

A Confederacy of Dunces Study Guide

A Confederacy of Dunces by John Kennedy Toole

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Contents

A Confederacy of Dunces Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Chapter 1.....	6
Chapter 2.....	8
Chapter 3.....	10
Chapter 4.....	12
Chapter 5.....	14
Chapter 6.....	16
Chapter 7.....	18
Chapter 8.....	21
Chapter 9.....	23
Chapter 10.....	26
Chapter 11.....	29
Chapter 12.....	34
Chapter 13.....	38
Chapter 14.....	44
Characters.....	46
Objects/Places.....	54
Social Sensitivity.....	57
Techniques.....	58
Themes.....	59
Style.....	62
Quotes.....	64
Topics for Discussion.....	67



[Literary Precedents.....](#) 68

[Copyright Information.....](#) 69



Plot Summary

Ignatius J. Reilly dresses eccentrically, holds a master's degree, has no job, is 30 years old, and lives with his widowed mother, Irene, in a dark, old house in New Orleans. He has left town only once in his life to apply for a teaching position in Baton Rouge, and that trip has become the defining event of his life, traumatizing him against travel and work. Ignatius is overweight, overeducated, and overindulged by his mother Irene. He watches television and movies and jots notes in notebooks, vaguely figuring someday to organize and publish them as a grand critique of the last four centuries of Western civilization, which he sees as steadily declining. He has rejected the Catholicism of his childhood, feeling himself superior to its lax, modern-day standards. Any amount of stress makes Ignatius' pyloric valve snap shut, causing him debilitating gas pains.

The green hat Ignatius wears everywhere, attracts the attention of police officer Angelo Mancuso, but Ignatius escapes arrest when old Claude Robichaux steps in, ranting against communist conspiracies. Ignatius and his mother seek refuge in a nearby bar, dark and unfriendly. Irene befriends a young gay man, Dorian Greene, whom Ignatius dismisses as a degenerate. Lana Lee, the owner of Night of Joy, is a Nazi in Ignatius' eyes. Lana hires a young black man, Jones, to sweep the bar for sub-minimum wages by threatening to turn him into the police for vagrancy. In return, Jones looks for an opportunity to bring Lana's business down.

On the way home from the bar, Irene crashes her car into a building, causing considerable damage. The hapless Mancuso, now assigned to undercover work as a first step toward being thrown off the force, feels sorry for Irene and arranges time payments of her debt. Ignatius resents Mancuso's incursion into the household. Irene will somehow make do on her own. Irene, however, sees no alternative to Ignatius' going to work to help pay off the debt.

Ignatius' first job is as a file clerk in the floundering Levy Pants Company, where he sets his mind to improving operations and drawing Gus Levy back into the day-to-day business. Gus, regularly besieged by his harpy wife, prefers to leave details to his hapless office manager, Gonzalez, poorly assisted by the senile Miss Trixie. Trixie wants only to retire, but Mrs. Levy, an amateur psychologist, demands she be kept on and made to feel wanted. With the best of intentions, Ignatius forges an insulting letter to a Levy Pants distributor, which precipitates a \$500,000 libel suit against Gus and organizes the factory workers, mostly black, in a demonstration for better conditions. For the latter, Ignatius is fired.

Ignatius' nose leads him accidentally into his second job, as a hot dog vendor for Paradise Products, Inc. Irene despises hot dog vendors and Ignatius' meager take-home pay, the result of a ravenous appetite combined with indifference to sales, increases tension in the Reilly home. Ignatius is dressed as a pirate, assigned to the French Quarter, and ordered to sell or be fired. There he forms a political alliance with Dorian Greene and unwittingly rents space in his cart for the soft pornography Lana and George peddle to schools.



Ignatius resents his mother's joining Mancuso and Mancuso's aunt, Santa Battaglia, in nightly bowling outings. Santa plays matchmaker for Irene and the rich widower Claude, and they pressure her to seek professional help for Ignatius. When Ignatius dons his pirate regalia and addresses a political rally for his secretive, new "Sodomite Party," Irene, Santa, Mancuso, and Claude unite to intervene. Ignatius takes politics too seriously for his wildly partying audience and is ejected. He goes to the Night of Joy bar and is used by Jones as the keystone in sabotaging Lana's business, suggesting the stripper Darlene is the Boethius-loving model in a risquy postcard. Ignatius ends up lying whale-like in the gutter and Mancuso breaks a citywide pornography ring. Newspaper coverage gets Ignatius fired from Paradise Products and helps Gus Levy figure out who forged the letter. Ignatius puts the blame on senile Trixie, which is convenient for everyone.

Irene resolves to commit Ignatius to the Charity Hospital and bids a tearful, too-tender farewell, which makes Ignatius suspicious and then panicky. His radical ex-girlfriend, Myrna Minkoff, rescues Ignatius, after driving to New Orleans non-stop from New York, however. They flee just before the ambulance arrives, and as they reach the highway, Ignatius' valve unlocks and his headache vanishes. Myrna's advice has been right all along.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

In a green hunting cap, tweed trousers, plaid shirt, muffler, and desert boots, Ignatius J. Reilly stands out in the crowd in front of D. H. Holmes. His hauntingly large eyes, one yellow and one blue show scorn for a world void of theology and geometry and a Rich Inner Life. Ignatius' mother has again been keeping him waiting after he has completed his shopping. A police officer demands to see Ignatius' identification, and is met with a diatribe about harassment. A crowd forms. Irene Reilly is inside, shopping for pastries and complaining about arthritis to the clerk. She would soak her elbow in hot water, but Ignatius is always in the tub. He has no prospects. In the mob, an old man, Claude Robichaux, defends Ignatius, screaming, "Communist!" The officer turns to Claude, whom Ignatius blames for the uproar. In frustration, the officer takes Claude into custody, and the Reillys slip away. Irene frets that had they not escaped, they would have been dishonored in the newspapers.

The Reillys enter the dark, empty Night of Joy bar, and Ignatius recoils at the smell. Ignatius breaks into his familiar lament about the trauma of taking a bus on his only trip outside New Orleans, to Baton Rouge. Irene is glad Ignatius did not take a job in the Medieval Culture Department. Ignatius wants to escape the horrid bar, but Irene orders another round of drinks.

Among the shoplifters in the precinct, Claude meets Jones, a young black man wearing sunglasses and blowing cigarette smoke. Jones says the police are throwing everyone in jail, blacks in particular. Claude says his only fault was calling an officer a communist. Jones hoots he would be in Angola if he did that. Someone stole cashews at Woolworth's and the police grabbed him. Jones seems resigned to being framed and sent up for life.

Before the desk sergeant, Angelo Mancuso explains he stopped a big, fat, suspicious-looking character, possibly a pervert, in a green hat, who escaped with his mother when Claude got in the way. The sergeant releases Claude to his daughter's custody.

Tourists and conventioners fill Bourbon Street at twilight, but few enter the Night of Joy. Irene wants to leave, but Ignatius wants to observe corruption. They meet dandy Dorian Greene, who argues with Ignatius. Irene intervenes, telling Dorian of their trouble with the police, while Ignatius tells his bus story to Darlene, a blonde sitting at the bar. Irene admires Dorian's attire, and he admires her hat, which he buys for \$15. Dorian leaves and Irene tries to pry Ignatius away from Darlene. Irene tells Darlene that Ignatius "graduated smart" after 8 years in college on the money grandma left. Now he just watches television. Darlene takes Irene's side and tries to push Ignatius off his stool. Statuesque Lana Lee asks what is going on and orders the Reillys out. Ignatius remarks Lana that looks like a Nazi and threatens to sue over the \$8 bar tab, but Irene pays from proceeds from her hat sale.



As the Reillys wobble down the street, Ignatius complains that Mother sold a hat, certainly for degenerate uses. Ignatius wants to buy hot dogs from a corner vendor, but Irene refuses; bums run these wagons. They find their 1946 Plymouth, Ignatius slumps into the safe back seat, and he begins criticizing Irene's driving. Irene lurches the car into a building, whose balcony collapses. Ignatius says the building's owner must have been hoping someone would demolish it to collect damages. His digestion destroyed, Ignatius vomits down the side of the car. Mancuso happens by, disguised in ballet tights and a yellow sweater, in search of bona fide suspicious characters. If he fails, he will be off the force. Mancuso stopped a young man in a lady's hat, but the culprit slapped him and escaped. Still smarting from the slap, he sees the green hat vomiting.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Chapter 1 introduces Ignatius J. Reilly, his mother Irene, Patrolman Mancuso, and various denizens of the Night of Joy bar. It establishes the dysfunctional relationship between mother and son. The pair speaks past each other. Ignatius is cruel and haughty toward his simple mother, who broke herself educating him. He has only once left his native New Orleans, and made it only as far as Baton Rouge, where he made a horrendous impression during a job interview. The bus trip there and taxi ride home have become the formative mythology of his life, which he recounts to anyone who will listen. By the end of the chapter, Ignatius appears a 30-year-old adolescent, feckless, self-centered, opinionated, and litigious, whose bizarre appearance captures attention and raises suspicion of perversion. He is preoccupied with his digestion. His writings, mentioned in passing, and Irene's views on hot dog vendors, await development.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Ignatius compliments himself on the wisdom of his latest jottings about the breakdown of the medieval system. Someday the doodles that cover his floor will be edited into a magnificent comparative history. Examining his bloated abdomen, Ignatius contemplates how concerns over society cause his pyloric valve to snap shut, filling his stomach painfully with gas. Ignatius believes in the *Rota Fortunzh* ("Wheel of Fortune"), central to Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Luck, Boethius teaches, comes in cycles and Ignatius' is spinning downward. The car accident is a bad sign, and Ignatius prays that Fortuna will not crush him. Through the door, Irene asks for a Hail Mary for her upcoming meeting with Mancuso. She is happy Ignatius is praying, but wonders why he is always locked in his room. Ignatius bounces on his side to free a gas bubble, and the action produces a tiny erection, which Ignatius relieves mechanically, picturing his beloved boyhood dog, Rex.

Jones asks Lana for the advertised job of porter. The police threaten jail unless he is gainfully employed. Lana wants no police involvement, but can find no one willing to work for \$20 a week. Darlene arrives gracefully, but late, and explains her cockatoo had to go to the vet. Lana demands to know why Darlene had encouraged the Reillys last night. Such people destroy business. Darlene is to show Jones around while Lana goes shopping, and both are to stay away from the under-bar cabinet. Darlene has been practicing to be an exotic dancer. She tells Jones about the man in a green hat, sitting with his mother. Jones makes the mental connection.

In T-shirt, shorts, and false red beard, Mancuso arrives on crumbling Constantinople Street and pulls up before the smallest house on the block, marked by a dying banana tree, a plywood Celtic cross, and a damaged 1946 Plymouth. Neighbors watch from their porches. Over coffee in the dark, dank, primitive kitchen, Mancuso reports the building owner wants \$1,020 in restitution. Irene explains Ignatius' ranting as he watches television shows that he despises but refuses to miss. Mancuso is heartbroken at Irene's plight, but he feels helpless. Irene figures she can mortgage the house.

Ignatius rumbles into the kitchen and reacts coldly to Mancuso's presence. Ignatius rejects mortgaging the house and declines to help find a solution. The United States, he dogmatizes, is on the edge of the abyss, in need of taste and decency, theology and geometry. Irene asks what to do with such an uncaring boy. Irene offers Mancuso some wine, which soothes her when she has the blues. Mancuso tells her about his dangerous job and domestic troubles, married to a woman with bad nerves. He bowls to avoid drinking and suggests Irene join him and his aunt, to make friends outside the house. Ignatius returns, demanding dinner swiftly, lest he be late for the movie.

Ignatius flaps off to his room to doodle for 30 minutes, and admits his mother only after she begins throwing herself against his door. Irene is shocked by the clutter and smell,



but Ignatius resumes his attack on Mancuso's intrusion into his family. Mancuso will arrange for installment payments, Irene says. Ignatius thunders at Irene's treading on his notebooks and drinking, but this time Irene is resolute: tomorrow they will search the want ads, Irene will dress Ignatius appropriately, and he will not return without a job. Ignatius reminds Irene of how he failed as a library clerk, his only post-college job. Irene reminds him that he also taught a class at college, but Ignatius recalls how his students demonstrated outside his window, he dumped their ungraded papers on them, and the dean fired him. Irene had not heard this story. Ignatius wishes Myrna Minkoff could see him going to work. Myrna is in her native New York, doubtlessly taunting the police and playing guitar. Irene regrets spending so much on Ignatius' schooling only to have him fall in with such a woman, but she still thinks if they had married and had a baby, they might have settled down. Ignatius declares such talk obscenity and filth, and again demands dinner. They will study the want ads in the morning. Irene is proud of Ignatius and kisses him emotionally.

On a bus, Jones laughs about a nervous old woman who probably thinks he wants to rape her just because he is black. He wonders where the green cap will appear next. Jones observes a man with a rolled-up newspaper beating another man in a red beard and wearing shorts. That one looks familiar, and Jones is uncomfortable having two unidentified people wandering his world. Jones wants to look like the men in *Life* magazine ads--cool and rich.

When Fortuna spins downward, go to a movie, Ignatius believes, and he attends them almost every night. Taking up two seats near the screen, Ignatius is well stocked with snacks. Ignatius relishes seeing and hearing things that offend him and sporadically screams critiques at the screen. The manager, who tries to silence Ignatius, agrees with the candy woman's claim that Ignatius is worse than ever on this night.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter 2 introduces Angelo Mancuso as more than a harried patrolman. He uses his own time to help Irene deal with the financial aftermath of her accident, but his concern only enrages Ignatius. Ignatius is very sure what his mother may *not* do to pay off the debt, but he is devoid of positive suggestions. She may not mortgage or sell the house. She may not, that is, threaten his carefree existence. Still, Ignatius accepts work as inevitable, and glimpses of Ignatius' brief experience in academia and the working world suggest his efforts will fail. Ignatius will continue demanding the world accept his views, and he has worked out a philosophical system to excuse and divert his failures.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Ignatius' only interview results in a closed valve. There are plenty of jobs available, Irene states, but Ignatius resents such optimism, doubtless derived from her Svengali, Mancuso. Ignatius sees humankind as destined to misery. Ignatius rejects a job requiring quiet, hard work, and another requiring a start time between 8 and 9 AM. Irene demands he answer the Levy Pants ad.

To get Mancuso to stop bothering his mother, Ignatius suggests he investigate the Night of Joy, where they fell prey to a B-girl and a Nazi. Mancuso takes the lead to his sergeant, but is dispatched to the streets disguised as a soldier, while detectives stake out the bar. The sergeant is determined that Mancuso get no credit for any arrests.

As he has for 20 years, Office Manager Gonzalez is first to arrive at Levy Pants. The owner, Gus Levy, rarely visits and is concerned only about attending sports events. The only other long-term employee is the octogenarian assistant accountant, Miss Trixie. Mrs. Levy demands Trixie be retained, no matter what. Gonzales takes pride in the order of his desk, which stands in contrast to Trixie's adjacent rolltop, which seems to attract debris magnetically. Trixie hoards the telephone books. Trixie shuffles in, carrying a new assortment of items in a paper bag, and heads straight to the ladies' room, ignoring Gonzalez's greeting. Gonzales wonders how many other workers will appear. The spring/summer line is due to begin shipping, and Gonzalez needs help.

Ignatius walks the largest man Gonzalez has ever seen, and he prays this is an applicant. Ignatius instantly dislikes Gonzalez, but when Trixie bumbles in, Ignatius warms and, feeling his valve opening, he resolves to accept the job. Gonzalez assures Ignatius that this is a wonderful place to work. He introduces a sleeping Trixie, who declares Ignatius a fine, well-fed big boy and begins complaining that she wants to retire, but they will not let her. Learning pay for the filing job is a mere \$60 a week, and Ignatius says this is lower than other positions he is considering. Gonzalez throws in 20¢ a day for carfare, which is enough to convince Ignatius to begin a trial period.

Lana demands that Jones remove his sunglasses to see what he is doing, but for \$20 a week, he refuses. Lana warns there are many people who could take his job. "Only other vagrants," he counters. Lana holds over Jones her ability to report him to the police, and he counters with a threat to gather proof the bar is a cathouse and turn her in. Jones likes Darlene and admires her goal of entering show business. A young, oily-haired boy bangs through the door and hands Lana some cash. They talk secretively about whether the "orphans" liked the new "merchandise." George figures Jones is a junkie, and Jones postures threateningly. Lana separates them and hands George a package from beneath the bar. They wink at each other and George leaves. Rejecting Jones' insinuations about the dubious orphans, Lana returns to the new revenue.



Riding a taxi home, Ignatius writes about his fatiguing first day. Gonzales is a pleasant, apprehensive, courteous cretin. Trixie, whom Mrs. Levy demands Gonzalez treat well and make to feel active and wanted, has many insights and observations. Gonzales fired Gloria, a brazen stenographer. Ignatius has plans for the filing department and the company at large. Fortuna has taken an inner up cycle within the larger bad cycle.

