

# A Confederacy of Dunces



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN KENNEDY TOOLE

John Kennedy Toole was born in 1937 in New Orleans, Louisiana. Toole was a bright child and his mother, Thelma Ducoing Toole, had extremely high hopes for his future success. Throughout school, Toole excelled academically and wrote his first novel, *The Neon Bible*, when he was only 16. At 17, Toole received a scholarship to attend Tulane University, where he studied English Literature. During his time at university, Toole worked as an editor for the college newspaper and spent a lot of time in the French Quarter of New Orleans with his friends, who were musicians. The area was considered disreputable and Toole's relatives disliked him spending time there. Toole later completed a Master's degree at Columbia University in New York and was then offered a job as an assistant professor at the University of Southwestern Louisiana. Toole then took a job as a professor at Hunter University in New York. He was drafted into the army in 1961 and stationed in Puerto Rico, where he taught English to the Spanish recruits. Toole was soon promoted and given a private office, where he began work on *A Confederacy of Dunces*. He completed the novel after his return to New Orleans and tried to get it published several times without success. Toole took a teaching position at a Catholic college, where he was known as a popular and witty professor. Unfortunately, after *Dunces* was rejected, Toole entered a period of mental ill-health and took his own life in 1969 at the age of 31. Toole's mother had the novel published in 1980, after several unsuccessful attempts. Toole was posthumously awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1981.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*A Confederacy of Dunces* is set in the American South in the 1960s and deals with several cultural and political issues of the period, such as racism and paranoia about communism. In the mid-20th century, America was engaged in the Cold War—a large-scale nuclear stand-off—with Russia, a communist country which America viewed as a significant threat to democratic freedom. Tensions between the two countries reached their peak in the 1950s. *A Confederacy of Dunces* deals with the aftermath of these tensions in American society in the 1960s, showcasing the political paranoia which existed among the older generation who had lived through the Cold War. Similarly, *Dunces* addresses the legacy of slavery in the American South. Up until the 1950s, segregation laws had been in place in the South, which meant that black people could not use many public services alongside white people and were treated as second-class citizens. These laws were the result of

the centuries-long history of slavery and resulting racism in the U.S. Although civil rights laws were being implemented for African Americans by the 1960s, the novel suggests that the legacy of slavery and segregation, and the racial prejudice from which it stemmed, were still prominent aspects of Southern American culture.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

*A Confederacy of Dunces* is both a satirical novel and an example of the picaresque tradition. Picaresque novels originated in 16th-century Spain and usually revolve around the adventures of a roguish, unconventional character who lives outside the bounds of respectable society and who is not redeemed or changed by their experiences. Picaresque novels often take place across a series of loosely-connected incidents, rather than a single, tightly-connected plot, and are often comedic and satirical as well as action-packed. *A Confederacy of Dunces* is a satirical picaresque novel as its protagonist, Ignatius J. Reilly, is an atypical heroic and undertakes a series of anticlimactic adventures in order to avoid going to work and becoming a member of mainstream society. *A Confederacy of Dunces* is similar to the Spanish author Miguel de Cervantes's 1605 novel *Don Quixote*, which details the adventures of a foolish noble who has read so much Romantic fiction that he believes he is a knight and sets out on a hapless chivalric quest. This mirrors Ignatius's various quests throughout *Dunces*. Other examples of picaresque novels are Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. Toole was heavily influenced by the American author Flannery O'Connor, whose short stories are famous examples of the Southern Gothic genre and deal with subjects such as race relations in the American South. As a modern satire, *Dunces* is similar in tone to darkly comedic novels such as Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, and to postmodern novels like as Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, which similarly satirizes modern American culture. *A Confederacy of Dunces* also frequently refers to the philosophical writings of the classical scholar Boethius, most notably his *Consolation of Philosophy*, which was published after Boethius's execution during the Roman Empire.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** A Confederacy of Dunces
- **When Written:** 1963-1964
- **Where Written:** Puerto Rico and New Orleans
- **When Published:** 1980
- **Literary Period:** Postmodern
- **Genre:** Picaresque

- **Setting:** New Orleans, Louisiana
- **Climax:** Ignatius J. Reilly, a medieval scholar, finds himself in the Night of Joy strip bar on his hunt for a mystery woman who has the same taste in books as him. His presence there leads to a commotion which exposes the corrupt nightclub owner, Lana Lee, who has been distributing pornography.
- **Antagonist:** Lana Lee
- **Point of View:** Third Person

## EXTRA CREDIT

**Based on Byrne.** Toole partially based the character of Ignatius J. Reilly on Bob Byrne, a college professor whom he befriended while teaching at the University of Southwestern Louisiana. Bob Byrne was a notoriously misanthropic, anti-modern medieval scholar, and he and Toole struck up a friendship.

**Swift and Sure.** The title of the novel, *A Confederacy of Dunces*, is based on a quote by the 18th-century Irish writer Jonathan Swift: “When a true genius appears in the world, you may know him by this sign, that the dunces are all in confederacy against him.” Swift was famous for satirical works such as *Gulliver’s Travels*.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Ignatius J. Reilly, an obese young man dressed in a **hunting cap** and other strange attire, waits for his mother, Irene, outside of a department store in New Orleans, Louisiana. Ignatius is a medieval scholar who despises the modern world. While Ignatius waits, a policeman—Patrolman Mancuso—approaches and tries to arrest him because he looks suspicious. Ignatius gets into a fight with Mancuso, and an old man, Claude Robichaux, tries to defend Ignatius. When Irene exits the shop, she screams at Patrolman Mancuso to arrest Claude—who she claims must have started things—and she and Ignatius escape. They hide in a nearby strip club called the **Night of Joy**, where they order beers. Ignatius and Irene strike up a conversation with the bar girl, Darlene, and a fashionable young man named Dorian Greene, until the proprietor, Lana Lee, returns and throws them out—Ignatius and Irene are not the sort of customers she wants in her bar. Irene is very drunk by this time, and as she tries to drive away, she crashes her car. Patrolman Mancuso, who is walking home, comes across the wreck and gives Irene a \$1,000 fine.

At the police station, Claude Robichaux shares a cell with a black man named Burma Jones, who has been framed and arrested for stealing cashew nuts. Even though the police know that Jones is not guilty, he is kept in jail. Claude is sent home—the sergeant realizes that he was involved in a misunderstanding and blames Patrolman Mancuso. The sergeant decides that, from now on, Mancuso must wear a

different fancy dress costume to work each day until he apprehends a genuinely suspicious character. Jones is released, too, but told that he must find a job or he will be arrested as a vagrant. Jones finds his way to the Night of Joy and miserably takes an advertised job as porter. Lana will pay him much less than minimum wage, but Jones cannot afford to turn the job down—besides, Lana says she will call the police on him if he tries to quit. Jones befriends Darlene, who tells him that she wants to become an exotic dancer.

Irene tells Ignatius that he must go out and find a job to help pay off her fine. Patrolman Mancuso visits Irene and comforts her—she is very upset about the car crash and the fact that Ignatius is unemployed, spends all his money at the movies, and does not help her around the house. Mancuso suggests that she come bowling with him and his aunt, Santa Battaglia, and Irene agrees. Meanwhile, Ignatius resentfully begins his job search. He eventually finds a position as a clerk in the office of a textile factory called Levy Pants. The office is run by a meek man named Mr. Gonzalez, and the boss, Mr. Levy, is never there. The only other employee is an elderly woman named Miss Trixie, who is desperate to retire. Mr. Levy and Mr. Gonzalez want her to retire, too, but Mr. Levy’s wife, Mrs. Levy, insists that her husband must keep Miss Trixie on because work keeps Miss Trixie vital. Ignatius takes to life in the office very well, though he always arrives late and throws all the papers he is supposed to file in the bin while Mr. Gonzalez is not looking. He secretly writes a rude letter to a client named Mr. Abelman, who has complained about Levy’s products, which Ignatius with Mr. Levy’s name rather than his own. He also begins to write a journal of his experiences in the workplace (alongside the book he is writing about the medieval period, which he hopes will be very influential). He hopes that the journal will annoy his ex-girlfriend, Myrna Minkoff, who is a progressive political activist living in New York.

Ignatius and Myrna often write to each other, and after a particularly offensive letter from Myrna which accuses Ignatius of being politically out of touch, Ignatius decides to organize a race riot at the Levy Pants factory. He knows that most of the employees in the factory are black and are paid below minimum wage. Ignatius tells the workers to bring weapons into work, and on the day of the protest tries to convince them to attack Mr. Gonzalez. The black workers are reluctant to do this, however, and Ignatius’s riot is a failure. Mr. Levy fires Ignatius when he hears what he has done. Mrs. Levy is not happy about this—she believes Ignatius is a “young idealist” and says that,] to pay for what he has done, Mr. Levy must bring Miss Trixie to the house so that Mrs. Levy can give her a makeover.

Meanwhile, at the Night of Joy, Jones looks for a way to sabotage Lana’s business. He has noticed that a young boy comes in every day, takes packages from Lana, and gives her money. Jones wonders what is going on and Lana secretly tells the boy, George, not to come anymore when Jones is present.

Darlene pleads with Lana to allow her a chance to showcase her exotic dance routine, which she has practiced with her bird, a large cockatoo. As part of the act, the cockatoo will rip her clothes off. Jones senses an opportunity for sabotage here and encourages Lana to give Darlene a chance. Lana finally agrees but demands some changes after she has seen Darlene's act. Lana says that Darlene's act is too smutty and that, instead, she must dress as a "virgin-y Southern Belle." Jones must dress as a plantation slave and work the door. When Lana goes out of the room, Jones peeks into a forbidden cabinet under the bar and finds the packages Lana gives to George. He writes the address of the club on one these packets.

Irene is enjoying her friendship with Santa and their new friend, Claude Robichaux, who met Santa by chance and remembered Irene from the incident with Ignatius in which he was arrested. Claude takes a fancy to Irene and Santa tries to set the pair up. The only obstacle, as far as Santa can see, is Ignatius, whom she feels is a waste of space. Santa wishes that Ignatius could be locked away and suggests that Irene put him in a mental institution. Patrolman Mancuso still has not arrested anyone and has been demoted—he now works in the bus station bathroom. Ignatius lends him [The Consolation of Philosophy](#) by Boethius to read, but one afternoon Mancuso tries to arrest George (who he has noticed with a suspicious package), and George escapes and steals the book from him. George gives the book to Lana because she has asked for school supplies for a project, which is seemingly related to the mysterious packages.

Ignatius goes out to look for another job and stumbles across a hot dog stand business called Paradise Vendors. He gets a job there but eats most of the hot dogs himself and does not make any money. The manager, Mr. Clyde, makes Ignatius wear a pirate costume and sends him into the French Quarter to attract tourists. One afternoon, in the French Quarter, Ignatius runs into Dorian Greene. He finds out that Dorian is openly gay, which gives Ignatius an idea for how he can involve himself in politics and annoy Myrna: he will form a political party of gay men, who will be so busy having sex with each other that they will not have time to go to war. Ignatius thinks he will bring about world peace this way. Dorian agrees to throw a party and Ignatius proudly heads home to write to Myrna about this.

George can no longer stash his packages from Lana in the bus station because Patrolman Mancuso is there, so he must find somewhere else to keep them. He decides to stash them in Ignatius's hot dog cart, which Ignatius agrees to so long as George will watch the cart for him. Ignatius snatches one of the packages off George and discovers that there are pornographic photos inside. The woman in the pictures poses with school supplies (the same ones Lana requested from George) and Ignatius is amazed to see that her face is covered with a copy of [The Consolation of Philosophy](#). He assumes that the woman must be a fellow intellectual and determines to track her down. As he passes the Night of Joy on his way home, he sees Jones at the

door and asks him if any of the women who work there like to read. Jones says yes—he means Darlene, who reads magazines. Jones thinks that if Ignatius comes to the Night of Joy, he may cause trouble, which will sabotage Lana. He invites Ignatius to the opening night of Darlene's show. Ignatius assumes Darlene is the woman who reads Boethius and agrees to come.

Ignatius attends Dorian's party and finds that it is a wild gathering, attended exclusively by homosexual men. He tries to win them over with a speech about world peace, but this goes down very badly and Ignatius is thrown out of the party by three aggressive lesbians. Furious, Ignatius traipses down to the Night of Joy where Darlene's opening night is about to start. Ignatius goes inside and takes a seat. When Darlene's act starts, however, the cockatoo notices Ignatius's earring—he is still in his pirate costume from work—and grabs ahold of it. Wrestling with the bird, Ignatius tumbles out into the street and is nearly hit by a bus before Jones pulls him back just in time. Ignatius faints, and a crowd, including several newspaper reporters, gathers around him. Lana Lee rushes outside and fires Jones and Darlene. A man in a silk suit approaches and Lana tries to sell him a pornographic photo. This man turns out to be Patrolman Mancuso, however, and he places Lana under arrest.

