

## ARTS IN RETROSPECT

### MARCHING (BACKWARDS) TO PENURY

The 10th annual Southern States Literary Festival and Pilgrimage focused on the life and work of Joe Bob Jones, whose ancestral home above the Ideal Cafe ('Good Eats') in downtown Penury was the focal point of the event's main program.

Joe Bob, known to his friends as joe bob, had written a striking series of interconnected novels and short stories dealing with the mythical county of Gonococcusatawpha and the struggles of the landed poor in their battle against the encroachment of the rapacious aristocrats, symbolically called 'The Magnolia Manglers.' The most famous of these works was the trilogy, 'The Shack,' 'The Shanty' and 'The Lean-to,' which were cited by the committee which awarded Joe Bob the World Punitive Prize for Literature, with which he established a home for aristocrats who find boll weevils on the family tree. (Joe Bob was said to have a sense of social justice. He was also said to be retarded.)

The Penury Town Council had declared Joe Bob's room above the Ideal Cafe ('Good Eats') a local shrine and at the prompting of Eustacia Della Robbia, a prominent slattern, had chosen her to preside at the special ceremony marking the disposition of Joe Bob's unfinished novel, the one upon which he was found dead a year before the Festival and Pilgrimage. Joe Bob and Eustacia had once had a heady dalliance at the Gulf State Motel Owners convention (Eustacia kept books for the Sleepy Time Down South Tourist Home, two miles outside Penury on the Millstone Pike). It was Eustacia who had urged the Town Council to set up a display of some of Joe Bob's personal effects, which included his collection of matchbook matches (he thought the covers were tacky) and first editions of his complete works, which numbered more than anyone had thought possible.

There was an air of moldy delirium when Eustacia delivered the opening remarks before the small group that had gathered before the makeshift platform on the sidewalk near the stairs that led to Joe Bob's room, which had been cleaned just before the carload of tourist(s) had arrived in Penury for this most auspicious of Southern literary festivals. (It always got space in the Memphis papers.) What might have been grief on Eustacia's face was quickly seen to be the effects of a half pint of bourbon she consumed instead of breakfast that morning. While some might have said she was grieving for the loss of Joe Bob, she was really gnashing her teeth in a perpetual snarl because he had failed to make her his wife, as he had promised to do many times. Eustacia was really an encroaching aristocrat who had been expelled from her family's ancestral condominium when she was found setting fire to a polyester dress, which had been used for generations as part of a Della Robbia wedding ensemble.

Joe Bob shared the secret of her tawdry past and she, in turn, shared his secret, that the salmon-colored freckles on his back were not honestly his, having gotten there as the result of an exploding sun lamp. (It was part of the landed poor's quaint beliefs that a male's freckled back denoted an unusually high virility quotient.) Eustacia also loved Joe Bob because he was a man who could sweat instead of perspire.

In a paean of praise that would have been considered excessive for the memory and virtue of a sportswriter, Eustacia extolled the qualities of Joe Bob Jones while the local

faith healer blessed the styrofoam box that had been chosen to house the unfinished novel that would have put the final turn of Joe Bob's screw of the whole Southern mystique. The box was to be placed in a site of honor on the lunch counter of the Ideal Cafe ('Good Eats'), where Joe Bob's head had often rested during the late afternoon and evening, a dirty hand clenching the handle of a beer mug.

Following the ceremony, there was to be a brief tour of Joe Bob's room and Eustacia was to be the main feature of a press conference, to be hosted by the head of the English Department of a newly-opened university in South Penury, a satellite of the main town (its facilities had formerly been occupied by a training school for rural guerrillas).

Next year's Literary Festival and Pilgrimage is planned for East Essence, on the grounds of the estate of Lilly Lyles Terrapin, a precursor of the school of Anxious Romanticism.

— Howell Pearre

## WORDS WORDS

### HOW I GOT MY HEART BACK

*My heart came back the other day,  
Damaged and deeply grooved.  
It was my foolish idea  
that the giving was a measure  
Of mature relationships.  
I know I must have schemed for its return,  
Laying suggestions like slow cards  
In my public way of being grateful.  
  
It came back with creases  
Like the clothes of desperate tenants.  
It came back speechless,  
Fearful and anxious to do penance.  
  
Perhaps I was too eager to have it returned,  
I let it go with such stylish abandon.  
There couldn't have been much love involved,  
Though I did all that was expected,  
And acted quite above the ordinary.  
  
