CHAPTER SEVEN

Colonizing the rural night?

On the night of Thursday, January 13, 1603, "early in the morning, roughly between two and three o'clock," the innkeeper Barthel Dorfheilige of the Hessian town of Wanfried awoke to the sound of splintering wood.[1] He quickly discovered two young noblemen, Hans Werner von Eschwege (*c.* 1581–*c.* 1624) and his cousin Eberhard von Alten (*c.* 1583–?), smashing in the window of the main room of his inn. Dorfheilige reported that he "hastily lit a lamp and ran into the room in his nightshirt, and shined his light out the broken window to see the malefactors." He recognized "Hans Werner, son of Reinhard von Eschwege zu Aue" and then Eberhard von Alten. Hans Werner greeted him and apologized for the broken window while Eberhard demanded that Dorfheilige open the door. Hans Werner said he would vouch for his cousin's good conduct, so Dorfheilige let them in and called for one of his servants to see to their horses.[2]

Once inside, the two young "Junkers" (as Dorfheilige called them) continued their harassment of the innkeeper, breaking another window from the inside and assaulting Dorfheilige's wife, children, and servants. The two young men then forced the innkeeper to accompany them on a similar visit to awaken the local miller, then returned to the inn for more wine and a meal. When the servants of the noblemen began to beat one of Dorfheilige's children, the innkeeper defended his son with a bread knife: the two noblemen and two more of their servants joined the fray and Dorfheilige fled into the streets of the town. Hans Werner and Eberhard mounted their horses and followed him. Several neighbors came out of their houses to aid the innkeeper, but paid the price as the young noblemen fired at them, broke out more windows, and screamed threats. "Finally the *Schultheiss* [village administrator]

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and soldiers came to town and sounded the bell," and the noblemen and their servants rode off, shouting abuse behind them.[3]

This violent incident, in which the "Junkers" shoved Dorfheilige's pregnant wife into a pile of manure, beat one of his children bloody, and unleashed terror on his "house and home," reveals several fundamental aspects of the early modern rural night. We see the association of violence with the night, and importance of the public house to the life of a village, both day and night. Towns like Wanfried had no regular night watch and Hans Werner and Eberhard had plenty of time to lash out at the villagers before any local authorities appeared. From the perspective of the local authorities, the rural night was simply much harder to police.

But the assault on the inn led by the young Hans Werner von Eschwege was no random act of nocturnal violence. His father Reinhard von Eschwege zu Aue (d. 1607) was entangled in several bitter legal disputes with the peasants of Wanfried over grazing, hunting, and fishing rights.[4] Early modern German law insisted on the daytime character of all legal proceedings. One could not convene a court, prepare a will, or pronounce a verdict at night.[5] Parallel with the legal disputes of the day, this rural conflict was carried into the night by the actions of young men. Hans Werner said as much while drinking in Barthel Dorfheilige's inn in the middle of the night. The complaint recorded his words in direct discourse:

> In particular he [Hans Werner von Eschwege] said: "You peasants of Wanfried or *Bürger* – whatever you want to be – last summer you gave my father some trouble. If I had known, I had some good fellows with me back then … You'll get very little out of it [i.e., the lawsuit], and I'll pay back each one of you, one after the other. It's your *Vogt* [county administrator] who's leading you into this. If I run into him, I'll put a bullet through his hat."[6]

By day the lawsuits worked their way through the courts; at night – the domain of young men – other pressures were brought to bear. This incident at Wanfried suggests that despite broad attempts to regulate nocturnal disorder, in the villages of early modern Europe young "guardians of disorder" ruled the night.[7] More often than in cities, their "order" prevailed over that of the church or the state when the sun went down.

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The ungovernable aspects of the rural night became more prominent after 1650 as a new contrast between urban and rural night emerged. The preceding chapters on the night at royal courts and in cities have shown a series of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century developments I describe as nocturnalization: an ongoing expansion of the symbolic and respectable social uses of the night. As we saw in the previous chapter, nocturnalization in cities evoked significant resistance from the young people who had made the night streets their domain. This dialectic of nocturnalization and resistance is best described as a colonization of the urban night. By 1700, contemporaries observed that this colonization was reshaping everyday life in the cities of Northern Europe.

Nocturnalization affected daily life in the villages of early modern Europe as well, but with a different set of priorities and outcomes. The agents of nocturnalization were church and state, but the development was less tied to commerce and consumption than at court or in major cities. As in cities, young people resisted incursions into a time that had traditionally been theirs. Because neither church nor state could intervene in rural daily life as effectively as they could in cities, villagers young and old more successfully defended their traditional night life. City and countryside were both sites of nocturnalization, but this process unfolded very differently in rural areas.

7.1 PATTERNS

How was the night understood and experienced in the villages of early modern Europe? Some scholars have emphasized that "The night is no man's friend," as a French proverb put it, and the unfortunate innkeeper of Wanfried might agree.[8] But historians of popular culture and daily life such as Norbert Schindler and A. Roger Ekirch have argued that far too many common people were active at night – by choice or necessity – to allow us to characterize the early modern night as universally threatening.[9] Early modern women and men did much more at night than sleep or fear for their lives and goods. As Alain Cabantous has shown, the first hours after sunset do not reveal the expected retreat into the home. In the city and in the countryside

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work continued, entertainment and socializing began, and groups of young people regularly disturbed the settling calm.[10] The literary formula of nocturnal fear and insecurity must be balanced by an understanding of actual nocturnal activity – although this kind of rural "night life" is more difficult to assess.

When we survey the material from Ekirch, Cabantous, and others, several patterns emerge. Night life in the early modern countryside was shaped by the tensions between necessity and leisure, and between order and disorder. Here we will consider the necessities of sleep and labor, then survey a range of activities extending from leisure and sociability to disorder and crime: it is between these poles that the distinct features of the rural night emerge. Village spinning bees and public houses, as well as the courtship customs of the youth, characterized the rural night as its contrast with the night in the city began to emerge in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

7.1.1 Necessity

Labor and rest shaped the rural night. The age-old pattern of segmented sleep documented by A. Roger Ekirch (described in chapter 1) appears in rural and urban sources alike until the end of the seventeenth century. At that point, as we will see below, rural and urban sleep patterns began to diverge. Labor at night was ubiquitous. Despite the comment in the Gospel of John (9:4) – "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (King James Bible) – some forms of work at night were unavoidable. Blacksmiths worked at night, in part because they could.[11] And as Alain Cabantous has shown, rural labor at night was on the rise at the end of the seventeenth century, encompassing a range of tasks, including fishing, sowing, or harvesting by moonlight, and spinning, weaving, sewing, or knitting by firelight.[12] In winter, the hearth might provide enough light for the indoor tasks; otherwise common people would use rush lights or oil-lamps, the rich candles.[13] Casual labor on long winter evenings was, as we will see below, a key feature of rural night.

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The regulation of labor and rest was recognized as an important aspect of household management. The Protestant Austrian nobleman Wolfgang Helmhard von Hohberg (1612–88) explained in his well-known *Georgica curiosa* (1682, editions through the eighteenth century) that "The father of the house is like the clock of the house, which everyone must follow when rising, going to sleep, working, eating and all other business."[14] The immensely popular *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry* (1557, editions through the eighteenth century) of Thomas Tusser (1524?–80) advised masters to "Declare after supper, take heed thereunto / what work in the morning each servant shall do." This guide gives us some idea what hours of sleep were expected in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries:

> In winter at nine, and in summer at ten
> to bed after supper, both maidens and men.
> In winter at five a clock servants arise,
> in summer at four it is very good guise.[15]

The Tyrolean physician Hippolyt Guarinoni (1571–1654) recommended that adults retire between 8 and 9 p.m. and wake at 5 a.m.[16] Across Northern Europe, the traditional curfew hour was 9 p.m., but it is difficult to say anything conclusive about the bedtimes of early modern people in the countryside. Prescriptions are common, but their relation to practice is not clear. The limited evidence we have from diaries and legal records suggests that, in practice, most country folk went to bed between 9 and 10 p.m.[17] But, as we will see below, when the household of John Wright of Brixworth, Northamptonshire was thrown into confusion by an errant dog at "eleven or twelve o'clock" on the night of December 13, 1672, the servant maids were still awake washing dishes, though the master of the house was already in his nightshirt and most rooms were no longer lit.

