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Author Queries & Comments:

Q1 : Please provide a short abstract of no more than 200 words.

Response: Martin Mulsow's Knowledge Lost provides a window into the precarious world of intellectuals in northern Germany around 1700. This essay considers that book's place in Mulsow's work and in the intellectual history of radical enlightenment through the prism of contemporary activity in Hamburg and its surroundings, in particular as informed by the work of those who exchanged ideas most extensively with English intellectual culture. It suggests that themes of obligation and expectation as they emerge in dialogue with Mulsow's work might provide means to extend his consideration of the material culture of knowledge around 1700 and to reshape its engagement with religious orthodoxy.

Q2 : Please provide 6 keywords.

Response: Hamburg Enlightenment Orthodoxy Radicalism Intellectuals Bibliography

Q3 : Please provide missing department for the affiliation.

Response: There is no missing department. The affiliation is correct as it stands.

Q4 : The disclosure statement has been inserted. Please correct if this is inaccurate.

Response: Resolved

REVIEW ARTICLE

Obligation, expectation, and the material traces of intellectual community in northern Germany around 1700: reflections on Martin Mulsow's Knowledge Lost[Q1][Q2]

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History :

Martin Mulsow has long been known for his remarkable ability to conceptualise intellectual change. He has shown unparalleled tenacity in tracing the links between the contradictions exposed in Christian scholastic thought by late Renaissance natural philosophy and the intellectual crisis of the early Enlightenment across a range of disciplines. Above all, he has brought to life the connections (personal, material, esoteric) that bound together north German protagonists in that crisis, especially those with some connection to the remarkable mercantile environment of contemporary Hamburg. Readers confined to the English language have not been able properly to appreciate the depth and originality of Mulsow's contribution until very recently. Now, thanks to the skills of Erik Midelfort, they can explore a book that brings out the theoretical challenges that Mulsow introduces to the practice of intellectual history, as well as following the high road of his scholarship in the radical origins of German enlightened thinking.[1] Midelfort's translation of *Prekäres Wissen* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2012) is generally readable and clear. Princeton University Press is to be congratulated on supplementing the number of illustrations offered in the original edition (even if several remain of very poor quality) and on their decision to

print notes where they belong at the foot of the page, rather than collected at the end of the book.

Such choices matter since one aspect of the originality of Mulsow's argument is his juxtaposition of the continuities and discontinuities of visual and material arguments with those of textual practices. Part of the knowledge that we have lost is the ability to read emblems or to decode the evidence hidden in archaeological traces or written into the margins of books for what it can tell us about the assumptions and identities of those whose published works interest us. An aspect of the precariousness of learning is that we no longer possess the tools properly to appreciate the traditions of understanding that populated the past. Bounded by our own assumptions, we miss its awareness of secret knowledge waiting to be disinterred. We lack its sense that gems, coins, or medals were not only things of beauty or antiquity to collect but things that transmitted the power of lost practices through direct connections that allowed the scholar to separate fact from fake.[2]

We are brought up short by the image of a stove taken from a convent in Salzburg which is clad with representations of the spines of heretical books that should be consigned to its flames. This was a society that believed in truth and orthodoxy, but which had also learned to laugh at both, and which used ambiguous images and behaviours to do so. Consequently, it was a society of infiltrators, whose private beliefs did not always match the public realities of political or ecclesiastical power and authority served by their careers. These are the people whom Mulsow finds most revealing. In the first five chapters of his book, they are embodied (often in a form of self-knowing schizophrenia, whose implications Mulsow is at pains to elucidate) in particular by two men, Theodor Ludwig Lau (1670–1740) and Peter Friedrich Arpe (1682–1740). Lau was a lawyer, cameralist, Spinozist, failed suicide and eclectic auto-bibliographer of unpublished, emblematic syntheses of materialism and kabbalah, on whose enigmatic portrait Mulsow lavishes great care. The lawyer, historian, and failed courtier, Arpe, and his friend the professor, diplomat, and list-maker Johann Heinrich Heubel (1694–1758), take the lead in the bibliographical rehabilitation of Renaissance atheism, tying together the intellectual concerns of early seventeenth-century historians of unbelief with contemporary biographers of Spinoza. They at once emulate their orthodox contemporaries, such as Johann Albert Fabricius, and share in their sublimation of philosophy, its transformation from something believed into something chronicled. This act of balance, withholding judgment, provides for Mulsow a way to define moderation within what might otherwise seem a potentially hypocritical form of radical enlightenment.

