

Toole, John Kennedy.

A confederacy of dunces. Foreword by Walker Percy. 1980. 338p. Louisiana State Univ., \$12.95 (0-8071-0657-7). Galley.

Many words could be applied to this novel: astonishing, extravagant, lunatic, satiric, and peculiar, but it is above all genuine, skillful, and unsentimentally comic. It is the story of a 30-year-old boy, monstrously fat, his drunken mama, and their unutterably awful life in New Orleans. You might say that despite their bumbling everything turns out for the best, except that in the world of Mr. Toole, which is eerily akin somehow to that of Flannery O'Connor and Nikolai Gogol, there is no "best." This is the first and last novel of John Kennedy Toole—written in the early 1960s and published by the author's mother after her son's suicide. There are plenty of novelists we could more easily have spared, if only because of Toole's absolutely wonderful gift for dialect and dialogue. The title is drawn from Jonathan Swift but here is given, of course, a particular and lurid application to the American South. PM.