

“A Myth Becomes Reality”: Kaspar Hauser
as Messianic Wild Child

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*for Charley B.
with thanks . . .*

From the biblical Moses set adrift on the Nile to *The Jungle Book*'s Mowgli to Jodie Foster's recent portrayal of Nell, wild children have occupied an important place in the mythic and literary imagination of the West. Historical cases of children growing up in isolation both partake in and reinforce the mythic power of this topos. The Egyptian king Psammetich, in the seventh century BC, ordered infants to be brought up in isolation to determine mankind's original language. More often, neglect and abandonment produced unplanned "isolation experiments" up to and including the recent case of Genie in Los Angeles.¹ The eighteenth century, deeply preoccupied with the origin and nature of humankind, debated wild children with particular fervor.² Embodying the demarcation between nature and civilization, they seemed to offer a chance to examine "Man in a State of Nature"—if only as specimens uncontaminated by society.

The subject of this article, Kaspar Hauser, was a nineteenth-century German foundling and was in many respects the climax of a long line of wild children in Europe. After presenting a brief historical sketch of Hauser's life in the public eye, I discuss in this article a key aspect of the literary Kaspar Hauser reception which, so far, has been neglected in Kaspar Hauser studies, namely, the tendency to transform the foundling into a mythic figure of redemption, a kind of latter-day savior.³

The Story of Kaspar Hauser, Foundling (1828-1833)

On May 26, 1828, around four o'clock in the afternoon, a 16-year-old boy appeared on a town square in Nuremberg in southern Germany. The cobblers Georg Leonhard Weickmann and Jacob Beck, who first encountered him, later reported that he could barely walk and cut a rather droll figure in his ill-fitting clothes. The boy carried a letter from his supposed foster father addressed to the captain of a local cavalry regiment. It claimed that the boy was a foundling kept inside the house for the last ten years who wanted to join the military.⁴

Asked about his comings and goings, the boy could only echo single words addressed to him or repeat time and time again this one sentence: "I wanna be such one as my father was," or occasionally, "I wanna be a horseman as my father was."⁵ This sentence evidently served him to express every conceivable emotion, pain as well as joy, bewilderment as well as curiosity. He did, however, when offered pen and paper, write what soon became his name: Kaspar Hauser. His questioning by the police proved rather unsuccessful, and Hauser was kept for further observation in the local jail for vagabonds and petty criminals. He remained there for seven weeks, where the jailer, Andreas Hiltel, taught Kaspar the rudiments of language and of behaviors expected in civil society. The jailer's children often played with the foundling.

The municipal physician, Dr. Preu, examined Kaspar Hauser on the second day of his appearance in the city, concluding that Hauser was "neither insane nor cretinous but has obviously been kept by force and in the most detrimental manner from all human and social upbringing" (Pies, *Wahrheit* 64).

On July 14, 1828, the case became a pan-European sensation when the Lord Mayor of Nuremberg, Binder, issued an announcement "concerning a young person brought up in illegal confinement, utterly neglected, but finally released" (Pies, *Wahrheit* 40). In it he mentioned Hauser's striking "innocence of nature" and mysterious prehistory that the boy had been held captive in a dungeon most of his life. Equally remarkable were Kaspar Hauser's vaccination marks. At the time, children were not generally vaccinated, only the highest echelons of society having regular access to vaccination. The Mayor speculated that Hauser might have been robbed not only of "his freedom" but also of "his riches, perhaps even the prerogatives of noble birth" (Pies, *Wahrheit* 46-47). Thus Kaspar

not only joined the ranks of the perennially intriguing wild children but was declared a prince violently removed from his true estate. The news spread like wildfire, and soon Kaspar Hauser was dubbed "The Child of Europe."

A few days prior to Binder's proclamation, the criminologist and legal philosopher Anselm von Feuerbach visited Hauser in his jail tower, "as a private person, out of human and scientific interest" (Hörisch 150).⁶ Feuerbach later became Hauser's key protector and the main proponent of the theory that Hauser was heir to the throne of the Grand Duchy of Baden. The heir apparent, according to this theory, had been robbed from the cradle and held captive as part of a *coup d'état* designed to bring a younger branch of the family to the throne.⁷ In any case, Kaspar Hauser became a ward of the City of Nuremberg. From July 1828 through January 1830, the quiescent school teacher Georg Friedrich Daumer took Kaspar into his house and educated him.⁸ Kaspar acquired language, began to read and write, and, for the first time, to dream. Kaspar eventually learned to sketch and to paint watercolors of surprising beauty; he wrote occasional poetry and began working on his autobiography.⁹

But a startling turn of events occurred on October 17, 1829. Prompted by rumors of this autobiography-in-progress an attempt was made on Kaspar Hauser's life. The foundling sustained a wound on his forehead from a cleaver-like instrument, but survived. In the aftermath of the attack, Daumer's declining health forced him to relinquish Kaspar's education, and the foundling was shuttled off to various other households in Nuremberg. One of them was that of the Baron von Tucher, a stern but caring man who later testified that Kaspar Hauser, while certainly prone to the occasional childish fib, had none of the makings of a fraud.¹⁰