Anyway, I have it now, here,  
Between these wet fingers.  
I wish it a gala career,  
With no past that lingers.*

by Howell Pearre

# A CHRONICLE OF THE REVIVAL OF MOLEHILL

## HYMN NO. 357:

### 'WHEN THE MOUTH OF JUNE IS PARCHED, SEEK NO RELIEF FROM TAINTED WATERS'

Many were those assembled by the Goawin who had designs for Molehill's river peninsula, and several were the conflicts between one plan and another. The last personage to arrive at the meeting was Mayor Wylie. His entry fitted his style of officeholding: he was conveyed to the place by way of a carriage suspended from a cable stretched between City Hall and the river landing (it makes for quick getaways and an even quicker descent). Wearing the everpresent symbols of his administration — white belt and shoes — he eventually staggered to his chair (whether his behavior was the effect of momentum or due to some other imbalance I cannot say). From that seat, from that moment, he presided over the debate.

At the outset things took on the flavor of a carnival. The first presentation was in dramatic form: the local theatre troupe wants to have a theatre built on the site, so they acted their parts to stage their views. Their play was unremarkable and frankly I can recall nothing of it. Excepting this — the troupe displayed a genuine constancy in making this performance seem much like all their preceding productions, no matter how different in substance: though scripts change, the steady characters of our players are unyielding to their roles — they are careful never to disguise their respective personalities.

Then Issac, costumed this time in the garb of a river captain, initiated the Snapper point of view. He pleaded the case for enshrining the river by building a museum in which everything found in, on or around the river might be contained on exhibit. But before he could further direct the imaginations of his hearers, they had skipped on by themselves and a volley of laughter and derisive comments — no small quantity of it from some river drunks present — reduced Issac to silence. With head hung and eyes averted he passed beneath the glower of Bric Boogle and company.

Luigi and Penny, undiscouraged, held the incredulous attentions of most while arguing their intentions to develop the peninsula into a public campground: a place where gypsy violins and itinerant opera companies, along with the local tavern wits and freebooters, could wail and waste, free from the fetters of shelter and cover charges; where nude bathing would be indulged along with ill manners. There was no response; for the most part no one saw how their proposal differed from nondevelopment of the peninsula.

Simpson B. VerDunn rose ministerially to the rostrum and began to decry his brother Erec's method of quenching the thirsts of the -Losers by leading all Molehill to trough at the river. With a glint of prophesy in his eyes, Simpson enthralled his congregation with a poetic recitation of the beauties of the setting in which he spoke: 'This simple theme of water, trees and sky cleanses and calms our urban souls; only here are we able to regain our concentration and apprehension of the majesty of nature.' Noting but one fault in the peninsula's present condition, Simpson spent many utterances on the necessity of a high point: 'We only hunger for a vantage point in Molehill, a place from which one can focus across a wide horizon and reflect on Molehill's proper place in a world not completely its own with which to toy. Molehillians lack a place where one might be seized by and submit to the sublimity of one's peculiar circumstances with the satis-

faction of a baptism in eternal reoccurrence.' Thereupon, sermonical metaphors spilled from his mouth in profusion: 'Will we attempt to seduce travelers and hold them at their moral expense by vain contrivances, or shall we invite them as honored guests to a meal on which we ourselves would sup, as we have made it wholesome?'

By this time, you may well have surmised, the crowd was intoxicated by his testimony; then came the call: 'Molehill, let us join in a spirit of self-sacrifice, let us build a mount here on this spot. If each Molehillian would bring but one bucket of earth a day from his holding and offer it here, a mountain would soon rise in the middle of this plainness from the patient endeavors of all our people. We, one by one, as individuals together, can clean up and set right this peninsula in the same spirit in which the great cathedrals were constructed, without cost to the city; for where the government does not buy, there the government does not abide.'

Even the -Losers were bent a little by the strength, if not of the plan, of its delivery and impact. However, singularly unimpressed and even agitated was Mayor Wylie; he stood, inflated to intercession in the name of the civil authorities, to remind Molehillians that he would forbid the disposal of recyclables and combustibles for which he had prior claim. He declared a moratorium on the decision to commit the public to any project for Goawin peninsula, but said his favor would rest ultimately with the plan that would cost the least in taxing his efforts and winning his acclaim.

Which plan will be allowed? — that depends primarily on who's doing the permitting. Who will build what? — that, dear reader, is contingent on who's paying the tab. Will the project accepted preclude all others? — that comes down to this: those who are builders are determined to build, as wreckers are to demolish, irrespective of almost every other consideration. Time will tell the tale, but time in Molehill is a powerful rebuilder itself: it's all that is needed to still the most toxic projects and to keep Molehill on its path of progress — with or without human interference.

— Gibbin Nash

(Molehill Will Be Continued As Required.)

## OBSCURE THINGS FROM OBSCURE PLACES

*The dead are walking and talking in the streets of Paris  
the uncombed students with their carefully chosen  
old clothes  
the mirror-conscious men  
the women who exist for shop windows  
they do not know it  
but they are dead  
  
only the mutterers, the inchoate staggerers  
whom no one else touches  
whose bright over-wise eye is never met  
only those drunk on their rage are alive in Paris  
  
Anger gorged in my throat  
and I spat those bitter words  
upon you*

by Pat Waters