

American Lyricon
A Poet Sings of America
Poetry Sampler

By Joel L. Young

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Young, Joel L.
ISBN: 1-931540-68-3
American Lyricon: A Poet Sings of America – 1st ed.

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SynergEbooks
1235 Flat Shoals Rd.
King, NC 27021
www.SynergEbooks.com

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Printed in the USA

Introduction

The premise of "American Lyricon"* is my vision of America through her eyes and mine. A personal anthology, this is a poetic replay of my own travels and flights of fancy concerning my idea of the ideal American.

In the book, I have penned my experiences from Appalachia to the Rockies. Influenced by the Florida town where I live extending to the streets of New York, I have written of the American people, their music and ideals, and the struggles they have faced since the 1600s to the present.

As a teen, I was deeply inspired by the John Wayne classic recitation, "America, Why I Love Her." John Mitchum, actor, poet, singer, songwriter, and brother of the legendary actor Robert Mitchum, wrote this poem for Wayne. The first poem in this anthology, "Under Wide, Wide Skies," was prompted by the long-lasting effects Wayne's words had upon my soul.

Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" served as a partial blueprint for this anthology. You will hear Whitman's words echo throughout, from the shipyards of Brooklyn to the San Francisco Harbor and songs of the open road.

Music plays a large role in my life. Woody Guthrie's "Pastures of Plenty" to Irving Berlin's "God Bless America" and Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the USA" to John Mellancamp's "Pink Houses" and Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the USA" are era-specific songs that have provided profound inspiration to my poetry.

In the 60s and early 70s, artists like Bob Dylan and Simon & Garfunkel's sang of America's struggles. Thirty years later, country duo Brooks & Dunn reminds us that dreams still do come true, "Only in America." Song artists in America have always written songs in times of strife. America will prevail as Aaron Tippin sings, "Where the Stars & Stripes and the Eagle Fly."

Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti provide a framework for this anthology's poetical beatitudes. You'll hear echoes of Langston Hughes and protest poet and professor orator Amari Baraka (Leroi Jones) as well as Longfellow, Poe, Whittier, Strindberg, Frost, Robert Service, and Siegfried Sassoon.

Written in 1999, the long poem, "American Lyricon," is narrated as a series of monologues fashioned after the protest rallies of the 60s. The poem was written as a protest for what was going on at the time. Now after 9/11, questions are being raised again with confusion, frustration, and anger. There are no easy answers, though the fight will continue on all sides.

Most of the work in "American Lyricon" was written prior to 9/11 and was originally released as an eBook in early September of 2000. Since then, about a dozen poems have been added.

Two deal directly with the crises; one is a tribute poem and an ancestor of sorts to Emma Lazarus' "The New Colossus." Part of that poem was used on the plaque held by the Statue of Liberty.

Another poem, "Autumn (9/21/01)," originally titled "American Autumn," deals with the aftereffects of the 9/11 tragedy and the farming community, stressing that, above all, America is a family that gathers together and provides support in times of trial.

"American Lyricon" has received some positive critical attention, winning an Honorable Mention from the Clara Awards 2001.

I dedicate this book to our military men and women, the civil service workers, firefighters, policemen, EMTs, and others who serve, honor, and protect Americans. Ladies & gentlemen, I thank you.

I would be remiss in not mentioning my father who passed away ten years ago. I feature a tribute poem to him. This book is also dedicated to my immediate family, mother, brother, sister, relatives, friends, former teachers, and other inspirers who encouraged me when others thought I was a lost cause.

Joel L. Young - July 2002

*lyricon - a poem in a combined form

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Part One
Under Wide, Wide Skies
(Roots & Americana)

Colossus' Child

"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore...."
Emma Lazarus, *The New Colossus*

Show me your land, wondrous silver land.
Past the golden door, blue robins carry ribbons
And now sing with the gray-haired dove.

She remembers the olden times,
Stood above the beaming lights
When the lady first stood gleaming
Looking out across the dawns.

Tomorrow was a baby with hazel eyes gleaming.
The child saw no color, no angst or hate
Love was a daffodil sitting on a windowpane
with mobile planes and wood varnished wings
flying above his head.

She stood watch for masses, tired, scared,
and lonely with tears looking for a golden shore
where there was no worry or terror knocking on her door.