Those with leisure and light might extend the day. Mary Jepp Clarke described long winter evenings at Chipley, the Clarkes's Somerset estate, in a letter of April 1700: "we have had all this winter our proper times for everything in our chamber, which is good, and in the evening while Nanny and I did work she [Elizabeth] read plays

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and what else diverted us which made the long nights pass a way the more pleasantly to us all."[18]

7.1.2 Sociability

Making long winter nights pass more pleasantly was a common desire in the early modern countryside. Beyond small gatherings in private homes, two sites emerge as especially important for "night life" in the countryside: the spinning bee and the public house. Spinning bees were a peripatetic but vital place for the nocturnal courtship customs of early modern rural youth, while public houses were more fixed locations for the adult sociability of the village. Rural night life was shaped by the contrast between the mobile sociability of the young and the relative stability of mature socializing in the public house.

Spinning bees were fundamental to rural night life in many parts of early modern Northern Europe, especially in Germany, France, and the Swiss cantons.[19] When a fire broke out in the Norman village of Basly late on the evening of February 4, 1684, we learn that most of the women of the village were at a spinning bee, including the unmarried Le Petit sisters and Anne Jouvin, whose homes were destroyed by the blaze.[20] Such spinning bees (*Spinnstube*, *veillée*) combined labor with socializing on long winter evenings.[21] Evidence from the Basle countryside and southern Germany suggests a fixed season for spinning bees, roughly from Advent to Carnival, with special celebrations on the first and last gatherings of the season; in other areas the winter gatherings appear more spontaneous.[22] The form of the spinning bee varied: as many as a dozen women young and old would meet to spin wool or flax, knit, or sew by candlelight.[23] "When there is a shortage of light," as a Swabian ordinance of 1651 explained, "neighbors and their families" might gather "by a common tallow candle" to work – but in a very modest circle "not to exceed six or at most eight persons, who keep a reasonable hour and completely avoid all idle chatter and other extravagances."[24] While sharing light, heat, and conversation, the women and girls might be visited by the young men of the village. (See Figures 7.1 and 7.2.)

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Figure 7.1 "Kurtzweilige Beschreibung der löblichen Spinn- vnd Rockenstuben," broadside engraved after Sebald Beham, Nuremberg, seventeenth century.

This – in the authorities' view – is where the trouble began. In 1661 the bishop of Châlons issued an ordinance forbidding "men and boys" from joining or visiting "the vigils [*veillées*] when women and girls spin or do other work in the winter." Likewise, "women and girls are not to let them in, play, or dance with them during the night."[25] In Calvinist Guernsey in 1637, the Royal Court forbade the "vueilles" "because of the regular and scandalous debauchery which is committed at the assemblies of young people … during the night." Marriageable young people met and courted at these "vigils"; a less judgmental English visitor to Guernsey noted that "from these meetings many marriages are contracted."[26] A contemporary French engraving (Figure 7.2) shows the scene just after the young men have arrived. A hanging oil-lamp illuminates the young women, distaffs in hand, one at a spinning wheel, just interrupted by the swains, who have begun to dance and show their affections. The text below claims that such visits, if handled wisely, transform "the most toilsome labor" into "more even than an amusement." Images and accounts from Germany (such as Figure 7.1) focus on sexual morality, adding concerns about disrespectful gossip, bawdy songs, rude pranks, and gluttony. At the spinning bees young

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Figure 7.2 The arrival of the young men at the spinning bee: "Decembre: La Veillée," engraving by Jean Mariette, seventeenth century. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

servants "cook, eat, and drink what they have stolen at home," as one reported.[27] French and German sources record such courting customs as the "brushing off," in which each unmarried woman gave one of the young men the honor of brushing the stray bits of flax or wool off her lap while she worked.[28]

From the perspective of the participants, spinning bees combined labor, leisure, and important courtship customs; village elders tolerated them, arguing that "the young must have their diversions and merriment."[29] In Figure 7.1, first printed *c.* 1524 by Sebald Beham, then copied and reprinted in the mid seventeenth century with new verses, the older "shepherd's mother Elizabeth" (figure Y) looks at the disarray around her but then "thinks back to the good old days / when she had such fun herself."[30] The spinning bees were denounced by pastors and administrators (outsiders to the village) not simply on moral grounds, but also because the gatherings sustained local nocturnal countercultures. In Figures 7.1 and 7.2 and in many written accounts of spinning bees the authority figures of family, church, and

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state are absent or obscured by the "rural plebian culture of laughter."[31] In Beham's print the village administrator (the *Schultheiss*, figure G) sits asleep beside the stove and "the priest is off taking care of his cook." Sexual license is everywhere in Beham's scene: the maid of the *Schultheiss* (E) is there with her lover Fritz (F); Curdt (L) "wants to sneak behind the stove and sleep with Elßgen," and Ulrich (W) "so pleases … Appel [Apollonia, figure X] that she is about to put out her light." The Beham print singles out each these figures for criticism, but offers no hope of any moral improvement.

Figure 7.3 shows a more orderly peasant home at night: the women are working flax while a group of men seated around the table drink. The young woman and man standing at the back converse discretely under more watchful eyes. In Figure 7.4 we see an ideal spinning bee: an all-female scene (an author, far left, looks on) with well-lighted and industrious figures. In the accompanying text the women give their legitimate reasons for gathering to spin. Several say their husbands are out drinking; a maid explains that she has been frightened by a ghost and does not want to stay in her room alone. Other women have come to socialize, leaving snoring husbands home in bed.

Condoned or criticized, and despite its many local variations (it might be more or less focused on productive work, and more or less planned or scheduled) all the evidence agrees that the spinning gatherings were always held on long winter nights.[32]

These gatherings are richly documented on the Continent.[33] In the British Isles, peasants gathered at night for spinning or knitting in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.[34] In England – with the exception of Yorkshire and Lancashire – spinning bees do not seem to have been an established practice,[35] but their key features – women establishing an evening space for work or socializing, then inviting unmarried men to join them – do appear. In Norfolk in the spring of 1665 we learn that

> Margaret Barkle, the servant of James Money of Gresham, butcher, was charged to have taken an handkerchief with flour & late in the night with Ellen Berston & Katherine Wilson to have gone to the widow Thoulder's house in Sustead, intending a merry meeting there with some fellows.[36]

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Figure 7.3 Spinning bee scene; engraving by Claudine Bouzonnet Stella, seventeenth century. Bibliothèque nationale de France.



Figure 7.4 An orderly spinning bee: Jacob von der Heyden, "KunckelBrieff oder SpinnStuben," *c.* 1620. Kunstsammlungen der Veste Coburg, Inventar Nr. XIII,441,8; Neg. Nr. 8685.