After Ignatius returns from hospital (having bumped his head when he fell), Mr. Levy arrives at his house and tells Ignatius that Mr. Abelman is suing him for a letter he believes Ignatius wrote. Ignatius denies that he wrote the letter and tells Mr. Levy that Miss Trixie is the one who wrote it because Mrs. Levy will not let her retire. Mr. Levy believes him and leaves. Irene, who is mortified that Ignatius appeared unconscious outside a stripe club in the newspaper, is sick of her son and calls up Santa for advice. Santa tells Irene that they must put Ignatius in the insane asylum—Irene is engaged to Claude now and must start a new life. Irene agrees and Santa calls for an ambulance to take Ignatius away. Irene does not want to see Ignatius taken away, so she rushes out of the house, saying a tearful goodbye to Ignatius as she leaves. Ignatius guesses what his mother has done and knows that he must escape, but does not know what to do. He is surprised by a knock at the door and is amazed to find Myrna on the doorstep. She has driven from New York to see him. Ignatius says that they must leave together at once, and he and Myrna escape just as the ambulance pulls into the driveway.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Ignatius J. Reilly** – Ignatius J. Reilly is the son of Irene Reilly and Mr. Reilly. He is a 30-year-old self-styled philosopher and social commentator. Ignatius is well-educated, specializing in the medieval period during his university studies, an era which he

believes was the high point of Western civilization. Ignatius is convinced that culture and society have been in decline ever since. Despite his academic success, Ignatius is extremely lazy and greedy; he still lives at home with his mother in New Orleans and refuses to get a job. He does eventually get a job at Mr. Levy's textile factory (at the desperate pleas of Irene), and there he shirks his duties and sabotages the business. Similarly, he gets another job at Mr. Clyde's hot dog stand business but spends most of his shift eating the food himself. Ignatius despises the trappings of capitalism and modern society and hates contemporary popular culture, yet he is obsessed with movies and television, which he loves to hate, and attends the cinema regularly. Ignatius also feels that modern society is hypersexualized and hates promiscuous women. He engages in a love/hate relationship with his ex-girlfriend, Myrna Minkoff, whom he views as obsessed with sex and morally corrupt. However, this rejection of sexuality seems to be a reflection of Ignatius's own repressed sexual deviancy, not a genuine conviction. Ignatius is extremely conservative and judgmental of others, and he hates progressive politics. However, he attempts to engage in progressive politics several times throughout the novel because he knows that this will annoy Myrna. Ignatius is extremely self-centered and assured of his intellectual prowess, convinced that he is in the process of writing a masterpiece though he only writes a page or so a month. Since he views himself as superior to modern society, Ignatius believes that society is jealous and afraid of him, and therefore seeks to punish him. Ignatius does, indeed, stand out in a crowd because of his enormous size and unusual style of dress—he insists on wearing shabby clothing and a fur-lined **hunting cap** even in the year-round hot climate of Louisiana. Eventually, Ignatius's idiosyncrasies nearly cause his undoing, as Irene's friend Santa convinces her to institutionalize Ignatius—a fate he narrowly escapes by running away with Myrna. Although he claims to hate humanity, Ignatius often comes across as a slightly sad and socially alienated character who is searching for genuine emotional and intellectual connection.

**Irene Reilly** – Irene Reilly is the mother of Ignatius J. Reilly and the widow of Mr. Reilly. Irene is a well-meaning but easily flustered and somewhat shallow woman. She drinks too much and has an obsessive relationship with her son, whom she continually pesters, fusses over, and spoils. It is implied that Irene is an alcoholic (she keeps a bottle of wine in the oven from which she frequently drinks) and that she believes she has had a very hard life. Irene allows Ignatius to depend upon her financially until they are involved in a car crash and must pay off a large fine, spurring Irene to demand that Ignatius go out and get a job. During the novel, Irene meets and becomes friends with Patrolman Mancuso, Santa Battaglia and Claude Robichaux. It is implied that these are the first friends Irene has had in a long time (until now she has been preoccupied with Ignatius) and Irene allows Santa to set her up with Claude when

she learns that Claude has a good pension and owns several properties. Although Irene cares about Ignatius, she is often embarrassed by his antics, and when he gets a job as a hot dog vendor she feels that he has disgraced the family. Irene, therefore, is a slightly shallow person, and hopes that Ignatius will do well for himself so that she can feel superior to her neighbors. Irene is easily confused and manipulated, first by Ignatius (who usually gets his own way with her) and then by Santa, who convinces Irene that Ignatius should be locked in an insane asylum. Although Irene clearly *wants* to do the right thing, she is exhausted by years of pandering to Ignatius's whims, and eventually allows Santa to call up the mental hospital and ask them to take Ignatius away.

**Myrna Minkoff** – Myrna Minkoff is a political activist from New York and Ignatius's ex-girlfriend. Ignatius met Myrna at university, and although the pair immediately clashed and disliked each other, they formed “an affair (platonic) of sorts” because of their argumentative and unlikable personalities. Myrna is the opposite of Ignatius and, therefore, ironically ends up being quite like him. Myrna is militantly progressive and constantly throws herself into social causes. Ignatius, by contrast, is staunchly conservative and is, in fact, hundreds of years out of date in terms of his worldview, which is rooted in medieval philosophy. However, although Myrna claims that she constantly acts for the greater good and for the benefit of others, the tone of her frequent letters to Ignatius suggests that Myrna's activism is often motivated by a desire for self-aggrandizement and a feeling of superiority (similar to Ignatius). Furthermore, Myrna is a hypocrite: she is obsessed by the idea that people must be “authentic” but she, herself, is something of a fraud. Although Myrna is extremely left-wing and feels that people should dedicate themselves to progressive causes without pay, she is from a wealthy background and routinely scrounges money from her father, just as Ignatius financially relies on his mother, Irene. Myrna is obsessed with sexual politics and believes that the root of all Ignatius's mental problems are the result of his virginity and his rejection of sex. The reader learns from Ignatius's neighbor, Annie, that Myrna tried unsuccessfully to seduce Ignatius several times throughout their relationship. Although Myrna's relationship with Ignatius is based on mutual antagonism, Myrna does seem to care for Ignatius in her own way and rescues him from incarceration when she arrives unexpectedly to take him to New York at the novel's end.

**Patrolman Mancuso** – Patrolman Mancuso is a hapless and unsuccessful member of the New Orleans police force and an undercover agent. He is the nephew of Santa Battaglia and becomes friends with Ignatius's mother, Irene, throughout the course of the novel. Patrolman Mancuso becomes entangled with Ignatius and Irene when he tries to arrest Ignatius outside a department store while Ignatius waits for his mother. It is clear from this bungled arrest, in which Patrolman Mancuso

ends up arresting Claude Robichaux, an old man who tries to defend Ignatius, that Mancuso's career is not going to plan. Furthermore, his sergeant is very angry with him over this, which suggests that Mancuso has been responsible for this type of misunderstanding before. As punishment, the sergeant makes Patrolman Mancuso wear fanciful costumes while he is undercover, so that Patrolman Mancuso can learn to be a stealthy and effective agent. Patrolman Mancuso is a timid man, and is described as having "weak, watery eyes." This suggests that, although he tries hard and loves his job, Patrolman Mancuso is slightly unfortunate and prone to accidents. His career is turned around at the end of the novel when he inadvertently discovers the pornography ring, run by Lana Lee, and breaks it up with the help of Burma Jones. Patrolman Mancuso's arc is redemptive throughout the novel and he is ultimately rewarded for the effort and hard work he has put into his career.

**Lana Lee** – Lana Lee is the owner of the **Night of Joy** strip club and is a thoroughly unpleasant and mercenary character. Lana openly exploits her employees, Burma Jones and Darlene, and blatantly rips off her customers by watering down the drinks that she serves in the bar. Rather than pay Darlene a salary, Lana makes her work on commission selling drinks. She pays Jones less than minimum wage because she knows that she can get away with it, since Jones is black and is desperate for a job so that he will not be arrested for vagrancy. Lana knows this and openly threatens to call the police on Jones whenever he tries to quit because of the poor wage or refuses to do a task which is not in his job description. Lana also runs a highly successful pornography ring and uses her accomplice, George, to sell pornographic photos of herself to high school students. The idea that Lana sells pornography to children suggests that she has no moral compass and will do anything, no matter how corrupt, to make money. Lana is extremely proud of her body and it is insinuated that she has used it to make money in the past (and in the present with the pornographic photos she takes). However, despite this, Lana is extremely judgmental and hypocritical—she thinks that women like Darlene, who wants to be an exotic dancer, are promiscuous and immoral. Lana wants to be a successful businesswoman, but her ownership of the Night of Joy suggests that she is not cut out for it and is too cheap to satisfy her customers, who feel cheated because of the low level of service that Lana is willing to pay for and provide. Lana is punished for her corrupt and ruthless behavior at the novel's end, when Jones leads Patrolman Mancuso to her pornography stash and Patrolman Mancuso arrests her.

**Burma Jones** – Burma Jones is a black man who lives in New Orleans and who takes a job at the strip club, the **Night of Joy**, to avoid being arrested on vagrancy charges. Jones is confident, witty, and intelligent. All he wants in life is to be left alone by the authorities and to be allowed to enjoy himself in relative comfort. At the beginning of the novel, Jones is arrested for

theft, even though the police have no evidence and it is obvious that he has been framed. Jones points out that the police only go after him because he is a black man and is fully aware of the injustice of his situation. Jones knows that since he is unemployed, he will be pursued by the police and arrested if he does not find a job. This incentivizes him to work for Lana Lee, the owner of the Night of Joy. Although Lana pays Jones less than minimum wage, which Jones vocally protests, he feels that he has little choice but to accept this wage so that he does not end up in prison. Jones is fully aware that his position is unfair and that white people in New Orleans are prejudiced against him. Up until the 1960s, when the novel is set, New Orleans had implemented segregation laws which meant that black people could not use the same public spaces or services as white people. Jones is understandably wary of the police and cautions other black characters in the novel not to draw attention to themselves or get themselves into trouble. However, Jones is not a passive victim and subtly tries to undermine his persecutor—the racist and exploitative Lana—through understated forms of "sabotage." Jones is also inadvertently the hero of the novel, saving Ignatius near the novel's end when Ignatius almost faints into the path of an oncoming bus.

**Darlene** – Darlene is a bar girl in the **Night of Joy** strip club owned by Lana Lee. Darlene is hired on commission by Lana to sell as many drinks as she can to customers in the bar. Secretly, however, Darlene dreams of becoming an exotic dancer and begs Lana to give her a chance at this. Darlene develops an exotic performance with her pet cockatoo, in which the bird is trained to rip her clothes off. Darlene is ambitious but not unkind or ruthless with her ambition like Lana is. Darlene dreams of making a career for herself but does not do so at the expense of others and is kind to Burma Jones when he gets a job as a porter in the bar. Darlene encounters Ignatius and his mother, Irene, when they escape into the Night of Joy to hide from Patrolman Mancuso, who has tried to arrest Ignatius. At first, Darlene listens tolerantly to Ignatius's story about a journey he once took on a Greyhound bus, which is notoriously boring, but when she sees him being mean to his mother she takes Irene's side and starts to defend her. This suggests that Darlene is a genuinely good-hearted person who does not like to see people mistreated or abused.

**Mr. Levy** – Mr. Levy is the owner of a textile factory called Levy Pants, which was founded by his father and which he inherited. He is married to Mrs. Levy and has two daughters, Susan and Sandra. Mr. Levy hates Levy Pants, which he views as a terrible company, but feels pressure to keep it running because it was his father's life's work and because Mrs. Levy puts terrible pressure on him to do so. Mrs. Levy believes that Mr. Levy's father was a saintly business genius and that Mr. Levy will ruin his father's company if he has the chance. Mrs. Levy makes her disapproval known explicitly to Mr. Levy, and their marriage is

one of strain and constant conflict. Mr. Levy is not motivated to run Levy Pants, however, and tries to avoid the place as much as possible. Every time he goes near the factory, he becomes so stressed that he gets indigestion. However, Mr. Levy feels that he is cursed because of his involvement with the business and finds that the more he tries to evade his responsibility there, the more catastrophes occur that he must then sort out. Mr. Levy is very materially comfortable because he has inherited the factory and has a nice house filled with modern conveniences. However, even in his luxurious home, Mr. Levy is stressed and unhappy because he lives with his wife. Mr. Levy generally means well towards people, and is often unfairly persecuted by his wife, who seems unnecessarily cruel to him. He is finally motivated to take the factory under control, and change some of its least successful properties, after Ignatius (who is briefly employed by Levy Pants) writes a rude letter to a client named Mr. Abelman, who nearly sues Mr. Levy in response.

**Mrs. Levy** – Mrs. Levy is the wife of Mr. Levy and the mother of Susan and Sandra. Mrs. Levy mercilessly persecutes her husband, who she claims has ruined her life. She believes Mr. Levy would like to throw away all his father's hard work that went into building the factory, Levy Pants, which Mr. Levy has inherited. Mrs. Levy's criticisms of her husband are partly justified—Mr. Levy *does* hate Levy Pants and does avoid working there. However, despite this, Mrs. Levy is extremely financially comfortable, and her complaints come off as ungrateful given her luxurious life in a house filled with every modern convenience. In fact, Mrs. Levy seems bored with her comfortable lifestyle and constantly takes up causes in order to stave off this boredom. One of these causes is the rejuvenation of one of Mr. Levy's employees at Levy Pants, Miss Trixie, a hostile and senile old woman whose only wish is to retire. Mrs. Levy will not let Miss Trixie retire, however—she berates her husband every time he suggests it—and instead takes Miss Trixie under her wing and tries to instill in her a fresh desire to work. It is insinuated that Mrs. Levy takes on these causes and criticizes her husband because she is unfulfilled and wants to avoid taking responsibility for herself or dealing with her own unhappiness. Overall, she is portrayed as a shallow, selfish woman who blames her husband for everything and is only interested in having power over him within their marriage.

**Miss Trixie** – Miss Trixie is an elderly employee at Levy Pants factory, which is owned by Mr. Levy. Miss Trixie is senile and is not a very effective employee. She frequently falls asleep at work and spends much of her day wandering aimlessly around the office. Her office manager, Mr. Gonzalez, despairs of her and longs for her to retire. Miss Trixie resents Levy Pants because they will not retire her and is fixated on the idea of receiving an Easter ham from them, which she was promised as a retirement gift. Miss Trixie does not realize that the reason she cannot retire is not her employer, Mr. Levy, but his wife,

Mrs. Levy, who projects her own unfulfillment onto Miss Trixie by insisting that Miss Trixie's work must give her a purpose and make her feel wanted. Miss Trixie takes a befuddled liking to Ignatius when he gets a job at Levy Pants—she confuses him with a previous employee, Gloria (who Ignatius gets fired), and refers to Ignatius as Gloria throughout the course of his time at the factory. In general, Miss Trixie is an angry old woman who wishes to be left in peace. Her hostility comes out when Mrs. Levy buys Miss Trixie a set of new teeth and Miss Trixie uses them to bite Ignatius's replacement in the office, Mr. Zalatimo.

**George** – George is an adolescent boy who helps Lana Lee distribute pornography at his school. George is surly and confrontational but is afraid of the police and believes that Patrolman Mancuso suspects him of something when Mancuso stops George in the bus station bathroom, where he Mancuso been temporarily stationed. Lana Lee uses George because she knows that he has access to the school (and to school supplies which she uses as props) and does not care that her venture puts him at risk of arrest. For a short time, George uses Ignatius's hot dog cart to store the pornography he distributes, as he cannot carry it around with him all day before school gets out. George's mother worries about him and hopes he will do well at school. This suggests that George is from a nice home and that his criminal behavior is a result of adolescent rebellion rather than any need for money to escape his circumstances. George is punished for his behavior at the novel's end when he is arrested for his involvement in the pornography ring.