The translator's choice to highlight loss of knowledge, rather than its instability, makes more definite the boundary between present and past than Mulsow perhaps intends. A reader senses that there may be skin in the game for an author whose description of the experiences and ways of expression of an academic precariat in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries first appeared a few years after his own academic home-coming, following several years of trans-Atlantic wandering. The courtly library at Gotha, where Mulsow directs a research centre, is an epitome of both the overreach and the underachievement that might be associated with the experience of absolutist *Kleinstaaterei*. Its distance from the academic metropoles of Tübingen, Berlin, and, above all, Munich, where Mulsow trained, echoes the barriers that the much-travelled lawyers and scholars about whom he writes experienced when they contemplated the world of learning from the provincial courts, commercial salons, or newly founded universities of the Baltic littoral. Their uncertainties about the career of knowledge (like our own) were underpinned by an awareness of the superfluousness of the merely learned, produced, Mulsow asserts, by the overproduction of the educated, especially the legally educated, by German universities around 1700. As the prospects of service contracted, so a sense of the purposelessness of public education formed: a conviction that accepted forms of learning were so much charlatanry and that private undertakings might fulfil a higher moral calling.

The tragedy of underemployed intellectuals, their searching out of libraries of clandestine books to inform esoteric histories of the corruption of the ecclesiastical and philosophical institutions of their time, hints at a catharsis in the transformation of public culture from intolerance to tolerance and from relative oppression to relative freedom. Mulsow is too careful a historian to push such intimations to their limits and his book is as much an elegy for lost forms of knowledge and places of learning (not least in its revelatory study of the first steps in bookish Orientalism taken by the Hamburg student and later teacher, Johann Christoph Wolf) as it is a story of intellectual transformations. Its strengths lie in its embrace of the fragmentary and episodic, rather than the construction of grand narrative. Here, unlike some other recent historians of radical enlightenment, Mulsow shows his respect for the humanity of his subjects and the contradictions of their lives.

Nevertheless, Mulsow values some aspects of those lives more than others. His account of the emblematic knowledge encoded in Lau's engraved portrait, is juxtaposed with paintings portraying Hadriaan Beverland and John Wilmot, 2nd Earl of Rochester. For Mulsow, these two pictures fail as portraits of 'a serious intellectual', and he suggests instead the engraving made in 1737 and printed in Hamburg of Lau as the representation of 'a serious freethinker' (p. 73). Beverland's portrait shows him smoking a pipe in the company of a woman who is reading his unpublished history of prostitution, whereas Wilmot's famously depicts him crowning a monkey with the bays normally associated with a poet laureate. The engraving of Lau, by contrast, depicts a middle-aged man wearing a frock coat, a breastplate, and a sword. Lau's views on polygamy may

have been influenced by the sexual satire of Beverland (if not that of Rochester); he may well have regarded the pen as his sword and have been conscious of persecution for his religious and social views, as the emblems around his portrait show. Yet it does not seem churlish to suggest that, as well as being esoteric, this depiction of Lau is both old-fashioned and pedantic, not least in the way in which it alludes to nobility. Part of the appeal of the freemasonry, to which Mulsow oddly if predictably associates Lau's iconography, and similar social gatherings was that they allowed men of lower social status to create bonds of friendship that permitted them to fantasise about getting away in private with the sort of behaviour that aristocrats like Rochester got away with in public.[3]

