

## SELECTED TITLES BY BRIAN MARLEY

### POETRY

Dense Lens [with Asa Benveniste], 1975

Resurgam, 1978

Springtime in the Rockies, 1979

### PROSE-POEMS

Eight Poems to Photographs of Les Krims, 1980

### FICTION

Excursions in the Dark, 1985

### MUSIC

Blocks of Consciousness and the Unbroken Continuum

[Ed. with Mark Wastell], 2006

### ALSO

*Collaborations with the digital animator Andrew Greaves:*

Unnatural Order, 2004

Jonah, 2008



# APROPOS JIMMY INKLING

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Nobody owns life, but anyone who can pick up a frying pan owns death.

– William S Burroughs –

sing late o'clock  
news and hopes absent

– Tom Phillips –

For help along the way  
my thanks to  
Ken Edwards

This book  
is for  
Joanna Swann





~~~: In the rotten heart of the criminal underworld, hidden from the prying eyes and ears of various law enforcement agencies, Jimmy Inkling is king. The man to go to if you want something done. The fixer's fixer.

CUSTOMER: Eh?

~~~: I know whereof I speak: in the many years I've known him he's done me favours galore, not all of which he expects to be repaid. In short, he's a sweetie. And versatile, a quick thinker, a game changer. Nothing fazes him.

CUSTOMER: Good to know. But why you're telling me this I have no idea.

~~~: Most recently he arranged something very much out of the ordinary: the vasectomy of one of my friend's daughter's unsuitable (to everyone but the daughter) boyfriend. I argued against death or castration, the radical solutions proposed by my friend, and Jimmy, on principle, agreed. All things considered, he's a principled fellow.

CUSTOMER: Is he indeed?

~~~: The friend – who shall remain nameless, he's a member of Parliament, it might affect his standing with the electorate – tried everything in his power to get his daughter to relinquish the ghastly youth. Chained her by her ankle

to her bed like a fairytale princess. Had her placed under heavy sedation in a grim lockdown facility for psychiatric patients near York. Sent her to a month-long lesbian induction workshop at Gels of Ramingingin, the only internationally recognised finishing school for young ladies of wealth and distinction in Australia's largely uninhabited Northern Territory. No joy. Argument and bribery didn't work, either with the boyfriend or her, and enforced absence seemed to make the girl's heart grow – despite her hatred of platitudes and almost everything else, including, alas, her dear devoted dad – fonder.

What she was so stubbornly fond of was a gangly, ferret-faced youth, a long streak of piss and vinegar with chip-pan pallor and unfathomable sex appeal but

According to the daughter  
on the telephone  
her conversation accidentally overheard.

a colossal 'shaft of life'

Feeling broody  
perhaps?

and a matching libido. He was inarticulate to a degree that suggested imbecility. Apparently he also deemed personal hygiene a bourgeois affectation.

'Glands are the source of the problem,' said my broken-hearted friend. 'If only we could remove all the glands, and while we're at it his liver and lights. Using something like a blunt spoon. Or perhaps a crowbar. Without anaesthetic or benefit of clergy.'

There speaks a loving father, a man worried sick, at the end of his tether, discharging his pent-up frustration like a squall of acid rain. Perfectly understandable. Were you in his shoes I suspect you'd feel the same way too.

CUSTOMER: You may well be right. Now, if you'll excuse me ...

~~~: The problem seemed insoluble, but Jimmy, quick off the blocks as always, suggested an alternative. 'Why not,' he said, 'give the boyfriend a surreptitious vasectomy, so that at least she, your friend's lovely daughter, his baby girl,

Baby girl?

At the last flick of the abacus beads  
she was all of twenty-two!

can't get pregnant. Not by him, anyway, the skunky stud.'

Late one night, in a West End drinking club, the boy was befriended by a couple of Jimmy's operatives, moon-lighting medical students. They invited him over to their table and topped him up with hi-octane Belgian beer and a brace of whisky chasers. Hewing to the script provided by Jimmy, they claimed to be celebrating a spectacular once-in-a-thousand-lifetimes win at Haydock Park and Aintree on a doubled-up six-fold accumulator. That's right, *doubled* – whoever heard of such a thing?

According to Srinivasa Ramanujan  
[or someone  
claiming to speak for him]  
the odds against  
this happening are so great they're  
impossible to comprehend  
and thinking  
incomprehensible thoughts  
can lead to  
headaches  
nausea  
anxiety  
and despair.  
Ramanujan's advice:  
Place simpler bets and  
whistle a happy tune.



CUSTOMER: Not me, that's for sure. Isn't anyone serving in here?

