Inequality," 28; Michael Mann, "The History of all Previous Society," 29.

[15] Laslett, "The Poverty of (Monocausal) Theory," 475-6.

[16] Tilly, "Errors, Durable and Otherwise," 492.

[17] Tilly has elaborated upon his understanding of agency in an interview with Stave and described himself as in many ways a Thompsonian. Elsewhere he has defended Thompson's relational notion of class, not as "an individual state of mind, not even the collective mentality of a single group, but a dynamic, contested relationship among sets of people." His may resemble Thompson's understanding of agency, although Thompson's stunted offsprings of the working class were more clearly actors than Tilly's illustrations. The difference between the two is in understanding structure and structural change, at least as Tilly represents his position in *Durable Inequality*. Stave, "A Conversation," 184-225; Charles Tilly, "Softcore Solipsism" in *Labour/Le travail* 34 (Fall, 1994): 263.

[18] Hanagan has regretted that "the timeless cast of his argument shifts attention from his radical new reinterpretations of the transition from feudalism to capitalism and early modern state formation." One does wish that Tilly had made these more apparent to his readers. Hanagan, review of *Durable Inequality* in *Journal of Social History* 34 (2000), 184.

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

Every so often a work of history comes along whose ambition and originality take one aback. Such a book captures a certain spirit of the times, engaging with contemporary trends across the broadest of fronts, while summoning the best of older traditions to manage them. It exercises breathtaking powers of synthesis – over a wide array of experiences and developments, over different types of knowledge in disparate fields, over theories and controversies, over wide scatterings of scholarship, over unexpected insights, over what has long been familiar and what is new. It pulls things together. It navigates a path through an otherwise disabling field of disagreements and partisanship. It takes the measure of powerful new theories, while calling them to classical account. It is passionately and eloquently written.

Bryan Palmer's book does all of this and more. Writing from inside the contemporary crucible of intellectual and political uncertainty we know by that "hybrid melange of analyses" bearing the prefix of the "post" ("postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, postfeminism, *posthistoire*"), Palmer sets out to explore the marginal and hidden places where "transgressive" lives are made (3) – where worlds are lived and imagined differently from

the estranged and disempowered everydayness permitted under capitalism by the prevailing distributions of power. Marginality in this sense is both a cultural condition and a physical space, "simultaneously an identity/consciousness and a structure/place," whose relative freedom from power's surveillance has come to be championed by a legion of historians, anthropologists, literary scholars, art historians, geographers, and others working in cultural studies. Backing away from the older metanarratives of capitalist critique that sought to conceptualize the bases of collective agency around the central category of class, such voices increasingly prefer an approach "that accentuates fragmentation, difference, and particularistic parochialism." Still more: "In the name of refusing power's master narratives, 'post' thought denies the very importance of a systematic center of exploitation's and oppression's causality" altogether, proposing instead a framework of "pluralism and diversity, in which proliferating stories of class, race, and gender" can coexist. (4)

So far, this language echoes Palmer's earlier *Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History* (Philadelphia, 1990), which sallied forth with bracing theoretical verve and some polemical excess to defend a particular theoretical standpoint in the early controversies surrounding the so-called linguistic turn. But this time Palmer's goal is different. He wishes to take up the challenge of the "posts," not with an armory of "theoretical abstractions," but by pursuing the histories of transgressive self-assertiveness – "illuminating moments of the experiences of class, race, and gender in particular historical periods of their formation" – as concretely and as widely across temporal and geographical boundaries as possible. In so doing, he crosses seven centuries of history, in a broad trajectory from late medieval and early modern Europe (two chapters on "Class and Gender in the Dissolution of the Ancien Regime") through the Age of Revolution (Part III) and the rise of early capitalism (Part IV) to the variegated processes of working-class formation (Part V on "The Transforming Power of Capital"), and thence to an extended reflection on late nineteenth and twentieth-century modernities (Parts VI-VIII, eight chapters, not quite half the book). He traverses the Atlantic back and forth, with appropriate forays elsewhere, in an unforced insistence on capitalism's global scale, beautifully capturing the transnational circuits of popular history. With all this, he seeks new "ways of looking at the relations of dominance and subordination, rooted always in the social relations of production, but often lived out in dark cultures distanced from the public visibilities of the day." (6) The resulting sequence of discussions, chapter by chapter, is a *tour de force*:

> ... peasant dissidents and witches in the moment of feudalism's dissolution; pornographers, libertines, monsters, and Jacobin conspirators in the Age of Revolution; pirates and slaves in the ascendancy of mercantile capitalism; debased trades and dishon-

orable work, the sociability of the tavern and the fraternal order,
the dangerous classes of the urban, industrial order, and the trau-
mas of Third World proletarianization in the global reach of the
Industrial Revolution; revolutions of the right and left, and their
respective uses of the night; cultures of erotic, musical, cinemat-
ic, and poetic disaffection, many of which consolidate in capi-
talism's mid-twentieth-century epic of conformity's successes,
Cold War America; and the ravages of race in the inner cities of
late capitalism's material and cultural chaos." (9)

In crafting a framework for these disparate and extraordinarily wide-rang-
ing discussions – which he intentionally frees from the fetters of "restricted
chronology, confining geo-spatial limits, and reified 'national' cultures" (6) –
Palmer has a number of guiding threads. One is the organizing metaphor of
"darkness" and the "night," which allows him to hold otherwise contrary
impulses in fruitful tension – on the one hand the social historian's commitment
to "event and actuality," and on the other hand the "post" theorists' attentive-
ness "to representation and metaphor, to image and its purposeful making." He
casts the book as a series of "travelogues" through the ages, for which night-
time becomes "the actual and metaphorical place where marginality might best
be both lived as an experience and socially constructed as a representation."
Almost universally, in fact, "night's association with darkness has cast the shad-
owy hours of evening and early morning as an environment of transgression, a
time and place where power's constraints might be shed and powerlessness's
aspirations articulated." (6)

Thus, on the one hand, the relative freedoms of the night recur through
Palmer's chapters as the eminently practical and enabling circumstances that
delivered the elementary wherewithall for popular self-assertion, whether indi-
vidually or in the collective. This was true no less of the subversive and hereti-
cal cosmologies imagined by the pre-literate peasantries and isolated autodi-
dacts of Emanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Natalie Davis, Piero Camporesi, and Carlo
Ginsburg (dealt with in the two chapters of Part II), than of the early democratic
movements accompanying the English Revolution and broader popular upsurge
of the later eighteenth century. Democracies were necessarily forged after dark.
This could be seen in the evening gatherings that produced the radical democ-
racy of Thomas Hardy's London Corresponding Society and the other
Jacobinisms of the 1790s, in the working-class sociabilities of the fraternal
lodge and the tavern, or in the socialist and anarchist agitations of the later
nineteenth-century labour movements. For these oppositional cultures, night-
time's importance was literal, providing both the respite from the depletions of
the working day and the protective cover against authority.

But for the defenders of privilege and order, on the other hand, the night
also signified danger, coded through demonizing languages of denunciation
and disavowal, which reviled the "dangerous classes" now seen to be lurking in

the dark and inaccessible netherworlds of the city. In this sense, the contests and skirmishes over self-assertion and emancipation were waged across the city's imagined and imaginary landscape as well as through the meeting halls and committee rooms and in the acknowledged political spaces of the formally recognized public sphere. In some chapters, Palmer gives these allegorical meanings primary rein, as in a superb discussion of vampires, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), and the Gothic novel during the age of revolution ("Monsters of the Night: Historicizing Frantasy"), or in a fine treatment of film noir during the Cold War ("Noir: The Cultural Politics of Darkness"). But usually he keeps these two registers, the literal and the metaphorical, intimately together – as in the three chapters of Part IV on "Exchange Relations, Empire's Underside, and Early Capitalism," which deal with the city's "dishonorable trades" (sweated industries, domestic service, sewage workers, prostitutes), empire and race ("Dark Continents"), and pirates and maroons respectively; or in the three chapters of Part VII on twentieth-century enetertainment cultures, dealing with blues and jazz, "Bohemia and the Beats," and "Noir."