This testimony became necessary because a new twist was added to the Hauser story with the 1830 publication of a rather clever polemic entitled *Caspar Hauser, Not Unlikely an Impostor*, a booklet authored by the retired Berlin police director Friedrich Karl Merker.¹¹ Merker was the only one among the major contemporary commentators on the case who never actually met the foundling. In his book he suggested that Hauser was simply a common crook seeking to gain an easy life underwritten by Nuremberg's coffers. A plethora of circumstantial evidence has been presented over the last 80 years supporting the theory that Hauser was indeed a prince of Baden, but the arguments for and against continue to this day.¹²

The next major development took place during May, 1831, when a British nobleman, Philip Henry Lord Stanhope, the fourth Earl of Stanhope, showed a sudden interest in the foundling. Although Stanhope was in town during October 1829, the month of the first attack, he had shown no interest in the boy at that time. Now he lavished costly gifts on Kaspar, wrote effusive letters to him, and managed to persuade the city to declare him Hauser's foster father. Soon thereafter, Kaspar Hauser was transferred to Ansbach, the regional capital, where Feuerbach was Chief Justice of the Bavarian Court of Appeals. He spent several weeks in almost daily conversations with Feuerbach and Stanhope. But Hauser's intended move to England with his "foster father" Stanhope never came to pass.¹³ Instead, he spent his last two years as a boarder in the house of the local school teacher Johann Georg Meyer, a small-minded man driven by the desire to unmask the "impostor" Kaspar Hauser. On January 4, 1832, Feuerbach wrote in his diary that he had discovered Hauser's "probable origin as a prince of the House of B[aden]" (Hörisch 17). During the same month, his famous account *Kaspar Hauser: An Incident of a Crime Against the Soul of Man* appeared.¹⁴ It remains, without any doubt, the most memorable contemporary account of the Hauser case. Eventually, Kaspar Hauser went to work as a scribe at the local courts, and his life became relatively "normal." But then, on December 14, 1833, Kaspar was attacked again and stabbed deeply in the chest. He died three days later, remaining the enigma of his times.

The Messianic Foundling: Kaspar Hauser in Literature

Even more intriguing than the real-life Gothic story is the continuing transformation of the historical Kaspar Hauser into a figure of legend and literature whose stature eventually reached mythic proportions. Throughout Hauser's short life and much of the nineteenth century, literary treatments focused primarily on the horrific tale of the motherless child, the prince from the dungeon. Around the turn of the century, he served as a stand-in for poets lamenting their alienation from society. In the 1960s, the question of language acquisition became fruitful for the literary Kaspar Hauser reception. A host of novels, dramas, novellas, poems, songs, and movies—recently even an opera and a ballet—have treated his story. Writers Paul Verlaine, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Klaus Mann, the Dada poet Hans Arp, the dramatist Peter Handke, and the filmmaker Werner

Herzog are among those who have reworked Hauser's story.¹⁵ In what follows, I would like to offer a reading of a number of twentieth-century texts that develop, in an exemplary manner, the motif of the foundling as a latter-day messiah.¹⁶ By studying this motif we may gain insight into our century's desire for redemption and some of the ethical ramifications of that wish.

A Myth Becomes Reality: Jakob Wassermann's Novelistic Passion

Redemptive motifs have been present in Kaspar Hauser's reception from early on.¹⁷ But the first full-fledged rewriting of the Hauser story as that of a redeemer occurred in Jakob Wassermann's 1908 novel *Caspar Hauser or The Inertia of the Heart*.¹⁸ Although it takes some liberties with historical fact, Wassermann's novel rests squarely on the conviction that Hauser was indeed an abducted prince of Baden. Despite this embedded historical and political argument, which drew the most vitriolic responses at the novel's publication, it is Wassermann's literary mythopoetics that ultimately shapes his writing.¹⁹

The world of the novel is a starkly dualistic world of good and evil, in which varying types of people are shown in their reaction to the singularly pure and innocent Caspar Hauser (see Kreutzer 23-25). The novel is structured around a set of pairs that align with the camps of Hauser's friends and foes: the valiant Feuerbach versus the devious Stanhope (who is a secret agent for the Baden court), the free-spirited teacher Daumer versus the narrow-minded teacher Quandt (the historical Meyer), and so on. But eventually even Hauser's best friends fail the test of his purity, and their guilt becomes apparent.

