

The Trial of
Rattenfänger

Justine Cope

with poetry by Robert Browning &
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow



The Trial of Rattenfanger
A play in one act

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Justine Cope is a Creative Arts and Drama Practitioner, Director and Lecturer in Education. Her passion for writing stems from her love of creativity and devising, scripting and directing drama, theatre and arts projects.

She works with numerous educational settings and arts organisations to design and deliver creative provision, in addition to being a Creative Director of Fusion Performance Arts, in Staffordshire.

Justine has written several award winning One Act Plays for Youth/Young Performers which have been performed as part of The All England Theatre Festival including 'Scratching the Surface' and 'From Ashes to Coals'.



ABOUT THE PLAY

‘The Trial of Rattenfanger’ is a one act play which uses a range of documentary sources, poetry and verse to explore the story of the Pied Piper. The piece presents possible solutions to the loss of 130 children from the town of Hamelin, Saxony, Germany as charted in the towns scriptures and depicted in the stained-glass window commissioned for Hamelin church in 1300, which was later destroyed by fire.

The play was first performed as part of the Tamworth Hastilow One Act Play Festival, at the Tamworth Assembly Rooms on 20th March 2015 with the following cast.

CHARACTERS

TOWN CRIER	Josh Moul
ARBITRATOR	Jonathan Bott
THE RATTENFANGER	Eleanor McFarlane
ANIKA	Beth Moul
ELSEBETH	Isabelle Foxall
FRIDA	Bettina Shepherd
OTTO	Dylan James
LIESL	Jodie Birks
GRETA	Zoe Hunter

Ensemble/Chorus of Villagers & Children



The images above show Hans Dobbertin's impression of the original window (destroyed by fire) in Hamelin church, and the window recreated using lighting gel for the original production by Fusion Performance Arts.

CHARACTERS

Town Crier

Arbitrator

The Rattenfanger

Anika

Elsebeth

Frida

Otto

Liesl

Greta

Ensemble/Chorus of Villagers & Children

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Casting is flexible and can be expanded to incorporate a large ensemble of chorus/villagers/children or rats!

The poetry offers opportunities for casts to enhance story telling through the use of physical theatre, dance or tableau.

Minimal properties are required to stage the production and scenes should be presented fluidly. However, it is essential to represent the church window which can be achieved through creation of a physical window or by projection.

OPENING

A group of children dressed in white enter ceremoniously with the RATTENFANGER, they form a tableau representative of the church window in Hamelin church. Three village females sit quietly praying.

TOWN CRIER: In the year of 1284, on the day of Saints John and Paul
By a piper, clothed in many kinds of colours,
130 children born in Hamelin were seduced,
and lost at the place of execution near the *Koppen*.

The RATTENFANGER who is clearly shackled is removed from the tableau; he is thrust forwards and the children and villagers disperse. A bright light appears from above, the ARBITRATOR appears: -

ARBITRATOR: You are the one they call Rattenfanger?

RATTENFANGER: I am known by many names, that is but one of them.

ARBITRATOR: Quite! And that is but one of the reasons you remain here.

RATTENFANGER: I remain here, as you chose to hold me against my will.

ARBITRATOR: Well, then are you ready to tell the truth about your crimes?

RATTENFANGER: I know not to what you refer? I have committed no crimes, I have merely served my duty, and for that am I to be shackled for eternity?

ARBITRATOR: Your shackles are bound by your own dishonesty Rattenfanger! If you choose to impart the truth about your actions, your chains will be removed, and you will be able to pass freely through.

RATTENFANGER: Pass freely through? I have stated my case time after time, and yet am still tethered like an animal. I have committed NO crimes, I am a loyal subject and have always served my masters. What am I accused of? What have I done? Am I to remain here, held against my will - without fair trial for an undisclosed crime?

ARBITRATOR: Do not mock me Rattenfanger, you know to what I refer! The Hamelin children, 130 innocents taken from their town. Why Rattenfanger? What led you to this unprecedented act of evil?

RATTENFANGER: Surely, he that knows everything, holds the answer to this question? I have withheld nothing from the world, therefore, I have nothing to repent for.

ARBITRATOR: He that knows everything will judge you in his own time Rattenfange, however, you must first explain your actions. The mortal world remains confused as many versions of events exist, only you can tell the truth about the Hamelin children.

RATTENFANGER: I have never hidden the truth, my story has been elaborated upon and told a thousand different ways! Am I also to be held responsible for the fictitious tales of others, unable to rest freely?

ARBITRATOR: The freedom you seek will be granted once the truth is established Rattenfanger. Hundreds of years have passed since the Hamelin children disappeared, yet the world still seeks answers, answers that you hold.

RATTENFANGER: Why do you seek my truth, when you place such emphasis on the accounts of others?

ARBITRATOR: Scriptures, pictures and poems attempt to provide plausible solutions, but only you can tell the real truth, Rattenfanger. Look down and ponder, see how the world sees you and then tell your truth - or be forever bound by your chains!

The RATTENFANGER looks on. We are transported to Hamelin Town (as depicted in Robert Browning's poem).

The ARBITRATOR exits and the RATTENFANGER picks up his pipe and begins to pipe his way around the countryside merrily. A company of villagers are soon revealed and the RATTENFANGER exits.

MAYOR: Hamelin Town's in Brunswick,

VILLAGERS: 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.

Three female villagers break away from the group and begin to pray./ and // indicates overlapping of speech.

FRIDA: Dear Lord it is now 100 years /since our children were taken away from us.

ELSEBETH: /Lord hear my prayer, it is some 300 years since //our children left the town.

ANIKA: //Lord above, I pray for our lost children, it is now 500 years since they were lost. I pray that our town will never be subjected to the pain, sorrow and disease spread by the black rat. *(The other villagers join in)* I pray that the sacrifices we made will protect us in the future and that our children continue to look down as angels of purity and peace. We pray that the terrible events that blighted our town are never repeated.....

ANIKA: We ask this in your name/ and vow to serve thee most faithfully. AMEN.

ELSEBETH: /we pray //you hear us dear lord – AMEN

FRIDA: //Oh Father hear our prayer – AMEN.