CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion

Nocturnalization was a revolution in early modern Europe. In the seventeenth century princes and urban oligarchs alike projected their glory onto the night with illuminations and fireworks displays, while purpose-built baroque theaters could be fully darkened, day or night, to enable the complex "special effects" and illusions of baroque opera or theater. These practices reveal a new willingness to deploy and manipulate darkness and the night. And as the eighteenth century began, Europeans in cities and at royal courts – and even a few in the countryside – encountered the night equipped with more domestic lighting, new street lighting, and new, sober beverages like coffee and tea. In cities, the abandonment of curfews and the rise of the club and the coffeehouse transformed late hours into a time of polite sociability and conversation. For those exposed to increased domestic lighting, sleep itself reflected this new relationship with the night. The traditional biphasic sleep pattern of a "first" and "second" sleep began to give way to a single compressed period of nightly slumber.[1] These are all signs of the uneven but distinct march of nocturnalization.

The sources of this nocturnalization were many. In the fractured Christendom of the confessional age, religious persecution and a disorientingly heterodox world led some to seek refuge, literal or allegorical, in the night. Nicodemus, the disciple "which at the first came to Jesus by night" became the byword for those who sought the Lord at night. The persecution which sporadically drove early modern Christians into the night marks the growth of both the scope and the ambitions of the early modern state, as state churches replaced or buttressed the authority of Rome. The expanding reach of these

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states, focused on moral and social discipline, included the policing of the urban night. Sweeping disciplinary ambitions were seldom realized, but the policing of the urban night rested on a long tradition and was one area of relatively successful oversight. Supported by this oversight, the elites of the court and city colonized the urban night, displaying their conspicuous consumption of time (and, materially, lighting) alongside their enjoyment of coffee, tea, fine porcelain, and other luxuries. The evening and night became the time of the emerging public sphere as the respectable public used the night which the authorities had helped colonize to gather and critique those same authorities, from the most mundane to the most exalted. The breadth of nocturnalization arose from its sources in state, public, and private initiative as a key site where projects of discipline and consumption overlapped.

A 1702 article on street lighting in an anonymous Leipzig newsletter summarizes these sources of nocturnalization. Written from a burgher standpoint that criticizes both the extravagance of the court and the folly of the poor, this feigned letter from the *Captured Letters, Exchanged between Curious Persons Regarding the Current … Political and Learned World* addresses the use of the night to display status, as well as the nocturnalization of daily life at court and in cities.[2] Its title is its program: "On the vanity and waste of illuminations / and in contrast regarding the useful and necessary employment of harbor lights and also the night lanterns set up here in Leipzig."[3] It concludes with a moralizing "madrigal" on the recent history of the night:

> The Epicurean makes
> The day into his night
> Vanity likes to turn things upside-down
> These folk let themselves be fooled
> into thinking that they can turn night into day
> through their illuminations.
> Whoever cannot afford so much
> that he can buy wax candles
> But despite that wants to ape the rich
> (also gladly feasting)
> He burns boldly little oil-lights or lamps.

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The folly has spread so far
that even the poor must follow it
Although some are already stuck in direst need.
These are the fruits of such solemnities!
This rubbish was invented by the papists
and so the land was disgraced.
It would be fine, if the money for it had to be paid
by the priests and not the lay folk.[4]

A far better use of artificial illumination, intoned this author, would be street lighting, which indeed was beginning in Leipzig as he wrote.

These comments identify the use of the night for spectacle with the "papists." Nocturnal spectacles and urban illuminations were used by rulers of all confessions, but the references to "papists" and "priests" by this Lutheran author remind us that religious conflict and baroque culture alike forced or led early modern Europeans into the night, and into new attitudes toward the night. The references to "illuminations" and "solemnities" also link lighting with court culture. Finally, we are told that conspicuous consumption and its imitation by social inferiors account for the spread of nocturnalization – a familiar comment in an age which satirized bourgeois gentlemen for striving to appear noble. Taken together, "commercial and urban vigor, a trend towards political absolutism, and an emphasis on orthodox, textual religions" formed a distinctly early modern compound.[5]

The nocturnalization which reshaped daily life for a significant minority of seventeenth-century Europeans separated darkness from the night as never before in Western culture. Darkness was slowly transformed from a primordial presence to a more manageable aspect of life, acquiring in the process new associations within mysticism and popular devotion, political display, respectable sociability, and learned exchange. In each of these areas nocturnalization encompassed both the triumph over darkness and the deliberate evocation or manipulation of it. Symbolically and historically, this pairing reveals a supplemented process in which stated goals were always shadowed by their contradiction or inversion.

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Alone and isolated in a literal or figurative night, early modern women and men could encounter the Devil or God on an intensely personal level – be it through seduction or revelation. The early modern night opened up greater heights *and* lower depths for the Christian soul, as mystics and witches alike were made in the dark night of illumination or temptation. Georges de La Tour's popular "penitent Magdalene" (Figure 3.5), isolated by candlelight, reappears in contemporary narratives of nocturnal diabolical temptation on stage or in witch trials. The promise of the night as a path to the Divine presented by John of the Cross, Johann Arndt, John Donne, or Claude Hopil was shadowed by the demonology of their churches, which shaped the interrogations of the thousands of accused witches who confessed to attending nocturnal sabbaths and to nocturnal pacts with the Devil sealed by sexual relations. By the early modern logic of contrariety, the night that could unite the soul with God could also unite the body with Satan.

