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Section **B**

## Toole's 'Neon Bible' may be auctioned

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A New Orleans judge may have opened the way for the public to read the only other novel by the late John Kennedy Toole, the New Orleans-born author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning "A Confederacy of Dunces."

Efforts to publish "The Neon Bible" were stymied when Toole's mother, Thelma, died in 1984 and killed her half interest in the

book to a teacher with a request that it never be published.

But Civil District Judge Gerald Fedoroff last week ordered the manuscript sold at public auction unless its owners — University of New Orleans Professor Kenneth Holditch and four Toole cousins — agree on another way to divide the property.

The attorney for Thelma Toole's estate said such an agreement could involve one owner buying out the others, or all

agreeing whether or not to publish the manuscript about life in a small Southern town.

Fedoroff's order came in response to a protest by Toole's cousin, Mary Toole McGuire, who said Thelma Toole had no right to leave the book to Holditch because she only owned part of it.

Fedoroff upheld Thelma Toole's legacy of her part of "The Neon Bible" to Holditch, but said she had no right to deny McGuire

"the enjoyment of her (ownership) interest in the novel." He said dividing the book by selling it at auction is the most appropriate way of resolving the dispute.

The Feb. 12 ruling was greeted with glee Wednesday by New Orleans bookseller Rhoda Faust, who last year failed to get Fedoroff to uphold what she said was an oral contract with Thelma Toole to publish "The Neon Bible."

"This is great; the main thing is, the book will be published,"

Faust said. She said the Toole cousins have agreed to let her publish the book and that she will bid on it if it is auctioned.

Holditch recoiled Wednesday at the idea of selling the book at auction, saying that would violate the spirit of Mrs. Toole's will "in the worst possible way."

The book, he said, was left to him with the understanding that it not be published. "It's a matter of morality," Holditch said.

Toole was 16 when he wrote

"The Neon Bible" after graduating from Fortier High School. He killed himself in Biloxi, Miss., in 1969 at the age of 32.

His frustration at being unable to publish "Dunces," written while he was stationed in Puerto Rico in the Army, was believed to have led to the suicide.

After his death, Thelma Toole spent years trying to get "Dunces" published. LSU Press published it in 1980 and it won the Pulitzer Prize the next year.