~~~: They wanted, one of them said (as per the script), to share some of the fruits of their outrageous good fortune. Share it with just one other person, someone of honest mien, suggestive of sound character, to whom they could safely confide. Someone who'd join them in celebration but quietly, without drawing the attention of the vultures, rats, cockroaches and vipers in human form that are always worryingly near. They'd steal the very breath from your mouth if they could, worthless to them though it is. As for tomorrow ... well, it's another day, as all top-drawer philosophers have been telling us since time immemorial, and only an utter blockhead would gainsay their wisdom. Tomorrow the whole world will know the epic scale of the win. All hell will break loose. Life will never be the same again, and aspects of it are bound to change for the worse. It's inevitable. So while we can let's enjoy this moment of reprieve, the heavenly calm before the apocalyptic shitstorm.

Having got that semi-plausible soliloquy out of the way, celebrate they did. Soon he, the boyfriend, was paralytically drunk whereas miraculously they remained stone cold sober. At closing time they waltzed him off the premises, one at either side, cupping his elbows to keep him upright so he didn't spill, his legs swinging like pendulums, toes barely skimming the floor.

What happened next must be left  
to the reader's imagination  
and/or  
medical knowledge  
assuming the reader is in  
possession  
of such things.

Just before dawn the boy regained consciousness, still reeling drunk, feeling like puke, dehydrated and aching all over, with a nagging/stabbing pain in the groin occasioned, he thought, by nothing more than a beer-swollen bladder. To his great relief and even greater surprise, nothing bad seemed to have happened: neither sexual assault nor vicious mugging. He staggered to his feet and pissed where he stood, with difficulty, against a large metal refuse bin that was accustomed to such indignities. The dried pool of blood in the crotch of his boxer shorts wasn't noticed until hours later, nor the ugly, inflamed keyhole wounds that looked like flea bites, little different from his other flea bites, just bigger.

To this day he probably has no idea that his sperm count is zero.

No future father he.

As Jimmy put it, with an unapologetic cackle: 'He's the Cockfosters of the procreative line.'

CUSTOMER: Hang on. Is that the same Jimmy Inkling who, at the tender age of nineteen, won the Victoria Cross for valour in QUOTE the face of imminent death, against insurmountable odds, under heavy machine gun and sniper fire UNQUOTE, who used the butt of his standard issue Enfield rifle like a cricket bat to send a German stick grenade caroming into the muzzle of a rapidly approaching Panzer tank, killing the crew and, in the nick of time, stopping the vehicle from crushing several of his comrades, one of whom, having lost an eye in the conflict and most of his wits, would later become a key advisor to Margaret Thatcher during her first term as Prime Minister?

~~~: The very same. You can read about that and Jimmy's many other World War Two exploits in a recently published omnibus edition entitled *Inkling Uncut* (books #2-4 in the Jimmy Inkling series), which consists of three highly acclaimed novels, classics of war literature, up

there with books by Heller and Wouk, that had, because of a copyright muddle, long been out of print. Their titles: *Fate Favours the Brave*, *Fountains of Blood*, and *Fighting Force Majeure*.

CUSTOMER: Is that also the Jimmy Inkling whose name was added to the 1943 Honours Board at Lord's Cricket Ground, although according to William Joyce, aka Lord Haw Haw, in one of the pro-Nazi anti-Semitic radio rants that got him hung as a traitor after the war, Inkling never played a satisfactory innings in his life?

~~~: That's him. Not much of a cricketer, he'd be the first to admit. The straight drive that sent the grenade soaring back from whence it came, or thereabouts, was a wild shot, a fluke.

CUSTOMER: It beggars belief.

~~~: How so?

CUSTOMER: The character of that brave, noble man and this ... this fiend. They're two different people, surely.

~~~: I can see why you might think that. But if you bear with me, I hope to persuade you otherwise.

CUSTOMER: Don't feel you have to, I'm really not fussed. In fact –

~~~: What manner of man is Jimmy Inkling? In a word, complex. As are we all, the male of the species. Apart, that is, from the likes of Mr Snipped Vas Deferens, the aforementioned boyfriend, an incestuously begotten son of an incestuously begotten son and, long way back, of Portuguese origin, one of Vasco da Gama's more distant relatives, a diseased bud on the spindliest twig of the family tree, not that he's aware of it.

Or  
for that matter  
who da Gama was.  
So much for the benefit of  
an expensive public  
school education.

His complexity was evidenced only by the unnaturally large cluster of nerve endings in the glans of his penis, a bodily appendage he wields with the subtlety of a club.

CUSTOMER: I hate to nitpick, but don't you mean complicated rather than complex?

~~~: Certainly not! You don't know Jimmy Inkling like I do. In fact, apart from a few factoids gleaned from *Who's Who* or Wikipedia, you obviously know nothing about him.

CUSTOMER: Well that's where you're wrong. Couldn't be more wrong if you tried. A decade ago I was a contestant on *Mastermind*.

~~~: The television quiz show?

CUSTOMER: The very same. Specialist subject: The History of Inkling Inc., 1967-2007. After the first round I was flying high, no wrong answers and only one pass. It was my general knowledge that let me down, not the Inkling stuff.

