
Articles

Neurocosmopolitan Melville

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A Boon More Blessed Than Knowledge

Much has been made of the plethora of disabled characters in *The Confidence-Man*, Melville's novel of distrust. In a special issue of *Leviathan* devoted to the subject of disability, Ellen Samuels teases out the relationship between deception and charity in an increasingly cosmopolitan America. The Christian injunction to be charitable, already under assault by the capitalist imperative to make money at the expense of others, found itself confronting a dizzying array of strangers whose differences generated anxiety. As Deborah Stone explains, "Sudden increases in geographic and social mobility . . . undermined people's sense that they could understand one another" (as qtd in Samuels 62). An especially noticeable form of difference, disability rendered a person even stranger and more suspicious than he would otherwise have been. The figure of the "disability con," thus emerged, according to Samuels, as a tense expression of an unmanageable fear. Melville partly undermines this figure through a "persistent questioning of the relation of reality to the body, language, and identity" (82).

I want to begin by linking disability more directly to cosmopolitanism—which was defined in Melville's day as being "nowhere a stranger" (Bryant 116)—and to make crucial distinctions in the category of disability itself. *The Confidence-Man* revels in disabilities that alienate characters not only from a bodily norm but also from typical cognition and communication. Whether depicting a deaf mute, a moon calf (which the *OED* defines as a monster, a dolt, or a deformed fetus), or a man whose memory has been wiped clean by a brain fever, Melville explores the situation of one who is ostensibly cut off, if only partially, from culture. These characters might seem incidental were it not for the novel's allusions to Caspar Hauser, a young man who appeared mysteriously on the streets of Nuremberg in 1828, having been kept for most of his life in an underground room, and to Peter the Wild Boy, who was discovered in the woods near Hamelin, Germany in 1725.¹ Shoring up this pattern, Melville even presents a farmer, "fresh-hearted as at fifteen; to whom seclusion gives a boon more blessed than knowledge, and at last sends [him] to heaven untainted by

the world, because ignorant of it" (NN CM 241). The farmer is said to be like a "countryman putting up at a London inn, and never stirring out of it as sight-seer, leave[s] London at last without once being lost in its fog, or soiled by its mud" (NN CM 241).

For all of Melville's commitment to cosmopolitanism—as symbolized by the steamboat *Fidele* and its "piebald parliament," its "Anacharsis Cloots Congress . . . of that multiform pilgrim species, man" (NN CM 9), and, of course, by the Mississippi itself, which is described as "uniting the streams of the most distant and opposite zones, pour[ing] them along, helter-skelter, in one cosmopolitan and confident tide"—*The Confidence-Man* engages, at times, in a counter-fantasy of extreme anti-cosmopolitanism. And it seems to associate cognitive difference with both interpretive suspicion and seclusion's boon. After all, what could be more provincial, more unreachably local, than a boy kept in the dark or one raised by animals in a forest? If truly "uniting" the strangers of the world in "one cosmopolitan and confident tide" is impossible, then the only antidote to anxious discord and proliferating chicanery lies, the novel ironically suggests, in what the merchant terms "oblivion, entire and incurable" (20), an "erased tablet," a "blank."

And yet, Melville conspicuously includes the cognitively different in his "pilgrim species, man." The deaf mute appears, after all, on the boat; despite what others make of him, he is making his way in the world. Recently, I advanced the notion of "neurocosmopolitanism" to discuss the work of non-speaking autistic Tito Mukhopadhyay, who like Caspar Hauser was presumed to be retarded but who learned to read and to write and has now authored three well-received books. By neurocosmopolitanism, I mean an attitude toward cognitive difference much like that of the conventional cosmopolite toward cultural difference. The concept envisions the dynamic interaction of neuro-typicals and autistics, each apprenticing themselves to the other's way of life and system of sensory processing. Oliver Sacks gets at part of my meaning—even as he pathologizes his research "natives"—when he refers to himself as a "neuroanthropologist" (Sacks xx) or speaks of "making house-calls at the far borders of human experience."

The "strong drink of travel," as Melville puts it in *White-Jacket* (228), left most nineteenth-century writers inscribing a civilized/uncivilized binary and strenuously privileging the former. Not so with Melville, who often extolled the virtues of the so-called "savage" when compared with the "vices, cruelties, and enormities of every kind that spring up in the tainted atmosphere of a feverish civilization" ("Must Christianizing the Heathen," NCE *The Confidence-Man* 369). Just because the culture at large began to view disability, particularly cognitive disability, as occasioning suspicion or disdain, does not

mean that Melville did—or that he did so consistently. At times, he seems quite open to what Rod Michalko calls "the difference that disability makes." Think of *Mardi's* Yoky, King of the Isle of Cripples, for example, who communicates rapidly and beautifully with his fingers. The encounter between hearing sailors and a deaf king could well be described as neurocosmopolitan.

