

THE BEST AND THE REST OF JAMES JOYCE

By Ian McDonald

British author Ian McDonald is an ambitious and daring writer with a wide range and an impressive amount of talent. His first story was published in 1982, and since then he has appeared with some frequency in *Interzone*, *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, *Zenith*, *Other Edens*, *Amazing*, and elsewhere. He was nominated for the John W. Campbell Award in 1985, and in 1989 he won the *Locus* "Best First Novel" Award for his *Desolation Road*. He won the Philip K. Dick Award in 1992 for his novel *King of Morning, Queen of Day*. His other books include the novel *Out on Blue Six* and a collection of his short fiction, *Empire Dreams*. His most recent books include a new novel, *The Broken Land*, and a new collection, *Speaking in Tongues*, as well as several graphic novels. He is at work on another new novel, tentatively entitled *Necroville*. Born in Manchester, England, in 1960, McDonald has spent most of his life in Northern Ireland, and now lives and works in Belfast. In the daring, playful, and lushly inventive story that follows, he gives us a look (or a succession of *different* looks) at a world-famous writer as you've never seen him before—in fact, as *no one's* ever seen him before . . .

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Aboard His Britannic Majesty's air-dreadnought *William and Mary* as it leaves the Command Holdfast buried beneath the cratered mudscape once known as London in the one-hundred-and-first year of the war are 112 ratings, 66 officers, and six highly important, highly secret passengers: Air Lord Blennerhasset, Admiralty Lord Van Loos, Marshall Valery-Petain, Director Ames, Sub-Academician Giorgio Joyce and his father, senior Academician James Joyce. Reinforced concrete bombproof doors open as *William and Mary* rises cautiously, every sense tuned, toward the perpetual rainclouds that discharge their poisoned drizzle over the mudfields of Staines. Despite two atomic cannon, a complement of ten turret-mounted 18-inch guns and a veritable arsenal of lighter artillery and rocket racks, the artillerymen standing by their weapons and the glider-marines ready at the launch tubes are nervous. They have heard stories of dirigibles, dreadnoughts even, surprised and destroyed attaining altitude by marauding Tsarist airships lying grounded, half buried in the mud. For the lynchpin of His Majesty's airfleet to lift unescorted, unprotected, into potentially hostile airspace . . .

They have long suspected that the High Command locked up in their War Room half a mile under Command Holdfast have gone insane: now they have proof. But His Majesty's Air Lords need not justify, to the crew of *William and Mary* their decision that a lone dirigible might escape the attention a dreadnought with full escort

would warrant. Their destination, the very fact that they are carrying passengers, have been kept secret from them. But seeing the cindered cities of the midlands slipping away far beneath their armoured glass observation bull's-eyes, they know that their course is northward. A combined services mission, perhaps, supporting the belea-guered 19th Army bogged down in melting permafrost north of Bergen, or a search-and-destroy mission on Tsarist submarine traffic across the Barents Sea. Maybe *William and Mary* has been sent to rendezvous with the remnant of the Royal Dutch Airfleet stationed at Scapa Flo Holdfast and destroy the Tsarist North Polar Fleet. In his armoured cubicle the Captain opens the envelope sealed with the wax sigil of His Majesty's Directorate and after reading and burning the flimsy within, calls a heading, altitude and velocity down the gosport to the flightbridge that will, in 18 hours' time, bring *William and Mary* and its secret passengers north to Iceland, to the Keflavik Chronokinetics Research Facility.

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In the summer of 1973 I was asked by a doctor of my acquaintance if I might examine a patient of his, a gentleman from Ireland of late middle age who had come to him complaining of persistent and severe insomnia. My doctor friend prescribed sleeping tablets but the patient, who I shall hereafter refer to as Herr J., complained that the prescription was ineffective and that the true source of the insomnia lay in a powerful and disturbing dream that recurred nightly, whereupon my colleague referred him to my practice. I was advised that the man, a writer of international repute, would not make the most co-operative of patients.

My first interview with the patient was at an outside table at a café on the Burkliplatz. The tetchiness against which my colleague had warned me made itself immediately evident in his response to my introduction of myself: "Ah yes, the Swiss Tweedledee, not to be confused with the Austrian Tweedle-dum." It was clear to me that the caustic witticism with which he leavened his subsequent conversation concealed a deep-seated discontent.

He was a tall, thin man, of protrusions and angularities. Behind the thick glasses he wore—he was a sufferer from persistent iritis—his eyes were an extraordinarily penetrating ice-blue. His hands moved constantly, making idle play with the table utensils. He was quite refreshingly frank about the details of his life, though more, I felt, from a mischievous delight in outrage: his first sexual experience had been at the age of fourteen with a prostitute on the banks of a canal. This had precipitated his lapse from the Catholic faith—an almost inevitable fall, I have heard, for the *intelligentsia* of his country. At the age of 22 he had left Ireland with his lover, Frau Nora B., and lived the following years as an artistic exile in Paris, Trieste and Zurich, during which time he produced his most notable work. He confessed to having been unfaithful to Nora B. only once; a short, tempestuous affair with one Martha Fleischmann of this city.