Arriving home, Ignatius is dismayed to see his mother dressed like a starlet from *Gold Diggers*. She has been attending Miss Annie, who fainted when Ignatius' lute playing overpowered her nerves. Irene stopped at Lenny's to buy Annie some beads, and Ignatius snorts at dealing in religious goods. Ignatius tells about his first day at Levy Pants, as Irene weeps with pride, but the salary disappoints her. Irene announces she is off bowling, which throws Ignatius into a fury, but he is diverted by news that he received a letter from Myrna in New York. On the back of an outdated calendar, Myrna responds to Ignatius' frightening letter about near arrest and the car accident. There is not enough information for her to contact the Civil Liberties Union. Myrna is worried about Ignatius' paranoia with homosexual tendencies. Ignatius must identify with some meaningful social movement, purify his mind and body through therapeutic sex - or face the psychiatric hospital. Myrna and her friends are planning a bold film about interracial marriage. They have lined up actors but need someone to play the landlord. Ignatius would be perfect, and visiting her in New York would help him cut the umbilical cord. They must begin soon because Myrna has bled her father dry and the leading lady is demanding a salary. Ignatius burns the letter, mumbling his determination to "show this offensive trollop."

Chapter 3 Analysis

Chapter 3 begins the story of Ignatius' employment at Levy Pants Company, sketching Mr. Gonzalez and Miss Trixie objectively and through Ignatius' eyes. In a journal entry, Ignatius reflects on plans to improve the company after his first day on the job. Mr. and Mrs. Levy differ in their attitudes toward the business, but neither appears regularly. The Levy family members will be fleshed out in the chapters ahead, as will Myrna Minkoff, whose relationship with Ignatius during college has been suggested. Myrna is a professional activist for whom Ignatius is a psychological charity case. Her letter outlines the outcome of the novel as a whole.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

A week into the job, Ignatius has lettered a sign proclaiming his proprietorship of the file cabinets. Gonzalez wonders when Ignatius might begin dealing with the filing backlog. Ignatius thinks it best not to risk plague by interfering with a large rat devouring the Abelman's Dry Goods folder, and his misbehaving valve prevents him from reaching the lower drawers. The tiny-wheeled stool Gonzalez produces collapses under Ignatius' weight. Determined to right "Gloria" (as she calls Ignatius), Trixie topples onto Ignatius just as Gus Levy arrives to collect his mail. Gonzalez introduces the owner to his bright new employee. Ignatius declares he has an unusual interest in Levy's firm and has many innovations in mind.

Gonzalez asks Levy to sign a letter he has drafted to the troublesome Abelman's Dry Goods, crooks demanding redress for a defective shipment. Levy tells Gonzalez to sign as usual. Ignatius watches Gonzalez forge *Gus Levy* and, while Gonzalez is in the factory, he types a disjointed, threatening, and insulting and letter to "Mr. I. Abelman, Mongoloid, Esq.," and copies Levy's signature. Back in his own area, Ignatius throws a stack of materials into a wastebasket.

At the bar, Jones asks Lana whether the fat mother in the green cap has been back and muses about the interest the police would take in her "orphans." Lana has bigger problems. Darlene wants to dance, Jones wants a raise, and, because plainclothesmen are hanging around, business stinks. Lana suspects Jones put the police onto her. If not Jones, who?

Ignatius' employment brings peace to the Reilly home. Irene remembers the horrible night she and her late husband conceived Ignatius after a movie. Santa Battaglia phones to report the police are arresting Angelo Mancuso. She learned that from an old man who, Santa thinks, has his eye on Irene. Irene switches to news about Ignatius' job. Ignatius wants her to be home more. Santa insists they will pick her up at 7 PM. Irene asks Santa to find out who the old man is.

"Levy Lodge" overlooks the bay. Outwardly, it is elegantly rustic. Inside, foam seating, nylon carpets, and mood lighting rule in a constantly controlled, purified atmosphere. Mrs. Levy's life revolves around her sensual, motorized exercise board. The couple sits before a television set that cannot hold its color and resume their standard argument, involving 1) the exercise board, 2) whether Gus has thrown his father's business down the drain or it is simply outdated and ready for sale, 3) whether his late father was a successful visionary or a mean, cheap tyrant who drained Gus of interest in the company, 4) whether Gus lets down daughters Susan and Sandra as a father or is supporting their wild life at college, and 5) Trixie. Mrs. Levy maintains retirement will kill her, and she is a candidate for psychic rejuvenation. Gus refuses to bring Trixie home to be worked on, and relates the odd behavior he observed today in the office.



Ignatius examines a pile of articles, written but never submitted for publication. A new project has suggested itself: "The Journal of a Working Boy, or, Up from Sloth." Ignatius begins by informing the reader that he has grown accustomed to the hectic pace and has initiated work-saving methods. The company's lord and master will soon learn of Ignatius' devotion to his firm. Trixie's apathy is a facade for resentment against Levy Pants. She is coherent only when talking about retirement. When Ignatius' valve adapts to the tension of the working world, he intends to investigate the factory inferno. In a "Social Note," Ignatius rails against tasteless, indecent, perverse, and blasphemous films, along with Mother's bowling with depraved undesirables, which causes him domestic pain. In a "Health Note," Ignatius reports his valve sealed violently when he was asked to add a column of figures. He signs himself "Darryl, Your Working Boy."

Satisfied with his journal entry, Ignatius puts off penning a slashing attack on Myrna's being and worldview until he has visited the factory. His leadership of the workers will make that offensive minx look like a reactionary. Ignatius plucks at his lute and begins to sing, but Annie screams at him to shut up. Before he can retaliate, Ignatius hears Irene and Mancuso drive up. He finds Irene animated, Mancuso morose, and Mancuso's aunt Santa doing a provocative dance.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Chapter 4 depicts the dysfunctional Levy marriage and business and sets up the novel's chief conflict, a letter Ignatius forges that is sent to one of Levy Pants' distributors. Mrs. Levy's interest in rejuvenating senile Trixie is suggested, and Mancuso is shown drawing closer to Irene. His crazy old aunt, Santa, becomes Irene's telephone and bowling friend and is shown egging her on to experience life. In particular, Santa proposes Irene meet a mysterious rich, old man. We read the first installment in Ignatius' first-person "Journal of a Working Boy," which helps appreciate the alternate world in which he exists.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

After reading about arrests in a nearby bar, Lana warns Darlene against talking with plainclothesmen. A customer in bowling shoes propositioned a woman there, but he escaped the melee. Darlene suggests it would be safer for business to let her dance on stage. Lana orders her to be quiet and forbids her to tell Jones there are police in the bar every night, lest he panic and quit. Darlene suggests an animal mascot like other clubs. Darlene has a smart cockatoo, which is part of her smashing dance act.

Jones, who has been kept out of the conversation, announces George's arrival, and Lana leads George out to the street, where it is safe to talk. She does not trust Jones, but cannot afford to replace him. George must limit his visits to the bar to the half-hour Jones is at lunch. He can stash his packages in the bus station if he does not want to carry them around until 3 PM. When Lana re-re-enters the bar, Darlene resumes promoting her bird act, and Lana gives in.

Gonzales considers how Ignatius has improved life at Levy Pants. He is four workers in one, is kind to Trixie, and has decorated the office. Ignatius' first priority today is to paint a large cross. Trixie arrives halfway through Ignatius' lunch, enjoys a sandwich and a half, and drops the soggy remnants on Gonzalez' desk, ruining a bank statement due that day. Ignatius defends her against the office manager and is disappointed when a full-fledged battle fizzles. Ignatius finishes his cross, dumps his filing backlog in a trashcan, adds the contents of a file drawer to the refuse, and lumbers off to the factory to promote social justice.

Mancuso's head is bandaged as he reports to his angry sergeant. He was injured moonlighting after an evening bowling with his aunt. The sergeant accuses Mancuso of giving them a phony lead about the Night of Joy and assigns him to restroom duty at the bus station until he brings someone in. Today, Mancuso will pose as a farmer.

Ignatius hears the familiar sounds of his mother preparing to leave the house. Ready to begin a new journal entry, Ignatius tries not to kiss her goodbye but relents and is aghast at her appearance. They argue about Irene's friends and money until car honks interrupt. From his window, Ignatius aims a bottle of ink at the white Rambler and begins to bring his Dear Reader up to date. Banish, Benefit, and Beautify are the three B's of his program. Without the dictatorial manager, Ignatius and Trixie would be content. The sweatshop factory is compelling and repelling. It mechanizes slavery. Ignatius provides a long aside on watermelons; civil rights organizations; the polluted Mississippi as ersatz father figure, Mark Twain; Baton Rouge; and the comforts of apathetic, stagnant New Orleans. The barn-like factory reminds Ignatius of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Production is far below capacity, and morale is a problem. The foreman, Mr. Palermo, drinks on and off duty.



Offended by the obscene jazz to which the workers listen and dance, Ignatius switches off the radio, but acknowledging poor judgment, restores it and demonstrates his dancing prowess to win the workers' confidence. They respond appreciatively until his knees give out, and show concern helping him up. Ignatius feels kinship with the colored race, but cannot understand why they want to join the bourgeoisie, which will be their ruin. He admires the terror blacks inspire in the white proletariat simply by being themselves, and he imagines himself as a "large and terrifying Negro." Apologizing to the reader for the digression, Ignatius continues: the workers are non-committal about their work. Ignatius parries their personal questions. Taking home less than \$30 a week, they would perhaps be better off composing jazz, creating new dances, or pursuing other innate talents. Ignatius is irate on their behalf.

In another aside, Ignatius recalls first meeting, as a graduate student, loud, offensive Myrna Minkoff. She is in college on money chiseled from her father. After their first traumatic meeting, at which Myrna prides herself on being actively engaged in society while Ignatius is disengaged, they begin a masochistic affair. Myrna fails to seduce Ignatius, but campus rumor links them in depravity. Sex is Myrna's cure-all, and two girls who fall under her influence come to tragedy. Nearly raped by a janitor and ignoring Ignatius' efforts to lead her to the path of truth, Myrna leaves college, declaring it cannot teach her anything she does not know. She and Ignatius meet several times during her "inspection tours" of the South, and they correspond regularly. Ignatius may some day accept her invitations to visit Manhattan. Tomorrow, Gonzalez will fall, and civil rights organizations will laud Ignatius' leadership. He will report that to Myrna.

Sarcastic Dr. Talc ransacks his desk, hunting notes for tomorrow's lecture. Talc manages by glibness to conceal his ignorance. In a stack of unreturned student essays dating back 5 years, Talc finds a page printed in red crayon demanding that he suffer the death penalty for his total ignorance. Soon all will know Talc is a total ass. Talc wonders what has become of "Zorro."

Chapter 5 Analysis

Chapter 5 concentrates on Ignatius' life at Levy Pants and reveals his history with the activist Myrna Minkoff, whose criticism of Ignatius' inactivity has challenged him to become a revolutionary in the factory. The Journal is again used to reveal Ignatius' views on race and culture, criticizing--and adopting--stereotypes and misreading people's reactions to his bizarre person. Ignatius is shown to be a devotee of hagiography, which contrasts with his skepticism about current Catholic doctrine and practice. At the end of the chapter, one of Ignatius' college nemeses, Dr. Talc, is introduced. Talc will become a key player in the final resolution of the novel's prime conflict.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Mr. Watson owns Mattie's Ramble Inn, a combination bar and grocery. Jones sits on a stool, complaining. Watson advises Jones to behave and be nice, which sounds like Lara's line. Jones is sure Lara has a high connection on the police force and is up to something crooked. He is watching for an opportunity to escape modern slavery and become somebody and owning things. Jones wishes his washwoman mother could have sent him to college like Watson did his schoolteacher son, but he spent his time on the streets, rolling tires around. Watson advises Jones to try sabotage. Another patron says coworkers at Levy Pants are planning a big sabotage tomorrow, led by some big, smart, and religious white man. When the stranger mentions a green hat, Jones says the police are looking for that freak. The stranger worried about going to jail.

Gonzales notices new crepe paper streamers and wonders how Ignatius does his filing without disturbing the vines growing down the front of the cabinets. Ignatius bursts in carrying a cheap movie camera and rolled-up bed sheet. Early and paranoid, Ignatius heads straight to the factory door. Gonzalez hears a cheer. Four workers hoist Ignatius, frantic about being dropped, onto a cutting table to supervise. The workers laughingly display the various "engines of war" Ignatius ordered they bring. One man asks whether Ignatius is in trouble with the police, which makes the workers uneasy. Ignatius declares it vile slander, but wonders how they learned about Mancuso's attempt to arrest him. Ignatius whips open the yellow-stained sheet to reveal "FORWARD" and "Crusade for Moorish Dignity," lettered in crayon. Ignatius cows two statuesque women into bearing the standard, and begins filming a documentary, directing the workers to wave sticks and stones menacingly, make faces, scream, and jump. After filming a bit, Ignatius asks a worker to shoot him, scowling and shaking his fist. Ignatius announces the order of the march: banner, choir, and warriors' battalion. They must proceed peacefully and rationally. They will gather around the cross. If Gonzalez fails to respond, Ignatius will call for attack. The force moves out rapidly, leaving Ignatius stranded on the table. Eventually he risks jumping the few inches to the floor, but lands awkwardly and the camera cracks open, exposing the film. Ignatius rails at the insipid song selection. Gonzalez looks confused. When Ignatius orders the attack, people demand Gonzalez be given an opportunity to speak. The army disbands, grumbling about the police-looking Ignatius. They have enough trouble without going to jail.

Mancuso completes his 8 hours without making an arrest, but does catch a cold, gets stuck in the restroom, and can only call for help. Ignatius growls at Irene as she berates him for being fired. She mocks his declaration that it is all Myrna's fault and demands Ignatius return to the want ads. Ignoring Irene's adamancy about a new job search, Ignatius laments that he cannot write Myrna. Fortuna has spun downward.

Mrs. Levy moans as the motorized exercise board kneads her ample flesh and commences harping on how Gus is throwing his life away and ruining his father's



business. Gus has a headache left over from firing some big kook Gonzalez hired and who has led a workers' rebellion. Mrs. Levy sides with Ignatius. Susan and Sandra have written how their friends think the factory sounds like a plantation and refuse to come home again unless Gus raises wages. Gus has seen his wife's letters to the girls, bristling with hostility against his countless injustices. Mrs. Levy declares this action against a young idealist is heartbreaking proof that Gus has hardened. He has drained her of warmth and idealism. She and the girls are disillusioned. Gus cares only about his sports cars. Gus takes the offensive, pointing out her constant attacks, insecurity, and guilt complexes. What she has done to Trixie is characteristic: he has forced her to remain on the job, alone and afraid. Mrs. Levy lacks outlets for her idealism and feels useless and caged in. If Gus brings Trixie for her to work on, Mrs. Levy will not write the girls about the firing. Mrs. Levy demands Gus see the analyst who cured Lenny's complexes and freed him to make his business prosper. Sandra too, has benefited from psychoanalysis. Unless she gets Trixie, the girls will get a letter. Gus gives in.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Chapter 6 shows Ignatius in action as the leader of a farcical, high-minded social protest. When it falls apart, Ignatius is fired and returns home in self-pity his mother refuses to abide. He will find another job--fast. The Levys resume their perpetual fights with a new focus: the firing of a young idealist who was trying to raise the workers from slavery. Mrs. Levy keeps the girls firmly behind her in her efforts to destroy the husband who disappoints and marginalizes her. Why Gus retreats into sports is not hard to imagine. Mrs. Levy demands--and gets--Trixie to rehabilitate a selfish, egotistical, inhumane--and ultimately doomed and destructive--project.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Ignatius happens upon Paradise Vendors, Inc. Most passers-by are repulsed by the stench, but Ignatius is drawn in. An old man, Mr. Clyde, attends a boiling pot, and Ignatius asks to buy one hot dog. He selects and consumes four with blissful savagery, and while criticizing Clyde's abominable whistling, he is then ready to resume his job quest. Most days, he confides, he is so discouraged he sits in movie palaces. Clyde offers Ignatius a job on the spot, but he declines. Clyde demands \$1 for the weenies Ignatius ate and holds a long fork at Ignatius' throat, declaring he will not be robbed again. Ignatius whines he has only bus fare. Clyde offers to call them even if Ignatius takes a wagon out for an hour. Clyde softens, telling how he has fought for 10 years to give Paradise Vendors a reputable name. Decent vendors are hard to find because of popular antipathy toward the profession. Why does God make life so hard? Ignatius suggests Boethius for insight. Ignatius is happy to don a white smock but refuses to replace his green cap with a paper cap. Clyde relents. Clyde stocks a cart with a dozen hot dogs, buns, and condiments and warns Ignatius it is illegal to push carts on the sidewalk. Ignatius figures a police presence will forestall robbery.

