

BUTTONHOOK PRESS 2022 CHAPBOOK SERIES

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# O:JA&L Comedy Hour

OPEN: Journal of Arts & Letters



POEMS

**Bruce Robinson**



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OPEN: JOURNAL OF ARTS & LETTERS (O:JA&L)



**Bruce Robinson  
Comedy Hour**

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**Bruce Robinson  
Comedy Hour**

# **Comedy Hour**

*Doems*

**Bruce Robinson**



## Acknowledgments

*Vestiges of the Floating World*  
*Umpteenth View of Mt. Fuji*  
*Police Blotter*  
*Aesthete at the Table*  
*As Much As You Can Take*  
*Fence, Field*  
*Stitch*

*Alembic*  
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*Where Are My Marbles?*

*In Lies Lie Beliefs*  
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*The Reflecting Pool at Washington, DC*  
*Medication on A Forbidding Morning*

Maintenant  
Seventh Quarry  
Evening Street Review  
great weather for MEDIA  
Toho Journal  
the brooklyn  
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Spectrum

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Main Street Rag  
Main Street Rag  
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## Henry's Room

*With all of their eyes, animals behold openness.*

*--Rilke, eighth elegy (Alfred Corn, tr)*

When the wind blows the door closed  
and shuts Henry inside the bathroom,  
he's perhaps reminded of the mystery  
of the locked room, or concerned about  
the erstwhile inviolability  
of potions and admonishments  
inimical to cats. But the room is cool,

there is, you'll understand, a breeze,  
and when he looks outside through  
the screen window there's the moon,  
the moon fortunate to have caught Henry's eye,  
although when he looks away, it's gone:  
The moon has a lunar agenda.  
Not much to do in a locked bathroom,

not for a cat anyway, although let's  
be clear, Henry can and, he's done it,  
close that door, unaided, with ease.  
Perhaps he settles down on the windowsill,  
catches a glimpse of the re-emerging  
moon, and then an early-rising  
lark or squirrel. There's a ticking clock

in the corner, but Henry, per our  
learning, can't or won't tell time. We know, though,  
the sky's still dark, the noises in the house  
are few. Now what? Hunker down and ponder  
those incoherent certainties that cover  
all our moments? It may be he understands  
so little of this; please, tell me, if we do.

## **Vestiges of the Floating World**

**T**hey didn't see it coming, how could they?  
And then it rained, rained  
and we weren't witness,

but it did rain, you know, poured,

so we can only surmise  
although we weren't witness  
that the days grew in upon themselves

or so we might surmise

despite the unavailable clocks  
and our inability to witness  
for there were no clocks to set the tone

and the odd nights and even days foreshortened

there dawned nothing perhaps  
because we mistrusted the clocks  
who seemed to us ever unavailable

to point the way and... look, there was nothing

they could do about it, I mean,  
how could they, we too,  
we never saw it coming.

## Umpteenth View of Mt. Fuji

*The selfie is a cover-up: it hides the true self.*

--India Ennenga

Strange, though, I can't remember  
a single thing about that day,  
the weather, sky, only that it was April  
and only that it was April

because that was when I was there.  
And I still don't know why I took this;  
maybe I was feeling confident  
in the capacity of my battery,

proud of the gold strand of the  
Hokusai shirt, ah, that's it..  
it was the 37th view of Fujiyama  
and I, grim as always yet

adamant in my satisfaction,  
could not know there was anyone else  
nearby.



## Police Blotter

-after Liao Yiwu and Wang Xilin

Police arrested a pair of goons reciting  
sonnet 111 contrapuntally  
and a thief skulked away with the final

quatrain; some punk took formal liberties  
with the anapest destiny  
of Tennessee and an ink-stained wretch

skimmed errant vocables from an erstwhile  
rondelet. Some moments later, an illiterate lummoX  
scammed a rhyme off our terza rima

while a nogoodnik swiped a [u] from  
minuscule. A malefactor misappropriated  
the better part of two continents

from a polysyllabic rhyme, while a  
would-be felon picked melons two days  
before they'd be ripe: they ripened anyway.

Sure, the dish ran away with the spoon,  
but consider the pair of goons who thought  
to take issue with the fragile meters

of a citizen rhymester; all that they'd left him  
was the pen in his pocket and dactyls  
on the dashboard, adjectives in the ignition

and four on the floor. Worse yet,  
a pair of stumblebums employed  
excessive force in a disproportionate response

to a rhyme unlikely to become an imminent threat;

it's even rumoured they threw a brickbat  
through a plate-glass innuendo.

Some despot stowed away on the star  
we'd counted on for justice Tuesday last,  
and who's the gorilla who reduced

that Brooklyn epic to a rusted blade of grass?

