



Pied Piper

Nevil Shute

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One of Nevil Shute's most exciting novels, *Pied Piper* is the gripping story of one elderly man's daring attempt to rescue a group of children during the Nazi invasion of France.

It is the spring of 1940 and John Sidney Howard wants nothing more than to enjoy his fishing holiday in southern France in peace and quiet. However, the Nazi conquest of the Low Countries puts an end to that, and he is asked by friends to take their two children back to England. Crossing France with his young charges seems simple enough at first—until the Germans invade, rendering them fugitives. As Howard struggles to sneak across France, he picks up several more helpless children of various nationalities. They walk for miles in an endless river of refugees, strafed by German planes and hiding in barns at night. By the time Howard and his flock of little ones reach the Channel, his plan of escaping on a fishing boat has become utterly impossible, and in their final confrontation with the invaders, all their lives are at stake.

Pied Piper Details

Date : Published August 24th 2010 by Vintage (first published 1942)

ISBN : 9780307474018

Author : Nevil Shute

Format : Paperback 320 pages

Genre : Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, War, Classics, Cultural, France, World War II

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From Reader Review Pied Piper for online ebook

Gary says

A beautiful, heartwarming and encapsulating story about an elderly English man holidaying in France during World War II and coping with feelings of uselessness' and getting over the death in combat of his son, While he is in France, that country is invaded by the Germans and two small English children come into his custody and he takes them under his wing with the aim of getting them to Britain.

He takes on the role of nurturer and protector and we get a window into France during the war and the German,an occupation.

Soon he comes across two French children, a lost Dutch urchin, a Jewish boy whose father was taken to his death in Auschwitz, and was hidden by a French farmer and eventually the small niece of a Nazi officer, whose mother it is said was not fully Aryan (likely part Jewish).

As well as being touching, the twists and turns are engaging and the focus on ordinary people in wartime is refreshing and timeless.

Amy says

This beautiful story follows John Howard, a grieving 70 year old man, who escapes to a fishing vacation in France, after the death of his son in the RAF. It's summer 1940 and he craves quiet, avoiding all the talk of war and death in England. Little does he know what he is headed for! This was a BEAUTIFUL, heart-wrenching tale that blessed the socks off of me. It was written in a plain, straight-forward style, and yet I was right there with Mr. Howard through every step of this extraordinary journey. The love and grace shown by him and others was an example to me of God's unconditional love. I loved the children in this book and Mr. Howard's treating them as people. One of my favorite books of the year so far!

Chrissie says

Each author has their own special style. How would I describe Nevil Shute's? His books have a "feel good" tone, and yet at the same time they don't shy away from difficult themes. As with fairy tales, you get scary and suspenseful tidbits, but at the conclusion you feel satisfied. Content.

This novel is said to be based on a true life story. Yet nobody calls it non-fiction. There are just too many coincidences for me to accept this as being totally true to life. The story is about a seventy year old English man from Essex who decides to take a vacation trip to France to go fishing. He is a widower and recently his son has died. His son was RAF pilot. He misses him terribly. It is the summer of 1940, and anyone with a little knowledge of history knows that this was not the summer to traipse off to France. When things start heating up, Howard, that is the central protagonist, ends up agreeing to take two children and then another and another.... back to England. Well, finally it gets to be a total of (view spoiler)! Children of different nationalities - (view spoiler) So with a hidden spoiler within a spoiler you see the story has a final exciting twist! This all **could** have happened. Maybe it did happen. The story is said to be true, but exactly how much of it? That is the question!

Several aspects of the writing make the story feel genuine. The children behave as children do, and at the same time each is an individual different from the other. Each is a character with distinguishable weaknesses and strengths. And Howard, the seventy year-old, he can manage only so much! You should see what a wreck they are when they reach the end of the trip! What also makes the story feel true is that there are both villains and kind souls. The history related is accurate.

Yet some events go too far:

1. Would parents (view spoiler)? It **is** possible but rather unlikely. It is more likely that the (view spoiler).
2. Not all Germans behaved badly during the war. They were instructed to set a good example, to show the excellence of German ways. I can understand that the child in the story is returned de-loused and clean, but that (view spoiler) is stretching believability!
3. It is just too coincidental that the German Gestapo (view spoiler)!