The kind teacher Daumer, for example, is shown to be a dreamer and enthusiast. He regards Caspar as living proof of the existence of the soul, which he would like to present to his philistine contemporaries. Nevertheless, Wassermann occasionally employs this figure for self-referential, if fleeting, characterizations of the novel's main thrust. In conversation with his mother, for instance, Daumer exclaims:

When you speak about him, you cannot exaggerate because language is too poor to express his being. It is an ancient legend, this appearance of a fairy-tale creature out of the dark nowhere; the pure voice of Nature suddenly speaks to us, a myth becomes reality. (34)

The novel's Daumer compares Caspar's soul to "a precious stone no greedy hand has touched." But he wants "to reach for it" and feels justified by "a sublime purpose" (34). Yet in the judgement of Wassermann's omnipresent and omniscient narrator, having any purpose at all already falls short of Caspar's pure being, and he chides Daumer for his "serious games" (45). Wassermann himself has fittingly characterized the key opposition of the novel as "Caspar Hauser against the world" (*Lebensdienst* 131). The failure of the world to respond appropriately to Caspar is all too clear, and the Manichean delineation of that failure is already part of Wassermann's mythopoetics. But the central myths of the novel are developed in conjunction with Hauser himself.

Early on in the novel, the narrator mentions that on the day of Caspar's appearance in the city "the torture he had to endure from so many people began" (24). The German word used here for "torture," "Peinigung," has distinctly biblical connotations. It suggests quite clearly that this is the beginning of a path of sorrow leading towards death, a Passion in the full sense of the word. Caspar is, in Daumer's words, a "mirror of untarnished humanity" (17) held up to the world, and it is this quintessential purity and innocence that later enable Caspar to become a redeemer. The foundling's original innocence is confirmed by the fact that he trembles at the sight of his first sunset just like "Adam [might] have trembled before his first night in paradise" (42). It is further confirmed by Caspar's relationship with the elements and nature surrounding him. A brief idyll embedded in the novel portrays a Biedermeier Garden of Eden:

There was a time when Daumer beheld a paradisaal scene: Caspar in the garden, sitting on the bench, a book in his hand; swallows are flying about him in zigzag loops, pigeons are pecking at his feet, a butterfly is resting on his shoulder, the pet cat is purring in the crook of his arm. In him mankind is free from sin, Daumer said to himself. (47)

Cut back to size for the Wilhelminian reader of 1908, the lamb and the lion lie peacefully side by side in this little Eden. And so, when a wild and vicious dog, "frothing at the mouth" (47), intrudes into the garden a short time later and Daumer and his guests prepare their defense, it is quite logical that Caspar alone remains calm, that the dog sidles up to him, wagging its tail, and licks Caspar's palm. Lo and behold, a new Adam before the Fall has miraculously entered this world.

The climax of Wassermann's mythopoetics is to be found in conjunction with Caspar's death. The foundation for a glorious death has been laid by Caspar's Adamic innocence. Later, when the chance presents itself to escape from an oppressive Ansbach, Caspar willingly chooses to bear his cross. When a friend asks him "So you want to take it upon yourself?" Caspar responds with a dark "Yes, everything" (322), because only a comprehensive and voluntary sacrifice qualifies the foundling to become a savior. On his death-bed, with some prompting from the pastor, Caspar follows Christ's lead in praying: "'Father, not my will . . . 'But thine be done'" (377). The imitation of Christ rounds out the Passion that had begun so much earlier. And on the day of his funeral, cosmological signs proclaim that Caspar's death was indeed that of a savior killed, but ultimately not overcome, by the powers of an uncaring world. Wassermann writes:

He was buried two days later. It was in the afternoon under a cloudless blue sky. The whole town was out and about. A famous contemporary, who calls Caspar Hauser the Child of Europe, reports that the sun and the moon were both in the sky at that hour, the one in the west and the other in the east. (378)

Despite the implicit arguments for the theory that Hauser was a prince of Baden, Wassermann's reader is ultimately left with a Caspar Hauser who becomes a martyr, a redeemer figure with a Rousseauistic tint patterned after the biblical typology of Adam and Christ.

Silvery it Sank, the Head of the Unborn: Georg Trakl's Sainly Song

Probably the most famous example of the literary Kaspar Hauser reception is a poem by the Austrian expressionist Georg Trakl, the *Kaspar Hauser Song* from 1913.

Kaspar Hauser Song *For Bessie Loos*

He truly loved the sun, as, crimson, it stepped down the
hill-top,
The paths of the forest, the singing blackbird
And the joy of the green.

Serious was his habitation in the tree's shade
 And pure his face.
 God spoke a gentle flame to his heart:
 O Man!

Silently, his footstep found the city at evening;
 The dark lament of his mouth:
 I want to be a rider.

But bush and beast followed him,
 House and twilight garden of pallid men
 And his murderer was looking for him.

Spring and summer and beautiful the autumn
 Of the righteous one, his soft step
 Past the dark rooms of dreamers.
 At night he stayed alone with his star;

Saw that snow fell through bare branches
 And in the dusking hallway the murderer's shadow.