**Dorian Greene** – Dorian Greene is a young, gay man whom Ignatius and Irene meet in the **Night of Joy** bar, and whom Ignatius encounters again while he is working as a hot dog vendor in the French Quarter, where Dorian lives. Dorian runs a vintage clothing business and buys Irene's hat, which is extremely old, when he meets her in the Night of Joy. Dorian is a fashionable socialite and throws notoriously wild parties in his lovely New Orleans apartment. Due to his association with the French Quarter (an area of New Orleans which was considered disreputable), he, too, is considered to be of low morals by society. As homosexuality was illegal and considered socially deviant in the 1960s, when the novel is set, Dorian's association with the French Quarter suggests that this is a place where social outcasts and unconventional people live. Dorian is associated with beauty, youth, and disguise throughout the novel—in this way, his name and character likely allude to the literary character Dorian Gray from Oscar Wilde's [The Picture of Dorian Gray](#). Wilde himself was persecuted for being gay, and Dorian Gray's character is obsessed with maintaining his youthful beauty. Ignatius befriends Dorian and decides to mingle with Dorian and his friends—he convinces them to throw a party so that he can start a political movement based entirely around gay men. Ignatius believes that if gay men infiltrate and take over politics, it will bring about world peace because they will all be too busy having sex and doing

stereotypically “gay” things, such as sewing and drinking cocktails, to go to war. Dorian is amused by Ignatius’s provincial and stereotypical ideas and gay people and agrees to throw a party. However, although Ignatius does not realize this, Dorian, obviously does not take Ignatius’s political ideas seriously and thinks that he is joking. Although Dorian himself is amicable and seems to want everyone to have a good time, the behavior at Dorian’s party—which is attended almost entirely by gay men—suggests that Ignatius is wrong and that, of course, all gay people are not alike and that they are just as liable to enter conflicts and to have complex relationships as straight people. In the end, the guests at the party ostracize Ignatius, whose political speech causes a scene.

**Santa Battaglia** – Santa Battaglia is a vivacious older woman and the aunt of Patrolman Mancuso. She befriends Irene and Claude Robichaux and convinces them to start a romantic relationship. Santa is formidable and overbearing. She bosses Irene around and competes with Ignatius, Irene’s son, for Irene’s attention. While Irene always gives in to Ignatius, Santa convinces her not to be so soft and even plots to have Ignatius committed to a mental institution because he will not behave. Although Santa comes across as something of a busy-body—she and Irene are always gossiping and whispering on the phone—Santa seems to be a good influence on Irene because she helps her learn to stand up for herself against Ignatius. However, Santa does not always consider the consequences of her schemes and seems more fixated on the idea of Claude and Irene getting married than on the fact that she plans to have Ignatius wrongfully committed to an insane asylum. Santa is of Italian descent and many of her character traits—her many Catholic statues all over the house and her large, abrasive family—parody stereotypes about the American Italian community.

**Claude Robichaux** – Claude Robichaux is a kindly old man who falls in love with Irene after he sees her defend her son, Ignatius, outside a department store when Patrolman Mancuso tries to arrest Ignatius. Rather than see Ignatius arrested for no reason, Claude begins to shout at Patrolman Mancuso and announces that the police are communists. Claude is interested in politics but is paranoid and believes that communists (people who he believes want to take away American freedoms) are everywhere. However, Claude’s interest in communism stems from the fact that he is lonely, and politics gives him a hobby to focus on. Although Claude lives with his adult children and grandchildren, he would like a companion of his own and takes a liking to Irene, to whom he eventually becomes engaged after Santa Battaglia (a mutual friend) sets them up. Claude is clearly a proud and slightly vulnerable old man. He is a member of many citizens’ clubs and is deeply upset and ashamed when Patrolman Mancuso arrests him for trying to defend Ignatius. Claude is conventional and cares deeply about his reputation. When Ignatius faints outside the **Night of Joy** strip club and

ends up in the newspaper, Claude is very concerned for Irene because he knows that she must suffer with the “disgrace” that Ignatius has brought on her. Claude is generous and well-meaning, however, and helps Irene pay for Ignatius’s medical bill. It is implied that he and Irene make a good couple and will likely stay together after Ignatius escapes to New York at the novel’s conclusion.

**Mr. Clyde** – Mr. Clyde runs Paradise Vendors, a hot dog cart business, from his garage in New Orleans. Mr. Clyde hires Ignatius when Ignatius stops by to purchase a hot dog. Mr. Clyde is a good-hearted but quick-tempered old man, who has worked hard to build a business up from nothing. He is annoyed because hot dog vendors have such a bad reputation—they are widely considered to be “bums”—and becomes frustrated with Ignatius when Ignatius fails to make any money, eats all the hotdogs himself, and gets Mr. Clyde a health warning because he stops to play with a cat while pushing his cart. However, Mr. Clyde gives Ignatius several chances before firing him in the end. He has heard Ignatius’s stories about how his mother, Irene, is a drunk who steals all his wages, and feels sorry for Ignatius. This suggests that Mr. Clyde is a tolerant and kindly character.

**Mr. Gonzalez** – Mr. Gonzalez is an employee of Mr. Levy’s at Levy Pants and runs the office which is attached to the factory. Mr. Gonzalez is also Miss Trixie’s boss and temporarily employs Ignatius. Mr. Gonzalez sincerely loves his job at Levy Pants, does his best to make the office run smoothly, and is long-suffering and patient when it comes to his (mostly useless) employees. He is desperate to retire Miss Trixie, who is ancient and spends much of her time asleep, but is prevented from doing so by Mrs. Levy, who wrongly believes that Miss Trixie’s job at Levy Pants is all the old woman has. Mr. Gonzalez is a meek man who does not like to be dictatorial with his staff. It is extremely ironic, therefore, when Ignatius organizes a race riot among the factory workers with the explicit purpose of getting rid of Mr. Gonzalez, who he claims is a tyrant.

**Mr. Zalatimo** – Mr. Zalatimo is hired by Mr. Gonzalez to replace Ignatius at Levy Pants. Mr. Gonzalez does not think Mr. Zalatimo is a particularly reliable employee and, when Mr. Levy and Mrs. Levy come to visit the factory, Mrs. Levy states that she thinks Mr. Zalatimo looks like a “gangster.” Mr. Zalatimo tries to solicit Miss Trixie to help him at the office, but Miss Trixie bites Mr. Zalatimo’s hand when he tries to talk to her.

**Gloria** – Gloria is an employee at Levy Pants until Ignatius lies about her to get her fired. It is insinuated that Ignatius dislikes Gloria because she is an attractive and efficient woman who helps the office run smoothly. Ignatius, who wants to skive off during his workday, does not want Gloria’s efficiency to interfere with his slothful behavior at Levy Pants.

**Dr. Talc** – Dr. Talc is a professor at the university which Ignatius attended. Dr. Talc claims to be a specialist in English History, but is, in fact, a fraud and does not know his subject well. It is

implied that Dr. Talc is a pervert and preys upon his young female students. He felt that he was persecuted by Ignatius and by Myrna Minkoff, who ganged up on him in his class and challenged his academic positions.

**Betty** – Betty is an aggressive gay woman who has several run-ins with Patrolman Mancuso and whom Ignatius meets briefly at Dorian Greene’s party. Betty and her two friends, Frieda and Liz, live above Dorian’s apartment because he feels that they provide security for himself and the building. Betty, Frieda, and Liz are finally arrested at the end of the novel and are placed in the same cell as Lana Lee, whom they gang up on and fight with.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Frieda** – Frieda is a gay woman and a friend of Betty and Liz, who lives in the apartment above Dorian Greene.

**Liz** – Liz is a gay woman and a friend of Betty and Frieda, who lives in the apartment above Dorian Greene.

**Rex** – Rex was Ignatius’s pet dog who died when Ignatius was in high school and who is now buried in Ignatius’s yard.

**Annie** – Annie is Ignatius and Irene’s next-door neighbor who always complains about the noise from their house.

**Mr. Reilly** – Mr. Reilly is the deceased husband of Irene, and Ignatius’s father.

**Mr. Watson** – Mr. Watson runs a bar called Mattie’s Ramble Inn and is friends with Burma Jones.

**Sandra** – Sandra is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Levy.

**Susan** – Susan is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Levy.

**Timmy** – Timmy is a friend of Dorian Greene. He is a male prostitute who often dresses a sailor.

**Mr. Abelman** – Mr. Abelman is a client of Mr. Levy. He tries to sue Mr. Levy when Ignatius writes him an insulting letter and signs it with Mr. Levy’s name.

widely believed to be a barbarous people compared to the civilized Romans, and Ignatius feels that he, too, is surrounded by barbarians. A scholar of medievalism, Ignatius has absorbed his academic work so thoroughly that he allows it to rule his life, and builds his own personal philosophy around Boethius’s ideas—like the idea that fate is determined by a wheel of destiny manned by the goddess Fortuna or his belief in the divine right of kings. Ignatius’s life takes on farcical dimensions when his old-fashioned ideas clash with the modern world, which generally holds that people are responsible for their own actions and views democracy as a favorable system of government. However, although Ignatius’s worldview may seem strange, Ignatius feels that he and Boethius are sane while, really, it is modern society which is confused.

Ignatius’s belief that he cannot control his own destiny means that his life feels out of control and he does not learn from mistakes or from the consequences of his actions. Boethius believed that the goddess Fortuna controls a wheel of destiny, which affects the fate of each individual, as well as the fate of society, and that this wheel can spin either up or down, bringing either good or bad fortune. This was a common belief in medieval culture, and individuals were believed to have their own place on the wheel of fate. Ignatius believes that he, too, relies on fortune’s influence and that he must succumb to Fortuna’s fickle whims. Ignatius uses this medieval belief to avoid responsibility for his actions. He feels that he is not in control of his life and, therefore, he does not see a cause-and-effect relationship between his actions and their consequences. While Ignatius works at Levy Pants, a textile factory, he writes a rude letter to a client named Mr. Abelman and signs it from Mr. Levy, the owner of the factory, rather than with his own name. Later in the novel, Mr. Abelman tries to sue Mr. Levy, who then tracks down Ignatius to make him take responsibility for the letter. However, Ignatius does not view this as a consequence of his own actions but as a mere accident of fortune based on the random direction of the wheel. This suggests that Ignatius uses philosophy to make excuses for himself and to avoid changing his life. While he feels validated by the fact that he relates to Boethius, Ignatius often laments that he is helpless to prevent his own suffering at Fortuna’s hands. This suggests that Ignatius is, to an extent, limited by his own beliefs. The end of the novel, when Ignatius’s ex-girlfriend, Myrna, arrives to rescue Ignatius from incarceration in a mental institution (which his mother, Irene, has orchestrated) does not suggest any lasting change in Ignatius’s perspective. As Ignatius sees it, fate has once again come to his aid—and prevented him from taking responsibility for or really understanding the consequences of his actions.

Beyond his antiquated beliefs in Fortuna, Ignatius also despises the modern world and sees it as inferior to the medieval period. Throughout the novel, Ignatius occasionally works on his own philosophical diatribe, which he hopes will pave the



## THEMES

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### MEDIEVALISM, MODERNITY, AND FATE

*A Confederacy of Dunces* draws largely upon medieval culture and philosophy. In particular, the novel focuses on Ignatius J. Reilly’s interest in the medieval philosopher Boethius, who wrote [The Consolation of Philosophy](#). Ignatius feels deeply connected to Boethius: in his lifetime, Boethius was imprisoned by the Ostrogoths, who were



way for future societies. This is another example of the way in which Ignatius emulates Boethius and uses [The Consolation of Philosophy](#) as a manual to determine the course of his own life. In this work, Ignatius describes the post-medieval period, when Boethius's work fell out of fashion, as a "low" era in which Fortuna's wheel "turned against" humanity. In comparison, Ignatius describes the medieval period, during which Boethius's work was widely revered, as a period of "order" and "tranquility." This suggests that Ignatius views the whole of modernity, from the medieval period onwards, as a negative, chaotic, and uncivilized time. Ignatius is extremely conservative and bristles at anything that is considered progressive. For instance, he believes that America should have a king rather than a democracy, claiming that democracy is vulgar and common because it allows ordinary people to participate in politics. As Ignatius's conservatism is taken to farcical extremes for the purpose of parody, it's clear that his worldview is wildly outdated and totally at odds with contemporary thought.

However, while the novel pokes fun at Ignatius's perspective, it does not dismiss it entirely. Many of the novel's twists are based on chance and fate. For example, it is pure chance that after Ignatius lends his copy of [The Consolation of Philosophy](#) to Patrolman Mancuso, it is stolen and used as a prop in a pornographic photograph taken by corrupt nightclub owner Lana Lee. This, in turn, leads Ignatius to the club, which helps Jones, Lana's porter, sabotage the establishment. As the characters are not aware of how these minor decisions affect their fate, the novel suggests that humans are not fully in control of their own destinies and, to an extent, are at the whims of fate. Furthermore, Ignatius's belief that he is a great thinker who is unappreciated in his own time cannot necessarily be proven wrong, since this has been the case with so many famous thinkers who have only come to be accepted many years after their deaths. Even Boethius died unknown and persecuted, but his philosophy determined the direction of much of western culture in the following centuries. Although Ignatius's worldview is objectionable by modern standards, the novel suggests that what is considered popular and moral in one period may be considered repugnant in another. This, too, supports the idea that humans are at the mercy of fate—the course of history is mysterious and unfathomable, and it is impossible to predict how people in the future will interpret and emulate the past.



### THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY

In *A Confederacy of Dunces*, Toole uses the experience of Burma Jones, a marginalized black man, to demonstrate the way in which the American South's historical legacy of slavery and racial prejudice affected the lives of black people living in the South during the 1960s, when the novel is set. *A Confederacy of Dunces* takes place in New Orleans, which, like much of the

American South, had segregation laws in place until the late-1950s. These segregation laws meant that black people could not share certain public spaces, such as transportation or restaurants, with white people. Through Burma Jones and the other black characters in the novel, Toole suggests that although segregation was illegal by the 1960s, the legacy of segregation lives on in New Orleans and leaves black people vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation.

