

THE LIFE OF A SPENGLERIAN VISIONARY

Dreamer of the Day:

Francis Parker Yockey and the Postwar Fascist International

Kevin Coogan

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Reviewed by Theodore J. O'Keefe

The American writer Francis Parker Yockey has long enjoyed cult status on the authoritarian fringe of the American far right. That the first serious attempt at a study of his life and influence, Kevin Coogan's *Dreamer of the Day*, is the work of a left-anarchist is less surprising considering that Yockey's thought and activity often defied left-right conventions. Coogan has researched this book extensively and intensely, ferreting out numerous elusive facts and long-forgotten rumors about his subject. The merit of *Dreamer of the Day*, however, is weakened by a division of emphasis signaled in its subtitle, Francis Parker Yockey and the Postwar Fascist International.

Yockey's mystique has rested in his chief work, *Imperium*, and in his mysterious death in 1960. Coogan dispels much of the murk surrounding Yockey's death, in a San Francisco jail where he was being held for passport fraud, by demonstrating that it was almost certainly suicide. His treatment of Yockey's 1948 historico-political manifesto is less definitive, for Coogan has avoided a systematic descriptive and analytical treatment of *Imperium*, by far the most substantial of Yockey's accomplishments. Instead, he has chosen to trace Yockey's shadowy and inconsequential efforts at revolutionary organizing, and to illuminate various of *Imperium's* ideas through their (often tenuous) affinities to the thought and activities of a tenebrous group he calls "the postwar fascist international."

Coogan has done a passable job in researching the verifiable facts of Yockey's origins in solid, middle-class German stock. Born in 1917 in

Chicago, Yockey was gifted with a powerful, analytical intellect and a strong artistic sensibility; to his credit the author breaks with a common practice among politically hostile biographers by not trying to minimize his subject's abilities. Coogan industriously uncovers Yockey's vagabond college years, during which he studied at half a dozen colleges and universities, and records his intensifying involvement in writing and speaking for anti-Communist and anti-interventionist causes during the years just before America's entry into the Second World War. The author devotes similar pains to investigating Yockey's unsuccessful wartime stint in the army, which ended with his medical discharge due to a psychiatric problem (Coogan presents evidence that Yockey faked it), then trails his subject through stopgap jobs in the mid-1940s as a government attorney, including a minor role in the prosecution of second-rank "war criminals" in Germany. It must be noted that for most of these episodes, as well as for many others in Yockey's life, Coogan is overly trustful of the FBI interrogation and informant reports that his subject's intrigues evoked in the last decade of his life.

Unquestionably, as Coogan shows, Yockey's discovery of Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* while an undergraduate at the University of Michigan in the mid 1930s was his great epiphany. Spengler's theory of historical culture-civilizations—unique phenomena of the spirit, monadic in their isolation from one another, each moving ineluctably toward its doom—which the German author illuminated with a host of brilliant insights and intercultural comparisons in music, economics, mathematics, philosophy, city life, art, technology, literature, the natural sciences, and religiosity, to name a few, did more than dazzle and instruct its young reader: it recruited him.

In a sense Yockey's life after reading Spengler was only a prologue to his retreat in 1947 to Brittas Bay in Wicklow on the Irish Sea, where he poured out the more than six hundred pages of *Imperium* in under six months, as his life thereafter is arguably only a postscript to that book. Besides embracing the schema of "the philosopher of history," *Imperium* channels other influences, including Spengler's adamant political musings in *The Hour of Decision* and "Prussianism and Socialism," Carl Schmitt's authoritarian theories of law and politics, and the geopolitical doctrines of Karl Haushofer and his predecessors. The book's title and imperative stem from the Spenglerian challenge to seize the moment at which each culture is destined either to perish or else to leave behind the vernal blooming of its youth, and, repelling enemies from without and within, cross over to an age of Authority and Duty (Yockey's proneness to initial capitals is unmatched by any author in English since Carlyle). In reflection of Yockey's anguish at the ruin of Europe, anno 1947, and

his defiance at the still formally intact coalition of the Western "plutocrats" and the Eastern Bolsheviks, including the Jews who played a prominent role in both camps, *Imperium* is dedicated to "the Hero of the Second World War," unquestionably Adolf Hitler.

