play. His longing to be human is expressed in the following lines:

Kingsley: O to be Human, a thing with only skin and a little bit of hair, walking smartly upright or lounging in a chair. O to be Human, with a decent sized brain, a semblance of free will, to be driven by my grandest aspiration, to fall in love rather than spend my

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life in mindless copulation...erupt in awe at the  
sight of a starry starry night, lose my heart to  
Mozart, to Goethe lose my soul—but, alas.

(Prologue, 3)

Kingsley's longing to be human reflects the great value of being "Human" with special qualities and characteristics that no other species possesses. It is as though Murphy is implicitly asking if people are truly aware of the value of their humanity of which other species are deprived and therefore envy human beings this priceless privilege. From another perspective, Murphy has much to say through the symbolism of the "Rats" in the play. "Symbols are representational; since they are in metaphorical relationship with nature, they point to certain attributes in the things for which they stand" (146); argues Robert Lawrence Heath. In *Fabled Piper Fun*, Louis B. Hobson conveys the words of the director of the play, Simon Mallet who states that "Colleen is asking who the real rats are in society and the four-legged rats do represent members of society." In considering the symbolism of the "rats", John Fiske argues that in Germany, rats "were thought to represent the human soul" (24). Consequently, the symbolic representation of the "Rats" in the play signifies members of society who can be regarded as disloyal and deceiving.

Murphy blends the literal and the symbolic representations of the rats in order to convey her peculiar point of view. As Kingsley raises his camera and takes a Polaroid of Tot, the latter writhes, and calls upon his mother, but there is no answer:

Tot: Help! Help!... help save me! (*opens his eyes*)

AHHHH! GET AWAY!

Kingsley: Lovely---let's see a hint of a smile.

Tot: Don't take my picture! (*calls*) MOTHER!!

Kingsley: Your mother cannot possibly hear you.

Tot: She can too! She hears my voice echo through the trees.

(*calls*)

MOTHER!

Kingsley: I bet she doesn't even know you are here atop

Mount

Koppen.

(Prologue, 4)

Tot represents the neglected child, and his mother's absence represents the absence of motherly care. Thus, from the outset, Murphy introduces her main theme which is child neglect. Will Tot be left for Kingsley as a leftover to deal with? Such an implicit ironical question is directed mainly to parents. Susan J. Zuravin defines child neglect as "the failure to provide basic necessities for the child that *may* or does result in damage to the physical, emotional, or intellectual development and well-being of the child" (111). Tot cannot endure Kingsley's sight. He regards him as only a 'big stinking Rat':

ToT: You're not like me and never ever will be because  
you're an  
ugly creep all gushy with words, and even if you  
poured bottles and  
bottles of perfume on yourself you could never hide the  
fact that  
you're a big stinking Rat!

(Prologue, 5)

However, as Tot sobs uncontrollably,—(because he dreamt that he was drowning and there was no one to rescue him)—Kingsley seizes the opportunity in order to comfort him. Feelings of loneliness and helplessness motivate Tot to accept Kingsley's company, for even if he goes home, there is no one there:

Tot: No one's home. This morning everyone was screaming so loud that

I went outside and hid behind the garage. My father came out and got in his car and drove away. A few minutes later a taxi stopped in front of our house. My mother came out the front door carrying a suitcase. She got into the taxi...and left.

(Prologue, 5)

Murphy points out to one of the main reasons of child neglect which is marital schism. No wonder then if the child is dominated by a stranger who *seemingly* offers him love and compassion. Kingsley proposes to

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teach Tot swimming, and the latter is overjoyed for realizing such a long-expected dream:

Tot: Will you really teach me?

Kingsley: Yes, I will....I will teach you the breaststroke, the butterfly, the dead man's float—and you, young Thomas Ottoman Theobald, you will become magnificently buoyant!

(Prologue, 7)

Evidently, Murphy satirizes parental neglect. However, at this point, she is foreshadowing Tot's death, for his body will be found 'magnificently buoyant' by the end of the play. The Chorus of the ghostly children ends the Prologue with the following words:

Chorus: The future of our nation, the best and brightest generation---we are the children of...*(sings, in a low haunting tone)* Hameln, my Hameln, my phantom life, my pickaxe, my blood...Hameln, my Hameln, my tomorrow, locked inside a broken clock, extinct, obsolete, destined to repeat...*(speak)*...so we watch. We watch from a distance. We watch the future come apart in our hands.

