

THE 'I' - A PLURALITY OF ALL SUBJECTS AS WITNESSED IN A CONFEDERACY OF DUNCES

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ABSTRACT

Meet the 'Every man' in Ignatius Reilly of Southern United States. Eccentric, idealistic and unhinged in the eyes of the world, he opines his thoughts often prophesying like Cassandra. Frequent predictions emerge paying homage to his pyloric valve signifying an insubstantial emptiness even before his words reach the realm of common parlance. He celebrates unemployment succumbing now and then to his mother's pleas to find himself a steady job. This desire thrust on him escalates into a set of lunatic adventures, yet each having its own eerie logic that only Don Quixote can empathize with. He contains the sacred and the profane expressing his disdain for popular culture through scatological humor. He disdains modernity which becomes an obsession and he makes painstaking efforts to mock their perversity and express his outrage with the contemporary world's lack of theology and geometry. He prefers the scholastic philosophy of the Middle Ages, and the Early Medieval philosopher Boethius in particular. It is a picaresque novel of epic proportions narrating the tale of an irritable Oliver Hardy, a perverse Thomas Aquinas and a vainglorious Falstaff, all rolled into one. The mental transference and physical transit of 'I' enunciate a dialogue between the world of ideas, as perceived and the world as it is. However, the 'as it is' state of this world has many versions of reality as expressed throughout the novel. The novel is a revelation that judges not the different realities, but assert each, adumbrating the similarities and differences between the private self and the public persona. Many binaries like the living and the dead (both physical and metaphorical); sanity and insanity; creative freedom and expurgation; genuine and ersatz are dexterously weighed by a subjective moral scale suspended in a world of unstable ethical tectonics. This paper aims at understanding the cognitive processes of an individual struggling to break away from a collective unconscious by traversing beyond fallacious moral boundaries paddling with the help of the carnivalesque and the burlesque.

KEYWORDS: Private Self, Public Person, Carnavalesque, Burlesque

INTRODUCTION

Too much sanity may be madness — and maddest of all: to see life as it is, and not as it should be!

-Man of La Mancha.

The public mask of sanity. Madness is an understated form of reality that a few manage to embrace after breaking the shackles of preconditioned pristine public systems. Meet one such hero, the twentieth century 'Don Quixote' of the Southern United States. Ignatius Reilly, an anachronistic medieval philosopher tilting his sword of Boethian wisdom at the neon lights and electric tabernacles of the youth of New Orleans, set in the sixties. He is the symbolic 'I', the 'Everyman' representing humans tired of sanity and all things 'normal' lying in its wake. Civilization is a roundabout search for the 'normal', the 'sane'; a lifestyle that vacillates between the importance of being an individual and an all inclusive citizen of this world. The lid of civilization opens and closes as we breathe in and breathe out 'normalcy'. Ignatius responds to the

above mechanism with the opening and closing of his pyloric valve symbolic of being unable to digest the abortions of worldly sanity. His loud eructations are denouncements of the aberrations of Modernity. Contemporary world seems to insult his awe for theology and geometry. Modernity catapults us into a futuristic world of 'progress, expansion and mobility'. Industrial Revolution spawned a new populace who indulged in being 'more than humans'. There are large amounts of leisure and labor that perforate the lives of modern beings. The 'sordid boon' we received made us think about our 'existence' in a way we had never considered before. The purpose and nature of life and art became a wanton abstraction caught in the cogs of the machine of mechanics. This novel, through the absurd brain of Ignatious, deals with the difference between what we imagine to be a normal life and what we actually end up living.

Ignatious is the key to understanding life 'as it should be'. It may sound eccentric, idealistic and maybe even unhinged in the eyes of the world because one man's sanity is another man's insanity. A mad alteration of the proverb is suggestive of the nuances of normalcy suffused with bouts of insanity.

Nobody realizes that some people expend tremendous energy merely to be normal.

-Albert Camus (*An Absurd Reasoning*).

Flesh billowing forward. Using Foucauldian Discourse analysis of the 'new normal' one can see the focal fracturing of skill into the merely physical and the purely intellectual. The former gets relegated to the background as the latter parades the 'brave new world' of polished culture. But our hero is against expending energy in any form as we witness throughout the novel. He belittles any idea, concept or route to being normal. To him expending physical energy is directly proportional to the disintegration of the psyche. He exerts tremendous energy only in criticizing the wayward and puerile advancements of the world outside his glorious being. Outside his Falstaffian imaginary world he relishes a 'verfrendungeffekt' from the narrative of this world.

