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Craig Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire: A History of the Night in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. xvi + 431 pp. Maps, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. £55.00 (hb). ISBN 978-0-521-89643-6; £18.99 (pb). ISBN 978-0-521-72106-6.

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“What is the night?” In the opening sentence of *Evening's Empire*, his ambitious, richly researched and probing book on the political, religious and social meanings of the night in early modern Europe, in both its quotidian and ideational contexts, Craig Koslofsky poses this fundamental, though far from simple, question (p. 1).

Koslofsky takes the question from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, specifically the famous, phantasmagoric scene in which the terrifying ghost of Banquo, whom Macbeth has had murdered by his brutal henchmen, appears to him unannounced at a feast. When the persistent spectre has finally disappeared, and once Lady Macbeth has dismissed their mystified guests, her husband, deprived of sleep and still half-psychotic, asks her the time: “What is the night?” It transpires that it is moments before the dawn; that is, the time when human beings' circadian cycle is at its nethermost point, their physiology at its most fragile. “Deaths themselves,” as A. Roger Ekirch has emphasised in his magisterial account of the pre-industrial night, “are most likely to occur during the early morning hours”[1]; and a sense of the embattled status of Macbeth's body, and of the body politic, is palpable at this point.

But if his inquiry constitutes a perfectly mundane, practical expression in the context of early modern England (“How goes the night?” asks Banquo in Act II), it has deeper implications, as Lady Macbeth's response indicates: “Almost at odds with morning, which is which.” This controlled, calm iambic pentameter, an antidote to Macbeth's feverish state, points to the indistinctness of the boundary separating the territory of the night from that of the day, and hence to the difficulty of defining it at all. In his *Treatise of the Pleas of the Crown* (1716), the English jurist William Hawkins noted that the distinction between night and day is not a stable one, because the times of “Sun-set” and “Sun-rising” cannot be reliably identified; and he elected to conclude instead that an indictment for the nocturnal crime of burglary “cannot be satisfied in a legal Sense, if it appear upon the Evidence, that there was so much Day-light at the Time, that a Man's Countenance might be discerned thereby.”[2]

But Lady Macbeth's response also hints at the moral significance of the night. The phrase “almost at odds with morning,” momentarily isolated by the practically imperceptible pause that succeeds it, underlines a deepening sense that, in Macbeth's universe, infernal as it has become, the night embodies values that are completely incompatible with those of the day. Far from complementing the day, and sustaining it, by offering opportunities for physical recuperation and spiritual reflection, the night in *Macbeth* is insomniac, insane, a time of satanic actions. Moreover, in Macbeth's kingdom, night progressively conquers day, and darkness conquers light, so that even when the witches meet on the heath in the daytime it feels like night time. “By th' clock 'tis day,” Ross comments in Act II, “And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp.” In the end, shortly before he is killed, Macbeth recapitulates this image, characterizing life itself as no more than a “brief candle” that is abruptly extinguished by

death. Macbeth's is a cosmos in which, to appropriate the final line of Alexander Pope's *Dunciad*, which probably echoes Shakespeare's play, "universal Darkness buries all."

Macbeth is a sustained, if slightly obsessive, exploration of the night as a realm of alternative values, ones that contradict and might ultimately even undermine those of the diurnal one that is ostensibly the domain of politics in the early modern period. In Shakespeare's most violent, vengeful tragedy, written in the opening decade of the seventeenth century, the language and culture of the medieval night, incarnated above all in the witches, irrupts into the more enlightened language and culture of a purportedly post-medieval epoch. An apocalyptic night, in Macbeth's barbaric court, is one of the forces that shape Realpolitik. In the Renaissance, at a time when daily life encroaches more and more on the night, especially in public settings, in the form of elaborately lit masques at court for example, *Macbeth* thus stages the limits of enlightenment. At a time when more systematic, socially centralized modes of illumination are increasingly disrupting older patterns of rest, including biphasic sleep, so that, for the early modern ruling class at least, night starts to feel like an extension of the day, its obverse rather than its inverse, Shakespeare dramatizes the tyrannical attraction, the absolutism, of darkness. His interest lies less in "evening's empire"—a formulation that, though evocative, sounds comparatively benign, as its echo of Bob Dylan's "Mr Tambourine Man" probably implies—than in the far more foreign, far more oppressive empire of night.