(Prologue, 7)

Through the words of the Chorus, Murphy raises a very important issue, namely the future of a nation that depends on the 'best' and 'brightest' generation of the children. The dramatist seems to be asking: how can a nation prosper without giving due attention to the children who are its future generation? This question can be directed to any nation. The Chorus's words demonstrate that the future of a nation will be coming apart if there are no decisive steps taken to rescue the drifting and lost children. Thus, in addition to the parents' responsibility towards their children, there is also the responsibility of the society, and the government.

Act I takes place in the Town Square where a number of important figures gather, among whom are Mayor Pops, Ludwig, who is the deputy Mayor, Winks and Munster who are Members of Town Council, the Rats, a religious man called Fugger, and Olga, a Russian

who feeds starving children. The dramatist's satiric attitude towards hypocrites is well manifested when she presents the Members of Town Council carrying the Mayor's chair. It is interesting to notice that Murphy interweaves political satire with social satire. In such an atmosphere of hypocrisy and self-interest, Mayor Pops finds scope to nominate himself "to run for Mayor of the Township of the Corporation of the City of Hameln for the sixth consecutive term" (Act I, 9). However, Olga objects, for she regards herself as the "Official Mayoral Candidate!" In response to her objection, Mayor Pops announces that he has "always won by acclamation!" (Act I, 9). When Olga begs that the Corporation should buy hot lunches for the starving children, Ludwig rejects clarifying that "if the Corporation feeds every open mouth there'll be nothing left" (Act I, 13). As Olga insists on her request, Ludwig evades giving an answer and comments on the structure of the sentence she utters:

Ludwig (*to Olga*): Those kiddies are the same ones you dragged around last week.

Olga: They are all my children starving.

Ludwig: *Starving children*—you cannot set an adjective adrift at the end of a sentence just because you believe in equality.

(Act I, 13)

Murphy's satire of a non-caring hypocritical society that neglects the welfare

of the children is made clear. Consequently, in addition to the role of parents in the good rearing of their children, the role of societies and governments is of extreme importance. In considering the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Nick Spencer and Norma Baldwin argue:

The key message of the Convention is that societies through their economic, social and cultural policies have a direct responsibility for the protection of children and the promotion of their welfare....The Convention makes it clear that societies as well as families and parents are capable of neglecting children.

(28)

However, one might question the presence of Olga who is a Russian as one of the characters in the play. Certainly, Murphy has added this

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character to the German myth of *The Pied Piper of Hameln*. Olga's role is to feed starving children, and she has a kitchen called 'Olga's Soup Kitchen' for this purpose. In *Two Worlds of Childhood: U.S. and U.S.S.R.*, Uri Bronfenbrenner draws a comparison between the Russian and the American upbringing of children, as follows:

If the Russians have gone too far in subjecting the child and his peer group to conformity to a single set of values imposed by the adult society, perhaps we have reached the point of diminishing returns in allowing excessive autonomy and in failing to utilize the constructive potential of the peer group in developing social responsibility and consideration for others. Moving to counter-act this tendency does not mean subscribing to Soviet insistence on the primacy of the collective over the individual or adopting their practice of shifting major responsibility for upbringing from the family to public institutions. On the contrary, what is called for is greater involvement of parents, and other adults, in the lives of children, and—conversely—greater involvement of children in responsibility on behalf of their own family, community, and society at large. (165-166)

Bronfenbrenner calls for greater involvement of parents, and adults in the lives of children. As for the greater involvement of children in responsibility on behalf of their family and society, it can be argued that this can only be achieved when adults socialize the children with their own environment and culture.

In addition to physical neglect, there is also the emotional neglect of the child. Maureen M. Black conceives that "physical neglect includes not meeting the child's need for food, clothing, shelter, and safety. Emotional neglect involves the interpersonal environment of the home and often includes negative aspects of the child's sense of security and psychological safety" (158). In the Prologue, Tot's sense of insecurity can be discerned. His dream of drowning can be regarded as a kind of expression for the lack of the sense of security---in addition to its dramatic significance in foreshadowing his actual death when his body will be fished out of the

Weser. At this point in the play, another aspect of child neglect is manifested in the relationship between Mayor Pops and Pink, his growing-up daughter. Mayor Pops is preoccupied with his plans for the future, namely for running the Corporate of the City of Hameln for the sixth consecutive term. Pops' ambition and hunger for power make him unaware that his daughter is growing up, and that she needs more physical and emotional care. One of the results of this neglect is that Pink resorts to stealing. She is caught by Wag, the officer, who drags her to her father, complaining that he found her stealing nail polish:

Pops: Why, Pink? Why do you constantly challenge my authority?

