Craig Koslofsky's *Evening's Empire: A History of the Night in Early Modern Europe* charts the steady erosion of morally-charged, religious discourse on the hours between sundown and sunrise. The book is presented as a study of “nocturnalization,” defined as the ongoing expansion of the legitimate social and symbolic uses of the night” (2). The night was tamed by detaching moral significance from the earth's diurnal rotation; by chasing devils from the darkened lanes of the imagination; by claiming it from the necessities of either work or sleep, or the perfidy of criminal activity, in the name of the leisured, polite society of respectable persons.

The book's purpose is summarized as an “incisive and encompassing perspective on... the origins of modernity” (282) with the experience of daily life, particularly the relationship between nighttime and society. Grandiose as the task may seem, Koslofsky enables the reader to detect the wider cultural significance of the subject matter in piecemeal contributions, illustrative of how discourses on darkness coloured the total perception of daily life. Notable is his command of prose, granting the reader an ease of access to the book's pertinent themes. A host of recent literature is woven together with surprising dexterity, highlighting the delightful irony that “darkness and the night were key to the early Enlightenment” (280).

A couple of simple observations serve to set the backdrop. It was a well-attested, common experience of a late medieval European to follow a biphasic sleep pattern: sleep after sundown, midnight wakefulness, and a second sleep until sunrise. By the end of the early modern period, this practice would give way to a night uninterrupted sleep. Among Christian theologians, notably Augustine, the actual physical experience of night also was differentiated from the spiritual connotations of light and dark, good and evil, as nighttime too was God's creation. The sheer physical oppressiveness of the night, however, was open to all manner of imaginative reconstruction. Once again, by the end of the early modern period, with the spread of street lighting, the imagination was shaken loose from enchanted frameworks. The dark henceforth was merely the absence of light—not necessarily the absence of good.

The story, of course, is never quite so simple as a couple of anecdotal observations might
Evening's Empire over a widely varied population base imposed itself in a good number of ways. A darkened woodlot, alley, or building could just as easily be host to practitioners of dark arts as it could a dissenting congregation. Nocturnalization is just one revolutionary thread in a tapestry of early modern social change. Prevailing assumptions linking morality and physicality could be easily be renegotiated. Whether God's blessing was present had a lot to do with one's perception of established authority. Preachers and political radicals alike used the cover of darkness, in the same way thieves and brigands used it to ply their trades.

A fascinating part of the narrative told has to do with the difficulty with which the colonization of the nighttime proceeded. The spread of street lighting across Europe was bound up with promotion of law and order. Lighting up the night, in this case, had the intention of throwing a moral light on illicit activities. It also had the constructive effect of beautifying cities and making possible social gatherings at clubs, coffeehouses, or theatres. Increased freedom of movement and the growth of forms of social control proceeded together, albeit at an uneven pace, after the sun had descended beneath the western horizon.

Characteristic of the sensitivity Koslofsky demonstrates towards his subject matter, the heterogeneous nature of the response to attempt to colonize the night receives ample attention. How the urban experience differed from that of rural community, the perceptible gendering of the experience, the response across class divides, and also the reaction of youth culture by comparison to its settled, adult counterparts all receive treatment. While the aristocracy and the bourgeois embraced street lighting, students and the working poor rejected, sometimes violently, what they perceived as an attempt to curtail their freedom to do as they would out of sight of the watchful gaze of authorities.

It remained for an enlightened intelligentsia, as Koslofsky notes, to point out a seemingly irrational result of this effort to colonize the night. One author feigned surprise at the sight of the sun before the noon and suggested vast sums of money spent on street lighting could be saved, if only the populace rose at the break of dawn.

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