## Aesthete at the Table

*not for a seat upon the dais  
but at the common table.*

*Charles Reznikoff*

I don't know that I should have needed  
permission to be seated

for there were seats at the table,  
the table set in its ways, and

by the way the one you've been seated  
at all this time, so I came in and

sat down, knife and tines at the ready,  
not necessarily set the way you

want it, in fact perhaps in your view  
somewhat peculiarly but nevertheless

prepared in a refectory  
sort of way to edge beside you

with whetted teeth, at once aware  
(not that I cared) of the stumbling manner

in which you bade me welcome: a plate  
and spare utensils at a table

now unsettled by the rain outdoors  
and the scraps from that table; it was

your look that set my spine. If you're  
resigned to the style in which

we'll have our meal, you'll find me  
charmed by your suffering.

## **As Much as You Can Take**

**T**here are only so many punches you can roll with:

only so many punches one can take

which by your calculations is a little  
like love, apoplectic love, so

one might calculate, hefting the weight

of pure linen, a little metaphorical,  
or cooling lava, so much less molten

than the way old advice falters into brick because

the way that counsel chips off a wall is just  
the soft eradication of cities

amid the ethnic scrubbing of cities,

the compost trucks that, like us, can just  
get by, the refuse trucks every Tuesday that

despite or because of alternate side

of the street parking can barely slide by  
as though you'd found yourself in bed with the

devil, a devil barely easing past you even though

there are just so many punches you can roll with.  
I don't know why you'd try.

## Fence, Field

Not meant for this,  
but bent like neglect,  
a broken wall the brush reveals,  
this fence, that field, an ear  
that's gone untouched for years.  
Go further: farther afield, and in decline  
the dust about an emptied town or  
that *deserted* railway line.

Then stop: why bother  
with metaphor? In metaphor  
lies connection; connection  
lies. Who thought this first --  
not fit for...this. Why else  
that fence across this field?

## Stitch

▲t last having thought of you --

Or the thought of you, having that:

is this the startled aperture

of any window, the air beyond

discovered, and the covert lining

of the world's spare coat

revealed in a revel of wonder

that old clothes can be so pocketed

with skeins of thought

in their unraveling?

## **Alembic**

It's raining. It's pouring. A car is  
idling beside a swamp field  
somewhere beyond the turnpike.  
It has no lights, but there's smoke  
from the field, smoke from the exhaust,

the smoke is visible

even without the light of multiple impressions,  
the trunk's closed, it had been open,  
now it's closed. You've got two guys  
standing around, their boots staining in the marl,  
they're watching without much interest  
the last bubbles popping from the bog.

One of them coughs.

## Fresco

**E**ven a man and a child who bury a book  
and plant a juniper above it:

and after the juniper plant more: bodies  
of birds and squirrels and mice killed by the cat,

old dolls, plush squirrels, mouse corpses  
the most painful, almost more than the girl

can bear, painful as a change of seasons:  
flowers, arbor vitae, the great alembic

mess begins to heat the flowers, arbor vitae  
and the dolls and books become pictures

on the dank walls of the cellar, the girl  
draws pictures, she uses her fingers

until with the pain they hurt all they touch,  
even a man and child who bury a book.

## **Intaglio**

**I**t begins to rise slowly,  
like paper peeling off the cans  
that are seething in the comfortable  
muck archaeologists call home.  
But a man asleep in a bog  
should know this - young girls

as they plant birds and books

are learning that myths don't lie -  
just before we hear the shots he sees  
the porcelain crack of heaven  
shred like the lid on a can of soup  
and hears, hey, they've been saying it

for years: "You're history."

## **Rain Delay, 1Q55**

It's a deluge,  
torrents tumbling in bucket seats  
like a Delage  
and I don't know, perhaps I'm eight,  
take the BMT to Prospect  
Park, then walk; now run for cover,  
I stand alone.

## Misanthropomobscene

*...quand il n'y a plus rien à retrancher.*

Terre des Hommes

Accommodation. Once we'd learned to spell it,  
found a pleasant sphere for an extended stay,  
for a while, it seemed to fit.

The cetaceans seemed to know, however,  
I don't know how, and say they tried to  
warn us, oh, those others too, gave them signs,

much to the distress of anyone concerned,  
shouldn't have been a shock. Well, no matter,  
no great loss. Seriously, not kidding.

And if it's true as some say that all creatures  
always look to burn some excess luggage,  
vascular dieback, then perhaps they

were intent on ridding themselves of earth,  
and their lemming's effort then flipped  
back upon them, undertow of their flame,

fodder for the fire. Not a problem, no, seriously,  
it worked. And you want to know where they went?  
Not our question to answer, put the screws to the moon.

All right, now, that's funny. Stop looking  
so serious, we needed something to  
break the ice. Oh, right.