Pink: I'm bored and extremely restless, father.

Pops: We're all bored and extremely restless from the endless

repetition of meaningless tasks in an age of dwindling expectations, but children cannot run away from home every five minutes!

Pink: I'm not a child, I'm sixteen and I want out of this stunted half-

life whereby my soul remains trapped between your trite idea of me and my real self which ripens towards the heads of each new flower, their bursting stamens, their shivering pistils trembling with anticipation, the starry pollen alighting onto their stigmas protruding down their quivering ovules—

Pops: Do not talk to me using those...nouns! Go back to your room, Katharina.

Pink: No! I'm bored--- bored of being bored, bored of being bored.

(Act I,15)

Obviously, Mayor Pops is only concerned about his “authority”, or position as a mayor, and regards Pink as only a child who has to be kept at home in her room. On the other hand, Pink suffers from neglect; neither of her parents gives her due attention, nor looks after her physical and emotional needs. Pink's sense of boredom and worthlessness causes her to steal in an attempt to draw her parents'

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attention to her presence in life. D. W. Winnicott perceives that the child who steals looks for “the mother, or for the person from whom he has a right to steal; in fact, he seeks the person from whom he can take things” (163). However, Pops proposes that Pink should work in Olga’s Soup Kitchen for free and learn manners so that she can take his place “without severely embarrassing” him (Act I, 15). In response to this suggestion, Pink replies: “I don’t want to be a stupid Mayor—I want to be a dancer or a biologist” (Act I, 16). Pink’s outlook to her future is completely different from her father’s plan for her future. When Pink threatens that she will one day escape the father, the latter treats the matter in a light way:

Pink: One thought holds me together; father...Someday

I will escape you.

Pops: You cannot escape---I live inside your psyche  
like inoperable cancer.

(Act I,16)

Indeed, it is a false self-confidence that Pops has, for actually Pink escapes with the Piper as the plot unfolds. However, the dialogue reveals the unfathomable gap between Pink and her father who cannot embrace the hopes and desires of a growing-up girl.

Murphy’s bitter satire on extreme parental neglect moves on from one high point to another. When Dot enters declaring that Tot is missing, Ludwig does not care in the least, but calms Dot down by telling her that Tot will “turn up sooner or later”:

*Enter Dot carrying a suitcase, upset*

Dot: THOMAS IS MISSING!

*Silence*

Ludwig: He’s probably just testing his independence,  
Dot—skipping  
school, experimenting with drugs. Go home,  
relax—he’ll turn up sooner or later.

(Act I,17)

Ironically enough, Ludwig has forgotten his son’s name. When asked about his son’s name, he replies: “Tyson. No...Taylor something. It starts with T.” He is soon offered the help of his wife who declares that their son’s name is “Thomas Ottoman Theobald . Tot for short”

(Act I, 19). Paralleling Ludwig's forgetfulness of his child's name, Munster is completely forgetful that he had lost his child:

Munster: Did I losse one?

Winks: Yes. Albert. A few years ago.

Munster: Oh yess, oh dear God...

(Act I,17)

However, when the attendants intend to search for Tot, the Mayor orders to call an ambulance, but to his great surprise, he finds out that they have sold all ambulances to Hannover so that they can buy more televisions! Pops then orders to call in Deep Sea Divers and Paramedics, but, to his astonishment, he learns that they have sold their Paramedics to Braunschweig in order to purchase Casinos! All the attendants then shout out: "keep the casinos—sell the schools!" (Act I, 19). Munster then informs them that they have already sold the schools! At this point, Murphy's satire on a governmental policy that keeps up appearances and ignores essential and important services reaches its highest point. In such a commercial society, the child will certainly become neglected since his welfare is not one of the priorities.

Juxtaposing the scene between Pops and Pink, there is another scene between Madame Speaker and her daughter, Alvina. Madame Speaker orders Alvina to go home, and assigns for her some tasks to be done. On the other hand, Alvina declares that she and Hannalore, her sister, desire to be "pretty for a change":

Madame: What are you doing loitering in the square?

It's dangerous.

Alvina: Don't be a DRAGON, mother.

Madame: Go home, young lady!

Alvina: No! Hannalore and I are being PRETTY FOR  
A CHANGE!

Madame: Go home, right now and help Otto with his  
homework, set the  
table, mend the drapers, drywall the basement  
and baby-sit the baby sitter!