Melville's reference to Caspar Hauser thus serves a crucial purpose: it signals an attempt to undermine dichotomous representations of the Other by strangely blending them. Hauser, after all, was a liminal figure: neither fully savage nor fully civilized, neither completely cut off from nor completely immersed in culture. Before his mysterious death some six years after appearing on the streets of Nuremberg, he became in part acculturated. He became, that is, a neurocosmopolite, not unlike the orphan survivors of Nicolae Ceaușescu's rule whose severe deprivation had led to sensory and emotional disturbances that were repeatedly diagnosed as autism and yet who, after being adopted by Western families, went on to live fairly typical lives. Indeed, one psychiatrist believes that Hauser was autistic (Simon).² In addition to learning how to speak and to read, Hauser drafted a short autobiography that attempts to narrate his baffling origin and imprisonment, to say nothing of the glories and miseries of his new existence above ground. He revised the autobiography as he became more culturally aware and more fluent with language. This manuscript allows us to see in *The Confidence-Man* what might be called the shock of the social, including the shock of the unreliably and even duplicitously social.

Hauser functions as a figure for three things simultaneously: interpretive suspicion with respect to disability, the fantasy of retreat from the social (or what I have called "seclusion's boon"), and the possibility of a vigorous and confident neurocosmopolitanism. At times, the third is undoubtedly linked in Melville's work, as Hauser himself was linked, to tragedy. That Melville later alludes to Hauser in his description of Billy Budd is telling. The handsome sailor's stutter and cognitive proclivities mark him as disabled (Savarese, "Organic Hesitancy"); he cannot survive in a world that is so imperceptibly conniving. An earlier reference to Hauser in *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities* further complicates Melville's tropological work, leaving a trace of this complication in *The Confidence-Man*. In *Pierre*, Hauser is a figure both for Adamic man, who awakens to the story of himself, and for the young writer, who awakens to the "multiform" world. A writer, especially a traveling one, Melville seems to be saying, cannot help being cosmopolitan, however much he might sometimes fantasize about never leaving his farm or inn. A writer cannot help being neurocosmopolitan in so far as he, like Hauser, was once, if only as an infant, sensorially and ontologically overwhelmed. Yet a writer can also choose to be neurocosmopolitan by engaging with the "multiform" Other in a neurodiverse way.

Assaulted on All Sides by a Vast Multiplicity of Impressions

What precisely did Melville know of Hauser in the mid-1850s when he was writing *The Confidence-Man*? The note on Hauser in the second edition of the Norton critical edition of *The Confidence-Man* mentions neither Hauser's autobiography nor the very public controversy about his lineage (NCE CM 13): that he was thought by many to be the heir to the throne of Baden, which was part of the German confederation from 1806 to 1918, and by others to be a fraud. Chapter two of *The Confidence-Man*, "Showing that many men have many minds," clearly exploits the popular fascination with this inexplicable figure's true identity. As the deaf mute "tranquilly sle[eps]" (NN CM 8), the crowd engages in a kind of caroming hermeneutics:

"Odd fish!"
 "Poor fellow!"
 "Who can he be?"
 "Caspar Hauser." . . .
 "Uncommon countenance." . . .
 "Singular innocence."
 "Means something." . . .
 "Trying to enlist interest."
 "Beware of him." . . .
 "Escaped convict, worn out with dodging." (NN CM 7)

Hauser himself elicited such responses; by the mid-1850s he had come to represent the paradigmatic stranger in public—one unwilling or unable to explain himself. That he was murdered and that the murder went unsolved only intensified his association with mystery and peril.

As Paul MacKenzie makes clear in "Caspar Hauser in America: The Innocent Abroad," Americans were fascinated by this "Child of Europe," as he was commonly called. Newspapers in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia devoted much attention to him soon after his discovery. In 1832 Allen and Ticknor published a translation of Paul Johann Anselm Ritter von Feuerbach's *Caspar Hauser: an account of an individual, kept in a dungeon, separated from all communication with the world, from early childhood to about the age of seventeen: drawn up from legal documents*—Feuerbach was the judge who had jurisdiction over Hauser's case. In 1833, just nine months before Hauser died, *Parley's Magazine* wrote of the young man's astonishment at the splendor of the world, urging readers to learn from his belated encounter with nature and "not to be less thankful for the beautiful sights around, because you see them everyday" ("Caspar Hauser" 30). The article, like many that would follow, crafted the image of a man-child who touchingly struggles to understand what his senses present to him:

He thought that a tree showed itself alive, by moving its leaves and branches. He expressed his indignation against a boy, who struck a tree with a small stick, for giving the tree so much pain. . . . Once when the snow had fallen, and covered the ground, he expressed great joy that the streets, the roofs of the houses, and the trees had been so well painted. He went down into the yard, to fetch some of the white paint, as he called it, but he soon came back crying, "that the white paint had bit his hand." (29)

In 1843 P. T. Barnum included what he claimed was Hauser in Peale's Museum and Picture Gallery, which he had just purchased. "Billed in the *New York Herald*," MacKenzie reports, "as 'Half man Half Monkey, possessed of the power of speech, yet walks upon all fours' . . . Kaspar appeared in daily exhibits along with the famous midget General Tom Thumb, a mermaid, and other curiosities including a minstrel show" (MacKenzie 438).³ Four years later, an article in *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature, Science and Art* focused on royal intrigue and carried the title "Caspar Hauser: The Hereditary Prince of Baden" (440). By 1850 *Robert Merry's Museum* concluded that Hauser was an "imposter": "that the story of his confinement was a fabrication; that his pretended ignorance, his stupidity, his childishness, were but skillful acting to enforce his story" ("Caspar Hauser" 104). Before coming to this conclusion, however, the article rehearsed key details of the now widely disseminated narrative emphasizing Hauser's sensory bafflement, which is to say his pristine engagement with the world:

When he first saw a lighted candle, he appeared greatly delighted, and unsuspectingly put his fingers into the blaze. When a mirror was shown him, he looked behind, to find the image it reflected. Like a child, he greedily reached for every glittering object. (103)

By 1861, five years after Melville had completed *The Confidence-Man*, the tide had turned once again: an article titled "Who Was Caspar Hauser?" insisted that Hauser was indeed the Prince of Baden. Published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, it explored "Hauser's mental, physical and social development (including the acuteness of his senses) and the events leading to his death" (MacKenzie 441). Its title recalls the words of the mystic to the Cosmopolitan in *The Confidence-Man*: "What are you? What am I? Nobody knows who anybody is. The data which life furnishes, towards forming a true estimate of any being, are as insufficient to that end as in geometry one side given would be to determine the triangle" (NN CM 193). In Melville's fiction, the problem of the conniving stranger becomes a larger problem of ontology and epistemology.

About Hauser's senses, the *Atlantic* article relates,

All his senses were thus at first wonderfully keen. It was so with his hearing and smell. The latter was the source of most of his sufferings; for, being so exceedingly sensitive, even the most scentless things made him sick. He liked but one smell, that of bread, which had been his only food for seventeen years. (65)

Eventually, Hauser lost his exquisite sensitivity, prompting the article's author to note, "It is remarkable that in the same proportion as he advanced in knowledge and acquaintance with civilized life, the intensity of all his faculties diminished." According to nearly every account, Hauser initially had surprising sensorial powers—for example, he could see perfectly well in the dark and could "read the name on a door-plate at the distance of one hundred and eighty paces" (65)—but these powers waned as he became acculturated. Here we apprehend another aspect of Melville's interest in Hauser and one of his own favorite themes: the ambiguous virtue of civilization.

The acuteness of Hauser's senses stands in hyperbolically for the shock of what Melville calls in *Billy Budd* "the good rustic out of his latitude" (Chicago BB 53) or, more simply, the country person in the city. On the steamer *Fidèle*, we encounter the assimilated, yet nevertheless anxious, aftermath of this shock, as the passengers attempt to read the confusing social spectacle in front of them:

As among Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims, or those oriental ones crossing the Red Sea towards Mecca in the festival month, there was no lack of variety. Natives of all sorts, and foreigners; men of business and men of pleasure; parlor men and backwoodsmen; farm-hunters and fame-hunters; heir-ess-hunters, gold-hunters, buffalo-hunters, bee-hunters, happiness-hunters, truth-hunters, and still keener hunters after all these hunters. Fine ladies in slippers, and moccasined squaws; Northern speculators and Eastern philosophers; English, Irish, German, Scotch, Danes; Santa Fé traders in striped blankets, and Broadway bucks in cravats of cloth of gold; fine-looking Kentucky boatmen, and Japanese-looking Mississippi cotton-planters; Quakers in full drab, and United States soldiers in full regimentals; slaves, black, mulatto, quadroon; modish young Spanish Creoles, and old-fashioned French Jews; Mormons and Papists; Dives and Lazarus; jesters and mourners, teetotalers, and convivialists, deacons and blacklegs; hard-shell Baptists and clay-eaters; grinning negroes, and Sioux chiefs solemn as high-priests. In short . . . all kinds of that multiform pilgrim species, man. (NN CM 9)

Imagine confronting such "strangers more strange" (NN CM 8) for the first time. As Feuerbach, describes Hauser's plight: "He just slept on in a stupor, until the day he suddenly awoke in terror and pain, to the wild clamor of a colorful world. Now in a daze, he does not know what happened to him" (as qtd in Masson 97). Significantly, Feuerbach, like Georg Friedrich Daumer, the

man with whom Kaspar lived and who taught the "Child of Europe" how to read and write, "worried about 'spoiling' the natural purity of the infant in him" (224).

An account by Hauser's physician lends itself even more directly to the figure of a threatening or sinister cosmopolitanism, and it hints at the young man's deep ambivalence about having been drawn into language and society:

Kaspar Hauser has been until now buried alive in a dungeon, isolated from the whole world, and left entirely to himself. Suddenly he was thrown into the world among people and found himself assaulted on all sides by a vast multiplicity of impressions which affected him not singly but all at once, impressions of the most diverse kind, fresh air, lights, objects that surrounded him, all of which were new to him. Then the growing sense of an inner self, his aroused hunger for learning and for knowledge, his altered way of life, all of these impressions must necessarily have violently shaken him. (as qtd in Masson 117)

In his book about Hauser, Feuerbach, the jurist, repeatedly notes, on the one hand, the young man's "thirst for knowledge" (109) and the "steadfast tenacity he showed for things he had made up his mind to learn or comprehend," which he describes as "beyond all imagining and deeply moving to watch," and, on the other, his extraordinary melancholy. Hauser, Feuerbach tells us, mastered "in days what others took months or even years to learn" (44), and yet "every moment reminds Kaspar of his loneliness amid the bustle of a world that overwhelms him; of his powerlessness, weakness, and helplessness against the power of the circumstances that rule his fate, especially his personal dependence on people's goodwill or the lack of it" (146).

