

## A Confederacy Of Dunces

By John Kennedy Toole. Louisiana State University Press. \$12.95.

★★★★

HIS NAME IS IGNATIUS J. Reilly, he is thoroughly unlikeable and, as protagonist, he is largely responsible for making this book superbly enjoyable.

He's self-centered, flatulent, fat, noisy, rude, brilliant, lazy, paranoid, acerbic and deceitful, and this novel details his attempts at becoming a success in a world he'd much rather didn't exist. He ruins every run-in that he has with people, including attempts at leading a workers' uprising (which he calls a crusade for Moorish dignity), founding an all-gay political party and selling hot dogs, and he blames his failures on everyone but himself. An unappealing 30-year-old virgin, his sexual and frustrated lusts have developed into an obsession with sex, which he twists into something dirty: he describes an *American Bandstand*-type TV show, which he never misses, as full of "debauched [and] . . . lasciviously gyrating children"; he calls one woman a "brazen tart" because she wears "mascara and lipstick and other vulgarities"; he even sees dyed flowers in terms both ugly and connected to sex; "a floral abortion . . . unnatural and perverse and . . . obscene." He's a complex, insightful portrait of a man whose inadequacies are so hard to face that he doesn't face them but instead criticizes everyone and everything else as inadequate.

And he's funny, too. A mad combination of T.S. Eliot and S.J. Perelman, his learned, polysyllabic journal entries run to the acidly humorous ("My mother is currently associating with some undesirables who are attempting to transform her into an athlete of sorts, depraved specimens of mankind who regularly bowl themselves into oblivion"). In fact, the whole novel is often hilarious; it's peopled with blatant caricatures (a fluttery, feminine male homosexual; a young, streetwise black whose every sixth word seems to be "Whoa" or "Ooo-wee!"; a senile office worker who catnaps in the office; a rich, radical-chic woman who sees Ms. Catnap as unjustly oppressed) and they're all wittily executed and sharply detailed.

If Chaucer were alive in our century, he might have dashed off this book. Or maybe he'd just read it—and probably love it. D.L.S.