Alvina: No fair. How come I have to do all the work?

Madame: Because I'm busy making the world a better

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place. Now go!

(Act I, 24)

It can be argued that the mother's words point out to "The Strict Father" model or the "authoritarian" model as experts on childrearing term it. George Lakoff contends:

The Strict Father (or "authoritarian") model is supposed to make a child strong and better able to function socially. It is supposed to make children into effective leaders. But, in fact, it has the opposite effect. Children of authoritarian parent...tend to withdraw, not to take social initiative, to lack spontaneity. (355)

Lakoff is for the "authoritative parent" model, or what he calls the "nurturant" parent that "encourages independence, originality, and open communication, and listens to the child's point of view as well as expressing his own" (357). Accordingly, the "authoritarian" model that Alvina's mother adopts will not make of Alvina an effective leader. It is ironic, however, that the mother is "busy making the world a better place", and leaving her duties to Alvina to perform. Murphy emphasizes firstly that charity begins at home; secondly, that a mother's responsibility is to meet the growing-up daughter's material and emotional needs.

Similar to Pink and Alvina, Hannalore longs for being appreciated and loved. Hannalore's material demands are so simple and natural. She declares that she only needs "a new dress and shoes with a matching purse and a new bedroom suite and a puppy called Dimples and a kitty named Boo" (Act I, 25). Kingsley offers his opportune assistance; he promises Hannalore wealth and prosperity. He can make of her "a famous Hannalore surrounded by her entourage, her feathers, her limousines, all the trappings of acclaim spreading out around her like a stain" (Act I, 25). There is only one condition, and that is she has to follow the Rats:

Kingsley: Come with us and you will have whatever your human heartache desires.

(Act I, 25)

Once again, a message is directed to parents to look after the material needs of their children so as not to give strangers and intruders the

chance to have a claim on the children by offering to realize their needs. This will jeopardize the future of the children.

Murphy clarifies more and more the drastic consequences of the lack of meeting the needs of the child on his psychological make-up. Olga has prepared soup for the poor starving children; but she refuses to give Pink some soup claiming that she can buy food, for she is a rich girl:

Pink: May I have some?

Olga: No! This is for children starving!

Pink: But I'm hungry.

Olga: Tough! Rich girl from Ruling Classes—you are for soup paying!

Pink: Well, isn't that just the pony's bum. Now what am I supposed to do? I have no money and if I steal some I'll get in trouble all over AGAIN and AGAIN. (*sobs*). I'm a failure, a nothing. All I want to do is fall passionately in love or kill myself!

(Act I, 26)

Pink feels an extreme sense of worthlessness; her identity is lost amid all the chaos and disregard that she finds around her. Thus, her sole outlet for such a meaningless life is to fall in love. At this crucial moment the Piper appears and has a complete hold of Pink's emotional life. Being so psychologically fragile, Pink falls in love with the Piper at first sight. Her emotional longing to be loved finds echo in the Piper's attitude towards her, for he begins singing to her: "you are desired, you are desired...a cocky girl in dazzling attire, flying round the world in glass aeroplanes, money coursing through your veins, a legendary beauty with a heart-shaped brain. You are desired, you are desired...." (Act I, 30).

In a sharp contrast to this romantic scene, the adults of the Corporate live in a world of their own. They have forgotten about the search for the missing Tot. Even Dot, his mother, is at home, for she "could not bear to search". Purdy and Knut, who are also mothers, in addition to Fugger and Munster, find excuses for not searching for Tot:

Madame: Where's Dot?

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Ludwig: At home. She could not bear to search.

Pops: Ladies and Gentlemen, check the malls, the playgrounds, the forest for the trees—the gaps in your thinking, your pedagogical beliefs...then link arms and fan out along the banks of the Weser and up the mountains!

Fugger (*looks down at his feet*): Dear God, I forgot to change my footwear.

Munster (*looks down at his feet*): Me too. I can't go traipsing through the oods in sshoess.

Purdy (*sneezes*): I have a terrible cold.

Knut (*sneezes*): I just caught it.

Pops: Shame on you! Do you not all have children?

All: (*sheepishly bow their heads*) ...YES.

(Act I, 32-33)

The search for Tot, (or the neglected child), is Murphy's main interest and concern in the play. Through her use of irony, satire, and even humour, Murphy makes all the attendants "sheepishly bow their heads" as if to acknowledge their shame on their passivity in the search for the neglected and abandoned children.