Palmer deploys the careful antinomies of lightness and dark creatively throughout the book. Sometimes this figures as mere trope ("The Jacobin night had not so much succumbed totally to the dawn of power's repressive day as it had been driven underground ... ." [111]), but always keyed to the main theme: "Fraternalism, then, was a night quest for light, a search in the leisured hours of the evening for sociable station, an attempt to transcend the compromises and threatening chaos of the day." (213) With the quality of his writing, still more with his standpoint – rewriting the histories of capitalist modernity from these obscured and clandestine locations fundamentally shifts the optic – Palmer provides a poetics of the margin. He is hardly the first to map this terrain or to see the larger analytical and political potential. Moreover, it's the extraordinary blasting open of the historian's legitimate agenda during the past two decades, and the wider cross-disciplinary fascinations for "hidden histories" and "borderlands," that first make a book like this possible, as Palmer's citations richly attest. But no one has provided such a sustained incitement to a new "metanarrative of alternative and opposition" (5), with quite this panoramic range. Whether explicating the "night battles" of Carlo Ginzburg's *benandanti*, discussing "the actual underground labors associated with sewers, subways, and mines" (147), historicizing "transgressive sexualities," or decoding literary and visual representations, Palmer brilliantly vidicates his chosen approach.

At one level, this claiming of darkness and the night is counterintuitive. Desires of progress and improvement have usually sought metaphors of light and allegories of the bright shining future. We owe this reversal of terms above all to Michel Foucault, whose studies of prisons, asylums, sexualities, regimes of knowledge, processes of normalizing and classification, and the general

"order of things" simultaneously marked out the places where resistance might result, where domination scuffed and scoured against its constraints. Palmer was inspired to this study "by the conceptual refusals of order and the persistent embrace of alienation and transgression found" in Foucault. The latter "opened our eyes to the historical placement of 'the other' within the field-of-force of the obscured centers of power, which pressured alienation and demanded dispossession and displacement in order to define and live its propertied authority." (7) But at the same time, Palmer contextualizes this Foucauldian understanding of estrangement with an analyses of exploitation and commodification from Karl Marx, joining the connective logic of capitalist accumulation to the fragmenting and decentering consequences of power. At the core of *Cultures of Darkness*, therefore, is a fascinating and fruitful conversation between Marx and Foucault.

The pay-off is enormous. Some of the book's best analyses historicize an overarching thesis about capitalist development, synthesizing huge bodies of theoretical and monographic writing, putting the best individual studies to work, and setting the scene for imaginative reflections on popular resourcefulness, with expert vignettes and capsule descriptions along the way. One example is the chapter on the relationship between occult power and labour exploitation in the capitalist conquest of the colonized and underdeveloped world, using especially the work of Michael Taussig and June Nash on Colombia and Bolivia ("Working for the Devil: Dark Dimensions of Exploitation"). Another is the stunning analysis of late capitalist accumulation in the twentieth century ("Nights of Accumulation: Banditry, Mafias, and the Contemporary Spirit of Capitalism"). This builds from the work of Pino Arlacchi, Anton Blok, and Christopher Duggan on Mafia's origins in the social histories of commercialization and state formation in southern Italy, together with Eric Hobsbawm's classic accounts of "social banditry," and climbs to an incisive discussion of the political economy of youth gangs in the "accumulative chaos" of the deindustrialized U.S. inner city.

This reciprocity of Marx and Foucault is remarkably even-handed. If Marxist political economy grounds Foucauldian readings of power, the latter reminds us that "marginality's making was not just externally imposed, but also internally, subjectively, constituted." (8) Like the preceding chapter on colonialism and slavery ("Dark Continent: Empire and Race"), Palmer's treatment of pirates and the maroon societies of fugitive slaves, drawing on work by Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker and the rich historiography of Caribbean slavery, shows the approach spendidly at work. So too does the chapter on "Dark and Dangerous Labors" in the emergent urban economies of the industrial revolution, where Marx's famous analysis of the working day passes into characteristic post-Foucauldian treatments of dirty and dishonorable labour, prostitutes, and the dialectics of disregard. In other parts of the book, "culturalist"

readings understandably prevail, as in chapters on the political genealogies of eighteenth-century pornography ("Libertines, Licentiousness, and Liberty"), and the outstanding discussion of "transgressive sexualities" between the later nineteenth century and the present. Visual representations, starting with an early reference to Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (1893) and an introductory framing chapter using the art of Thomas Hart Benton, William Hogarth, and the Harlem-born photographer Roy DeCarava ("A Walk on the Dark Side: The Metaphorical Night"), are used excellently throughout.

