

# American Singularity

Patrick Chapman

HOW ARE YOU? • HIGH ATOP THE PYRAMID,  
LOOR OF THE CRYPT. SURE, I'D KILLED TO GET INTO A GREEN-FEATHERED, RE  
THESE WERE THE TREASURES OF A NATION LURED THE BIRD TOWARD HER C  
AST MAYA; PROBABLY DUSTY BONES. AMONG MESMERIZED, THE BIRD WALKED  
RIGHT AS SUNSHINE, DIAMONDS TEMPERED IN... AND WAS QUICKLY REDUCED TO A  
X, AND SAPPHIRES, BLUE GREEN LIKE THE AN IDENTICAL BIRD ROSE FROM  
WEAPONS; PRICELESS ARTIFACTS? FOR "NICELY DONE," THE SILENT  
PT INTO THE ANCIENT IN HER COFFIN THE WIFE TOOK  
WERE... SPENT GROUNDS AND THE SHOW T  
... DO YOU KNOW  
... OF THE MEXICAN

# American Singularity

Patrick Chapman

**BlazeVOX** [books]

Buffalo, New York

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Published by BlazeVOX [books]

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Printed by CafePress.com in the United States of America

Book design by Geoffrey Gatzka

First Edition

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## Contents

American Singularity

Empire Diner

Skydiving Narcissus

Nostalgia

Dead Beat

Miracle Mile

Hot Milk

Turing's Apple

Glossolalia

Style Goddess

Sunday Morning

A Shopping Mall On Mars

## American Singularity

I

The room is blue and empty and a perfect cube.  
The blue is the colour of the sky  
In late May over Denver.  
There is no door.

This is what the room has become  
Now that it is empty.

It was emptied of all sound.  
It was emptied of all light.  
It was emptied of all life.

Then the door was removed.

Only then did the room become  
The particular shade of blue  
That they use when constructing these places:

An infinite blue  
Where distance and depth,  
Time and presence,  
Can not be measured.

This is how the room  
Erased the space  
That used to be there.

Whatever it was is lost to us now.

## II

The world has many such rooms.  
No-one knows how many and where they are.  
No-one knows how the rooms are illuminated.

Some say that the world itself  
Will become such a room  
Then it will cease to exist.

Some say that this is what they want,  
The ones who build the rooms.

There will be no desert, no ice, no cities, no forests.  
There will be no clouds, no lakes to mirror them,  
No grass to fail in bursting them, how ever tall the blades.

There will be no-one to know  
That this is how the world is now  
And not how it was.

Nobody will miss the world.  
Nobody will remember it.  
Nobody will be in it.

### III

In order to create the present, you erase the past.  
In order to create the future, you erase the present.  
In order to create the past, you erase the future.

### IV

The blue rooms are spaces where nothing exists.  
Therefore they do not exist.  
Therefore the world they replaced is still there.  
Therefore everything is well.

Therefore –

There is a room, blue and empty, and a perfect cube.

## Empire Diner

Muhammad sauntered in and ordered  
Peace.

Jehovah rumbled in and ordered  
Love.

Jesus Christ strode in and ordered  
Hope.

Confucius wandered in and ordered  
Brotherhood.

Gandhi shuffled in and ordered,  
With a tiny smirk,  
Western civilisation.

The Buddha floated in and ordered  
Everything and Nothing.

Then, a Special Ops brigade,  
Crashing through the windows, ordered  
Everybody on the floor.

The soldiers opened fire, killing  
One wise man, one prince of Time, a godhead and three prophets,

A waitress in a uniform, suspected of collaborating  
With the old regime –

And a burger-flipping alien  
Who had threatened them with a spatula.

## Skydiving Narcissus

Rush of air. The hatch sucked in its cheeks.  
A steward pushed him skyward  
And the aircraft, lighter by a sigh,  
Blew a trail of kisses in its wake.