Silvery it sank, the head of the unborn.²⁰

Georg Trakl's long-time interest in the Hauser story is manifest in the recurrent Kaspar Hauser motifs in his *œuvre* (see Klettenhammer). About three years before the poem appeared, Eberhard Buschbeck noted in a review that Trakl had authored "a puppet play 'Kaspar Hauser' " characterized by a "rapturous, spring-warm primitivity" (Klettenhammer 50); the puppet play never appeared in print and was apparently lost. In April 1912, in a much-quoted letter to Buschbeck, Trakl expressed intense anguish at being in Innsbruck, the "most brutal and mean city" on this "cursed globe," and gave voice to his alienation by comparing himself to the foundling: "What for all the pain. I will ultimately always remain a poor Kaspar Hauser" (Trakl, *Dichtungen* 1: 487). A year and a half later, Trakl writes the *Kaspar Hauser Song*.

Trakl was familiar with Hauser's story primarily through Wassermann's novel, and one can trace the connections between specific images in the poem and the novel (see Stix). To give but one example, Caspar's previously mentioned first sunset is described by Wassermann's narrator as follows: "It was a beautiful sight: the round crimson slice was rolling down as if to cut apart the earth at the edge

of the sky; an ocean of glowing scarlet was streaming after it, the heavens were aflame." The magnificent spectacle elicits Caspar's response "in a tone of darkly idolatrous veneration: 'Caspar loves the sun'" (42). Trakl echoes this scene, masterfully condensing and heightening it at the same time, in the opening verse of his poem: "He truly loved the sun, as, crimson, it stepped down the hill-top." Wassermann's mythopoetics too returns in Trakl's poem, but in a muted fashion.

The poem follows the way of the youth Kaspar Hauser from an initial paradisaical space where he is close to nature, not alienated from it, into the city, an alienating and hostile environment where he meets his death. Kaspar's original peaceful place in nature already harbors a sign of threat as the blackbird, in German folk belief a sign of death, indicates. But Kaspar loves "the joy of the green," a formulation which allows for both his enjoyment of the green as well as the joy accorded to the green (see Blass 225). Despite the momentary threat, harmony and a respectful relation to nature are possible at the outset of the poem.

In the second strophe, moments of individuation and separation from nature are signaled by Kaspar's seriousness, but his purity still prevails. It is this purity, and the innocence that stems from purity, that turns the flame of God's speech to gentleness. Addressed as "O Man!" Kaspar becomes a fully individuated person. The result of this individuation is his separation from nature and Kaspar's passive, inescapable "finding" of the city. As if to confirm his separation from nature, Kaspar demands, "I want to be a rider," that is, a person in charge of and ruling a part of nature (see Blass 228). Something decisive appears to have changed in Kaspar's relationship to nature, and his innocence and purity should by rights be spoiled through his desire to lord it over a fellow creature. But here Trakl stages a minor miracle, the key paradox of the poem: even after Kaspar fully separates from nature, his purity somehow remains intact, as a sign of which "bush and beast" follow him even into the city.

The poem makes it quite clear that Kaspar's purity is indeed preserved. Kaspar is called "the righteous one." He is a man different from all others, one who can only stay alone and ultimately has to be destroyed. But even in Kaspar's death, Trakl signals his purity and continuing innocence: "Silvery it sank down, the head of the unborn," reads the closing line of the poem. There is a definite "messianic glory" (Theisz 173) in this death, albeit a much calmer one than in Wassermann's novel. Having against all odds preserved his

purity by a miracle which the reader never gets to witness, Kaspar does not fall violently at the murderer's hand in a gush of red blood.²¹ Kaspar sinks calmly down in a silvery glow as if to assume a saintly repose. His death seals and preserves Kaspar's essential purity, and the poem reaches its defining moment in this glorification of the saintly foundling.

O Save Us: Emma Krell-Werth's Anthroposophist Kaspar Hauser Poetry

The most fully developed instance of mythopoetics in the literary Hauser reception is presented by Emma Krell-Werth in her 1976 Kaspar Hauser poems.²² These poems do not simply appropriate single mythic motifs but are based on a comprehensive mythology unique among the interpretations of the historical Kaspar Hauser. Anthroposophy, to which these poems speak, is a syncretistic *weltanschauung*—some would call it a modern religion—which was founded in 1912 by the Austrian social philosopher Rudolf Steiner as a splinter group breaking off from Madame Blavatzky's Theosophical Society. Anthroposophy combines mystical Eastern elements with components from esoteric Christianity and a strong aesthetic sensibility regarding the visible and invisible world.