His very appearance is a defiance of social acceptance.

A green hunting cap squeezed the top of the fleshy balloon of a head. The green earflaps, full of large ears and uncut hair and the fine bristles that grew in the ears themselves, stuck out on either side like turn signals indicating two directions at once. Full pursed lips protruded beneath the bushy moustache and, at their corners, sank into little folds filled with disapproval and potato chip crumbs (Toole 1).

Below his head we are greeted with waves of flesh rippling beneath tweed and flannel bursting at the buttons. It is, however, not just a ludicrous reference to the layers of modern flab encasing a medieval soul, but the way in which his ludicrously bizarre clothes pair with cynicism offering a grand one man tableau of 'disapproval and vexation' to the bemused beholder. His beauty lies in the irony of having the body of a modern glutton feasting on junk and being addicted to movies while criticizing the same as an abomination to the soul.

Possession of anything new or expensive only reflected a person's lack of theology and geometry; it could even cast doubts upon one's soul (Toole 1).

His 'bulk' though ridiculed by all around him is nonetheless his biggest asset (pun intended). Before we hear his thoughts on this we need to understand the medieval concept of the 'Rota Fortunae'. It means the 'wheels of fortune' spinning at the whim of the Goddess Fortuna imparting the 'highs' and 'lows' of our life. This theory is espoused in the sixth century philosopher Boethius' most important treatise *The Consolation of Philosophy* which was written in AD 523

during a one-year imprisonment Boethius served while awaiting trial and eventual execution for the alleged crime of treason against King Theodoric the Great. Boethius was at the very heights of power in Rome and was brought down by treachery. This experience inspired the text, which reflects on the fickle nature of fortune and how evil and good can coexist in this world. The book is written in both verse and prose in the form of a dialogue between the forlorn author and Lady Philosophy. In the original Latin title '*Consolatio Philosophia*'- 'consolatio' or consolatory oration is a type of ceremonial oratory, typically used to comfort mourners at funerals. Ignatius constantly refers to this work to save his soul from the execration of modern life. He believes that the wheels set in motion by the capricious Fortuna are in for a downward spin when he gets into conflict with the law for apparently no fault of his. Implicated on the basis of looking 'suspicious' he runs into a series of disasters created more by his desire to change the existing order. His stupendous genius becomes incomprehensible to this world and its people, having dire consequences as he tries to forge his thought of medieval scholasticism to save the world from decadence and debauchery. His 'consolatio' here being a zany version of Hamletian 'words, words and words' etched in Big chief tablets. They also function as powerful invectives recording his version of events. A mega narrative within the many mundane narratives of the society. His layers of fat are the only defense mechanism against the cruel slings and arrows of outrageous fortune plummeting him down the abyss.

Therefore, my size it is a safeguard against my ever sinking too low within the structure of our civilization (Toole 249).

He seems to keep the Godhead out while quoting the Boethian treatise. God being called upon in times of mock desperation to imprecate his mother's decadent lifestyle. He seems to advocate Catholicism only when pressurized by his mother to get a job. He offers prayers to a few saints which upon inference is found to be a critique of our trivial greedy supplications than exuding a sense of piety in any way.

I prayed to St. Mathurin, who is invoked for epilepsy and madness to aid Mr. Clyde (Mathurin is, incidentally, also the patron saint of clowns). For myself, I sent a humble request to St. Medericus, the Hermit, who is invoked against intestinal disorders.... For my mother, I sent a prayer flying to St. Zita of Lucca, who spent her life as a house servant and practiced many austerities, in the hope that she would aid my mother in fighting her alcoholism and nighttime roistering (Toole 252).

The sacred and the profane. While almost everything qualifies as the 'profane', nothing is sacred to him except for the wisdom of Boethius and Hrothsvitha. The latter is a tenth century German canoness, as well as a dramatist and poet who lived and worked at Gandersheim Abbey. Hrothsvitha's works fell under the categories of legends, comedies, and plays. There is no particular reference to any work, but Ignatius hails her as a Sybil, a holy nun who is the only one authenticated to exorcise the horrors of television.

If we could only juxtapose one eyeball of this sanctified woman and a television tube, both being roughly the same shape and design, what a phantasmagoria of exploding electrodes would occur. The images of those lasciviously gyrating children would disintegrate into so many ions and molecules, thereby effecting the catharsis which tragedy of the debauching of the innocent necessarily demands (Toole 48).