I am fine with an elderly man helping kids get away from France and the war, but the coincidences are a bit thick. We have here a "feel good" story with accurate historical events and of course it **could** be possible. I would say there is a core of truth with some extra embellishments added.

It is nice how a love story is woven in. It is satisfying that Howard (view spoiler). Again, nothing is to say this couldn't have happened, and it is beautifully told. The horrors of war and the beauty of love are intertwined, just as it should be in both a good fairy tale and in real life.

I enjoyed the narration of the audiobook. David Rintoul **can** and **does** speak French properly. This adds authenticity. His ability to capture how English often incorrectly pronounce French adds humor too! Very well done and easy to follow. Only a little knowledge of French is necessary to understand the untranslated lines.

The book is satisfying and tells accurate history. I found only one silly mistake - St. Malo is in Brittany not Normandy.

Judy says

Nevil Shute is such a wonderful storyteller. I wish we had more books by him. My library doesn't have many ; so I've been buying used copies of several of his books. It's my one concession to adding to my own library. I wonder if many younger readers even know of Shute. Even the several of his books that have been made into movies are quite old. This book is another of his WWII stories--an interesting tale of how an "old" man tried to help several children out of France as the Germans were invading. I was a bit amused by the fact that I am a number of years older than John Howard, the main protagonist. There are some "Britishisms" that an American has to figure out, and these are somewhat intensified by the passage of time. Still this is an exciting and heart-warming book. Now if someone would re-release A Town Like Alice on film, I'd be happy. Of course the book is better, but Alice and Pied Piper are my favorites by Shute.

Jaksen says

A wonderful book! Absolutely outstanding!

My copy came from the library at the Mass Maritime Academy in Bourne, MA (where I also have a summer home.) I tried to get it via my home library, this was the closest copy they could find. It is part of the Complete Works of Nevil Shute, which I had no idea existed. Anyhow, I am a huge fan of Shute's novel, 'On the Beach,' and that prompted me to look for some of his other novels.

To the book. What a story. Supposedly based on a true story, it was told to Shute during a bombing raid in London. He's in his club, drinking, smoking, etc., when a raid begins - the year, 1942. Instead of taking refuge in the basement with the other members, Shute remains 'upstairs,' enjoying his coffee and brandy. (Well, he remains alert to what's going on and IS ready to take refuge if need be.) At any rate he runs into a man named Howard, also staying upstairs in the club and to pass the time Howard tells Shute the story of how he crossed France with several small children just as the Germans were invading. Hence the 'Pied Piper' of the novel's title. Except 70-year old Howard is a very loving, caring, concerned and provident piper, unlike the one of legend.

(view spoiler)

I loved Mr. Howard, though I found some of the children hard to like, and in general I do like children. (A lot more than I like a lot of adults, btw.) But the children are portrayed very realistically, sometimes being a total delight and at others a bunch of whiny, bratty pains in the you-know-where. And still Howard fords on, gathers them up, keeps going when he's tired or feeling sick. He finds ways to distract the children, entertain them, keep them warm, fed and safe.

This book was made into a movie in 1942, but it needs an update. I can see one of our fine 'senior' actors, either American or English, in the lead role. I'm looking for a copy of the 1942 version to watch, but I'd love to see a newer one, too.

It's simply an all-around, well-written, great tale.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

Pied Piper, Nevil Shute

Pied Piper is a novel by Nevil Shute, first published in 1942. The title is a reference to the traditional German folk tale, "The Pied Piper of Hamelin". The story concerns an elderly Englishman, John Sidney Howard, who goes on a fishing holiday in France after the outbreak of the Second World War, but before the fall of France. Entrusted with the care of two English children, and overtaken by events, he attempts to return to England and safety. His journey is hampered by the unexpected speed of the Nazi invasion of France, and by the fact that he eventually finds himself entrusted with the custody of seven young children. Eventually, he and the children are stranded in Nazi-occupied France. As an Englishman, he is an enemy to the occupying

forces. While waiting to escape France on a fishing boat, he and his charges are discovered by the Germans. Howard is accused of spying and threatened with death.
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Carol says

John Howard's world has collapsed; the seventy-ish English man responds by going fishing in the Jura mountains in France. [friends of ours named their dog "Jura" after these mountains] When the Nazi army is poised to invade France, Howard betakes himself back to England. His trip back is complicated by two English children with whom he agreed to travel. They are hoping to get to St. Malo [a city I never heard of until two weeks ago when I read All the Light We Cannot See...and voila! it reappears in my reading!!] and take a boat across the channel.