Between 1905 and 1925, Rudolf Steiner made a number of remarks about Kaspar Hauser to the effect that Hauser was "a higher being who had a special mission on earth," a being charged with building a "new grail's castle for the new Fighters of the Spirit" in southern Germany (Tradowsky 274, 272). To make a very long story unduly short, some of Steiner's followers, most notably Karl Heyer and Peter Tradowsky, have expanded his remarks into an astonishingly complex and elaborate historical metaphysics (see Höyng). They hold that Hauser was the carrier of the "Christ Impulse," a kind of nineteenth-century messiah whose "sacrificial death" (Tradowsky 64, 235) was central to the history of Europe. If the powers of darkness had not prevented Kaspar Hauser from assuming his historical and spiritual role, then, for example, the German Third Reich might never have happened. In a classic example of *post hoc* reasoning, Tradowsky deduces from the date of Hauser's death in 1833 via numerical mysticism that with the beginning of the Nazi rule in 1933 it "became apparent for the first time in its true dimensions what has been caused through Kaspar Hauser's murder by those who commit the sin against the Spirit" (172). But, as Steiner makes clear, Hauser's

death is not just of historical importance; it is of truly cosmic significance: "If Kaspar Hauser had not lived and died as he did, contact between the earth and the spiritual world would have been completely interrupted" (Tradowsky 276-77). In light of this mythology, it makes perfect sense that the anthroposophist Camphill community in Ringwood, Great Britain, would dedicate its chapel to Kaspar Hauser.

Emma Krell-Werth's Hauser poems connect to this understanding of Kaspar Hauser's significance. She shows herself uninterested in historical questions in the traditional sense. According to her poem "Kaspar Hauser" (305), the foundling was "entombed" in his name to deflect attention away from the truly relevant, the spiritual questions. But Kaspar is "risen out of it / As the spirit of Pentecost, / To loosen the tongues of the sufferers." In parallel to Acts, Chapter 2, this risen Kaspar brings about the miracle of Pentecost, endowing the sufferers, the anthroposophist believers, with the gift of speaking in tongues. The sufferers are also called "truth seekers" as they are the only ones who take seriously the pointers contained in Kaspar's origin. These pointers are of universal importance: they

Sind Weisungen der Wahrheitssucher geworden,
Denen der Mensch seine Befreiung
Und die Welt ihren Fortschritt verdankt.

Have become directives for the truth seekers
To which/To whom Man owes his liberation
And the world its progress.

It is of interest here that the poem, which of course addresses spiritual progress, uses the relative pronoun "denen." This allows for a dual reading: one either owes one's liberation to the pointers themselves ("to which") or to the truth seekers who recognize and pass on these pointers to others ("to whom"). In this way, the anthroposophist faithful assume a central soteriological role.

But in Emma Krell-Werth's poems, Kaspar's importance for salvation history is not only universal, it transcends the centuries as well. In "Kaspar Hauser Question to the Heavenly Ones" (306), Krell-Werth posits Kaspar as a mediator between heaven and earth. She asks quite confidently whether his "mediating presence today" does not transform "our question into the tasks / Of future centuries."

One may even ask this spiritual mediator for help and intercession. The poem "Weathered Inscription" (310) turns into a prayer at the precise moment when Kaspar is directly addressed:

You darling of sun and moon,
Dethroned by dark powers,
O save us from erroneous earthly wages
Until innocence catches up with the murderer.

Clearly, the final victory over the murderer and the "dark powers" is envisioned here. In the context of this set of Kaspar Hauser poems, the writer seems to hope for salvation through Kaspar from "the legacy of original sin" (306). But in a more general sense, the text might also refer to the falsehood created by sin or, considering the "erroneous earthly wages," to St. Paul's injunction in his Epistle to the Romans (6.23) that "sin pays a wage, and the wage is death."

Emma Krell-Werth's final poem in the sequence is entitled "Heaven and Earth" (313), referring to a German children's skipping game. It depicts Kaspar Hauser yet more directly as a messianic figure. In continuous appropriation of biblical discourse, Kaspar is identified with Christ. Childlike questions and knowing authoritative answers, figuring in their masked quotations as answers straight from Holy Writ, take turns in this poem:

"Up, let us look for Kaspar!"
The one you are seeking is not here!—
"If we look for him in the dungeon?"
You will never find him!—
"Let us ask for his coming!"
Yes he loves you dearly!—

The poem implicitly marshals God's messenger from Luke 24.5-6, to speak on behalf of Kaspar: like the angel, the poem too gives testimony for one who has risen from the dead. It is only fitting to ask the risen Kaspar for his coming, like Christ at the end of time (see 1 Corinthians 16.22). For the interim period it serves as a consolation to know that "the one you are asking, rests amidst." Thus the anthroposophist salvation history claims for Kaspar Hauser what Jesus promised his disciples: "For where two or three meet together in my name, I am there among them" (Matthew 18.20).

In this manner, the speechless and stumbling foundling reaches his highest literary triumph as mediator between heaven and earth in

Emma Krell-Werth's anthroposophist Kaspar Hauser poems. It is a rather dubious triumph, however, for it comes at the price of utter disregard for the historical Kaspar Hauser's very real suffering.