His diatribes aimed at the screens in Prytania symbolize his need for the profane, to scoff and scorn at it. Not very different from the boxes of popcorn he consumes, his stomach distends in response to the unseemly action on stage like corn that expands from the kernel and gets puffed up when heated with scenes of passion inappropriately portrayed. It is

also his 'sanctum sanctorum' from a world cackling with pseudo responsibilities, knave ambitions and civilized bickering. The horrors of modernity are also his cannabis. It helps produce a convoluted euphoric effect where he seems to be nourished by the same that he also condemns would destroy him.

From umbra to umbrage. Mrs. Irene Reilly is a maternal stock character who paradoxically jumps out of her skin towards the end of the novel, this may be the final stroke of ill luck that Fortuna bestows on Ignatius. She as a single parent houses her behemoth burden of a son on the Constantinople street in a shady neighborhood of indifferent houses. Their most active neighbor being a corrosive haggard voice through the closed shutters from across the alley. The voice belongs to Miss. Annie, whose nerves Ignatius has managed to excite with fervor strumming and drumming away on sundry instruments to fend off ennui. Irene's maternal obsession can be best understood in the words of Ignatius, which incidentally is also a telling comment on voter mentality.

Mrs. Reilly had been solidly behind Franklin Roosevelt for four terms not because of the New Deal, but because his mother, Mrs. Sara Roosevelt, seemed to have been respected and well treated by her son.... To Mrs. Reilly, Nixon and Kennedy had meant Hannah and Rose. Motherless candidates confused her, and in motherless elections, she stayed at home.

Irene is constantly thinking about Ignatius and his future that she becomes a self-saboteur of her date with Mr. Robichaux at Santa's place. Her fixation only disappears when the final fiasco of Ignatius makes him an infamous star of New Orleans involved in a brawl with a bird at the hideous Night of Joy bar. She misunderstands his 'peace movement' as some insane communist manifesto triggered by the red scare housed in Mr. Robichaux's lonely being. Ignatius carries a picture of whom he thinks is a Sibyl enshrining Boethian wisdom, but caught in this perverse world of cruel fetishes and crass erotica. When Irene finds this picture one can only imagine her reaction which is obviously contrary to the way Ignatius' brain works. Further, she finds out that he has been stashing up cash and all her maternal ire comes raining down on his inanities that she finally bids an emotional, quite filmy farewell to her son after ringing up the psychiatric ward of Charity Hospital dreaming of a last chance to redeem his damaged brain. Irene is not better than Ignatius when it comes to the antics. According to Ignatius, she is the nagging factor coupled with parental anxiety that hurls him down the abysmal pit with the initial push at D. H. Holmes departmental stores. Irene really, is a typical mother who had lost herself in her son's future, but his failure to launch makes her give up on him. She's the immediate strand of societal behavior to any label anything out of the mundane as insane and crazy. Ignatius has not been the responsible son yes, but his own logic for it, his story, his imagination fails to allure an audience with her.

His muse of vituperation. The almost non-existent, illusory 'Dulcinea del Toboso' is his girlfriend of unparalleled craziness and ardour named Myrna Minkoff. She is first mentioned as some distant past whose very existence is questionable; adding substance to her character only much later through the vitriolic missive attacks. They start to correspond through letters telling each other about their dreams and heroic feats. Myrna is a typical girl disillusioned with College life and the world around and is way too symbolic of the Student Revolution of the late sixties. She had gone to College with Ignatius and the duo had created quite a havoc in the life of their teachers needling them with unanswerable questions. Their flashbacks of amorous history offer a brutal criticism of the educational system and the pseudo intellect of teachers. She of course is no advocate of medieval philosophy, but a modern proponent of cure through sexual release. Heavily influenced by Freud she connects everything with sex and believes in protesting against established political systems of thought as the only way to modern salvation. She establishes contact with several young men in the name of