Pedestrian traffic parts for Ignatius, but no one stops him to buy. Still, Ignatius figures this is better than facing personnel managers, and he lacks funds for a movie. Out of Clyde's line of sight around the corner, Ignatius parks and treats himself to a hot dog. Mother has been surly all week, threatening to sell the house, and lauding Mancuso's fight to retain his job. Ignatius has given Irene *The Consolation of Philosophy* with recommendations for passages about accepting what one cannot change that Mancuso might wish to read. This kind gesture brings peace to the house. Within 15 minutes, Ignatius has consumed most of his stock and sets off to sell the rest.

Carrying an armload of packages, George asks for a hot dog. Ignatius' valve protests the boy's pimply, surly face, and he brushes him aside. George is hungry and opens a lid to see if there is stock. Ignatius roars for police protection. As the two scream insults at each other, a small crowd gathers, and people take George's side. Ignatius calms himself by consuming a hot dog, and then waddles slowly onward. Two more hot dogs fortify him for the last leg of his trip, which Ignatius undertakes at a trot.

Clyde protests Ignatius has not been out an hour, and is suspicious of Ignatius' story: a nondescript teen held a pistol to his head and no one would help. The perpetrator, perhaps so crazed by television that he sublimates his sexual urges in food, has taken only hot dogs; Ignatius is lucky to have escaped rape. Clyde asks Ignatius to make another try, but Ignatius is so traumatized he must go home to soak in a hot tub. Clyde begs him to return tomorrow. Ignatius agrees, if he feels well enough. He will wear the smock home to prove to his alcoholic mother he is employed. Home life is grim. Ignatius explains to Clyde the mystery of his valve.



Jones quits cleaning the bar as soon as Lana leaves on a shopping trip and begins studying *Life* ads by the light over the cash register. Jones's sabotage plot has left dust so thick it looks ploughed rather than mopped. For higher pay, he might do a better job, Jones suggests, and launches into a speech about how blacks pay the same as whites for food and clothing. Lana reminds him she took him off the streets and keeps him out of jail. Lana ought to quit giving charity and slip him more money, Jones complains.

With the plainclothesmen out of the way, it is safe to put Darlene back on a stool talking to patrons. When Darlene and her huge, loud cockatoo arrive, she is told the bad news. Darlene plugs a new angle - having the bird help her strip. Lana is afraid the bird will hurt someone and ruin her investment, but Jones has seen rehearsals and figures the act will offer excellent sabotage. He helps Darlene assure Lana the act will draw customers, especially if a doorman hawks it on the street. Lana agrees to an audition.

Irene phones Santa to relate how his new job has broken her heart. The women agree: being a hot dog vendor makes Ignatius a bum, a vagrant. Santa reports Mancuso has pneumonia. Santa does not trust any "inspirational literature" Ignatius might lend him. Irene returns to her shame, should anyone she knows see Ignatius pushing a cart. Santa advises Irene she needs a good man in the house to set Ignatius straight, promises to learn the old man's name, and suggests they all have a party at her house.

Ignatius hears half of the conversation while thrashing in the bathtub, thinking about new material for his journal. When the water has relaxed his valve, Ignatius emerges and opens an envelope. It contains a folded poster announcing a lecture on "Sex in Politics" to be given by M. Minkoff at the YMHA in New York. On the other side, Myrna asks why he has not written. She insists a good, explosive orgasm will cleanse his being. The movie project is off, primarily for lack of funds. The upcoming lecture grew out of meeting an unbelievable boy just returned from Israel who cannot understand why Myrna keeps her musical social protest to herself. Irene demands Ignatius get out of the tub, but he requests peace to finish Myrna's letter. Her getting him fired from Levy Pants may be a blessing in disguise, as the new job looks agreeable. Irene yells through the door Santa's opinion that someone ought to punch Ignatius in the nose. Refusing to discuss Myrna, Ignatius orders his mother off to her wine, housework, or a nap. Irene warns if he gives her a stroke, Ignatius will be alone in the world, wishing he had not mistreated his poor mother. Ignatius returns to his letter.

Myrna declares her new friend a real mensch, tough-minded and gentlemanly. Myrna will speak in Brooklyn Heights and did not need to use sex to get this opportunity. She has learned the folk singer is a fraud, reminding her of the time she was feeding a squirrel in the park and it turned out to be a rat. The Bronx "Y" crowd is likely to be parochial, but great thinkers air their views there. Is Ignatius' paranoia worsening? His brain would flower in New York. Oedipal bonds are destroying him. He has doubtlessly abandoned his plans to form a "Divine Right Party." Otherwise, she could help organize a New York chapter. Myrna closes by begging Ignatius to get out of the house and enter the world around him. She is worried about his future.



Ignatius emerges pucker-skinned, ignores Irene's lamentation about wasting her inheritance funding his education, and sits down to reply to Myrna's "offensive communication." The squirrel/rat symbolism is evocative, but the remaining contents are obscene. Ignatius advises Myrna to cancel the lecture, which no one will attend, and announces his personal life has undergone a metamorphosis. He will write later about his new food merchandising involvement.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Chapter 7 follows Ignatius through his first day of employment as a hot dog vendor. During his first trip around the block, Ignatius runs into George and refuses the adolescent service, ostensibly to prevent his complexion from growing worse by eating a product Mr. Clyde will not eat. Ignatius finds the acidic items tasty and consumes most of the stock. This surprise contact will soon become crucial to the story. Ignatius agrees to return to weenie vending next day and insists on wearing his new uniform home to prove he is employed. Recall Irene's view that only bums do this kind of work, and note that Ignatius tells his employer that his mother is an abusive drunkard. After an interlude where Jones sets Darlene up to sabotage business at the Night of Joy, Ignatius is like a pink walrus relaxing in the tub, locked away from his mother, who is irate over his new job. Ignatius, however, is confident all will go well. Myrna's letter reveals a disjointed mind, idealistic, overly trusting, and defiantly caring for Ignatius' welfare.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Trixie sits before Mrs. Levy, who is anxious to try out a program outlined in a correspondence course in psychology Mrs. Levy took but failed miserably. The snarling old woman, tired and confused, has been put on indefinite vacation instead of being retired. Mrs. Levy advises Trixie she is suffering age psychosis and that in reality, she is still a very attractive woman. Gus wishes his wife would return to another of her hobbies and threatens to ship her to San Juan. Mrs. Levy asks Trixie about dreams she cannot remember. Trixie would rather be with Gomez than listening to the Levys argue. She misses poor, kind Gloria (Ignatius) and recalls how Gus walked in one day and kicked Gloria out. Trixie wants to leave and threatens to get even, but Mrs. Levy pins her to the sofa.

Mancuso is getting sicker, and claustrophobia attacks him in the bathroom stall. Reading about Boethius' wheel of fortune is depressing, and his mind wanders from Ignatius' book. Mancuso sees a boy who seems to visit the station daily and steps out to ask what he is doing. George looks over the disguise and orders this character--as odd as the hotdog vendor--to move away. Sensing fear in the boy, Mancuso places George under arrest, but George grabs the thick book, slams it down on the undercover officer's head, and escapes. George collects the packages stored in a locker and flees to the Night of Joy. Lana is angry about their bad luck. With the bus station unsafe, George will need a new afternoon hiding place. At least Lana has her prop book.

Santa kisses the only picture she has of her poor late mother. Santa assures her she lights candles for her every day. Irene and Mancuso arrive. Irene reports how Mancuso lost Ignatius' book and is worried Ignatius will find out about it. Santa is determined Ignatius' ghost not haunt her party, and changes the subject any time his name comes up. Have a drink and dance with the old man; do not disappoint the poor old man, she counsels, and orders Mancuso to lie down until the final guest arrives. Irene hopes the old man will forget and not come. With her nerves bothering her, Irene pours and consumes her third drink, which Santa pulls from her lips and lists all the reasons Irene needs a man with money. Irene brightens at the thought of finding a way out of debt.

Claude Robichaux, the rich old man, arrives. Tending his grandchildren detained him. He is introduced to Irene, who sits frozen on the sofa. Both remember the confrontation with Mancuso, and Claude launches into an attack on the communist police. Claude hopes never to see that man again; they called his daughter that day, and the whole family knows he was hauled in. Santa recalls how her mother was arrested four times but did not care. Mothers have a hard life, Irene observes. So do police officers, Santa says, and sometimes they make mistakes. She has relatives named Mancuso on the force and one of them is sleeping in the back. Irene is panicky. Santa orders her to pour Claude a drink while she wakes her nephew.



Seeming neat and freshly pressed, Claude asks how Ignatius is doing. Claude bets Irene is a good mother and proclaims Ignatius a fine-looking big boy. Good training and safety are important, he observes. Irene opens up about the awful cross she has to bear and breaks into wild tears. Ignatius is breaking her heart. He writes foolishness no one will read and exchanges insults with poor Myrna. Irene should have him hauled away to a detention home. Claude suggests enlisting a priest's help, but Irene reveals Ignatius got into a fight with one who refused his dog a funeral. Ignatius now considers him a heretic and will not talk with him. And now, Ignatius is pushing around a weenie wagon. Word of that dishonor is all over the neighborhood. Claude suggests Ignatius spent too long in college where communists abound. Irene considers how communists treat their mothers badly and agrees to ask Ignatius about his politics. Claude remembers admiring Irene's character the two times he saw her and has asked Santa to help them meet. Irene wishes Angelo would have locked Ignatius away. When Claude asks who Angelo is, Irene panics and tries to escape.

Seeing Mancuso, Claude screams he would punch him in the nose if he were not a dirty cop. Santa tries to pacify Claude. Mancuso is sick and depressed. Irene puts all the blame on Ignatius and wishes again he had been jailed. She begs Claude to take pity on Mancuso's plight. Santa declares it Claude's fault that Mancuso is so sick now. Mancuso is sorry he took the old man in. Irene takes the blame for protecting Ignatius, who truly is a troublemaker. Santa declares Ignatius should be punched or beaten up. Claude and Mancuso shake hands. Santa puts on a deafening record and suggests Irene and Claude dance, but everyone stares at the linoleum. Suddenly, Irene screams about Ignatius running water into the tub and probably forgetting to turn it off.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Chapter 8 places Trixie in the hands of a bad amateur psychoanalyst, and she vows revenge on Gus Levy for putting her there; shows Mancuso catching pneumonia, trying to arrest George and succeeding only in making the boy look elsewhere for an afternoon hiding spot; Lana receiving a book as a photographic prop; Irene meeting rich, sympathetic old Claude; and Claude confronting the communist cop who ruined his reputation. These story lines have yet to be intertwined, but will be soon. Irene is coming to grips with the fact that her son is a troubled troublemaker and must receive proper treatment.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Clyde confronts Ignatius over complaints from the Board of Health. Ignatius defends himself and then tries to turn to conversation to the cart he received or the grueling musical he saw last night. Clyde remains focused: did Ignatius pick a cat out of the gutter as reported? What was he doing so far from their routes? No wonder he sells nothing. Ignatius feels unappreciated. He comes to work only for fear of his vicious mother. Clyde offers him one last chance, a better route, and some merchandising gimmicks. Clyde orders Ignatius into the French Quarter. After deducting the cost of the hot dogs Ignatius has eaten, Clyde hands him \$1.25 and threatens to fire him unless he shows up early tomorrow.

Irene falls on her knees and asks why the Lord has given her such a terrible cross to bear. Ignatius is getting worse every day. Ignatius denies being a communist and settles in to watch Yogi Bear. Irene hands him an envelope from Myrna, who writes that his last letter was sick and petty. Ongah, a vital, virile, and aggressive exchange student from Kenya, intends to attend her lecture. At least Ignatius is alive. She warns he faces a crack-up unless he snaps out of his apathy and gets out of the house. Opening his heart will open his valve. Myrna asks that he describe any sex fantasies he is having so she can interpret them. Members of her therapy group are following his case. She wishes she could get away on an inspection tour and see him personally.

Red-faced, Ignatius throws the letter away and screams that Myrna is braying at "some unfortunate Negro. In public." Irene says black people lead a hard life and launches into a story, which Ignatius cuts off furiously. Irene forges on, but when she mentions giving a poor black woman a quarter, Ignatius lashes out at this waste of money. His valve is screaming for appeasement. Annie demands they shut up, and Ignatius sweeps away, contemplating his next assault on Myrna's effrontery: politics and sex.

Lana balances on a bar stool. What she has seen of Darlene's rehearsals gives little hope for the act. The bird makes up for Darlene's ineptitude and may draw a crowd. Darlene bumps lasciviously to "Stranger in Paradise" and the bird grabs a ring on her dress to pop it open. Lana will not see her decent club defiled like this. They must rethink the act. Jones suggests Darlene play a sweet, pure virgin, surprised when the bird grabs at her clothes. That will provide drama. Lana likes the idea: Darlene will be a refined Southern belle, still having her honor when the ball is over. Then the bird startles her by grabbing her dress. Darlene agrees, but cannot master her one, simple line. Lana tells Jones, again ranting about poor wages, that if he wants to help Darlene, whom he obviously likes, he must play an Old South doorman to pack the bar. While Lana drags Darlene and the bird into the alley, Jones sees in the cabinet, which Lana absentmindedly leaves ajar, 10 packages, a globe, a box of chalk, and a book. In tiny letters, Jones writes the bar's address on each package, figuring this may somehow advance his plan.



Mancuso begs his sergeant to free him from the bathroom. Not wanting to be responsible for Mancuso's death--just wanting him off the force--the sergeant returns Mancuso to the streets for 2 weeks of probation.

Ignatius ignores his mother's door pounding and lamentation about 50? income. He confides to his journal that jealousy over his physique and worldview has made the "czar of sausage" turn on him. Chaste, impressionable Working Boy has been condemned to experience every variety of degradation in the French Quarter. Ignatius vows not to land on skid row or on park benches. He requires a modicum of creature comforts. Conditions at home have deteriorated; Mother is an agent of his destruction, biting the hand that feeds her. Clyde demands he wear a pirate outfit as a nod to New Orleans folklore, but his stature allows him to don only a red scarf, gold earring, and plastic cutlass. Ignatius recalls tourists approving of his costume as he wheels his cart towards the Quarter, where he implores appropriate saints for help and imagines the melodrama of Irene mourning at his low-cost funeral had Clyde slain him during their mock duel. The cutlass helps Ignatius feel like a Crusader as he enters the Quarter.

Ignatius sleeps on the curb until a rude police officer awakens him. Ignatius imagines the indecent acts people of the Quarter are performing. Doubtlessly, they are watching him hungrily behind shutters. Midwestern tourists ask to photograph Ignatius and he pleases them with a series of artful poses. They depart without reimbursing their model, and because a Working Boy can use every penny, Ignatius is about to chase them down when he is intercepted by Mancuso, dressed as a tourist. Ignatius demands his book back or a written critique upon completion. Having sold only one hot dog, Ignatius is certain he has a "White Elephant" route, but maybe the Quarter will suggest a crusade for taste and decency he can use against Myrna. A "Social Note" laments work will keep him from the premiere of a sophisticated comedy. A "Health Note" observes Ignatius is gaining weight astonishingly, no doubt Mother's fault. He signs the entry, "Lance, Your Besieged Working Boy."

Dr. Talc is delighted when a lovely girl praises his fresh, unorthodox approach to history, and debates inviting her to share a drink. He admits to having no more interest in Celtic Britain than the students, with whom he feels rapport. Talc wishes there were more girls like this wide-eyed creature and fewer like the dreadful, slovenly Minkoff girl who was raped outside his office. He remembers how she and the Reilly monster tormented him and wonders if they married or defected to Cuba. The girl asks about a report she handed in 2 months earlier. His bubble burst, Talc searches his desk, and a paper airplane falls to the floor. The girl picks it up and reads Zorro's threat to hang Talc by his testicles until dead. The girl drops the airplane into her purse.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Chapter 9 sees Ignatius given one last chance at Paradise Vendors after the Health Department files a complaint against him. He is assigned to the French Quarter, dressed in the few marks of a pirate that his massive body will accommodate. Another long journal entry describes Ignatius' first day on the route, which includes an encounter

with undercover Mancuso, freed from bathroom stakeout in the sergeant's final drive to get him off the force. Meanwhile, at the bar, Jones sets Lana up for a fall in two ways: marking her secret packages and getting Darlene's wretched act onto the stage.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Gus Levy is a nice guy, popular among sportsmen, but void of friends at home. Having survived another Christmas with his daughters demanding money and threatening to disavow him if he continues to mistreat their mother--fueled by Mrs. Levy's usual list of their father's injustices and brutalities--Gus is looking forward to escaping to Florida and Arizona. Mrs. Levy has Trixie stretched out on the couch, slathered in facial cream and snapping a stupendous new set of false teeth every time she snarls for silence. Mrs. Levy remarks that Trixie's self-confidence is returning, but she still subconsciously hates Levy Pants. Mrs. Levy knows all about Gloria, the soul of kindness. Gus assures her there is no Gloria, except in Trixie's twilight zone. Mrs. Levy implores Gus to see Lenny's miracle working doctor. Gus suggests the doctor help by buying Levy Pants, which three realtors have declared unsaleable. Mrs. Levy is aghast that Gus would sell his heritage. It is a chamber pot, Gus declares and heads to the whirlpool, contemplating dumping the property--and throwing the hateful exercise table into the Gulf. Mrs. Levy adjusts a coiffed black wig on Trixie's head. Trixie looks like Mrs. Levy's mother.

