

I open with a biblical rainstorm,  
no weathervanes in sight,  
galoshes crying out for mercy,  
and a burning cross of Farmers Almanacs  
which will not relinquish its fiery crusade against moisture.  
Off in the distance, Lot's wife, having turned to salt,  
is gargled in the rapacious throat of a gopher hole  
like some home remedy for laryngitis.

*I see those drops wet-willy-ing your California ears.  
Let's not overreact, I see your drizzle.*

*Here is the point:*

*There are two men standing on a street corner.  
One man is wearing a hat, the other is bald.  
The street is waiting, the men stretch out with the sunset.  
There is a bus, but it is wrong.  
The men's heads are thin pockets, heavy with moments.  
They jangle these moments like keys  
or bullets.  
Signs are re-read.  
They will never turn toward each other;  
Lines have been drawn, a contract of silence has been notarized  
and clipped to the annals of etiquette.  
There are too many people these days.*

I see homeless urban vagabonds  
pan-handling for bounteous forgetfulness to wash over them like birdsong,  
remembrances of social missteps,  
the attempted surrealistic mapping of textile receptacles teeming with intangibility—  
like errata in a stanza gone horribly awry.  
On the wet pavement, several unfinished games of tic-tac-toe  
are scratched around a chalk outline where the body had lain just hours ago.  
Confidentiality agreements were made to be broken.  
Nobody respects privacy anymore  
and latch key kids ignore their curfew  
to gossip at the local bodega.  
The only thing that cannot be heard  
is the voice of the basenji urinating on a fire hydrant,  
it's misguided warnings muted despite all efforts.

Nonetheless, we will proceed.

Before you get too sure of your footing,  
make sure you've tied your shoes.



## Dmitry Berenson



Dmitry Berenson moved to Orange County after graduating from Cornell University; getting as far away from upstate New York as possible. While at college, he was the Editor-in-Chief of "The Quad" literary magazine and host/participant of many poetry readings. In 2005, he was selected as one of four undergraduate readers to present his work to the faculty and graduate students of the English department for that year. He also wrote for "The Lunatic" humor magazine. He has featured at numerous venues around southern California and recently published his first chap book, "Clever." He lives in Newport Beach where there is a chicken in every pot and an SUV in every garage. Dmitry Berenson truly does love America.

# Showdown at the OC Corral

I raise three copper pennies  
to give you some cents of direction.  
Flip all three while standing on one foot,  
close your left eye, and pray they land within your field of view.  
Next, consider the relief of Abraham  
discovering his heart was coated in zinc,  
wouldn't rust against the precipitation of civil disobedience that eats at hope like acid rain:  
equality yearning to become more than just an idea trapped under his ten gallon hat, luscious,  
as dewy quinces sparkling in sunlight.

*I see your three pennies;  
how fitting that the image  
matches its meaning in value.  
As for poor Abe,  
how horribly you have mangled his features:  
made a stovepipe realpolitik  
into a ten-gallon cowboy.  
And "equality," a firecracker in the  
flailing stanza that pops and rattles  
but never really bursts or flares.  
Don't worry, such things are common  
when you crutch on abstractions.*

*Before you get too sure of your shoes,  
make sure you have feet to stand on.*

*I raise you Stonehenge in fog.  
Yes, I know about the tourists,  
but today the road is too foggy to travel.  
The cameras are sheathed in their holsters.  
At the hotel, they play cards, watch the britcoms and make tea.*

*Roger, 35, is fumbling with the electric teapot in the tiny kitchen.  
Claire, 32, smirks at Mr. Lucas' pun regarding Ms. Slocumb.  
Alex, 12, tunes out the laugh-track and stares at the queen of diamonds,  
wondering if that is what men found attractive a long time ago.  
Angela, 7, turns from her two pair  
and looks into the milk of the window.  
Twenty miles north, a circle of leaning rocks, 5000, has no thoughts or moods,  
does not wait, allows others to name it calendar or temple.*

*We too are rock circles built by forgotten hands,  
but we are not graveyards on hills,  
we are rubbing down cliffsides, in motion:  
we have pebble-sack brains searching for purpose  
or at least that's what we grate and rasp from the caves of our mouths,  
at least that's what we see with these chiseled-stone eyes.*

*It is best we don't know;  
it is best we keep moving.  
Rocks have a way of accepting when they stand still.*

Peering through your chalk dust, half-complete erector set,  
and tea party daydreams with imaginary friends,  
I notice your self-satisfying need to diddle with rocks,  
and a desperation to elongate like the romance poets:  
a vain effort to get women to talk to you.  
I see your igneous sock-stuffed allegory.

