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CHAPTER ONE

An early modern revolution

Alone with Lady Macbeth after his disturbing encounter with Banquo's ghost (3.4.126), Macbeth asks, "What is the night?" The question is both a common way of asking the time in early modern England, and the inquiry which shapes this book. In the lives of early modern men and women, what was the night? In 1785 the Parisian writer Louis-Sébastien Mercier (1740–1814) confidently stated in an essay on "The Pillow" that "the night is the common benefactress of every thing that breathes."[1] A century earlier the barber-surgeon Johann Dietz (1665–1738), riding out of Hamburg late at night, unexpectedly came upon three hanged men on a gallows. "Filled with horror," he reminded himself in his memoir that "the night is no man's friend."[2] The ubiquity and ambiguity of the night evoked by the comments of Dietz and Mercier make the night impossible for the historian to pin down, but they also make these hours an extraordinarily revealing vantage point.

For the people of early modern Europe, the night imposed fundamental limits on daily life, at the same time serving as a many-faceted and evocative natural symbol. By connecting the quotidian with the symbolic, I examine the night at the intersection of the history of daily life and cultural history. Bringing empirical evidence from early modern daily life, drawn from diaries, letters, and legal sources, together with the immense trove of representations of the night in early modern religion, literature, and art, this study opens up a new and surprisingly consistent image of Northern Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. With overlapping and sometimes conflicting goals poets, princes, courtiers, burghers, and common people "nocturnalized" spiritual and political expression, public

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space, and their use of daily time.[3] My study is focused on this *nocturnalization*, defined as the ongoing expansion of the legitimate social and symbolic uses of the night.

Nocturnalization touched all aspects of early modern culture. In the early modern centuries spiritual authors from John of the Cross to John Milton used the night to express contrariety, self-denial, and the ineffable nature of the Divine. At royal courts and in cities, nocturnalization unfolded (and is most visible to scholars) in the years after 1650, when mealtimes, the closing schedules of city gates, the beginning of theatrical performances and balls, and closing times of taverns all moved several hours later.[4] In the same years the nonalcoholic beverages chocolate, coffee, and tea surged in popularity – and coffeehouses, notorious for their late hours, appeared in all European cities by 1700.[5] Of all these developments, the swift rise of public street lighting is the most salient: in 1660, no European city had permanently illuminated its streets, but by 1700 consistent and reliable street lighting had been established in Amsterdam, Paris, Turin, London, and Copenhagen, and across the Holy Roman Empire from Hamburg to Vienna. Fear of the night was now mingled with improved conditions for labor and leisure as the emerging modern night began to show its characteristic ambivalence. Devotional writers such as the Anglican minister Anthony Horneck (1641–97) praised the hours after sunset: "Now is the soul nimbler, subtler, quicker, fitter to behold things sublime and great ... Midnight prayers strangely incline God's favour."[6] Early eighteenth-century moralists like the urbane *Tatler* editor Richard Steele (1672–1729) and the German Pietist Phillip Balthasar Sinold (1657–1742) described *as new* the regular "night life" of citizens and courtiers. Across Northern Europe in the seventeenth century we see the increased scope and legitimacy of the use of the night in spiritual and political imagery, and in everyday life.[7] This study seeks to understand the origins, development, and effects of nocturnalization in early modern Northern Europe.[8]

1.1 AN EARLY MODERN REVOLUTION

Rooted in early modern daily life, nocturnalization was a revolution. The turn to the night changed how the people of early modern Europe

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ate, drank, slept, and worked, restructuring their daily lives and their mental worlds. Through nocturnalization early modern men and women found new paths to the Divine, created baroque opera and theater, formed a new kind of public sphere, and challenged the existence of an "Invisible World" of nocturnal ghosts and witches. And the imprint of nocturnalization on the early Enlightenment helped reconfigure European views of human difference and the place of humankind in the universe.

