

A note on translating Tsvetaeva's title *Krysolov* (Крысолов)

The title of Marina Tsvetaeva's 1925 "Lyrical Satire" is rightly translated as *The Ratcatcher*. The word "krysolov" consists of 'krys' [=rat] plus 'lov' [=catch[er]]. It is quite wrong to substitute the title of Robert Browning's poem, "The Pied Piper". Yet many commentators do just that. Browning's work, although based on the same legend, does not significantly resemble Tsvetaeva's in any way. The hero of Tsvetaeva's poem, moreover, is not "pied", neither is he presented as any kind of clown or mere "piper".

In the well-known legend of the Ratcatcher who appeared in the German town of Hameln in 1284, this figure is not called "pied", which means two-coloured, but is described as wearing multi-coloured clothing the first time he appears, and as being dressed like a huntsman the second time. Tsvetaeva knew the version by the Brothers Grimm, where he is described as a huntsman, as well as the poems by Simrock and Goethe entitled "Der Rattenfänger"(The Ratcatcher); there is no evidence that she even knew of Browning's version, let alone that she made any use of it.

Browning's hero is called "pied" because he is dressed in two colours:"His queer long coat from heel to head / Was half of yellow and half of red"; around his neck is "a scarf of red and yellow stripe". [Browning. Penguin Poets, 1954, p.99 +] His poem is subtitled "A child's story" and such it is: often reproduced for children, it has nothing either horrific or elevated in it and has a conventionally pious, thoroughly non-Tsvetaevan, moral at its ending.

Tsvetaeva's hero is NOT dressed in two colours; he wears only green. "Into the town a man made his entry, / carrying a flute and dressed all in green." Here I added "all" for the rhythm, but it is clear that Tsvetaeva meant this: "В город медленно входил / Человек в зеленом, с дудочкой". He is dressed like a huntsman, and like the mythical "Green Man": in the colour of nature.

The word "dudochka" (pipe) is very rarely used in this work; instead the instrument is called a "flute" and its player the "flautist". Though he catches the rats, his chief characteristic is music – he represents music, poetry, art, the spirit.

Translators of Tsvetaeva's *Krysolov* into other languages have always correctly translated the title as "The Ratcatcher": thus *Der Rattenfänger* (German translation by Marie-Luise Bott); *L'accalappiatopi* (Italian translation by Caterina Graziadei); *Råttfångaren*(Swedish translation by Annika Bäckström).

Moreover, the German town Hameln (to us, Hamelin, or Hamlin) is known as the "Rattenfängerstadt" and it celebrates "Rattenfängertag"; it has in it a house called the "Rattenfängerhaus". No concept of "pied piper" is part of the tradition of Hamlin town or its legend. To introduce it into discussion of Marina Tsvetaeva's "lyrical satire" is unnecessary and misleading.

22.8.2010

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OED: pied = parti-coloured, esp. two-coloured; cp piebald (meaning of two different colours).

The correct translation of Marina Tsvetaeva's 1925 "Lyrical Satire" *Крысолов* is *The Ratcatcher*. Not 'The Pied Piper' Robert Browning's poem based on the same legend does not significantly resemble Tsvetaeva's work in any more, and the hero of her poem is neither "pied" nor any kind of clown or mere "piper".

In the well-known legend of the Ratcatcher who appeared in the German town of Hameln in 1284, the hero is not "pied", which means two-coloured. Instead he is described as, in his first appearance, wearing multi-coloured clothing and, in his second, dressed like a huntsman. Thus he is described in the version of the Brothers Grimm. Tsvetaeva knew the Grimm version, as well as the German poems by Simrock and Goethe entitled "Der Rattenfänger (The Ratcatcher); there is no evidence that she even knew of Browning's version, let alone that she used it.

Browning's poem is subtitled "A child's story" and such it is; it is often reproduced for children, there is nothing horrific or elevated in it and it has a conventional, thoroughly non-Tsvetaevan moral at its ending.

Browning's hero is called "pied" because he is dressed in two colours: "His queer long coat from heel to head / was half of yellow and half of red"; and he has around his neck "a scarf of red and yellow stripe".

But Tsvetaeva's hero is NOT dressed in two colours; he wears green. "Into the town a man made his entry, / carrying a flute and dressed all in green." I added "all" for the rhythm, but it is clear that Tsvetaeva meant just that: "В город медленно входил / человек в зеленом, с дудочкой".

As for the clothing: pied means parti-coloured, usually two-coloured (especially black and white) – OED; thus also piebald - of two different colours.