Eighteen months ago he had embarked upon a new, major, work, to be

entitled *Finnegans Wake*, a “stream of consciousness” exploration of a single night’s dream. After three months he had abandoned work on account of failing concentration which he blamed on insomnia caused by a recurring and vivid dream. Two months to the day after the first dream, the Travellers arrived and threw our affairs into disarray. He found himself no longer capable of working on *Finnegans Wake* and was convinced that the Travellers were the source of his dreams. Indeed, his attention was continually being diverted from our table across the Burkliplatz to the large number of spectators who thronged the promenade with telescopes and field glasses, and from these spectators upward, to the focus of their observation, the hazy curtain of air, half hidden by thin cloud, beyond which the incomprehensible forms of the Travellers may occasionally be glimpsed.

“Dreams of falling, Dr Jung? Well, we all know what they mean,” he said. “Dreams of flying? Doubtless, there is some handy psychological rebus for these too.”

“I don’t deal in psychological panaceas, Herr J.,” I said. “You tell me rather what you think these dreams signify.”

“A belief and a fear, Herr Doctor. I believe that the Travellers will soon leave. I fear that I want more than anything to go with them.”

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Righteous Rhythm Rocks the Musik Halls

A traditional sound from the Eastern Emirates of the United Kingdoms is the new popular music craze of the basement clubs in the Capital. *Sarif*, a fusion of traditional Moorish music with Western Kingdoms electric instruments has emerged from the *kasbahs* of the cities of the Southern Counties to become the essential listening of the new youth underground, a new musical wave determined to sweep all before it.

Lyle Santesteban goes every week to the musik clubs in the depressed area of Vincastra where *sarif* is drawing packed houses to dance all night to the rhythms of Afrika and Islam. Escapism through music, or something deeper? “*Sarif* speaks to us,” says Lyle Santesteban. “*Sarif* has something to say. That stuff on the wireless, the electric crooners, the neoballadeers, they got nothing to say; it’s all just love and romance and let’s get married tootsie-wootsie. What’s that got to do with life in the United Kingdoms, what’s that got to say about Vincastra in 1902? *Sarif* is music of the street. *Sarif* speaks with the voice of the street. *Sarif* has something to say about being young, about being old, about being poor, about being rich, in a job, out of a job, family problems, arranged marriages, polygamy, sex, morality, God; *sarif* speaks to us.”

Sarif’s musical revolution is essentially a *righteous* one. The clubs and cafés

that specialize in the new music serve nothing stronger than coffee. Says Haran Gomez, manager of the El Morocco Cafe: “Islam and *sarif* cannot be separated. And that means no alcohol, and certainly, no drugs.

We catch anyone in the toilet toking a *kif*, he’s not just bounced, we call the cops as well. What *sarif* is about is having a good time, hearing great music, dancing, meeting people, without getting blind drunk, smashed out of your skull, or into a fight. But it’s not a wank. *Sarif*’s got steel at its core, it’s strong, like Islam. The spirit of *sarif* is the spirit of Islam.”

James Joyce would agree. He is one of the most promising of *sarif*’s rising stars; coupling social consciousness with intense verbal imagery and ingenuity. This seminal figure is in many ways an anomaly in an anomalous genre, originating not from the Hispano-Moorish section of the population which spawned *sarif* as a distinct form, but from the purebreed Western Celts.

“It’s a positive advantage,” the twenty-year-old boy from Hibernia East says. “I’m bringing together two separate strands of our culture, the Moorish and the Celtic; bringing a little North African soul and spiritual fibre into the Celtic, a little Celtic playfulness and imagination into the North African. The two cultures really have much more in common than you think, it’s exciting experimenting with new ways of fusing Celtic melodies with Islamic rhythms, breaking down the structured lyrical system of ethnic proto*sarif* into improvisational stream-of-consciousness passages. But there’s nothing over-cerebral about it,” Joyce adds. “It’s dance music pure and simple, first and last.”

Certainly, the Celtic-Islamic fusion makes James “Ched” (the Moroccan Arabic name for traditional folk singers) Joyce’s sets at the El Morocco where he holds down a regular Saturday night spot stand out among an already outstanding bill that includes Ched Alayah and Ched Christo Dos Santos. His inventive, improvised vocals, the purity of his singing voice and the multi-layered complexity of his backing group leave the listener both beguiled and stimulated.

James “Ched” Joyce has recently moved from Soukh Recordings, a small independent company specializing in *sarif* and other ethnic musics, to Marconigram, the Kingdoms’ largest; his first album for them, *Three Quarks*, is due for release early next month.

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The city’s greatest expert on the enigma of the Travellers is Dr Peter Pretorious, to whom I made recourse in the case of Herr J. for a layman’s summary of the phenomenon.