Tolstoy weeps for this to come to an end.  
Jagger laughs at your disguised clichés.  
Freud fluffs the pillow on his couch.

My feet are firmly planted.  
Here's a paper bag to breathe in.

I raise a cocktail napkin.  
On one side someone has written the word brevity.

And so—

wind cradles honor  
above the prismatic snow  
opposing frostbite

Where have all the mice gone?

*That's easy,  
the mice have fled from your  
comic book samurai.  
Even their tiny noses  
can smell the cliché  
of a haiku about honor.*

*Be a good boy,  
count your syllables before you go to bed;  
dream your lockstep dreams.*

*I raise a mathematician:  
Chalk coated hands  
combing spiraling hair  
on an aching head,  
scribbles on paper  
and text and papers  
and more papers of diagrams,  
photographs, a travel-log, a half-eaten orange,  
a pair of glasses, Wrangler jeans, a matrix of waiting numbers,  
a broken chair, an open-faced book, a maze of waning equations at dusk light,  
a puzzle of locked links,  
pencils, pens, notepads, a shoehorn, a bookshelf,  
a Rothko poster in the corner that he looks at when he doesn't understand,  
when he needs to feel that dark lake inside him, wade, and wait.*

(a poker poem)

Q

Aaron Roberts was once the Poet Laureate of planet Pluto and also knows THE place in France where the naked ladies dance. Don't ask him. He's not going to tell you. Well... maybe for a substantial amount of money. Aaron's been featured at various venues throughout Southern California and is a regular at the *Two Idiots Peddling Poetry* reading in Orange. Publication credits include, *ARTLIFE*, *Spillway*, *Poems of The World Magazine* and the upcoming anthology from Tebot Bach. He has written three chapbooks: *Reinventing Taon*, *My Aardvark Is Worse Than My Bite* and *Laundry Day*. He lives in behind the Orange Curtain in Mission Viejo, CA with his wife Lisa and their two cats Eliot and Emily. Some day, Aaron hopes to find a family of fireflies that will hold a conversation in his head so he can use his eyeballs like flashlights to find his way home. Unfortunately, in Orange County, fireflies are in short supply.



Aaron J. Roberts

J

I see your Hail Mary of school supplies, classroom furniture, and conundrums,  
but this is poker, sir,  
and I think you are bluffing.

I call, while casually sipping a tawny port.  
Show me what you're made of.  
Show me you are holding more than microbes in your hands,  
that your fountain pen isn't filled with invisible ink,  
your cards aren't merely eye charts for blind seers weeping in alleyways,  
screaming for fortunes in the puddles of their tears and floodwater.

*Oh, I hear your call, here is the bent-note-on-a-blues-guitar response:*

*I'm holding California:*

*The ace of fields windblown under a sky  
slashed black and red in the fading light.  
The colors tuned perfect like a piano  
player's fingers.*

*The king of redwoods burning in  
a forest fire, the bark blackened  
as red wisps snake up the throat  
of the trunk and out to the branch-arms,  
burning the fingers of needles to steam.*

*The queen of battered coasts of jagged  
rocks, thin crags in the spray  
of the leaping surf like the ocean  
was flour and the ragged wind sneezed.*

*The jack of brown hills rolling  
like crumpled sheets into the  
unmade horizon, the grass heavy  
with dew like last night's sweat.*

*And the ten of pavement, traffic lights,  
drain pipes overpasses, lamp posts,  
power lines, fences, head lights, shopping carts,  
and torn flyers that drift through the street.  
Read them and weep.*

I shall not shed a tear or cry for a state that  
places more value on sunshine and plastic surgery  
than it does on it's elected officials.  
And while born here, I cannot in good faith call it home.

I'm holding the Pacific Northwest  
as much as it will allow itself to be held.  
My palms filled with wood pulp,  
ink bleeding down to elbows.

I'd rather fold into a rain puddle  
and go blind inside a cloud  
than wear the same suit of clothes  
just to win a game of cards.