Amending Melville's line about that "fresh-hearted farmer," we might say of Hauser that he put up in a Nuremberg hole, and, never stirring out of it as sight-seer or sound-hearer or smell-sniffer, was, when he emerged, very much lost in the city's sensory fog and very much soiled by its social mud. Although it was unimaginably harsh, Hauser partly preferred his dungeon existence to his new life: "I never had so many headaches, and nobody tormented me the way they do now in the world," he said (as qtd in Masson 110). The young man resented having to learn the import of his captivity and status as a foundling: "Why did that bad man keep me locked up all the time and never show me any of these beautiful things" (123), he asked. "Why . . . don't I have a mother, a brother and a sister"? he persisted. "It would be so beautiful."

Yet, the very words Hauser deploys to lament his predicament are the sign of damage already done—damage, in fact, he can never undo. Feuerbach captures the strange inexorability of acculturation when he exclaims, "And now this half-man is even writing his autobiography! Whoever writes down his life,

must have something to say about it" (as qtd in Masson 136). From a stumbling language user with whom "conjunctions, particles, and auxiliary verbs were lacking in almost everything he said" (107) to a beginning writer whose autobiography commences, "I will write the story of Kaspar Hauser myself! I will tell how I lived in a prison, and describe what it looked like, and everything that was there" (189) to a more sophisticated writer whose revision reflects a ballooning sociality, "What adult could fail to feel deeply touched at my guiltless imprisonment during my younger years, where I spent the most tender years of my life. While other young people enjoyed living enchanted golden dreams and pleasures, I had not been awakened to life" (188)—with each step, the "Child of Europe" moved ever more deeply into sociality. For Melville, who makes figurative use of Hauser, the problem of cosmopolitanism is inextricably tied to the problem of language: both generate tremendous anxiety.

But a Gallipot for You Experimenters

While we cannot be certain of what Melville knew of Hauser in the early 1850s, by the time of *Billy Budd* he knew a great deal, including, it seems, something of his sensory predicament. Like Hauser, Billy has little self-consciousness, does not understand metaphor or humor, seems child-like, and finds religion unnecessary if not perplexing. So uncanny is the parallel between these two that Billy's indifference to the chaplain and surgeon at the end of the novella finds a stunning echo in Hauser's much more dramatic "loathing," in Feuerbach's phrase, "for two kinds of people: doctors and clergymen" (as qtd in Masson 134). "The former because of the disgusting medicines they prescribed," Feuerbach explains, "in order to make people sick, the latter because they frightened and confused him with incomprehensible blah, blah, blah, as he put it."

After telling us at the beginning that Billy was a foundling with no knowledge of his father, Melville's narrator says, as though preparing additionally for the Hauser simile to follow, "Noble descent was as evident in him as in a blood horse" (Chicago BB 52). Remarking that Billy has "an untampered-with flavor like that of berries, while the man thoroughly civilized . . . has to the same moral palate a questionable smack as of a compounded wine" (Chicago BB 53), he then concludes,

To any stray inheritor of these primitive qualities found, like Caspar Hauser, wandering dazed in any Christian capital of our time, the good-natured poet's famous invocation, near two thousand years ago, of the good rustic out of his latitude in the Rome of Caesars, still appropriately holds:

Honest and poor, faithful in word and thought,
What hath thee, Fabian, to the city brought? (Chicago BB 53)

"Daze," you will recall, was also Feuerbach's word. That the plot of *Billy Budd* turns on the Handsome Sailor's stuttering implicates language in this neurocosmopolite's demise. As I demonstrate elsewhere, nineteenth-century experts believed stuttering to be a strictly western phenomenon: "Most travelers," says James Hunt, "who have long resided among uncultivated nations, maintain they never met with any savages laboring under an impediment of speech" (as qtd in "Organic Hesitancy" 311). As a liminal figure himself, "Billy must be civilized enough to fall prey to its clutches yet not so civilized as to be alienated from the natural world." In the end, an antidote to complete acculturation proves tragically untenable.

I am inclined to believe that Melville possessed this more detailed understanding of Hauser when he wrote *The Confidence-Man*.⁴ If an inability to use language deceptively manifests itself as a failure of fluency in *Billy Budd*, then the earlier novel turns this dynamic on its head: we encounter almost nothing but slick, rhetorical chicanery, which reveals itself perhaps most forcefully in the figure of the herb doctor. Hauser, it turns out, was the subject of prolonged and horrific homeopathic experimentation while under the care of Daumer. Although Daumer had agreed, in Feuerbach's words, to protect this "tame hyena in Herr van Aken's famous menagerie" (as qtd in Kitchen 32) from the crush of people who desired to see him, he did no such thing.

In the chapter from *The Confidence-Man* titled "A Sick Man, After some Impatience, Is Induced to Become a Patient" the sick man shouts at the herb doctor, "Begone! You are all alike. The name of the doctor, the dream of the helper, condemns you. For years I have been but a gallipot for you experimenters to rinse your experiments into, and now, in this livid skin, partake of the nature of my contents. Begone! I hate ye" (NN CM 79). When the herb doctor persists, the sick man, having already been the victim of a physiologist in Louisville who administered tincture of iron, cries, "Begone! Just in that voice talked to me, not six months ago, the German doctor at the water cure, from which I now return, six months and sixty pangs nigher my grave" (80).