Now the child has returned a father,
old, wise, kneeling, picking cherry-blossom days
Out of minefields that his father laid,
worried about the morning when nothing will be said.

The plaque ideal remains outside his window
an addendum has been added now due to his father's death:

"Come, my brother and sister, and all who wish to live
away from strife and affliction to live freely from warring ghosts.
Propose to understand our ways, as we would yours. Live within
our laws. We'll feed your hungry bellies, teach your children, and
give your men a decent wage, and take your worries away."

When the sun shines bright against a golden sky,
when brethren of all races bicker no more,
and evergreen forests sparkle across silver mountains far and wide

the Colossus will see better days again.

Masses will huddle once again,
the poor, the wretched, the rich, and the worker, too.
They'll live with peace and harmony and not just here
but where other colossuses loom across teeming lands,
Looking out across their own nations, seeing their world
for all the good with shelter for all. Life is theirs to live free.

The Field

On amber cloth they laid him in the ground
From a war fought with fired cannons
Over sod freshly grown soiled with blood and ash fodder.
History on sacred ground is nothing new
The wars were fought the ghosts that walked
The builders and makers made a nation,
All walked this laden field.

Elysian cries and cattle prospered with sweat
And natures gentle rain; worms made it fertile ground.
Grass grew wild for a nearly a hundred springs
Dormant and ancient for a world that lost its way
Now the grasslands wave in the breeze
The tombstones have faded with age,
Still wildflowers blossom in the open fields.

American Son

I was with you father when you came over the red horizon
You saw the future through your children's eyes.

Leaping toward freedom's foothills, away from strife's rocky
slopes. Our ancestors struggled to grow dreams, in rocky furrow
lands wasted by inherent winds and foreign stress.

I was with you brother. We saw doves flying on a white horizon
Peace, laughter and hopes danced in every family's heart.

Our music made obelisks into monuments for generations to see
and hear. The songs you sang were not just about heroes and
celebrations.

They were bands of brothers who grew up and understood a good
day's work. Fought and sacrificed to have their names inscribed on
walls of valor. They lived by example for all to see.

I was with you grandfather when you sailed to these blue horizons,
Toward tomorrow's rough seas and grew a nation.

Raised ladders for your children's children bracing against evil
winds as young men, fighting cousins who stood on the other side.
Wives, mothers, and daughters tears washed away their pain and
bitterness. Love overwhelmed and won both sides in the end.

May our sons and daughters know of their father's and mothers;
The good deeds they have done. May their sons and daughters
know the values that made our nation strong.

Setting Fences

Wyoming in August comes early in the morning
Free ranging hills, least as far as the BLM goes.
Cowboys ride helicopters now, instead of horses
Makes it easier to herd cattle they say.

Come fall, fence walkers ride the lines
Truck their horses in with poles, nails and wire.
Sometimes your alone rebuilding fences
From a Monday sunrise to Saturday late into October suns
When snows cover bluebells on farmhouse window seats

They'll be time for singing old songs liked they used to
On the trails with nothing but those
White sparkles on a black velvet night
The moon hanging down like a soft reading light
A chef's is cooking vittles; the camp is still
Young coyotes are howling at a kid's squeaky wheel.

Folks are riding Jon Boats on the breakwaters like broncos,
wannabe's with cowboy dreams, looking for a thrill.
A rancher with a herd of 500, needs cattle drove
He'll charge you a bundle for the challenge
if you ride them down the hill.

A chance at an old west long gone
to taste dust and feel a saddle on their backs
and smell a branding iron's peat.

My hands are calloused, throat and skin dry
my arms feel like elastic taut and twanged
tired as hell, with cuts from barbwire.

I'll sleep well tonight. The rest of the crew
will gather around a fire, drink beer,
brag about their earnings and life back home
and tell stories of old stage routes from Cheyenne to Denver.

I'll ride the range in my dreams
like the old cowboys did
looking for adventure and romance.
I won't find it like in the movies
But I won't be alone. I sleep with peace of mind.

Open Call

Open your mind; clear your thoughts
Open your heart's door; follow the path
Walk on crushed velvet green grass
Feel the wind beneath your feet.