When Tot's body is found floating in the River Weser, Kingsley is accused of drowning him. Ludwig attempts to murder Kingsley, but in vain, for he only hurts him. Significantly then, the dramatist displays that the marital schism between Dot and Ludwig, and the unfaithfulness of each towards the other is one of the main reasons that has made Tot leave home early in the morning in search of a quiet place to rest. At present, however, each parent tries to hold the son's body longer than the other in a pathetic scene:

Dot (*to Ludwig*): Were are you going?

Ludwig: I'm taking MY son to the Undertaker. Go pick out some clothes.

Dot: Let me hold him for a minute.

Ludwig: No, I'm holding him.

Dot: It's my turn!

*They pull at the body...*

Ludwig: You had him the whole time he was alive.

(Act I, 45)

Murphy makes of Tot's death a turning point in Ludwig's life, as he announces that he resigns as Deputy Mayor of the Corporation. Ludwig, suddenly, confronts himself with his reality:

Ludwig: The world is a mirror wherein we see  
ourselves and suddenly I see myself.

(Act I, 46)

It can be argued that Ludwig has faced himself with his mistakes, and errors not only in neglecting his child, but also in developing the interests of the Mayor as his Deputy regardless of the welfare of society. Abner Cohen perceives that "through our style of life and social activities, we may develop the interests of a 'class' or status group without even realizing that we are in fact doing so or that we are at all 'members' in such groups" (66).

As for Dot, she blames Pops for allowing the Rats to participate in the cultural and mercantile life of Hameln, and asks him to annihilate the Rats, or else her son's death is "a waste" (Act I, 47). War is thus declared on the Rats, and in return, the Rats promise to have their revenge:

Kingsley (*chants*): Humans hide your faces, cover your  
pores, for we come upon you like a black  
death knocking, knocking on your doors.

Rats (*chant*): "THERE IS NO PESTILENCE," you  
shout, thinking you are protected by your doubt,  
shielded by your hygiene, your medical clout,  
shielded by your stupid optimism! Your  
optimism! "THERE IS NO PESTILENCE," you  
whisper, "NOTHING CAN PENETRATE." But  
we do...we spit, (*they spit*) we cough, (*they*  
*cough*) we enter you. Humans hide your faces,  
cover your pores, for we come upon you like a  
black death knocking, knocking on your doors.

(Act I, 52)

And so, the Rats proclaim war, and pestilence to come over all the people of Hameln in revenge for annihilating them from the City.

Act II begins by a passionate encounter between Pink and the Piper. In an attempt to reward him for his heart-felt song for her and to

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express her love for him as well, Pink sings to the Piper that he, too, is desired:

Pink(*sings*): You are desired, you are desired, a mysterious boy in coloured tights, wandering through the darkening night, music gushing through your veins, you are desired, a thousand girls thousand watch a thousand screens as you glide across their eyes and slip inside my dreams...

(Act II, 55)

Caught with the Piper, Pink tries to defend herself in front of her father. Mayor Pops scorns Pink for trying to run away with the Piper who is a Stranger:

Pops: As for you, Katharina ---how could you?

Pink: How could I what? Grow up?

Pops: Get it into your head to run away with this...this.... You think love has made you bold but it has merely made you coarse and loose.

(Act II, 69)

At this point, the Piper intervenes and declares that the melody that his pipe blows has a special power that can drive all rats away from the City. When the Mayor accepts the Piper's offer, the latter puts down his conditions which are a thousand American dollars and Pink's hand. Pops agrees to give him the dollars, but puts the matter of Pink's future into her hands:

Pops: I guarantee your life and the money---however, I cannot speak for Katharina. Only she can contemplate such insanity.

Pink: Oh, Piper. Yes! (*Kisses Piper*) I'll marry you, move to Düsseldorf and never come back here again!

(Act II, 70)

Shortly, the Piper fulfills his promise and rids the people of Hameln from all rats as they are drowned in the River Weser by the mysterious melody of his pipe. The citizens of Hameln thus hold a marvelous

party to celebrate this very special event.

All the adults of the City are invited to the party except the children and youngsters who are forbidden from attending such an unprecedented occasion. Hannalore and Alvina are scolded by their parents when they see them at the party, for it is “an adult party”:

Munster: Hannalore, what are you doing sssneaking around out here?

Hannalore: Nothing.

Madame: Get back to bed, Alvina—this is an adult party!

Alvina: Can we have some balloons?

Madame: Go home right now, missy, or else!