~~~: Inkling Inc. is one thing, Jimmy Inkling quite another. I still contend you know nothing about him, nothing of real importance. We need to remedy that situation, and fast. Let me call my first witness.

CUSTOMER: Witness? I came in here on the not unreasonable assumption that this was a café. That's what's written on the sign outside, and there's nothing but café paraphernalia in here. The predominant smell is of coffee, not periwigs and dusty legal tomes. Look, on every table there's a laminated menu and a defanged rose in a glass flute. Over there, chalked on a blackboard, a list of lunchtime specials. Paper napkins in a stainless steel dispenser. Sugar in a bowl. This is definitely a café, not a courtroom.

~~~: It's whatever I say it is, according to need. Let me call my first witness.

CUSTOMER: Oh well. If you must I suppose you must.

# Opening Session

~~~: Please state your name, age, present occupation and place of domicile.

FIRST WITNESS: Blenkinsopp with two peas, Rodney James Fulwell, known to friends as Rodders or Roddy and to the branch of the film industry in which I work as Hot Rod, for obvious reasons. I'd rather not state my age, it's bad for business. Occupations (yes, plural): male model and actor, currently resting and residing on a friend's sofa in Kew.

~~~: Tell us, Mr Blenkinsopp, what you know of Jimmy Inkling.

BLINKINSOPP: He did funny voices and performed magic tricks at the sixth birthday party of a boy I went to school with. His name escapes me. Bland or Blunt, something like that. Not a close friend, obviously. The school itself has since been demolished. Absolutely riddled with asbestos it was, and said to be cursed. It had a resident ghost: a maths teacher who hung herself in the headmaster's office, or perhaps his secretary's office, circa 1960, reason unknown. On stormy nights she'd occasionally be heard chanting the prime numbers from two to forty-seven, the age at which she topped herself, in a creaky old-crone

voice. That's what I was told. I've no idea where she went after the school got pulled down. Into retirement, I suppose. An old ghosts' home, if such a thing exists.

~~~: And Mr Inkling?

BLINKINSOPP: What about him?

~~~: We'd like to know more. Much more, if possible. And please try to keep to the point, we haven't got all day.

BLINKINSOPP: No need to use that tone of voice, just because you offered to pay my return fare from Kew and promised refreshments, which, by the way, have yet to materialise. Not even a sip of water offered in all the time we've been here. Anyway, there's not much more to tell, is there?

~~~: I really wouldn't know. Perhaps you'd care to enlighten us.

BLINKINSOPP: There's that tone again. You really are a supercilious little shit, aren't you?

~~~: Mr Blenkinsopp ...

BLINKINSOPP: Don't you Mr Blenkinsopp me. We, your unhappy band of witnesses, have been waiting in that cold, dingy corridor, sitting on rock-hard benches, those of us who've managed to get a seat, since 8:00AM. You wafted in at 11:45 without a word of apology and immediately went out to lunch – stepping over the prone body of Mr Ancrum, who'd fainted from the stress of standing for so long – and didn't return for three hours. Three whole hours! – we timed you to the second. Since then we've had to undergo various humiliating procedures, including a full body cavity search that was filmed by a sniggering camera crew for some sleazy documentary or other and, one at a time, a Q&A session on a polygraph machine, while naked, the film crew still in attendance, to determine whether we're reliable or not, capable of saying a horse is a vegetable without the machine throwing a hissy fit. But mostly we've been hanging around, fully clothed, awaiting your summons. Waiting and gradually losing the

will to live, those of us who had that to begin with. And now it's early evening, the light fading fast, day almost done, and the proceedings have only just got underway. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for treating us in such a cavalier fashion!

~~~: Perhaps we should have a short recess, to repair frayed tempers and calm frazzled nerves ...

BLENKINSOPP: Don't bother. What little I know of Jimmy Inkling can be boiled down to a single sentence. He's an extremely tall man with a terrible facial scar, an Old Testament beard, and he drew rabbits out of a hat, white ones.

~~~: And ...?

BLENKINSOPP: That's it.

~~~: What do you mean?

BLENKINSOPP: Just what I said: That's it. That's all I know. It's what I was told.

~~~: You mean ... you didn't attend the party in question, didn't actually see Mr Inkling yourself, in person?

BLENKINSOPP: Correct.

~~~: No further questions.



CUSTOMER: My curiosity has rather got the better of me, though I sincerely wish it hadn't. How come you seem to know so much about that vasectomised boy, what he did, thought and felt?

~~~: I'm a psychic medium. In the pantheon of the gods, a minor one.

CUSTOMER: I see. But I'm still not entirely sure I understand. Are you a minor psychic medium or a minor god?

~~~: Both.

CUSTOMER: Ah.