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FORTHCOMING FILMS AT KINGS LYNN COMMUNITY CINEMA CLUB

Thursday 9th March — JULIETA

Tuesday 21st March 2pm —  
CLOSELY OBSERVED TRAINS

Thursday 13th April —  
HELL OR HIGH WATER

Thursday 27th April — ADULT LIFE SKILLS

Coming soon...

Hunt for the Wilderpeople

Paterson

The Handmaiden

Night and the City

All details at <http://www.klccc.uk/films>

# The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser

Werner Herzog, West Germany 1974

German title *Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alles*

Script by Werner Herzog and Jakob Wassermann

Bruno S. .... Kaspar Hauser  
Walter Ladengast ...

Professor Daumer

Brigitte Mira ..... Kathe, Servant

Willy Semmelrogge ... Circus director

Michael Kroecher ..... Lord Stanhope

Hans Musäus ..... Unknown Man

Henry van Lyck ..... Cavalry Captain

Gloria Doer ..... Frau Hiltel

Volker Prechtel ...

Hiltel the prison guard

Herbert Achternbusch ...

Bavarian Chicken Hypnotizer

*If, in times like the present, when events of extreme importance succeed each other with unexampled rapidity, and years seem to comprise the history of centuries, we can turn our minds from contemplation of public affairs to those of a private or personal nature, there is, perhaps, no subject which more deserves our attention, and none which can be more interesting, both to the philosopher and to the philanthropist, than the*



*Narrative which is here translated. Our sympathy must be excited by the case of a Youth, who appears to have been confined from his early childhood for a period of many years, and to have been secluded from all human society, and even from the light of heaven.*

Count Feuerbach's account of the tale of Kaspar Hauser was published in 1832. Within a year Hauser was dead, murdered aged 21 in the streets of Nuremberg by an untraced assassin who was alleged to have orders from royalty. His five years in the

city as the “wild boy” who had been discovered in the town square one morning clutching a letter asking that he become a cavalry officer “like my father”, became a German folk legend around which speculation swirled. Was he the discarded foundling of the royal house of Baden? Where had he come from? Was his strange behaviour a matter of nature or nurture? Would he ever have made a regular citizen with such deprived origins?

Werner Herzog, a director whose films have mostly been about misfits and rebels, used Feuerbach’s book extensively as his source material for the film. While the book examines Kaspar, however, the film uses the power of quiet images to show us how Kaspar looks back at the people who would examine him, and the simple, almost animal-like world he clings to in his head despite their efforts. It is a film about the beginning of modern analytic psychology, but also about the last of an old medieval belief system about “nature” and destiny, reflecting Germany’s turbulent century of change from settled patterns of rural life to its reformation as a modern and scientifically-minded nation. After Kaspar, many beliefs could never be quite the same again.

*Schreiben – schreiben – dieses Märken schreiben* growls his unknown tormentor and jailer as the first words of the film. *Write these marks*. Words will apparently explain Kaspar once he is dumped into civilised society. He himself has almost none, and as he acquires words, they do only what he needs. The rest of the time, like a cat or a chicken, he is seemingly unreflective in the moment. Only a film can show it, just as a book can only overexplain it.

The casting is also a matter of legend. Herzog chose as his Kaspar a man called only Bruno S. (his real surname was later divulged as Schleinstein) whom he had seen in a documentary about mental disability. The unwanted son of a prostitute, Bruno was beaten so severely by his mother at age 3 that he became temporarily deaf. This led to his placement in a mental institution; he spent the next 23 years in various institutions, often running afoul of the law. Despite this past, he was a self-taught painter and musician (with

the money from the film he bought a piano); while these were his favourite occupations, he was also forced to take jobs in factories such as driving a fork lift. He was also the subject of Nazi experiments on mentally disabled children during the Nazi era in Germany. (At the time of making the film he was actually 42). He was very difficult to work with, sometimes needing several hours of screaming before he could do a scene.

Though exhibited in a circus as a freak, Kaspar is rescued by local worthy Professor Daumer and slowly introduced to the norms of society: clothing, food, reading. But the higher functions elude or baffle him: religion is a particular failure, while a test of his logic by a visiting academic elicits an astonishing capacity for lateral thinking. He takes to music with a fellow recluse as his guide to the piano (a cameo role by Florian Fricke of the prog-rock group Popol Vuh, who contributed moody ambient soundtracks to several of Herzog’s other films, though not this one which contents itself with sparse snippets of Bach and Pachelbel, and indeed is quiet throughout).

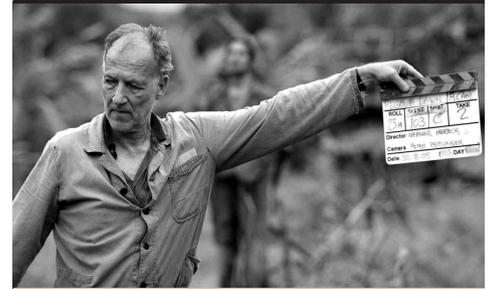
Introduced to polite society under the patronage of visiting English aristocrat Earl Stanhope, he turns his back on it. With knowledge comes disillusion. “The people are like wolves to me”. He believes his dreams are real, and cannot bear to be parted from their comfort by sophistry. “It seems to me that my coming into this world was a terrible hard fall”. Even after his death and autopsy, the regular world must have its words of explanation: the town clerk is delighted that Kaspar’s misformed brain explains all. Everything is “for the record” but the mysteries endure in his head to the end.

And the film’s original title? It translates as *Each For Himself, And God Against All*. Herzog has been quoted as saying that the title was inspired by a sentence in the novel *Macunaíma* by Brazilian writer Mário de Andrade. Beyond that he has said little. As a statement of nihilism, or maybe humanism, it is almost unimprovable. Is it what Kaspar sees in the world outside his cellar, with all its civilisation?

An alternative version of Kaspar

## WERNER HERZOG

born 5 September 1942, Munich



### Fiction feature films

- Signs of Life* (1968)
- Even Dwarfs Started Small* (1970)
- Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972)
- The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (1974)
- Heart of Glass* (1976)
- Stroszek* (1977)
- Nosferatu the Vampyre* (1979)
- Woyzeck* (1979)
- Fitzcarraldo* (1982)
- Where the Green Ants Dream* (1984)
- Cobra Verde* (1987)
- Scream of Stone* (1991)
- Invincible* (2001)
- The Wild Blue Yonder* (2005)
- Rescue Dawn* (2006)
- Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call New Orleans* (2009)
- My Son, My Son, What Have Ye Done?* (2009)
- Queen of the Desert* (2015)
- Salt and Fire* (2016)

Hauser was made in 1993 by Peter Sehr. In it the story of a baby-swap at the Bavarian court is made explicit, and Kaspar spends his last days redeemed by simple wisdom, assisting the proto-geneticist Gregor Mendel in his monastery garden, teasing out the secrets of blind heredity by sowing and resowing rows of *Duftwicken*. A worthy film, it has nevertheless sunk from view. The very stubbornness of Herzog’s version and of its central actor have left it a cult classic. Herzog once named Bruno S. the “unknown soldier of German cinema”. Bruno made another film, *Stroszek* [1977] with Herzog before retreating in his turn to quiet art. He died in Berlin in 2010.

NEXT MONTH’S FILM IS  
**JIMMY’S HALL**  
(Ken Loach, UK 2014)  
**Monday 20 March**

[www.elyfilmsociety.com](http://www.elyfilmsociety.com)

[www.meetup.com/ely-film/](http://www.meetup.com/ely-film/)