Jones is back in Mattie's Ramble Inn, complaining about being dressed up like a "plantation darky" by Lana. While jail is a sure way to eat regularly, Jones would rather starve. Jones tells Watson the sabotage is going well. The floor is ankle-deep in dust. Jones hopes the police will find the bar's address on those packages. Jones is too frightened by the police to talk to them as Watson advises. Watson reports no news on the Levy Pants demonstration. Jones would like to find the freak in the green hat because he would be a nice touch on opening night.

Ignatius' valve has failed through Paradise products and maternal antagonism. Ignatius believes Irene has fallen under the control of a right-wing fringe group. Normally apolitical (Irene votes only for candidates known to be kind to their mothers), she is constantly questioning his political philosophy. Myrna appears to him in dreams, heckling his sexuality. These dreams are worse than the old bus ones. The French Quarter is an impossible venue, and Ignatius' take home pay is getting smaller, which only makes Irene surlier. Reading that a ladies' art guild is holding an outdoor exhibition, Ignatius positions his cart nearby. He letters a sign, "Twelve Inches (12) of Paradise," and tapes it to the cart, but none of the well-dressed ladies responds. Instead, they beg him to move on. Anger brings on a fit of violent belching. After a heated debate over aesthetics, Ignatius waddles off to rest and inspect his aching feet.

Dorian Greene, who bought Irene's hat in the Night of Joy, approaches Ignatius. Ignatius threatens to strike down the intruder. Dorian inquires about Ignatius' outfit, and Ignatius strikes out with his cutlass, which Dorian dodges, giggling and dancing about. Throwing one of his boots, Ignatius again misses, but Dorian's aim is true, and Ignatius wails he has been disfigured and threatens to sue for assault. Dorian counsels caution,



lest Ignatius be booked for something worse. Ignatius erupts when the degenerate asks about his dear, sweet mother. Dorian hopes she does not know her son is flouncing around looking like a Hungarian Joan of Arc. Dorian taunts Ignatius, suggesting he and his friends just may use connections in high places to take over the country, as Ignatius fears. A sword thrust ruins Dorian's cashmere sweater, and he seizes Ignatius' hoop earring. Ignatius drops his weapon, howling in pain, and threatening federal prison and a lifetime of medical bills. Dorian mourns the ruination of his favorite sweater. Eventually, they agree it is prudent to settle out of court.

Ignatius suggests Dorian run off with a lonely-looking sailor drifting along Chartres St. That is Timmy, Dorian remarks, one of his oldest friends and certainly no sailor. Mancuso, attired in beret and goatee is stalking Timmy, and Dorian shrieks gaily that everyone in the Quarter knows about Mancuso and thinks him marvelous. He wears such wonderful disguises. They have twice had him arrested for making indecent proposals, just to enjoy the show. Ignatius sees the possibility for worldwide deception: old sodomites taking over military leadership and turning the next war into a massive orgy. That could mean an end to war. It could also help him get one up on Myrna. Dorian agrees it would be a wonderful solution--and help end the population explosion. Unhappy with birth control, Ignatius sees additional benefit and not finding anything on the horizon more likely to save the world, declares he will dedicate space in his journal for this valuable new insight. Dorian breaks into a Ruby Keeler song and performs a soft shoe.

Ignatius orders Dorian to be serious. Have his people considered forming a political party and running a candidate for president? Ignatius declares oratorically they must save the world. Dorian declares the conversation is depressing him the way his father used to and begs he must be running along. Ignatius restrains him, demanding they hold a large organizational meeting. Dorian sees an opportunity for a fun party. Ignatius offers to share his extensive knowledge of political organization by lecturing. He orders that there be red, white, and blue bunting. Dorian squeals with pleasure, promising yards of it--and plenty of close friends. Ignatius is so much more fun than he appeared in that tacky bar. Few people comprehend his worldview, Ignatius replies, suggesting Dorian read Boethius and early medieval literature, and then skip forward to select comic books--Batman in particular, whose morality is rigid. Dorian promises to work to exhaustion. The kickoff rally will be held in his home. Ignatius hopes the core group will be serious and allows that a few tasteful costumes will lend the gathering an international atmosphere. No female impersonators, however, since they will cause resentment among rural voters. As Dorian skips away, Ignatius treats himself to a hot dog and hopes to face no more customers today. Fortuna has spun the wheel to let him confound Myrna the minx.

George needs storage for his packages. Carrying them into movies or wandering the streets with them is uncomfortable and dangerous. If one breaks open in public, George will land in a juvenile detention home. George curses that undercover agent, who must have ESP. George sits safely through mass in St. Louis Cathedral, and then wanders to Chartres St., where he answers a sailor's wink with an obscene gesture. George hears shouting and sees the crazy hot dog vendor trying to stab some fairy with his plastic



knife. The vendor looks like he is made up for Mardi Gras. Spotting Mancuso dressed as a beatnik, George flees uptown. Outside the Night of Joy, George finds Lana giving directions about a poster. Suddenly, George realizes where he can store his packages and is furious at not seeing it earlier: the oddball vendor's wagon.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Chapter 10 reinforces Trixie's resentment over being denied retirement and being worked over by the persistent Mrs. Levy. We also see Jones's determination to ruin Lana's bar. Ignatius meets Dorian Greene and, despite his homophobia, finds common cause with him. Dorian sees the opportunity to throw a gala party while Ignatius sees a change for proving his political credentials to Myrna. Ignatius cannot see Dorian is delighting in his campiness. George, tired of the effort and the danger of dragging his packages around daily, sees the battle phase of the Ignatius-Dorian meeting and only later realizes Ignatius' weenie cart holds the solution to his dilemma. The story lines are set to converge.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Santa, Claude, and Irene are having coffee. The women are discussing Debbie Reynolds' new film. Ignatius has hung a "Peace to Men of Good Will Sign" outside the house and Annie has launched an inquisition. To Claude it suggests communism. Santa resumes her argument for having Ignatius put away. Mancuso, she reports, says Ignatius is wearing an earring. With his railroad pension and some rental income, Claude has bought his daughter a new electric range; Irene could use one of those. Claude is tired of living with his daughter's family. Irene says if she had a child that nice to her, she would stay where she is. Santa kicks her, and Irene innocently begins talking about her sore feet. Santa makes another face, which Irene ignores. Ignatius was heavy as a baby and carrying him ruined her feet and gave her arthritis, she believes.

Santa resumes her call for attending the movie. Claude never goes to the show, but agrees. Santa demands that Irene stop thinking about Ignatius and lock him away in the Charity Hospital where they can make him behave. Claude snorts at socialized medicine and communism, and Irene doubts the poor nuns running the Charity are communists. Santa does not care who runs the hospital. It is the right place for Ignatius. Irene sees little alternative but worries whether he will listen to the doctors. They will make him listen, Santa assures her, too eagerly and quite graphically. Claude agrees: Irene must think about herself before Ignatius puts her in her grave. He will not straighten out selling weenies, Santa declares, and suggests they go to the movie.

The trio walks through the warm evening air. Passing a funeral parlor, they learn old lady Lopez, whom Santa knows slightly and Irene not at all, has died of a heart attack. Both would pay respects if they were better dressed, and both vow to offer masses for her soul. Claude insists on purchasing the movie tickets, which brings relief to Irene, who calculates all she has spent recently on Ignatius. She is nervous when Claude takes her hand and considers fleeing. Santa orders her to watch the movie, but Irene breaks into tears, and a frightened Claude comforts her.

Ignatius records in his journal his surprising day in the Quarter. A "cherished old acquaintance (deviate)" helps him conceive a daring, magnificent solution to the crisis of their times: Dorian's "associates in foppery" will gather under the "Save the World Through Degeneracy" banner to get one of their number elected to the presidency, infiltrate the military, and soldiers and officers will be so busy talking about tailored uniforms at cocktail parties they will have no time for battle. Worldwide, perverts will follow. Once in power, pederasts will not know what to do with nuclear weapons, and international quarrels will be resolved in men's rooms at the redecorated U.N. Common folk will learn to enjoy ballets and musicals and be happier than under their old fascist leaders. Only perverts have been denied a chance to run the world, which is a global disgrace. Degeneracy will bring peace and new solutions to new problems. Ignatius will guide and mentor the movement as Boethius advised degenerate Rome.



This breathtaking scheme will also confound literalistic, clichéd Myrna. The "Crusade for Moorish Dignity" failed because of the bourgeois views of its participants. If Myrna wants sex in politics, Ignatius will deliver plenty. She cannot be allowed to go unchecked. Pragmatism fights Morality in Ignatius' brain, but Peace is the overwhelming concern. Ignatius foresees film producers filming his internal debate, and suggests how to stage it as a musical. He must disappoint readers interested in news about frankfurters because his mind is too preoccupied. In a "Social Note," Ignatius reports his truant mother's constant, blistering attacks are affecting his valve, but she is often absent on made-up excuses. He is compelled to attend a "sophisticated comedy" opening downtown, which will, of course, flaunt theology and geometry, taste and decency, but he cannot resist watching it. In a "Health Note," Ignatius reports his stomach is growing out of bounds. He signs himself, "Tab, Your Pacifist Working Boy."

Mrs. Levy helps a renovated Trixie up the steps into Levy Pants, assuring her she is needed, wanted, and missed. Trixie feels tricked out of retirement. Gonzalez is heartbroken to see her but promises to give her responsibility. He identifies--but Trixie refuses to meet--a tall, threadbare, scratching new file clerk. Trixie thinks Zalatimo looks like a gangster. Gonzalez gives Gus his mail, pointing out a message from Abelman's. It expresses shock and grief at receiving Gus' recent letter, and declares they are suing for \$500,000. Reading the attached copy of the offending letter, Gus realizes Abelman has struck gold. Gonzalez is perplexed, and Mrs. Levy rants about the business being ruined. The girls will have to quit college and become prostitutes. Demanding silence, Trixie declares them the noisiest people she ever met.

Gus knows Gonzalez did not write that letter. There is no Abelman folder--the whole drawer is empty--so they have no grounds for defense. The phone rings, and Jones asks if the fat mother with a green cap is working there. Gonzalez dazedly says no and slams down the receiver. Someone asking for Mr. Reilly, he reports. Mrs. Levy wonders who would want the young idealist, who is doubtlessly out helping unfortunates. Gonzalez confirms Ignatius was employed at the time of the letter and handled outgoing mail. Mrs. Levy explodes at the thought that they intend to frame the young idealist. Gus reminds her that the alternative is admitting he is the author, which will land her in the poorhouse. Mrs. Levy casts Ignatius to his fate. Gus wants Ignatius' phone number, and Trixie has to be awakened for access to the phone books she hoards. Gus reaches a tipsy-sounding, weeping woman who says Mr. Reilly is out until late afternoon.

Gonzales has to attend to a factory accident. Gus admonishes him to treat Trixie well to lessen her deep-seated hatred of the company. Gus will get in touch with Ignatius. They cannot sue him for a letter he did not write. Mrs. Levy surveys the sad remnants of a family business so pathetic that it has driven a young idealist to revenge, but takes pride in the miraculous restoration of Trixie, shown in the conviction with which she ordered everyone out of the office. Trixie sinks her new teeth into Zalatimo's hand when he asks help alphabetizing, and Gonzalez hears the screaming from the riotous factory.

In their sports car, Mrs. Levy announces plans to establish the "Leon Levy Foundation," honoring her father-in-law. It will comfort Susan and Sandra. This Abelman business is the most dangerous of Gus' many mistakes. Sensing his wife has a slush fund in mind,



Gus rejects the idea. Leon was so mean that recipients of money in his name will sue for libel. Mrs. Levy should take up another hobby. Gus must consult Lenny's saving doctor before it is too late and not put off getting in touch with the idealist criminal. Gus has a revelation: Lenny's doctor can analyze Ignatius and get the state to put him away so he cannot wreck people's lives.

George stakes out the Paradise Vendors' garage, planning to offer the poor vendor a few dollars to serve as his carrier. Around 1 PM, Ignatius billows off the trolley, still in costume. He looks stupid, but George knows from the way he talks that Ignatius spent a long time in school. George will play up education and money to rent space in the cart. An old man with a fork yells after Ignatius that he must bring in \$5 profit today or else.

Ignatius is late because stayed up late composing his kickoff lecture. He has only 10¢ in his pocket and wants badly to go to the RKO Orpheum for the film debut. That means he must sell 5-6 hot dogs quickly and park the wagon somewhere to reach the theater on time. Ignatius is too wrapped up in his sales plan to notice one of his tires lodge in the groove of a streetcar track. As he hears a streetcar approach, Ignatius feels his valve slam shut, and struggles frantically to extract the cart, but succeeds only in overturning it, spilling the hot dogs onto the pavement. George seizes the opportunity to help his mark and Ignatius rudely accepts. George hands Ignatius \$2, which Ignatius takes as amends for their earlier meeting.

George declines a hot dog, but asks Ignatius' help in storing packages of school supplies until the schools close, and he is able to deliver them. Ignatius belches skepticism but is convinced by \$10 a week. George forbids Ignatius to examine the contents, but Ignatius rips one open and finds postcards of a nude woman sitting on a desk beside a globe. A copy of *The Consolation of Philosophy* obscures the model's face. Ignatius is impressed by such good taste. He pockets a card and an address written on a scrap of wrapping paper. George refuses to identify the brilliant woman depicted, leaving Ignatius to muse about her plight and determined to meet her. Despite his misgivings, Ignatius agrees to make his cart available daily, provided George watch it this afternoon while he keeps an urgent appointment. Ignatius warns George he has a friend on the force who will gladly lock George up if he crosses him. Mancuso's name strikes fear in George. Ignatius orders George to meet him in 2 hours and billows grandly off. George is furious at having been taken--and being stuck with the wagon for the afternoon.

Ignatius arrives at the theater just in time, plotting how to blackmail George into watching the wagon daily. Ignatius snorts at the movie credits, and shouts "Filth!" during the first seduction scene. A lady with a shopping bag comments to her neighbor about how rude matinee audiences are. Ignatius rages at the screen and wrestles for control of his cutlass with an elderly usherette sent to control him. Ignatius shouts to the end of the film and is tempted to stay for another showing, but remembers George. Ignatius is physically spent and emotionally traumatized when they rendezvous. As George slouches away with his packages, Ignatius eats a hot dog and studies the photograph. The woman's air of solitude, detachment, solitary sensuality, and scholarly pleasure appeal to him. What a contribution she will make to the journal! Ignatius sets off to find



the Bourbon St. address on the scrap of paper, pondering an affair with the model. What envy that will bring out in Myrna! Ignatius will not tell the woman how he came across her until he has overwhelmed her with discussions of Boethius.

Arriving outside the Night of Joy, Ignatius realizes his heroine has fallen into the hands of fiends. A poster announces performances by Roberta E. Lee as Harlett O'Hara, the "Virgin-ny Belle. (and pet!)." Ignatius is intrigued, but fearful of facing the Nazi owner. Lana is satisfied with the act--and the money George is delivering with the new "merchandise." Even Jones seems to be broken. Seeing Ignatius on the curb, Lana orders him away. His earring will make people think this is a gay bar. Darlene inquires about Ignatius' poor momma. Jones refuses to chase the character away, because bouncers' beginning rate is \$50 a week. Ignatius is too traumatized and exhausted to fear a beating and resigns himself to torture by the particularly terrifying, dope-crazed Negro, observing his forceful stand in defense of civil rights left him crippled here today. Jones is surprised to hear Levy Pants fired him. Ignatius wonders how Jones knows about that fiasco. Delighted to have become a legend, Ignatius offers Jones a hot dog, assuring him he extends courteous service to all colors and creeds. Jones cannot believe the good luck of having Ignatius drop from the sky just when he needs him most.

Jones asks why an educated person is selling hot dogs. He should have a good job and everything money can buy. Ignatius objects that this is a pleasant outdoor occupation, and someone working in a bar has no right to criticize. Jones claims he has goals, which Ignatius is certain must be bourgeois, and laments Jones's brainwashing. Ignatius asks if there is a woman in the bar given to reading. He is anxious to meet her. Jones is confused but suggests Ignatius come for opening night. Ignatius imagines a brilliant satire on the decadent Old South, but fears the Nazi owner. Realizing his sabotage plot is falling into place, Jones assures Ignatius that Lana will be away and promises a ringside table. The two laugh conspiratorially as Ignatius prepares to leave. Ignatius hopes Jones will read Boethius to ward off a nervous breakdown. Ask Miss O'Hara about Boethius, he advises. Ignatius would be happy to be a vagrant. The workers at Levy Pants are lucky they have not landed in Angola, Jones thinks. He points out to Ignatius that someone has decorated his "Twelve Inches (12") of Paradise" sign with drawings of genitalia.