In the novel, prejudice against black characters reflects the legacy of slavery in the South. The novel opens on an arrest: the hapless policeman, Patrolman Mancuso, tries to arrest Ignatius J. Reilly for loitering while Ignatius waits for his mother, Irene Reilly, outside a store. When an old white man named Claude Robichaux defends Ignatius, Claude is arrested instead and finds himself in jail alongside Jones, who has been arrested for allegedly stealing cashew nuts. While Claude is distraught and ashamed over his arrest, Jones seems "resigned" to his fate, even though he says he has been framed. It is implied that Jones has been in jail before, which suggests that black men are frequently arrested on flimsy pretexts, whereas white men are not. This speaks to the way that black people are often treated as criminals simply because of a societal stigma against their race, even when they have done nothing wrong. Jones also observes that if *he* had called a policeman a communist, as Claude did during his arrest, he would be sent to Angola: a maximum-security prison in Louisiana (which just so happens to be named after a former slave plantation, further emphasizing the lasting imprint that slavery has left on the state's institutions). Jones's recognition of the inequality between his and Claude's treatment suggests that punishment for black men in the South in the 1960s was much harsher than punishment for white men when they committed the same crime. This implies that white people had more privilege and freedom than black people, even though, according to the law, they were supposed to be equal. Jones's arrest suggests that the police are actively looking for reasons to frame and imprison black men. Although Jones is clearly not a danger to society, and is not even a thief, prejudice against black people and the racist idea that they are criminals leads to Jones's arrest. Jones's nonchalance about his situation implies that this is a widespread problem in New Orleans, where there is a history of slavery. Even after abolition, prejudice among white communities lingered and led black people to be viewed as a threat, a hostile environment which puts black people like Jones in danger of unfair persecution.

The working conditions and treatment that the novel's black characters are subject to also reveals the legacy of slavery in the South. The novel insinuates that vagrancy laws (laws against being homeless or unemployed) were *supposed* to apply to both black *and* white people in the 1960s, when the novel is set. However, in practice they were applied more aggressively to black people because of racial prejudice. Ignatius, who is

white, is unemployed but is only bothered by the police once, when Patrolman Mancuso tries to arrest him. Furthermore, Mancuso is subsequently berated for his treatment of Ignatius—something the reader can reasonably assume will not happen to the policeman who arrested Jones. Furthermore, when Jones is let out of prison, he knows he must immediately find a job because if he is unemployed he will be arrested again. Because of this, Jones feels forced to accept a job at the **Night of Joy** nightclub, run by a white woman, Lana Lee, where he works for less than minimum wage. This suggests that prejudice causes black workers to be exploited by employers. Lana is aware that she exploits Jones and even threatens to have him arrested if he quits. Being a white woman and a business owner, Lana has all the power in the relationship and can pay Jones as little as she wants—something that she might not be able to get away with if Jones were a white man. Jones also knows that the situation will not be better elsewhere because other employers will do the same, and this suggests that this type of exploitation was a pervasive problem in the South during the 1960s, even after the abolition of segregation laws.

Though the conditions of literal slavery no longer exist in the South, although many of the novel's white characters do not seem to realize this. Toole parodies this attitude when Lana Lee forces Jones to dress up as a plantation slave (alongside a sexualized Scarlett O'Hara character played by the bar girl, Darlene) to host the "Southern Belle" themed night at the club. This suggests that Lana literally sees Jones as a slave who she can exploit in any way she chooses. The link between slavery and modern working conditions for black people appears again when Ignatius gets a job at Levy Pants, a textile factory, and finds that most of the factory workers are black, underpaid, and work in unsafe conditions. Ignatius makes the connection between exploitation and slavery when he points out that, while black people used to pick cotton for textiles, now they make the cotton into garments for the profit of white business owners. This suggests that although conditions have improved for black people in the South, racism has merely shifted forms and is still reflected in day-to-day life. Ignatius tries to rally the black workers into a protest against their working conditions. However, although he claims to arrange this for the workers' benefit, Ignatius really arranges the protest to prove to his ex-girlfriend, Myrna, that he is socially progressive. As Jones points out, however, the protest is the opposite of progressive—rather than liberating the black workers, it is more likely to get them arrested, and all for the benefit of Ignatius's selfish motivations. This suggests that, although Ignatius claims to be socially progressive, he sees black people not as free individuals but as objects he can use to further his own ends. While black people like Jones and the workers at Levy Pants are certainly better off than slaves, the lingering discrimination and exploitation they face in their everyday lives suggests that racism was still a prevalent, systemic problem in

the South in the 1960s.



## SEXUALITY, ATTRACTION, AND REPULSION

Sex is portrayed as both attractive and repulsive throughout *A Confederacy of Dunces*. Ignatius, who seems to have unusual and repressed sexual urges, views sexual behavior as symbolic of corruption, which he takes as evidence of degeneracy in the modern world. However, although the modern world appears hypersexual to Ignatius, it becomes clear throughout the novel that disgust with sex is not something which is limited to Ignatius himself, and that although the modern world *appears* to be extremely liberal when it comes to sex, in reality, there are still many areas of sexuality which are considered socially unacceptable.

Ignatius is repulsed by the idea of sex and open expressions of sexuality. When Ignatius and his mother, Irene, flee Patrolman Mancuso, Irene leads Ignatius into a nearby strip club: the **Night of Joy**. Ignatius views the bar as representative of modern "vice." His reaction reveals that he is disgusted by public consumption of sex in places like the Night of Joy, and views these practices as a sign of modern society's flaws. This sentiment is echoed in Ignatius's reactions to letters from his ex-girlfriend, Myrna Minkoff, whom Ignatius views as a hypersexual "minx." Rather than being disgusted by sex, Myrna views it as a psychological cure-all and feels that lack of sex is at the root of Ignatius's anti-social behavior. While Myrna views herself as exceptionally progressive, Ignatius sees her as a symbol of modern society's vulgar obsession with sex. Ignatius views himself as pure and believes that, during their relationship, Myrna tried to corrupt him with her sexuality. This is depicted comically when Ignatius's neighbor, Annie, describes the exchange she overheard between Myrna and Ignatius, when Ignatius furiously told Myrna to "put down her skirt!" This suggests that Ignatius views himself as morally pure and virginal, lambasted on all sides by attempts to tarnish and corrupt him. Ignatius conflates sex with moral degeneracy and feels the need to hold out against it so that he will not become a part of modern life, which he views as excessively hypersexualized.

However, Ignatius is also frequently drawn to things which repulse him, and this implies that his aversion to sex may also hide his unconscious desire to explore his own sexuality. Ignatius is disgusted by modern cinema and television, yet he is utterly compelled to watch them. This suggests that people are not always in control of what they find attractive, and often the things which unconsciously draw them in may also be repellent to them. In addition to pop culture, Ignatius also claims to be disgusted by sexual deviancy. However, early in the novel, he seems to masturbate to a fantasy about his pet dog, Rex, who died several years before. This suggests that Ignatius has unusual sexual preferences and

may cover up his own strangeness by feigning extreme disgust at anything sexual. This is also supported by Ignatius's presence at Dorian Greene's party, which is exclusively attended by homosexuals, and at which Ignatius finds himself ignored and reviled for being sexually unattractive. Although Ignatius claims to be disgusted by homosexuals, whom he views as another symbol of modernity degeneracy, he cuts a sad and pathetic figure at the party. Dorian's party symbolizes physical expressions of connection and sexuality (it is filled with people who touch each other in a variety of ways—fighting, dancing, being tied up). Ignatius's separation from this makes him seem sad and lonely and suggests that he subconsciously wants to be able to express physical affection like Dorian and the other guests. Ignatius also seems to feel genuinely repulsed by the idea of Myrna and her constant prodding at him to garner sexual experience. However, at the novel's end, when Myrna rescues Ignatius from his impending imprisonment in a mental institution, he seems to show genuine attraction and affection towards her and repeatedly kisses her hair as she drives him out of the city. This gap between Ignatius's expressed beliefs and his actions suggests that he is not fully conscious of his desires and perhaps does not fully understand his own sexuality.

Despite his complicated relationship to sex, Ignatius is not necessarily repelled by the idea of a *romantic* relationship. He becomes quite excited when he comes across one of Lana Lee's pornographic photos. However, Ignatius's excitement does not stem from the sexual content of the picture but from the fact that Lana has hidden her face with a copy of Boethius's **The Consolation of Philosophy**, Ignatius's favorite book. He assumes that the woman, whom he takes to be a fellow intellectual, is forced to pose for pornographic pictures, and believes that a woman who is intellectually pure, like himself, would not behave sexually on her own volition. This implies that Ignatius has an idealized perception of love and holds himself to high standards of celibacy because he believes sexuality is corrupt. Although Ignatius's attitude may seem strange, these attitudes are also reflected in the society around him. For example, when Lana Lee promotes Darlene as an exotic dancer, she is horrified by the overtly sexual content of Darlene's act. Although Darlene reasonably assumes that people will pay to see her behave sexually during a strip show, Lana informs her that people will only want to see this if Darlene *seems* virginal and midway through the act is somehow forced to become naked. This suggests that people are disgusted by the idea of overt sexuality, particularly in women, but that they subconsciously desire this very thing. Although Lana seems to be a purveyor of vice, she is really selling a puritanical fantasy: the idea that women should be virginal and do not really enjoy sex. Although this is clearly not true and explicitly goes against Darlene's wishes, the popularity of Darlene's show suggests that Lana knows her audience. In modern society, it is not only Ignatius who is horrified by the open portrayal of sex. There are

still many areas of sexuality—such as homosexuality or the open expression of sexual desire by women—which are considered deviant and immoral by modern audiences, suggesting that modern society is not as progressive as it may seem to be.



## FREEDOM

There is a preoccupation with freedom in the novel and a sense that freedom, both personal and political, may be taken away at any moment. Although American society is outwardly protective of personal freedom, many aspects of American life, such as the necessity to work under capitalism or the need to conform to social convention, mean that life is restrictive, especially for people who deviate from social norms. For example, Ignatius Reilly is singled out for his strange appearance and characters like Dorian Greene and Burma Jones are targeted for their sexual orientation and race, respectively. Ultimately, many of the characters in *A Confederacy of Dunces* face restrictions on their freedoms *because* they do not fit in with mainstream society, rather than because their unconventional behaviors are harmful in any way.

Ignatius senses that he is under threat throughout the novel, and the reader's first encounter with him involves Patrolman Mancuso, who tries to arrest Ignatius because he looks suspicious. Although Ignatius does come across as paranoid, his fears that society wishes to incarcerate him for no reason are not totally unfounded, as his encounter with Patrolman Mancuso shows. Regardless of his paranoia, Ignatius's freedom is under threat. Furthermore, Patrolman Mancuso's interest in Ignatius does not stem from the fact that Ignatius poses any threat to society—Mancuso only chooses to approach Ignatius because Ignatius *looks* strange. This suggests that one does not have to cause harm or threaten the freedom of others to be persecuted in American society, and one's freedom can be arbitrarily taken away purely because one does not fit in. The sense that freedom is under threat is not limited to characters like Ignatius, who feel specifically persecuted, but seem to be part of a more pervasive feeling in society. Claude, Santa, and Irene are obsessed with the idea that society is overrun with communists. This fear is rooted in the 1950s paranoia about communism, because of America's Cold War conflict with the Soviet Union. Communism in the Soviet Union was totalitarian, and therefore the idea of a communist became synonymous with someone who tries to take away other people's freedoms. Although Ignatius feels his freedom is uniquely threatened, this is, in fact, a common and pervasive fear in 1960s America.

People who do not conform to social norms are restricted in how they behave. Dorian Greene, an openly homosexual man, faces threats to his safety, even in relatively liberal parts of 1960s America, such as New Orleans's French Quarter (which is home to many of Dorian's gay friends). Dorian does not feel

safe in his apartment without the protection of Betty, Frieda, and Liz, three aggressive women who live above Dorian and who are arrested at the end of the novel. This suggests that because Dorian does not conform to social norms—homosexuality was illegal in this period—his personal freedom is restricted; he cannot live wherever or however he wants without facing potentially violent threats to his personal safety. It is ironic that Claude and Santa—the characters who are the most concerned with protecting American freedom from political deviants, such as communists—are prepared to take violent measures against, and therefore infringe upon the freedoms, of people who deviate from social convention. Santa and Claude take a strong dislike to Ignatius merely because of his unconventional behavior and his choice of career as a hot dog vendor. They say that he should be locked away or beaten up because of this failure to fit in. Santa and Claude are also the characters who are the most concerned with keeping up appearances and fitting in with their neighbors, and this suggests that although conventional American culture is outwardly preoccupied with freedom, ideas of what constitute freedom are still limited to a narrow spectrum of behavior within mainstream American society.

In reality, freedom means different things to different people. Some of the characters in the novel view freedom as liberation from the necessity to work. Miss Trixie, an employee of Mr. Levy's, longs for the freedom that retirement promises. This sentiment is most clearly echoed by Ignatius in his written diatribe against modern society, in which he vents his frustrations about his mother forcing him to get a job by diagnosing society's greatest attack on freedom as the necessity to "GO TO WORK." This suggests that there is a restrictive element to modern society, which is largely defined by capitalism, that require people to be gainfully employed in order to achieve material comfort. However, for others in the novel, the ability to work *represents* freedom. For example, although Mr. Levy's wealth has allowed his wife, Mrs. Levy, the freedom to avoid work, Mrs. Levy is deeply resentful of this and seems bored with her life of leisure. Mrs. Levy throws herself into strange causes, like her campaign to prevent Miss Trixie from retirement, because she is bored. Her obsession with Miss Trixie's employment status seems to stem from the fact that Mrs. Levy has no need to seek employment herself and, as a result of this, feels irrelevant and unfulfilled. Free time and material comfort, therefore, cannot necessarily be conflated with freedom, as for some, like Mrs. Levy, these things themselves can become a trap. For other characters in the novel, employment is literally a source of freedom—Jones's job at the **Night of Joy** strip club is what prevents him from being imprisoned under vagrancy laws. However, Jones is severely underpaid and mistreated in this role, and so obviously does not view this compulsion to work as genuine freedom. His idea of real liberation is as subjective as that of the other characters—he views freedom as basic material comfort and

the ability to be left alone. It is ironic that this is exactly the lifestyle achieved by Ignatius, yet Ignatius feels imprisoned. This implies that freedom is not only an exterior, but also an interior state, which can be achieved in different ways by different individuals. It also suggests that, since Jones, who is black, and Ignatius, who is unconventional, do not fit in with conventional American society, it is harder for them to achieve their own ideas of freedom because society does not always allow them the ability to be themselves.