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The gatherings of young people in the evening for work or conversation could easily turn into an impromptu dance or a "merry meeting."[37]

Indeed, when young men and women met at a spinning bee, they took part in one of several related and widely documented early modern customs of nocturnal courtship. The spinning bee overlapped with the south German *Heimgarten* (in other parts of Germany, *Nachtfreien* or *Kiltgang*), an evening gathering of unmarried young men and women at the house of a married couple. The term *Heimgarten* could also refer to time spent together by a courting couple at night after the larger gathering broke up, or to night-time visits by young single men to the homes – or beds – of young women.[38] Thus the *Heimgarten* could shade into the practice of bundling, the most intimate of early modern nocturnal courtship customs.[39] In France examples of the custom of allowing courting couples to share a bed for the night appear in the Protestant county of Montbéliard, and in Champagne, Burgundy, and Savoy.[40] Bundling was a rural custom, arising in part from the long distances suitors traveled to visit young women, which then necessitated an overnight stay. This seems to have been the excuse Leonard Wheatcroft used when staying overnight at the home of his future wife, Elizabeth Hawley, during their courtship in 1656–57.[41]

Wheatcroft's detailed courtship narrative describes many evening gatherings and nights spent together with his "beloved paramour, sweet Betty." They met at the "wakes" (i.e., church ales, notorious for lasting well into the night) in Wheatcroft's hometown of Ashover. One evening Wheatcroft waited at Elizabeth's house for her to return from a walk, "it being a fine warm evening for maids to delight themselves in." To Wheatcroft's great joy she returned "when the evening drew towards an end, and the glorious sun withdrew himself from my sight."[42] They went to her uncle's house, where they stayed the night and "did lovingly embrace each other." On another occasion, after Wheatcroft pretended to be engaged to another woman, he reported that "these and suchlike expressions [of Elizabeth's exasperation] did keep us waking all night. She, being then so vexed at me, would not so much as afford me one kiss."[43] Much of Wheatcroft's courtship of Elizabeth Hawley took place at night.

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Indeed, the night was the accepted time for courtship. A notary describing a street fight and ensuing homicide in the village of Septfontaines (in the Franche-Comté) on the night of December 7, 1623 acknowledged that the night was the time "for visiting homes where there were girls or widows available for marriage." In this case an unwanted suitor named Pierre Révillon was asked repeatedly to leave a private home where he was courting a young widow, "for which … Pierre Révillon was truly dissatisfied because *it was only around seven or eight o'clock in the evening*" and "other young people were [still] drinking in the kitchen … Nothing about leaving had been said to them so that he, the said Pierre Révillon, thought that it was insulting to ask him to leave."[44] It was already several hours after sunset, and the gathering continued well after Révillon was expelled. The late hour was not the issue, but the frustrated Révillon started a fight outside which ended with a death, producing our record of the events of that night.[45]

In the many ways described here, young adults got to know potential sexual or marriage partners, both personally and physically. As historians of early modern marriage and sexuality have established, "the majority of the … population did not make arranged marriages."[46] Parental consent became more important in the confessional era, but this was consent to a match based on some kind of personal choice. With the exception of the wealthy or the nobility, young people sought out their own marriage partners within a group circumscribed by status, trade, and locale. Once mutual interest was established, courting couples enjoyed considerable physical intimacy with one another; sexual relations often began with the engagement.[47] The night significantly facilitated all aspects of the passage from single youth to husband or wife. From meeting a group of potential spouses at a spinning bee or village dance, to getting to know a specific individual in the dim intimacy of a chamber during a *Heimgarten* visit or while bundling, to the physical consummation of the relationship (ending, it was hoped, in marriage), the night was constant companion to the couple. Church and state gave their sanction to the marriage during the day, but husbands and wives were made at night.

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Seen in these terms, the night was much more than an accidental or contingent part of rural servants' lives. In comparison with young servants in the city, rural youth had less contact with their peers during the working day, and fewer opportunities to socialize.[48] They relied more on the evening and night hours for the serious business of meeting potential marriage partners, and for less serious pursuits as well.[49] In Norfolk in 1665 a justice of the peace noted that he had

> sent Robert Coe, Sir John Palgrave's man, to Bridewell for having on two nights run out to dancings, & the first time he was out all night & the last time till midnight, for he would not come home until the dancing was over, though Sir John sent for him. The last time he carried away the key of the hall door to get in again.[50]

Here we catch a glimpse of the struggle between servants and masters over access to the night. Coe's insistence on having his night life reflected a frequent demand by servants. In Bavaria, for example, the Bishop of Augsburg complained in 1603 that when servants negotiated their contracts, they demanded (and received) explicit permission to go out at night and meet with unmarried persons of the opposite sex, or at least to talk with one another at night through a window.[51] These are all well-known aspects of rural courtship, of course, but the servants' contracts and authorities' complaints make the importance of the night explicit. A shortage of servants made these negotiations possible, as a Bavarian mandate of 1635 explained: "so too the farmers, if they want to keep their servants, are expected to allow [morally] suspect gatherings and *Heimgarten*, both day and night."[52] In his collection of sermons for country folk, the *Tuba rustica* (1701), Bavarian parish priest Christoph Selhamer gave several examples of courtship by night, all of which ended badly for the young women involved. In a sermon titled "The Bedroom Window" he came to the root of the problem: "I know quite well: in some places wicked servants set the terms when they enter into service, saying: 'Yes, farmer, I will serve you well for a year … but I'll tell you right now: you won't forbid me from running around the streets at night.'"[53] An Augsburg print of the seventeenth century shows this nocturnal courtship at a maid's window (Figure 7.5).

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Figure 7.5 "Nacht": lovers meet at a window ("Fensterln"). Augsburg print, seventeenth century.

In 1760 the Lutheran pastor in Swabian Oberrot (near Hall) complained bitterly to the territorial authorities about the spinning bees and unrestrained night life of the local youth and begged them to impose some discipline: "You can start with my own servant, who is a nightwalker. I am at my wit's end trying to contain loose servants: as soon as an honest man says something [to them], they simply quit, and no one else wants the job."[54] At the end of the century, Graf Preysing reported the same problem on his Hohenaschau estate in

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1796.[55] He also blamed the shortage of servants for this demand, suggesting that when their bargaining power rose, rural servants tried to secure their access to the spinning bees and "merry meetings" of the social night.

Like the spinning bee, the night life of the public house was condemned from the pulpit. But the importance of the public house was also well recognized: these institutions served the village throughout the day and evening.[56] Even in a single region they showed great variety, including alehouses, taverns (originally associated primarily with the sale of wine), and inns authorized to provide meals and lodging.[57] Subject to licensing and regulation in all European polities, public houses were of tremendous economic importance locally and served as hubs for communication and travel.[58] The men (and often the women) of a village spent much of their leisure time there, and public houses were at their busiest on Sundays, feast days, and in the evenings.[59] Closing times were an issue at all public houses, underscoring their association with night life. Mandated closing times were remarkably consistent across early modern Europe, generally 8 p.m. in the winter and 9 p.m. in the summer.[60] These mandates were honored only in the breach, however.[61] Patrons leaving public houses at closing time (or after) were the most common disturbers of the peace in early modern Europe, urban or rural.[62] As we will see below, the evening hours of the public house correspond with the higher incidence of violent crime in the evening rather than late at night.

Dancing linked all sites and forms of nocturnal sociability, from the spinning bee to the public house and beyond. Young and old took part in dances scheduled and spontaneous. We learn from court records of a late-night "dancing match" in 1639 at a mill in Wiltshire. When examined, Jane Lawes explained "that on St. John's Day last at night she was invited to the mill at Broad Chalke to a dancing match where there were diverse of the young men and maidens of the p[ar]ish, where she saw no abuse offered or incivility committed by any." Another examinant gives us an idea how these impromptu dances ended: "Joane Deane confirms the above and says further that 'about two hours before day, the candles being burnt out, she heard some of the maids cry out, but who they were or what caused them to cry out she knows not, being in

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the dark'."[63] Again we see youth-centered night life as more itinerant than that of married folk.[64]

7.1.3 Disorder

From distracted spinners to violent suitors and riotous dancers out all night, the rural night was a time of disorder. Of course, "disorder" is in the eye of the beholder; here it refers to the category used by church and secular authorities. Some of the night-time practices classified by authorities as disorder, such as the charivari, were seen by the participants as in fact affirming a village order which had been upset by a problematic marriage. Other sources of disorder, such as spinning bees, were important to villagers for economic and social reasons. Beyond these group practices, disorderly individuals appear across the rural night. By examining what constitutes "disorder" in the rural night we can better understand the conflicting claims made on it.

