

Jesus, Borges, Jelly Roll

by Con Chapman



i.

“‘What is truth?’ said jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer.”

So wrote J.L. Austin, a man who
knew How to Do Things With Words.

So did Pilate, for when he washed his hands and
Released Barab'bas, he said of Jesus
“I am innocent of this man's blood,”

setting in train a sequence that ends
each Christmas Day with
a mess of wrapping paper on the floor.

While Pilate sat in judgment, his wife Procula sent word to him—

“Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much over him today in a dream.”

If Mrs. Pilate hadn't taken her nap that day,
Jesus might have gone free.

Here's the rap sheet on Barab'bas:
a murderer, an insurrectionist, a robber.

Had Pilate released Jesus to the Jews
instead of Barab'bas
we might today celebrate Barab'basmas,
by stealing gifts from our neighbors.



ii.

“You shall not go down twice to the same river,” Heraclitus wrote,
according to Jorge Luis Borges,

in A New Refutation of Time.

Here's a guess that Borges didn't throw his watch away
and that on Saturday morning Heraclitus didn't say
to his wife "I'm going swimming."

"Where?"

"The same old place I've never been before."

Philosophers are subject to refutation on the plane
where they disdain to exist, as old Sam Johnson proved--sort of—
when he kicked a rock in the road to dispute Bishop Berkeley.



iii.

It was Judge Fogarty who said

"Thirty days in the market—take him away.

Give him a good broom to sweep with—take him away"

That's what Jelly Roll thought he heard his Honor say
of some anonymous miscreant.

At least that judge had the decency to hand down
a proportional and determinate sentence.

We don't know who the man was or what he did,

but his suffering had an end, unlike ours.

iv.

*I passed unnoticed through a place
that wasn't there before me
and every new-made molecule
betrayed its high indifference
to whence I came and where I went
by brushing blindly past my face
as if it did not hear or see
and bade me get my body hence.*