As the sovereigns of the seventeenth century embraced the night for their displays of power and provision of pleasure at court, they also articulated the supplemented process of nocturnalization – in two different ways. First, princes moved their spectacles and celebrations into the night during a century of unprecedented challenges to the very principle of royal authority. Forced by these challenges to claim that "Ecclipse and suff'rings burnish Majesty," and that "we best read the lustre in the shade,"[6] these princes and their panegyrists evoked the darkness to claim victory over it. Writing in praise of Louis XIV in 1665, André Félibien repeated a now-familiar theme: "his majesty has destroyed the grim clouds [of rebellion] which have darkened this entire kingdom for so many years, and illuminated it with rays of joyful light."[7] Figuratively and literally, the darkened backdrop enhanced the luster of would-be sun kings. Second, from Machiavelli on, the principles of statecraft emphasized the ruler's need to conceal and dissemble, and nocturnal spectacles and pleasures also served to divert both the common people and the political nation, leaving them blinded by the light of their radiant monarch.

The dark side of the colonization of the urban night can be seen in its exclusions, as the new urban nights of respectable sociability were

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carved out of the youthful, undisciplined, violent night life known in European cities since the high Middle Ages. The blithe comments in the *Tatler* about the movement of urban sociability into the night are shadowed by the fates of the individuals and alternate publics excluded from the nocturnal "public sphere as a 'polite zone'."[8] This new respectable night life required the discipline of even elite young men, and fostered sites with very little access for women, such as the club or coffeehouse, as well as the salon, theater, or evening ball, open only to well-born ladies. The contrast with the traditional order of the night in the countryside underscored the fashionable distinction of this urbane night.

In the taverns, coffeehouses, and clandestine printing workshops of the urban night, a respectable public discussed claims to dispel the darkness of ignorance and superstition. Despite its insistent rhetoric of light and clarity, darkness and the night were key to the early Enlightenment. Arguments that threatened established political or spiritual authority had to be expressed carefully, and many relied on the darkness of anonymity or the shadows of discretion. Enlightenment authors like Fontenelle proposed a hierarchy of perception, with troubling truths hidden from the benighted masses. And these early Enlightenment works supplemented their claims that physical darkness was a nonentity by stressing differences of region and race, sometimes marked by contrasting "white, black, tawny, and olive complexions."[9] Nocturnalization marked Enlightenment claims to dispel darkness while actually deploying it elsewhere as a deficiency that could not be corrected through the light of reason.

The early modern expansion of the legitimate social and symbolic uses of the night described in this book created new centers of power and new margins of exclusion. This supplemented process always combined the elimination of darkness with its deliberate evocation or manipulation. As Europeans consolidated the expansion of respectable daily activity into the night in the eighteenth century, they identified their intellectual and political achievements with the light of reason and the torch of civilization. As Pope's "Epitaph. Intended for Sir Isaac Newton" (1730) exclaimed: "Nature, and Nature's Laws lay hid in Night / God said, *Let Newton be!* and All was Light."

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The Enlightenment's rhetoric of illumination adapted the received Christian theology of light without much appreciation for its corresponding theology of darkness. In 1796 the first Christian missionaries to the islands of the South Pacific set sail from England. Reports of the "mental ignorance and moral depravity" of the Polynesians had impressed upon the missionaries "the obligation we lay under to endeavour to call them from darkness into marvelous light."[10] To go into the night and dispel its darkness was foundational to nocturnalization. But for the peoples of this vast region between Hawai'i, Tahiti, and New Zealand, the night itself was sacred, a reflection of the creation of the world and its gods. Darkness represented a sacral connection between creation, death, and the ancestors of the living. In contrast, the light of day was profane and ordinary.[11] Ill-equipped to grasp the exalted place of darkness in Polynesian cosmology, these first missionaries could only report on the "dreadful … darkness that envelopes the minds of those poor heathens."[12] Success was limited, and seventy-five years later another English missionary to the Polynesians encountered the same cosmology while visiting an island near Samoa:

> As evening deepened into night, the heathen became quite friendly and chatty … When pressed to embrace Christianity, they affectingly said, "We know that your God is stronger than ours; but we love darkness. To us darkness is good, light is bad."

This Polynesian exaltation of the night evoked the other side of European nocturnalization – the discourses and practices that embrace or manipulate darkness. But in response, the missionaries turned to the dominant associations of light and darkness in their tradition:

> We thought of the inspired declaration, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved" (John 3:19–20).[13]

Always two-sided, the nocturnalization examined here fostered a culture ever more identified with diurnal reason, power, and authority, generating its dark others in encounters at home and around the globe.

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Given the significance of the night in Western culture and its ubiquity in daily life, perhaps it is not surprising that the night intersects so many themes and developments in early modern Europe. In contrast with the attempts of some scholars to find a coherent theme in the night's history, I have approached it as part of a fundamental distinction within early modern daily life. The contrariety between daylight and darkness has served, like gender, as a category of analysis. With no claim to completeness, I have shown how this contrast between night and day was used to order and express key aspects of early modern culture, and, reciprocally, how this culture structured the multiple meanings of night and day. The night is heuristic: it provides unexpected perspectives on diurnal discourses, authorities, and institutions, whether as a view from the margins, or as those authorities and institutions seek to enter the night itself, literally or figuratively. To follow on the conclusion of Bryan Palmer in his *Cultures of Darkness: Night Travels in the Histories of Transgression* (2000): "The night can be grasped historically as both a figment of power's imaginative fears … and as an actual place and space in which the ubiquitous contestations of everyday life were fought out."[14] Understanding the content of those fears, and the outcomes of those struggles provides an incisive and encompassing perspective on early modern Europe and on the origins of modernity.

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