Touch the world with tingling toes
As leaves crackle under your heels
Let the planet move you to evolve.
Hear nature's conversation in the trees

Listen to the sound of the whippoorwill.
She calls for you. Are you open?

Part Two
An American Lexicon
(Fanfares for the Common Man)

My Blue-Colored Soul

I am a man like you.
I was born a slave to the dollar
and worked a dog's wage
I earned my way against tides of indignation

My identities are black, white, red, and brown.
I am a wretch, the geek, the nerd,
The redneck, the laborer, the worker,
The iconoclast, and the brother on the line.

I left my family, across raging rivers
rode trains as far as they would go.
Brakemen came with Billy clubs
broke my ribs and cage.

Still I hopped the cars and rode on.
I saw my sisters raped and beaten.
I fought men with batons, who sought
to take me down, lynched my spirit on trees of persecution,

I just played my music louder. My voice carried on.
I went about the land hearing the old gospels:
of prophets, dreamers, and poets who wrote,
for orators on the mountains who told it like it was.

I raised my life in acclamation;
I knew that I'd be damned.
I knew this world would never change
unless I made my own.

My people are of richness, beauty and concern.
I am proud of my heritage.
I've seen the other side of the mountain
where hearts are good, and the land is rich.

Join me with new self-consideration
with mind, heart, and determination
make this world your own.

The Voice of the People

(Or What Happened at the Annual Convention to Elect and Impeach a Presidential Candidate, Who Would Not Have Been Elected Otherwise, on a Bet, to Take an Oath, He Wouldn't Uphold)

The vox populi waited in the gallery for the announcement. It came with a label: "this is not for the faintly patient, this may take awhile please be seated, get on with your lives and someone will see you shortly."

When the vox populi heard. They stood aghast and applauded.

The seatbelt warnings were now in effect. The conceptual committee got separated from the perceptual committee. The Libertarians couldn't hang with the Conservatives. Because, the Liberals were trying to set all the rules. The Realists were saying; "there are no rules just guidelines." Independents and Moderates giggled, while taking in the news.

A sunshine mentalist with the holistic appeal mingled in the crowd taking polls; everyone was agreeing to disagree, and agreed, never to agree, unless they all agreed, on a agreement. Some genius recommended they compromise.

When the vox populi heard. They stood aghast and applauded.

"A perception and a conception will meet at an inception where both can mingle and interrelate in a rational reception of a momentary inclination," so it was said.

It was found the person who said that had smoked cannabis. The man was arrested on a charge of possession and signed to be a Democratic candidate. The candidate made sense maybe too much.

All committees agreed and a compromise was reached.

The vox populi were ecstatic. They stood aghast and applauded.

People gathered round a barrel fire sang songs and gave themselves an ovation for justifying the status quo.

Then the demo man came out of his little box. Made speeches,

gave demands said the foundation of any democracy was in its people. A chicken in every pot is worth eight to ten in the pen.

Anyone can do time. The candidate had - he just didn't tell anyone. The trifecta came with the dinner rolls and non-alcoholic wine served with a platter of mind altering analysis. It made the evening just right.

When the vox populi heard. They stood aghast and applauded. It seemed the candidate was a drone cloned in a factory in Chicago to justify the collective body of a new Proletariat. They could see the new social agenda in the blue-neon sky. They knew the writing was on the wall with the graffiti vandalism and the paint wasn't even dry yet. Some wise acre mentioned that. All got embarrassed and he was asked to leave the room.

When the vox populi saw him. They stood aghast and applauded.

An error had been noted and made, courtesy of a notary public who just dropped in, to see what condition, his condition was in. A doctor said he was fine according to the old songs anyway.

All committees redirected their thinking
no candidate was selected but concurred to meet again to discuss it.
They all agreed that a root is a foundation and it does matter.

When the vox populi heard. They stood aghast and applauded.

The vox populi ascended to find out what was going on,
some were dejected but agreed it was an eventful evening.

When the vox populi saw. They stood aghast and applauded.

*Vox Populi - Voice of the people

Autumn (9/21/01)

Harvesting will come late this year.
Seeds feel steeped in sad regrets,
Lost in the throes of a great tragedy.
Autumn has come with discontent.

Seeds feel steeped in sad regrets
Fields of October lie still, unresolved.
Autumn has come with discontent.
America's farmers join the cause.