As Norbert Schindler has observed, in towns or villages the disturbers of the nightly peace fell into two distinct groups: young men and tavern visitors.[65] The two groups were separated by the cost of drinking in the tavern, which exceeded the means of most young men. As Beat Kümin has shown, drinking beer or wine at a public house regularly was a luxury for most peasants: a few glasses could easily exceed a day's wages.[66] Those who could afford to drink at a public house often left singing, shouting, blaspheming, or quarreling, often well after the mandated closing time.[67] For the young men of the village, on the other hand, the sheer disruptive exuberance of making noise under the cover of darkness sometimes bursts out of the records, as in a 1732 church council report from Gruorn, a Württemberg village in the Swabian Alps: "The servants from the Aglishardt farm raced through the village at eleven-thirty at night with bellowing cries, which greatly angered the residents."[68] Singing also could disturb the relative peace of the village at night. The 1732 church council report from Gruorn mentions "Johannes Grießinger, mason" who "almost every night, and especially on Sundays, sings improper street songs."[69] These songs might be as lewd as the "The Chimney-Sweep"

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(a "knave's ditty" sung by servants at spinning bees across southern Germany in the first half of the seventeenth century) or pious but unorthodox, such as the "Jörg Wagner," an Anabaptist hymn sung by Hans Ankelin at the top of his lungs one night in 1598.[70]

When night fell the contrast between the order of the state and the order of the village became especially clear.[71] The various shaming rituals of early modern rural society, such as the charivari (also "skimmington" or "riding") or the "groaning" were meant to restore order upset by some individual or relationship. In France the charivari was typically nocturnal, but the best-documented "ridings" and "groanings" in early modern England were all daytime events.[72] The cover of darkness allowed individual villagers to reproach their neighbors anonymously, and these practices could be quite refined. In 1639 a tavern servant named Bastian Scheckenbach was fined heavily by the parish of Frickenhausen (near Würzburg) for "strewing straw at night as mischief."[73] This sounds insignificant to modern ears, but in fact the practice was well known: villagers would awake one morning to find their muddy lanes marked with paths of straw connecting various houses, suggesting or revealing illicit relationships among their inhabitants – the rural equivalent, one might say, of posting political placards at night in London or Paris.

In this case, the young Scheckenbach seems to have gone too far: someone turned him in for creating a disturbance at night.[74] These nocturnal disturbances threatened the order of the day, as the local clergy felt most keenly. For priests, pastors, and preachers all this disorderly night life resulted in drowsy churchgoers who fell asleep during services. Among the published sermons of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, sleeping in church was a familiar topic. In 1709 the Swiss Reformed pastor Conradin Riola published a "spiritual trumpet" against the habit of sleeping during services. Riola, writing from the village of Sent, explained that God had ordained the night for rest and the day for labor: those who roamed about at night like wild animals and slept during the day disturbed the divine order.[75] Catholic preachers in Bavaria repeated such condemnations, as did the Reformed Scottish kirk sessions studied by Margo Todd.[76] All referred to the misuse of the night as the cause of daytime slumber.

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7.1.4 Violence and crime

Sociability at night flowed easily into nocturnal violence. On December 9, 1666 in the Hessian village of Ebsdorf, two men emerged from a house "in the evening in the twilight."[77] Andreas Keiser, a Lutheran, and Hans Caspar Hägelich, "calvinisch," had been drinking beer in the house of Hans Kiß. They had begun to argue about religion and had already come to blows. They each left the alehouse to go home but met up outside, where the dispute continued. Hägelich, the Calvinist, pulled a hatchet out from his tunic and swung; Keiser, unarmed, tried to flee but received a deep wound in the back, from which he died two days later.

The victim Keiser was the husband of the niece of Caspar Preis of Stausebach, a pious Catholic peasant whose diary recorded this typical outburst of "one-on-one" nocturnal violence.[78] Robert Muchembled was one of the first to note that dusk, rather than the late night, was the critical time for violent crime in the countryside. Based on a study of judicial records in Artois from 1401 to 1660, he observed that among cases of homicide in which the time of the violence is indicated (37 percent of the total cases), about 17 percent of these deadly encounters took place in the afternoon, 22 percent at night, and 55 percent in the evening.[79] Alain Cabantous has made a more detailed comparison of eight studies of rural crime at night in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France and England and concluded that about half of all crimes recorded took place at night, about equally divided between the evening hours and later at night.[80] In other words, the rural night was no more criminal than the rural day.

But nocturnal crime was more frightening, if not more frequent, than crime during the day. Records of criminal proceedings confirm the real potential for violence in any encounter involving young men in the evening or after dark. In the Artois village of Lorgies in 1602, on March 17 at around eight in the evening, the young Pierre Soix mistakenly attacked Philippe Carpentier, the village farrier, mortally wounding him. Their exchange captures some of the tension of these nocturnal encounters. Soix was walking along, singing, when he heard

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someone approaching and called out "Who goes there?" Carpentier, well known to Soix but unrecognized in the dark, responded with "What have you?" ["Que veux-tu avoir?"] Soix responded hopefully "friends," but Carpentier replied "I know of no friends" ["Je ne cognois nulz amis"] and knocked Soix to the ground. In defense, Soix fatally stabbed him.[81] In 1616 in the upper Bavarian village of Siegsdorf, a certain "Wolf, servant of Pämer" stabbed another young servant "for no other reason" than that they came together in the lane and did not recognize each other. Earlier that year in the same village Adam Aufhaimer attacked the weaver Stephan Peutner "at night in the street," breaking one of his ribs with a stone.[82] In the dark villagers tended to attack first, assuming that anyone whom they did not recognize had shadowy intentions.[83]

Early modern authorities condoned this kind of defensive or preemptive nocturnal violence, even at its most extreme. On April 30, 1666 William Knaggs and Thomas Bell, a blacksmith, "together with several young men and boys of the town of Birdsall [Yorkshire] … being about the number of fourteen" went into a forest belonging to the Eddlethorpe farm at "about eleven o'clock in the night." Knaggs and Bell separated from the group, "their intention then being to choose and get a young ash tree for a Maypole to carry to the town of Birdsall." The search proved fatal for Knaggs: he and Bell "heard someone speak but did not well understand what they said and immediately after a gun was discharged and the said William Knaggs being then close by … gave a shriek and turned around and fell down dead." Bell could not see who shot Knaggs, but "immediately after the gun was discharged, one Mr. Edward Ruddock and another person" came up to Birdsall, saying "'Ho rogues! Ho rogues! Have we met with you? I'll make rogues on you. It's more fit you were in your beds than here at this time of night.'"[84] Ruddock asked Bell where the rest of the group was, then set off after them, "in his hand one gun," and fired again a few minutes later.[85] Ruddock was tried for the homicide. Despite the evidence given here by Thomas Bell, he was acquitted, underscoring the expectation of danger at night reflected in all these deadly encounters.