(Act II, 80-81)

Evidently, the children will be punished if they do not obey the orders of their parents. This is made clear by the threat declared by Alvina’s mother: “or else!” F. William Gosciewski believes that “punishment is the most effective means of stopping a behavior abruptly, and there are some situations where there is really no other recourse” (137). At this point, Gosciewski’s statement is put in question. Hannalore and Alvina’s parents should have given them the chance to participate in society instead of punishing them if they attend the party. Mark Kirby’s following comment makes it clear that the child has to indulge in a social network in order to be able to effectively perform in society:

Clearly, some form of social network is required to introduce children to their own culture. They need to learn the culture of their own society if they are to exist within it in any acceptable way....What people eat, wear, believe in, aspire to and reward, as well as how they behave, has to be learned from someone. This process is often called *socialization* by sociologists. (80)

The process of socialization can only be attained when children are offered the chance to get introduced to society and be acquainted with its environment, culture, and beliefs.

However, as the time of rewarding the Piper approaches, Pops goes back on his word, and denies the Piper the money that he had previously promised him if he releases the City from the pestilence of

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the rats. Moreover, Pops disapproves of giving him Pink in marriage. Unexpectedly, then, Pops bribes the citizens so that they vote to expel the Piper from the City:

Pops: Ladies and Gentlemen, this Stranger freaked the Rats out!

Next he'll be killing the little birdies of Hameln, then the puppies, then he'll begin stealing your children just like he stole the heart of my daughter, for he possesses a most terrible power---the power to breach the Juvenile Mind, and your children will not even know they are being breached for this Musician's flute makes no bloody sound! Therefore I move that each Citizen who votes to banish this predator will receive forty bags of Pop Korn, brand new patio furniture, and romantic cruises up and down the Rhine!

(Act III, 91)

Pink cannot endure to hear her father's sudden offer. At once, she decides to leave the City with her lover without regret:

Pink: I have already left, father, and when you are on your deathbed begging me to visit and lay my hand against your lonesome forehead I will simply SHRUG. And when you die I will not attend your funeral because I shall be too busy dressing and feeding my BABIES!

(Act III, 94)

Pink's words denote feelings of ingratitude, for she has always felt neglected as a child, and as a growing-up girl. Susan E. Warrell observes that "young children want others to recognize and affirm their identity" (38). Pink clarifies that as a future mother; she will take enough care of her "babies" and even if it is the funeral of her father, she will not attend it because she will be too busy dressing and feeding her infants. The child can reach such a point of filial ingratitude if he/she is forsaken by his/her parents. Pink has always longed "to be found", as her following words to the Piper reveal:

Pink: I cannot imagine life without you. At first I thought you were just a scrappy fellow I could hike out of town with but...I

had always wanted to be found, Piper...and you found me.  
(Act III, 97)

The young girl's desire to be found has its rudiments in her early years of abandonment and neglect by her parents, and by society. In *Child Care and the Growth of Love*, John Bowlby argues that a social institution can help the child "by providing surroundings in which he may develop his physical, mental, and social capacities to the full so that, when grown up, he may be able to deal with his physical and social environment effectively" (84). Consequently, the responsibility of the society towards the well-being of the child is as necessary as parental child care.

Before leaving with Pink, the Piper exacts his revenge on the citizens of Hameln. As he blows his pipe, all the children follow him, forsaking their parents and their homes. Now comes a moment of great sorrow and regret to all the parents of Hameln. Munster and his wife try hard to convince Alvina and Hannalore to get back to them:

Munster: Hannalore...where are you going?  
Madame: Come back, Alvina. I'll give you some  
balloons!

(Act III, 98)

Even Winks implores his children to come back to him:

Winks (*calls*): My brand new children...come back!  
I'll take you to ball games and buy you  
poodles and oodles of skipping ropes and ice  
cream cones and you can climb all over me  
like I'm a big, giant tree. Come back to me!

(Act III, 99)

The promises of parents fall on their children's deaf ears. In the following passage, Pops admits that he has never noticed his daughter before, although all the time she has been with him:

Pops: I never noticed you before, Katharina. I thought  
you had been sent off to private school, but all the  
time you were here in your room in Hameln. All  
this time...you were here...with me.

(Act III, 100)

The children of Hameln follow the Piper towards Mount Koppen, hoping for a better future in a land where everything is green:

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Pink (*sings*): You are running to a land just beyond your comprehension, a country where nature welcomes you into gardens of perfect air and you are never left alone in cold, dark fields of terror where nothing ever grows.