Fields of October lie still, unresolved.
Cries ring out for an Americathon.
America's farmers join the cause.
Sing, pitch in, and donate what you can.

Cries ring out for an Americathon.
Your country needs your help and hands.
Sing, pitch in, and donate what you can.
This new harvest is one of unity.

Your country needs your help and hands.
Show the world our nation is strong and proud.
This new harvest is one of unity.
God bless us all. We're a family again.

Android Slang

Singing in monotone, drinking electric wine,
My gentle frame integrates sweetly on my life,
trying to remember when life started in November.
Things were absolutely positronic then.
I can't wait for my electro-shock freeze load.
The end should justify my existence.

Words can't come fast enough.
Thinking of my electronic sheep
starving in the fields,
who will take care of them?
I wonder about Farmer Don
in his glass electro-lab,
cloning tomorrows, whistling an old tune:

"Going to skedaddle to Seattle,
Get myself a paddle, sail down the Columbia,
think about my Mary, sleeping in Tipperary,
wondering what I'll do about that."

Electric gangs are on street corners,
selling tech chips to my brothers and sisters,
looking to get high and cool
from their futuristic diorama.

I can't wait to click off.
My collective has gone, man.
Hit the road, freeze the hard drive,
turn to plastic gold dust
in the wake of interplanetary dementia.

Imagine my surprise, the phone
won't stop ringing in my head!
The universe keeps calling me collect,
always looking for another angle,
stealing from my consciousness.

For once I'd like to be a human being,
kiss the girl, live the lie, believe for believing's sake,
and not hear the cries of my people
in my deep electric sleep.

American Powwow (Drum Circle)

I know my brother's rhythms
lessen with age now
that the great eagle has taken him home
to the teepee of his ancestors.

Drums tell a story of our sisters
healing their husbands, suffering cries,
suckling their children to their breasts.
Their men were warriors of courage and bravery.
They shall never be forgotten.

Their names shall remind us of the sacrifices they made.
I'm left with legacies, not only as a Native American,
but as a citizen of my country and of the world.

Join me, brothers and sisters,
bring your drum to the circle,
Islam, Hindu, Jew, and Sikh
Asian, Latino, Russian, and Greek
English, rich, poor, or meek.

To the gods of our fathers,
let us grieve in tears.
Let our loved ones know our hearts.
We're with them in their despair.

Pray for the world, pray for the sick.
Take the evil away from these souls
who destroyed our way of life.
Harden their hearts with burdens ten-fold.

There should be no bitterness,
no more death or woe of spilt blood.
There shall be peace and hope for all
who know the meaning of love.

Look upon the ruins, my child.
Your city is being rebuilt from the shambles.
Befriend your neighbor with a brotherly smile
and help him where he has fallen.

Part Three
Karaoke Honky-Tonk
(Songs from the Heartland)

Coffee House Blues

Here's another golden oldie for your listening pleasure,
a sweet-sounding city girl looking to make guitar treasures.
The people in the cafe are sleeping on each other's shoulder
Not looking for a thing, not waiting for anyone,
but him or herself to come of age.

Somebody's dying for a cigarette while outside a war's going on.
Streets are blazing with the fires of anger,
rebellion a market for mad radicals selling bull
while prostitutes unburden themselves,
writing poetry on their bathroom walls
looking for a little soul asylum within themselves.

The 60's, man, what was it?
The 40's, daddio, who remembers?
The 20's are dead and gone, old sport.
So the young woman sings her song,

Where are you my true loved one?
Gone to fight a war that'll never be won.
Dream your dreams and think of me,
kiss me while you sleep.
If I were a butterfly with multicolored wings
dancing on air and causing a storm,
I'd cause the rain to whet your appetite
and carry you back home.
Be careful, my true loved one.

Some smile and clap and send her on her way.
She'll work another coffee house tonight.
Sing a different song. She'll be on her way.

Meanwhile, beer and drugs flow like a river.
Down the block, blue sounds are playing in a garage,
Off the bowery Rock N Roll, wannabes look for a different kick.
Meanwhile, riots continue, the news gets too real,
bathroom poets move to writing on tissue paper,
drink Molotov cocktails and let their political angst
get the better of them.