Mulsow's subjects include pastors and schoolteachers, as well as disappointed members of the service nobility and those on the fringes of the mercantile (and, in civic terms, governing) elite. The political realities of life in Hamburg, which encouraged Lau and others to take refuge across the Danish border in Altona, or which led Hermann Samuel Reimarus to conceal the true nature of his conclusions about the Bible, were supportive of the social and cultural dominance of a particular and often narrow form of Lutheran orthodoxy. The limited protection offered to Jewish, Catholic, or Calvinist communities within the city reflected the need to recognise broader diplomatic and economic realities, creating serious tension only when other political factors undermined consensus. As Mulsow notes in his discussion of Abraham Hinckelmann, the disruptive influence of pietism, whose educational and ontological concerns represented an alternative means of formation that swayed several of his subjects, was largely contained in early eighteenth-century Hamburg's public life. Although leading intellectuals, including influential pastors, had by necessity studied elsewhere in Germany, they were able to maintain a religious position which upheld, in public at least, the primacy and wonder of Protestant biblical Christianity. Within Hamburg, orthodoxy could represent itself as the embodiment of a tolerant tradition (in the polemical context of an attack on Roman Catholic tyranny) which had remade the city and its intellectual and cultural traditions in the mould of Lutheranism.[4] Viewed from outside, the stridency with which the city's intellectuals resisted the blandishments of a more irenic or cosmopolitan approach to religion appeared itself to be at times a threat to harmony.[5] Given the access of those who lived in or passed through Hamburg to a wide range of ideas drawn from abroad, and their participation in what was, despite itself, a plural intellectual culture, it is perhaps unsurprising that esoteric thinking and clandestine practices of communication should continue to find such fertile soil there.

The protagonists of Mulsow's studies are not confined to those living at the mouth of the Elbe, although many of his most important discussions circle back there, whether through the careers of Lau, Wolf, Hinckelmann, or Reimarus. With relatively few exceptions, however, their experiences were in dialogue with the responses of Lutheran orthodoxy to new currents of knowledge in the early eighteenth century. Those responses, in turn, were shaped by past reactions to more heterodox traditions, as expressed, for example, in the ideas of Jakob Boehme. Other contexts of interpretation existed cheek-by-jowl with these: for example, the ongoing refinement of the ideas of the further reformation in the piety and practices of the pastorate of Bremen, its gymnasium, and their community, in light of developments in both Dutch and English Calvinism.[6] The extent to which members of the Bremen pastorate (for example, Wilhelm Ernest Ewald, who also served from 1728 to 1734 in Altona) shared the interests of Mulsow's protagonists in emblems and allegory, in the elucidation of historical rites and customs, and in the bibliographical compilation of compendia is remarkable. Yet, despite their openness to the style and method of thought that Mulsow often associates with free-thinking, these denizens of Dutch enlightenment thinking in Germany were defenders both of covenant theology and a pietistic renewal which owed less to Halle than it did to Leiden, Groningen, or even Richard Baxter's Kidderminster.

Mulsow writes particularly interestingly about the debt that so many of those he studies owed to free-thinking writings from England (references to John Toland outnumber those to Newton or Locke, and Shaftesbury, Blount and Anthony Collins figure as often as Christian Wolff and more frequently than August Hermann Francke or Johannes Cocceius). He also has much to say about excerpting, and a historical worldview shaped by a threatening sense of the oriental past that might be derived from Ralph Cudworth, Thomas Hyde, or John Spencer, rather than directly from Spinoza, Richard Simon, or even Jean Le Clerc. The juxtaposition that Mulsow makes here is between the ambivalent orthodoxy of Johann Christoph Wolf, concealing his private reflections on clandestine literature as he moved from notebook to print, and the disguised free-thinking of Reimarus. The latter, in his lectures at the Academic Gymnasium, braved the contradictions of inconvenient facts and the need for a critical appraisal of the scholarship that considered them (not least that of Le Clerc), in order 'to arm his young students with arguments against the threats coming from the new religious scholarship in England'.[7] Yet it was Wolf, rather than Reimarus, who engaged most fully with Jewish learning and its attitudes to the history of the interpretation of the Bible, and who learnt to navigate the most important collection of rare Jewish books amassed in contemporary Europe.[8]

One of Mulsow's achievements is to draw attention to the development of bibliography, in the sense of the critical listing of works on a particular subject, in the intellectual formation and practices of his subjects. The growth of bibliography as a discipline has fascinated several commentators on this period, but Mulsow is unusual in bringing out its links to the practices