In the absence of any sustained coherent communication between man-kind and the Travellers, Dr Pretorious’s theories were highly suppositional. The general

consensus seems to be that our visitors are travellers not of the distances between the stars, as had first been thought, but of the distances between universes; the infinite array of potential other earths that modern physics suggests are created by the indeterminacy of quantum theory. The hypothesis is that the Travellers originate from a parallel earth that diverged from ours at the very dawn of the solar system; one in which matter was not gathered into discrete planets, but remained in an annular nebula around the sun and of which the Travellers, and the incomprehensible companion bodies with which they share their Enclaves, are the dominant life: the *humanity* of this alternative earth. Their colossal size and mutable shapes are products of evolution within the gravity-free conditions of the gasring; the size of such an organism being governed ultimately by the speed of transmission along the nervous system. Hence the forty-kilometre diameter spheres of gravitylessness they have created in those places they have chosen to arrive upon our earth: Brisbane, Sao Paulo, Vancouver, Freetown in Sierra Leone, Luzon in the Philippines, and here in, or rather above, Zurich. Such enormous creatures, Dr Pretorious informed me, could not hope to survive the effects of gravity. At for a means by which they might negate gravity, or even the method by which they travel with such apparent ease between alternate worlds, both he and the scientific world at large are at a loss to supply.

I mentioned to him Herr J.'s belief that the Travellers might soon depart. Dr Pretorious replied that recent observations through telescopes, and from aircraft flying as close as they safely dared to the immense pressure barriers that defined the Enclaves, indicated that the Travellers and their companion bodies were indeed undergoing physical changes into new forms that might signal an imminent change of activity.

Returning to my offices from the University, I called at the residence Herr J. shared with Frau Nora B. to leave a card with the *concierge* and a request that he call me at his earliest convenience to make an appointment.

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Eoin Uí Níall reviews the new James Joyce album, “Agenbites of Inwit” (*New Musical Express*: March 29th 1911 edition)

Consider this man's quandary. In the wireless-defined universe orbit ten million frequency-modulation ghosts who have come to know and possibly love Joyce through his waxings on Marconigram. Yet in the dark streets shine the souls of the luminous few who have danced to glory with him up through the *sarif* clubs, soul survivors of the Saturday nights (as was your gentle reviewer, in what seems like a previous incarnation) when James Joyce held down a spot at El Morocco and the Virgin's Kitchen. Quandary quantified: these are two mutually exclusive camps. That they are not yet at war is due to the ministrations of their titular deity: Joyce himself. Though James Joyce on cylinder is a pale shade of James Joyce behind the footlights with five hundred watts of power on each shoulder—the extemporized,

improvisational spirit of Joyce's work is a bird that pines and dies when caged—still a watered-down James Joyce is better than no James Joyce at all.

So, as an exercise in squaring circles, how does *Agenbites of Inwit* fare?

Never let it be said that the man does not believe in value for money. Ten tracks are here, not one under six minutes in length. Roundabouts and swings; what you gain in danceability, you lose in singalong: there is no lyric sheet. Lyrics are superfluous; the titles (“Gas from a Burner,” “The Dead,” “Clashing Rocks”) are themes for improvisation. Join the celebration of mutability: if you feel that on another day, in another place, if the band had one more or one less to drink, this would have been an altogether other album; that is Joyce's intention. Songs in the key of possibility: what you are listening to is just one of a spectrum of possible alternative Agenbites. If this is a deliberate strategy by Joyce to unite both the dance-floor hero and the wax junkie under the banner of boogiedom, it is successful; this will be filling the floors well into the next decade.

All the familiar Joycean techniques have been Brassoed to a fare-thee-well: the medium rare, *al dente*, yet *together* punch of his instrumentalizations; the verbal and lyrical bravura, like a rather well arranged firework display *just for you*, the concrete-hard, almost architectural *righteousness*, the mining of new gems from the overworked lodes of *sarif* and ethnic genres. If there is a sense of progression, it lies in a search for spiritual understanding, a theological touchstone to transmute this tarnished age to, if not gold, at least lamé. The popular press, in its brief moments of relevance between Dal Riada spruce forest and the nail on the outdoor toilet door, have nudged and winked at James Joyce's interest in the mystical religions of the North Afrikan *safidis*, and if this quest for a Holy Grail reaches a climax in “Ulysses, Telemachus, Eumaeus,” the whole thing is mercifully saved from toppling into terminal pomposity by the impudent, shamelessly danceable “Stogged.”

The final track, “The Inner Organs of Animals,” leaves one hungry for more, with a tang of faintly scented urine on the tongue, and eagerly anticipates the next cylinder. Clubland and dubland will bop till they drop and then discuss post-modernism and the punk ethos over pools of seventy-percent-proof vomit on the toilet floor. Few cylinders warrant the epithet “seminal”; James Joyce stands unique among popular musicians as one who (to date) has produced nothing but masterpieces, and looks set fair to continue to do so. *And* you can dance to it. There's presence, and progress, in this cylinder; and that rates five stars by me.

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Senior Academician fames Joyce is uncomfortable at the formal dinner that night at the Captain's table. His white frock coat and high-collar shirt are drab and contemptible among the militaries' synthetic golds and carmines and purples. Even the sombre black and silver of the Directorate outshines him. He is acutely conscious that his thick pebble glasses mark him geneti-cally inferior to the

eugenically engineered military and political castes. He does not enjoy the enforced informalities of shipboard life, he does not enjoy being pushed into an intimacy with these superior castes. Son Giorgio seems at ease, weaving across strands of conversation from military to political to scientific; father James finds himself longing for the company of his peers at the tachyon facility. Over ersatz coffee, the threads of conversation draw inevitably toward the War, and how it might be won.