The early modern centuries began with an entirely new conception of the night. In 1540, the earliest published description of the heliocentric model of the solar system explained its implications for understanding the physical cause of the night:

> The earth, like a ball on a lathe, rotates from west to east, as God's will ordains; and … by this motion, the terrestrial globe produces day and night and the changing appearances of the heavens, accordingly as it is turned toward the sun.[9]

This text, the *Narratio prima* (1540–41) of Georg Rhäticus, was the first publication to explain the night as an effect of the earth's rotation. Rhäticus was a student of Copernicus, whose *De Revolutionibus orbium coelestium libri sex* ("Six books on the revolutions of the heavenly spheres") of 1543 described "the best-known movement of all, the revolution of day and night … as belonging wholly and immediately to the terrestrial globe."[10] The new astronomy explained that the rotation of the earth on its axis produces day and night, but it also implied another kind of night: the endless darkness of space, through which the earth moved around the sun "Like one that hath been led astray / Through the Heav'ns wide pathless way."[11]

Our deep-seated awareness of the darkness of space was unknown to the medieval world. As C.S. Lewis has observed, in the geocentric medieval view the space between the earth and the distant circle of fixed stars was illuminated: night was "merely the conical shadow cast by our Earth."[12] Solar and divine light filled the space above the earth, and the darkness of night was local, limited to the hemisphere of the earth not illuminated as the sun rotated around it. In this geocentric view, "when we look up at the night sky we are looking *through* darkness but not *at* darkness."[13] So Dante imagined the universe. But for

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the German shoemaker and theosopher Jacob Böhme (1575–1624), whose influential understanding of darkness and the night we will examine in chapter 3, the transition from the medieval universe to the new astronomy was deeply unsettling: "Before this [his acceptance of the heliocentric view] ... I myself held that the true Heaven formed a round circle, *quite sky-blue*, high above the stars."[14] Led to "pagan thoughts" by his acceptance of the heliocentric view, Böhme was not the only pensive soul thrown into crisis by the thought of a polycentric and infinite universe of darkness: Pascal cried out that "the eternal silence of these infinite spaces fills me with dread."[15] Early modern Europeans slowly realized that the new astronomy revealed an infinite universe of endless night. As we will see in chapter 8, leading figures of the early Enlightenment, such as Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657–1757), embraced this understanding of darkness and the night as a new basis for European cultural superiority.

This identification of the night with the earth's immanent motion signals the history of the night in early modern Europe: dynamic and revolutionary, yet tied to age-old rhythms and continuities. And like the new heliocentric understanding of the physical cause of night on earth, the nocturnalization examined in this book spread gradually from its distinct origins to widespread cultural impact. The claims made by Copernicus and elaborated by Rhäticus were understood by few and accepted by fewer still in their lifetimes. But like the new attitudes toward the night seen in nocturnalization, these revolutionary reorientations in space and time were far-reaching.

To understand nocturnalization in the early modern period we must examine the long-standing continuities of the night stretching from the ancient world to the Industrial Revolution. Compared with the effects of industrialization on the human relationship with the night, any developments within the pre-industrial period might seem trivial: the hearth, the oil-lamp, and the candle remained the only sources of artificial light before the nineteenth century. All early modern Europeans experienced the night as a natural force, with little or no way to escape its constraints. A synchronic history of the night shows how consistently the night was experienced across the pre-industrial world, from village to palace, from shepherd to

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sovereign.[16] But within this enduring pre-industrial night, the early modern period reveals a dynamic relationship between daily life and cultural expression that drove nocturnalization forward. This relationship gave us the modern night illuminated for labor and leisure by gas and electricity. How have scholars examined the continuity and change in this relationship between early modern Europeans and the night that surrounded them?

1.2 TAKING STOCK

Individual and social responses to the division of the day into daylight and darkness are fundamental to every culture, but scholars have just begun to examine systematically the social experience of the night in early modern Europe. References to nocturnal activity and the symbolic associations of the night in early modern Europe are scattered in research on topics ranging from Caravaggio and the history of street lighting to witch persecutions, astronomy, and coffeehouses. This research offers a fascinating but contradictory picture: we see a diabolical night, nocturnal devotion, honest labor at night, and a night of drunken excess and indiscipline. This study explores these extraordinary tensions in the early modern night, a night balanced between pre-industrial societies and the modern world, a night both devilish and divine, restful and restive, disciplined and ungovernable.

The work of scholars such as Norbert Schindler, Wolfgang Schivelbusch, A. Roger Ekirch, Daniel Ménager, and Alain Cabantous has begun to orient us to this jumbled terrain, placing the early modern night in three important contexts: in the history of sleep, as a site for every sort of quotidian activity, and as a symbol of great force in popular and learned culture. These scholars have approached nocturnal activities in early modern Europe in terms of necessity and leisure, and order and disorder. To understand the night as a symbol, these scholars have assessed its positive and negative connotations in the classical and Christian traditions. This scholarship, which has focused primarily on the night in the *longue durée*, provides an essential overview of what we already know about the quotidian and symbolic aspects of the early modern night.