## APPEARANCE, IDENTITY, AND DISGUISE

Throughout *A Confederacy of Dunces*, characters don disguises to hide their true identities and to temporarily transform themselves. Patrolman Mancuso and Ignatius are both made to wear costumes or uniforms for their respective jobs, and these false personas enable them to behave in out of character ways. Disguises also allow characters like Jones and Lana Lee to protect themselves from undesired consequences, legal or otherwise. Disguises clearly have transformative power over individuals' behavior and identities—these transformations are short-lived, however, and the novel thus suggests that it is difficult for people to change and unlikely that most will do so in any lasting or meaningful way. In spite of this, however, disguise can be a freeing experience and can make people behave in unexpected ways, for better or worse.

One of the most explicit examples of costume in the novel is Patrolman Mancuso, who must wear a different ludicrous disguise to work every day as a punishment for an incident in which he tried to arrest Ignatius for no reason. Although at first Patrolman Mancuso is morose about this, as the novel progresses, Patrolman Mancuso's disguises improve his performance as a police officer and he finally apprehends a suspicious character (Lana Lee, a nightclub owner who distributes pornography) because he has become so successful at blending in while in disguise. This suggests that costume and disguise can enable people to inhabit situations or take risks that are otherwise out of their comfort zones. The same is true for Ignatius, who is forced to wear a costume when he works as a hotdog vendor. Mr. Clyde, Ignatius's boss, makes him wear a pirate costume to attract tourists. Although Ignatius is resentful of this, while he is in this costume he engages in several behaviors which are out of character. Firstly, he attends Dorian Greene's party, which is made up entirely of homosexuals—Ignatius is homophobic and would not usually attend such a gathering. He is explicitly invited by Dorian *because* of his costume, which Dorian finds amusing. Secondly, while in disguise, Ignatius visits the **Night of Joy** strip club in search of a mystery woman, whom he has seen in a pornographic photo and with whom he hopes to spark a relationship. Given that Ignatius is so averse to human contact, this behavior is odd. It is significant that he is in costume when

he embarks on this mission, as it suggests that costume and disguise are not only external things but also temporarily impact a person's interior state.

Characters who are more self-aware, like Dorian Greene, recognize that fancy dress is a liberating experience. Dorian announces that he “loves fancy dress” because it reminds him of Mardi Gras (a carnival which takes place in New Orleans) and insists that his party will be fancy dress. Dorian loves fancy dress because he loves scandal and fun (he likes his parties to get out of control) and knows that people are likely to lose their inhibitions while in costume. This also ties into medieval Carnival—Ignatius is obsessed with the medieval era due to its relative conservatism and upright morality compared to modern society, yet during the medieval period the festive season of Carnival was considered a time in which the normal rules did not apply to society. Furthermore, medieval Carnival was viewed as an important psychological tool as it allowed people to express emotions and desires while in costume, which would be considered taboo in everyday life. Toole's use of disguise in *A Confederacy of Dunces* seems to support this idea, as disguise imbues the repressed Ignatius with a rare desire to put himself in rowdy and sexually explicit situations.

Disguise can also be used to conceal one's real identity. Some of the characters in the novel make disguise a permanent fixture in their lives so that they can disguise or conceal some central aspect of their identity or behavior. For example, Jones does not remove his sunglasses throughout the novel and even keeps them on inside the dark bar, the Night of Joy, where he works. Although Jones's sunglasses are not a literal costume, they effectively disguise his true feelings and motives from the people around him—he is an extremely cool and inscrutable character who does not disclose his emotions. The fact that one of the most unflappable characters in the novel is also one whose face is always partially obscured suggests that Jones uses his sunglasses as a protective device to mask his true character and to put a barrier between himself and world that is hostile towards him (Jones is black and is a victim of racial prejudice throughout the novel). This further demonstrates the sense of power and freedom that disguise can provide. In a different way, Lana Lee uses disguise to mask her criminal behavior. Lana is a deeply immoral character, who does not care about subscribing to conventional morality. She is willing to create pornography to sell explicitly to children and uses a book to cover her face in these pictures so that her identity is not revealed. This suggests that disguises can be used to conceal someone's true personality or intentions, which can be both beneficial and manipulative.

However, transformations of this type are usually short-lived and do not necessarily reflect a change in someone's underlying disposition. Although Patrolman Mancuso's professional life improves after his time in disguise, the end of the novel suggests that Mancuso, who is a timid and sycophantic

character, has not become more assertive or confident because of this professional success. Instead the novel concludes with a scene in which Mancuso finally gets what he has always wanted: the approval of his sergeant. Although this is a positive ending for Mancuso, it suggests that he has not really changed and still wants to impress those in power, even if they humiliate him (as the sergeant does with his ploy to put Mancuso in ridiculous disguises). His confidence while in disguise, therefore, is only a temporary state brought on by his costumes and does not reflect a greater change in his character. Similarly, although Ignatius takes on different roles throughout the novel—he transforms into a “working boy,” a political activist, and a pirate—he is not really changed by his experiences and remains the same misanthropic and close-minded person underneath, despite the diverse experiences to which these new roles lead him. This reflects the idea that the transformations in the novel are carnivalesque and temporary, and do not amount to lasting changes in personality. Although disguise can be a freeing experience, it does not change the fact that how a person looks on the outside does not necessarily reflect who they are underneath, even if it can temporarily change how the world perceives them.



## HYPOCRISY AND SELF-INTEREST

[Throughout the novel, many of the characters pretend to act on the behalf of others. For instance, Mrs. Levy has her mind set on transforming the life and appearance of Miss Trixie, her husband's elderly employee, while Ignatius is determined to start political upheavals in order to impress his ex-girlfriend, Myrna. However, although characters like these want to think of themselves as philanthropic, most of them are merely hypocrites who pretend to act with other people's best interests in mind—really, they are just out to help themselves. Toole thus suggests that it does not take much to convince people that their actions are justified, especially when they can convince themselves that they are behaving charitably, and that people, in general, look out for their own interests before they take other people's needs into account.](#)

Many of the characters undertake seemingly selfless acts throughout the novel. Mrs. Levy is endlessly proud of her own philanthropy because she adopts Miss Trixie, an elderly employee at Levy Pants, as a cause and tries to help Miss Trixie transform her life. Throughout the novel, Mrs. Levy is dedicated to helping Miss Trixie remain employed and views this as a great struggle against her husband, Mr. Levy, who wants to let Miss Trixie retire. This suggests that Mrs. Levy views herself as a virtuous person, who has other people's best interests in mind. Similarly, Santa Battaglia, Patrolman Mancuso's aunt, befriends Irene Reilly after Patrolman Mancuso tries to arrest Irene's son, Ignatius. Santa gives the impression of being a generous woman who is intent on

matchmaking for Irene—she tries to set Irene up with an acquaintance named Claude Robichaux. Like Mrs. Levy with Miss Trixie, Santa adopts the role of protector towards Irene and seems to feel that she is performing a charitable service through her interference in Irene’s life. Toole suggests that it is common for people to believe that they are helping others when really their actions are self-interested. This is demonstrated through Ignatius, who is extremely misanthropic but still feels that, eventually, he will help save humanity because he will write a book which will teach people how to behave properly. This suggests that even people who seem outwardly hostile towards others are subject to this type of vanity and can begin to see themselves as saviors for people who are seemingly less fortunate than themselves.

However, although the characters may view their actions as selfless, they usually have an ulterior motive. Mrs. Levy is not really concerned about Miss Trixie’s welfare and, in fact, only wants an excuse to lambast Mr. Levy, whom she picks on throughout the novel. Miss Trixie is desperate to retire and despises the Mrs. Levy because she will not let her. This suggests that Mrs. Levy’s ulterior motive is her desire to dominate her husband and take on the self-aggrandizing role of hero or savior, to make herself seem important. Rather than openly bully Mr. Levy, Mrs. Levy convinces herself that Mr. Levy is the bully and that she must stand up for his victims, such as Miss Trixie. This implies that Mrs. Levy’s motivation is, in reality, self-interested rather than selfless, but that she denies this to herself. Santa’s plan to set Irene up with Claude also seems to be driven by a desire for control, rather than by genuinely selfless motives. Santa is pushy with Irene, who at first shows little interest in Claude. Even though Santa gets Irene out of the house and breaks her overly dependent bond with Ignatius, Santa also convinces Irene to place her son in a mental asylum—a controlling and destructive move the reader can safely assume that Irene will regret later. Again, Ignatius is the most extreme and parodic version of these traits. When he tries to organize a party of gay men to overthrow the government, Ignatius claims that he is acting for the greater social good (to bring about world peace), when really he is behaving selfishly and only wants to impress his ex-girlfriend, Myrna. This suggests that people often have ulterior motives for seemingly generous behavior, but that they often hide these motives even from themselves.

Many of the novel’s characters are punished for their selfish behavior, making it clear that their so-called charitable acts were anything but. Some of the characters face negative consequences as a direct result of their selfish or hypocritical behavior. For example, Mrs. Levy’s attempt to use Miss Trixie to get back at her husband ultimately does not pay off—Miss Trixie spoils Mrs. Levy’s plans and reverses Mrs. Levy’s position of power in her marriage. Mr. Levy proves that Miss Trixie hates Mrs. Levy, and therefore no longer has to tolerate Mrs. Levy’s

bullying, which Mrs. Levy claims is on Miss Trixie’s behalf. This demonstrates that selfish actions often have negative consequences. The novel makes a distinction between characters who try to control others to their own selfish ends and those who act out of self-interest to improve their situation. For example, although Irene is partly interested in Claude for his money, she is also interested in having a relationship and being treated kindly, instead of tolerating Ignatius’s selfish demands. Irene, therefore, it is suggested, gets a (somewhat) happy ending when she becomes engaged to Claude. Although she does have her own best interests in mind, her behavior also positively impacts Claude. In contrast, characters like Lana Lee, who is only out for herself and uses other people like Jones to advance her own position without benefiting him in any way, is punished at the novel’s conclusion. This suggests that selfishness is not necessarily a bad thing (and is, in fact, a perfectly natural motivating factor in most people’s lives) but that taking such an attitude too far will inevitably reap negative consequences. The novel draws a distinction between blind self-interest, which only advances one’s own position and uses other people purely for this end (often while pretending to help the people that it exploits) and a desire to help oneself and to improve one’s own situation, which Toole suggests is something to which everyone is susceptible.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### THE NIGHT OF JOY

The Night of Joy is a strip club which represents Ignatius’s idea of modern vice and impurity throughout the novel. Ignatius views the modern world as inherently corrupt and overly focused on sex. The strip club, which is associated with criminal activity such as gambling and pornography (both prohibited in New Orleans in the 1960s, when the novel is set) is a literal place in which all the things Ignatius despises about the modern world come together. It is significant that shortly after the reader is first introduced to Ignatius, he and his mother, Irene, flee from the police and escape into the Night of Joy to hide from them. This Night of Joy comes to symbolize Ignatius’s clash with modernity and represents his reluctant descent into modern life, as Irene gets drunk at the club and crashes their car as they leave, which sets off a chain of events in which Ignatius must go out into the world and look for a job to pay the fine for the crash.

The Night of Joy is also the place where the disastrous conclusion of Ignatius’s escapades takes place, and the club symbolically both opens and closes the narrative, which mainly

revolves around Ignatius's conclusion to successfully find work and become a respectable citizen in New Orleans. As the strip club is a place where performances take place, it is also connected to the theme of appearance, identity, and disguise throughout the novel and suggests that, with his entry in the Night of Joy, Ignatius enters a temporarily altered state, where the normal order of things is reversed—indeed, Ignatius's life is turned upside down by the aftermath of his evening in the Night of Joy.



### IGNATIUS'S HUNTING CAP

Ignatius's hunting cap, which he always wears and refuses to take off, symbolizes his individuality, neurosis, and inability to fit into conventional society. Much like Holden Caulfield's infamous red hunting cap in Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, Ignatius's hat is usually unnecessary—it is a very warm, fur-lined hat which is impractical for New Orleans's year-round warm climate. The hat thus makes Ignatius look strange when he wears it indoors and makes him stand out in a crowd. The hat symbolizes Ignatius's failure to comply to modern fashion or conventionality, and nearly leads to his arrest when he is seen wearing it in town by Patrolman Mancuso, a policeman who is on the hunt for a suspicious character.

The cap also represents Ignatius's inability to blend into a professional environment—such as an office—and signifies his antagonism to the world of work and modern capitalism. Ignatius refuses to fully integrate into a workplace by wearing a uniform (although he does wear the pirate costume while he works as a hot dog vendor), and he refuses to remove his cap. This refusal to conform is a symbolic act of protest, as it shows Ignatius will not compromise his individuality or personal freedoms to blend into a professional role. The hat is also a symbol of safety and security to Ignatius, and suggests that he does not feel comfortable in society without it. As Ignatius is a large, conspicuous man with an odd personality, his refusal to remove his hat suggests that it serves as a protective talisman of sorts. He can blame the hat for making him stand out, it thus prevents him from having to think about his social alienation, which at its core may have nothing to do with his style of dress.



### THE CONSOLATION OF PHILOSOPHY

*The Consolation of Philosophy* is a philosophical book written during the Roman Empire by Boethius, who was in prison and awaiting execution at the time. In the novel, *The Consolation of Philosophy* symbolizes Ignatius's worldview which is more medieval than modern—Ignatius is a scholar of medieval history and thinks that the medieval period, although it seems bizarre to modern scholars, was far superior to the 20th century. The novel itself even mirrors the chapter structure of *The Consolation of Philosophy*, which, given that

Ignatius is the protagonist, suggests that *Consolation* is foundational to his worldview and narrative.

The actual copy of *The Consolation of Philosophy* that Ignatius owns is representative of Ignatius's quest for a meaningful life in an age in which he feels persecuted and like a stranger. This book is both a philosophical guide for Ignatius and becomes a literal guide when he follows a photograph of the book, which Lana Lee gets ahold of and poses behind in her homemade pornographic pictures, to the **Night of Joy**—a strip club which Lana owns. This symbolizes Ignatius's quest to find companionship and to be understood in the modern age, as he thinks that the woman who poses behind the book must be a fellow intellectual. Ignatius also relates to the figure of Boethius, as Ignatius views himself as metaphorically imprisoned within modernity just as Boethius was literally imprisoned in his own time.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Grove Press edition of *A Confederacy of Dunces* published in 1980.