Air Lord Blennerhasset stoutly advocates the strategy of mass bombardment of the Tsarist Holdfasts by air-dreadnoughts armed with atomic cannon.

“Crack them open like an egg!” he says. Death-light shines in his eyes, or perhaps the grainy illumination of the bulkhead bulbs. “The enemy annihilated, the war won, in less than a week!”

Marshall Valery-Petain, clinging with his French Territorial Army to the handful of coastal holdfasts and revetments that are all that remains of his homeland, is dismissive of the new atomic artillery. He thinks it is over-vaunted. The ultimate weapon has always been, will always be, the man on the ground, the Bloody Infantry.

Giorgio Joyce, respectfully, disagrees with both. “Atomic artillery, massed waves of infantry, both are like a blunt cudgel compared to the sure, swift, untraceable scalpel of Chronokinesis. The ability to change an enemy’s history without him ever knowing that you have done so, that is the ultimate weapon.”

“Sub Academician Joyce of course, speaks as our first potential Chrononaut,” Director Ames says, a pinch-faced, bulbous-headed man with luminous violet eyes, dressed in the uniform of the elite Steel Guard.

A subaltern serves ersatz whisky. James Joyce excuses himself from the table and beckons for his son to follow him outside onto the airdeck. *William and Mary* travels wrapped in thick cloud as a precaution against detection. Father and son walk the steel balcony that runs around the perimeter of the dreadnought; to their left, the curving boron fibre hull, to their right, a dimensionless gray limbo. They pause over an engine housing, whisper under the threshing of the impellers.

“That was reckless,” James Joyce says to his son. “To mention the infinite mutability of history in company such as this.”

“Military? If it doesn’t involve attrition rates of over five hundred a minute, I might as well not be speaking.”

“Ames is no Military. He may not be an Academician, but Directors, even if they are Steel Guard, have some capacity for speculative thought. If he begins to suspect that it is not just our enemy’s history that is mutable and untraceable, but our own also...”

Speed unchanged, heading unchanged, altitude unchanged, concealed in its cloud-layer of mystery, *William and Mary* bores on over the slate-cold sea.

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(Sleeve notes from the cylinder “The Best and the Rest of James Joyce: Collected Recordings: 1902-1922”)

Imagine. I know it’s hard. I know it’s a thing to which you are not accustomed, you who have parted with your pelve and pence for this cylinder that claims to be the Best and the Rest of a man called James Joyce. I know you are impatient to hear just what James Joyce thinks constitutes his Best and Rest (Old Light Through Old Windows). But try. For one moment, try and imagine the Rest.

Imagine a world where our United Kingdoms and Emirates are not a maternal clutch of three islands off the coasts of Africa and Spain—imagine Home Islands that lie, say, off the North coast of France, imagine a Dal Riada, say, consigned to the cold waters beneath Greenland’s southern tip.

Got it now? Try it again. Imagine a world where the cylinder that rests impatiently in your sonogram will never be heard, will never have been, a world where James Joyce is not a musician, where there are no wirelesses, no live bands, no televisions, for the thermionic valve, the transistor, the cathode-ray tube, the microprocessor, have not been invented.

Imagine the world turned upside down, where north is south, and south north, where the twin spires of Africa and South America reach toward the polestar.

Imagine the world turned inside out, an earth that is a bubble of air and light and life in an infinity of dark, lifeless rock, where the moon and stars arc a perforated veil of darkness about a sun that is a blazing atom a few hundred miles above our heads.

You have it now. Fun, isn’t it?

Imagine a world, imagine worlds, where men, or what pass for men, may step from world to world, possibility to possibility, with the ease that you cross the room to throw the play switch of your sonogram.

Enough? Too much for your imagination? Time now at last to surrender the cylinder to the needle and settle back in the privacy of your headphones. To lay down the Best, to say that better will never be found, is to deny the Rest. But who is to say that the Rest might not be better. You have imagined just a hair’s-breadth of the Rest; the possible worlds that are held within the contemplation of God by the exercise of His free will. For the exercise of choice, be that choice human or divine,

creates worlds of undoing that might have been had we, or He, chosen otherwise: infinite choices, infinite worlds brought into existence by our lowly, daily acts of ablution, defecation, copulation, mastication. Consider the responsibility. With each step you take to cross the room to fit this cylinder into your sonogram a world may be created, humdrum worlds each a footstep different from ours.

This is the teaching of the Al Afr sect. Let not a footfall go unconsidered.

Got that?

Screw philosophy, let's dance!