(Act III, 99)

By the end of the play, the parents are awakened to the disastrous repercussions of their passive role towards their children. Ludwig's following words foreshadow a bleak future to the parents of Hameln:

Ludwig: ...I'm afraid that one morning our children will stir to their deeply buried resentment of our disregard and oh, how violently they will shudder awake, as if having slept for a thousand years they are now a thousand years late! And on that morning our kids will rear up and chase us through the streets of Hameln and into the open fields.

(Act III, 92-93)

Ludwig's words of regret make it hard to accept Bob Clark's remark that parental indifference "surfaces more prominently after the appearance of a strange pied piper who suddenly strays into their midst." On the contrary, the parents start regretting their lack of interest in the affairs of their children when they can no longer find them. At any rate, Murphy is directing a warning message to parents. They can suddenly find their children missing from their lives if they overlook their good rearing.

The ghosts of the children join the Chorus of the Ghostly Children on top of Mount Koppen. The Epilogue sets clearly the longing of the Chorus of Children to be loved unconditionally:

Chorus: We expected Mount Koppen to open and welcome us into the possibility of being loved unconditionally....[...]we are here, waiting, trapped between yesterday and tomorrow, between earth and sky, and though we remain forever young and forever

hopeful...our deaths end nothing.  
(Epilogue, 101)

The Chorus of Children declares that they will remain forever young and forever hopeful and that their deaths “end nothing”. This comment points out to the extreme importance of revising priorities on the parts of parents and societies. The children need to be loved unconditionally. Mario Custino remarks that “of all the different aspects of parental behaviour that have been found to influence the way children grow up, emotional warmth is consistently found to be the most important” (159). It is significant to note, however, that Murphy ends the play on a note of hope. Tot’s ghost clarifies that he still loves his mother. His following relevant words end the Epilogue: “I’m sinking... (slowly raises his arms)...sinking up to my neck in my beautiful mother”(Epilogue, 103).

In *The Piper*, Murphy highlights social, psychological and political issues through her effective use of the significances of the German myth of *The Pied Piper of Hameln*, and her creative improvisation on the myth. Commenting on the important role that myth plays in human affairs, Mortimer Ostow states:

The myth, of course, plays an important role in human affairs because it is a communally shared and communally active fantasy. It is not merely an idea, a story. It possesses cogency and motivates behavior, either instigating action or defending against inner drives or outer reality. It may generate despair or hope and may result in surrender or enterprise. (65)

Through myth, Murphy challenges the accepted concepts of child rearing, and exposes the dull conditions in which the child might be living. In considering the lot of children all over the world, Jill E. Korbin’s following statement is relevant:

Humankind has fallen far short of the goal set by the United Nations. The lot of children the world over is not pleasant to contemplate. In both developing and developed nations, children are subject to poor parental and postnatal care. Despite this bleak picture, one of our cherished beliefs is that human nature compels parents to rear their young with tender and loving care,

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thus dulling or mitigating noxious environmental and social conditions. (Introduction, 1)

Perhaps this bleak picture of child neglect becomes brighter if adults afford opportunities to the children and youths of a nation in order to allow them to develop their capacities to the fullest, as Bronfenbrenner argues:

If the children and youth of a nation are afforded opportunity to develop their capacities to the fullest, if they are given the knowledge to understand the world and the wisdom to change it, then the prospects for the future are bright. In contrast, a society which neglects its children, however well it may function in other respects, risks eventual disorganization and demise. (1)

It is only when the children are given “the knowledge to understand the world and the wisdom to change it” that a society can prosper. In contrast, a society that neglects its children becomes in jeopardy of “disorganization and demise”.

Thus, through myth and its significance, Murphy tackles the extremely important social issue of child neglect, and sheds light on its negative effects on the child from the psychological, physical and material perspectives. However, the political significance cannot be denied in the play. Chiara Bottici observes that a cultural myth that has nothing political in it “can come to affect specifically political conditions, and thus to contribute to the shaping of a political identity” (202). Murphy’s play can be regarded as a political satire on the indulgence of those in power in political self-interests, disregarding the good rearing of their children, and the welfare of the society as well. Here, again, the significance of myth is functional. Commercialism is attacked as one of the main reasons for the society’s neglect of children-- the Town Council of Hameln sells off essential and beneficial services in order to buy more televisions and casinos! It is made clear throughout the play that the desires of the adults are completely different from those of the children and youths. Zoltán Kövecses has the following insightful comment on the notion of desire:

The notion of desire appears in emotion concepts in two ways. In the first, there is some desire on the part

of the subject of emotion to perform an action, where the action is “spurred” by or is a result of the emotion itself....In the other, the desire consists of having the emotion. (45)

In *The Piper*, there is an insatiable hunger for power and acquisition on the part of the adults compared to an emotional desire to be loved unconditionally on the part of the children and youths.

