



*A Confederacy of Dunces*. By John Kennedy Toole. Foreword by Walker Percy. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1980. 338 pp. \$12.95.

In *A Confederacy of Dunces* Toole's hero, Ignatius Reilly, sets out to slay the dragons of racism, capitalism, and the Puritan work ethic. Grossly overweight and dressed in baggy, spotted trousers, plaid flannel shirt, and a green hunting cap with flaps flying, Ignatius is a noble knight of the sixties. Forced into the work world from his room in his mother's house in a working class New Orleans neighborhood, Ignatius makes his mark—first as a file clerk turned labor organizer and then as a French Quarter hot dog vendor who eats up the stock.

Armed with eight years of college (four spent getting his master's degree in literature), great thoughts which he has recorded on Big Chief tablets, and his love/hate for Myra Minkoff (*the* woman in his life), he reluctantly accepts his first job as a file clerk in the Levy Pants factory. An absentee owner and grotesque office employees make Levy Pants a classic example of modern industry—New Orleans style. Ignatius dispatches the filing with speed and efficiency into the wastebasket and tackles the important task at hand—an organized revolt of the downtrodden laborers at Levy Pants. He unites the unwitting and largely apathetic workers in a small and hilarious riot, using his own foul and yellowed bed sheets for their banners.

After a hasty departure from Levy Pants, Ignatius becomes an indignant but satiated purveyor of hot dogs. Dispensing very little food, but lots of wise counsel, Ignatius and his wiener-shaped wagon roam the cracked pavement of the French Quarter.

Sharp and colorful characters—his bemused mother and her working class matchmaker friend, an inept policeman, a black vagrant turned doorman who brings down the establishment in all its forms, a French Quarter madam, and an exotic dancer and her trained cockatoo—weave in and out of Ignatius's adventures.

Written largely in dialogue, which does manage to capture the ease and humor of New Orleans as well as the dirt, *A Confederacy of Dunces* is a book with a great sense of the ridiculous.

It is a funny book, but as Walker Percy says: "It is also sad. . . . The tragedy of the book is the tragedy of the author—his suicide in 1969 at the age of thirty-two. Another tragedy is the body of work we have been denied."

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