In *Macbeth*, then, the night is atavistic, chthonic, satanic; but it is not irreducibly other. For the tragic protagonist internalizes it, progressively benighting himself as he pursues his socially destructive desires (urged on, of course, by his crazily ambitious wife, who invokes the night almost as a god: "Come, thick night, / And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell [...]"). Macbeth discovers that the dark matter of night has become an intimate part of his being, and that its associations ineluctably reconstitute him from the inside. "Stars, hide your fires," he intones in Act I, "Let not light see my black and deep desires." This is a spiritual landscape comparable to the unconscious, as Freud will subsequently identify it, a space seething with unacceptable desires that only escape prohibition, and so find expression, at night. *Macbeth*, in sum, might be said to describe a process of nocturnalization, whereby the "cultures of darkness" that have been catalogued by the historian Bryan D. Palmer irresistibly colonize the day, fatally infiltrating both the state and the protagonist's consciousness.[3] To use a word that had some currency in the seventeenth century, but has long since fallen out of use, Shakespeare's drama is a study of "benightment."

Having opened his monograph with a reference to *Macbeth*, Koslofsky returns to it in chapter two, "Darkness and the Devil, 1450-1650." In this chapter, which is centred on "the night as a site of diabolical temptation," he offers a reading of the play that, though brief, is insightful (in spite of its careless reference to Duncan, the king of Scotland whom Macbeth murders in order to ascend to the throne, as "Donald" [p. 25]). He argues convincingly, albeit not in sufficient detail, that *Macbeth* is illustrative of "a distinctive early modern emphasis on the night as a site of temptation and surrender to the forces of darkness" (p. 25). *Macbeth*, he claims, both "rehearses the older identification of the night with physical danger" and elaborates a more recent "association of night with temptation and sin" (an association that, according to Anne Pasternak Slater, Shakespeare derived in part from Thomas Nashe's *The Terrors of the Night* [1594]).[3] In the play, it is the so-called "weird sisters" who most clearly embody this temptation; and Koslofsky helpfully demonstrates that Shakespeare's portrayal of the three witches, composed at a time when the Swiss theologian Ludwig Lavater's *De spectris* (1570) was popular, dramatizes contemporary fears about succumbing to "nocturnal temptation and participation in the Devil's nocturnal anti-society" (p. 38).

In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, as the brutal execution of countless ordinary women testified, witches personified the threat of nocturnalization in the malign sense that I have been using the term. In *Evening's Empire*, Koslofsky uses the term rather differently, and rather more positively, to signify the ways in which, in religious, political and everyday social contexts, night was progressively, if of course unevenly, assimilated to the day at this time. In the introductory chapter, he defines nocturnalization as “the ongoing expansion of the legitimate social and symbolic uses of the night” (p. 2). His concern is for the ways in which “poets, princes, courtiers, burghers, and common people ‘nocturnalized’ spiritual and political expression, public space, and their daily use of time” (pp. 1-2). His emphasis, then, is largely on “legitimate” forms of nocturnalization, rather than the illegitimate ones characteristic of what I have called benightment—in spite of the chapter on witchcraft as an important terrain on which the meanings of the night are contested, he is more interested in day’s conquest of night than night’s incursions into the day. So in a sense the focus of this book could be said to be diurnalization rather than nocturnalization.

This scarcely limits the range of Koslofsky’s commanding panorama of the early modern night. Carefully organised and thoughtfully argued throughout, *Evening's Empire* reconstructs the colonization of the night, across several categories, by ideas and activities previously assumed to be the preserve of diurnal culture. “Darkness was slowly transformed from a primordial presence to a more manageable aspect of life,” Koslofsky writes, “acquiring in the process new associations within mysticism and popular devotion, political display, respectable sociability, and learned exchange” (p. 278). The night was socialized at this time. To an unprecedented extent, it became a scene of action—of conversation, debate, performance, prayer, spectacle and worship. People thus used the night in this period, and thought about it too; but they also ‘thought *with* the night’ (p. 19). Building on the work of Ekirch, Palmer, Alain Cabantous and others, Koslofsky presents this historical shift, only partly driven by technological developments, as nothing less than “a revolution in early modern Europe” (p. 276).^[5] Nocturnalization changed how people “ate, drank, slept, and worked”, especially in the metropolitan centres, and it altered, indeed created, the public sphere, not least in the form of coffee houses (p. 3). This change is the historical origin of the twenty-four-hour culture that we unthinkingly inhabit today.