Ignatius removes the sign and heads to the ferry ramp where he sells his remaining hot dogs. Fortuna is on his side. Clyde is amazed to receive \$10, and Ignatius rides the trolley home with a glad heart. Irene is on the phone, quietly agreeing with Santa that Ignatius belongs in the Charity. Claude, who is ready to pop the question, will not want Ignatius around, Santa advises. Irene is nervous about Claude's fixation on communism, however. Santa figures once he is married, Claude will drop it. Santa says she and Claude will pick Irene up tonight for dinner and hangs up.

Irene thrusts her hand into Ignatius' pocket to see how much he earned. Finding the postcard, she refuses to hear an explanation, and sends Ignatius to his room. The phone rings, and Irene says it must be Mr. Levy for the third time today. Ignatius fakes an accent to avoid talking with Gus. Ignatius informs him Mr. Reilly has been admitted to



the state hospital in Mandeville. Gus' vicious dismissal is resulting in staggering psychiatrists' bills that Levy Pants can expect to receive. Ignatius suggests Gus visit the poor man in the hospital--and bring cookies. Ignatius feels the wheel revolving skyward as he enters his room.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Chapter 11 finds Santa convincing Irene that Ignatius should be hospitalized, both for his own good and to enhance her romantic chances with Claude; Gus Levy trying to track Ignatius down to get out from under the lawsuit Ignatius' forged letter has left the company open to; George using Ignatius' cart to hide his mysterious packages; Ignatius figuring he has George over a barrel with Mancuso over the risquy cards he is carrying; and Jones on the verge of using Ignatius as the cornerstone of his plot to sabotage the hated Night of Joy bar. Trixie, meanwhile, resentful over her remaking by Mrs. Levy, is back at Levy Pants, angrier than ever at not being allowed to retire. The story is poised for its climax.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Ignatius' kickoff rally preparations are interrupted by a special mail delivery, Myrna's frantic response to Ignatius' telegram asking that she recruit sodomites for a new political party. Myrna is confused and worried to find him hanging around with "queers." She has warned he will come to crisis by blocking normal sexual outlets so long. She begs him to flee to New York. Myrna was prepared to join the Divine Right Party, but this Sodomite Party cannot succeed. Non-Sodomites will claim sexual discrimination. Myrna's lecture went over everyone's heads. She was heckled. Ongah abandoned her. Myrna demands an immediate reply.

Ignatius is pleased and cannot wait to shock Myrna by Miss O'Hara. Ignatius evades Irene's questions about the envelope and why he is preparing to go out again. Ignatius announces he will address a political meeting tonight, which pleases Irene, until he declares the party must be kept secret for the moment. She has been reading about communists lately in pamphlets, which Ignatius has seen and suspects were left for him to find. Ignatius pronounces them illiterate garbage. He is not a communist. Irene suggests resting a while at Charity, where he could write. Ignatius is irate and refuses to be brainwashed. Psychiatry, he declares, is worse than communism. The nation's asylums are filled with victimized martyrs. Irene demands to know where Ignatius has gotten the money to pay for the cab that arrives. He claims that he has been collecting pennies, concealing his successful blackmailing of George, Fortuna's recent gift to him.

Irene is shocked to see Ignatius in pirate regalia and forbids him to leave the house that way. When Ignatius refuses to stop or to reveal the contents of his speech, Irene slaps him on the face. Ignatius menaces her with his scimitar, and Irene lands another blow. Ignatius runs into the yard, daring his mother to follow in her shredded nightgown. Annie demands they knock it off. Irene reaches the curb as the taxi speeds off. She must phone Santa.

Ignatius hears frenetic singing and laughter emanating from Dorian's three-story stucco building. He mentally denounces the recent defacing of the vintage 18th-century facade with canary yellow paint and various tasteless decorations. Ignatius rings the bell and Damian admits him, upset over the tardiness. Things are getting out of hand. Feelings are running high. Ignatius is concerned that no warmongering resolutions come out of this initial rally. Dorian reveals that he owns the building through financial support supplied by relatives in Nebraska who demand only that he stay away. Growing up there was depressing. Dorian enjoyed college in the east and then found freedom in New Orleans. Ignatius would have preferred to rent an American Legion hall, but this perverted building will have to do. Dorian is insulted but comments only on Ignatius' earring.



Responding to screams of distress, Dorian and Ignatius find Timmy chained to the wall. Mean Billy and Raoul did this, Timmy cries and begs to be set free. Dorian is concerned only with the door Ignatius destroyed, following the screams. Dorian orders Timmy out of his house, but Ignatius cautions the movement must avoid internal strife. He wishes the two deviates would show some taste and decency. Ignatius feels his valve closing, and to shut Timmy up, raps him over the head with his cutlass. As Dorian frees Timmy, Ignatius muses how manacles and chains could transform suburban life. He will develop this theme in his journal.

In the main room, Ignatius soaks in the seething mass of people worshipping Judy Garland on the phonograph as a sort of electric tabernacle or variously knotting together in obscene postures. They are human furnishings in a severe room. These people will make it difficult to capture the redneck Calvinist vote, Ignatius calculates. Ignatius is upset that no one in this whitened sepulcher of a room has greeted--or even noticed--him. These people care only about their private fates. Dorian informs Ignatius that this is the first good party they have had in months and points out a bud vase containing one red, one white, and one blue rose; he thought that better than crepe paper. Ignatius declares it an abomination, and Dorian leads him aside to the kitchen to meet the Ladies' Auxiliary. Organizing that shows foresight, Ignatius commends Dorian.

Seated at the table are three tough women drinking canned beer. Frieda, Betty, and Liz greet Ignatius with a raucous Bronx cheer. They are bored in the kitchen, and Liz has to break up a chair fight between Frieda and Betty. Ignatius pleads for peace and ducks an unopened beer can aimed at his head. Dorian steps in. He is keeping them isolated to prevent the brawl they would surely start with his other friends. Dorian explains they would crash the party if uninvited and are in a bad mood tonight because of police trouble the other day. Ignatius demands they be expelled to keep the movement unbesmirched, but Dorian feels sorry for them. They were forced to leave California after assaulting a bodybuilder, and they serve as watchdogs and protectors in exchange for sanctuary in his building. Ignatius sees value in this for the movement.

It is time, Ignatius declares in a business-like tone, to shut off the phonograph and get down to business. Dorian is annoyed that Ignatius has turned out to be so dreary and wishes he would leave. Chanting "Peace!" Ignatius pulls the plug and commands silence so he can speak about saving the world. Now all eyes are on the grotesque figure. The guests are not amused at this interruption of their fun and prepare to go elsewhere. Ignatius finds his notes and talks of apocalypse. Guests fear Ignatius' eyes and demand Dorian end this inappropriate, tasteless charade. Dorian restores power to the phonograph and begins actively ignoring Ignatius, who flashes back to a high school chemistry accident that made him wet himself. Ignatius shadow duels to relieve his discomfort and tries in vain to get Dorian's attention.

Bored in the kitchen, Frieda, Liz, and Betty burst through the door and attach themselves to Ignatius. Timmy asks Ignatius to dance, and Liz demands that they limbo. Ignatius' excuses anger the trio, and they tackle him backward onto a guest. Fellow partygoers huddle fearfully in the corners, begging Dorian to get rid of Ignatius. Dorian gives in, feeling betrayed by Ignatius, and the Ladies' Auxiliary ushers him through the



door and onto the sidewalk. Ignatius begins loudly dissociating himself politically from such distempered people but is cut short when Frieda offers him a 10-minute head start before they begin stalking him. Betty observes they have not had a fight in a while and are ready for one. The door slams as Ignatius waddles back and forth in fury, lamenting he has nothing to report to Myrna. A second debacle. Fortuna is a vicious slut.

Unable to face his mother, Ignatius sets off for the Night of Joy. Miss O'Hara's photograph restores his hopes of confounding Myrna. The night may yet be rescued. A man in silk suit and homburg follows Ignatius, undetected. He has been watching Dorian's building. Outside the bar, Ignatius finds Jones hawking "Harla O'Horror" and her plantation act. Everyone will catch the clap off the glasses, he guarantees. Opening night might be people's only chance to catch this act. No one enters the premises. Jones is happy to admit Ignatius to a ringside table and assures him the Nazi is in California. Only a few old men are scattered around the room. Ignatius looks forward to whispering comments about Boethius to get Miss O'Hara's attention. The bartender ignores Ignatius, but a Latin barmaid comes over. They have only champagne at \$24 a bottle. Ignatius demands to be left alone, and a weak fanfare sounds before she can complete her threats.

Ignatius wants to flee when Lana appears to introduce the act. Darlene sweeps on stage in a ball gown and immediately flubs her only line. Ignatius cannot remain silent at such a performance. The cockatoo spots Ignatius's earring and dashes, squawking, towards Ignatius' head. Darlene points out "the crazy man." Ignatius runs for the street, the bird digging claws into his shoulder and snagging the earring with its beak. Bottles and glasses shatter in his wake. Lana orders the band to stop and somebody to fetch Jones. Darlene laments opening night is ruined. Ignatius threatens lawsuits and the barmaid demands her \$24 immediately. Ignatius stumbles past Jones and is nearly struck by an oncoming bus. He faints, staring into its headlights, saved only by Jones pulling him backward rather than letting him topple forward.

As a crowd forms, the man in the homburg steps forward and orders people to give Ignatius some air. Jones thinks back to a different disguise and recognizes Mancuso. Lana fires Darlene, Jones, and the Latina. The crowd ignores Lana's invitation to a new and classy Night of Joy, finding greater interest in the great white mound in the street. The homburg asks politely to use the phone to call an ambulance, and Lana, hoping yet to make a profit on the evening, wonders what high-paying profession this soft touch of a man might be in. Ignatius dreams feverishly about Myrna's being tried in the court of Taste and Decency and given a dreadful sentence. Lana slips a Boethian photograph to the homburg, suggesting they spend the night together. Mancuso identifies himself as an undercover officer and arrests Lana for solicitation and possession of pornography. Just then, Frieda, Betty, and Liz find Ignatius, as threatened.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Chapter 12 shows Ignatius' political plans thwarted as Dorian and his friends seek only to party. He cannot face his mother, who, we are led to believe, has spoken again with



Santa and doubtlessly been further pressured into having Ignatius institutionalized. Instead, he goes to the Night of Joy bar in hopes of finding the beautiful Boethian student performing her unique act of satire on the Old South. Jones happily admits him as the crowning jewel in his plan to sabotage Lana's business, and Darlene's bird fixates on Ignatius' pirate earring, sending him flailing from the bar. Mancuso, reputedly costumed for a change as a prosperous businessman, is on the scene and finally makes the arrest that will redeem his doomed career. The chapter ends abruptly, with the fearsome Ladies' Auxiliary catching up with their prey of the night, conveniently disabled in the street--surely not a good omen.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Ignatius awakens, confused, in a hospital, his aching head bandaged and his mother grousing in his ear. How will she face people after this? Ignatius looks at the newspaper Irene throws at him--"Wild Incident on Bourbon Street" headlines and three accompanying photographs: Darlene in ball gown with cockatoo; Lana Lee being loaded into a squad car beside three tough-looking, closely cropped women (with Mancuso proudly holding the door for them); and a doped Negro grinning at a dead cow in the street. Ignatius criticizes the staff photographers' ineptitude.

What, Irene demands, will the neighbors think about her son being mixed up with brawls, dirty pictures, and ladies of the evening? She refuses to listen to Ignatius' ramblings and forces him to read the text, which names him as a participant. Irene sniffles about calling Santa to alert Mancuso to Ignatius' suspicious dress and activities, which sent him to the St. Peter St. address that Irene heard Ignatius give to the taxi driver. Ignatius fulminates against the bus driver and the medical profession, but Irene is finished listening to his stupidities. Ignatius' blaming everything on Myrna, Irene declares, is pure insanity; Myrna is not even in town. Ignatius has no compassion for Irene's sufferings that evening and takes the return of his *The Consolation of Philosophy* tome as proof Mancuso is his nemesis. Subhumans have conspired against him, and Fortuna has wantonly abandoned him.

Irene orders Ignatius to shut up. The hospital wants \$20 before it will discharge him, and his trumpet payment is due tomorrow. Then there is the man whose building she hit. Ignatius rails against highway robbery and is content to spend more time in this peaceful hospital. He demands pencils and paper from his room, quickly, so he can record his traumas while the memory is fresh. Irene orders him out of bed immediately. Claude is on his way to pay the bill. Ignatius demands to know who Claude is and forbids his paying his bill; Ignatius will remain in bed until honest money buys his freedom. By now, Irene is too angry to respond to Ignatius' criticism of her attire.

Seeing the paper, Clyde fires Ignatius; an ape like him could destroy 10 years' work at building a decent commercial name. He doubts he will get the uniform back. What a family!

Seeing the newspaper, Dr. Talc stops smiling as he realizes calling a weenie vendor before the faculty as a witness will be fruitless. Talc has been the butt of campus humor since the note about his "underdeveloped testicles" began to spread, and he figured that finding Ignatius and forcing him to confess to writing the note would end the calumny. He was convinced the faculty would understand, just looking at that mound of flesh. Talc had been recalling the horrible semester he endured teaching Ignatius and his anarchist girlfriend and sipping a remedy for last night's intoxication when he saw



the story. Revealing Ignatius now will only serve to make Talc look like a clown. Talc will just have to live with the jokes.

Seeing the morning paper, Annie turns red and vows to rally the neighbors to sign a petition to rid themselves of the Reillys.

Holding the newspaper up before his chest with pride, Mancuso poses for yet another snapshot. He wants plenty of pictures for his children to show to their friends. The sergeant is amazed Mancuso has turned out to be a hero. Mancuso reveals Jones tipped him where to look under the bar for the postcards. Still, it was a one-man raid, and Mancuso will probably be promoted.

Holding the newspaper up before her mother's photograph, Santa brags about her grandson Angelo, and then grieves for the mother of the washed-up whale. Santa hopes Irene will put the boy away and marry. Santa assures her mother she is praying for her.

Seeing the newspaper, Claude wonders how Ignatius could disgrace his fine, sweet mother. Santa is right: Ignatius must get treatment. This time he spent only \$20, but how much the next time? One cannot afford a stepson like that--or the disgrace.

George pastes the article into his Junior Achievement scrapbook. His mother is happy he is showing an interest in school, but George is figuring it is time to go visit his uncle on the coast. When the police arrive at the door that plan collapses.

Lana shreds the newspaper until the prison matron orders her to stop and clean it up. The Ladies' Auxiliary, occupying the same cell, orders the matron to leave; they like paper on the floor. Lana screams to get away from them. They demand to see the pictures Lana is hiding in her bra and fall upon her simultaneously.

Dorian puts the Ladies' Auxiliary's apartment up for rent, figuring they will be gone a long time, as two-time offenders. Had they been more sociable, someone might have warned them about who Mancuso was before they attacked him. Too bad also that Dorian is losing his protection. Still, that was a marvelous party. Ignatius must be heartbroken by the publicity.

Pleased with the publicity, Darlene cut her picture out of the paper and thinks about how Jones had put them all out of business. She feels sorry for that crazy big man's momma. As she ponders finding a job, the phone rings with an offer from a club owner who has read about her.

Jones spreads the newspaper out on the bar of Mattie's Ramble Inn, remarking to Watson how his idea of sabotaging the Night of Joy has turned him into a vagrant again. The fat freak set off a nuclear reaction that looked like a Western movie, a gang rumble, and a football game. It turns out Lana has no pals in the precinct, and some of her "orphans" are maybe being hauled in as well. Jones is the most famous vagrant in society and has asked Mancuso to get his colleagues to lay off him. He fears ending up in Angola with Lana. Lana was right all along: the fat freak ruins everyone's lives. Jones feels he deserves a vacation. There are too many black men looking for jobs. Darlene is



sure to have a hard time, too. Jones is sorry his sabotage exploded in her face, but he could not resist using Ignatius to blow up the Night of Joy. Watson observes Jones is lucky he was not hauled in with everyone else, and Jones explains that Mancuso was grateful for pointing out the pictures of Lana beneath the bar, pictures that would help Mancuso get ahead. Jones, however, has gone from broom expert to vagrant. Jones agrees philosophically with Watson, things can always be worse--he could be that fat mother--and wonders what will happen with Ignatius.

After a sleepless night, Gus Levy reads the paper. He and Mrs. Levy had driven to Mandeville to visit Ignatius but were rudely turned away. Mrs. Levy is not particularly concerned because she hopes, deviously, that Abelman will win the libel suit and ruin her husband in their daughters' eyes. Gus has canceled his spring practice reservations. He muses about things he should have done: renamed the company (because the very sound of "Levy Pants" gives him indigestion) and removed Gonzales from the thankless, low-paying job he loves (although that would probably drive the office manager to suicide). No one seems to want to buy the business. Gus recalls wanting the name changed to "Levy Trousers" since childhood, but was thrust aside by his father.