This is a cozy read, with a sentimental flavor that isn't off-putting. What made me love the book was John Howard's patience: patience with the slow pace, the children's limitations, the irritating circumstances, the incessant difficulties. He must have memorized the serenity prayer.

When motion sickness causes a child to vomit: "For a moment he was startled and disgusted. Then patience came back to him; children couldn't help that sort of thing. She was coughing and weeping; he pulled out his handkerchief and wiped her face and comforted her."

Another exchange I loved. "He felt himself in peril. This woman was quite capable of giving them all up to the Germans. He faced her boldly, and looked into her eyes, "Do you believe that England has abandoned France?" he asked. "Or do you think that is a German lie?" She hesitated. "These filthy politics," she said at last. "I only know that this farm now is ruined. I do not know how we shall live." He said simply, "By the Grace of God, madame."

One last quote: "We spoke quietly as we lay relaxed beside each other in our chairs, with long pauses between sentences. When you are tired there is pleasure in a conversation taken in sips, like old brandy."

I was surprised that this book was published in 1941, a short time after the Battle of Dunkirk, mentioned in this book.

Chrisl says

Pied Piper. He's among my Shute five favorites. One of those old quiet stories that stays with me.

Here's a professional review from KIRKUS REVIEW

" ... Shute has the faculty for seizing upon contemporary drama and weaving it into a story with very human elements. This is the story of a conservative, tradition-bound old Englishman, faced with the need to be needed, meeting it with quiet courage and no bombast. He is caught by rumors of German invasion, while on holiday in the Jura mountains, and is asked to take two English children to safety in England. In their checkered progress across invaded France, he takes under his wing other children, -- the niece of a matron at the Inn, a French child whose parents were killed by a dive bomber before his eyes, a Dutch urchin, and

finally -- as the price of his own freedom, a German child, whose Jewish blood condemns her to perpetual escape. What a picture of refugee glutted roads, of German dive bombers, of terror -- and yet of the sentimental weak spot that exposes even the most hardened to the appeal of sheer goodness."

Phair says

While this was published in 1941 and was about events of the 1940 German invasion of France, to me it was historical fiction made more interesting and real because of the immediacy. A very leisurely book about frantic events- the pace fit a story of a 70 year old man traveling, largely on foot, with a group of very young children. Seeing events through the eyes of the children who did not see the Germans as enemies but treated all people they met as befitting their actions- kind or friendly people were friends, mean people were not, be they German or French. I liked that the book was written as a retelling of the story by a narrator who had it from the old man while they waited out a blitz attack in London at a gentleman's club. Knowing that the old man had survived to tell the tale lessened some of the tragic potential and allowed me to read with at least some hope for a happy ending. There was a little disbelief at the incredibly lucky happenstance that brought about the conclusion- it brought to mind Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*. This would make a good TV movie for sure. (3.5 stars)

Stephen says

enjoyed revisiting this author after so many years and still hasn't lost its charm of the storyline and emotions which come in this novel based around the time of the German invasion of France in 1940 and an old mans attempt to travel back to England with several children at the time of France imploding.

Andy says

The timeliness of this book is astonishing. The historical story of refugees fleeing from the Nazi invasion of France is so compelling that it is still the subject of current bestsellers (*The Nightingale*, *All the Light We Cannot See*). This is perhaps the first English language novel about the episode, so it's interesting from that standpoint, but also in the context of the refugee crisis in the news.

The plot is bizarre enough to be a page-turner, yet the initial premise is plausible, and the rest of the story holds together from there. While a brutally honest war story, it is also very human and touching. This is masterful storytelling.