of scholarship, especially in the milieu of the Academic Gymnasium in Hamburg.[9] Bibliographies and review journals helped scholars to navigate increasingly complex fields of knowledge and to intuit connections that might otherwise have escaped them because of limitations of skill or training. Together with editing, translation, and piracy, they enabled the incorporation of the learning of one part of the world in that of another. Hinckelmann, for example, appears in the list of authors attacking atheism in the philosophical history of that subject published in 1716 by Jenkin Thomas Philipps, subsequently historiographer to George II and tutor to his children. Philipps, who had himself studied in Basel, included several supposed German atheists, particularly Matthias Knutzen (mentioned also by Mulsow) and the student suicide, Joachim Gerhard Ram, in his penultimate chapter on the effects of Spinozism, before concluding with the uplifting story of Rochester's death-bed conversion.[10] Elements of the influence of a shared Lutheran court culture also lurked behind the paean to English scholarship provided in the bibliography of patristic scholarship compiled by the Leipzig theologian, Thomas Ittig.[11] Generations of English commentary on the Bible were ranged in the order of chapter and verse under consideration by the Königsberg historian, Martin von Kempe. Kempe may now be notorious for his history and typology of kissing (to which a life of Judas was annexed), but he provided a favourable and compendious history of English religious thought, together with accounts of practical divinity and the early Royal Society.[12] Broad knowledge of English theology (including its implications for natural philosophy) was not confined, therefore, to readers of Toland or Collins, or those who had picked up information about controversies through the journals published by Bayle or Le Clerc. Bibliography created an order of knowledge (and a structure for collecting) that was driven as much by the concerns of orthodoxy as those of heterodoxy. Its practice led to stable collections (such as the library, rich in English authors, of the Waisenhaus in Halle) as well as precarious careers.

For Arpe or Lau, as for Kempe or Philipps, one of the purposes of bibliography was to form the basis for writing compendious histories and one of the jobs that history could perform was the service of the state. Bibliographies of atheism and collections of heterodox authors might titillate rather than threaten: the extent to which they tamed dangerous ideas rather than undermined belief depended on how they were read not on the fact that they existed. The stability, rather than the precarity, of the orthodox economy of knowledge provided for some the foundations from which to broaden their own opportunities to make a living. An example is the use made in Hamburg of the early seventeenth-century Jesuit scholarship of Villalpando and Prado (as later taken up in the London Polyglot Bible) on the form and function of the Temple of Jerusalem in the context of the biblical book of Ezekiel. The setting for *Der Verstöhrung Jerusalem*, composed by Johann Georg Conradi with libretto by Christian Heinrich Postel for the opera house at the Gänsemarkt in 1692, moves from the camp of the Roman armies to the outer and eventually the inner court of the Temple, ending with a view of the destroyed city. Inspired, perhaps, by the stage decoration, the impresario Gerhard Schott displayed a vast model of the Temple (initially incomplete) in rooms off the opera house. Placed in storage after Schott's death in 1702, this model was eventually sold and moved to London together with a model of the Tabernacle. Offered for purchase to George I, it was put on display in August 1724 and could be visited for half a guinea (one guinea for unlimited visits). It was later displayed at the Royal Exchange and was bought by Friedrich August I for the collections at Dresden in 1732. Schott's project was 'not carried on either by Opinion or Conceit, but according to the Direction of the Scripture, and the most authentick Authors, not neglecting to consult in all Points thereupon the most Renown'd Architects and Learned Men' (who included Fabricius). It displayed the appeal of historical scholarship about the Bible, conducted across confessional boundaries, to the polite audiences of mercantile cities. It attracted royal patronage and provoked no clerical ire, while generating revenue that compensated to some extent for the considerable investment required to build it. Although it involved speculation and risk, and, like more precarious scholars, went on its travels, the model proved considerably more durable than the opera that inspired it: through it, 'the Circumstances of Facts that happen'd there, will make a deeper Impression in the Mind, and the Spectator be the more convinc'd *de Materia facti*.'[13] Following the viewing of a white wax model brought by a rabbi from Prague to Halle, similar convictions (and broadly similar authorities) inspired the construction of a large version in wood of the Temple for the Waisenhaus, with an accompanying handbook, in 1718. The recipients of enlightened pedagogy, with its help, could be led by their studies and by their senses to a proper understanding of the biblical past and its place in the religion and order of their modern state.[14] The material past was recreated here to bear witness to what were believed to be universal facts rather than to expose particular incidents of fakery.

These accounts from Hamburg, Königsberg, and Halle add to the stories to which Mulsow treats us of all kinds of readers and the objects that they encountered. It remains clear nevertheless which ones he believes provide us with an alternative history of early modern intellectual history. Yet, in the wake of Leo Strauss, Tullio Gregory, Carlo Ginzburg, Gianni Paganini, Richard Popkin, and Jonathan Israel, one might be permitted to wonder how 'new' the view that Mulsow draws from his vantage point, often near the Elbe, really is. His conclusion that modernity has increased freedom and decreased the precariousness of knowing seems less secure in 2022 than perhaps it did in 2012.