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Sleep is the first necessity of the night. Its history in pre-industrial times has been examined in the innovative work of A. Roger Ekirch.[17] Contrary to assumptions that pre-modern people "fled to their beds soon after sunset" and generally stayed there until sunrise, Ekirch has uncovered an age-old pattern of segmented sleep, arguing that "until the close of the early modern era, Western Europeans on most evenings experienced *two major intervals of sleep* bridged by up to an hour or more of quiet wakefulness."[18] Ekirch describes a first sleep starting after sunset and lasting several hours, followed by a short waking interval and then a second sleep until dawn. The division of the night into a "first" and "second" sleep is supported by a vast range of sources, from diaries and depositions to poetry and prose literature, and the experience of segmented sleep seems to have been familiar to all medieval and early modern Europeans.[19] The implications of segmented sleep are many. The interval of wakefulness provided time for prayer, reflection, conversation, intimacy, or activities ranging from housework to petty theft: a demarcated period of nocturnal activity in the middle of long nights. And if the feeling of well-being some described during their wakeful interval was widespread, then the baleful accounts of night's terrors must be qualified.

The second necessity of the night was work, and early modern people worked at night in countless ways. In large cities, work rhythms were uncoupled from sunrise by the end of the Middle Ages. Evidence from sixteenth-century England and France and from a detailed study of Hamburg shows that activity began around 6 a.m. regardless of the hour of sunrise. This pattern applied to merchants, clerks, masters, apprentices, and domestic servants – all rose around 5.30 a.m., often in the dark, to breakfast and begin work, perhaps attending an early church service first.[20] By the end of the seventeenth century, merchants and officials had left this common schedule by moving the start of their workday at least two hours later.[21] The urban workday included several long breaks and ended between 7 and 10 p.m.: extending the day's work after sunset by candlelight was always a possibility. Many references to late-night labor come from craftsmen and artisans working to fill an order or finish a specific job that had to done by a certain time.[22] In contrast to the intensive

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night work of urban artisans, those in the countryside often filled the "extra" time on long winter evenings with less skilled tasks or those that required less light, such as carding wool or spinning. Village spinning bees were an extraordinarily important part of sociability in the rural night, discussed below in chapter 7.

There were in fact many reasons to work at night in the early modern period. Harvests could not wait, especially if bad weather or pilferage threatened the crop. Once heated, furnaces and forges were used around the clock; brewing and distilling were complex tasks that could not be halted at nightfall. The tides set the work rhythms on the London docks and for rural fishermen.[23] Bakers rose very early; in eighteenth-century Paris their work "day" began between 11. 30 p.m. and 2.30 a.m., and we read of one master and his baker-boys who worked straight through from 8 p.m. to 7 a.m.[24] The domestic labor of wives and servants extended nearly around the clock.[25] Consumption also promoted work at night. The extraordinary growth of London and Paris in the eighteenth century had to be fed, and an army of local farmers and vendors traveled overnight to bring their wares into the cities' markets for the morning. In cities and villages "labor at night developed significantly at the end of the seventeenth century, and the regulations intended as safeguards quickly became obsolete,"[26] reflecting the nocturnalization of early modern daily life.

When the workday ended, some were too exhausted to do anything but sleep. But even the urban day laborers, artisans, and farmhands with the most physically demanding work looked to the evening and night for their free time. Church and state authorities recognized, at least in principle, the need for leisure time, and the service contracts of apprentices and servants gave them some expectation of free time during the day and in the evening. These servants and apprentices could hardly afford to drink in alehouses, taverns, or *cabarets*, but these public houses provided the "night life" for the more established men and women of the village or neighborhood. Among the many diversions in local public houses at night (especially conversation, singing, or dancing), card-playing stands out as near-universal by the end of the sixteenth century.[27] The increasing regulation of leisure from the Reformation onward focused on the use of the night by

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young people, with countless proclamations of curfews for servants and apprentices, and on holding public houses to strict closing times (usually 9 p.m. in winter and 10 p.m. in summer). The limited success of these regulations, together with the enormous growth of nocturnal leisure for the wealthy, has led Alain Cabantous to conclude that "one way or another, the vast majority of the population of Western Europe slowly began to see the night as a period of free time."[28]