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In addition to this interpersonal violence, the rural night also saw communal violence that enforced group identities or village boundaries. The young Thomas Isham of Lamport kept a diary of country life in Northhamptonshire in 1671–73, recording on April 30, 1673 a particularly brutal encounter between the young men of two villages:

> Last night the servants of four farmers, with Mr. Baxter's man and Henry Lichfield, went to Draughton [about a mile northwest] to bring home the first drawing of beer, which they bought from Palmer. On the way back sixteen or seventeen Draughton men met them with stakes and began to lay about them; but being few and unarmed against a greater number of armed men, they were easily beaten, and Mr. Baxter's man has had his skull laid bare in several places and almost fractured.[86]

The diarist does not explain what score the Draughton men had to settle with the six young men of Lamport; a slight to village pride, or perhaps the visitors were courting the young women of Draughton. The chronicle of the Dötschel brothers of Mitwitz, a village in rural Franconia, recorded violent brawls after their village's church fair (kermesse, *Kirchweihfest*) on August 31, 1628 and in 1670: "Anno 1670 year [sic], at our church fair in the night, Erhart Bauer … became unruly with Attam and Michael, the two Jüng brothers from Rotschreuth … and it became a great brawl." Each of these "battles" (as the Dötschels described them) between neighboring villages ended with several men seriously injured.[87]

Nocturnal crimes against property were associated with nightwalkers, suspicious persons who might eavesdrop, "cast men's gates, carts or the like into ponds, or commit other outrages or misdemeanors in the night, or shall be suspected to be pilferers, or otherwise likely to disturb the peace."[88] When the term first appeared in the late Middle Ages, nightwalkers were assumed to be men, but, as discussed in chapter 6, in seventeenth-century London the term came to refer to "lewd and idle women." In the provinces the term retained its masculine associations through the eighteenth century: as the Justice of the Peace Robert Doughty explained to Norfolk jurors at a quarter session in 1664, nightwalkers were "rogues … such as slept on the day & watched on the night, & such as frequented alehouses &

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fared well & had no visible means of livelihood."[89] In the countryside nightwalking shaded into poaching, a widespread nocturnal crime issuing from deep social tensions.[90]

Whatever the actual level of interpersonal nocturnal crime in the countryside, early modern villagers were quick to defend themselves against perceived nocturnal threats to themselves or their goods.[91] Thomas Isham recorded an "uproar" on the night of December 13, 1672:

> About eleven or twelve o'clock tonight a noise was heard in Mr. Wright's yard. The maids, who were washing dishes, heard someone beating on the window, breaking it as if trying to get in. They were terrified.

The entire household, and the village, sprang into action:

> [O]ne beat on the bell, another blew a horn, a third put candles in every room. Meanwhile Wright, clad only in a nightshirt, ran through the house like a madman, and his son waited in the hall with a sword and holding a gun, ready to receive them with a volley … the neighbors, aroused by the horn and thinking that the house was being attacked by thieves, assembled with forks, sticks, and spits.

Armed and ready, when the villagers investigated the yard they found "a dog that had been shut out and had broken a window." Isham notes that "this sent them away with roars of laughter,"[92] but the retrospectively ridiculous preparation for violence clearly shows that such a situation could be dangerous. In the Bavarian town of Traunstein in 1698 the apprentice carpenter Ruepp Jähner lost the fingers on his right hand when he took an ill-considered shortcut over a fence late one night: he was attacked without warning by his neighbor, Sylvester Schneiderpaur. After dark, any "intruder" to a domestic space could reckon with a violent response.

7.2 COLONIZING THE RURAL NIGHT?

The rural night belonged to the common people. When church and state authorities sought to discipline the night in the countryside, they spoke and acted as if they faced a "dark continent" of rural superstition,

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excess, and intransigence. All the activities just described drew the authorities' attention as they sought to regulate and police labor, leisure, disorder, and crime in villages and farms, and in the rural night's uninhabited spaces, such as forests and roads.[93] This focus on the rural night increased in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[94] In Catholic areas church leaders tried to reinforce their moral discipline by co-opting or introducing nocturnal forms of popular piety.[95] How does this engagement with the rural night compare with the colonization of the urban night examined in previous chapters? The same legal-disciplinary framework underlay authorities' engagement with the night in the countryside as in the city. But the encounter of church and state with the rural night was shaped by different cultural and social forces and led to outcomes distinctly different from the colonization of the night in the cities of Northern Europe.

In these cities, the colonization of the night was based on settlement, achieved when courtiers and respectable burghers shifted their daily activities later into the evening and night. Respectable activity after dark reoriented the use of the evening and night hours away from young people and toward a new kind of homosocial, respectable man. The result was a new period of urban time based on public street lighting and private consumption. This engagement with the night sought to create an urban site of *activity* for respectable men, who eagerly occupied its taverns, coffeehouses, clubs, and theaters, now more safely connected by lighted streets.[96] Unlike the colonization of the urban night, which was based on the expansion of the nocturnal activity of one group at the expense of another, the colonization of the rural night was a struggle to *clear* the rural night of its traditional activities (such as spinning bees, courtship customs, and popular nocturnal celebrations) and create an ordered time largely empty of activity.[97]

Efforts to colonize the rural night required a sharp focus on young people. Youth were the "indigenous" people of the early modern night, and limiting their night life was a constant concern. The Bavarian priest Christof Selhammer epitomized this view when he preached that rural servants should be locked in at night: "Among the

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peasants, the master of the house should keep careful watch over his servants. At night every house-door should be locked and bolted so that no one goes out and no one can sneak in."[98] The administrators and pastors who sought to discipline the rural night had little interest in supplanting traditional village night life with their own sociability. The colonization of the rural night was not based on settlement. Indeed, as we will see below, the rural gentry began to slip out of step with the daily rhythms of their urban cousins at the start of the eighteenth century.

The means by which spiritual and secular authorities sought to colonize the rural night have been described as "social discipline." The early modern colonization of the night – urban and rural – began on paper with a stream of legal writing on the dangers of the night and its fundamental association with sin and crime in the early seventeenth century.[99] These works proposed, both implicitly and explicitly, that policing could and should combat the disorder of the night. In theory and practice, the colonization of the rural night sought to reclassify nocturnal leisure, sociability, and disorder as crime.

7.2.1 Disciplining the rural night

The sexuality of young adults was at the center of these attempts to discipline the rural night. As we have seen, young people in the countryside depended on the night for courtship, social exchange, and leisure, and they defended their access to the night in negotiations with their masters. In response, church and state authorities repeatedly tried to restrict all forms of rural "night life."

The prescriptions of church and state maintained an intense focus on spinning bees and similar gatherings. Across France a succession of bishops condemned these gatherings from the sixteenth century through the end of the Old Regime.[100] The statutes published by the bishop of Saint-Malo in 1619 were especially florid, describing the spinning bees as "assemblies of the night invented by the prince of darkness whose sole aim is to cause the fall of man."[101] Worse even than the public house was the "intolerable corruption and detestable, hideous debauchery committed under the guise of what is known in

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this country as spinning [and] scutching [hemp] … done at night, where men, women, and girls flock." "We have heard from reliable people," the statutes continued, "that going to such a … spinning bee is [the same as] going to a brothel."[102] The parlement of Brittany prohibited them entirely in 1670.[103] The synodal statutes issued for the diocese of Troyes in 1680 forbade

> men and boys, under pain of excommunication … to be with women and girls in the places where they assemble at night to spin or work, to linger there in any way, or to wait to walk them back home. As we also forbid under the same penalties women and girls to receive [the men and boys]. We urge them to behave during the time of their work with all the modesty befitting the faithful, and even to sanctify their meetings by a few prayers.[104]

This statute reflects a modest hope that casual labor at night could be "sanctified" once the sexes were rigorously separated. Most other authorities, less optimistic, simply forbade the gatherings entirely.[105] German authorities also focused on the sexual associations of the spinning bee, "in which all kinds of immorality and fornication are carried on."[106] In a personal plea, a Lutheran pastor bedeviled by the spinning bees begged the state authorities for a decree that "every servant who would be found on the streets or in public houses, or other such places after 9 p.m. should be condemned to pay a fixed fine." Recognizing that masters were not especially interested in separating young people from the rural night, the pastor continued: "and those heads of households whose servants were not home at the aforementioned time, and who keep silent about it and do not report [their servants] should just as well be punished with a fine."[107]

Church authorities challenged all forms of nocturnal courtship across Europe in the seventeenth century, with some success: in France bishops threatened bundling and prenuptial sex with excommunication, and they had all but disappeared by the mid eighteenth century.[108] In electoral Cologne the nocturnal courtship customs of the spring, such as the *Mailehen* (a mock marriage for courting couples) were successfully separated from the church's celebration of Pentecost, though not eliminated entirely.[109]

We might suspect that the focus on the sexuality of village youth made the night itself incidental to this program of social discipline.