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James Joyce has a recurring dream. He is alone, quite alone, dressed in a heavy rubber gas and radiation suit, flapping in webbed shoes across the mudscape that extends from Edinburgh to the Caucasus. He stumbles without aim or purpose through tangles of corroded wire hung with rags of rotted fabric, through hulks of guns and tanks and tracked war machines, through the cavernous interiors of land dreadnoughts, once tall and proud as battle-ships, stogged to the waist in mud; stumbling, through the faintly luminous fog that gathers in the shell craters, ever faster in an effort to keep up with his ludicrous, flapping feet, stop himself from falling, falling, into the mud, until at last his flapping feet catch on a snarl of wire or a chunk of rusted concrete, and he falls. He puts out his hands to save himself, but they plunge up to the elbow into the mire. His gloved fingers feel an embroidered cap badge, a piece of domestic thermoplastic, a porcelain doll's head, a water flask, a military honour, a silver picture frame, a scrap of cloth. Then in the dream his hands are suddenly bare, and the mud between his fingers has a fibrous, grainy texture. He knows then that the gritty graininess is the powdered brick and stone and steel of the great cities of Europe, the stringy fibrousness the rotted bones and blood of 300 million men, gently mixed into mud by the rain that falls upon the battlefield.

He dreams that he hears the voices of those 300 million, and more: the hundreds of millions who once lived in those drowned cities, the men and the women and the children, calling out to him from their dissolution beneath the mud.

James Joyce has never thought of himself as the material from which traitors are made. Born in the 29th year of the war to a prosperous mercantile family in the city that now lies in fused ruins above East Hibernia Holdfast; by education and temperament his inclination lay toward the arts; to literature. In moments of lassitude in his Academician's domicile under Keflavik Holdfast, he imagines himself writing about that city of his birth in such detail that, should the war ever end, it could be reconstructed out of its ruins from his book. By the 41st year of the war the British Empire had already embarked on its transmutation into leaner, fitter, more ruthless Britannia, and James Joyce understood instinctively that there was no place within

the new order for navigators of the stream of consciousness. It was an easy decision to become an Academician, a temporal physics specialist. The only other choice available to those born outside the privileged castes was to become another digit of Great Britannia drowning in the mudfields of Sax-ony. Perhaps that is why he became a traitor, because reshaping history is the only way he knows to rebuild that city in his imagination. It is the only way he knows to apologize to those calling voices beneath the mud.

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“This, Dr. Jung, is the dream that afflicts me night after night. Always the same, never varying in the slightest detail, projected with utter clarity and vividness.

“I am a passenger aboard an Alpine railway train, like those that take tourists up the Rigi, or Pilatus. I am in the last carriage of all, which is a glass observation car; glass walls, glass roof. The observation car is quite full; there are passengers from all parts of Europe and the Near East. Most of the women are smoking Turkish cigars. Nora is there too, sipping a frothy white cocktail of a sticky, glabrous consistency through a straw.

“I notice that the mountains through which our train is travelling are peculiarly rounded; strangely smooth and curvaceous for Alpine peaks, and each is surmounted by an erection of some form or another; a small stone cairn, a cross, a gazebo, a revolving restaurant.

“The train arrives at its destination: a tunnel inside a mountain. Everyone but I seems to know where we have arrived. Porters in extremely tight uniforms seize my bags, whirl me along, *this way, Herr J . . . if you please, Herr J...no time to lose, Herr J...* Everywhere, porters and passengers, rushing. I cannot see Nora. I ask one of the porters where Frau Nora is— strangely, as I ask that question, I know that we have arrived at the hotel.

“The hotel is built on the top of a mountain and all its outside walls are made of glass. Indeed, much of the hotel interior; the ballroom, the dining tables, the grand staircase, the health hydro, are also made of the same clear, smooth glass. The room I have been given overlooks a lake. Paintbox blue, the lake, encircled by the smooth, succulent domes of the mountains. There are pleasure boats and pedalloes abroad on the lake; I ask my porter if they are available for hire. A look of concern crosses his face; no, he says, they should not be out on the lake because of the dolphins. I look through the glass wall and see squadrons of dolphins diving through the blue lake water. The folly-boats and pleasure-craft make for shore with all haste but a few are too slow, too far from the jetty and are capsized by the leaping dolphins. Their leaps grow higher and bolder, the dolphins are hurling themselves clear from the water twenty, thirty, forty feet. As I watch I realize that all along I have not been in my room at all but in the residents’ saloon where the other guests have gathered. A woman with an oversized shoe for a hat cries, ‘Look, oh look at the dolphins,’ and

we all look and see that the dolphins have, in one immense leap, broken free from the water and are soaring into the air. They circle the glass hotel, turning and flashing like silver in the sun, and we notice that they are changing form, elongating, extending into shapes like zeppelins with flukes, fins and beady eyes.

“A voice cries out; *we can do it too, look*; and a woman with a red-tipped Turkish cheroot climbs onto the back of a glass sofa and steps off. She’s flying, up round the ceiling, around the chandeliers. The other people in the bar see her and want to join in, one after another they climb up onto the furniture and step off and fly with her around the room. I go with them, it is very easy, all one has to do it climb up on the furniture and step off. But it is taking that one step . . . Nora is the only one still on the ground. She’s dressed in a skin-smooth dress of silver fishscales. The windows of the Glass Hotel all burst open and then we go flying out of them, up into the air, with the zeppelin-dolphins, and a great light engulfs us all and I wake up.”

