

Craig Koslofsky. *Evening's Empire: A History of the Night in Early Modern Europe*.

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Can something as seemingly immutable as the night have a history? Craig Koslofsky does a remarkable job outlining the many ways in which it did during Europe's early modern centuries. He considers night as both a quotidian reality and an evocative symbol, and argues that it underwent nothing less than a revolution in this period. *Nocturnalization* is his term for the broad changes he identifies, which amount to "the ongoing expansion of the legitimate social and symbolic uses of the night" (2).

Among the most evident instantiations of nocturnalization was the rapid implementation of extensive public street lighting in Europe's major cities in the later seventeenth century, but around that beacon cluster many other interesting and informative examples. Koslofsky traces how early modern princes nocturnalized their courts, in part because theater and other gala courtly displays, such as fireworks, were more impressive in the dark. By pushing courtier bedtimes into the wee hours, they changed the entire rhythm of upper-crust life. Sophisticated urbanites followed suit, rising later, dining after dark, and entertaining by candlelight, assisted by various salons, clubs, and all-important coffeehouses. There was a downside to all this nighttime gaiety. For one, the traditional denizens of the night — ribald young men, criminals, and prostitutes — were pushed into the more constricted shadows of increasingly well-lit towns. For another, women of all ilks remained very restricted in the dark. While men could go freely to cafes or taverns, respectable women still risked their reputations if they ventured too openly into the night (except in Paris, where a unique salon culture gave them a place to go after sundown).

There was some pushback against these changes. Industrious bourgeoisie tended to criticize the late-night hours of the courtly classes. They continued to invoke the traditional wisdom of “early to bed, early to rise,” even though they themselves might patronize the after-dark pleasures of the coffeehouses. Such ambiguities have an important place in Koslofsky's analysis. His history of the night is never simply light and dark. While some cities invested heavily in major street-lighting schemes, others resisted this innovation, and cities that did light their streets found that lamps were often smashed by those who preferred more traditional rhythms. Moreover, while elites effectively colonized the night in many urban centers, night kept its more traditional guise in the countryside. There, early to bed and early to rise was often a necessity, as much agricultural work could only be done in daylight. But the rural night was not empty of labor or entertainments. Spinning bees were an example of both industrious work and also social gathering taking place by firelight.

Such broad and varied changes surely stem from multifarious causes, but Koslofsky begins his history with religion and the Reformation. Focusing initially on witchcraft and the (elite) obsession with the nocturnal witches' sabbath, he argues that the early modern period saw an intense diabolization of the night. As the Reformation wound its course, however, religious thinkers also came to valorize the night as a time of quiet reflection and communion with God. This was true across religious confessions because every confession was persecuted somewhere in Europe, and so every group knew of co-religionists who were forced to practice their faith in the secrecy of the night.

This is a sweeping book, and its arguments work best in broad, evocative strokes. Much of the revolution here boils down to discrete changes in elite thought or fashion that then helped to reshape broader culture. Koslofsky is to be commended for stressing the limitations, ambiguities, and sometimes outright dichotomies of such developments, even as he argues for their extraordinary impact. At some point,

however, I began to wonder about the revolutionary quality of all this. If the night had always been a time for both God and the devil, for both work and rest, and for more frivolous pursuits both legitimate and illicit, always varying in their degree and correlation to one another, then are even the most evident and dramatic changes of the early modern period really a revolution? Indisputably, however, Koslofsky has shown the night to be a dynamic and fascinating component of early modern history.

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