organizing movements of change only to be physically used for carnal pleasures. She is the average mind that gets hooked on to anything new but with only partial absorption soon falling into the rabbit hole for the search of God alone knows what. Their relationship is most exquisite to say the least. It is unique and holds all shades of being eccentric and bizarre. She is his inspiration to revolt in his own way against the system. Ignatius further descends down the wheel thanks to Myrna's instigation. She is a clownish little Lady Macbeth becomes his subconscious witch only this time there is no 'unsexing' needed. Ignatius, however seemingly detests physical intimacy, but any form of touch as we see in the novel proves to excite him. He seems to be fighting his instincts as Myrna freely embraces them. She helps him to organize his protests of the system and to stand up for fringe groups and marginalized people with mock determination. Her 'deus ex machine' arrival in person towards the end of the novel is the one good use that Ignatius finds for her existence. Feigning defeat and apparently surrendering to her theories of sexual release therapy Ignatius makes her gather his Big Chief tablet invectives and makes the ultimate escape before the Charity Hospital ambulance gets the better of his sanity. Myrna is a counterfoil to the character of Ignatius, who shares the same Nihilistic tendencies, but lacks the queer imagination of his master mind. She is a burlesque parody of the student riots of the sixties. Nevertheless, she represents the unharmonious balance between 'selfhood' and 'public systems of interpellated behavior'. It lacks the vivid and ludicrous mental imagery of Ignatius in executing private dreams within the public domain.

The spokes of employment misfitted into a felly of unemployment. Ignatius is the ultimate parody of our system of 'formal education' and 'job procurement' and ultimate 'social and financial security'. Contrary to popular belief, our educational system functions not with a defect. That is, what we think as a 'defect' in our system to cater to the myriad needs of various individuals is actually a system 'requirement'. Daniel Quinn makes an interesting study of this in his novel *My Ishmael*. According to Quinn, the otherwise automatic process of learning is hindered and convoluted by the institution of formal education, which largely forces students to study topics that they do not apply outside of the classroom and that they therefore largely forget once the information is no longer needed to pass tests or similar evaluations. This is more of a system requirement to keep them out of the work force. Another grand illusion we all believe in is that, unless we are employed, we cannot consider ourselves happy. But then again we get placed in work spots we detest turning us into burnt-out case studies of human disillusionment. Take the case of Mr. Gus Levy, for example. He is a warm and regular person whose psyche shuts down, unable to work for a concern that does not strike a cord with him. Ignatius keeps reiterating the fact that the thought of going to work appeals him. He, in his own 'methodless mad' style comprehends the system as a rat race without an end. Throughout the novel, we find him tangentially indifferent to this system requirement. All his employments have been cataclysmic. Be it the New Orleans Public Library or at his own College. His *Weltanschauung* instills fear and hatred in the minds of his employers (Toole 54).

However, when he succumbs to pressure and gets out of his 'maternal womb of a house' he is seen happily employed in Levy Pants. The only place he and his valve seem content. Here he hails the presence of Miss. Trixie, the octogenarian assistant accountant painfully yearning for retirement. She is a comic parallel to his personality and the only work the two are capable of is to bring their charming selves to the office every day. He puts up with Mr. Gonzalez, the manager, waves his giant paw at the drunk foreman, Mr. Palermo and occasionally has the pleasure of greeting the exasperated Mr. Levy. His journey into the factory sparks a brilliant idea of a crusade to fight for the black workers. He looks at them as wretched creatures portraying a scene of 'mechanized Negro slavery'. It pitifully represents the progress which the Negro has made from picking cotton to tailoring it (Toole 129).

His convictions concerning social injustice were aroused and he comes up with his infamous 'Crusade for Moorish Dignity' as a 'coup de grâce' against Myrna and her wayward demonstrations. It results in his eviction from the only place he was happy working.

His next employment is a result of a bickering between him and a hot dog franchise owner, Mr. Clyde. Unable to pay for the Paradise hot dogs he had gobbled he accedes to the owner's bizarre barter by becoming a hot dog vendor. Here he bumps into all kinds of characters ranging from a homeless cat to the pimpled George, the foppish Dorian and patrolman Mancuso in his various disguises. His encounter with the mysterious George is an epic of Falstaffian proportions. Remember the immortal scene from Henry IV Part I, the gulling of Falstaff by Hal? Falstaff's riveting account of the highway robbers, he had so courageously fought with is mirrored in wavelength when Ignatius refuses to sell any hot dogs to George only because his face lacks decency and geometry. He then gobbles all the frankfurters and concocts a story of robbery to Mr. Clyde. He ingeniously blames the entire society for the rip-off.

The incident is sociologically valid. The blame rests upon our society. The youth, crazed by suggestive television programs and lascivious periodicals had apparently been consorting with some rather conventional adolescent females who refused to participate in his imaginative sexual program. His unfulfilled physical desires, therefore sought sublimation in food. I, unfortunately, was the victim of all of this. We may thank God that this boy has turned to food for an outlet. Had he not, I might have been raped right there on the spot (Toole 182).