Gus tells his wife he has found Ignatius--in the newspaper. She admires Ignatius' cleverness in sending them to Mandeville like stooges. Seeing the young idealist in the photo as a bloated derelict, she declares Ignatius another of Gus' victims. Soon Gus will be pushing a wagon. She has her mother's money to fall back on. She mocks her husband and declares the Leon Levy Foundation must go forward and reward people having the courage and bravery of the founder. She will not let Leon's name be dragged down, but Gus deserves his sorry fate. Gus realizes from this diatribe his wife needs him to lose the suit and be totally ruined for her to justify herself. The young idealist is too clever, Mrs. Levy taunts, for Gus to pin down. Mrs. Levy demands to hitch a ride as far as Trixie's apartment. Trixie's old hostility toward the company is back and she must receive attention. Gus vows to himself that if Abelman's suit fails, he will give the company a little supervision.

Mrs. Levy heaves herself out of the bucket seat outside Trixie's apartment building, taking along the cookies intended for Mandeville. Gus speeds off and pulls up at the Reillys' address. He hears a phone ringing indoors. Annie yells over that no one is home. Ignatius ought to be in an asylum. He lives with his mother, who has probably gone to get him out of the hospital. Ignatius has destroyed both women's nerves. He was precious as a kid, but look at him now, lying in the gutter. He and his mother fight all the time now. Annie is suspicious of Gus' questions until Gus explains Ignatius used to work for him. He asks whether Ignatius has a police record, and Annie reveals his mother is seeing an undercover officer. Irene likes to drink. Ignatius was okay until his dog died. That is when the fighting began: when Ignatius left the Catholic Church and put on a funeral of his own, wearing a Superman cape and burning candles in front of a dozen kids. His mother had to sell her piano to keep Ignatius in college for 10 years, and she nearly went broke. Ignatius picked up some girl in college, and they put on hootenannies every night in his room. Then the girl left--and Annie cannot blame her. Gus is depressed hearing the story, but Annie is happy to have an audience. She says



she is going to have the police put Ignatius under a peace bond Annie abruptly ends the story and disappears.

Gus turns to see Ignatius and Irene arrive, fighting over the affair she is having with a degenerate old fascist and her conspiring with that police officer from before the encounter outside D. H. Holmes. Irene orders Ignatius out of the car. To Gus, Irene looks like a floozy. Irene falls on her knees to ask God what she has done wrong. Ignatius demands Irene get off Rex's grave, and denounces how her friends are scheming viciously against him. Irene tries to explain her relationship with Claude, whom she would happily marry, if he asks. Then she will not have to worry about money. They found nearly \$30 in Ignatius' clothes at the hospital--and withholding that from his poor mother is the last straw. Ignatius is just plain mean. Ignatius forecasts a life of degradation for Irene if she remains with Claude, and she draws herself up, tired, disgusted, and uninterested in his views. She is tired of being kicked around by a son who learned all there is to learn, except how to be a human being. Claude might be dumb, but he is her only chance at dying halfway decently. Irene tells Ignatius to go to hell for breaking her heart so often. Ignatius bars Claude from his home and invokes his late father's memory.

As a new fight looms, Gus steps in to introduce himself to Irene, and he asks to speak privately with Ignatius. Irene demands he talk to Gus. Ignatius examines the two letters and maintains he could not have written the letter because Gonzalez allows no one to use the typewriter. Irene is sure Ignatius is guilty and demands he tell the truth before she hits him in his bandaged head. Ignatius is saved by a phone call. Irene glares at him as she protests to the caller that she, Ignatius' mother, is sober. She promises to return the costume, again maintains she is not drunk, and slams down the phone. "You're fired," she says, and Ignatius is relieved. Mother and son fall to fighting over another lost job, and Irene strikes Ignatius when he blocks her from reading Levy's letters. Gus is convinced Ignatius is a victim of abuse and is sorry to have fired him.

Ignatius grabs Gus' lapels histrionically, begs for help, and suggests Trixie is the culprit. He leads Gus into his room, leaving Irene shouting that Ignatius should not be believed. Gus is nauseated by the smell but dares not open the window because Annie is staring at him. Ignatius produces notes he jotted while working at Levy Pants, visions of restoring Gus to belief in his company and suggesting Trixie resents the firm. Trixie wants only to retire and knows a great deal. Snatching back his "evidence," Ignatius advises Gus to penetrate her false senility. Gus doubts Trixie could write such a letter, but he admits that she hates the company enough to break it. Ignatius, by contrast, loves it. Claustrophobia torments Gus, and he squeezes out and drives away with Irene's voice ringing out against Ignatius. Irene declares forgery a federal offense, and Ignatius is in real trouble. Feeling ill, Ignatius blames it all on Irene's forcing him take a job.

Gus drives to Trixie's, certain his wife is behind the lawsuit. Trixie's apartment is a sea of debris through which a narrow aisle has been cleared to the window, where the old lady is gorging on cookies. Trixie has discarded all "improvements" except the gleaming teeth. Gus demands to know whether Trixie wrote the letter. Mrs. Levy gloats that the



idealist has fooled him again. Trixie examines the letter and declares they are in trouble now. Mr. Reilly claims she wrote it. "Who," Trixie demands, "is Reilly?" A description of the fat man in a green cap clarifies Gus means her true blue friend, Gloria Reilly. If Gloria says Trixie wrote the letter, it must be true. Levy Pants deserves trouble, and Trixie hopes they lose everything. Mrs. Levy turns on Trixie as a viper in her bosom. Gus steps between the screaming women, gloating over Susan and Sandra's reaction to news of their mother torturing an old lady. Gus gloats about the harebrained "project" of renovating Trixie that will bring about the downfall of Levy Pants. Mrs. Levy demands that Gus see Lenny's doctor immediately. Gus, for once, agrees. The doctor can declare Trixie senile and incompetent.

Gus comforts Trixie and promises that she can retire with a raise in exchange for a signed confession. Trixie agrees with elation and thankfulness toward her smart friend Gloria. Trixie will say anything they want. Mrs. Levy is bitter because her husband thinks he has something on her. Gus plans to shift production to Bermuda shorts that will actually sell and will rename Levy Pants as "Levy Shorts." They argue about Gus's ability to run any business. What will happen to Mrs. Levy and the girls when he fails? What about the foundation? Gus picks up a newspaper and points to the picture of Jones standing over the fallen idealist. The Foundation will go forward, and Jones will receive the first award for meritorious service and bravery. It will be good public relations and improve factory morale. Mrs. Levy questions Gus's sudden idealism. This is not spite, Gus replies. Finally, he is doing something constructive. Gus orders his wife down the street to phone Lenny's doctor. Gus will call Jones personally. Trixie demands her Easter ham, as long as Mrs. Levy is going to the store. It is her condition for signing a confession. Levy gives his wife \$10 and sends her on her grumbling way

Gus' mind is calm for the first time in days. Visiting the crazy Reilly household has convinced him that Ignatius wrote the letter. The kooky language matches. Still, it is best for Trixie to be framed. Everyone will be saved. Jones, whoever he is, deserves a generous award. Gus will offer him a good job at Levy Shorts--even better for public relations! Gus watches a freighter sail out to sea and imagines his wife sailing soon to San Juan. She will not fit into the Levy Shorts plan.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Chapter 13 deals with the aftermath of the fracas at the Night of Joy bar. The reaction of each principal to the headline newspaper report is examined, revealing a few details of how everything fell together into a perfect storm. Irene and Ignatius face off repeatedly, first in the hospital where Ignatius landed, suffering no more than scratches and panic, but certain he is near death and threatening legal action against everyone involved. Irene reveals her relationship with Claude, and they fight over that. They fight in front of Gus Levy, and Irene's new resolution not to be taken advantage of by her useless son causes Gus to misjudge her as a dictator. Irene believes her son causes trouble everywhere he goes, but Ignatius plants in Gus the seeds of a plot to blame the letter on the senile Trixie, who is willing to admit to anything, provided they let her retire. The Levys have a final fight over the destruction of the family building, and it appears that

Gus will pull all the chestnuts out of the fire without being burned. All that remains to be seen is how Ignatius will end up.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Ignatius has spent the afternoon napping, masturbating, and ignoring the phone. He fears Gus Levy. Ignatius is avoiding his mother, who is busy lamenting the family's ruin. Gus is too petty a person to withstand a trial. What might Trixie be babbling in Gus' ear? Ignatius feels like a condemned prisoner. Abelman will surely demand his life when it is proved Ignatius forged the letter. Filled painfully with gas, Ignatius reviews all the characters who have connived to cause his downfall, focusing on Myrna, whom he vows to stalk for life in search of vengeance, and his traitorous mother, who is contemplating marriage. Claude will doubtlessly testify to get his future stepson locked away. Doubtlessly, too, Irene will end up a penniless prostitute.

Irene is also thinking about the letter and Ignatius' landing in jail. She listens outside his door to the squeaking and belching, but does not want to see his face. For the fourth time today, she calls Santa. Ignatius has to be committed, Irene admits, but they cannot talk about this by phone. Claude told Santa about the scene Ignatius made at the hospital and is now afraid of him. Santa claims Claude suggests he and Santa move in for Irene's protection, but Irene refuses. She wants Ignatius declared temporarily insane (like on TV) for his own good. He is in trouble at Levy Pants. Irene is too nervous to be home when the Charity people come for Ignatius. Santa agrees: it will be like netting a wild elephant. Santa offers to call the Charity immediately. Irene and Claude should meet at her house. Claude will be happy to hear this news. They will be married soon and Irene will be well provided for. Irene likes the sound of this, but is still concerned about the fixation on communism. That will go away, Santa is sure, once they are busy together. Claude will want to turn Ignatius' room into a den, and that will turn Annie green!

Irene is glad it is dark, so the neighbors will not see Ignatius dragged away. She dresses hurriedly and reaches the door, but cannot leave without saying goodbye to her child. Ignatius ignores her knocking and pleas for a goodbye kiss. Eventually he gives in, and the sight of his bandaged head brings tears to Irene's eyes. She is sorry it has to end this way. Ignatius grows suspicious of this sudden pleasantness. Irene admits Ignatius is incapable of working. He should stay indoors and not answer the phone. Ignatius has heard her whispering on the phone and is afraid. Momma is fixing things with Mr. Levy. She has his welfare at heart. Irene begs Ignatius not to be mad at her, embraces and kisses him, and then flees, apologizing for running into that building.

Ignatius thunders at the fleeing car to come back. Ignatius is certain his mother has a clumsy plan up her sleeve. He phones Santa and demands to speak with his mother. Santa denies talking with her today, which confirms Ignatius' fears. Only a plot can explain the emotional farewell. They must be plotting to commit him to psychiatric tortures in the Charity. Ignatius prefers jail, where one is limited only physically. Cursing



wretched Fortuna, Ignatius waddles around the house like a sitting duck while mother bowls, and a barred truck speeds towards him, a clay pigeon.

Ignatius realizes he must move fast. It is 8 PM, his \$30 is gone, and he finds only 60¢ in his bed--limiting him to hiding out in the Prytania. Myrna, rather than health workers, knocks at the door. Pulling her indoors, Ignatius declares he has been through hell, asks why Myrna left his life, and kisses her pigtail vigorously. They must flee to Manhattan, where he will flower as she always says orr to a motel to release his natural impulses--has she any money? Myrna wants to rest from her 36-hour drive. Ignatius admits his telegram was horrible and deranged--but they must leave immediately! Ignatius' desperation does not register, and he is forced to narrate all that has been transpiring. He confesses to sublimating through food and renews his plea to escape a house so full of bad associations. Myrna's interest revives and she announces they must get him packed. Ignatius cares only about his writings, to keep them out of fascist hands. The journal has commercial potential. Myrna recalls good times spent in his room, composing anti-Talc manifestos and babbles about how happy her therapy group will be to see him. Ignatius cannot wait to see New York but fears, if they do not leave instantly, Mother will return with her mob. Ignatius declines to leave a bitter note. Myrna rejoices to be saving someone.

Myrna and Ignatius load her Renault and Ignatius climbs into the back seat, determined not to sit in the deadly front seat. He is frantic that she start the car, and Myrna grows vexed. Ignatius demands they drive straight through, despite Myrna's exhaustion. They must avoid Mandeville, where psychiatrists must be on alert. Every route Myrna suggests holds lethal dangers. When Annie demands where the two beatniks are going, Ignatius' valve slams shut. Myrna realizes Ignatius is his same old self and fears she is making a mistake. A Charity ambulance passes the Renault as they drive away. Fortuna has saved Ignatius. Myrna makes her way through city traffic and onto U.S. 11, where purgative sea air opens Ignatius' valve and relieves his headache. Ignatius kisses Myrna's pigtail.

Chapter 14 Analysis

The final chapter reveals the plot to have Ignatius committed, and his salvation by Myrna. Myrna is exhausted from a frantic drive from New York, and is slow picking up Ignatius' desperation. Ignatius, who has shown remarkable ability to misread situations, has the presence of mind to use all the buzzwords that will get his way. As they escape New Orleans, Ignatius is amazed that Myrna's prediction he could be freed only by escaping his prison home is correct.



Characters

Ignatius Jacques Reilly

The novel's protagonist is an elephantine 30-year old man, Ignatius is perpetually, conspicuously, but comfortably dressed in green hunting cap with earflaps, tweed trousers, plaid flannel shirt, muffler, and suede desert boots. Ignatius has full lips, a bushy black mustache, and hauntingly large eyes, one yellow and one blue. They show that Ignatius scorns a modern world void of theology and geometry. Ignatius enjoys a Rich Inner Life based on Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*, and views himself to be spinning downward on the *Rota Fortunzh* (Wheel of Fortune) the great medieval work. Ignatius hates the modernism of the Catholic Church, but he admires medieval piety and constantly invokes the saints.

Irene Reilly

Hard-working, arthritic, henna-haired and alcoholic, she is Ignatius' mother, who dropped out of school to help her own mother, an immigrant who spoke no English, at her seafood stand. Irene married when her boyfriend got her pregnant after a movie, and she idolized her oversized son. She spent her inheritance putting Ignatius through college and graduate school and continues to support him on Social Security and a tiny widow's pension. Nervous at Ignatius' carping on her driving, Irene plows the car into a building, collapsing its balcony, and incurring a new debt she knows she cannot honor without sending Ignatius to work. Chances are good Irene will better her life now by marrying Claude.

Angelo Mancuso

Married to nervous Rita and father of three, Mancuso is a police officer whose sergeant is determined to get him off the force. Mancuso is introduced as he is questioning Ignatius about his suspicious appearance and arresting Claude Robichaux for interference. This and other false steps get Mancuso assigned to undercover work in a variety of demeaning disguises, and ultimately lands him in the men's room at the bus station, where he contracts pneumonia. Mancuso takes pity on Irene Reilly after investigating her car crash and he arranges time payments on the debt. As Ignatius' behavior worsens, Mancuso dresses up and follows him to the Night of Joy bar, where Mancuso stumbles into Jones's plot to bring the bar manager down. Mancuso gets in the newspapers as the hero who brings down a citywide pornography and prostitution ring for which he will doubtlessly be promoted.



Miss Trixie

Levy Pants' inaccurate assistant accountant for 50 years, Trixie is now in her 80s, dimwitted, somnambulant, and savagely bitter. Trixie mistakes Ignatius for Gloria, a stenographer recently fired, and takes a liking to him. Trixie's only goal is to retire, but the owner's wife, Mrs. Levy, is convinced that retirement will kill Trixie. Mrs. Levy takes Trixie on as a project, modernizes her clothing and makeup, and fits her out with a lethal set of false teeth. The efforts only deepen Trixie's hatred for the company and determination to get revenge. When a letter signed by Gus Levy threatens a ruinous lawsuit, Ignatius's forgery is discovered, but he blames Trixie. The Levys go to her apartment, which is cluttered from wall to wall, with a path cleared only from door to window, and Trixie declares that if her good friend Gloria (Ignatius) says she wrote the letter, it must be true. She will swear to anything they want, provided she is allowed finally to retire.

Myrna Minkoff

Ignatius' radical but unfocused lost love, Myrna was born and raised in the Bronx, but escaped to New Orleans to attend college, using money bilked from a father with whom she shares no political or economic views. There, as an undergraduate, Myrna met Ignatius, a graduate student, and they began a relationship that he demanded be strictly platonic. Myrna and Ignatius took pleasure in tormenting Dr. Talc. Myrna advocated sexual freedom on campus until two followers came to grief, and a custodian outside Talc's office raped her. Myrna returned to New York, as a folksinger and political activist, but kept in touch with Ignatius through letters and occasional visits, while promoting antique black folk music to unappreciative audiences. Myrna is part of a therapy group with whom she shares Ignatius' stories, and barrages him with calls to give into his natural sexual urges, flee New Orleans, and experience life with her. Preoccupation with getting ahead of Myrna consumes Ignatius, whom he calls a minx and the root of all his woes. A particularly troubling letter from Ignatius convinces Myrna to drive 36 hours, straight through from New York to New Orleans to rescue him from his Oedipal self-seclusion. Myrna arrives, exhausted and wanting to sleep, only to find Ignatius anxious to act instantly on all her old arguments. Myrna relents and, wondering if he is truly changed, spirits Ignatius away just ahead of the ambulance dispatched to take him to a psychiatric ward.