A Cowardly Jesus: David Constantine's Epic Poem *Caspar Hauser*

It would be difficult to top the anthroposophist mythopoetics surrounding Kaspar Hauser. But even in the most recent literary reworking of the Hauser story, in the Oxford poet David Constantine's 1994 *Caspar Hauser: An Epic Poem in Nine Cantos*, one finds a marked interest in poetic mythmaking.²³

Constantine's *Caspar Hauser* opens with a lyrical narrative: "Whit Monday 1828 he stood / In Nuremberg in the biggest empty square / Bang in the middle of it where // They burned people and broke them on the wheel" (11). This narrative voice drives the poem relentlessly forward from Caspar's release and first exposure to "the brutality of plain daylight" (18) to the triste post mortem eventually performed on him by the college of surgeons. This voice also counters, frames, interrupts, and challenges the three primary speakers of the poem: Caspar's teacher, G. F. Daumer; Clara Biberbach, a local merchant's wife; and Lord Stanhope. Close to the time of their deaths—41, 19, and 22 years respectively after Hauser's final curtain call—Daumer, Clara, and Stanhope reminisce about Caspar and his meaning to their lives.

Daumer's voice is laden with a bitter nostalgia and sharp-edged regret. The dreamily remembered beginnings, when Caspar "was new" and "his compassion was infinite" (23), stand in stark relief to Daumer's later withdrawal and Hauser's violent death. The depiction of Clara's melancholic sadness is imbued with great tenderness and empathy. Married to an unloving workaholic, Clara had fantasized in vain of escaping with Caspar. In loving him, she "was shown / The way out of a life gone wrong and told / This is the only true / Way out but it is not for you" (48). Lord Stanhope emerges from the poem as a spiritually homeless man characterized by unceasing restlessness and deeply divided loyalties. He is touched by Caspar's dreams of a home and pines away for him "like a lovesick chambermaid" (56). But nonetheless, Stanhope appears to have had a hand in Caspar's death as well, committing him "into a tributary of the Acheron" (50).

Thus, Constantine touches lightly on the contemporary intrigues surrounding Kaspar Hauser. But his conception of the figure

is much more concerned with the foundling's innocence and the mythic potential of the story. After the first attack, when Hauser's separation from his teacher becomes imminent, he clings to Daumer "as a cowardly Jesus / Might have to a fatherly Judas" (37). As we have seen in the previous three examples, such employment of the Hauser story as Passion is not uncommon in the literature. But the motif becomes uniquely and unmistakably Constantine's when Lord Stanhope develops messianic aspirations for his foster child. Fancying himself a latter-day John the Baptist, Stanhope, who plans to adopt the boy, has great dreams "for the regeneration of Man / From a source in England" (58) mediated by Caspar's Christ-like innocence. The great renewal never comes to pass but, like Christ, Caspar ends up crucified since "Anselm Feuerbach / Was nailing him with facts to a family tree" (56). And, like Christ, his person, bodily and imaginary, is dispersed after his death as memorabilia and relics, and in the stories told about him: "The crumbs still lodging here and there would make / More bread of life than Caspar ever broke" (88).

Yet despite the eucharistic imagery, Constantine does not project any successful redemption. Instead, his poem registers most acutely the affront that every true innocent represents to an indifferent world. In a final turn that marks Constantine as a poet of deep ethical concerns and brings to the literary Kaspar Hauser tradition a heightened awareness of the ethical ambiguities inherent in the Hauser material, the poem addresses the relevance of its nineteenth-century protagonist for our time. In the poem's most haunting passages, the reader is brought face to face with the Kaspar Hausers of today: the downtrodden and derelict, the mentally ill forced from insane asylums by budget cuts, hungry girls selling their bodies out of desperate need. They are an indictment of a society that considers such lives expendable. In his eighth Canto, the poet tells us with muted rage:

The wars

Blow children up. Some fall our way.
They know a single sentence. They can say
My father is dead in somewhere in the news,

My mother raped and dead. (77)

Or rather, Constantine's poem reminds us, since we all have seen the pictures on CNN. And still these children are met with averted eyes. What becomes utterly clear is "the need, the helplessness, / The infinite requirement of redress" (81). But the dilemma is left unresolved. Instead of offering facile solutions, the poem articulates the fear that encounters with outcasts—and wild children—often engender. "He would be still there if I ever went that way. / I don't. He frightens me. // Best never look" (82). Nowhere more than here will readers need to recognize themselves and the shaky ethical ground they tread in their fascination with "wild children" of any kind.

Conclusion

In the spiritual homelessness of the twentieth century, the desire for redemption is great. The poets and writers I have discussed articulate this desire through the figure of the wild child Kaspar Hauser and in the process have transformed the historical person into a mythical personage. Both Jakob Wassermann and Georg Trakl glorify the foundling as a messianic figure, if a strictly literary one. Emma Krell-Werth, on the other hand, essentializes these literary-mythopoetic figurations and proclaims Kaspar Hauser a true nineteenth-century messiah. But elevating the speechless foundling to such dizzying heights is only possible by discounting the suffering of the historical person behind the myth. David Constantine, by contrast, adamantly refuses to gloss over the suffering of any of the "wild children." At the same time, he remains deeply intrigued by the mythical potential of the story and acknowledges the strength of the desire for redemption.