His biggest takeaway from this place is the pirate costume which he wears to the rescue operation which goes berserk. He, the elegant knight rescuing the Sibyl, the damsel in distress from the Night of Joy bar which culminates in the exposé and the downfall of Lana Lee. The Ignatius' downward spiral has some sort of Chaos Theory effect in elevating the social positions of Jones from a vagrant to a celebrated local citizen, the no-hoper Mancuso into a decorated policeman, the B drinker Darlene into an exotic dancer, the depressed Gus Levy into a spirited owner and earning the most desired retirement for La Trixie. He seems to be a 'vidusaka' cum 'soothradhara' connecting the dots and ironically elevating the social status of all other characters except his own. His life in comparison with that of Angelo Mancuso is vivacious and alive owing to his faith in his individual imagination undeceived by sore reality. While Mancuso serves as a burlesque parody of the institution of Law, Ignatius's life is an unrestrained carnivalesque of social life and security. The comic violence, ludicrous sensuality, scatology, exaggeration and heightened satire are pure elements of the carnivalesque that liberates his medieval soul. He never loses the virginity of frenzied fountains of imagination. Peals of laughter are invoked against our public lives caught in a tiresome grind.

The Medieval Picaro and all his roads to misfortune. Ignatius Reilly is a two word definition of the medieval Picaro caught in a modern setting. His greatest contribution to the picaresque of the 1960s being his two mass projects that spins off a series of disasters that ends all too happily for all around him. The epicenter alone remains drastically affected.

The projects being:

1) *Crusade for Moorish Dignity*- which sparks off a series of ludicrous developments in Levy Pants. In wanting to release the Negro from mechanized slavery, he organizes a demonstration against the management at Levy Pants. How he relates to their misery can be summed up in an excerpt from his following Big Chief monologue:

In a sense, I have always felt something of a kinship with the colored race because its position is the same as mine: we both exist outside the inner realm of American society. Of course, my exile is voluntary.

He organizes a group of factory workers who are just drunk on the idea of a protest and march in the office of Mr. Gonzalez singing madrigals and holding a stained bedspread of Ignatius with the words 'Crusade for Moorish Dignity' functioning as a banner. All hell breaks loose when Ignatius scream 'attack' for the workers tear at the crepe paper decorations and the large name board, the only proof of his creative genius at Levy Pants instead of breaking the head of the sincere manager. Miss. Trixie wakes up amidst the commotion to applaud what she thinks to be a live minstrel show. This ends the short legacy of the happy worker Ignatius.

II) *Movement for Peace*- an absurd yet incisive commentary on politics filled with war and strife. Ignatius' chance encounter with Dorian Greene, the foppish rich dandy in the French Quarter ignites the most queer thought in his mind about organizing a syndicate of sodomites who would infiltrate the armed forces so, when the question of war arises, the leaders and armed men would only be soliciting other sodomites and have a grand orgy in lieu of a bloodbath. However, when Ignatius after weeks of preparation turns up at the yellow stucco building with dreams of implementing his plan he only gets offended by bad music and indecent gyrations of wasted youth around the electric tabernacle of a phonograph. He is quite a spectacle in his pirate dress attracting all kinds of taunts and japey until he decides to the abandon the haven of debauchery.

Ignatius, feeling just as invisible standing there in Dorian's living room, began feinting at some imaginary opponent with cutlass to relieve his self-consciousness.

And forced by the three girls (Dorian's defence mechanism in place for the safety of his apartments) to dance, Ignatius ends up crashing into the crowd, sucking the joy out of the wild party.

The third most important project, more like a mission:

III) *The Knight at the Night*- spurred by Jones to sabotage the opening night of Darlene's show at Lana's cathouse of a bar, Ignatius does more than what was called for. He through George comes across a pornographic picture of the naked Lana with her face masked carrying the book, *The Consolation of Philosophy* to add a certain naivete about the picture to augment the debasement of the innocent. The book itself was stolen from Mancuso earlier, which in turn was lent by Ignatius to the patrolman to improve his world view. Irony would have it that his downward spin would culminate by the very same book that professes the process. He thinks that a woman of great wisdom with similar interest in Boethian has been cast down the horrors of his society and in a final coup to rescue her he ends up at the Night of Jot in his pirate costume with a sparkling earring to complete her resplendent attire. Darlene's pet cockatoo and co-star for the night takes a fancy to Ignatius' earring than concentrating on the striptease act of pulling at rings attached to the dress of Darlene. He runs out brandishing his pirateer cutlass at the persistent bird and falls down on the street as big white mound of inertia. Mancuso, who has been on the run to catch suspicious characters, after many days of parading disguises like a walking Mardi Gras himself finally succeeds in exposing a high school pornographic racket. The tale ends happily except for Ignatius while Lana gets what she deserves more for her tyranny than for the crime of the flesh. This episode echoes Don Quixote's tilting at the windmills and his brandishing spear at other figments of imagination, immensely. It is a modern version of lunacy turned epic. The great irony being, through assays of his inanities others seem to regain their sanity.