Now consider Martin Kitchen's summary of Hauser's response to his own treatment:

It is hardly surprising that Kaspar Hauser developed an intense dislike of doctors. . . . He was used as a guinea pig by cranks and amateurs who gained nothing from their experiments. He was so frightened of these experiments that it was impossible to tell whether the often violent reactions were caused by the homeopathic medicines or by sheer terror. When he was ill

the medicines he was given made him feel worse, and it seemed to him that the medical profession devoted its efforts towards torturing their unfortunate subjects and making the healthy sick. (50)

A child of mistrust, we might say, learns to mistrust others. He learns, that is, despite his fundamental innocence, to conflate the social with a failure of confidence.

But what precisely is the connection of homeopathy to *The Confidence-Man*? Originated by Samuel Hahnemann, homeopathy upholds the principle of *similia similibus curantur* or "like cures like." We know that Melville was familiar with Hahnemann, for he alludes to him humorously in *White-Jacket*. Writing of "a young medico of fine family but slender fortune" (NN WJ 227), the narrator declares,

He has read *Don Quixote*, and, instead of curing him of his Quixotism, as it ought to have done, it only made him more Quixotic. Indeed, there are some natures concerning whose moral maladies the grand maxim of Mr. Similia Similibus Curantur Hahnemann does not hold true, since with them, *like cures* not *like*, but only aggravates *like*. Though, on the other hand, so incurable are the maladies of such persons, that the antagonist maxim, *contraria contrariis curantur* often proves equally false. (NN WJ 227–28)

The Confidence-Man presents an elaborate parody of the homeopathic approach, in which distrust is used to cure distrust and manipulations of language are used to cure manipulations of language. The name of the product that the herb doctor hawks, the Samaritan Pain Dissuader, implicitly links linguistic artfulness with the restoration of health, and it does so under the sign of a commercially co-opted Christianity. The novel conducts a continuous "experiment" (NN CM 234), though not with conventional homeopathy's minute dilutions but, rather, with gargantuan doses of the offending agent. "Now, let me set you on the right track; let me restore you to trust in human nature, and by no other means than the very trade that has brought you to suspect it" (232), the philanthropist tells the barber.

For Melville, the maxims of allopathy and homeopathy are "equally false"—no cure is possible for any of man's ailments, whether they are physical, spiritual, philosophical, or political—and he employs what Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. terms, in his scathing critique of homeopathy, "a vulgar love of paradox." Think, for instance, of the Missourian's retort to the herb doctor: "I have confidence in distrust" (NN CM 108). Herb doctors elicit as little confidence as mineral doctors or hydrotherapists—indeed, the herb doctors advance a sentimental view of nature. "Who froze to death my teamster on the prairie? And

who made an idiot of Peter the Wild Boy?" (112), the Missourian asks rhetorically. Here Melville echoes Jonathan Swift, who quips,

I am told, that the new sect of herb-eaters intend to follow him into the fields, or to beg him for a clerk in their kitchen; and that there are many of them now thinking of turning their children into woods to graze with cattle, in hopes to raise a healthy and moral race, refined from the corruptions of this luxurious world. (as qtd in Kitchen 4)

Morality is a product of culture, and it is hardly moral in any simple sense. Neither seclusion in nature nor immersion in society offers a way forward. And disability is just disability, not the "erased tablet" its cognitive versions are frequently made out to be.

Caspar Hauser represents a kind of compromise: belated, which is to say especially "dazed," sociality. In the case of Hauser, we have a full neurocosmopolite, a modern Adam kicked out of his underground garden, at once the object and the agent of interpretation. Exploited by his caretakers and the likes of P.T. Barnum, he joins a world in which sociality's primary tool—language—is hardly the lifesaver it might first seem. It cannot get to the bottom of things; or rid itself of its own dizzying indeterminacy; or help but be commandeered by the profit motive. And yet, words, the novel implies, are all we have: our most insistent masquerade.

A passing allusion to an idiosyncratic figure turns out to be central to our understanding of Melville's message. Indeed, *The Confidence-Man* seems haunted by Caspar Hauser. When the reference to Hauser in *Pierre* is considered, that impression crystallizes. Here, the Hauser trope links an essential and unnerving cosmopolitanism to the phenomenon of authorship. Discouraging on the plight of the young writer, the narrator of *Pierre* remarks,

The world is forever babbling of originality; but there never yet was an original man, in the sense intended by the world; the first man himself—who according to Rabbins was also the first author—not being an original, the only original author being God. Had Milton's been the lot of Caspar Hauser, Milton would have been as vacant as he. For though the naked soul of man doth assuredly contain one latent element of intellectual productiveness; yet never was there a child born solely from one parent; the visible world of experience being that procreative thing which impregnates the muses; self-reciprocally efficient hermaphrodites being but a fable. (NN *Pierre* 259)

Writing requires the "visible world of experience"; it cannot be done in a hole. The illusion of originality gives way to continuous impregnation by others—a point anticipating Eliot's in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." As the narrator of *The Confidence-Man* notes, with respect to the phrase "quite an

original," "[It is] rather oftener used by the young, or the unlearned, or the untraveled, than by the old, or the well-read, or the man who has made the grand tour. Certainly, the sense of originality exists at its highest in an infant, and probably at its lowest in him who has completed the circle of the sciences" (NN CM 238). Hauser evolved very quickly from a kind of infant to a kind of first man and author, though he never had a chance to begin "the circle of the sciences." Just after alluding to Hauser, *Pierre's* narrator concludes, "It is impossible to talk or write without apparently throwing oneself helplessly open" (NN *Pierre* 259).

