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BATMAN AND IGNATIUS J. REILLY IN A CONFEDERACY OF DUNCES

In John Kennedy Toole's A Confederacy of Dunces (New York, Grove Press, 1980), Ignatius J. Reilly, the anti-hero, recommends Batman comics because Batman "transcends the abysmal society" he is in and "his morality is rather rigid" (275). The parallels between Batman and Ignatius not only add to the plot's comedy, but they also indicate Toole's panacea for the isolated character in contemporary American fiction.

As does Batman, Ignatius has his own costume--the ever-present green hunting cap, plaid flannel shirt, wool muffler, voluminous tweed trousers, and desert boots which are "acceptable by any theological and geometrical standards" and which "reflects a rich inner life" (19). As a hot dog vendor, he adds a red sateen pirate's scarf about his green cap, a gold earring, a billowing white smock, and a black plastic cutlass--all of which make him feel "rather like a Crusader" (209). But because of his eccentric clothes, other characters, who are in confederacy against him, call him a "kook," "pervert," "fat freak," and his mother even calls him crazy.

Batman emerges from his self-imposed isolation to conquer evil, but Ignatius locks himself in his room and scribbles invectives in Big Chief tablets and denounces anything modern from Greyhound scenic-cruisers, movies, and TV programs to Doris Day and Mark Twain. His only active protests involve screaming at movie screens, disrupting a ladies' art guild sale, and organizing two abortive crusades--the Crusade for Moorish Dignity and the Sodomites for Peace.

Just as Batman appears when Gotham City needs him, so does Ignatius. When he finally sees Ignatius, whom he has heard about, Burma Jones exclaims: "The green cap mother. In person. Live . . . The fat mother dropped out of the sky just when he needed him most" (315-16). The destruction is complete when Jones uses Ignatius as the sabotage against the Night of Joy: "That fat freak a guarantee one hunner percen nuclur bum . . . Drop him on somebody, everybody gettin caught in the fallout" (371). But significantly, Ignatius bumbingly and unwittingly does save Jones from racial discrimination, Gus Levy from irresponsibility, Miss Trixie from boredom, and Angelo Mancuso from a petty and vicious precinct sergeant.

As the novel ends, Ignatius's mother is going to commit him to a psychiatric ward, and so Ignatius must end his self-imposed isolation and flee east with Myrna Minkoff. This then is John Kennedy Toole's rejection of the isolated figure in fiction and the solution. As do Salinger, Kesey, Heller, and Bellow, Toole believes that man must actively contend with the absurdities and injustices of life instead of isolating himself from them. The more Ignatius tries to isolate himself, the more he becomes involved with life. Since retreat into the

Middle Ages, into the Batman world, or into isolation is no longer possible, Ignatius leaves his room, his house, and New Orleans. Simply, the green cap freak--in person, live--is free to drop out of the sky when society needs him again.

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"DESPAIR AND DIE," A NOTE ON NABOKOV
AND SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGEDIES"

Among Nabokov's richest sources of allusion and illusion are the plays of Shakespeare (Humbert describing topics of adult conversation which he never held with Lolita links "God and Shakespeare"). It is not surprising, therefore, that Despair, a work which includes numerous references to such diverse figures from the literary past as Pushkin, Oscar Wilde, and Conan Doyle would be rich in material borrowed from or illuminated by "dze Bart." Even so, it is noteworthy to discover as thoroughly Shakespearean a paragraph as the following, in which Hermann is justifying his atheism.

Now tell me, please, what guarantee do you possess that those beloved ghosts are genuine; that it is really your dear dead mother and not some pretty demon mystifying you, masked as your mother and impersonating her with consummate art and naturalness? There is the rub, there is the horror; the more so as the acting will go on and on, endlessly; never, never, never, never will your soul in that other world be quite sure that the sweet gentle spirits crowding about it are not fiends in disguise, and forever, and forever, and forever shall your soul remain in doubt, expecting every moment some awful change, some diabolical sneer to disfigure the dear face bending over you.

This two-sentence unit contains at least these Shakespearean echoes:

--The theme of the first sentence is that of the doubtfulness of the positive identification of ghosts--specifically, determining if the ghost is a dear dead parent or an impersonating demon. This, of course, is a major item of concern for Hamlet (i.e., "The spirit I have seen may be a dev'l, and dev'l hath power t' assume a pleasing shape [II. ii. 598-600]," "a spirit of health, or goblin damn's" [I. iv. 40]).