All in all, this is a very major achievement. It reflects the best achievements of the innovative social histories of the 1970s and 1980s, moved by empathetic solidarity with history's voiceless and dispossessed, guided by Marxism, and now further extended by the challenges of the new cultural history. All three of those strands are equally essential. A theory of capitalism and confident knowledge of the now-classic literatures on national state formation, the "transition debate," industrialization, class formation, and globalization are just as vital to Palmer's book as the post-Foucauldian perspectives and the succinct renditions of vast historiographies. Methodologically, the book is meant to provide an incitement to further thought. Palmer calls it "a speculative pastiche of commentary." By bringing together disparate "historically situated experiences," it explores "how they are connected and what they look like in the mirrors of marginality, where transgression's countenance is sometimes reflected, sometimes distorted." (17) At the same time, he avers, this inventory of transgression offers no panacea for the Left, no ready-made counter-story to the tarnished grand narratives of progress that no longer persuade.

In other words, Palmer resists fashioning marginality into a sufficient and authorizing source for politics. "The dark cultures of the night," as he puts it, can't be "unified in[to] any categorical history of sameness." (17) He repeatedly reminds us of the dark side's contradictory valencies. The latter's possibilities

> are presented here as moments excluded from histories of the day, a counterpoint within the time, space, and place governed and regulated by the logic and commerce of economic rationality and the structures of political rule. Night can be understood as lowering curtains on these domains of dominance, introducing theaters of ambiguity and transgression that can lead toward enactments of liberation. (17-18)

But if night could provide a "comfort and escape or, on occasion, a nursery of revolt," we should always remember "the deep and dark prices the subordinate have been forced to pay," the "dark moments of doubt, distress, and worse." (17, 19) Marginality produces "darkness within darkness" as well, "a discomforting anarchy of alienation and distress that shattered the brittle securities of daylight in fearful and terrifying dangers, in tensions and self-destructive behaviors all the more tragic for their relative autonomy from the powers that

conditioned them and bore ultimate responsibility for their history of hurt."
(18) Likewise, he clarifies the political meanings of dissentient culture (notably
in chapters on jazz and blues, and "Bohemia and Beats"), but without roman-
ticizing or flattening their contradictions.

The question at the end of this remarkable book is the one its author leaves
intentionally open. What strategic sense can we make of these eloquently pre-
sented counter-histories? How do the histories of the marginal and the exclud-
ed, the hidden and the disavowed, emerge from the darkness Palmer describes?
How does "transgression" turn into "social transformation," to use his own
words? (19) His answer – "the dialogues and detours of its makings, often
forged in the possibilities of the night, had to undergo the difficult translation
into languages that could restructure the day" – remains necessarily abstract.
Moreover, the book's trajectory (despite all its complex unevenness), from the
political optimisms of the age of revolution and the rise of labour movements,
down through the discrete cultural dissidence of the twentieth century to the
racialized ravages of the late capitalist city, is profoundly pessimistic. And of
course, the generative context for contemporary interest in marginality has
been partly the exhaustion of class-political optimism, which remains the silent
referent of the book. Palmer's eloquent and moving conclusion meditates on all
of this indeterminacy. His book is a rare achievement, a triumph of engaged left
scholarship, truly a book of our times. In puzzling through the terms of our con-
temporary dilemmas, it's hard to imagine a better resource.

Geoff Eley
University of Michigan

Gregory Elliot, *Perry Anderson: The Merciless Laboratory of History*
(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

John Higgins, *Raymond Williams: Literature, Marxism and Cultural
Materialism* (London: Routledge, 1999).

Late twentieth-century British Marxist historians and cultural theorists have
had a world-wide influence. In the context of Western Marxism, their work has
been as important as French existentialist and structuralist Marxism or the
German Frankfurt School. British Marxism is not a school of thought so much
as an intellectual milieu. It grew out of an effort to create a socialist under-
standing of postwar capitalist transformations, to understand changes that
seemed to undermine traditional Marxist assumptions about the working class,
and to question the traditional Left's exclusive reliance on political and eco-