By making Hauser a stand-in for the young writer, Melville joins the neurotypical and neuroatypical: he puts all of us on a kind of spectrum, undoing, or at least tempering, both the public suspicion that was beginning to greet the disabled and the rigid bodily norms that science and medicine were beginning to establish. These norms, as historians have shown, helped to construct the idea of disability as pathology. Although *Billy Budd* renders the neurocosmopolitan encounter a tragic affair and returns us, in part, to the fantasy of seclusion, taken together, Melville's three allusions to Hauser fuse anxiety about the social, the needs of the writer, and the fundamental unreliability of language—all the while intimating the possibility of a satisfying neurocosmopolitanism. It would be a mistake to overstate this point; as I noted at the beginning, Melville seems conspicuously divided about disability. And yet, he is also intrigued by, and in fact, drawn to, engagement with the corporeal other. "Throw[n] . . . helplessly open" to the world, the able bodied can either shrink from or embrace the difference that they find. The figure of the individual whose very mouth is "open" in the act of speaking suggests an a priori interpenetration of self and other through language, rendering some degree of cosmopolitanism and perhaps even of neurocosmopolitanism inevitable.

Notes

¹ *The Confidence-Man* also alludes to works of literature featuring feral children. For example, in the fifteenth-century French romance *Valentin et Orson*, the protagonist twins are raised respectively in court and in a bear's den (see NCE CM 150n4).

² The prominent autism researcher Simon Baron-Cohen has also linked Hauser to autism, suggesting that he might be the "first well-documented case of autism in literature, or even in history" (Baron-Cohen).

³ Melville might have visited this museum or been aware of its contents, for he alludes to another Barnum "curiosity" in *The Confidence Man*: Calvin Edson. With respect to investigating Melville's response to disability, the NCE editors usefully note, "By references to feral children, children raised by beasts, deformed bodies, conjoined bodies, human beings becoming animals or animals turning into human shapes, angels appearing as human beings . . . and other anomalous creatures, Melville raises questions about what is really human and what if anything is unnatural or freakish" (NCE CM 83).

⁴ In his essay on Hauser in this issue of *Leviathan*, Len Gutkin points out that Feuerbach, in one of his footnotes, alludes to another feral child, "the wild Brazilian girl Isabella, whom Messrs Spix and Martins had brought to Munchen." Because the heroine of *Pierre* is named Isabel, Gutkin concludes that Melville was familiar with Feuerbach's text. He writes, "It seems plausible to me Melville derived not only aspects of Isabel's character from Feuerbach, but also her name as well."

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"Jostled by Difference"

Ralph James Savarese Responds to Len Gutkin

That two literary scholars, at roughly the same moment, would each pursue in Melville's work a passing allusion to Caspar Hauser seems uncanny. And yet, my interest in this figure was, as Marxists like to say, overdetermined. As the adoptive father of a nonspeaking young man with autism—by some accounts, the first ever to be admitted to a highly selective college—and as someone who has published much about this neurological condition, I knew that a number of prominent researchers considered Hauser to be autistic. I had not read Feuerbach's narrative when I began pondering Melville's three allusions to this famous wild child (in *Pierre*, *The Confidence Man*, and *Billy Budd*); when I did read the narrative, I was flabbergasted. Beyond the similarities between my son's early life in foster care, where he was so terribly deprived and abused, and Hauser's in that underground room, what struck me was the account of heightened, yet completely unacculturated, sensation. What struck me, at least at first, was the analogy to Romanian orphans under Ceaușescu.

Yet these are not the only "autistics" who have traveled a great cognitive distance and to whom we might attach the term "neurocosmopolites." The last fifteen years have witnessed the belated emergence into language of a number of classical autistics who were thought to be retarded but who were in fact so besieged by sensory input that they evinced, in the words of Feuerbach, "an almost brutish dullness, which either leaves external objects entirely unnoticed, or stares at them without thought, and suffers them to pass without being affected by them." New sensory integration therapies and new techniques for teaching literacy (including some pioneered by my wife, Emily Thornton Savarese) have had a decisive impact in ushering these children into sociality. As my own memoir, *Reasonable People* (Other Press 2007), demonstrates, this journey is typically marked by many of the cognitive idiosyncrasies that Feuerbach identified in Hauser: trouble with abstraction (and thus categorization), atypical language, a reluctance to individuate, and a stubborn animism (or the belief that natural objects, such as trees and stones, are consciously alive).

Like my son and other so-called "low-functioning" autistics, Hauser need not be pitied, however. He need not be thought of as tragically stuck between pure sensory knowing and conceptual abstraction but, rather, as reflecting a

distinctive mix of autistic and neurotypical processing proclivities. A mix, I should say, that in “high-functioning” autistics has clearly proven advantageous. Temple Grandin’s “thinking in pictures,” for instance, revolutionized the cattle industry: her keenly felt understanding of how cattle see precipitated an image in her mind of rounded, as opposed to rectilinear, chutes, which she believed would calm the animals’ anxiety on the way to slaughter. Sensory-based problem solving made all the difference, she contends. At this point in our culture’s growing awareness of neurodiversity, it has become something of a cliché to attribute extraordinary professional accomplishment, in certain arenas, to a mild form of autism. Witness Bill Gates or Albert Einstein.