For the reader of a certain age and sensibilities, *Imperium* can seem a philosopher's stone, encompassing all of human history, glittering with hard insights into politics (not to mention the Jewish taboo) one could never get from one's political science class or the *National Review*, and concluding with a mighty trumpet call for the resurgence of the West. Yet the book was singularly incapable of rousing a Caesarist revolution that would cleanse Europe of its capitalist counting houses and repel "the Mongols in the Kremlin." The couple of hundred copies of *Imperium* published in 1948 and Yockey's attempts to buttonhole various Euro-fascists such as Oswald Mosley could not transcend the book's theoretical limitations and its author's own impolitic personality. Above all, however, Yockey's rejection of any possibility that America could play Rome to Europe's Greece bumped up against a Soviet threat that seemed increasingly urgent.

From here on Coogan bifurcates *Dreamer of the Day* into involved, but not always firmly supported accounts of Yockey's obscure and ineffectual efforts to implement *Imperium's* program, and into probing the "fascist international," the author's name for a congeries of theorists and activists whose thought, Coogan believes, mirrors various of Yockey's ideas. This is something of a bad bargain for the reader interested in Yockey's life, his ideas, or his influence. In place of a measured account of any of these, Coogan recounts his subject's endless rendezvous, usually with nonentities and often observed obliquely or obscurely through unverifiable sources. A more judicious author might have supplied more focus and analysis than Coogan does to the tensions inherent in Yockey's courting of hard-core American anti-Communists (he seems even to have written a speech, refulgent with Yockeyisms, for Senator Joseph McCarthy, which, alas, the senator never delivered), and in his attempts to cultivate the Soviet Union, recently purged of its Jewish influences, against an America that showed no signs of freeing itself from the "Culture Distorter." Aside from these efforts (which may well have included borderline espionage activity in concert with Soviet bloc secret services), it would probably have sufficed to observe that Yockey, badly misreading the spirit of the age, had strived to realize his dream of revolutionary Caesarism in not only an America, but also a Europe, in which pragmatism, materialism, and optimism easily trumped Yockey's heroic cultural pessimism and self-sacrificing idealism.

Long stretches of *Dreamer of the Day* are devoted to surveying a variegated plenitude of mostly European thinkers, many of them former Italian Fascists or German authoritarians, National Socialists or not, who claimed to reject what they saw as Hitler's reductive racialism, especially his aversion to Slavic Russia, and were often ready to make common cause with non-Westerners, from the Soviets to Nasser to Castro, against the enervating American influence. Here the author can be instructive and occasionally diverting, but his treatment of political and philosophical ideas paralleling those of his subject is often misleading or irrelevant, in terms of actual influence in either direction. A positive review of *Imperium* from the pen of the fascist esoteric Julius Evola or former SS officer and propagandist Johann von Leers suffices to send Coogan off on chapter-long vagaries on Atlantis and the Hypoboreans or the far-flung (and seemingly far-fetched) archeological expeditions of the SS Ahnenerbe, which are often followed by histories of political efforts with only the most tangential connection to Yockey.

Worse, the author has let his enthusiasm for such distracting diversions seduce him into unwarranted speculations on what he calls the Order, "a new kind of Knights Templar designed to successfully function sub rosa" (p. 320). Coogan provides no substantiation for the existence of this corps d'élite of fascist adepts, which he elsewhere imagines to have been linked in the 1940s and '50s by "a devil's pact" to Eisenhower's CIA chief, Allen Dulles. Coogan's attempts to link Yockey to the Order are no more effective than his dabblings in the mystical interests of its members. Coogan's opinion that "By tapping into methods used in the occult and Traditional world, Evola developed extremely powerful MKULTRA-like thought-control techniques" (p. 336) will raise eyebrows among his more phlegmatic readers, some of whom may also wonder why there is no reference to a source for it on one of the several score of pages of reference notes included in this book.

In the strictest interpretation, *Dreamer of the Day* is neither a proper biography nor a history of ideas nor a reliable account of the anti-bourgeois right in either Europe or America during the 1950s. A two-hundred-page biography that is more focused, more critical of its sources, more judicious in weighing Yockey's actual effect as a thinker, an organizer, and a revolutionary is still called for. For all its defects, however, *Dreamer of the Day* has its uses, as an introduction to a past current of thought and (attempted) action in defense of the West that fairly glitters beside the turgid and predictable efforts of North American "conservatives" over the past half century. Coogan is often an engaging writer, with for the most part an objectivity, a sense of humor, and a genuine interest in the doings of his subjects rare among leftists

depicting rightists (and vice versa). Despite his lapses, Coogan has been for the most part quite up to the task of depicting a swarm of characters far more diverse and interesting than any comparable collection of leftists or “movement” conservatives. When all is thought and written, it’s hard to damn an author who (discussing on the polymorphous sexuality of the American propagandist for Germany Sylvester Viereck) can produce a line like, “From his youth onwards he also had a fondness for orgies.”

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