Notes

1 In addition to the book under review, Midelfort has now translated Mulsow's *Enlightenment Underground: Radical Germany, 1680–1720* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2015) [*Moderne aus dem Untergrund: Radikale Frühaufklärung in Deutschland, 1680–1720* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2002)] and *The Hidden Origins of the German Enlightenment* (Cambridge University Press, 2023) [*Radikale Frühaufklärung in Deutschland, 1680–1720*, volume 2 (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2018)].

2 On coins, see also Martin Mulsow, *Fremdprägung. Münzwissen in Zeiten der Globalisierung* (Berlin: Matthes und Seitz, 2023).

3 On such clubs and their sociability, see particularly David Stevenson, *The First Freemasons* (Cambridge University Press, 1988) and *The Beggar's Benison: Sex Clubs of Enlightenment Scotland and their Rituals* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2001).

4 See Joachim Whaley, *Religious Toleration and Social Change in Hamburg, 1529–1819* (Cambridge University Press, 1985); Mary Lindemann, *The Merchant Republics: Amsterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg, 1648–1790* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 153–70; Ernst-Peter Wieckenberg, *Johan Melchior Goeze* (Hamburg: Ellert & Richter, 2007).

5 As in the case of reactions to the polemics of Fabricius's contemporary as a professor at the Academic Gymnasium, Sebastian Edzard: see Ulrich Groetsch, 'Adversos Haereticos. Sebastian Edzard's Epic Battles for Souls', in *Das Akademische Gymnasium zu Hamburg (gegr. 1613) im Kontext frühneuzeitlicher Wissenschafts- und Bildungsgeschichte*, ed. Johann Anselm Steiger, Martin Mulsow, and Axel E. Walter (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 137–61.

6 See Gert Leurdijk, *In het voetspoor van Lampe: Gereformeerde piëtisten tussen Bremen en de Republiek in de eerste helft van de achttiende eeuw* (Kampen: Summum, 2022).

7 Mulsow, *Knowledge Lost*, p. 411; see also Ulrich Groetsch, *Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768)* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 116–76.

8 Joshua Teplitsky, *Prince of the Press* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 188–94.

9 Cf. David McKitterick, *The Invention of Rare Books* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 50–61, 189–203, and especially Archer Taylor, *A History of Bibliographies of Bibliographies* (New Brunswick: Scarecrow Press, 1955), who shares Mulsow's admiration for Placcius.

10 Jenkin Thomas Philipps, *Dissertatio historico-philosophica de atheismo, sive historia atheismi* (London, 1716), 139–43 (Knutzen and 'Rom'), 148 (Hinckelmann), 152–5.

11 Thomas Ittig, *De Bibliothecis et catenis patrum* (Leipzig, 1707), which is dedicated to William Cave and opens with a lengthy discussion of the work of John Fell and Johann Ernst Grabe at the Oxford University Press.

12 Martin von Kempe, *Charismatum sacrorum trias, sive bibliotheca anglorum theologica* ([Königsberg], 1677]; cf. Kempe, *Opus polyhistoricum, dissertationibus de osculis* ([Königsberg], 1680).

13 *The Temple of Solomon … as also the Tabernacle of Moses … Erected in a Proper Model and Material Representation* (London, 1725), especially sig. A1r-2v; Johann Georg Conradi and Christian Heinrich Postel, *Der Verstöhrung Jerusalem … oder die Eroberung des Tempels* ([Hamburg], 1692); Gisela Jaacks, *Abbild und Symbol. Das Hamburger Modell des Salomonischen Tempels* (Hamburg: Museum für Hamburgische Geschichte, 1982); the model is now on display in the Museum für Hamburgische Geschichte.

14 [Christoph Semler], *Der Tempel Salomonis* (Halle, 1718), especially pp. 2–10; Kelly J. Whitmer, 'Unmittelbare Erkenntnis. Das Modell des Salomonischen Tempels im Waisenhaus zu Halle als Anschauungsobjekt der frühen Aufklärung', *Bildwelten des Wissens* 7, no. 1 (2009): 92–104.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s **[Q4]**).