My own recent work in disability studies has been devoted to developing neurocosmopolitan potential in classical autistics—particularly in the domain of poetry—and here Len Gutkin’s essay usefully connects the figure of Isabel, as wild child, with the artist. Unpacking the scene in which she strums the “strange song of herself,” Gutkin notes the guitar’s role as “murmuring” interlocutor, and he suggests that murmuring “is speech at its lowest level, tending toward mere undifferentiated sound.” Quoting the work of Elizabeth Duquette, who argues that Isabel’s song, in its “phonic . . . emphasis,” “rejects interpretation,” Gutkin writes, “The foregrounding of language’s materiality reflects the pre-conceptual materiality of the phenomenal world itself, the apprehension of which constitutes, in Duquette’s de Manian formulation, the experience of the ‘sublime.’”

According to de Man, “What ‘poets do’ is see the materiality of the world, unfiltered by the faculties Kant details through the many pages of his critical philosophy.” In other words, they behave, at least to an extent, like wild children who have not learned to process sensory data through conceptual categories. As part of this purposeful failure, they play with the tangible, non-semantic properties of language. (The pre-verbal infant, the autistic, and the poet would thus all be linked in this view.) For Duquette, as Gutkin rightly points out, Melville’s “model of the sublime [is thus] grounded in ‘cognitive failure’” (21). But must we see poetry—or the prose of a conspicuously poetic writer like Melville—as wanting simply to privilege sensuous materiality? Is not poetry neurocosmopolitan, which is to say, poised, like Isabel herself, between infant “thoughtless[ness]” and adult “humanness,” between undifferentiated communion with nature and differentiated self-reflection? What is a poem, after all, but patterned sound whose embodied pleasures match that sound’s symbolic or representative function? Put another way, to “take Isabel seriously as an artist” must we patronize her?

While Melville no doubt romanticizes cognitive failure, I am not sure that this is all he is up to. In literature we need not choose between murmuring

and semantics—or even between the primitive and the civilized. For one thing, meaning can be tamed by ambiguity; for another, it, too, can be sensuous. An appeal to the neuroscience of literary reading and writing shows that not only do concrete words activate sensory cortices (along with traditional language centers in the brain), but that metaphors do as well. Literary language preserves our palpable apprehension of phenomena in a way that abstract language does not. It makes us see, hear, feel, touch, and taste. It invites us to awaken ourselves, like Hauser or Isabel, to “the wild clamor of a colorful world.” Melville knew this intuitively. Hence, the rigid tension between “empty nominalness” and “vital realness” does not completely hold.

Similarly, we need not position people with cognitive disabilities as figures of non-meaning exclusively. Teaching poetry writing to classical autistics has shown me just how hybrid or neurocosmopolitan poetry can be—which is why I think of it as a meeting place for different neurotypes and why classical autistics appear to take to it immediately. Consider, for example, the following poem by autistic Tito Mukhopadhyay, which seems to harken back to that time of “perfect peace,” before what Isabel calls “individualness”:

It was orange as always when I heard the wind.
Orange it is—the sound of the wind in spring.
It made the branches swing. It colored every little thing.

It smelled in orange—that sound of wind in spring.
Orange it is—as always—the sudden wind.
It kept getting wilder—its orange on everything.

If an infant could write poetry, it would sound a lot like this poem: higher order thinking as pure, synesthetic relation.

My only concern with Gutkin’s fine and illuminating essay is the recuperation of a strict civilized/primitive binary. To argue that “Isabel’s skill is untaught and unteachable” precludes a fuller understanding of cognitive disability and, in the process, strands neurocosmopolites like Mukhopadhyay in a futureless void. It also risks simplifying Melville’s method, a method in which binaries dissolve even as they appear to hold firm. A disability studies critique would object to metaphorizing embodied difference because such an act lays claim to the lived experience of an oppressed minority. As James Trent, author of *Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Mental Retardation in the United States* makes clear, the lived experience of people with cognitive disabilities has been anything but salutary in this country.

A disability studies critique would also favor the concept of an embodied continuum over such dichotomous constructs as “the able” and “the disabled.” Activists mischievously refer to the former as TABs (temporarily able-bodied

people) in order to stress the highly fluid nature of embodiment. Accidents, disease, and simple aging but also culture and education—all of these things transform the human body. The human body, we might say, is entirely amenable to change. A current buzzword in science—"neuroplasticity"—suggests a similar dynamism in the brain. We are not, any of us, static creatures, frozen at one end of the continuum or the other. Nor are we stalled unproductively in the middle.

Of course Gutkin is responding to *Pierre*, not advancing his own view of cognitive disability. His approach, which brilliantly ties Melville's novel to Feuerbach's narrative, need not copy mine. The impulse to render neurocosmopolitanism tragic certainly exists in Melville's work, but another exists as well, and it moves beyond the mere troping of disability to an engagement with actual difference, with what Melville calls in *The Confidence Man* the "multiform world." Much has been written about Melville, the cosmopolite—how he anticipates, and speaks to, our global age. Much has been written about his treatment of disability—a good deal of it quite critical. Might we view Melville, at least in part, as a cosmopolite of the human organism itself, as being at home with all manner of bodies and neurologies?

No matter how much Melville might link disability with suspicion (or even doom), he gives us characters that find themselves, as on a steamship, jostled by difference. They rub off on it; it rubs off on them; they each go on their way. Who knows what Isabel might be taught? Who knows what she might teach us? (Recall that Hauser twice revised his autobiography.) For Melville, what puts the issue of physiological distinction into perspective is the cognitive distance that every infant must travel: from the moment we are born, we all become neurocosmopolites.

