

A Confederacy of Dunces: A Novel

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A popular Pulitzer Prize-winning comedy follows the adventures of New Orleans's lower denizens of the French Quarter.

"A green hunting cap squeezed the top of the fleshy balloon of a head. The green earflaps, full of large ears and uncut hair and the fine bristles that grew in the ears themselves, stuck out on either side like turn signals indicating two directions at once. Full, pursed lips protruded beneath the bushy black moustache and, at their corners, sank into little folds filled with disapproval and potato chip crumbs."

Meet Ignatius J. Reilly, the hero of John Kennedy Toole's tragicomic tale, *A Confederacy of Dunces*. This 30-year-old medievalist lives at home with his mother in New Orleans, pens his magnum opus on Big Chief writing pads he keeps hidden under his bed, and relays to anyone who will listen the traumatic experience he once had on a Greyhound Scenicruiser bound for Baton Rouge. ("Speeding along in that bus was like hurtling into the abyss.") But Ignatius's quiet life of tyrannizing his mother and writing his endless comparative history screeches to a halt when he is almost arrested by the overeager Patrolman Mancuso-- who mistakes him for a vagrant--and then involved in a car accident with his tipsy mother behind the wheel. One thing leads to another, and before he knows it, Ignatius is out pounding the pavement in search of a job.

Over the next several hundred pages, our hero stumbles from one adventure to the next. His stint as a hotdog vendor is less than successful, and he soon turns his employers at the Levy Pants Company on their heads. Ignatius's path through the working world is populated by marvelous secondary characters: the stripper Darlene and her talented cockatoo; the septuagenarian secretary Miss Trixie, whose desperate attempts to retire are constantly, comically thwarted; gay blade Dorian Greene; sinister Miss Lee, proprietor of the Night of Joy nightclub; and Myrna Minkoff, the girl Ignatius loves to hate. The many subplots that weave through *A Confederacy of Dunces* are as complicated as anything you'll find in a Dickens novel, and just as beautifully tied together in the end. But it is Ignatius--selfish, domineering, and deluded, tragic and comic and larger than life--who carries the story. He is a modern-day Quixote beset by giants of the modern age. His fragility cracks the shell of comic bluster, revealing a deep streak of melancholy beneath the antic humor. John Kennedy Toole committed suicide in 1969 and never saw the publication of his novel. Ignatius Reilly is what he left behind, a fitting memorial to a talented and tormented life. --
Alix Wilber

When Walker Percy penned these prophetic words in his foreword to the first edition of *A Confederacy of Dunces*, he could not have known just how wide Toole's "world of readers" would become. Released by Louisiana State University Press in April 1980, *A Confederacy of Dunces* is nothing short of a publishing phenomenon. Turned down by countless publishers and submitted by the author's mother years after his suicide, the book won the 1981 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Today, there are over 1,500,000 copies in print worldwide in eighteen languages.

Toole's lunatic and sage novel introduces one of the most memorable characters in American literature, Ignatius Reilly, whom Percy dubs "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". Ignatius' ire explodes when his mother backs her car into another automobile. The owner of the damaged vehicle insists on payment; Mrs. Reilly demands that her son cease watching television and writing in his Big Chief tablet and get

a job.

Set in New Orleans, *A Confederacy of Dunces* outswifts Swift, one of whose essays gives the book its title. As its characters burst into life, they leave the region and literature forever changed by their presences -- Ignatius and his mother; Miss Trixie, the octogenarian assistant accountant at Levy Pants; inept, wan Patrolman Mancuso; Darlene, the Bourbon Street stripper with a penchant for poultry; Jones, the jivecat in space-age dark glasses. Satire and farce animate *A Confederacy of Dunces*; tragic awareness ennobles it.

Louisiana State University Press celebrates *A Confederacy of Dunces*' twentieth year with this anniversary edition, which includes a new introduction by Andrei Codrescu that examines the relationship of this modern-day classic to the city whose pulse it so brilliantly captures.

Other Books

Twentieth-Century and Contemporary American Literature in Context [4 volumes]. This four-volume reference work surveys American literature from the early 20th century to the present day, featuring a diverse range of American works and authors and an expansive selection of primary source materials. Bringing useful and engaging material into the classroom, this four-volume set covers more than a century of American literary history-- from 1900 to the present. *Twentieth-Century and Contemporary American Literature in Context* profiles authors and their works and provides overviews of literary movements and genres through which readers will understand the historical, cultural, and political contexts that have shaped American writing. *Twentieth-Century and Contemporary American Literature in Context* provides wide coverage of authors, works, genres, and movements that are emblematic of the diversity of modern America. Not only are major literary movements represented, such as the Beats, but this work also highlights the emergence and development of modern Native American literature, African American literature, and other representative groups that showcase the diversity of American letters. A rich selection of primary documents and background material provides indispensable information for student research. Covers significant authors, as well as those neglected by history, and their works from major historical and cultural periods of the last century, including authors writing today. Situates authors' works not only within their own canon but also with the historical and cultural context of the U.S. more broadly. Positions primary documents after specific authors or works, allowing readers to read excerpts critically in light of the entries. Examines literary movements, forms, and genres that also pay special attention to multi-ethnic and women writers.

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