## **Rumination on the Utility of Gas- Powered Leaf Blowers**

**Y**es, you're awake, no different from  
yesterday, it's only your eyes,  
no wonder they're open. Trees will seize upon

the point that persuaded them,  
turtles clamber like crabs to their nests;  
thing is, just in opening your eyes,

the moon may show you its darkened knees,  
the sun send icebeams to shatter  
the soil. Dolphins will sing their deliriums,

manatees their cohorts, sand slice our feet  
like rapiers unfazed by argument. It's only  
your eyes, you'd think they'd be open.

## Where Are My Marbles?

I don't remember, out on the town  
some place downtown I think, where does  
the time go, I mean when it's  
had too much to drink, when it's

decided not to wear its memory,  
as if memory were as real as  
any other story, yes, I know,  
this will have to do, it's just that, well,

my heart's misplaced,  
yes, you'll say with a smirk,  
somewhere down by fourth or eleventh  
I'd wonder, wherever time may go when  
it takes off on a bender, wherever marbles

gather, and hearts near a corner look to ascertain  
the lines they might take to find home again.

## Accompaniment to a Hairdryer

The pastoral scene beyond my screen  
displays a ride-on mower and a lawn,  
across the street a chainsaw yawns  
simple surgery like syrup on a tree.

You'd think there'd be a constant drone  
but that's not so, as far as I can tell,  
scything permutations of the mower,  
rasps of a lopped-off limb, susurrations

of a love-starved engine, even with the  
windows closed, and soon the door as well.  
Violins in the morning well before  
the opening bell, no thought to any breath

we'll hazard, as long as we may take one:  
inside the cats are quiet, drowsy, no more  
apple carts to empty, no more dishes  
to employ. No thought to any close impending,

or so I suppose, they'll be well done  
of all of this before too long. That's how  
I think the story goes.

## A Legacy, after Avercamp

▲ And then we come in, late to the party:  
A child, yet alive, crosses the bridge  
between solitude and communion to  
meet his father, returning home. Next door

a bucket dips, draws water from a stone.  
Despite the crowded winter ice, a fallen  
skater sprawls, alone. The quail? Well, they're  
above it all. The buildings have little to say;

like us they follow protocol. You'll want  
to tell me this is not what the present  
tense is for but I'm not so certain.  
Is the present no more than what's been left

to us, a passing wave, a plane's contrail, harangues  
and exhalations of entangled whales?

## In Lies Lie Beliefs

Onset:

He'd seen the moon, how could you miss it,  
the brightness, its rotational persistence.  
But the stars, that was something else entirely,  
a separate story, you could go for years

without them, and he had, until tonight,  
he doesn't know why but tonight  
he'd looked for them,...oh,  
it was because he'd wondered whether it would rain,

that was all, and he'd looked up at a dark gray  
expansive sky, then shifted his gaze  
until he saw one, a bright star, there's another,  
light years apart. But not very many.

He still didn't know if it would rain,  
but he realized that he'd said he'd seen a star,  
and thought it would be a good idea  
to start looking at them once it was dark.

Muddle:

None of that constellation incandescence,  
he thought he should just find a star.  
It was just one more body he'd never get to,  
but he didn't think it could be a bad thing,

to look at a star. Some stars you couldn't look at,  
like the sun, but these others, possibly  
much larger, much brighter, with light  
that was so old you'd only read about it,

**Bruce Robinson**  
**Comedy Hour**

a bright light you couldn't read by.  
Which was not to ignore the moon though;  
It stepped in front of the stars and  
outshone them, even after its long

estrangement, even with its borrowed light,  
he knew that much, or thought so, the moon  
had no light of its own, neither do we,  
but just couldn't, or wouldn't, admit it.

Mend:

Luminosity was just a lie it told itself.  
Us too; still we say we've seen the moon.

## Saith

**T**he sun hasn't said two words all day,  
keeping its counsel, the way a river  
withholds its source, no, not like that,  
it's just wishing it had a dark side like,

you know, the moon, or, no, not like that,  
the moon has no dark side, not really,  
not when you get to know it, not that  
anyone really knows it all that well,

and a river, well, you expect to be able  
to comprehend its roots, but sometimes,  
sometimes, oh, you know what I mean.  
Sometimes a river keeps its counsel

from anyone who like the sun, or  
like you, will flare up every now and then,  
as when you go solar, startling me,  
even though it's not yet noon.

## **Quire**

*When the wind blew, a great mass of burning pages danced into the air.*

*--Yoko Ogawa*

**J**ust a leaf of paper, not a leaf, a sheet  
of paper, foolscap blown across the street  
by the wind I guess, what else could there be,  
just a slight breeze, you know the kind of breeze

I mean, and maybe you know the street:  
the thing is, I was here to see it,  
so were some cars that ran it down,  
but I was on my feet, stationary

-- no, stop -- but ambulatory,  
yet all I could do was dither,  
inquiring, no, I did, I don't know why,  
was it deckle-edged? Left it then as litter.