Len Gutkin Responds to Ralph James Savarese

In his surprising and suggestive reading of the function of Melville's references to Caspar Hauser in *The Confidence-Man*, *Billy Budd*, and *Pierre*, Ralph Savarese finds Melville's neurotypicals at once inhabiting and disrupting the field of human diversity summoned by the category "cosmopolitan." If, on the one hand, neurotypicals inspire a distrust analogous to the urban cosmopolite's pervasive suspicion—that adaptive micro-strategy for navigating a world of strangers—then, on the other hand, they present the opportunity of encounter, of "engaging with the 'multiform' Other in a neurodiverse way," as Savarese has it. The horizon of this reading is utopian, but cautiously so—Melville intimates a "possibility of a satisfying neurocosmopolitanism" whose contours must wait to be known. I am reminded of *Moby-Dick's* description of the *Pequod's* crew, that "Anacharsis Clootz deputation from all the isles of the sea, and all the ends of the earth." Here, for a moment, is one image of cosmopolitan, if not neurocosmopolitan, possibility. But it is short-lived, interrupted by darker stirrings, since after all "not very many of them [will] ever come back":

Black Little Pip—he never did—oh, no! he went before. Poor Alabama boy! On the grim *Pequod's* forecastle, ye shall ere long see him, beating his tambourine; prelusive of the eternal time, when sent for, to the great quarter-deck on high, he was bid strike in with angels, and beat his tambourine in glory; called a coward here, hailed a hero there!

Poor Pip's shattered mind is, like the drowned sailor's sea, a place from which one never does come back. Pip's difference cannot be absorbed into the floating city of the *Pequod* but serves rather as a "prelusive" symbol of the speechlessness of annihilation. But Pip is possessed also of a comic and humane wisdom; the interpenetration of this wisdom and his traumatized and compromised cognition reflects the "divided[ness] about disability" that Savarese observes in Melville. Evidence of the dark side of this division is the specter of Hausarian man in *Pierre*, where Hauser's rebirth in the traumatized psyche of Isabel unleashes, finally, a breakdown of all of the suturing relations of the social and the familial: we are left with death and the mineral silence of the Memnon Stone, or—to return to *Moby-Dick*—the sea in its vastness as suffered by Pip, bobbing along, alone.

For Savarese, sensory shock and cosmopolitanism are intimately bound up. The implications of this inextricability root both in the phenomenology of urban modernity propounded in Walter Benjamin's "On Some Motifs in Vol. 15.2 (2013): 41–42 © 2013 The Melville Society and The Johns Hopkins University Press

Baudelaire" as the "shock experience" typifying the nineteenth-century city. Might the Hauserian dilemma, particular as it is, come also to represent an increasingly standardized experience—that of urban humanity's perpetual adjustment to ubiquitous sensory shock? I love Savarese's characterization of Hauser's "belated" and "dazed" sociality, which elegantly articulates the characterological disposition my essay more pretentiously expresses in describing Isabel as "shot through with otherness." For Isabel, as also for Pip (for whom the trajectory of belatedness works somewhat differently), dazed sociality produces special kinds of language, marked by peculiar intensities and peculiar omissions. For this reason, I suggest the literary conception of the Hauserian subject stands at the fount of certain experiments with stream-of-consciousness. Quoting Rob Michalko, Savarese, too, finds formal implications in Melville's openness to "the difference that disability makes": Yokoyama's beautiful sign-language in *Mardi*, a new code borne of necessity.

The Lawyer's Trouble with Cicero in Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener"

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When readers finish "Bartleby, the Scrivener" for the first time, they may find themselves standing squarely in the lawyer's shoes, repeating a version of the remarks made by the lawyer early in the story when Bartleby begins to "prefer not to": "This is very strange, thought I. What had one best do?" (NN PT 21). Bartleby vexes us because, like the lawyer, we are not sure of the best approach to Bartleby's apparent passive resistance. Critics of the story have expended a great deal of interpretive energy combing through the lawyer's rationalizations for his treatment of Bartleby in order to understand how the lawyer answers his own question, and, by extension, our own. Our reading of the story is enriched if we consider the lawyer's speculations within the larger context of Melville's critique of mid-nineteenth century American society. To be specific, critics have overlooked two important, inter-related factors that appear to underlie the lawyer's decision-making process: first, the Ciceronian code of ethics that permeates the lawyer's rationalizations for his charitable acts, and second, the nineteenth-century laws and social attitudes that pathologized and criminalized a homeless population once thought to be worthy of charity. Such an approach illuminates the responses of Melville's nineteenth-century lawyer and may clarify our own interpretations of the puzzling scrivener as well.

Before I lay out a more detailed thesis, let us look at a telling passage that often serves as the crux for a prominent reading of Melville's short story. The lawyer, critics suggest, relies on ethics derived from Christian morality, even while he cannot ignore the demands of doing business on Wall Street, a place where the market economy prioritizes work and production above all else.¹ This reading derives some of its evidence from the scene in which the scrivener is found living in the office, when the lawyer's "melancholy" feelings about Bartleby "merge into fear . . . [and] repulsion" (NN PT 29). This passage stands out in the story because though the lawyer previously has relied on his understanding of Christian morality to rationalize his sympathetic response to Bartleby, here his sympathy evolves into repulsion. Readers are left to wonder