They don't have a clue not unlike the folksingers do
So they bought cheap guitars and learned to play.
Amateur night at the shop is a full house

but is closed down with the owner cleaning up his lounge.
So everyone moved over to the amateur radio show
looking for a record deal, sell outs to their own ideals.
Nobody played their songs.

The young woman has moved on,
singing her songs at a coffeehouse
in a Minnesota nowhere town,
wondering when her true love
is coming home if he ever does at all.

Hawaiian Love Song

(Intro)

I've fallen into her dreams,
that old sea of tranquility.
She just of thought of me,
and lucky for me, she's in love.
A summer breeze is rising
There's a tear in her eyes and
ukuleles are tropically twangin'.
Sounds like they're playing our song.

(Act 1)

Have you seen? (Have you seen?)
My Hawaiian Lady—
she's the one for me. My Oahu cutie.
She's like a dreamboat on the seas.
When she sways her dance,
she's like a romance avalanche.
She sings like an angel.
She's my Hawaiian baby.

(Act 2)

Have you seen? (Have you seen?)
My Hawaiian angel?
She's the girl with charm.
It's like heaven in her arms.
She's a queen of the prom.
She sets my head to spin.
She's a knock to the chin.
Her kiss sets off my alarms.
She's my Hawaiian angel.

(Act 3)

Have you seen? (Have you seen?)
My Hawaiian sweetie?
When we go out for a night on the isle,
our friends just smile
and envy the way we coo.
They invite us to luau's
and they're such pals!
You can hear everyone shout!

She's his Hawaiian sweetie.

(Act 4)

Have you seen? (Have you seen?)

My beautiful Hawaiian lady?

She's got a touch of class
the way she wears her grass.

She's a glamorous sight to see.

She's an amorous melody.

She sparkles like the blue sea.

She's my beautiful Hawaiian lady.

To a Star in a West Virginia Sky (For My Father)

To a star shining in the West Virginia skies,
blink for my father three flickers,
then repeat seven times more.
(A Morse code if you will.)

Tell him I'm doing okay, mother is well,
Brother, sister and family are fine.
(No, that's not completely true.)

This Florida spring has flung
a melancholy of infinite confusion.
The azaleas have bloomed,
withered, and dried into brittle dust.

(Dad, I'm learning how to grow, I think.
Now I need to learn how to follow through.)

Gray horizons seem water-colored
among red-sun mornings while pink-
orange hues roll in magenta fogs
rising like mist to begin the day.
The mud wears me like a frown.

(Where do I go from here?)

Everything seems hurried, flushed,
dehydrated in depressed daydreams,
lazy, matter of fact, routine.

(I know. I need to keep at it
and make my life work.)

It all seems like a lie
and a false nature.
I wish it were not true.

(I still miss you.
Say hello to grandma for me.)

Star, keep him well, and guide me to him
when my time has come.

Doo-wop on the Corner

Brothers are singing in Harlem.
There's doo-wop on the corner,
song's about having good times.
Things were pretty good back then.

There's doo-wop on the corner,
a brother is singing about his girl.
Things were pretty good back then.
His love for her still remains the same.

A brother is singing about his girl.
One night he sang to her in the rain.
His love for her still remains the same.
His brothers sang doo-wop as they danced.

One night he sang to her in the rain.
She held him closely as her sisters shooped.
His brothers sang doo-wop as they danced.
Things were good in Harlem back then.

Mississippi Boy/Louisiana Man

Mississippi baby growing by the river's shore,
listening to the riverboats engines roar.
Momma is in the kitchen, crying in her tears,
'Cause daddy's run off with a Louisiana girl.
Daddy's gone running from this boy's little world,
left me playing in the Mississippi dirt.

Mississippi river so muddy and so wide,
I promised I'd go find him on the Louisiana side.
I'm running a hundred miles an hour,
Momma can't control me,
now she's gone to sleeping under the wildflowers.

Mississippi boy, running on my own.
Momma, I can't stop this wild urge to roam.
Louisiana's calling me, now I'm all-alone.

Now that I've traveled to the other side,
looking for the man who made my mama cry,
thinking I would I put him in the muddy ground
if I saw the man who made Mom's world go around.