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But the official abhorrence of youthful rural night life was so prevalent in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that we can see the night disciplined *as night*. As the council of Schwäbisch Hall ordered in 1684:

> If any unmarried servants go out to drink wine, and otherwise do only what is right, and in the evening each one goes home alone, nonetheless the male servants shall pay 1 fl. and the maids 15 ß as punishment.[110]

In this small city, most servants came from the surrounding countryside and continued to socialize there – hence the rural context of this decree. The authorities focused directly on the night rather than on excesses in nocturnal sociability in their attempts to contain their young servants: even if nothing improper was done and all returned home by a reasonable hour, nocturnal gatherings would still be an offense.

These attempts to discipline the rural night faced sharp limits. The proliferation of laws, ordinances, and statutes focused on the night life of rural youth began in the first third of the seventeenth century. As many scholars have noted, this legislation remained in place, relatively unchanged, for 150 years or more.[111] Spinning bees and similar nocturnal gatherings were forbidden everywhere, but with little effect. Scholars have documented their persistence through the eighteenth century in German-speaking Switzerland, in the Vorarlberg, in rural France, and across Germany.[112] Disciplining night life in rural public houses was equally unsuccessful. These inns and taverns were too deeply rooted and performed too many acknowledged functions to be challenged directly. Specific complaints about late hours did not lead to any general restriction of opening times on paper or in practice.[113]

This failure to discipline the rural night is part of a key feature of the early modern state first discussed by Jürgen Schlumbohm in 1997: countless laws and regulations promulgated but not enforced.[114] Yet the limited effectiveness of early modern administration only partially explains the enormous gap between prescription and enforcement seen in these attempts to discipline the rural night. As

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Schlumbohm has argued, early modern administrators valued laws, ordinances, and proclamations as symbols of the state's authority. As symbols, these laws were not limited by modern-rational expectations of what could be enforced or effected in practice. The act of making or proclaiming law *in itself* showed the state to be Christian and benevolent.

For these laws to be more than symbols of state authority, local cooperation between rulers and subjects was essential. Church and state authorities proclaimed their baleful view of the moral and physical dangers of the night in countless laws and ordinances. But local support for limiting the night life of village youth was quite limited. Priests, pastors, and administrators noted that when pressed, heads of households sometimes defended spinning bees. One Lutheran pastor complained that "the fornication and license of the youth are made into a praiseworthy custom by parents [who claim that] from it many Christian marriages are made, as the nightly gatherings and noise bear witness."[115] Every spinning bee or *Heimgarten* had at least the tacit approval of the head of the household in which it was held, and the concluding verses of the Beham spinning bee print (Figure 7.1) explain: "how could it be finer for these servants / after all, the whole community of the village is with them / high and low alike. And so they like their fun at all hours / in the evening as in the morning." With the whole village involved, who would prevent this night life? Village courts almost never prosecuted young men for nocturnal visits to court young women at their windows, or in their bedchambers. Indeed, these visits were not met with the sort of condoned violence seen above in cases of nocturnal intruders, suggesting some level of acceptance. In the specific case of Leonard Wheatcroft and Elizabeth Hawley, we know that her parents allowed them to spend the night together on many occasions once their courtship had begun. As long as spinning bees, late nights in taverns, nocturnal courtship customs, and similar night life received the tacit approval of village elders, neither church nor state could do much to discipline the rural night.

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7.2.2 Sanctifying the rural night

Alongside these widespread attempts to discipline the rural night and limit nocturnal activity, a more ambitious aspect of the colonization of the rural night unfolded in Catholic territories, driven by the baroque piety of Catholic reform. As we saw in chapter 3, pious laymen, Capuchin missionaries, and reforming bishops all sought new uses for the night in a program of spiritual renewal and ecclesiastical intensification. The spiritual uses of darkness discussed in chapter 3, ascetic and aesthetic, inspired new forms of nocturnal lay piety in Italy, France, and Catholic Germany.[116] This interest in sanctifying the rural night went beyond the purely disciplinary aims shared by church and state. New practices, such as the devotion of the Forty Hours and nocturnal lay processions during Holy Week, played a major role in the public piety of the seventeenth century, urban and rural. The continuous veneration of the Host day and night, formalized in the Forty Hours' Devotion, has been described as "an incomparable means to gather the faithful," while the nocturnal processions of the lay penitent brotherhoods on Holy Thursday or Good Friday represented "Catholic ritual's most massive venture into the night" in the early modern centuries.[117] Here we will examine the rise and fall of rural nocturnal devotion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The devotion of the Forty Hours is a period of continual prayer before the Eucharist augmented with preaching, processions, and other displays of piety.[118] From its origins in Milan in the 1520s and 1530s, the devotion spread with the reforms of Trent. As Pope Clement VIII explained in the Papal Constitution "Graves et diuturnae" of 1592: "We have determined to establish publicly in this Mother City of Rome an uninterrupted course of prayer in such wise that … there be observed the pious and salutary devotion of the Forty Hours … at every hour of the day and night."[119] The devotion was an ideal expression of the visual, emotional, and Eucharistic piety of the Catholic Reformation: performed in commemoration of the forty hours between the death and resurrection of the Christian savior, the penitential devotion served the missionary efforts of Capuchins, Jesuits, and Barnabites in the century after Trent.

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The Forty Hours' Devotion was practiced in French-speaking lands from the late sixteenth century on.[120] In the duchy of Chablais, for example, the devotion played a vital role in missions to the Protestant region around Geneva in 1597–98, performed twice in the town of Thonon and once in the village of Annemasse. Held across France in episcopal cities and towns, the devotions were intended to draw the faithful from rural parishes and involved confraternities from nearby towns and villages.[121] The literal span of forty hours meant prayer through at least one full night. Public prayers and processions in darkness served to "render the site [of the devotion] more venerated through this clear dark obscurity," as one Catholic account explained in apophatic terms.[122] The night served the emotional, penitential, and missionary goals of the Forty Hours' Devotion.

In France this devotion, though "established and developed by the church, gained a popular character."[123] But the very popularity of the practice with clergy and lay people led to a nocturnal collision between the devotional and the disciplinary imperatives of Catholic reform. Clergy often scheduled the Forty Hours' Devotion to counter the start of Carnival or on Mardi Gras, seeking to draw revelers away from the traditional masquerades and nocturnal revelry and into the churches for continual prayer before the consecrated host. But by the mid seventeenth century some churches chose to interrupt the devotion at night, arguing that it was better "to avoid unpleasant encounters … in the evening on the streets and to close the church and avoid the disorder that might be committed there later."[124] These concerns grew, and in 1686 the Capuchin order of France received official permission from Rome to interrupt the Forty Hours' Devotion at night. Instead, the forty hours of prayer and preaching would occur only during daylight hours. But interrupting the "around-the-clock" veneration of the Eucharist robbed the practice of its unique theme and intensity, and surrendered the night back to the spinning bees, Carnival revelry, and tavern visits described above.[125] By the end of the seventeenth century the Forty Hours' Devotion was in decline.