A baby boom of blushes born in air,  
A legend wombed in silk, he pulled his cord.  
But, stillborn as his parachute refused,  
He had to think, and fast. Relief –  
His shoes were fine. They would not look  
Improper on the peacocks of Milan.

Then, before the hill-encrusted ground  
Presumed to hug his delicate remains,  
He prayed that down below he'd find a lake  
And knew that he would make a gorgeous corpse.

## Nostalgia

'My fellow Americans, I'm pleased to tell you today  
that I've signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever.  
We begin bombing in five minutes.'

– Ronald Reagan, August 1984

With the last drop of juice in the batteries  
Came the voice: a septuagenarian president  
Declaring war. Then our radio went dead.

We could not figure, in this pasture where  
We'd pitched camp for a summer week,  
If there was substance in the air  
Of mild amusement in his voice.  
Was he around the twist?

We cut sticks for a fire and sat around it,  
Two of us warming our cold hands and faces.  
Smoke rose. Fire crackled. Sticks spit resin.

Would they land while we were sleeping,  
Those protective-suited government officials,  
Armoured knights of some new feudal age?

We did not sleep that night and  
Come the dawn, we reckoned:  
Out here we are safe, but for how long?

That fine, slow, powdered fall from Washington,  
That dust migrating south towards our bivouac  
Would get us, even if we heard no missile roar,  
Or saw no vapour trails:  
Horsepower of the Apocalypse.

You suggested that we pack what food we had,  
Strike camp and take the car.  
'In any case, we're goners,  
So we might as well go out among our own.'

The landscape seemed unblemished, country  
Lanes unspoilt by bodies of dead  
Sheep and cattle, dead civilians, horses.

We were bearing up. As building after out-  
Building went by, we wondered if a neutron bomb  
Had been deployed, no dead outdoors.  
It was only in a town that we found out:

The war had not occurred. The former  
Actor had been improvising. Testing  
Out a microphone, he'd joked about the one thing that  
We'd kill him for, should we be, come the moment, close enough.

## Dead Beat

Discovering its body in  
The attic living room

Where, some nights before,  
I'd trapped the moth –

I regard with satisfaction  
This enemy fritillary.

The motive for the darkness  
I'd revealed inside its brain:

*Moth, you were a bomber  
Of dust-mite Nagasakis.*

## Miracle Mile

On Miracle Mile, a man answers a phone.  
His caller, a soldier, announces  
The death of the world, and is shot.  
End of film. You implore, 'Come to bed'.

'But how can we love,' I enquire,  
'When Minutemen criss-cross Wyoming,  
Preparing surprise Armageddon;  
When submarines rust underwater  
Out by *Novaya Zemlya*?'

'Give me that place-name again.  
It's so eastern, exotic and sexy.'

'*Novaya Zemlya*,' I mutter.  
'I can not make love with you now.  
Mare Winningham, Anthony Edwards  
Will die in an hour and a half  
In a chopper submerged in the water.  
The fabric of space rips a seam on the Earth.'

You tell me: 'You've ruined the ending.'  
'No,' I retaliate. 'It's ruined us.'

## Hot Milk

Your father would not speak of it.  
He brought home cans  
Of carrots, peas, Carnation, Spam.

He reinforced our concrete walls  
With mattresses.

'Strontium in the milk,' they'd said,  
'But no cause for alarm.'

I might as well have suckled you  
On long-range missiles' noses  
As on the teats of bottles, warmed  
At four a.m. to quiet you.

## Turing's Apple

It was only after he had shared  
His knowledge that he ate the poisoned fruit.

The garden, having no more use for him,  
Destroyed the one who made the weapon sharp,  
Dissolved the bond of love that spoke in code,  
Denied the secret namer of the world.

## Glossolalia

In his teenage years, the kid can speak in tongues.  
He feels such peace as he has never known.

