

Davis has written an account that you won't forget.

Certainly a bargain of information is the paperback *Naturalist's Big Bend* (\$5.95; Texas A&M University Press, Drawer C, College Station, Texas 77843). The author Roland H. Wauer is currently with the National Park Service and was formerly chief park naturalist for Big Bend National Park. The park in southwest Texas includes 708,221 acres that are little changed from the founding of this continent.

There is a sprinkling of four-color photographs in the book, but the strength of the work is the vast information offered by Wauer in direct, uncluttered style.

An example: the plant "Havard Agave . . . Like Lechuguilla, this plant dies the year that it flowers. It takes from twenty-five to fifty-five years before it finally sends up a ten- to twenty-foot stalk . . . and 'platters' of yellow blossoms cover the end of each branch . . . Every year during the blooming season the National Park Service brings one of these plants to park headquarters . . . during one twenty-four-hour period in May, 1968, a stalk grew sixteen inches."

LSU Press continues its ambitious program of publishing original fiction. And has scored quite a coup with *A Confederacy of Dunces* (\$12.95; LSU Press, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803).

Rarely is the discovery of a book more newsworthy than the book itself. Even less often does a university press have a manuscript brought to it by the writer many critics believe to be the first novelist in America.

Walker Percy of Covington, Louisiana (and *The Last Gentleman*, *The Moviegoer*, *Lancelot* fame), brought the "Dunces" manuscript to the attention of Les Phillabaum, who is director of the LSU Press.

The novel had been written in the early 1960's by John Kennedy Toole, who took his own life in 1969. Toole grew up in New Orleans, graduated from Tulane with honors in 1958, and earned a master's at Columbia.

Toole's mother, Thelma Toole, appeared in Percy's office at Loyola University in 1976 with the unpublished manuscript, insisting that her late son was a genius. Percy was unable to refuse to read it. Rather amazingly, after he had read it through, several times, he agreed that the author was the rarest of writers, an original.

The book's hero is one Ignatius Reilly. It is hardly possible to improve on Percy's description of the young heavyweight at war with his own century: "Here at any rate is Ignatius Reilly, without progenitor

in any literature I know of—slob extraordinary, a mad Oliver Hardy, a fat Don Quixote, a perverse Thomas Aquinas rolled into one—who is in violent revolt against the entire modern age, lying in his flannel nightshirt, in a back bedroom on Constantinople Street in New Orleans, who between gigantic seizures of flatulence and eructations is filling dozens of Big Chief tablets with invective."

It is a marvelously comic book. And as fate would have it—that never allowed Toole to see it in print—the book is turning a profit. Paperback rights have been picked up by Grove Press. // JDL.