Despite the popularity of the Forty Hours' Devotion and the willingness of lay people to gather in churches for prayer and

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veneration of the Eucharist at night, the French clergy of the age of Louis XIV were convinced that no good could come from a gathering of common people at night, no matter how pious the context. By the end of the seventeenth century, numerous episcopal ordinances and statutes prohibited all lay prayer in churches at night, as the synodal statutes of the diocese of Amiens of 1697 indicate: "we urge all parish priests in the countryside to make public in their churches an evening prayer (at least on holidays and Sundays) at the sound of the bell, at the time they deem most convenient, *and always before dark*."[126] The interruption of the Forty Hours' Devotion at night and the statutes prohibiting public prayer in churches after dark reflect the deep suspicion of French clergy of the late seventeenth century toward popular nocturnal gatherings of any kind.

In the Catholic territories of the Holy Roman Empire the same pattern emerges. Forays into the night by the clergy and pious laypeople, reflecting the baroque piety of Catholic reform, were followed by a retreat from popular nocturnal piety at the end of the seventeenth century. In the Empire nocturnal penitential processions were the most salient aspect of this attempt to sanctify the rural night. The Jesuits introduced these processions in cities such as Augsburg and Würzburg, but confraternities and lay brotherhoods soon followed suit in small towns and villages in Swabia, Bavaria, Franconia, Austria, and Tirol.[127]

The drama of these nocturnal processions, with costumed participants and illuminated images of the Passion, put baroque devotion in motion. The Good Friday procession of the confraternity of the Holy Rosary in the town of St. Johann in Tirol is especially well documented. Between 1645 and 1756 the confraternity held seventy-nine processions. All seventeen processions held between 1667 and 1686 took place "in the evening," but the practice was then moved permanently to the daytime.[128] In the Bavarian city of Traunstein, the processions of the Corpus Christi confraternity were viewed with wonder by local peasants, but they showed "poor reverence and respect" for the evening spectacle (1667). In 1676, in hopes of a "more attractive" procession, the confraternity considered moving

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its start from 7 p.m. to "the daytime, soon after matins … because people could see everything better, and it would be easier to maintain order than at night, and would also save on lights, and avoid the danger of fire."[129] The brotherhood decided to keep the spectacle at night, but in 1680 tried processing in the afternoon before returning again to nocturnal processions. In Mindelheim the Good Friday procession of the Corpus Christi brotherhood, documented as nocturnal in 1686, was moved to the early afternoon sometime in the early eighteenth century.[130] The nocturnal processions of confraternities in France, usually held on the night of Holy Thursday, suffered the same relocation.[131]

The confident, Tridentine attempt to sanctify popular nocturnal customs and initiate new nocturnal rituals was overshadowed in the course of the seventeenth century by the defensive action described as an "obsessive denial of the night."[132] As a result, the Catholic church, like its Protestant relations, had little relationship with the rural night by the early eighteenth century. A 1671 ordinance of Antoine Godeau, bishop of Vence, sums up the Catholic withdrawal from the rural night:

> Being advised that in our diocese every year many irreverences are committed on the night of Holy Thursday in the churches where the people linger under the pretext that the Blessed Sacrament is exposed, we have ordered as a remedy, first, that … the Blessed Sacrament will no longer be exposed after the Mass of Holy Thursday but … will be deposited in the chalice which will be covered by a white veil and placed upon the altar.
>
> [Second,] We prohibit any sort of person from sleeping in the church under pain of excommunication, [and] order that it will close at ten o'clock precisely. The penitent brothers who are accustomed to come in procession to the church will have to come before nine o'clock to sing the litany of the Passion as they are accustomed and will then return to their chapels with modesty and without noise.[133]

By the end of the seventeenth century the church's colonization of the night was in full retreat. The very practices curtailed by this bishop – prayer vigils before the Eucharist at night and nocturnal processions by confraternities – had been promoted by pious laymen and missionary clergy during the previous century.

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The colonization of the rural night was less ambitious than that in the city. It was also less successful, even in its limited terms. By and large, attempts to rid the rural night of its courting couples and drunken tavern-goers failed. Attempts to sanctify certain rural nights during Holy Week or at Christmas also had little effect on rural youth and village culture.[134] Most of the ordinances, statutes, and decrees aimed at clearing the rural night of its disorder were in place by the early seventeenth century; most of the goals described in these regulations, such as the elimination of women's spinning bees or "alley-catting" by young men, were unmet at the end of the eighteenth century, with the ordinances and prohibitions repeated and reprinted through the end of the Old Regime.

The sources of this failure to colonize the rural night are easy to see. The colonization of the urban night was driven by the settlement of urban elites in the night, reflecting powerful forces of conspicuous consumption of goods and time, supported by the disciplinary efforts of the state. In the countryside, settlement was not a priority and village elites often winked at the nocturnal customs of their youth. The disciplinary reach of the state was notoriously limited.[135] As a result, country life moved in traditional rhythms, creating a new contrast with the nocturnalized pulse of the better-policed and illuminated streets of the great cities of the eighteenth century.

7.3 COUNTRY FOLK, CITY NIGHTS: DAILY TIME DIVERGES IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

By 1700 a new literary formula was emerging. Authors embellished the age-old comparison between urban and rural life with a new contrast between the nights of the city and those of the countryside. In 1714 Alexander Pope (1688–1744) penned an "Epistle to Miss Blount, on her leaving the Town, after the Coronation." Addressing "some fond Virgin, whom her mother's care / Draggs from the town to wholesome country air," Pope describes the fate of Miss Blount in the country:

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She went, to plain-work, and to purling brooks,
Old-fashion'd halls, dull aunts, and croaking rooks:
She went from Op'ra, park, assembly, play,
To morning walks, and pray'r three hours a day:
To part her time 'twixt reading and bohea,
To muse, and spill her solitary tea,
Or o'er cold coffee trifle with the spoon,
Count the slow clock, and dine exact at noon:
Divert her eyes with pictures in the fire,
Hum half a tune, tell stories to the squire;
Up to her godly garret after sev'n,
There starve and pray, for that's the way to heav'n.[136]

The daily rhythms of country life seem especially deadening here, with dinner at noon and bedtime not long after seven.

Were the urban and rural nights truly drifting apart? Pope's comments clearly reflect the divergence of city and country time as a literary theme, but also reveal a real shift in patterns of daily time. In the *Tatler* of December 12, 1710, Richard Steele mentioned "an old friend … being lately come to town" from the countryside. "I went to see him on Tuesday last about eight o'clock in the evening," continued the author, "with a design to sit with him an hour or two and talk over old stories":

> but upon inquiring after him, his servant told me he was just gone up to bed. The next morning, as soon as I was up and dressed, and had dispatched a little business, I came again to my friend's house about eleven o'clock, with a design to renew my visit; but upon asking for him, his servant told me he was just sat down to dinner.