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Corvettes and gunboats marked with the shield and trident of Britannia escort *William and Mary* to its landing cradle in the Keflavik Holdfast hangar bay. As the concrete blast-doors close over the quarter-mile long shell of the dreadnought, its special passengers are whisked by tubetrain to the Chronokinesis Facility 20 miles distant. The car rattles and sparks along its tunnel. Senior Academician James Joyce explains the theoretical basis of Chronokinesis and tachyon physics but his explanations of faster-than-light particles that move backward through time are quite incomprehensible to the militar-ies. Director Ames alone displays a semblance of intelligent understanding.

“The physics itself was quite straightforward; the problem lay in generating a stream of tachyons at the correct initial velocity so that they would come to rest-velocity and deposit our chrononaut at the correct date,” James Joyce is saying as the rail-car arrives at the Chronokinesis Facility Station. Waiting on the dingily lit tiled platform are his fellow Academicians, fellow conspirators. Academician Retief, the historian, leads the party along dripping tiled tunnels into the bowels of the Facility. The corridors throb to a pulse of power.

“Merely the atomic pile that powers the bevatron,” Academician Fisk, the Particle Physicist, reassures the mistrustful militaries. “To rotate our chrononaut back to 1917 requires a tachyon flux with a velocity in excess of 30,000 C.”

“What is the significance of 1917?” asks Air Lord Blennerhasset.

“The year in question was a time of unparalleled success for the then Grand Alliance and of uncharacteristic weakness in the Tsarist Empire,” Academician Retief says, his voice barely audible over the rising swell of power. “Indeed, our sources reveal that the Empire was close to collapse. A revolutionary group, the Bolsheviks,

subscribers to the political philosophies of Marx and Engels, sought to overthrow the Imperial family and establish a proletarian state. Large sections of manufacturing and the armed forces had been infiltrated, indeed, the army was on the verge of widescale mutiny. That they did not succeed is due entirely to the assassination by an Imperial agent of their charismatic leader, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. Leaderless, the Bolsheviks were rapidly purged and eliminated by the Imperial security police.”

At the entrance to the antechamber of the Chronokinesis Unit, Giorgio Joyce leaves the party. His father bids him farewell, clasps his son’s hands within his own. He would shed tears, but Britannia does not believe in tears. For once he is gone, he is gone forever. The technology that might bring him back will never have been created. All that can be seen of the chronokinesis chamber from the anteroom is an open airlock door. The militaries seem disappointed. Doubtless they had expected yawning chasms filled with manmade lightning, stupendous devices crackling with power, searing beams of energy. Only Ames seems to appreciate the significance of what lies beyond the airlock door.

“Your belief is that if you can prevent the assassination of this Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, the Tsarist Empire would crumble under Bolshevik assault, and be forced to sue for peace,” he says, nodding slowly, slyly, like one chess master in appreciation of another’s skills. “In effect, the war would have been won 37 years ago.”

The militaries in their ludicrous uniforms are dumbfounded. “Except that is not the truth,” says an unexpected voice from the door into the antechamber. Giorgio Joyce has entered the room. He is dressed in a red pressure suit but has left off the helmet. “Is it, Academician Retief? No, the plan is to send a man much further into the past than 77 years. Is that not so, Academician? In fact, to send him one hundred and one years into the past, to the Crimean Incident that was the root of the War. In fact, his intention, the intention of all the Academicians gathered here, is to end the War before it ever began, to re-shape history so that there is neither victor nor vanquished, indeed, that neither the Tsarist Empire nor Britannia came into existence.” From inside the pressure suit Giorgio Joyce draws a heavy revolver.

“Why so horrified, Father? Are you not proud that your son is a loyal and dutiful citizen of Britannia, ever vigilant to root out disloyalty and treachery wherever it may be found? Including the treasonable behaviour of certain members of the Keflavik Chronokinesis faculty. And you invited me, pleaded with me, begged me to be your chrononaut!” His wire-framed spectacles glitter with reflected fluorescents.

“The Chronokinesis Project is cancelled as a threat to the security of Britannia!” screams Director Ames. A thin rope of creamy drool has leaked from the corner of his mouth. “The facility will be dismantled and its staff disbanded. All Academicians here present are under arrest. Air Lord Blennerhasset, you are ordered by the Directorate to proceed forthwith on plans for the wholesale atomic bombardment of the Tsarist Holdfasts!”

And the blighted, poisoned mud that has been piling up night upon night, year upon year behind James Joyce's eyes pours out of his skull in a drown-wave that will entomb the whole world. Militaries, Director Ames, fellow Academicians, his own son, stand immobilized and mired in mud as, with a speed no one would think credible in a man of 72 years, he darts past the gun in his son's hand to squeeze through the airlock door and slam it behind him. Wheels spin, dogs engage.

