

'A Confederacy Of Dunces'

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By John Kennedy Toole
Louisiana State Univ. Press, \$12.25
Reviewed by James Stowe

Seven years before he died, John Kennedy Toole began writing "A Confederacy of Dunces" while in the Army in Puerto Rico. He returned to the United States, determined to find a publisher for his novel, only to have one house after another turn him down. The numerous rejections apparently

were more than Toole could bear, and in 1969, at the age of 32, John Kennedy Toole committed suicide. His mother, however, was persistent. It was her perseverance to see the manuscript published that led her to beg Walker Percy to read her son's novel with an eye to helping her find a publisher. Percy immediately was taken with the book, calling it "a great rumbling farce of Falstaffian dimensions."

Indeed, "A Confederacy of Dunces" is a tragic-comic masterpiece. Set in New Orleans, the novel recounts the exploits of Ignatius J. Reilly, a large, grotesque man — "slob extraordinary" — who shuffles through New Orleans in his revolt against the world. He lies in a back bedroom on Constantinople Street filling Big Chief tablets with his vicious ragings against the world's situations. When his mother insists he cease his aimless jottings on paper and get a job, he does. We follow him through each successive job he takes, a journey that allows Igna-

tus the opportunity to wage further war against the modern age. He takes on anything and anybody that gets in his way: Greyhound Scenicruisers, Freud, fraud, homosexuality, heterosexuality and countless other execrable excesses of modern life.

The tragedy here is that Toole is no longer alive to provide us with more brilliantly drawn characters who are touched indelibly with their creator's genius.

James Stowe is a novelist and teacher whose reviews appear frequently in The Times.