### Chapter 1, Part 1 Quotes

“Is it the part of the police department to harass me when this city is a flagrant vice capital of the civilized world?” Ignatius bellowed over the crowd in front of the store. “This city is famous for its gamblers, prostitutes, exhibitionists. Antichrists, alcoholics, sodomites, drug addicts, fetishists, onanists, pornographers, frauds, jades, litterbugs, and lesbians, all of whom are only too well protected by graft. If you have a moment, I shall endeavor to discuss the crime problem with you, but don't make the mistake of bothering me.”

**Related Characters:** Ignatius J. Reilly (speaker), Irene Reilly, Patrolman Mancuso

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 3

### Explanation and Analysis

Ignatius J. Reilly waits outside a department store in New Orleans for his mother, Irene. While he waits, he is approached by a police officer, Patrolman Mancuso, who wants to arrest Ignatius because he looks suspicious.

Ignatius is a medieval scholar and despises the modernity because he feels it is morally corrupt compared with medieval times, as reflected by the rant that he “bellow[s] over the crowd in front of the store.” Ignatius connects the

city with modern “vice” because urban industry, which capitalism is built around, did not exist until the post-medieval period.

Ignatius especially dislikes people whom he considers to be sexual deviants: “sodomites,” “fetishists,” “onanists,” “pornographers,” and “lesbians.” He is extremely conservative and views any type of liberal attitude towards sex as a modern vice, as sex was considered sinful in the medieval period. Although Ignatius feels he is unique, and therefore superior to modern society, his attitudes actually line up with the modern mainstream American culture in the 1960s (when the story is set), as sex was still a taboo subject and homosexuality was illegal. This suggests that, although American society claimed to be liberal about sex during this time, it was as old-fashioned as Ignatius on certain points.

Ignatius is offended by Patrolman Mancuso’s attention because he considers himself morally virtuous. This gives the reader an insight into both Ignatius’s superiority complex and his intolerant belief that everything he does not agree with should be abolished. The fact that Patrolman Mancuso approaches Ignatius because of the way he looks suggests that American society is similar to Ignatius on this point, too, as the state persecutes people who do not conform to rigid social conventions.

“In addition, I am at the moment writing a lengthy indictment against our century. When my brain begins to reel from my literary labors, I make an occasional cheese dip.”

**Related Characters:** Ignatius J. Reilly (speaker), Patrolman Mancuso, Irene Reilly

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 6

### Explanation and Analysis

While Ignatius waits for his mother, Irene, outside a shop, he is almost arrested by Patrolman Mancuso because he looks so strange. When Irene leaves the store and intervenes, Ignatius explains to Patrolman Mancuso why he does not have a job and what he does with all his time.

It is important for Ignatius to justify his unemployment because unemployment, or vagrancy, was illegal in New Orleans during the 1960s. Although America claimed to be a free society, citizens were not free to be unemployed. This reflects a facet of modern capitalism (a system which Ignatius intensely dislikes) in which citizens are obliged to

be productive, since capitalism runs on productivity.

Ignatius is a medieval scholar and believes that the medieval period, before the development of capitalism, was a superior time. However, people were not free in the medieval period, either, as most commoners had to give up everything they produced and pay rent to a king or lord who controlled all wealth. Despite this, Ignatius hopes that his book he is writing will convince people that life in modernity is shallow compared with what he perceives to be the glory of the medieval period. Ignatius rarely works on his book, though, and in fact mainly uses it as an excuse not to work and to scrounge off of Irene.

## Chapter 1, Part 2 Quotes

“How come you here, man?”

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t know? Whoa! That crazy. You gotta be here for somethin. Plenty time they pickin up color peoples for nothin, but, mister, you gotta be here for somethin.”

**Related Characters:** Claude Robichaux, Burma Jones (speaker), Ignatius J. Reilly, Patrolman Mancuso

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 14

### Explanation and Analysis

When Patrolman Mancuso tries to arrest Ignatius outside of a department store, Claude Robichaux steps in to defend Ignatius. Claude is then arrested and finds himself in a cell with Burma Jones, a black man who has been framed and arrested for allegedly stealing nuts.

Claude and Jones get into a conversation and Jones asks Claude why he has been imprisoned. Jones knows that, because of the long history of slavery and racial segregation in New Orleans, the police are prejudiced against black people and buy into negative racial stereotypes which suggest that all black people are criminals. Because of this, it is common for the police to arrest black people on very little evidence, as is the case with Jones. Unfair incarceration like Jones’s is a running theme throughout the novel, and almost all the characters face threats to their freedom at certain points, exposing the corruption that pervades nearly every level of society.

In contrast, it is rare for a white person to be arrested without good reason—Jones’s reaction to Claude demonstrates just how unusual this is. White people’s






freedoms were clearly respected in 1960s America, and white police officers would not infringe upon these rights unless they had a good reason to. This suggests that white people were treated with more respect than black people in 1960s America despite society ostensibly becoming more tolerant after the abolition of slavery and the introduction of civil rights laws.

## Chapter 2, Part 1 Quotes

●● His vision of history temporarily fading, Ignatius sketched a noose at the bottom of the page. Then he drew a revolver and a little box on which he neatly printed gas chamber. He scratched the side of the pencil back and forth across the paper and labeled this APOCALYPSE.

**Related Characters:** Ignatius J. Reilly

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 28

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ignatius spends time on his academic work, which concerns the superiority of the medieval period over modernity. Ignatius is a medieval scholar and wants to write an academic tract which points out the evils of modernity. Ignatius views history as a downward spiral from the height of culture, the medieval period, into the modern. The doodles he creates suggest that Ignatius feels modernity is unusually violent, oppressive, and corrupt. Guns, for example, are a modern invention which are associated with the use of violent force. Ignatius also draws attention to particularly modern atrocities, such as the Holocaust, in which technologies like gas chambers were used to mass-murder Jewish people and other minorities in Nazi Germany.


The Holocaust is often quoted as an especially modern horror because of the technology which was employed and the callous efficiency with which it was carried out. Ignatius associates efficiency and technological advancement with modernity because these are values which came out of the post-medieval period and led to the contemporary era. Ignatius feels that all these modern horrors can only lead to one thing: apocalypse. Although there was a real threat of nuclear destruction during Ignatius's childhood in the 1950s during the Cold War, Ignatius's view on modernity is exclusively pessimistic and does not account for the many

technological conveniences which modernity has created and which he also enjoys.

●● Ignatius thought smugly that on their yellowed pages and wide-ruled lines were the seeds of a magnificent study in comparative history. Very disordered, of course. But one day he would assume the task of editing these fragments of his mentality into a jigsaw puzzle of a very grand design; the completed puzzle would show literate men the disaster course that history had been taking for the past four centuries.

**Related Characters:** Ignatius J. Reilly

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 28



### Explanation and Analysis


Ignatius looks over his academic work, which is written in fragments on different notepads and scattered about his messy room. Ignatius is a medieval scholar and believes that the medieval period was superior to modernity. He plans to write a study which points out modernity's flaws in comparison with the medieval values. Ignatius describes his work as "disordered" and hopes one day to bring order it. This supports his overall goal in life: to bring order to a world which he does not fit into by changing people's worldview to suit his own.

However, Ignatius does not show any movement toward this goal. His medieval worldview leads him to believe that human beings cannot control their own fate and that, instead, their fate is controlled by a blind goddess named Fortuna who spins a wheel of destiny which arbitrarily decides their fortune. Although Ignatius knows he must edit his writing to achieve a final version, his need to do this does not feel pressing because he does not hold himself responsible for completing the work, instead using this idea of fortune as an excuse not to act. Ignatius feels that the modern world, particularly the 20th century, has been uniquely violent and hopes that his work will illuminate this. However, although Ignatius *may* be a great thinker who sees something that the people around him do not, no one will ever know about this if the work remains unfinished.

●● As a medievalist Ignatius believed in the *rota Fortunae*, or wheel of fortune, a central concept in *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, the philosophical work which had laid the foundation for medieval thought. Boethius, the late Roman who had written the *Consolatione* while unjustly imprisoned by the emperor, had said that a blind goddess spins us on a wheel, that our luck comes in cycles. Was the ludicrous attempt to arrest him the beginning of a bad cycle? Was his wheel rapidly spinning downward? The accident was also a bad sign. Ignatius was worried. For all his philosophy, Boethius had still been tortured and killed.

**Related Characters:** Patrolman Mancuso, Irene Reilly, Ignatius J. Reilly

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 29

### Explanation and Analysis

Ignatius bases his worldview around the work of the medieval scholar Boethius—a Roman writer who was imprisoned and killed by the Ostrogoths during the decline of the Roman Empire. Boethius’s idea of the wheel of fortune is generally understood as a metaphor by modern scholars and is not usually believed literally. The idea that the goddess spinning the wheel is blind suggests that fate is random and that humans cannot change or predict their destiny, as their actions may not achieve their desired result. Ignatius not only believes this literally—which often leads him to feel that his life is out of control and that there is nothing he can do to change things—but also sees himself as a modern version of Boethius.


Ignatius relates to Boethius because Boethius’s ideas were not appreciated during his time and he was killed for his unconventional beliefs. Similarly, Ignatius feels that he is not understood by modernity and that his ideas will only be appreciated when culture improves. Boethius was imprisoned by the Ostrogoths who, compared to the Romans, were considered barbarians. Although Boethius was a classical scholar, his work went against many trends in classicism and formed the foundation of medieval thought, which was quite unique from Roman belief systems. Again, Ignatius believes that he is a pillar of civilized (medieval) thought in a barbarous society and that the people in this society would lock him up if they could because they do not comprehend his ideas.

## Chapter 2, Part 3 Quotes

●● “The ironic thing about that program,” Ignatius was saying over the stove, keeping one eye peeled so that he could seize the pot as soon as the milk began to boil, “is that it is supposed to be an *exemplum* to the youth of our nation. I would like very much to know what the Founding Fathers would say if they could see these children being debauched to further the cause of Clearasil. However, I always suspected that democracy would come to this.” He painstakingly poured the milk into his Shirley Temple mug. “A firm rule must be imposed upon our nation before it destroys itself.”

**Related Characters:** Ignatius J. Reilly (speaker), Patrolman Mancuso, Irene Reilly

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 42

### Explanation and Analysis

Ignatius despises television and sees it as another example of the evils of modernity, which he believes is inferior to the medieval period. Despite this, however, Ignatius is obsessed with television and religiously watches shows that he claims to hate. In this passage, he discusses one of these shows with Irene and Patrolman Mancuso.


Ignatius dislikes the fact that modern advertisers use sex to sell products like Clearasil, since he views sex as sinful and the use of sex in advertising as an example of the modern world’s debauchery. Medieval culture focused on the importance of spirituality and the soul, rather than the body, because Christianity held that the material world was corrupt. In contrast to these medieval values, modern products tend to focus on the improvement of the body, rather than the soul, and Ignatius therefore feels that this is evidence of modern society’s shallow materialism. However, this is ironic because Ignatius is clearly partial to novelty consumer goods himself, such as his Shirley Temple mug. It is even more ironic that Shirley Temple was a film star and a product of modern media industries, which Ignatius claims to hate.

●● “Ignatius, what’s all this trash on the floor?”

“That is my worldview that you see. It still must be incorporated into a whole, so be careful where you step.”

**Related Characters:** Ignatius J. Reilly, Irene Reilly (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 46

### Explanation and Analysis


Irene, Ignatius's mother, bursts into his room and asks about the paper all over the floor. Ignatius explains that this is his great academic work which he hopes to publish one day, and which explains his perspective to the world. Ignatius feels that he is not understood by modern society. He is a medieval scholar and believes that the medieval period is superior to modernity. Irene is clearly disinterested in Ignatius's work, which is slow, sporadic, and brings in no money, and views it as "trash." This supports Ignatius's idea that he is misunderstood, but also suggests that he uses his academic work as an excuse to avoid other responsibilities, such as finding a job or helping his mother clean the house. This attitude suggests that Ignatius is hypocritical and pretends that his studies are extremely valuable and a service to mankind, when, really, they are just a way for him to avoid work.


However, at the same time, Ignatius genuinely believes in his perspective and is legitimately unusual compared to the people around him, whereas Irene cares about keeping up appearances and wishes that Ignatius would conform and lead a nice, middle-class life. Her inability to accept him suggests that Ignatius *does* struggle to find people he can relate to and, therefore, might genuinely need a book to explain himself to the world. The fact that Irene dismisses his work as "trash" also suggests that American society does not value things which do not conform and which it does not understand.

### Chapter 3, Part 1 Quotes

☝☝ "I refuse to look up. Optimism nauseates me. It is perverse. Since man's fall, his proper position in the universe has been one of misery."

**Related Characters:** Ignatius J. Reilly (speaker), Patrolman Mancuso, Irene Reilly

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 59

### Explanation and Analysis

Patrolman Mancuso tells Ignatius to look on the bright side of life and Ignatius sneeringly responds with this quote. Ignatius and Patrolman Mancuso are opposites within the narrative—Mancuso is somewhat of an antagonist to Ignatius, who is the protagonist of *A Confederacy of Dunces*. Unlike a typical antagonist, though, Mancuso is an optimistic, well-meaning person who is dedicated to his job even when his boss treats him unfairly. Ignatius, on the other hand, despises Mancuso's chirpy disposition and feels that no amount of hard work can change or improve a person's life.

Ignatius's worldview is medieval—he is a medieval scholar and bases his approach to life around philosophy from this period—whereas Patrolman Mancuso's outlook on life is modern and is based in common approaches to capitalism and American work ethic. Ignatius believes that a medieval goddess named Fortuna controls humanity's fate—based on the writings of the philosopher Boethius—and that, therefore, humans cannot improve their lot in life and must instead rely on the whims of fortune. In medieval culture, it was not possible to work one's way out of poverty or change one's class status, because all wealth was generally controlled by a king. Mancuso, on the other hand, believes in the modern capitalist notion that one can change one's life with enough perseverance—a mindset that is suited to modern society, in which economic wealth is more accessible.

### Chapter 3, Part 5 Quotes

☝☝ For the first time in my life I have met the system face-to-face, fully determined to function within its context as an observer and critic in disguise, so to speak.

**Related Characters:** Ignatius J. Reilly (speaker), Irene Reilly

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 74

### Explanation and Analysis

Ignatius starts a job at the Levy Pants factory and determines to document his experience in a semi-fictional journal which he calls "The Journal of a Working Boy." Ignatius despises modern systems like capitalism and has always avoided participating in them by refusing to get a job—though he still enjoys many of the comforts of capitalism, such as fast food and television. However, Ignatius is forced to find a job to help his mother, Irene, pay

off a fine and decides to take on a role at Levy Pants. Ignatius is extremely concerned about retaining his individuality at work, since one of his objections to modern work culture is that he must compromise his personality in order to participate.