There was a chance at love, I thought,
to try to settle down. A Louisiana girl I loved.
We had some good times and drank a ton of wine.
O Daddy. O daddy. What am I going to do?

The fast times have caught me, now I'm on the run.
Your Mississippi boy has the Louisiana blues.
They'll take me in the morning where corn grows tall
Down to the bayous where the gators yell
to Angola prison just south of hell.

Too many wrong turns, picked too many fights.
tT protect my Cajun lady, a man lost his life.

Tonight I met a man from another cell.
We talked into the night while riverboats wailed.
I finally found the man who left my mom alone.
Daddy, O Daddy where did I go wrong?

Once a Mississippi boy, now a Louisiana man
Born a Mississippi boy, I'll die a Louisiana man.

Part Four
Cracking on a Political Moon
(Protests, War, & Peace)

Airplanes in the Schoolyard (A Student's View)

A hummingbird drifts by
on a warm Friday afternoon.
I'm on the learning curve today,
now the school bell rings.
They said detention would be easy.
Take into account the square root
of eighteen equals nothing to sum of nowhere.

I'm stuck with a teacher who tells me
I am the future of America
along with the rest of my class.
I don't feel American.
I must have missed that lesson.
between economics and home ec.
In modeling class, we learned to
make paper airplanes.

Misbehaved when the teacher
was outside fighting school boards
and misguided policies that prohibited us
from reaching our potential.
They taught us rebellion and revolution,
said our forefathers did that.
When the school changed the rules,
we protested and revolted.

We were expelled for doing
what we were taught.
We were expressing ourselves, we thought.
"Apathy kills," said the butterfly.
"Hate is good for you," said the radical.
"You are your own maker,"
said the philosopher to the fly.
(I suppose the spider was his counselor.
What a freaking lie!)

So I stand, without guidance, with other students
smoking cigarettes in the back of a literary history class
waiting for Sam Beckett friend Godot.
Tired of waiting, a student took his notebook
from Lessons on Origami, made an airplane,
escaped all the nonsense. Like Icarus, he climbed too far.
The sun singed the wings.

You can guess the rest. The needle made him fly,
but his soul never came back down again.
To generations and officials who missed the memo
On raising kids, and schooling in blackboard jungles.
Thanks for the memories. You've taught me well.
I owe you nothing. I'll make my own future.

Voided by a CRT*

Pulled into a generation by a media
fasting on a cultural inept society
brought by a multi-channeled void,
anchored by cars, razors, and things.

A look to the past brings us joy,
hoping it'll bring happiness
upon a lost youth wasted, on lies and drugs,
from a remote-controlled assembly line
raised on television and crime.

Twenty-something, shallow and afraid,
with nowhere to go, a burger-and-fry man
dreaming of millions but living on nickels and dimes.
A twenty-something friend, he knows, has gone to class.
Now he's making thousands in real estate.
Some have fought in wars; others have been killed and maimed.
Elders point their fingers and tell us were to blame.

*Teen girls sit and talk of life
and wonder who will be a wife,
dream of boys and talk about sex,
slumber away their lives doing less and less.*

Television churns another night of Madonna
and a Simpson named Bart.
More manufactured lies are made.
A young black man takes a vile crack,
probably wake up dead.
A white youth disillusioned with reds gets
a gun and puts a bullet through his head.

They're a minimum-wage class struggling,
looking for a way out, caught in a skewed religion
where God is nothing but a radio. Still, they dream on.

* cathode ray tube

Cracking on a Political Moon

Give me a walnut with a crisis inside
where all the pecans taste bitter
cracking on sunshine, where political hacks hide.
Give me a riot where the killers stay killed
and doctors heal the sick and dying.

Crack the ghettos from would-be robbers
who've taken the moon and stolen the tomorrows.
Crack me a smile, sweet pretty blue eyes,
sing like a siren, then drink to your sorrows.

Give me a nighttime when a hangman sleeps
on his own gallows pole and all politicians sleep in the snow.
They'll snack on cracked candles and bittersweet cakes
for all the insanity, they call a mistake.

Give me a war like Tommy Paine called for,
where the fascists are screamers, communists are dreamers,
and everyone else is throwing their streamers.
They'll kill their sadness and die for forgiveness
and everyone else will think they are careless.