## **Dozens of Eggs in A Carton, and A Dozen Rules of Thumb**

*Today's word count: 808 words (about seven minutes)*

--my lexicographer

▲ swimmer who enters the pool at the shallow end disturbs the eddies that had quietly begun to form at the deep end.

If it is cold in the parking lot, the sun takes notice, but takes it as an affront.

Try bringing a \$2.00 package of hummus marked down to \$2.09 to the customer service desk.

There are days, and there are newspapers, when the funniest thing you'll read is the capsule weather report in the upper left-hand corner.

Careful. There are a pair of gloves loose in the kitchen. They may be armed.

A person's distance from the sun can be calculated by gauging the wear on the sole of their shoe.

Not so if the shoe is a new purchase, regardless of price.

You will go farther on a gallon of gasoline if you warm it up beforehand.

Cat is god transliterated. I have this from Henry, a cat.

Why is this message in verse? It contains content that's typically used in metrical messages. [\*Learn more\*](#)

One day humankind will break the code and be able to fly meat to the moon.

This is complicated to the one I love.

## Birds on Parole

When a song comes into their heads,

passerines have the good sense  
to just chirp it away, get it out,

be done with it. Henry lies poised

on the windowsill, enraptured and,  
even though he's just eaten, ravenous.

Could writers, faced with the slack

jawed awe of their audience,  
wish for more when

spooling out a villanelle

that's taken months to build,  
their gaze resting on readers

without claws, stomachs filled?

## denizen

In late spring this hinge  
of red began to sing

from his perch within  
our pine, a squatter

I'd call him  
if he did not sing so eloquently,

of what I can't even fathom,  
so hermetic not even the erudite

squirrels had a clue, possibly  
(given his plumage) nothing

more than "I'm brighter than you."

## **The Reflecting Pool at Washington, DC**

**Y**ou know how it is, the way we do laps,  
we all defect  
to the deep end we pushed off from; would  
it surprise you

if our grandparents had been told  
to do the same  
back when we may have had even more  
ferment and rain

than buffets us now? As it happens, the swamp  
we were to drain  
depends upon a pool that's lost its  
ability

to reflect; was it this way  
before you and I deftly swam ashore?

## Medication on A Forbidding Morning

Here's a room, an empty room,  
or has it just dawned on you,  
you were thinking, "there's a moon,"  
a quiet dwelling, unadorned,  
it looks intent on perhaps nothing,  
nothing at all, perhaps the forlorn air  
that lives there, around wherever  
rest gives way to rust, forewarned,  
or a visitor we may encounter  
who wonders that the unhinged notes  
of dust that drift beside him should be  
so stunned by any room,  
a room with no light on  
or a room without a light,  
a room encumbered  
by a door, but an open door,  
outside a room.

## Cocktail Hour at Tala Bistro

As the ice melts,  
and the air above your glass  
begins covertly to warm  
and as Savannah offers  
to top off your glass  
and you put up your hand politely,  
to demur, perhaps you'd feel it,

an incipient chaleur, not much warning.  
No one offers ice, there's plenty,  
and even in its absence  
no one offers more. And as the water  
or whatever molecules you're cradling  
begins to warm, there it slips,  
the dissolution of a solid

relationship: Chemistry, 11th grade.  
If your drink is darker than the ice  
in your glass, it augurs worse; in summer,  
on the bistro's patio, the sun that heats the water  
warms the ice. If this is a problem  
elsewhere, let's not let it bother us here:  
Make Savannah happy; order more.

## **Comedy Hour** **(with four noncommercial interruptions)**

*ocean unknowable by unknowable sand.*

*--Conrad Aiken*

You know that joke about the in-laws? They're gone,  
what a relief? Well, they're gone, so have you,  
The sound, too, except our own, the few

residual cormorants, groaning whales,  
expiration of the last surviving  
embers, gruff love, warm wave, warmer sand.

Oh, that other joke, that line in the sand:  
cargoes of iron still roiled by the sea,  
nowhere to go, no here, no there. No joke:

so much sea and wind, toying with  
those few forests aflame, the earth's  
grown flatter. Where did everyone go, anyway?

Not our question to ask, well, sand. The joke  
about the open-ended hourglass, badaboom:  
Sand leaves no trace, the former, the latter.

## **About the writer:**

**Bruce Robinson's** poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Greenfield Review*, *Poetry Australia*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Spoon River*, *Rattle*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Maintenant*, *Prism Review*, *Pangyrus*, and *Xavier Review*. He holds degrees from Kenyon College and the Johns Hopkins University.



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