

"Confederacy of Dunces," by John Kennedy Toole, pub. by LSU Press, 338 pp., \$12.95

**Reviewed by
Irving Ward-Steinman**

Seldom, indeed if ever, does anyone read such a fantastic novel of New Orleans. This fiction introduce a style that is loaded with pepper, spices, surprises, and it is almost impossible to put down once

you start reading it.

The hero is Ignatius Reilly. He is over-fat; over-height; looks like a hippo, has no redeeming virtues, is arrogant, a hypochondriac, lazy, slanders everyone, and holds

himself out as mankind's only hope. And is: anti-sex!

Take all of the faults and vices and vanities of a hundred people; roll them into one monstrosity and you have Ignatius Reilly.

The continuing result is: humor, chuckles, laffter, wonderment, surprises. Whatever you think the outcome will be of any situation: it is different.

The author, John Kennedy Toole (the family name originally was: O'Toole) was born in New Orleans. He caught superbly the aroma of the Crescent City with its nuances, its lingo, and the every-day vocabulary of its people. You are right there, witnessing everything.

Ignatius Reilly was educated to the extent of having graduated from college, and it is the very opposite that Ignatius portrays: that of an illiterate. Him "momma" is a character in her own right. Levy Pants, Patrolman Angelo Mancuso, Dr. Talc, Miss Annie, Miss Trixie, Mr. Robichaux, M. Minkoff, "Hot Dogs from Paradise," the Crusade for Moorish Dignity, Gonzalez, "Gloria," Night of Joy, "Whoa-Ooo-wee Jones," Dorian, women of the night, and the galaxy of 'just' New Orleans people.

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One outstanding masterful development is how the author uses the logic of intermittent sequences to parade illogic. This is genius and only a Louisianian can achieve the fragrance of stench and put it together into a unique and powerful novel of New Orleans.

John Kennedy Toole has written an unforgettable book. It's a book the reader will enjoy over and over again. The touches of O'Henry (Sidney Porter) are exaggerated to produce laughs and chuckles. Its an outrageously anti-sex book.

Ignatius does not believe in sex. For singles or married people. His logic is the epitome of illogic. He sees nothing good in a woman sitting on his bed. He is pure and chaste. Chased by no one other than Myrna Minkoff, his nemesis. If she is trying to "make" him she does not succeed - other than pseudo intellectually.

The title of the book: "Confederacy of Dunces" reveals the contempt, with humor, the author feels. All the characters are "dunces" according to Ignatius Reilly. And this, without thinking, that of the "dunces" he is the chief one.

There is plot, development, continuity in this epoch of New Orleans. Everything in it strikes a true note. The charm is a negative one, evoking comedy reactions but taken seriously. This is the phase that entices and lures the reader to read on and on and then when finished, to start all over again in order to 'catch' what mayhap was overlooked.

The humor in the book is subtle but obvious. The predicaments are ego-made and the people are flustered. Everyone is telling everyone what to do. And all the characters in the book are wrong-except Ignatius Reilly.

How his "mamma" - a widow, meets a man and wonders if she is attractive enough for him is delightful and with Ignatius looking down on the budding romance, with his anti-sex attitudes, produces threats of placing him in a mental ward. How Myrna Minkoff, has detested girl-friend comes to his rescue, is a curtain call of speed, flash, quixotic response.

Adding to the impact of the book is famed Walker Percy who writes a foreword of great disclosure. Perhaps someday someone will write a book about John Kennedy Toole, who at the age of thirty-two, in 1969, precipitated his entry into St. Peter's Kingdom. He has left a legacy of how to write a unique book. "A Confederacy of Dunces" introduces a new era in writing. No novel of a city equals the strength and power of this book. It is unique and alone. An accomplishment of outstanding literary genius. Selah!

(Note: following the author's death, it was his mother who pushed and pushed for the publication of his son's book. This story has yet to be written.)