The movie *Nell*, which I mentioned briefly at the outset of this article, expresses the same desire: a desire for a truer, more authentic life that seems forever beyond our reach, for a kind of redemption that the feral innocents of this world are supposed to procure. Nell too, at the end of the film, is proclaimed just such a redeemer in an exchange between the policeman's wife and Paula, the now happily married linguist: "'Don't you know? You were the first.' 'The first what?' 'To need her!'" But unlike the movie *Nell*, Constantine's poem does not let us get away with projecting our desire for redemption onto Kaspar Hauser or any other innocent at hand. It insists on the very palpable suffering of the foundling and thus challenges the reader to respond with empathy and creativity to "the need" and "the helplessness" (81) of Kaspar Hauser's present-

day cousins. In Constantine's *Kaspar Hauser*, in its foregrounding of the ethical ambiguousness and the challenges inherent in the Hauser material, the literary Kaspar Hauser reception reaches a new level of maturity in responding to the foundling's story. For the first time, the myth that Kaspar Hauser has become in the course of the literary rewriting of his story is imbued with a deep and unsettling sense of ethical responsibility.²⁴

Notes

1. Severely abused and neglected for 13 years by her overly "protective" father, Genie came into the custody of the authorities after leading her nearly blind mother into a welfare office in November 1970. Russ Rymer chronicles the case, including the linguistic controversies involved, with great clarity.

2. Roger Shattuck offers a good account of Victor de Aveyron, the most prominent case at the close of the Enlightenment. Berthold Weckmann traces the eighteenth-century debates and their import on Kaspar Hauser's reception in an excellent chapter entitled "Natur-Geschichten" (23-73). Weckmann also offers a comprehensive and up-to-date bibliography (511-60); some shortcomings of his book are discussed in my review in *Colloquia Germanica*.

3. Alan F. Bance alludes to the subject (209); Ursula Sampath (79-93) offers more extensive albeit cursory commentary.

4. The primary historical sources are the contemporary accounts by Daumer and Feuerbach. Excerpts from Daumer and a full reprint of Feuerbach are readily available in Hörisch. An English translation of selections from Daumer is available in his *Kaspar Hauser Speaks For Himself*; a new translation of Feuerbach's account is included in Jeffrey M. Masson's book *Lost Prince* (73-158). The most sustained effort to establish the historical facts of the case is to be found in the work of Hermann Pies who, over the course of his life, published eight books devoted to the subject and reissued many of the original sources. The *summa* of Pies's research is presented in the *Dokumentation* from 1966. Jeffrey Masson, doing research for his Feuerbach translation in a private German archive, has recently discovered Daumer's original notes concerning Kaspar Hauser from 1828-1830, which were the basis for Feuerbach's account. The publication of these early notes by such an important witness who was very close to the case right from the start 166 years after they were penned is nothing short of sensational; see Daumer and Feuerbach, *Kaspar Hauser*.

5. This famous initial sentence becomes a recurrent leitmotif in many literary reworkings of the Hauser story; see for example Handke's play or the opening of R. M. Rilke's poem "Der Knabe" (30). All translations in this essay are my own unless otherwise indicated.

6. P. J. A. von Feuerbach (1775-1832), the father of the philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach, counts among his many achievements the abolition of torture as a means of criminal investigation in Bavaria.

7. A readable and comprehensive account based on this theory is presented by Leonhardt; the work of Pies also supports this interpretation of the Hauser case. By contrast, the argumentation of the latest addition to the literature, Mehle's *Der Kriminalfall Kaspar Hauser*, is inconclusive and the writing remarkably shoddy.

8. G. F. Daumer (1800-1875) was a very colorful character who studied with Hegel, became an orientalist by training, translated the Persian poet Hafis, and wrote his own poems, some of which Brahms set to music. Daumer was keenly interested in homeopathy, and the experiments he conducted on Hauser are documented in his *Mittheilungen* from 1832. Daumer's attempt at establishing a new religion failed, but the "Tierschutzverein" he founded in 1840, one of the first German Humane Societies, flourished instead. Nowadays he is mostly remembered for his involvement with Kaspar Hauser, whom he championed in three successively more voluminous books. See Kluncker.

9. Hauser's artwork is reprinted in Mayer/Tradowsky; his writings may be consulted in Pies, *Kaspar Hauser* (419-48). The earliest extant version of Hauser's autobiography is available in English in Masson, *Lost Prince* (187-95).

10. Tucher's testimony is solicited by the courts after Hauser's assassination in December 1833, but its characterizations bear upon the earlier debates about Hauser's integrity that begin with Merker's polemic. See Tucher in Hörisch (61-68).

11. Merker, who had been denied access to the Nuremberg court transcripts of the Hauser case, clearly had an axe to grind. His polemics are excerpted in Hörisch (214-21). An analysis of Merker's strategies of denunciation can be found in Pies, *Wahrheit* (141-90).