It is worth noting that Murphy employs satire, irony, and symbolism as valid dramatic devices for enriching the significance of myth in the play. Finley Eversole considers that myths and symbols “act as *energy transformers*, making available to us heightened psychic energies” (28). Murphy uses symbols that stand for “strangers” or “intruders” in the lives of the children. The symbolism of the “Rats” and the “Piper” are effective in clarifying that if the child is neglected physically, socially, emotionally and intellectually, he would become so fragile that any stranger can easily have a good hold on him, and direct him as he desires. Ostow perceives that “a stranger may possess potential for both good and evil” (79); for when the Piper was not rewarded by the townspeople of Hameln, he turned against them, and in revenge drove their children away.

It can be argued, however, that the awakening of the parents, and of the society to their passivity in dealing with the children points out to Murphy’s successful use of myth in instigating positive action on the part of the audiences. Kenneth “Shujaa” Rice observes that true myths allow for one’s awareness of old truths, thereby for one’s self-study:

True myths have the ability to speak the truths of the present time, truth of time that proceeded this time and truth to all time. The power of the myth has the ability to open the eyes for one to see, open the ears for one to hear, and open the mouth for one to speak the truth of the reality of one’s divine nature. This brings one into awareness and a consciousness of a truth of an ancient time. Moving oneself into the direction of self-affirmation, and self-study, thereby, establishing a historical identity to one’s own cultural heritage. (4)

Thus, true myths make people confront their realities. In a keynote address delivered at Alberta Theatre, Murphy regards that “the stage is

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a perfect place to confront ourselves because the scale of the stage is a human scale." She concludes her speech by saying: "Open your eyes. Turn on your light and see that dramatic meaning must be given to the human condition and to the feelings that erupt from people who live in these times---our time." Moreover, Jeff Kubik transmits Simon Mallet's remark about the play: "I think it is less about commenting and more about questioning." Consequently, it is hard to agree with Louis B. Hobson who conceives that "what began as entertaining satire turns into an irksome lecture." Rather than considering the play as an "irksome lecture," it can be viewed as a warning message to the disastrous effects of ill rearing children, and of ill-functioning society.

It can therefore be argued that Colleen Murphy has successfully made use of the German myth of *The Pied Piper of Hameln* in *The Piper* in order to exhibit the theme of child neglect: its aspects, causes, and negative effects on the child, and on the society at large. However, Murphy has portrayed an ill-functioning society on different levels. Consequently, the use of myth has acquired significances that imply governmental and political shortcomings. It is also notable that Murphy's employment of symbolism, irony, satire, and humour has aided her in clarifying the instrumentality of the significances of myth. Hence, through myth, Murphy conveys warning messages to parents, societies and governments, worldwide, in order to awaken them to the extreme importance of reconsidering the priorities of their roles for the welfare of the children, and the prosperity of their nations. In conclusion, the ubiquity of myth allows the play to transcend the regional implications of the significance, and reach universal dimensions.

### Note on Colleen Murphy

Playwright Colleen Murphy was born in Rouyn-Noranda, Quebec, in 1954. She writes for stage and film, and has twice won prizes in the CBC Literary Competition with *Fire-Engine Red* (1985) and *Pumpkin Eaters* (1990). Her play, *Beating Heart Cadaver* was first staged in 1998 in Toronto by Necessary Angel Theatre, directed by Richard Rose. The play was nominated for a 1999 Governor General's Award and a Chalmers Award. A large-scale production of her recent play, *The Piper*, was mounted by Necessary Angel Theatre in 2002 and was also directed by Richard Rose.

The December Man premiered at PlayRites Festival in Calgary in 2007, directed by Bob White. Based on the Montreal massacre of women students at École Polytechnique in 1989, the play examines the wrenching guilt experienced by a young man ordered out of the classroom where the women were shot, and the ways in which his parents attempt to help him. The play is published by Playwrights Canada and won the 2007 Governor General's Award. Colleen's film work includes *Putty Worm* (1993), *The Feeler* (1995), *Shoemaker* (1996), *Desire* (2000) and *War Holes* (2001). She lives in Toronto with her husband, documentary filmmaker Allan King, and their son.

Web. 29 Jan. 2012.

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