The night was becoming the focus of one's free time, but it was not a time free from suspicion. In the eyes of early modern criminal courts, any night life outside the home made an individual, whether defendant, victim, or witness, suspect. But this suspicion was not distributed equally. When brought together, the existing scholarship reveals a matrix of reputation, location, class, and gender used to evaluate nocturnal activities. Wealthy or well-born men stood in one corner of this evaluative grid, with poor women "nightwalkers" in the opposite position. There was room on this grid for well-born, respectable women to attend the opera or a ball at night, and for day laborers to drink late into the night at a public house without drawing the charge of disorder. Likewise, ordinary married women frequented the drinking establishments of their neighborhood or village in the evening or at night; these visits were more respectable when the married women went as a group, perhaps to celebrate a baptism or churching. The night fascinated (and continues to fascinate) because one could move in the blink of an eye from the most legitimate and respectable locations in this nocturnal matrix to a far more disorderly, vulnerable, or exciting position.

The line between licit leisure, drunken disorder, and violent crime was easily crossed at night. Disturbances of the peace by young men or by those leaving public houses arose from masculine leisure cultures, rural and urban. Following these men further into the night, they might be the victims of theft, or perpetrators of assault. The most recent work on crime at night from Alain Cabantous seeks to distinguish between early modern perceptions of the night as criminal and the actual incidence of crime at night. According to the studies surveyed by Cabantous, in England and France homicides were not more numerous at night; nor was theft. But both crimes

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were classified differently and punished more severely if committed at night.[29]

Indeed, the night remained a separate jurisdiction with its own crimes, policing, and sanctions through the end of the Old Regime. The venerable watch policed the night as best it could. There was no corresponding "day watch": the cities and towns of early modern Europe did not employ any general daytime policing until the nineteenth century. Some crimes and misdemeanors were also specific to the night – walking without a light, keeping a public house open too late, disturbing the peace, lantern-smashing, dueling (at dusk or dawn), and grave-robbing.

In cities like London, Paris, or Leipzig, the curfew was overwhelmed by a growing night life in the seventeenth century, well before the establishment of street lighting. Authorities focused on the requirement that anyone out on the streets after dark carry a light so that they could be seen, and on the closing times of public houses. In 1700 the lieutenant-general of police of Paris, d'Argenson, sought to "establish some order in the cabarets of the villages neighboring Paris." He proposed that "upon order of the King … the proprietors of those cabarets found open after midnight will be led to prison." As the legal closing time in summer was 10 p.m., he thought this a reasonable step.[30] D'Argenson noted that "cabarets of this sort depend for all their profits on the countryside parties," reminding us of nocturnal movement throughout Paris and out to its suburbs. This night life was facilitated by street lighting (already a generation old in Paris by this time), but as Cabantous has observed, growing nocturnal sociability and mobility also sustained and promoted assaults, brawls, and theft by night. Almost all perpetrators and victims were male; female victims included shop assistants, peddlers, and prostitutes.[31] Cabantous's findings on gender and crime raise significant questions about women and the urban public sphere examined below in chapter 6.

The existing scholarship on the symbolic valences and associations of the night in the pre-modern West reveals an ambivalent legacy. All the religious traditions of early modern Europe – Roman Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Jewish, and Muslim – used the night to think about God and humankind, good and evil. Certainly some of the

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most complex and sustained discussion of darkness and the night in the West took place within the Christian tradition. The volume, complexity, and variety of writing about the night in the Christian tradition and the range of topics it understood through the night far surpass modern attempts to address the night in philosophical or literary terms. And the upheavals within early modern Christendom from the Reformations to the Enlightenment make the symbolic associations of the night in this period especially dynamic and significant.

For early modern Christians, darkness and the night had long served as powerful metaphors. From the tradition's earliest writings, darkness and the night have borne strongly -— though not exclusively – negative associations. The letters of Paul repeatedly contrast light as righteous with darkness as evil, as in 2 Corinthians 6:14: "For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" and 1 Thessalonians 5:5: "You are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness."[32] The night represents evil or separation from God. The light–night opposition is especially intense in the Johannine books: "Jesus answered and said unto him … this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil," and "Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 3:10–19; 9:5). The betrayal and arrest of Jesus at night and the mid-day darkness that marked the crucifixion reflect the same associations.

Do these early Christian writings present any counter-associations in their use of the night? In the frame of its powerful light–darkness / good–evil oppositions, the Gospel of John introduces "a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God." Later when he is praised for preparing the body of Jesus for burial, he is described as "Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night" (John 3:1–2; 7:50–51; 19:39). There has been little consensus among commentators on this obscure figure, on the one hand criticized for coming to Jesus only in secret, on the other

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