12. On the one hand, Johannes Mayer in particular has expanded the arguments developed by Pies and other researchers early in the century, primarily Fritz Klee and Adolf Bartning. On the other hand, Merker's polemic created an anti-Hauserian tradition, whose most vociferous proponents were Julius Meyer, Otto Mittelstädt, and Antonius van der Linde; the contemporary heirs to this tradition are the neurologist Günter Hesse and Walter Schreibmüller, a retired judge. The opposition between these groups

is so strong that, according to one eye-witness, during the biannual "Kaspar Hauser Week" held in the city of Ansbach in November 1992, a dispute between Johannes Mayer, an acknowledged proponent of the "prince theory," and Walter Schreibmüller, an equally outspoken proponent of the "impostor theory," was not only the best-attended event of the week, but the latter, confronted with a lecture by Ulrike Leonhardt, who also strongly supports the "prince theory," is said to have stooped to raving invective quite rapidly. Bibliographical details regarding the mentioned authors can be found in Weckmann.

13. Johannes Mayer, in *Philipp Henry Lord Stanhope*, while unable to provide final proof, builds a strong case for the contention that Stanhope worked as an agent of the Baden court in the Kaspar Hauser affair.

14. Feuerbach's key concept of a "crime against the soul" and its legal-historical antecedents are extensively discussed by Küper.

15. My anthology *Der Findling* offers a representative selection of more than 90 examples from the literary Kaspar Hauser reception. Further texts are documented by Weckmann and in my recent collection of articles *Der imaginierte Findling*.

16. There also exist, to be sure, literary reworkings of the Hauser story which are decidedly critical of mythopoetic appropriations or relativize mythic motifs with ironizing wordplay or a strong historicizing focus. See for example Arp, Vesper, and Lange-Müller in my book *Der Findling* (170-73, 279-85, 337-43), or the recent novel *Feuerblumen* by Thiemt and Schreeb.

17. An instructive early example is the wax relief of Hauser which depicts the foundling as a saint on a votive tablet, a small devotional image customarily left behind in pilgrimage churches; the image is reproduced in Mayer (661; see also 652).

18. Quotes from Wassermann's novel are given in my translation. The Penguin edition by Michael Hulse has been gratefully consulted. Page numbers in the body of this article refer to the German text.

19. In a memoir of his "Personal Experiences with the Caspar Hauser Novel," Wassermann summarizes the reactions to its publication, saying that there "was also no lack of anonymous letters, literary and personal vituperation, of anti-Semitic derision, not even of worrisome threats" (*Lebensdienst* 127). The Tieck scholar Marianne Thalmann introduces anti-semitic sentiments into her argument when she indicts Wassermann's citational techniques "for reasons of cleanliness in the German life of the mind" (218), casting the Jewish author Wassermann as defiling an ostensibly pure German "Geistesleben." In the same memoir, Wassermann, who grew up near Nuremberg, reports about his early acquaintance with Hauser's

story and talks about visiting his jail tower as a child. Wassermann's conversations with Franconian villagers point to the author's predisposition towards a mythopoetic treatment of the foundling: "[I]f you ask an old farmer in the village," writes Wassermann, "or an old master craftsman in town about Caspar Hauser, an indefinable beaming spreads over his face and you get the impression you were speaking of a holy person" (*Lebensdienst* 128-29).

20. The German original of the poem can be found in Trakl, *Dichtungen* 1: 95; for an alternative English version see Trakl, *Selected Poems* 59.

21. As extant correspondence indicates, Trakl had considered "red" instead of "silvery" but eventually chose the latter; see Trakl, *Dichtungen* 2: 163.

22. Other examples of anthroposophist literary appropriations of Kaspar Hauser are Lampe, Pietzner, and König; on anthroposophist drama and its (non)reception in German studies see Höyng. Anthroposophist readings of the Hauser case in English are provided by Pietzner, Fevosa and Max Stibbe, as well as Adam Bittleston and Baruch Luke Urieli in Daumer, *Kaspar Hauser Speaks for Himself* (13-24, 51-66); Urieli's contribution bears the telling title "Man's Approach to the Spirit Today and the Sacrifice of Kaspar Hauser."

23. Constantine's epic poem is not the only work in the English language to rewrite the Hauser story, but it is by far the most sustained and intriguing reworking in English. In my anthology *Der Findling* I was able to present information about Peale's New York Museum, where P. T. Barnum presented a certain "Casper Hauser, Half Man Half Monkey" ten years after the real Hauser's death; a TV production of *The Mystery of Caspar Hauser* (1956) starring Michael Landon; poems by Eibel, Southwick, Fulton, and Sewell; a song by Suzanne Vega; and an earlier poem by Constantine (74-75, 250, 287-88, 307, 312, 323, 335-36, 350). One might add Anaïs Nin's *Children of the Albatross* (98-99), where a key scene makes use of a more romantic aspect of the Hauser story, his infatuation with a Viennese relative of Mayor Binder.

24. An earlier, German version of this essay—which includes sections on Klaus Mann's *Kaspar-Hauser-Legends* (1925) and Peter Handke's *Kaspar* (1967) but does not discuss Constantine's poem—appeared in my edited volume *Der imaginierte Findling* (77-102).

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