Nerdy musings: The writing at first felt sloppy, as if the author were rushing it out, but the more I read, the more I thought he was being deliberate. The word "presently" is used so frequently, that it's like a code word he's trying to get the reader to notice. As in, we need to react to this NOW. There are other bizarre usages too. "Desolated" is used to mean "I'm sorry" a lot. This would be a bad word-for-word translation from French of "désolé" but the author isn't French, the character isn't French and isn't necessarily even speaking French in the story when this word is used. So again, it seems like a sort of code for communicating how desperately serious the danger is. Who is Shute trying to get this across to? Americans I would guess, presumably pre-Pearl Harbor. Over and over again it is explained how kind-hearted the Americans are, and how they would want to help refugee children. Anyway, it would be interesting to find out if my

interpretation is correct. Are there are some Shute experts out there?

Sally906 says

The original Pied Piper of Hamelin story is a German Folk tale where a man offers to rid Hamelin of its rat problem for a fee – accepted he plays his pipes and the mice all follow him to be drowned in a river. However when the city leaders renege on the payment the piper plays another tune and the children all follow him into a gap in the mountain where it closes behind them and they are never seen again. I am not sure of the connection as Mr Howard is rescuing the children in this story rather than taking them to be vengeful. Still an elderly man leading children to freedom against a foe that means them harm is an uplifting theme. Nevil Shute wrote this book in 1942 – when WWII was still raging – and is set in 1940 when Germany invaded and occupied France; a dark time for the people of France. Shute is a master of building the tension without the in your face wham bam that many writers do today, you really don't realise you're on the edge of your seat until you have to put the book down and realise you can't! There is violence in the book – but it is war after all – again the violence does not degenerate into pages of gore – but the fear and the senselessness of it all is all to evident. A very good read indeed.

Linda says

Nevil Shute never disappoints me, not being a present day writer.....his novels have a timeless quality to them. A very heartfelt story of an old man mourning the loss of his son in World War II, tries to come to terms with his grief.....in the process meets up with 6 children at various times in war-torn France & endeavors to bring them to safety in England, his home country. It's a wonderful read.....highly recommend it!

Betty Ast says

A wonderful story of an old man and children during the war in Europe.

Cindy Rollins says

Thoroughly British, thoroughly enjoyable!

Nevil Shute is the author of one of my favorite novels A Town Like Alice. I had not realized he had written quite a few more novels. This one, Pied Piper came highly recommended and rightfully so. It is a wonderful story, simple and deep. Thoroughly British

Hanna-col says

I stumbled upon Pied Piper while going through a list of Nevil Shute's works. The synopsis of the book

piqued my interest and I almost bought it soon after while making an Amazon purchase (I opted out to buy *Steal Like An Artist* instead). Several weeks back, I received *Pied Piper* as a birthday gift from my parents and started reading it a few days later.

In the most simple of terms, I loved it. The idea of an old man trying to return to England as the Nazis invade France and taking refugee children with him appeals to my imagination and Nevil Shute did not disappoint. *Pied Piper* was everything I wanted it to be and then some.

As with the majority of my favorite books it was the characters that captured my heart most. John Sidney Howard might be an unlikely hero at the ripe old age of seventy but he is a compelling one. Feeling useless in England during the stalemate of the winter of 1939, he journeys to Southeast France in the spring of 1940 determined to fish and enjoy himself, unaware of the Nazi invasion of France about overtake him. When his perilous position finally does rouse him into returning to England, he is entrusted to take two English children to their aunt in England as well. Their journey is difficult from the outset but Mr. Howard is completely unprepared for just how arduous and difficult it becomes. As they straggle towards the coast, he finds himself taking more children under his wing even though he hardly knows what he will do with them.

Fans of historical fiction and WWII history buffs will find *Pied Piper* a treat, though be on the look out for occasional smatterings of language throughout. The bulk of foul language comes from the mouths of two RAF men Howard and the children travel with briefly.

Tatiana says

Ah, this is one of my favorite books of all! Shute is a wonderful writer. His characters are quite ordinary and believable yet they are also extraordinary and wonderfully good. He gives me faith in humanity, in the world, and in the power of just calmly going about doing what needs to be done. Most people really are like this!