Cracking a political moon and creating a cause.
I saw one once without the applause,
full of mechanics and parading machines
with bands, trumpeters, and paper Marines.
That's not soldiering. It's a Hollywood thing.

Cracking the dawn with a moon-sized bomb
that made men suffer for making their arrows
and shooting their slings from catapult things.

They heard the sound of ancestors in pain
who built lives for them with bitter chives.
Now they seem chunky like sour milk.
Pour me a glass. I'm feeling quite ill!
They say there's a tomorrow.
Can you show me the print
where the classifieds are rented?

I'd like to see the one who invented it.
Our leaders are the same as any generation's.

foolish, hoarse, and without self-remorse.
I wouldn't fight them, they're not worth the force.
Crack me a window, I'll breathe my own air,
ending silence in this world that's gone off its course.

Fire Watch

(Paris Island 1983)

In olden times, sentries were posted
to watch for enemy fire,
keep an eye on fellow soldiers
so they wouldn't go AWOL,
report to their COs all was well,
count heads, and keep fires burning.
The tedium was maddening.

Raw green recruit, with flashlight beaming,
checking footlockers in a squad bay
on a Parris Island night.
He looks back on the day
as he paces the barracks runway.

Drill Instructor's scream
echo in my fellow recruit's ears.
Our end has come.

John Wayne-types, don't apply.
United States Marine Corps, sir!
He'd go to hell for a dollar,
put the devil in a shroud,
and return home, proud to serve.

Quarterdeck pushups and jumping jacks.
Somebody did wrong again.
DIs bend the ears, molding boys to men.

Senior Drill Instructor is chef,
bottle washer, and cook.
For some men and women
have to go through
hell's kitchen to get to heaven.
Some recruits give in,
can't stand the heat.

Sleep is a commodity.
Many do without, you sleep light,
tuned awareness keeps you tight.

It's lonely for an eighteen-year-old,
no longer a kid, growing into a man.

Letters home are sobering,
telling folks everything is fine. It isn't.

Homesickness never goes away
for those who struggle in boot camp.
You feel for them. You keep your distance
They're not good news.

Watch is almost up,
I'll wake another recruit
while I get some shut-eye.
He won't be the only one awake.

Come sunrise, sergeants mold soldiers
only an enemy's bullet can contain.
They'll yell and scream, push our limits,
or break us in the end

Some men and women
will make it to the parade grounds
after nine weeks of basic training
to hear the words, "Dismissed!"
They'll have earned the right to be
United States Marines.

Unknown Soldier

(for the ones who never made it home)

You were brought home today,
nameless, another John Doe,
a nameless man who saved
the world from hypocrisy.

The body bag embraced you
like a second skin,
polyurethane slick as vinyl.
Your mind is peaceful now in your shroud.

Nurses wept for you,
doctors handled you with care,
fragile as a porcelain soul.
Soldiers saluted the flag on your casket
when you were laid to rest.
No war followed, only angels to guide you.

I don't need to know your identity.
You're a hero. That's all I need to know.

Part Five
Green Slumbers
(Lullabies, Ditties, and Other Poems)

Napping on a Glass Bottom Boat

I'm stoned, immaculate!
Drifting through the ocean bottom
off Key West, seaweed scraping my back,
having coffee with a dolphin who'd like
to take me for a ride, I drift off to sleep.

Ding-dong! Goes the diving bell.
Tourists take turns looking at the blue diver,
sleeping in his observation tank
while the world passes him by,
looking for the fun of it all.

Guys, go back to Sloppy Joes,
have a beer on me, go fishing for marlin.
The kingfish could use a thrill.
Just don't bother me.

Sure, while looking through a window,
on a glass-bottomed boat face-down, stoned,
the world seems different. Ashes to ashes,
dusk until dawn, excitement never ends.

Atlantis is a dream away. Ask your tour guide.
When you see me snorkeling among the ruins,
don't mind me. I'm looking for galleons.
Ask the fish. We're all in this big fishbowl together.
Go ahead, it's all right.

I'll stay here and dream of a blue-silver sea
bask myself in the deep brine, and search
for starlight in the oceans of my mind.