And when it's over,  
When the preacher has moved on  
And when the kid has reached his twenties  
And discovered women,  
Booze,  
And women,  
Booze  
And women –

His pleasure is tempered by the certainty that  
He is damned,  
Because the tongues –

Those glottal *aides mémoires* to one true prayer,  
Delivered to a Bronze Age tribe: an oddly ululating code  
The devil and his lawyers can not crack –

The tongues are no longer  
Speaking his language.

So –

He searches for their avatar  
In every mouth he comes across.

## Style Goddess

You had a fondness for the uniforms,  
Though not, it must be noted,  
For the men themselves. You said that  
God might love a sinner's outfit  
Though he hate the sinner. So you praised  
The Nazis' taste in jackboots, yet  
You loathed those whose taste it was.  
I wondered if you would admire  
The wrapping on a bar of soap  
Reduced from Dachau pulchritude.

## Sunday Morning

Someone has been murdered on my street.  
I'm thinking that there ought to be more clues.  
You only ever hear about those  
Other places, round the corner:  
Stabbing, shooting, drug-related,  
Race-crime, sex-crime, gang-crime, booze-crime.

Maura's mother comes to take her  
Back to Connemara. We are  
Packing up the car with clothes  
And boxes full of necklaces –  
And someone has been murdered  
On my street. It's just been on the news

But there's no sign, this Sunday morning.  
Shutters in the shops are down  
And church bells are a rumour yet  
And people coming home are re-  
Discovering their aching brains  
And disappointed lovers. Now

The car is full to bursting,  
Maura's mother recollecting when  
She was a girl in Boston. 'Back then  
Everything was wonderful, my  
Colour no impediment.  
My background was a calling card.

'But what was then an Irish town  
Is now a Polish neighbourhood.'  
She starts the car. Her daughter slips  
In front and waves goodbye and they  
Are gone. I cross the street for home.  
It's Sunday morning, calm and mild.  
The shutters in the shops are down  
And church bells are a rumour yet  
And someone has been murdered on my street.

## A Shopping Mall On Mars

'We do not know where this journey will end, yet we know this –  
human beings are headed into the cosmos.'

– George W. Bush, 2004

Out beneath the auspices of Deimos,  
Lovers tease each other's lips  
In pressurised Buckminster-tents.

They're waiting for the dust to settle.  
Then they'll venture back to where  
The Habitation billows –  
Resting from a long day  
At the hydroponics factory.

Once, they'd have imagined this:  
Gliding in the sky above *Utopia Planitia*,  
Engineers in shuttlecraft  
Repairing Aztec-plating  
On the starship *Enterprise*  
Gripped within the scaffold  
Of a skeletal, low-orbit yard.

But now, no one remembers them,  
Those pulpish dreams redundant  
In a place where Wells's tripod-borne  
Unsympathetic eyes are dead,  
Where vast and cool intelligences  
Open church and shopping mall.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to the editors and producers of the following, where these poems have been published or broadcast:

Babylon Burning: 9/11 Five Years On (nthposition, 2006), The Burning Bush, The Dublin Quarterly, Electric Acorn, The Enchanted Way (RTÉ Radio 1), Human Rights Have No Borders (Marino Books, 1998), Liberties College Radio, 100 Poets Against the War, Poems For Lord Hutton, Short Fuse (Rattapallax, 2002), 'This Poem Is Sponsored By...' (Corporate Watch, 2006), Times New Roman, The Virtual Writer, W.P. Journal.

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In 2001, he collaborated with Gemma Tipton on the art exhibitions and art-book, *The Foot Series*. With Philip Casey, he founded the Irish Literary Revival website. In 2003, he won first prize in the story category of the *Cinescape* Genre Literary Awards.

He wrote the film, *Burning The Bed* (2003, dir. Denis McArdle), which starred Gina McKee and Aidan Gillen and was named Best Narrative Short at the 2004 Dead Center Film Festival in Oklahoma.

Chapman has also written an audio play, *Doctor Who: Fear Of The Daleks* (Big Finish, 2007).