On and off the couch of psychoanalysis. The pinnacle of satire in the novel is the burlesque proponent of Freud, Mrs. Levy. She tortures Miss. Trixie on her exercise board denying the octogenarian, her rightful retirement, for she believes in revitalizing her youthfulness by making her a part of the system sans retreat.

Miss. Trixie, you think you are old and tired. This is very bad. It's all in your mind. You have this age psychosis. You're still a very attractive woman. You must say to yourself, 'I am still attractive. I am a very attractive woman'.

This is a supreme attack on Freud and his 'talking cure' method. Trixie is Dora to the Freud hungry Mrs. Levy. Mr. Levy seems to be the practical censure of her half baked Freudian methods. Interestingly, Myrna also is an advocate of Freudian methods, but those centered on sexual repression alone. When Myrna through her correspondences with Ignatius starts to psychoanalyze our hero, his comebacks as proclaimed asides are a riveting rebuttal of everything Freud and the bolus of his psychological influence. In one such invectives, Ignatius mirroring the red scare of his times denounces Psychiatry as more perverse than communism.

They would try to make me into a moron who liked television and new cars and frozen food. Don't you understand? Psychiatry is worse than communism (Toole 335).

Devoid of superficial prejudices, this is a reminder that when we embraced psychoanalysis as a new outlook towards life we had forsaken the more fundamental mental imagery of our creativity namely, imagination.

The locale- native versus exotic. The locale of New Orleans portrays the microcosm of the world shrouded with the fur of American culture. Right from the description of the places, character names and personalities, ethnic slurs and cultural prejudices, the novel acts as an interface between culture and moral boundaries of a confused confluence of identities. Ignatius interacts with most of the cultural groups from the affluent Jews, the Levys to the infringed groups of vagrant African American offering an interesting take on the 'American Dream' claiming it an illusion from the very beginning. The dream was a celebrated National ethos that was fed with mawkish pathos to its citizens keeping away logos of any sort. It did not end in disillusionment, but held it at its core.

When life itself seems lunatic, who knows where madness lies? Perhaps to be too practical is madness. To surrender dreams — this may be madness.

--Man of La Mancha.

Not just America every nation falls a prey to the above, when our dreams are as mechanized as our large contraptions of machines.

CONCLUSIONS

A true genius. Ignatius Reilly is the plurality of all minds mired in a claustrophobic clutch of clichés- our civilization. He causes distress to the watchful eyes of Law, he sabotages the repute of an enterprise with just a waltz of his pen, he heaps insults at Ladies in a Guild exhibition, he frequents Prytania to scream insults at the screen, he gobbles Paradise hotdogs to appease his gargantuan hunger, he organizes protests and demonstration and ends up losing his balance, quite physically, he is all this and more but for his undaunted spirit of madness paralleled only by his ancestors like Falstaff and Don Quixote he attains the state of a true genius. He might be more mad than what madness could ever mean, but not mad enough to surrender his dreams.

No story is devoid of meaning, if you know how to look for it. This is as true of nursery rhymes and daydreams as it is of novels and epic poems (Quinn, *My Ishmael* 26).

It is indeed one such tale that abounds with meaning amidst all its mad concoctions. To attest Ignatius as a true genius one must get back (or to the very beginning) to the epigraph to the novel:

When a true genius appears in the world, you may know him by this sign, that the dunces are all in confederacy against him.

The above lines and the book's title are taken from Jonathan Swift's essay, *Thoughts on Various Subjects, Moral and Diverting*. Things do come full circle after all. The novel, however, begins with our 'true genius' exposing the manoeuvres of the confederacy of dunces. It is reversible, slightly warped deductive reasoning. Blame Fortuna if you find the spin hard to believe.

The 'automated dunces' of the modern world are in confederacy against true geniuses. Whether to embrace our personal face of insanity, or the public mask of sanity, remains a choice despite being spun around.

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