Clearly, London and the country are out of step in this case. Steele continued:

> In short, I found that my old-fashioned friend religiously adhered to the example of his forefathers, and observed the same hours that had been kept in his family ever since the Conquest.[137]

When the Newcastle curate Henry Bourne published his thoughts on *Antiquitates vulgares; or, the antiquities of the common people* (Newcastle, 1725) he sought to give "an account of several of their opinions and

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ceremonies." The common people are in his understanding country folk (and there is nothing new in this assumption), but Bourne's comments suggest that he sees a different daily rhythm in the countryside. Discussing the belief that the evil spirits of the night are banished by cockcrow, he notes

> that in Country-Places, where the Way of Life requires more early Labour, they always go cheerfully to Work at that time [i.e. cockcrow]; whereas if they are called abroad sooner, they are apt to imagine every Thing they see or hear, to be a wandering Ghost.[138]

Rural folk also spend their long winter evenings differently, as Bourne notes in his tenth chapter, "Of the Country Conversation in a Winter's Evening: Their Opinions of Spirits and Apparitions." Bourne claims that "Nothing is commoner in Country Places, than for a whole family in a Winter's Evening, to sit round the Fire, and tell stories of Apparitions and Ghosts."[139] Physician and poet Mark Aikenside's *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (1744) presents a similar scene:

> Hence finally, by night
> The village-matron, round the blazing hearth,
> Suspends the infant-audience with her tales,
> Breathing astonishment! of witching rhymes,
> And evil spirits …
> of shapes that walk
> At dead of night, and clank their chains, and wave
> The torch of hell around the murderer's bed.[140]

The connection these authors make between the absence of nocturnalization and the belief in ghosts and witches plays a key role in the disenchantment of the night discussed in the next chapter. By creating the stereotype of rustic superstition at night, these commentators reflected a new divergence of daily schedules between city and village. In the cities, nocturnalization was promoted by the state on one hand, and by a deepening public consumer culture on the other – a powerful combination of discipline and distinction.[141] Both forces were attenuated in the countryside.

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Figure 7.6 Two peasants marvel at an illumination in Vienna. *Curioses Gespräch: zwischen Hänsel und Lippel zweyen oberländischen Bauern bey der den 14.Märzen in … Wien … gehalten Illumination* (Vienna, 1745), fo. 2.

The spread of street lighting and festive illuminations in cities also created a new contrast with the night in the countryside. In a 1745 pamphlet celebrating the birth of a Habsburg prince, two "peasants from the highlands" view the illumination of Vienna (see Figure 7.6). The first is astounded: "wherever I look, wherever I go, lights shine without end / and the houses all around are like the heavens." The

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other adds "in our village there's never been a church fair ('kermes') like this!"[142]

Ekirch has shown that the age-old pattern of segmented sleep was disrupted by artificial light beginning in the late seventeenth century (coincident with the rise of street lighting, better domestic lighting, and coffeehouses). "Divided sleep," he argued, "would grow less common with the passage of time, first among the propertied classes in the better-lit urban neighborhoods, then slowly among other social strata."[143] References to segmented sleep are absent from the diaries of elite men because their daily life was extended well past sunset by artificial lighting, indoors and out. The nights of townspeople, compressed by artificial light into a single sleep of seven or eight hours, began to diverge from the age-old pattern of segmented sleep found everywhere else.

By the middle of the century, the well-born might encounter early rising and rural daily time as something "new." In 1740 Anne Donnellan (*c.* 1700–62), daughter of a chief baron of the Exchequer, discovered rising with the sun during a visit to Spa. Writing to Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, Donnellan explained:

> I like Spa exceedingly; 'tis a mere country village, with a very romantic country about it. I like the way of living, which is new to me; we are all out by six in the morning in our chaises, and go three miles to the Geronstere waters; we come home at nine, and take a cup of chocolate, dine between twelve and one, go to the assembly at four, where there are all countries, and all languages, half a dozen card tables, and no crowd; from the assembly we take a walk in the Capuchin's garden; all are in before eight to supper, and to bed at ten.[144]

In her reply Elizabeth Robinson imagines herself at Spa and seems quite touched by the "new" country schedule of rising by 6 a.m.:

> I like the manner of living, it is quite new, and the place so romantic! I cannot say I am fond of such early rising, or that I delight in cards, but custom would, in a week's time, make the first easy, and I suppose for the other it is not worse than Bath.[145]

In the summer 6 a.m. would be just after sunrise, which would have scarcely seemed early to the sixteenth-century ancestors of these women.

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Summing up these developments in 1786 the fashion writer Friedrich Justin Bertuch explained that "an entirely new order of things" had supplanted the traditional rhythm of daytime for work and night for rest and sleep.[146] As discussed in chapter 5, Bertuch regarded the change as self-evident and presented numerous examples drawn from the courts and cities of Northern Europe, noting that people of quality in England had shifted their mealtimes and sleeping times later by about seven (!) hours over the past two centuries.[147] This nocturnalization was inevitable: "the occupations of the day begin ever later, the more society is refined and luxury increases."[148] This refinement was perceived and presented as urban and European: "the king of Yemen, ruler of Arabia Felix, dines early at nine for a midday meal, at five for the evening [meal], and goes to sleep around eleven," whereas "the pleasures of the evening and night are the ruling fashion in France and England, and indeed in every great city."[149] The shift to later hours does not include the rural population.[150]

By the eighteenth century the temporal markers of daily life – the traditional times for labor, meals, and sleep – in the two sites were slipping out of step as townspeople used artificial lighting, indoors and out, to shift their daily schedule into the night. The nightward shift of daily times for dinner (i.e., the main, "midday" meal), supper, and sleep by social class is underscored by the view from Napoleon's Paris:

> Two hundred years ago the Parisians had their dinner at noon: today the craftsman dines at two o'clock, the great merchant at three, the clerks at four, the parvenu, the businessman, and the exchange agent at five o'clock; the minister, the legislator, the rich bachelor, at six, and the last usually leave the dinner table at the time when our fathers sat down for their last meal of the day.

Emphasizing the late hours of the city's well-to-do, the author continued, "those who do have supper sit down at the table at eleven o'clock, and in the summer they go to bed when the worker rises."[151] In the *Tatler* essay quoted above, Steele elaborated on the development by creating a contrast with rural life:

> For this reason I desired a friend of mine in the country to let me know, whether the lark rises as early as he did formerly? and whether the cock begins to crow

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at his usual hour? My friend has answered me, that his poultry are as regular as ever, and that all the birds and beasts of his neighborhood keep the same hours that they have observed in the memory of man."[152]

Steele recognized that waking, dining, and sleeping hours were now dictated by location and class as they had not been a generation earlier. Moral commentators like Steele may have criticized the nocturnalization of urban daily life, but they were too invested in social discipline and social distinction to actually challenge the process. The resulting tensions between urban and rural time persist to this day, as rural resistance to daylight savings time suggests.

In 1658 the peasant Michl Bruckhay sued the Jewish livestock dealer Hudel Hitzig before the Imperial Aulic Court (*Hofgericht*) in Rottweil. Both men lived in the village of Kriegshaber, near Augsburg, and as the dispute moved through the imperial legal system, Bruckhay's son and his son's friends lashed out against their Jewish neighbor. On the night before Easter 1659 they threw a pig in Hitzig's well and broke his windows. The local authorities did not condone this nocturnal assault, levying a 45-gulden fine on Michl Bruckhay for his son's actions.[153] Little had changed between the invasion of Barthel Dorfheilige's inn at Wanfried in 1603 and this incident in 1659, and young men would continue to serve as the "guardians of disorder" in villages through the end of the Old Regime.

When darkness fell over the early modern countryside, the characteristic ambivalence of the night emerged. Fear waxed alongside pleasure, leisure merged with labor, and limitations created opportunities. An intense combination of discipline and distinction drove nocturnalization at courts and in cities. From a rural perspective, however, the illuminated courts and cities resembled another vitreous innovation of the seventeenth century, the greenhouse. The concentrated administrative energy and dynamic conspicuous consumption at courts and in large cities produced an exotic bloom of night life. This growth could not be sustained in the early modern countryside, where rural folk instead tended hardy, native nocturnal traditions. Attempts to colonize the rural night were fewer and less successful. At the end of the eighteenth century the spinning bees had endured,

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rural publicans and customers continued to ignore closing hours, and the night remained a time and place for youth, especially young men. The expansion of respectable night life at the expense of the nocturnal elements of traditional youth culture in cities created a new contrast between city and country nights.

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