However, at his job at Levy Pants, Ignatius makes the conscious decision to wear the role like a “disguise” and try to fit into its office culture despite his individuality. This is one of many temporary transformations which Ignatius undergoes in the novel. Ignatius feels that this journal, written by an “observer,” will be valuable to society because it will expose the horrors of working life. Of course, it is ironic that Ignatius has chosen the easiest job he can find and does not even intend to commit to this—he uses the job to serve his own ends, to research for this journal, rather than focusing on his work or trying to help his employer.

## Chapter 4, Part 1 Quotes

☝☝ If Levy Pants was to succeed, the first step would be imposing a heavy hand upon its detractors. Levy Pants must become more militant and authoritarian in order to survive in the jungle of modern commercialism.

**Related Characters:** Mr. Abelman, Mr. Levy, Ignatius J. Reilly

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 88

### Explanation and Analysis

While working at Levy Pants, Ignatius hears about a complaints letter from a client, Mr. Abelman. Ignatius decides that Levy Pants must not tolerate this type of dissent and writes a rude letter back to Mr. Abelman, which he signs with Mr. Levy’s (the factory owner’s) name, rather than his own.

Ignatius does not fit in with modern society and dislikes capitalist concepts like consumer satisfaction because he believes that humans are meant to suffer. Ignatius is a medieval scholar whose worldview is based on the Roman philosopher Boethius. The medieval period was a period of absolute monarchy in Europe, and Ignatius believes that every aspect of life should still be ruled in a similarly dictatorial way because this is what people secretly need.

This belief suggests that Ignatius has a fascistic worldview and does not like to have his perspectives challenged. This

speaks to his belief in his own intellectual superiority, which he feels cannot be challenged by anyone inferior to him. Ignatius dislikes modern political systems like democracy because they allow a variety of competing opinions to exist in politics, and he cannot tolerate other opinions. Similarly, capitalism and free trade are based in concepts such as consumer satisfaction, as companies must impress customers in order to compete in the market. Ignatius fails to grasp this and damages the company’s reputation further because he wants to impose his views on Mr. Abelman and tell him that he is wrong to complain.

## Chapter 4, Part 4 Quotes

☝☝ At last he closed the looseleaf folder and contemplated a reply to Myrna, a slashing, vicious attack upon her being and worldview. It would be better to wait until he had visited the factory and seen what possibilities for social action there were there. Such boldness had to be handled properly; he might be able to do something with the factory workers which would make Myrna look like a reactionary in the field of social action. He had to prove his superiority to the offensive minx.

**Related Characters:** Myrna Minkoff, Ignatius J. Reilly

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 101

### Explanation and Analysis

Ignatius receives a letter from Myrna Minkoff, his ex-girlfriend, which accuses him of being social backwards. Ignatius tries to think of a way to get back at Myrna and prove her wrong. Ignatius and Myrna are opposites—he is exceptionally conservative, and she tries to be extremely progressive—but their extreme and unconventional perspectives make them similar and draw them to each other. Ignatius is infuriated by Myrna, who represents everything he hates about modernity, and seems to want to inflict physical violence on her with his use of words like “slashing.” As they were once a couple, it is implied that Ignatius’s hatred of Myrna stems partially from an underlying passionate attraction to her, and his resultant fury at himself for liking someone who stands against everything he believes.

Ignatius plans to take “social action” in order to prove Myrna wrong and make her look “reactionary.” Myrna, who is always involved in some social cause, suggests that Ignatius does not contribute to society because he is not involved in political action. Ignatius clearly worries, on some level, that this is true—he wants to prove her wrong and suggest that


it is Myrna who is useless to society, and not him. However, this is not a very admirable reason to undertake social action and only proves Myrna's point that Ignatius does not care about social causes and only thinks about himself.

## Chapter 5, Part 1 Quotes

☝ “Now look here, Darlene, don't tell that Jones we suddenly got the whole force in here at night. You know how colored people feel about cops. He might get scared and quit. I mean, I'm trying to help the boy out and keep him off the streets.”

**Related Characters:** Lana Lee (speaker), Burma Jones, Darlene

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 105

### Explanation and Analysis

Lana Lee, who runs the Night of Joy strip club, employs a black man named Burma Jones. Lana knows that Jones is afraid of the police and tells one of the bar girls, Darlene, not to tell Jones that the bar is full of plainclothes policemen every night. Although Lana pretends that she does Jones a favor by employing him, really, she is exploiting Jones because of his race. Lana knows that Jones has been arrested before and will be imprisoned for vagrancy if he does not have a job, as it was illegal to be unemployed in 1960s New Orleans, where the story is set. Therefore, Lana knows that she can pay Jones below minimum wage and that he cannot quit because, if he does, she will call the police. Therefore, Lana is not really doing Jones a favor by employing him, but keeping him captive and using him for her own gain.

Lana is aware that black people are afraid of the police because the white police forces are biased against them and will use unjust means to incriminate them. Jones has already experienced this—he has been framed and arrested for allegedly stealing nuts—and this suggests that the police look for excuses to arrest black people because of racial stereotypes that black people are criminals. Really, Lana does not want Jones to know about the police because she runs an illegal pornography ring from the bar and knows that Jones would turn her in if he could find evidence of this.

## Chapter 5, Part 4 Quotes

☝ The original sweatshop has been preserved for posterity at Levy Pants. If only the Smithsonian Institution, that grab bag of our nation's refuse, could somehow vacuum-seal the Levy Pants factory and transport it to the capital of the United States of America, each worker frozen in an attitude of labor, the visitors to that questionable museum would defecate into their garish tourist outfits. It is a scene which combines the worst of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*; it is mechanized Negro slavery; it represents the progress which the Negro has made from picking cotton to tailoring it.

**Related Characters:** Ignatius J. Reilly (speaker), Myrna Minkoff, Mr. Levy, Mr. Gonzalez

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 118-119

### Explanation and Analysis

During Ignatius's time as an employee at Levy Pants, he visits the factory and gathers evidence about the conditions in which the black workers operate. He writes these observations in his “Journal of a Working Boy.” Ignatius suggests that the conditions of the black workers at the factory are like the conditions of a sweat shop or plantation. Ignatius suggests that this comparison would be obvious to any modern person who witnessed it and that, if the scene was placed in a tourist museum like the Smithsonian Institute, people would be horrified that this took place in the supposedly civilized modern world. Ignatius despises tourists because he associates them with modern concepts of leisure and consumption, which he considers indulgent and vulgar—though, of course, he partakes in leisure activities liberally himself.

Ignatius refers to two pieces of media to make his point: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a 19th-century novel which raised awareness about the horrors of slavery but has been criticized in modernity for romanticizing it, and *Metropolis*, a modernist film about production line culture and workplace alienation under capitalism. Ignatius suggests that the factory is like a plantation because the workers work with cotton—something which was commonly grown and picked by the slave on Southern American plantations—and that it is an example of the horrors of modern capitalism because the workers use technology. Technology is an important feature of Fitz Lang's film and the reason, the film suggests, that the workers are treated like machines themselves.

●● 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. However, it is apparent that many of the Negroes wish to become active members of the American middle class. I cannot imagine why. I must admit that this desire on their part leads me to question their value judgments.

**Related Characters:** Ignatius J. Reilly (speaker), Myrna Minkoff, Mr. Levy, Mr. Gonzalez

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 122

### Explanation and Analysis

Ignatius writes in his journal and describes his plans to start a race riot at work. He claims that this is for the benefit of the black workers—who are underpaid and work in unsafe conditions—but, really, it is to annoy his ex-girlfriend, Myrna, and prove that he is socially progressive.

Ignatius feels that he can relate to the black workers because he feels discriminated against by modern society due to his unusual views—Ignatius is a medievalist and rejects modern values. Black people were socially “exiled” in the 1960s in the American South because of racial discrimination. Although the Civil Rights Movement, which gave black people equal status with white people under the law, was introduced in the 1960s, the South had a long history of slavery and racial segregation. This meant that, although black people were meant to be treated as equals, there was still a great deal of racial discrimination in cities like New Orleans, where the novel takes place.

The workers at the factory are underpaid and exploited because they are black. Although Ignatius *feels* he can relate to them, his own status as an outcast in society is a choice and one that he could easily change as an educated white man. This shows that Ignatius cannot really empathize with the black workers, who cannot change their race or how others treat them because of it. Ignatius looks down on the black workers because they want to improve their situations by earning more money and having more leisure time, concepts Ignatius views as modern and vulgar. However, Ignatius lives a very privileged and comfortable life and it is hypocritical of him to judge the black workers for wanting to experience this for themselves.

●● I must admit that I always suspected Myrna of being interested in me sensually; my stringent attitude toward sex intrigued her; in a sense, I became another project of sorts, I did, however, succeed in thwarting her every attempt to assail the castle of my body and mind.

**Related Characters:** Ignatius J. Reilly (speaker), Myrna Minkoff

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 125

### Explanation and Analysis

Ignatius writes in his journal about his ex-girlfriend, Myrna, with whom he had a celibate relationship but whom he suspected of making sexual advances toward him. Ignatius is disgusted by sex and views it as a sinful. Ignatius is a medieval scholar and holds a medieval worldview, as he believes it is superior to modernity. In the medieval period, sex was considered sinful because it was part of the material world and anything to do with materialism or the body was considered inferior to the spiritual realm. Ignatius, therefore, views his voluntary celibacy as evidence of his own purity compared with the corrupt modern world, which is more liberal about sex.

Myrna, on the other hand, considers herself extremely progressive and believes that sex is a psychological cure for all emotional problems. She symbolizes everything Ignatius hates about modernity and the pair have a strange love/hate relationship because of this. This is demonstrated in Ignatius’s statement that Myrna tried to tempt him while he “thwarted” her. This puts their struggles in medieval terms by suggesting that Myrna’s sexual interest is a kind of battle for Ignatius’s soul which will be corrupted by sex. Ignatius recognizes that Myrna is attracted to things she can’t have. She is a provocative, argumentative person who, despite her claims that she is tolerant and open minded, seems to want to impose her worldview on everyone around her, especially those who do not agree. She views Ignatius as a “project” in this sense because his conservative worldview is the opposite of hers.

●● The subsidiary theme in the correspondence is one urging me to come to Manhattan so that she and I may raise our banner of twin confusion in that center of mechanized horrors [...] Someday the authorities of our society will no doubt apprehend her for simply being herself. Incarceration will finally make her life meaningful and end her frustration.

**Related Characters:** Ignatius J. Reilly (speaker), Myrna Minkoff

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 126

### Explanation and Analysis



In a journal entry, Ignatius writes that his ex-girlfriend, Myrna, is desperate to persuade him to come live with her in New York. Myrna believes that New York is progressive while the American South, where Ignatius lives, is backward. Although Myrna claims to be tolerant and to love freedom, she wants to impose her worldview on everyone around her and, therefore, wants to literally move Ignatius to a place which she feels epitomizes her own beliefs. Ignatius, in contrast, hates cities—he views them as symbols of modernity and thinks the medieval period was superior to the modern world.


Ignatius knows that Myrna, although she claims to be ultra-progressive and modern, does not fit in well with conventional American society. Although Myrna's views are progressive, they are extreme and clash with conventional society, such as her belief in total sexual liberation in a society which is, in many ways, still quite intolerant and puritanical about sex. Ignatius feels that Myrna cannot help this—she is just being herself—but feels that, because she is so antagonistic, prison will provide a type of fulfillment for her because it will confirm her belief that her progressivism makes her superior to the modern world. Ignatius relates to Myrna in this way—he, too, views himself as a genius who is unappreciated and persecuted in his own society.

## Chapter 6, Part 1 Quotes

☝☝ “I’m workin in modern slavery. If I quit, I get report for bein vagran. If I stay. I’m gainfully employ on a salary ain even startin to be a minimal wage.”

**Related Characters:** Burma Jones (speaker), Mr. Watson, Lana Lee

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 131

### Explanation and Analysis

Jones describes his job as a porter in the Night of Joy strip club, where he is employed by Lana Lee, to his friend, Mr.



Watson. Jones describes his job as “modern slavery” because he is not free to leave the Night of Joy and will be arrested if he tries. Laws against vagrancy in New Orleans in the 1960s meant that it was illegal to be unemployed. Since Jones is black and there is a problem with institutionalized racism in the city, he has been framed and unjustly arrested before, and now has a criminal record. As a result of this, Jones must have a job or he will be immediately imprisoned as a vagrant.

Lana knows about Jones’s situation and exploits it to her own advantage. She knows that Jones cannot quit, because he will be arrested, and has even threatened to turn him in to the police herself if he tries. Lana wants to keep Jones employed because she knows that she can pay him below the minimum wage since he cannot leave. In this sense, the job is more like slavery than employment because only Lana benefits from the exchange—she keeps more of her profits because she can underpay Jones. Lana, therefore, exploits Jones for her own gain and he has no power in the situation because he is not free to leave and put a stop to this exploitation.

## Chapter 7, Part 1 Quotes

☝☝ She described to Ignatius the courage of Patrolman Mancuso, who, against heavy odds, was fighting to retain his job, who wanted to work, who was making the best of his torture and exile in the bathroom at the bus station. Patrolman Mancuso’s situation reminded Ignatius of the situation of Boethius when he was imprisoned by the emperor before being killed.

**Related Characters:** Irene Reilly, Patrolman Mancuso, Ignatius J. Reilly

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 160

### Explanation and Analysis

Irene compares Ignatius to her friend Patrolman Mancuso and complains that Ignatius refuses to get a job, whereas Mancuso has one in which he is treated badly and yet still makes the best of it. Irene is frustrated with Ignatius because he despises the idea of work. This is because he believes that work is a modern concept which opposes his belief that the medieval period, in which work in the modern sense did not exist, was superior to modernity. However,

Ignatius also partly rejects work because he is lazy and neglects the fact that, of course, people in the medieval period *did* have to work, but that, because most lived under a feudal system in which a lord controlled all wealth, they did not get to keep what they earned and could not work to change their class the way that people often can under modern capitalism.

In contrast to Ignatius's worldview, Patrolman Mancuso has a modern worldview associated with American capitalism and believes it is possible for a person to change their fate through hard work and optimism. Ignatius disagrees with this and believes people's fates are literally and arbitrarily controlled by a medieval goddess, Fortuna, and therefore no amount of work can change a person's fate. Ignatius feels that Mancuso's attitude will get him nowhere and compares him to the medieval philosopher, Boethius, whom Ignatius has based his worldview around, and who invented the concept of Fortuna.