The central chapters of Koslofsky’s book explore the colonization of the night, successively, in religious, political and social contexts. Chapter three, “Seeking the Lord in the Night, 1530-1650,” demonstrates that, partly because a number of Christian sects were forced to practice at night in order to escape persecution at this time, darkness acquired a rich theological significance, as exemplified in ascetic, apophatic and mystical discourses by philosophers and divines such as Jacob Böhme and John of the Cross. And this reshaped mundane as well as supra-mundane life, diversifying both individual and collective uses of the night. “Worship at night helped expand the legitimate social and symbolic uses of the night,” Koslofsky contends, “fostering the nocturnalization of spirituality in the confessional age” (p. 90). Chapter four, which makes skilful use of an impressive range of documents and illustrations, is for its part concerned with the nocturnalization of the court in the seventeenth century, when French and English monarchs in particular staged elaborately illuminated spectacles at night, involving the creative use of chiaroscuro effects and perspective devices, in order to consolidate and celebrate their political authority. “Lighting up the night had always been an elite privilege,” Koslofsky comments, “but baroque celebrations used the night on an unprecedented scale as nocturnal entertainment began to take precedence over daytime festivities” (p. 97). One of the effects of this was “to reorder everyday routines at court,” so that the daily life of the aristocracy began to extend deep into the night, reconfiguring itself, for instance, around *appartements*, social occasions centred on music and games of cards and billiards (p. 110).

This cultural shift at the courts of Louis XIV and the Stuarts in the seventeenth century was coterminous with the rise of nightlife in the European metropolises, which it at least partly caused. Chapters five and six of Koslofsky's book take the urban night as their focus. The first of these, which looks at the examples of Leipzig and Lille in particular detail, charts "The Rise of Street Lighting, 1660-1700," showing how emergent technologies both of illumination and social control, of public lighting and policing, reorganised the rhythms of everyday life in the city, opening it up to "nocturnal business and pleasure," especially for aristocrats and burghers (p. 129). The second, "Colonizing the Urban Night," develops this discussion, tracing the effects these technologies had on the gendered and class-based character of public spaces. Koslofsky explains that the strategic introduction of lighting and night-watch routines on the streets, one effect of which was to discriminate between acceptable and unacceptable forms of nocturnal sociability, inspired "sustained resistance from the urban night's traditional inhabitants" (p. 162). Criminals, prostitutes, publicans, students and idle apprentices all exploited opportunities to challenge the colonization of the night—and the attendant criminalization of the poor—sponsored by the European ruling class. Lantern-smashing, for example, seems to have become an almost fashionable means of symbolic rebellion at the turn of the seventeenth century (as late as the 1850s, incidentally, Marx and Engels were reprising the insurrectionary associations of this activity as they drunkenly careered up London's Tottenham Court Road shattering gas lamps).

The final chapters of *Evening's Empire* judiciously extend the reach of the book's research in terms both of time and space. Chapter seven discusses the colonization of the night in the European countryside, a process that involved "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" (p. 219, emphasis original). Chapter eight reassesses the intellectual developments of the early Enlightenment in relation to the night, scrutinizing the role played by ghosts, witches, and Hell, the topics addressed in chapter two, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. According to Koslofsky, the night performed an important ideological function for philosophers like Descartes, Newton and Spinoza, who (not unlike the directors of a baroque masque) deployed images of darkness in order to stage enlightenment.

In spite of its slightly one-sided understanding of nocturnalization, which it identifies with the diurnalization of the night, Koslofsky's monograph is a triumph of detailed, patient scholarship, clearly and enthusiastically communicated. It imparts considerable subtlety of texture to the fresco of the pre-industrial night so vividly painted by Ekirch in particular. Consequently, it should remain authoritative for decades to come, influencing scholars of literature as well as history. It is now incumbent on other scholars to pose the apparently simple question from which *Evening's Empire* commences—"What is the night?"—in relation to other epochs, other places.

NOTES

[1] A. Roger Ekirch, *At Day's Close: A History of Nighttime* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), p. 14.

[2] William Hawkins, *A Treatise of the Pleas of the Crown*, 5th edition (London, 1771), vol. 1, p. 102.

[3] Bryan D. Palmer, *Cultures of Darkness: Night Travels in the Histories of Transgression* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000).

[4] Anne Pasternak Slater, "Macbeth and the Terrors of the Night," *Essays in Criticism* 28(1978): 112-128.

[5] Alain Cabantous, *Histoire de la nuit: XVIIe-XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2009).

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