Bullets carome outside but James Joyce knows to within a fraction of an inch the tolerances to which this door was manufactured. Of the tolerances of his own body, how long it can survive unprotected in vacuum, what level of radiation it can withstand, he is less certain. He rests the heel of his left hand on the "Airlock Cycle" button. The steel chamber shudders to the power of the bevatron smashing fundamental particles into the wave of tachyons that will sweep him into the past. Visions swim, before his eyes: tachyon ghosts of other times, other possibilities. The gulf of the years yawns before him and he sees that it is deeper than any of his colleagues had ever guessed, not one hundred and one years deep, but deep as all time. At the bottom of the chasm is the earth, still unformed, fresh and molten from the forge, shifting, restless, waiting the hammerblow that will give it solidity and definition. That event, he understands, may be as small as the touch of a single footprint upon it. All time, and all space, are his to mould. The world can be any shape he wishes it to be. Infinite alternative geographies.

"So be it," he says. He fills his lungs, clamps lips shut, pinches his nose with his fingers. He closes his eyes. His left hand slams the button and in a blast of decompression James Joyce is hurled into the tachyon flux. And swept away.

* * * *

It seems clear to me that Herr J.'s dreams are not the projections of seductive alien intelligences, but rather products of the *angst* of losing Nora B. to younger, fitter, sexually attractive rivals. His doubts over his own fidelity after the affair with Martha Fleischmann, coupled with his peculiarly Irish sense of religious guilt, are transferred onto Nora B.; that recurring dream of his, so ripe with phallic, vaginal and mammary symbolism, is so clearly a sublimation of his fears of failing sexual potency.

Treatment in such cases of low self-esteem I have found to be straightforward and successful. I was eager for Herr J. to begin therapy immediately but my telephone calls to his apartment went unanswered, my telegrams unacknowledged and when finally I called in person at his apartment on Strehlgasse I was informed by the *concierge* that Herr J. had not been home for the past three days.

Thank God for whatever whim it was, conscious or otherwise, that moved me to return to my office via the lakefront. The crowd, always in evidence, was extraordinarily dense this day. The trams could hardly pass for the press of people; they were packed onto the none-too-safe balconies of the lake-front buildings; the most foolhardy elements had climbed lamp-posts and tramhalts. Around the

pleasure-boat jetties, where the crowd was thickest, the general hubbub rose to a clamour. Patrons of the Burkliplatz Café, were standing on the table-tops, craning to see. I asked a waiter the cause of the frenzy.

“Have you not heard, sir? They are leaving us.”

In that same moment I saw, in a moment of preternatural revelation, the face of Herr J. close by in the crowd at the jetties; his thick, wire-framed spectacles dazzling in the sun. I went to him. Together, we were swept onto a steam side-wheeler already packed to the plimsoll line with babbling Passengers.

“Herr J.!” I cried over the din of excited passengers. “What are you doing here?”

He did not seem the least surprised to find me at his side. “The Rapture, Doctor. Is come,” he said, strangely distracted. “And the dream. The testing thereof.”

He passed me a pair of field-glasses. As I focused them upon the shivering curtain of the Enclave, he continued: “See, Doctor? The Companion Bodies, that we liken to airborne trees, or deep-sea medusae; they are absent. Disappeared. Gone ahead to who knows what unimaginable other Zurich to prepare the way.” I did notice that the Travellers seemed to have assumed a definite arrow-head shape, striped and mottled with many colours.

The pleasure boat had joined the great fleet of craft major and minor that had assembled to witness the Rapture. Virtually anything that would float had been pressed into service: punts, motor launches, horribly overloaded sailing dinghies, clusters of pedalloes roped together, sections of pontoon. The paddle steamer’s steam horns warned the lumbering, over-burdened small craft away from our bows. The density of the lake traffic grew as we approached the lowest point of the globular Enclave. Herr J. was almost beside himself, leaning perilously over the rails. Every eye, every lens, was directed on the sky. There at the centre was a curious, almost reverent hush.

“Now we shall see, Herr Doctor,” he whispered. While every eye was fixed on the sky, in a trice he had stripped himself of his outer garments and climbed onto the rail as if to dive into the water.

“No, no, don’t you understand, man?” I implored. “It is impossible, quite impossible. The dream, your dream of the Glass Hotel, is not to do with the Travellers but of your own fear of losing Nora to the attractions of a younger, more virile man. It is the dream of the fear of your own inadequacy, Herr.”

“Such convenient answers, Dr Jung,” Herr J. said. “But perhaps in this dream the hidden meaning is that there is no hidden meaning. This time everything is exactly

what it seems to be.”

With those words he dived into the cold waters of Lake Zurich. Murmurs of surprise came from the spectators around me, in an instant changed into a sigh of amazement. I looked back to the sky, and saw the ending. The interior of the bubble of gravitylessness ran with rainbow-coloured light, like the sheen of oil on water. Strong beyond his years, Herr J. cut on through the waters. Some others, seeing and comprehending, tried to follow him, threw themselves from the upper decks. The Enclave began to spin. Like clay on a potter’s wheel it elongated into a funnel of light within which the Travellers moved, its lower end reaching closer, closer to the surface of the lake, whipping up the water to spray and foam. I shouted a warning to Herr J. but I was one voice among a multitude. The waves and spume broke over him, the whirling wall of light engulfed him. A dark tear appeared in the radiance, a rent of infinite darkness. Through the rent I glimpsed the Travellers’ destination. As if looking down from a great height, the outline of the Black Sea and the suspended pendulum of the Crimean peninsula. The Travellers launched themselves into the tear and were consumed. In the same instant the Enclave burst with a tremendous thunderclap of air.

