

MATHEW TILSLEY

Now That's What I Call Humanity

Old Man McHann's been jumping out at little boys on the street again—what a guy—
Living like a king in hotels off his inheritance—always going out to find the right
dumping grounds—His buddy Businessman Bill smiles in his office when he hears
Old Man McHann is in trouble with the law again—he should've listened when I told
him hacksaws make a hell of a mess, Bill says to himself—So now bow down and cut
your throat under the eyes of God—but why do that when you've got a few Cokes left
in your refrigerator?

“Good” people lead bad lives, says Businessman Bill; so he rejected “good” people—
now hangs around with the bums downtown—spends his spare time drinking beer
with them—Got divorced years ago for gross neglect—crawls around in the gutter
when he's supposed to be seeing his daughter—Takes a pistol into the office these
days—he's moving up the corporate ladder...

Yes yes yes—the Crazy Boys are bustin' around the suburbs doing all manner of
crazy things—jumping off roofs into bushes and skateboarding into ditches—ringing
doorbells then running away and throwing rocks through windows—prank phone
calls—tearing across golf courses and scaring old folks—going into stores and
knocking things off shelves—Oh boy...

And Little Timmy's got his scary black costume on—got that killer wand out—
leaping out at people as always—little ten-year-old murderer—smiles for his parents

when they take a picture of him—stands at the edge of the pavement and screams horrifically at passing drivers—wants to slip into their dreams with a knife—know your sorrows, know your sorrows, he says—I’ll put you in your resting place—I’ll take away your tragedy...

So Jimmy—yeah—he’s dancing around with the trashcans in the alley—Makes a tight little living as a mail-order salesman—never needs to leave his basement except when he gets the shakes—Ooh boy—Saw a girl being raped in the business district yesterday—didn’t move a muscle, just walked away whistling—Found out next day the rapist was his good pal and fine associate Old Man McHann—Said to Businessman Bill, “It’s a beautiful world,” and went on whistling...

The best doctor in town is driving around right now looking for bait—uses Jimmy’s basement for utter destruction with the good man’s permission—Friendly and polite in the hospital by day—and who’s to say not by night?—even when’s he up on the rooftops taking pot-shots at children—What a guy...

...Somewhere in Omaha, deep in the heart of the nation, the Jazz Boys are playing the theme-tune of all this humanity—sax and trumpet and drums and barrelhouse piano—heart-wrecked adventure music...

Crazy Boys are wreaking havoc across the parking lots and strip malls—“Oh dude—dude—get that metal pole and start swinging it” —and then they let it go and run away laughing after a window smashes—fun ‘n’ games, fun ‘n’ games—the good times, so to speak...

Indeed, those two Seattle hoboes Mack and Bruce are having a whale of a time as they guzzle down the sweet smell of misery tonight on the marsh-ridden banks of the Lake—got their cluster of trees for shelter—a little bundle of dollars for bread and bourbon—always on the move along the muddy Lake shores to evade the cops—always in danger—innocence threatened—but they got a safe place tonight—a little fire built—yeah, they’ll be bundled up in their raincoats, watching the deep orange of the flames shimmer across the dark ripple of the water...

...as Little Timmy rolls his second kill into an Oklahoma City pond...

All people are good people, all people are bad people—What’s the difference? says Reverend Thompson—as long as there’s a beer in the fridge at the end of the day, what difference does it make? —Yeah, says Businessman Bill, but there’s no good, quiet places in New York to dump bodies anymore—Well there’s plenty of good dumping grounds in Delaware, says the Reverend—Wow, hey, thanks, says Bill—Rock on, says the Reverend...

Old Man McHann used to be a Senator, you know—hard-line Republican from Indiana—still is, by the way—Came from wealth, went to Harvard—Most intelligent man in Congress, they said—But now he spends his years hustling for a dollar down on Wall Street—and in the old days he would’ve blacklisted those corporate scumbags who drop a dime at his feet and make him bend down and pick it up—now he just bashes their heads in—But never his good friend Businessman Bill—Bill is always up for standing in a doorway and sharing a beer and telling jokes (“Hey, did you hear the one about the group of students who visit a concentration camp in Germany and as they come out all sombre and perturbed at the end one guy says ‘What, no gift shop?’”)—Oh boy...

