

Posthumous hit

A Confederacy of Dunces. By John Kennedy Toole; Louisiana State University Press.

This comic tale of perverse innocence waddling along the cobbled streets of low-life New Orleans seems destined to wedge itself firmly onto the bricks-and-boards bookshelf occupied by the writings of such collegiate favorites as Heller, Robbins, Vonnegut and Brautigan.

Already a best seller, "Dunces" boasts a wayward humor, a sharp sense of characterization and a warped outlook on life.

Hero Ignatius J. Reilly is a 30-year-old, obscenely obese deadbeat. He spent a decade in college getting an advanced degree in classics, which has prepared him for the jobs he holds throughout the course of the novel: unemployed, file clerk in a pants factory, hot-dog vendor.

Filled with disgust for the modern world, he would rather spend his mornings in bed singlehandedly attending to his sexual needs, his afternoons scribing his *Weltanschauung* in a series of Big Chief notebooks,

his evenings digesting the worst of cinema. His central character asset is an unfailing survival instinct.

Toole displays a good ear for delightful dialect dialogue, although he overdoes it at times. One of the book's major delights is Reilly's pedantic, paranoid vocabulary. He never says "red" when "vermilion" will do.

It is questionable which is the more long-suffering, Reilly or his drunken mother dear. Other characters whose paths are doomed to cross Reilly's include Officer Mancuso, who is forced to stake out a bus station restroom until the grippe sets in; Jones, Darlene and Lana, all denizens of The Night of Joy bar; Gonzalez, Miss Trixie and Mr. Levy, associated with Levy Pants; and Myrna Minkoff, Ignatius' beatnik partner in a platonic (through no fault of hers) affair.

Books

Reilly sabotages (deliberately or otherwise) everything he touches. At novel's end he narrowly escapes the clutches of Charity Hospital's mental ward and rides off into the wider world.

There will be no more adventures for Reilly, though. Author Toole committed suicide in 1969 at age 32. His mother found the manuscript of "Dunces" and peddled it to publishers.

—Bart Becker