The narrative builds from a calm center and grows more and more compelling and urgent. His protagonist, a 70 year old British gentleman, goes fishing in the Jura in France in the spring early in WW2, and gets caught up in the overrun of France by the Germans. His trip home is delayed by the needs of a couple of English children his friends at the French hotel ask him to take back to England with him. He's so patient and good with the kids as things get more and more desperate on their trip and they're finally overtaken by the advancing German army. Along the way he has picked up more kids: Rose from the hotel, Pierre whose parents were killed on the road by a German bomb, Wilhelm who's being persecuted and stoned by French villagers because he speaks Dutch they've mistaken for German. People help them along the way and he's taken in by a French family he barely knows only to find out they are more connected than he realized. This really is the most heartbreakingly beautiful story!

Shute appeals to my geeky heart by getting every detail of the boats, planes, tanks, every physical detail, just exactly right. You can count 100% on whatever he says, in his wonderful aviation-engineer's way. This gives his tales a solidity, a truth about them, that is palpable. I love that so much about his stories. Whenever I read a book and they get some small fact wrong, some physical detail that I know isn't right, it just kills the whole thing for me and razes my carefully-suspended edifice of disbelief. Not only will Shute never do this to you, but you can learn a great deal that's interesting about sailing, flying, etc. from reading him.

I've read this book five or six times now and it gets better every time. I really hope Nevil Shute, who was

well-beloved a generation ago in Britain and Australia, I really hope he gets the attention now in the US and the rest of the world that he deserves. Just one of the best storytellers ever!

If you want to check him out, try these titles: this one, "Pied Piper", "Round the Bend", "Trustee from the Toolroom", "No Highway", and "The Legacy" which was sold in the US under the title "A Town Like Alice". If you've read "On the Beach", the nuclear-holocaust one, realize that it's very uncharacteristic of him in a number of ways, and these others will be different in a vastly-better sort of way.

Cathleen says

I really loved this story and the character of Mr. Howard, as the children called him. I loved his relationship he had with the children. As with most war stories, you see the bad, evil and ugly things that happen during this time. But in this story, you see something evolving that makes you feel good. I'm not sure if this was based on a true story or not but I wish it was. Mr. Howard you are a war Hero of a different kind!

Tim says

Recovering from the death of his Son, an RAF pilot during the early days of the War, elderly John Howard takes a Holiday in France close to the Swiss Border. The news of the War is sombre, the French Invasion by Germany is gathering pace, and is swooping southwards beyond Paris.

He is asked by friends to escort their two young children, back to England and embarks on a race against time to reach the atlantic coast and a passage to safety, before the advancing Nazi forces consume France. Along the journey he picks up other young Children that for a variety of reasons need to escape the War in France.

Nevil Shute's Novel written in 1941 is equally exciting and uplifting. He paints a wonderful picture of rural/peasant France as they await the arrival of the "sale bosche". The tension builds as they enter occupied France and enlist the help of various Partisans and past acquaintances of his and of his Son, including his Sons French lover Nicole.

John Howard is a typical "stiff upper lip" Englishmen, a perfect Gent in everyway, right down to his Harris Tweed attire and fly fishing pasttime. He is also portrayed by Shute as a vulnerable old man, but one with boundless humanity and a desire to do right by everyone he encounters.

The writing is somewhat dated, but has unlimited charm and has you confirng with the dictionary (and "babelfish") regularly to understand the meaning of words now somewhat lost in the English Language, as well as the occasional use of french phrases. Rather than annoy, the use of french embelishes its quality and seems to add to the overall feel and authenticity of the Novel.

As someone from the times might say, A rollicking, spiffing good yarn.

Sally Stanton says

This is the third book that I have read by Nevil Shute. I can see why he was such a popular, best selling author in his time. Every story is unique and the characters capture my interest right away. I've loved all three novels ("A Town Called Alice" and "Trustee from the Toolroom" are the other two)

This was a wonderful story that kept me involved til the end. I didn't read the summary of this novel beforehand which is rare and I'm so glad I didn't. It was great to have the story unfold with no anticipation on my part. I realized how the title is so fitting as the story progressed.