Remembering Mayport Ferry

As a child, I stood on Mayport Ferry
watching porpoises swim and play,
singing their songs of the sea.
Now I stand as a confused young man,
wondering where I've been,
never to walk another gold sand beach again.

A merry-go-round goes round and round.
A merry-go-round am I.

I tried to live other men's dreams,
wandered until my feet bled,
now I write of the life I've led.
I've chased rainbows with waves and curls
and grown white and red roses
with blooms like strawberry twirls.

A merry-go-round goes round and round.
A merry-go-round am I.

Though a man, I'm still a child at heart,
flying a kite in a raging storm.
The wind is a calliope echoing in the park.
I walk these gold-white shores
My porpoise shadow returns like an old, old friend.
And I remember the sounds of Mayport Ferry.

A merry-go-round goes round and round.
A merry-go-round am I.

Sombrero Flowers

Time for siesta, my sweet,
let pink flamingoes catch your dreams,
mariachis play a song
from their old guitars.

Like a neverending ball of twine,
kittens dangle from the windowsills,
playing with strings of stardust.

Trout swim in sombrero ponds,
burros race in the desert,
wild stallions take flight across Guadeloupe horizons
while falcons speak in nomadic rhymes.

Run my child, run,
pick sombrero flowers,
weave in colors of red, white, beige, and blue.
Redwoods look like skyscrapers.

Above desert floors,
bats bicker in their caves,
conversing about tales of ancient abodes,
night birds dance on a tortoise's back

Rest my child, rest,
in your sombrero boat.
Night is a river gently flowing.
Turquoise rainbows bridge the sky
and set sail upon the night.

Whistling Through a Forest Green

I'm whistling through a forest green,
Listening as the echoes sing,
I wander low and wander high

I feel the sun and see him smile.
Some trails go long some go wide,
Some go onward till they reach the sky.

Walking through a forest green,
I come upon a Nature's scene.
Animals ignore my eccentric ways

Some sing along, others run away.
I wonder still, and think of hills
Of paths and brooks with baths,

Whistling a tune through a forest green
The echoes like markings guide me on,
I hear the home folks call to me

The wind carries their song
Robins echo their gentle refrain
I'm a traveler who never walks alone.

Whitman's Agony

(Where the green goes to slumber)

Where the green goes to slumber,
What a beautiful place to dream.

Across Harper's Ferry, ships have sailed
their masts held high, crossing green silver seas.
Still, voices cry and scream in vain.
Do you hear the mourning?

Coal stacks pollute, belch hate and poverty
where envy green smoke, rises into a black, black night.
Still I hope for this great race called humanity.
What a glorious creation we are,
holding such truths as this "republic,"
this grand ideal of the American Dream

shines under a golden sun
stretching over this great country,
a vast spirituality of hills and valleys
where there's still so much to achieve.
Yet, these golden streets, paved with good intentions,
run red with blood rivers flowing, drowning souls
who couldn't swim the tide,
sinking into deep, dark depths
where green fathoms swallow.

There is hope in the hazel-green gleams
of our children's eyes. There, spirited hearts glow.
Nurture their dreams and let them grow.
Hang picturesque horizons where green rolling hills
ramble into mountain valleys and peaks.
Eagles and doves nibble on golden stars,
let heavenly stardust fall,
sparkling rain on amber wheat fields.
Green grass grows to tickle the ears
and wondrous glades dance in the breeze.
Sleep now and dream
where the green goes to slumber
in this universal tide and follow your heart
under wide, wide skies.

About the Author

An unofficial apprentice to John Donne, Joel L. Young is a writer, poet, and drummer living in Middleburg, Florida. He graduated from Florida Community College of Jacksonville in 1986 with an AS degree in television production.

In 1998, Young became an AOL volunteer on America Online's Amazing Instant Novelist site. Currently, Young is also the newsletter editor for SynergEbooks.

In December 2000, "American Lyricon" was released in eBook form and, in early 2001, his "With Pen In Hand" series was released.

"American Lyricon" received a poetry honorable mention from the 2001 Clara Awards. His second book, "To John Donne & Other Poetic Letters" was a 2002 poetry finalist in the EPPIE Awards. His poetry has been featured in Internet webzines.

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Check out Joel's With Pen in Hand Poetry Series, also available at SynergEbooks:

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