Claude Robichaux

Claude is the old man picked up by Officer Angelo Mancuso for making trouble when Mancuso was questioning suspicious-looking Ignatius. Claude is retired after 45 years with the railroad and enjoys a good pension. He is tired of living with her daughter's family, and several times admires Irene Reilly. Mancuso's aunt, Santa Battaglia, introduces them. Claude is consumed by anti-communism, which got him into trouble with Mancuso in the first place, and is the only thing about him that gives Irene reason not to want to be married. Claude pays Ignatius' hospital bill after the fracas at the Night



of Joy bar, and shares Santa's conviction that Ignatius must get psychiatric help. He worries about getting further involved with Irene otherwise.

Burma Jones

The black man whose eyes are always hidden behind sunglasses and who constantly blows clouds of cigarette smoke, Jones first appears as he is awaiting processing when Claude Robichaux is brought in for causing a public disturbance. Jones claims he was standing around Woolworth's when someone stole some cashew nuts, and the police grabbed him. The sergeant orders Jones to find a job or face jail as a vagrant. Jones, who sees vestiges of slavery everywhere, finds a job in the Night of Joy bar, sweeping floors for \$20 a week. The owner, Lana Lee, holds over Jones' head the threat of being returned to the streets, which means going to Angola State Prison. Jones, in turn, begins looking for ways to bring Lana down. Learning about an abortive uprising in the Levy Pants factory led by a "mother in a green cap," Jones figures Ignatius is the key to a good sabotage plan. Seeing where Lana hides packages beneath the cash register, Burma is able to put Officer Mancuso onto evidence that will get him the big arrest he needs and get Jones off the hook. Ignatius plays perfectly into Jones's plan. Gus Levy, reading about the fracas in the newspaper, decides Jones should be the first recipient of the Leon Levy Foundation award for heroism and the offer of a job in the Levy Shorts' operation. Jones's only regret is causing sweet, innocent Darlene her job, but the newspaper article works to her advantage as well.

Dorian Greene

A young homosexual man dressed in a bottle-green velvet jacket, drinking daiquiris, Dorian first meets the Reillys in the Night of Joy bar, as they lie low after Officer Mancuso tried to arrest Ignatius. Irene wins Dorian over with her kindness, and sells him her hat. Dorian remembers fat, insulting Ignatius less fondly, and when they meet again, Ignatius tries to drive Dorian away from the sidewalk where he sits resting his enormous tired feet. Dorian and the hot dog vendor bicker and trade insults for a while, Dorian dancing around happily to avoid Ignatius' scimitar and a shoe, which he throws back at the ersatz pirate, dropping him to the ground. They discover common ground in forming a homosexual political party, which Dorian agrees to host at his home. Dorian has a wide circle of gay friends, whom he loves to entertain. New Orleans is in perpetual Mardi Gras, a refreshing change from Dorian's native Nebraska. His relatives there paid for his East Coast education and now for him to stay away. As the wild party evolves, it is clear Dorian wants only fun, and Ignatius wants only business. Dorian tires of the large pest, sides with his guests, and lets his "Women's Auxiliary" expel Ignatius from the building.



Lana Lee

The owner of the Night of Joy bar, Lana is a tall, statuesque, sharply-dressed woman, nearing middle age. The seedy bar brings little profit, so when Lana realizes Jones, her new sweeper, fears the police, she constantly pressures him not to complain about his wages. Frustration leads Jones to look for a way to bring Lana down. Jones and Darlene convince Lana to allow Darlene and her pet cockatoo to stage a strip act, which however lame, might draw new customers into the bar. Lana puts more hope of success in soft-core pornographic pictures George takes of her, posing as a schoolteacher, and sells in schoolyards after hours. Her claims that George is a middleman for contributions to charity make Jones suspicious, and he organizes a plot that eventually gets Lana arrested for solicitation and pornography. She is last seen being put upon by a trio of tough lesbians also jailed during the raid.

Gus Levy

Owner of Levy Pants and son of the founder, Mr. Leon Levy, Gus has no interest in the running of the building, preferring to give his attention to sports. From childhood Gus has resented his mean, dismissive father, now deceased, and Gus's pampered wife (first name never revealed) perpetuates the old man's memory every chance she gets to torment Gus. She enlists their college-age daughters, Susan and Sandra, in the psychological warfare. Gus fires Ignatius after the abortive rebellion in the factory, and later learns Ignatius forged the letter that threatens him with a \$500,000 lawsuit, but allows old Miss Trixie to take the blame. Levy Pants will be transformed into Levy Shorts, as Gus wanted long ago, producing a saleable product. He uses the Trixie debacle against his wife to force her into stopping the propaganda aimed at the girls and retiring to San Juan with her mother. She does not fit in with his rejuvenated plans.

Mrs. Levy

The aquamarine-mascara-eyed, platinum-curved wife of the owner of Levy Pants, Mrs. Levy despises her husband's inattention to the business and glorifies the memory of his much-hated father, the company's founder, Leon. She is talented in and diligent about pointing out to her daughters their father's social injustices to keep up the pressure on him. To fulfill dreams left frustrated when she failed the final exam in a correspondence course on psychology, Mrs. Levy adopts Miss Trixie as her cause. The macabre external transformation she effects makes Trixie only angrier. Mrs. Levy depends on the \$500,000 lawsuit destroying her husband for her to feel justified. Gus has learned enough from her during their marriage, however, to turn the tides on her over Trixie's downfall and is happy she will soon join her mother sunning herself in San Juan.



Miss Annie

Miss Annie is the Reillys' elderly, nosey next-door neighbor, whose nerves suffer when Ignatius plays loud music or fights with his mother. Fed up by the novel's end, Annie is organizing a petition drive to force the Reillys out of the neighborhood and reveals its history to Gus Levy.

Santa Battaglia

Angelo Mancuso's stocky, gray-haired, pendulous-breasted, baritone-voiced, busy-body aunt, Santa accompanies Irene Reilly and her nephew Angelo Mancuso bowling, and introduces Irene to Mancuso's nemesis, the rich old widower, Claude Robichaux. Santa reveres the memory of her troubled late mother, and talks to and kisses her picture frequently. Santa is the strongest advocate of committing Ignatius to a mental ward.

Liz Bumper

A member, with Frieda and Betty, of the militant "Women's Auxiliary," she is relegated to the kitchen during Dorian Greene's wild party. They dislike Ignatius on sight, throw him out of Dorian's building on Dorian's request, and stalk him to the Night of Joy bar. There in a melee, they assault officer Mancuso and are jailed with Lana Lee.

Frieda Club

A member, with Betty and Liz, of the militant "Women's Auxiliary," she is relegated to the kitchen during Dorian Greene's wild party. They dislike Ignatius on sight, throw him out of Dorian's building on Dorian's request, and stalk him to the Night of Joy bar. There in a melee, they assault officer Mancuso and are jailed with Lana Lee.

Darlene

A pretty, depressed blonde working as a B-girl in the Night of Joy bar, Darlene aspires to be a dancer. She befriends Jones, the new sweeper whom owner Lana Lee also oppresses, and Jones pushes to let Darlene perform as part of his plan to bring Lana down. After having her raucous bump-and-grind strip act rejected by Lana, Darlene is transformed into Roberta E. Lee, starring as Harlett O'Hara, the "Virgin-ny Belle. (and pet!)." Newspaper reports of the fracas that breaks out on opening night land Lana an offer from a better class of bar.

George

George is the slouching, greasy-haired, ballpoint pen-tattooed intermediary for Lana Lee's pornography ring. He and Ignatius try to take advantage of one another in renting



space in the weenie wagon to store George's packages. Not caught up in the raid on the Night of Joy bar, George is nonetheless arrested at home even as he plans to escape to the coast.

Mr. Gonzalez

Levy Pants's dedicated Office Manager for 20 years, Gonzalez does his best in a trying situation. He hires Ignatius, despite his appearance, with great hopes he will help the company. Gonzalez's greatest burden is trying to make senile Miss Trixie feel appreciated, as Mrs. Levy demands. Gonzalez escapes injury when Ignatius' rebellious factory workers refuse his order to attack. Later, we learn that Abelman's Dry Goods is suing Gus Levy for \$500,000 in libel, only Gonzalez has access to the office typewriter, and he routinely signs Gus's letters. Gonzalez suspects Ignatius, who was employed at the time the letter went out, and thus is exonerated.

Hroswitha

Hroswitha is a medieval nun whose serenity Ignatius greatly admires.

Lenny

Lenny is the owner of a religious artifacts store frequented by Irene Reilly, who owes the resurrection of his business to treatment by a psychiatrist that Mrs. Levy demands her husband also visit.

Leola

Leola is Myrna Minkoff's closest friend, a girl from the streets of Harlem whom enlisted to play the female lead in her play about interracial marriage, opposite Shmuel. Leola demands a salary, which dooms the project.

Leon Levy

Gus Levy's father, founder of Levy Pants, Leon forbade his son to take any business initiative, earning his eternal hatred and marginalizing him in the company's operation. Mrs. Levy constantly extols her father-in-law's rise from pushcart vendor to mogul and wants to establish a charitable foundation in his memory.



Susan and Sandra Levy

The Levys' spoiled, idealistic college-age daughters, who are away at school, Susan and Sandra are used constantly by their mother as a means of coercing Gus through guilt.

Rita Mancuso

The patrolman's nervous wife, Rita buys every new appliance advertised on television.

Ongah

Ongah is an exchange student from Kenya, about whom Myrna enthuses in a letter to Ignatius as real, vital, virile, and aggressive, a musician, and a sculptor. When he fails to attend Myrna's lecture and abandons her cause, she turns on him.

Mr. Palermo

The foreman of the Levy Pants factory, Mr. Palermo drinks on and off duty, and mostly stays out of sight.

Shmuel

Shmuel is Myrna Minkoff's friend from high school whom she enlists to play the male lead opposite Leola in her film about interracial marriage.

Betty Steele

A member, with Frieda and Liz, of the militant "Women's Auxiliary," Betty is relegated to the kitchen during Dorian Greene's wild party. They dislike Ignatius on sight, throw him out of Dorian's building on Dorian's request, and stalk him to the Night of Joy bar.

Dr. Talc

Dr. Talc is one of Ignatius' college professors, whom he attacked as a total ass in a crayoned note the popular, sarcastic professor finds while preparing for a lecture. Talc covers up his nearly total ignorance through glibness. A student discovers one of Ignatius' old crayon-lettered diatribes against Talc and publishes it around school. Talc is determined to get Ignatius to confess before the faculty, but he is dismayed to see in the newspaper what Ignatius has become. Talc will have to accept being the butt of jokes.



Mr. Watson

The quiet café-au-lait-skinned owner/operator of Mattie's Ramble Inn in the Carrollton section of New Orleans, Watson, who put his son through college, regularly counsels Jones.

Mr. Zalatimo

Ignatius' replacement as file clerk at Levy Pants, Mr. Zalatimo is tall, threadbare, scratches a lot, and has trouble with the alphabet. Trixie thinks he looks like a gangster.



Objects/Places

Abelman's Dry Goods

This store is a 30-year retailer of Levy Pants products, currently claiming a recent shipment was defective. Needing to escape the depressing office, Levy orders Gonzalez to sign a letter to them as usual. Earlier in the day, Ignatius noticed a large rat eating their paperwork and forges a disjointed, unprofessional, and downright nasty letter. Abelman's takes offense and sues for \$500,000.

Angola

Angola is the Louisiana State Penitentiary to which Jones repeatedly refers as being where black people are sent without justification.

The Board

The board is Mrs. Levy's mechanized exercise apparatus that husband Gus despises as a symbol of her decadence and she uses as a means of diverting their fights.

The Charity Hospital

The Charity Hospital is the Catholic-run institution offering medical care for indigents. Santa convinces Irene she should commit Ignatius to its psychological wing for treatment.

The Consolation of Philosophy

Boethius' seminal *De Consolatione Pilosophizh*, upon which Ignatius bases his world view. The *Rota Fortunzh* (Wheel of Fortune) works in cycles, and Ignatius' appears to be spinning downward. Ignatius lends a physical copy of the book to his mother's bad luck friend Mancuso, and George steals it from him in a men's restroom. George provides it as a prop to Lana Lee for her risquy photographs, and Mancuso restores it to Ignatius after raiding the Lana's Night of Joy bar, thereby completing another turn of the wheel of fortune.

Fazio's Bowling Alley

The site of Irene Reilly's rebirth is Fazio's Bowling Alley.



Levy Pants Company

Levy Pants is the failing manufacturing company where Ignatius finds--and loses--his first job. The offices where Ignatius works are at the top of a three-story commercial building to which the barn like factory is attached. After figuring out the mystery of the forged letter that threatened ruin to the company, Gus Levy decides to reorient the product line into Bermuda shorts, rename it Levy Shorts, and become involved in the operation after decades of neglect.

Mandeville State Hospital

Mandeville State Hospital is the pay-for-services facility for the insane to which Ignatius claims Mr. Reilly has been confined in order to keep him from having to talk to Gus Levy. The staff treats the Levys rudely when they attempt a visit. At the end of the novel, Ignatius is anxious Myrna drive nowhere near Mandeville during his escape to New York.

Mattie's Ramble Inn

Mattie's Ramble Inn is a combination bar and grocery located in the Carrollton section of New Orleans. Its facade is covered with tin advertising posters. Despite the name, there is no Mattie. Mr. Watson is the owner/operator.

The Night of Joy Bar

The Night of Joy is the dark, empty, odiferous bar on Bourbon St. in the French Quarter of New Orleans, LA, where Irene and Ignatius Reilly hide from the police officer that intends to arrest him. Much of the action takes part in the bar, where sweeper Jones plots to bring down the avaricious owner, Lana Lee. The climax comes when Ignatius attends the premier of Darlene's Southern belle strip act, is attacked by her cockatoo, flees into the street, is comforted by an undercover cop, whom Lana propositions, and is hauled off to jail.

Paradise Vendors, Inc.

Paradise Vendors, Inc. is the headquarters of Mr. Clyde's fleet of hot-dog-shaped vending machines. Paradise Vendors is located on Poydras St. Ignatius and Clyde face off several times on the stinking premises.

The Prytania

The Prytania is the movie theater Ignatius frequents nearly nightly. Its managers and employees are used to his disruptive behavior.



The Reilly Home

A dying banana tree, plywood Celtic cross, and 1946 Plymouth, but no shrubs or grass marks the smallest house on Constantinople Street, the Reilly Home. The kitchen is small and outdated, the living room dark, and Ignatius' second-floor room, facing Miss Annie's windows, stinks. He spends much of his time frolicking in the adjacent bathroom. A smell of used teabags suffuses the house. The final scene of the novel takes place here, as Irene kisses her son goodbye after arranging for him to be locked away for psychiatric treatment. Ignatius smells a trap, and is helped by Myrna to collect his writings and flee, just in time.

Rex

Rex is Ignatius' boyhood pet, over whose funeral Ignatius split with the Catholic Church. Rex's Celtic cross grave stands in the front yard of the Reilly home. Pleasant memories of Rex that help Ignatius masturbate.

The Valve

Ignatius claims his pyloric valve, which separates the stomach from the duodenum, responds to stress by clamping shut, causing his stomach to fill painfully with gas. It is a barometer of his mood and an element in his introductions to new acquaintances.



Social Sensitivity

A Confederacy of Dunces is about a gross, obese, gluttonous, half-mad, thirty-year-old slob, named Ignatius O'Reilly. Ignatius considers himself a genius, and he feels out of place in modern society, which he sees as a conspiracy designed to offend him. He dubs this conspiracy "A Confederacy of Dunces," borrowing the phrase from Jonathan Swift. Ignatius lives shabbily in New Orleans, with his alcoholic, dim-witted mother, who repeatedly subjects him to the ultimate indignity of going to work for a living. Most of the novel consists of his misadventures at several jobs (he sells the world's foulest hot dogs but eats all the merchandise), his run-ins with the people he meets, and his tirades against the outrages of modern life. He rages in inflated, oratory, florid language at whatever displeases him; nearly everything displeases him.

Readers may be surprised to realize the novel's story occurs in 1962, so contemporary are some of its concerns.

For instance, a bohemian/beatnik liberal woman, Myra, who tries to become Ignatius' lover, is obsessed with liberal concerns that are much more widely discussed today than they were in 1962 — feminism, open sexuality, civil rights. She resembles, satirically, the protesters and marchers of a few years later.