...Jazz Boys keep it strong in an Omaha alleyway—poignant old tunes and grieving blues—the music of our boys—boys living far away in another time and place...

The Berlin Crook has exiled to Toronto—the loneliness is safer there, he’s decided—has bought a big old house in the dense outskirts of town—lies on his bed each day and falls deeper down—keeps the doors locked, can barely go out for fear of a bullet—got the movie channels on cable TV to keep him company—movies about vacuum cleaners with souls and villains foiled by intelligent dogs—makes him laugh from time to time—makes him cry too—and when everything’s as still as death he climbs up onto the roof and looks out across the vast, deadly silent neighbourhood—grits his teeth and pays tribute to the loneliness—“I love this place...,” he whispers...

Little Timmy’s grades are slumping in school—his parents, the dentist and his wife, are concerned, but only mildly so—for they don’t know Timmy’s secrets—they don’t

know of his kills—they don't know of that distant mysterious world he's built and put himself at the centre of—he just continues to be that lively little boy who lives in the biggest house on the street...

Businessman Bill went to Oklahoma City on business and met up with Little Timmy on a sidewalk—knew the boy was special right off the bat—they eyed each other and shared something out of this world, out of control—birds were singing sweetly—wind was blowing softly—it was a peaceful encounter—they located a rock and went to find the right window...

Jimmy gets a night every now and then at a Manhattan nightclub doing stand-up—anal-retentive bald-headed people-hater in sunglasses insulting the hell out of everyone—the customers love and hate him in equal measures—he draws a crowd in for sure—keeps the club owners happy—and it's the only place where Jimmy confronts people—disposes of all fear and all repression and comes face to face with the mystery of other people—but nobody knows where he lives or where he goes or what he does after the show's over—for he's always there for Bill and Old Man McHann and the best doctor in town—would give up everything just to help his only friends...

And Mack and Bruce found one another—cannot live without each other—have nowhere else to go, have nothing else they know—sharing the bottle—sharing sadness—hanging on together—living in trees and bushes by the Lake—their dying ground—their cold hard reality—where friendship is all there is—where there is magical adventure out of poverty...

What's a Berlin Crook in Toronto to do?—the most displaced of all, the most lost...—watches raindrops sliding down glass through a slit in blanketed windows—television on but sound turned down—sleeps with a pistol under the pillow—soused in the loneliness of the last safe place—loneliness as the only thing left—the most displaced, the most lost...

...Bill and Timmy sit on the leafy, shaded pavement and share a Coke...

Reverend Thompson keeps interrupting services to go help Old Man McHann in a latest escapade—McHann appears at the back of the hall and the Reverend knows his services are needed for a bludgeoning or a fact-finding mission—“Whenever we need to blow-up a building, you’re there,” McHann compliments the Reverend, whose congregation are outraged when he takes off with his haggard old friend—but the Reverend knows who his church is really for...

Crazy Boys have started throwing rocks at babies in prams coming out of shopping malls—the mothers horrified—Crazy Boys in stitches as they skedaddle—ah well, boys will be boys—sometimes innocence just sticks around...

...Occasionally Mack and Bruce, or Bill and McHann, or Jimmy and the best doctor in town, will stop to ask one another, “What are we *doing?*” and then burst out laughing...

Good boys, all of them. Right now. Yessir. Going on till dawn. Jimmy and Bill and Old Man McHann are hitting the road in a couple of days, heading out West to soak-up the good times. The best doctor in town is quitting his practice soon and will join them, along with the Reverend who will abandon his church for his boys.

The suburbs are always there for the Crazy Boys, and for Little Timmy. The fun ‘n’ games are neverending.

But some good things move toward their end... Bruce died today on a wooded Lake shore. Mack stands for hours over the corpse feeling complete emptiness before stirring to wipe the tears from his eyes. “It is done,” he says sadly...

In Omaha, the Jazz Boys play a funeral song. The lament echoes across the land for those who can hear it...

...as the Berlin Crook takes a deep breath and lets his silhouette darken further into the swarthy Toronto sunset...

Oh boy.