Clouds sailed serene and uninterrupted over Lake Zurich.

Of Herr J. there was no sign whatsoever. And no sign was ever found, though the Lake was several times dragged at Frau Nora B’s insistence by the city police.

The optimist in me likes to believe that he was indeed taken when the Travellers transited between universes, dragged along in the metaphysical slipstream, that even now, as I write these casenotes, he is finding a foothold in whatever version of our world it is we glimpsed through the tear in reality. But what I cannot reconcile is why he did it. What was it that made him trust his dreams and embark on such a mad scheme? All I can offer is that I, like Herr J., am a man in his late middle years, and men of our age have always needed some notion of heaven.

* * * *

(From an interview in *WorldWeek Magazine*: 26th July 1930, conducted with James Joyce at his home in the hills above Tangier by Gwynnedd Suarez.)

We’re sitting here on a patio by the pool-side, it’s 86°, your valet has just served us mint tea, below us are the Straits of Hercules; an idyllic setting: it’s six years since your last cylinder “Finnegan’s Wake”; do you now consider yourself to be in retirement?

I would say rather a man taking time over his life. Certainly not retired. God forbid. I may well cut more cylinders. Certainly I’ve at least three more works in varying degrees of potentiality in me. But it’s a question of timing.

Do you feel you want to distance yourself from the general bafflement that greeted "Finnegan's Wake"?

No. Not at all. I had complete faith in *Finnegan's Wake* as it was released. So did the producers and the record company. I still have. They still have.

But it was a radical departure from your previous recordings.

Every recording I have ever made has been a conscious attempt to be a radical departure from its predecessors. To limit yourself to one mode, one style, one way of doing it so that people can say, aha, yes, this is Jimmy Joyce, this is what we like, let's have the same again only more so; it's death to music, and worse, death to the soul. Whoever put music in the hand of the market researchers and public relations people deserves a particular kind of personal hell. I want to push hard at the limits of what can and can't be done within as tightly defined a genre as popular music. I want to explore the ... the potential for mutability, for other ways of doing it, within the genre constraints.

Hence the preoccupation with free will and alternate worlds on the jacket for the "Best and Rest." I gather you weren't happy about that cylinder's release.

I wasn't. I'm still not. To a certain extent, I am not totally happy with any of my recordings because they limit the music to one thing and one thing only, and not a set of potential things at different times thematically linked together.

Those notes were written at a time when you were becoming involved with the Al Afr sect: between the "Best and the Rest" and "Finnegan's Wake" was a period of several years when you studied under the Sidi Hussein, and the influence of Al Afr belief was evident in that cylinder. Yet here you are in your comfortable, might I even call it luxurious, home contemplating new recordings: are the Al Afr years a period of your life you consider conclusively behind you?

By no means. Faith is not something you can step out of like a pair of shoes. I have no regrets about the years I spent with Sidi Hussein at the University of Fez. So, I wasn't touring, I didn't cut a cylinder until *Wake*, but I don't consider the time was unproductive. No time spent in the company of remarkable men is ever wasted. With the Al Afr I experienced things that have reshaped my life.

Could you expand on that?

There is a sense in which religious experience, any transcendent experience, is essentially uncommunicable. But I'll try. One of the tenets of Al Afr belief is that, as a consequence of his free will, God creates, has created, will create alternate worlds, alternate universes, alternate humanities parallel to yet separated from our own. In the Al Afr whirling trance, I experienced a . . . crossing, no, nothing so

precise as that, a *leakage*, across the God-barrier between those other worlds. It's hard to explain properly. There are creatures there, in between the universes. I can't explain them, they are incomprehensible to us, yet they are as human as you or I. But they have felt the touch of our presence and responded. They are coming to us, searching across thousands upon thousands of possible universes to find us and join us. The reason I left the order was to try to explain that experience; that attempt was *Finnegan's Wake*, and, to use your own quote, it was, at best, misunderstood.

But you still sympathize with Al Afr belief?

As I said, you don't step out of faith. At the moment, I am trying to establish retreat and study centres in the Home Islands for, well, anyone really, who needs time and space to re-evaluate their lives and places in this world. Prepare themselves for the coming of these travellers. Because they most assuredly are on their way. These are the days of miracle and wonder, but we are human and can only bear so much miracle and wonder at once.

And plans for the musical future?

Well, as I intimated, I have ideas for a new collection; I'm going to take a few months off and travel through Sub-Saharan Afrika and learn the musical language of the people there. There's a tremendous, vital, musical heritage down there almost totally unexplored which deserves world attention. After that, my plans are less formalized. Maybe go back to pure, plain *sarif*, just a backing group and a musik club. It has a certain righteous appeal.

So you still stand by the motto you used on the sleeve notes for "Best and Rest"?

Screw philosophy, let's dance? Well, I'm 48, and that's an entire geological age in popular music, but I think it's a pretty good motto, yes, I do, yes.