Ignatius reacts against the complacency, falseness, and hypocrisy which characterized the 1950s and early 1960s. While watching television or movies — notably Doris Day's 1962 films, "Jumbo" and "That Touch of Mink," both described in detail but not named — he rants against the hidden corruption he sees lurking below the supposedly innocent surface. He has a particular obsession with Doris Day, believing that her facade of wholesomeness conceals perverted depravity.

He makes a running commentary during her films, creating a disturbance in the theater.

He visits an art show given by wellmeaning but shallow club women and screams, "Who is responsible for this abortion?" This closes the show. He is fascinated, attracted, and repelled by the apparent duplicity of the media and the arts.

Ignatius also unsuccessfully attempts to organize black workers at a factory where he is employed and becomes the dupe of a pornography ring which hides lewd packages in his hot dog cart. In these episodes Toole satirizes other issues which have remained contemporary.

Techniques

Outrageous exaggeration of each character's overriding personality trait, repetition of each character's keywords and actions, and the florid verbose articulation of Ignatius all combine to make a somewhat wordy and drawn-out book. It is episodic and many of the characters do not meet or seem connected; but as previously noted, the author is in control enough to tie all together as every incident eventually contributes to the outcome, leaving no loose ends.

Themes

Themes

Although Ignatius finds little to praise and likes few people, although he is a disgusting creature who lives in squalor with his demented mother, although there are few if any positive statements within the book, the final effect is one of giddy celebration. Most of the absurd, silly characters enjoy themselves, including Ignatius, who goes out daily in search of new atrocities and relishes finding them. The world portrayed by this book is not a pretty one, but it is an irresistibly entertaining one. The main character's enjoyment of his own obscene lifestyle and inflated vocabulary, and the author's obvious love of his creations, combine to form an unexpectedly cheerful impression.

Race

A Confederacy of Dunces is peopled largely by white Cajuns, but racial matters arise in two contexts. First, Jones is hired to sweep floors in the Night of Joy bar for \$20 a week, and spends much of his time complaining that this sub-minimum wage is a continuation of slavery. Jones remains there only out of fear that the police will jail him if he once again falls to being an unemployed black vagrant, and his employer systematically exploits this fear. Without becoming a stereotypical black, Jones confronts and voices the stereotypes in stark, profane racial terms. Jones would like to find a better job and live the American dream, but he feels blacks are destined from birth to menial tasks and resulting poverty.

The second area is Ignatius' attempt to lead a "Crusade for Moorish Dignity" in the Levy Pants factory, whose work force is predominantly black. In the main narrative and in his "Journal of a Working Boy," Ignatius proclaims ignorance of black culture and admits ongoing systematic, discrimination, but works on the assumption all blacks share a characteristic diet, a sense of rhythm, a talent for music, and a general slothfulness. Ignatius particularly deplores the goal of the civil rights movement to bring blacks into the middle class, feeling this will demean the race as it has bourgeois whites. At the end of the novel, the Leon Levy Foundation is given to Jones as a public relations and racial ploy.

Sex

A Confederacy of Dunces deals with sex in several ways. Ignatius, perennially in search of a Rich Inner Life, demands girlfriend Myrna respect his virginal purity, but regularly masturbates, thinking about his late dog Rex. Myrna actively promoted sexual freedom in college until two of her protygyys came to bad ends and she herself was raped. Back in New York and in group therapy, Myrna constantly berates Ignatius about the danger of suppressing his libido and championing the liberating nature of orgasm. Ignatius



obsessively watches television programs and movies he knows will offend his morals, and enjoys railing at the immorality and depravity.

A second approach to sexuality is Lana Lee and George's scheme to produce and market soft porn in the schools. They keep it "clean" enough to appeal to youngsters. Ignatius falls into being an intermediary, and mistakenly identifies the model with Darlene, an aspiring stripper at the Night of Joy bar. One of Lana's props is a copy of Ignatius' beloved *The Consolation of Philosophy*, and seeing it in the pictures motivates Ignatius to see the model as a dedicated philosopher enslaved by vice and makes him yearn to meet her for more than prurient reasons. He contemplates an affair only to drive Myrna mad with jealousy.

A third aspect is Ignatius' encounters with the gay community. Ignatius' Catholic background makes him openly condemn and revile the perverted lifestyle, but in a bizarre interchange with Dorian Greene, Ignatius sees the value of allowing "sodomites" to take the reins of political and military power worldwide because they will be so preoccupied with all the stereotypes of gay life that there will be no time for war. Dorian and his gay friends happily adhere strictly to the stereotypes.

Religion

Religion, overall, fares badly in *A Confederacy of Dunces*. A number of characters are shown piously practicing Catholicism by attending masses, going to confession, lighting votive candles, and saying rosaries. Ignatius, well educated in Catholicism, invokes the saints appropriate to various activities, and recommends at every turn that people read Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*, but he no longer attends mass after fighting with a priest over a funeral for his dog Rex. Properly refused such a service, Ignatius donned a Superman cape, lit candles, and celebrated a funeral in his front yard, surrounded by other children. A Celtic cross stands over Rex's grave, which is sacred ground to Ignatius. At Levy Pants, Ignatius puts a religious statue on the filing cabinet in his work area and later spends most of a workday painting a large cross, which he labels "God and Commerce." Senile Miss Trixie kneels piously before it in prayer and the factory workers ask if they may congregate there to sing spirituals. Ignatius endlessly espouses "taste and decency, theology and geometry," but obsessively watches prurient entertainment, masturbates without guilt, and denigrates Catholic modernism, Calvinism, and Negro spirituals. Ignatius is a stereotypical lapsed Catholic.

On a smaller scale, Lenny, the owner of a religious artifacts store frequented by Irene Reilly, is shown to have avoided bankruptcy only when straightened out by a psychoanalyst. He changed his merchandise to appeal the nuns and is now prospering. Ignatius and Gus Levy both voice skepticism about his trafficking in piety. George, the intermediary in Lana Lee's soft porn operation, attends mass in the cathedral to stay off the streets while carrying his merchandise. He leafs through the missal, musing about how simple the celebration of mass is, suggesting an altar boy past he has, like Ignatius, outlived. The black factory workers appear to be largely devout born-again

Christians, singing joyfully before the Lord. Myrna is portrayed as a non-practicing, secular Jew, ever on the lookout for the slightest hint of anti-Semitism.



Style

Point of View

An anonymous, omniscient narrator unrelated to any of the characters tells *A Confederacy of Dunces* primarily in the past tense. There are, however, a series of first-person entries in the protagonist Ignatius' self-serving and pretentious "Journal of a Working Boy" and strident letters between him and his activist former girlfriend, Myrna Mirkoff. These serve to show Ignatius and Myrna's personal reaction to events and characters dealt with neutrally by the narrator.

Setting

A Confederacy of Dunces is set in New Orleans, Louisiana. References to television programs and movies demand its action take place no earlier than 1963, but references to political events like the Kennedy assassination or civil rights marches and inner city riots are carefully avoided by the author. Ignatius is adamantly opposed to the breakdown in Catholic discipline, which suggests a somewhat later dating, to allow time for the reforms of Vatican II to take effect. Action takes place in various run-down venues: a bar on Bourbon St., the streets of the business district and French Quarter, and the Reilly's quiet neighborhood on Constantinople St.

Language and Meaning

A Confederacy of Dunces is narrated in Standard American English, but it is largely moved forward through the 18th-century patois of the Gulf Coast, similar only, one character remarks, to the dialect of Hoboken, NJ. Black and white characters speak close variants of the dialect, with the blacks' somewhat more pronounced in the dropping of final G's, internal slurring of polysyllabic words, and the corrupting of numerous words and phrases. Ignatius adheres to Standard English, with the high pretension of a pseudo-intellectual, usually talking past rather than to interlocutors. He writes in the same style in his "Journal of a Working Boy." Myrna's writing and dialog capture the tough, determined New York radical she is supposed to be.

Structure

A Confederacy of Dunces consists of 14 untitled chapters, which introduce the major characters straightforwardly, with only minor recourse to flashbacks to establish personality and motivation. These are generally dealt with in dialog among characters. The seeds of a bar and street melee, which marks the climax of the novel in Chapter 12, are planted gradually, and virtually every chapter in the last two-thirds of the book advances every story line, although participants intersect only incidentally a few times before the ending. Chapter 13 shows each of the characters dealing with newspaper

reporting on the fracas and suggests their individual outcomes. The final chapter shows Ignatius fearing that his mother will have him locked away for psychological therapy and his *deus ex machina* escape that Myra Minkoff suggested in Chapter 3.



Quotes

"'Sure.' A new cloud floated up. 'How come you here, man?' "'I don't know.' "'You don know? Whoa! That crazy. You gotta be here for something. Plenty time they pickin up color peoples for nothing, but mister, you gotta be here for something.'

"'I really don't know,' the old man said glumly. 'I was just standing in a crowd in front of D. H. Holmes.' "'And you lif somebody wallet.' "'No, I called a policeman a name.' "'Like wha you callin him?' "'Communiss.'

"'Cawmuniss! Ooo-woo. If I call a po-lice cawmniss, my ass be in Angola right now for sure. I like to call one of them mother a cawmniss, though. Like this afternoon I standing around in Woolsworth and some cat steal a bag of cashew nuts out the 'Nut House' star streamin like she been stab. Hey! The nex thing, a flo'walk grabbin me, and then a police mother draggin me off. A man ain got a chance. Whoa!' His lips sucked at the cigarette. 'Nobody finding them cashews on me, but that police still graggin me off. I think that flo'walk a cawmniss. Mean motherfucker.'" Chapter 1, pgs. 14-15.

"(See Reilly, Ignatius J., *Blood on their Hands: The Crime of It All, A study of some selected abuses in sixteenth-century Europe*, a Monograph, 2 pages, 1950, Rare Book Room, Left Corridor, Third Floor, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, 18, Louisiana. Note: I mailed this singular monograph to the library as a gift; however, I am not really certain that it was ever accepted. It may well have been thrown out because it was only written in pencil on tablet paper.)" Chapter 2, pg. 28.

"'My being is not without its Proustian elements,' Ignatius said from the bed, to which he had quickly returned. 'Oh, my stomach.' "'It smells terrible in here.' "'Well, what do you expect? The human body, when confined, produces certain odors which we tend to forget in this age of deodorants and other perversions. Actually, I find the atmosphere of this room rather comforting. Schiller needed the scent of apples rotting in his desk in order to write. I, too, have my needs. You may remember that Mark Twain preferred to lie supinely in bed while composing those rather dated and boring efforts, which contemporary scholars try to prove meaningful. Veneration of Mark Twain is one of the roots of our current intellectual stalemate.'" Chapter 2, pg. 47.

"'If I had demolished private property while intoxicated and had thereby thrown my child to the wolves, I would be beating my breast and wailing. I would kneel in penance until my knees bled. By the way, what penance has the priest given you for your sin?' "'Three Hail Marys and a Our Father.' "'Is that all?' Ignatius screamed. 'Did you tell him about what you did, that you halted a critical work of great brilliance?' "'I went to confession, Ignatius. I told Father everything. He says, 'It don't sound like your fault, honey. It sounds to me like you just took a little skid on a wet street.' So I told him about you. I says, 'My boy says I'm the one stopping him from writing in his copybooks. He's been writing on this story for almost five years.' And Father says, 'Yeah? Well, don't sound too important to me. You tell him to get out the house and go to work.'" "'No wonder I cannot



support the Church,' Ignatius bellowed. 'You should have been lashed right there in the confessional.'" Chapter 3, pgs. 59-60.

"'Oh, that's wonderful,' Mr. Gonzalez blurted. 'He'll love it here, won't he, Miss Trixie?' 'Miss Trixie was too preoccupied with her scraps to reply. "'I find it strange that you have not even asked for my name,' Ignatius snorted. "'Oh, my goodness. I completely forgot about that. Who are you?' "That day one other office worker, the stenographer, appeared. One woman telephoned to say that she had decided to quit and go on relief instead. The others did not contact Levy Pants at all." Chapter 3, pg. 70.

"'It used to be the old Kiwanis types liked to come in and watch a cute girl shake it a little. Now it's gotta be with some kinda animal. You know what's wrong with people today? They're sick. It's hard for a person to earn an honest buck.' Lana lit a cigarette and matched Jones cloud for cloud. 'Okay. We audition the bird. It's probably safer for you to be on my stage with a bird than on my stools with a cop. Bring in the goddam bird.'" Chapter 5, pg. 107.

"'Don't get me wrong, son. I ain't a bad guy, but you can only take so much. I spent ten years trying to make Paradise Vendors a reputable organization, but that ain't easy. People look down on hot dog vendors. They think I operate a business for bums. I got trouble finding decent vendors. Then when I find some nice guy, he goes out and gets himself mugged by hoodlums. How come God has to make it so tough for you?' "'We must not question His ways,' Ignatius said. "'Maybe not, but I still don't get it.' "'The writings of Boethius may give you some insight.' "'I read Father Keller and Billy Graham in the paper every single day.' "'Oh, my God!' Ignatius spluttered. 'No wonder you are so lost.' "'Here,' the old man said, opening a metal locker near the stove. 'Put this on.'" Chapter 7, pg. 157.

"'Well, I got a doorman. You.' "'Hey! I ain comin around here at night below the minimal wage.' "'You're coming out on opening night,' Lana said evenly. 'You gonna be out front on the sidewalk. We're gonna rent you a costume. Real Old south doorman. You attract the people in here. Understand? I wanna see a full house for your pal and her bird.' "'Shit. I quittin this motherfuckin bar. Maybe you getting Scarla O'Horror and her ball eagle on the stage, but you ain getting a fiel han out front, too.' "'The precinct is gonna be getting a certain report.' "'Maybe they be getting another orphan repor, too.' "'I don't think so.' "Jones knew that this was true." Chapter 9, pg. 223.

"'The power-crazed leaders of the world would certainly be surprised to find that their military leaders and troops were only masquerading sodomites who were only too eager to meet the masquerading sodomite armies of other nations in order to have dances and balls and learn some foreign dance steps." Chapter 10, pg. 252.

"'She's *back*?' Mr. Gonzalez cried heartbrokenly.

"'Can you believe your eyes?' Mrs. Levy asked him.

"Mr. Gonzalez was forced to look at Miss Trixie, whose eyes were weak pools edged with blue shadow. Her lips had been extended in an orange line that almost reached her



nostrils. Near the earrings a few gray wisps of hair escaped from beneath the black wig, which was slightly awry. The short skirt revealed withered, bowed legs and small feet that made the pumps look like snowshoes. Whole days of napping under a sunlamp had baked Miss Trixie to a golden brown. "She certainly looks *fit*," Mr. Gonzalez said. His voice was false and he smiled a broken smile. 'You've done her a wonderful service, Mrs. Levy.' "I am a very attractive woman," Miss Trixie babbled." Chapter 11, pg. 272.

"See wha I mean? You drop somebody like that fat mother for sabotage, plenny innocent peoples like Darlene getting theyselves screwed. Like Miss Lee all the time sayin, that fat freak ruin *everbody* inves'men. Darlene and here ball eagle probly starin at one another right now sayin, 'Whoa! We really boffo smash for opening night. Hey We real opening *big*.' I plenny sorry that sabotage goin off in Darlene face, but when I see that big mother, I couldn resis. I knowed he make some kinda esplosion in the Night of Joy. Ooo-wee. He really go off. Hey!" Chapter 13, pg. 351.

"Mrs. Reilly looked out the front shutters. It was very dark now, which was good. The neighbors would not see too much if they took Ignatius away during the night. She ran into the bathroom and powdered her face and the front of her dress, drew a surrealistic version of a mouth beneath her nose, and dashed into her bedroom to find a coat. When she got to the front door, she stopped. She couldn't say goodbye to Ignatius like this. He was her child. "She went up to his bedroom door and listened to the wildly twanging bedsprings as they reached a crescendo, as they built toward a finale worthy of Grieg's 'In the Hall of the Mountain King.' She knocked, but there was no answer." Chapter 14, p. 382.



Topics for Discussion

Who is the most balanced person in the story? Why do you think so?

Who is the least balanced person in the story? Why do you think so?

What is the pyloric valve and how does it function (you may look it up)? Does Ignatius' affliction sound plausible?

Is Ignatius sane? Cite at least three (3) episodes to support your judgment.

How do you think Ignatius will fare in New York?

Is Irene Reilly a victim or a codependent of her maladjusted son?

What moral dilemma(s) does Miss Trixie present in the story?

How are the Levy girls used in the story?

Is Jones a worthy recipient of the Leon Levy Foundation prize?

Literary Precedents

More recent precedents than Shakespeare or Chaucer include such large, wordy comic novels as Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) and Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767).

Indeed, Ignatius' vocabulary, the author's satirical point of view, and the fact that the novel's title is borrowed from Swift, all point to eighteenth-century influences.

Toole's caricatures are reminiscent of Charles Dickens's style. The novel has been compared to the modern theater of the absurd, and to contemporary black comedy novels such as Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961) and John Irving's *The World According to Garp* (1978).

However, Toole's novel is more purely comic than those of Heller and Irving, and it lacks their dark tragic vision.



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