'A Confederacy of Dunces' continues to fascinate and confound

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BBC Radio came to town this month looking for the meaning of *A Confederacy of Dunces* and answers to why the beloved comic literary masterpiece set in 1960s New Orleans has never been made into a film.



John Kennedy Toole, a 1958 Tulane grad and author of *A Confederacy of Dunces*, one of the most beloved books about the real New Orleans, created the unforgettable character Ignatius J. Reilly. (Illustration by Kenneth Harrison)

Written by Tulane University alumnus John Kennedy Toole, the book, called a “grand comic fugue” by the *New York Times* when it was posthumously published in 1980, won a Pulitzer Prize. It is in its 30th edition of printing and has been translated into 22 languages.

But nearly four decades after it was written and the author's suicide in 1969, this “huge, baggy monster of a novel,” as Tulane emeritus professor of English Dale Edmonds described it, has not been turned into a movie.

The BBC reported that there have been seven serious attempts to film *A Confederacy of Dunces*. But film producers are confounded in an “epic tangle” of

Hollywood machinations and filming rights.

Also stopping progress on filming has been the death of actors John Belushi, John Candy, Chris Farley and Divine, who each were considered for the role of the main character Ignatius J. Reilly, one of the strangest, funniest characters in fiction.

During his 42-year teaching career at Tulane, Edmonds often discussed *A Confederacy of Dunces* with students, asking them, what is this novel about? The students suggested themes such as “the parent-child relationship, self-deception, narrow-mindedness, blinkered vision,” among other things, said Edmonds.

Eira Tansey, library associate in the Louisiana Research Collection, which is part of Special Collections at the Tulane University Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, where John Kennedy Toole's papers are housed, says that the novel is a “love letter to the city of New Orleans.” The BBC interviewed both Tansey and Edmonds for the program.

If the movie ever is made, Tansey says that she'll definitely buy a ticket. New Orleans is a major character in *A Confederacy of Dunces*, and Tansey wouldn't want to miss it on the big screen.