Lana recognizes that mainstream American society is also hypocritical about sex. Although customers want to consume sexual content, they, too, look down on the women who perform and consider them "tramps." This suggests that, although American culture in the 1960s claimed to be liberal about sex, it was still puritanical in certain aspects and viewed sex as degrading and shameful. Lana's customers are therefore disgusted with themselves because they enjoy sexual content and want to disguise sex in ways that make them more comfortable. Therefore, people would rather watch a "pure" woman behave impurely—even though this is inherently contradictory—than a woman perform in an openly sexual way, because this makes them feel better about their own desires.


Like a note in a bottle, the address might bring some reply, perhaps from a legitimate and professional saboteur. An address on a package wrapped in plain brown paper was as damaging as a fingerprint on a gun, Jones thought. It was something that shouldn't be there.

## Chapter 9, Part 2 Quotes

"I know this business. Stripping's an insult to a woman. The kinda creeps come in here don't wanna see a tramp get insulted [...] Anybody can insult a tramp. These jerks wanna see a sweet, clean virgin get insulted and stripped. You gotta use your head for Chrissake, Darlene. You gotta be pure. I want you to be like a nice, refined girl who's surprised when the bird starts grabbing at your clothes."

**Related Characters:** Lana Lee (speaker), Darlene

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 


**Page Number:** 220-221

### Explanation and Analysis

In the Night of Joy strip club, run by Lana Lee, the bar girl Darlene practices her exotic dance. However, Lana stops her halfway through and complains that Darlene's dance is too sexual for an exotic performance. Lana exposes her hypocrisy in this passage—she runs a strip club herself yet feels that stripping is an "insult to women." This suggests that Lana looks down on the women she hires but continues to exploit them for her own gain. Lana believes that her strip club is classy, and that there is a difference between this and other, low status strip clubs. However, ultimately, Lana still sells sex—the difference is not as great as she seems to think.

**Related Characters:** George, Darlene, Burma Jones, Lana Lee

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 224

### Explanation and Analysis

Jones discovers a heap of packages in a cupboard at the Night of Joy and thinks that these may contain evidence of Lana's criminal activities. He writes the address of the club on the side of a package to try and sabotage Lana.

Jones cannot quit his job at the Night of Joy because he is black and will be arrested under racist vagrancy laws if he is unemployed. Lana knows this and will turn Jones in to the police if he tries because she knows the police will believe a white woman's word against a black man. Jones suspects that Lana is a criminal but knows he cannot go to the police because he will not be believed. Therefore, although Jones wants to sabotage Lana to escape from his unfair working conditions, he cannot do so openly because he risks arrest himself if he causes trouble or openly defies Lana.

Jones's idea reflects the theme of fate which runs throughout the novel. The idea of the package being like a "note in a bottle" suggests that it will go out into the world




and may, at some fateful moment, come back to haunt Lana in an unexpected way. Although Jones has little control over his own fate, as he is basically kept captive by Lana and cannot change this because of systemic racism, he knows that the universe works in strange, unfathomable ways and believes that this random piece of evidence, which links the package to Lana, may still yield results.

## Chapter 9, Part 4 Quotes

☛ Some musk which my system generates must be especially appealing to the authorities of the government. Who else would be accosted by a policeman while innocently awaiting his mother before a department store? Who else would be spied upon and reported for picking a helpless stray of a kitten from a gutter? Like a bitch in heat, I seem to attract a coterie of policemen and sanitation officials. The world will someday get me on some ludicrous pretext; I simply await the day that they drag me to some air-conditioned dungeon and leave me there beneath the fluorescent lights and soundproofed ceiling to pay the price for scorning all that they hold dear within their little latex hearts.

**Related Characters:** Ignatius J. Reilly (speaker), Burma Jones

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 230

### Explanation and Analysis

Ignatius writes in his journal about his tendency to attract suspicion when he is out in public and his worry that, one day, he will be arrested simply for being himself. Ignatius feels that he is uniquely persecuted because he is unconventional and at odds with modern society—Ignatius is a medievalist and believes that modernity is inferior to the medieval period. Although Ignatius is partly correct and was almost arrested outside a department store because he looked out of place, he fails to take responsibility for the part his own actions played in the incidents he describes. For example, the “helpless kitten” was, in fact, a stray cat that he picked up when he was meant to be serving food and therefore violated health codes. Ignatius does not believe he is responsible for his own behavior and that, instead, human life is controlled by the medieval goddess Fortuna. Although Ignatius is unfairly persecuted in the novel—at one point, his mother and her friends try to have him locked


in a mental institution because he will not conform to their view of respectability—he does not take into account the fact that almost all the other characters in the novel face threats to their freedom at some point. Furthermore, Ignatius likes to think of himself as persecuted because it supports his belief that he is superior to modern society, and therefore that society fears him, making him similar to his favorite author, Boethius, a medieval philosopher who was imprisoned for treason.

## Chapter 10, Part 2 Quotes

☛ “Color peoples cain fin no job, but they sure can fin a openin in jail. Coin in jail the bes way you get you somethin to eat regular. But I rather starve outside. I rather mop a whore floor than go to jail and be makin plenny license plate and rug and leather belt and shit. I jus was stupor enough to get my ass snatch up in a trap at that Night of Joy. I gotta figure this thing out myself.”

**Related Characters:** Burma Jones (speaker), Lana Lee, Mr. Watson

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 240

### Explanation and Analysis

Jones complains to his friend, Mr. Watson, about his job in the Night of Joy strip club, where he is paid less than minimum wage and exploited by the owner, Lana Lee, because he is black. Jones draws attention to the racial discrimination, which was a widespread problem in 1960s New Orleans because of the history of slavery and segregation in the American South. Jones observes that, as a black person, it is easier to get regular meals in prison than it is to find decent employment that will pay minimum wage. Vagrancy laws, which made it illegal to be unemployed, along with racial bias, meant that black people were often imprisoned because they were unemployed. This suggests that, although black people are supposed to be free, they were treated like slaves by the state who incarcerated them and made them work for free in jail.



Although Jones acknowledges that this would be easier, his freedom is important to him and he would rather be a free man working for less than minimum wage than face prison. This suggests that freedom is essential to quality of life and that people will go to great lengths to protect their

independence. Although Jones's situation is very difficult, he is willing to take responsibility for himself and acknowledges that he made a mistake at the Night of Joy because he let Lana know he was desperate for work and she took advantage of him. Jones, therefore, shows himself to be conscientious and much more cognizant of the consequences of his actions than the other characters in the novel, despite the fact that he has the least agency of anyone in the novel.

### Chapter 10, Part 3 Quotes

☝☝ "That's what's so wonderful about New Orleans. You can masquerade and Mardi Gras all year round if you want to. Really, sometimes the Quarter is like one big costume ball. Sometimes I can't tell friend from foe."

**Related Characters:** Dorian Greene (speaker), Patrolman Mancuso, Ignatius J. Reilly

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 256

#### Explanation and Analysis

Ignatius meets Dorian Greene, a gay man who lives in the French Quarter, and has a conversation with him. Ignatius is dressed as a pirate for his job as a hot dog vendor, and, while they talk, Patrolman Mancuso passes in one of his disguises which his sergeant makes him wear to work. Dorian exclaims that he loves fancy dress.

Dorian loves costume and disguise because he feels that people can be themselves in costume in ways that they cannot in everyday life. New Orleans is associated with Mardi Gras, in which people often dress in masks, because the Carnival celebration takes place there, but also because it is a diverse city that contains many different races and types of people. The French Quarter was considered a disreputable part of town by middle-class New Orleans society during this time, which was still very conventional and restrictive. This suggests that, in the French Quarter, people can be themselves in ways they cannot elsewhere. For someone like Dorian, who is gay and, therefore, does not fit into conventional society (homosexuality was illegal in the 1960s) this is important.

Dorian's remark that he "cannot tell friend from foe" suggests that costume can also mask people's true identities

and intentions. For example, Patrolman Mancuso is a foe to Dorian and his friends, many of whom are gay and/or male escorts. However, because of Mancuso's disguises, which make him stand out even in the French Quarter, they can identify him and avoid arrest.

### Chapter 11, Part 2 Quotes

☝☝ When we have at last overthrown all existing governments, the world will enjoy not war, but global orgies conducted with the utmost protocol and the most truly international spirit, for these people do transcend simple national differences. Their minds are on one goal; they are truly united; they think as one.

**Related Characters:** Ignatius J. Reilly (speaker), Dorian Greene

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 269

#### Explanation and Analysis

After he meets Dorian Greene, Ignatius comes up with a new "socially progressive" idea to annoy his ex-girlfriend, Myrna: he plans to enlist an army of gay men to overthrow the government and bring about world peace. Ignatius has an extremely reductive and stereotypical view of gay people. He is homophobic and believes that gay people are sexual deviants, who are obsessed with sex and will therefore turn every gathering into an orgy. Ignatius dislikes sexuality in general and views open displays of homosexuality as modern perversions which would not have occurred in the medieval period—a time he believes to be morally superior to the present.

Ignatius also dehumanizes gay people with his belief that they "think as one," as he does not credit them with being individuals or holding autonomous opinions. Because he believes all gay people think the same, he thinks that he will easily be able to manipulate them to accept his own political views. This suggests that Ignatius is not really interested in helping gay people or improving society, but merely imposing his own worldview on society and using gay people to this end. His motives are also self-interested as one of his main objectives is to make himself look good to annoy his ex-girlfriend, Myrna.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## CHAPTER 1, PART 1

Outside the D. H. Holmes department store on Canal Street in New Orleans, Ignatius J. Reilly stands amid the crowds beneath the clocktower, eating chips and surveying the outfits of the people around him. He sees that many of the people wear expensive or fashionable clothes and takes this as a sign of their moral and spiritual bankruptcy. He himself is dressed comfortably—in a flannel jacket, baggy pants, and large **hunting cap** with ear flaps—and regards this as the ideal outfit for a sensible and intellectual person.

Ignatius waits for his mother, Irene, who has been inside the store for some time. Ignatius grows indignant about this—he is overweight, and his feet hurt when he is forced to stand for a long time. He decides he will hold this against Irene later to “keep her in her place.” The sun is beginning to set, and Ignatius and Irene have been in town all afternoon. Ignatius went to the music shop, to buy strings for his lute, and after this, went to the arcade and played on a baseball machine.

The machine broke, however, and Ignatius demanded his money back. The arcade owner tried to blame Ignatius for breaking it, but Ignatius won the fight. He wonders now, while he stands in the crowd, where the machine will need to be fixed. He thinks perhaps it will have to go to Chicago or another city. He associates cities with pollution and industry and hopes the machine will be returned in working order. Ignatius is so wrapped up in these thoughts that he does not notice that he is being watched by a policeman.

*The opening passage establishes Ignatius as an individual who is staunchly opposed to modern conventions. The department store symbolizes modern society, from which Ignatius feels he is separate. Ignatius, similarly, distances himself from the people in the crowd, who wear modern clothing. Although, of course, Ignatius's clothes are also modern, he takes no pride in them, and therefore views himself as separate from modernity, which he thinks is vain and obsessed with image. Ironically, however, Ignatius is just as preoccupied with appearance as the others in the crowd, as he, too, thinks about what his clothes represent and how they make him look compared to others.*



*Ignatius is hypocritical here—he convinces himself that he wants to help Irene (who he believes gets out of control without his censorship) when, really, he just wants to control her. It is ironic that Ignatius despises modernity because the things he enjoys are modern. This suggests that Ignatius does not always understand his desires and is both attracted to and repelled by many aspects of modernity.*



*Cities represent modernity and capitalist production, things that Ignatius despises. However, Ignatius is again shown to be hypocritical as he enjoys many of the benefits of modern capitalism, and the leisure activities it produces, such as the game machine. The policeman symbolizes a threat to freedom and supports Ignatius's idea that modern life is not free.*



The policeman, Patrolman Mancuso, slides up to Ignatius and asks to see his identification. Ignatius replies indignantly that he is waiting for his mother. Mancuso notices the lute string dangling from his bag and wants to know what it is. Ignatius begins to shout at Mancuso for harassing him. He wants to know why the police target him when the city is awash with “vice” and crime. Mancuso tries to take Ignatius by the arm, but Ignatius smacks him on the head with the sheet music he has bought and the two begin to tussle.

*Although there is a general preoccupation with freedom in American culture, Ignatius’s interactions with Patrolman Mancuso suggests that American culture is not as free as it appears. This encounter shows that people may be arbitrarily arrested if they merely look out of place, or that they are required carry ID cards with them. These standards are not generally associated with free societies, but are common in totalitarian societies, such as the Soviet Union, a communist country which America went to war with during the 20th century. This suggests that American attitudes toward freedom in the 1960s (when the story is set) are hypocritical, since the U.S. is freer in theory than it is in practice.*



Inside D. H. Holmes, Mrs. Irene Reilly, Ignatius’s mother, is in the bakery discussing Ignatius with the girl who works behind the counter. Irene complains that the arthritis in her elbow is bad but that she can’t soak it in the bath because Ignatius is in the tub all day. The woman behind the counter says she thought Ignatius was married, but Irene scoffs at this and tells the woman that Ignatius’s girlfriend left.

*Irene’s conversation gives the reader a picture of Ignatius’s home and romantic life. The fact that Ignatius takes long baths suggests that he has little to do all day and is not a productive member of society. Since modern America is a capitalist society, it places an emphasis on productivity as a virtue because this is what drives the economy. This supports the idea that Ignatius does not fit into modern society, and the fact that his girlfriend has left suggests that he is romantically and sexually alienated as well.*



Outside the shop, a crowd has gathered around Ignatius and Patrolman Mancuso. People begin to side with Ignatius and tell the policeman to leave him alone. One old man shouts that Ignatius is only waiting for his mother. Mancuso ignores the man and tells Ignatius that he must come to the station. The old man pipes up again and cries that the police are all “communiss,” and that the city never used to be this way. Mancuso turns on the old man while Ignatius swings the lute string at Mancuso, and someone else from the crowd screams that the poor old man is probably “somebody’s grampaw.”

*The old man’s accusation of the police being “communiss” reflects the general paranoia about communism that pervaded the U.S. during this time. Communism was associated with authoritarianism in 1960s America because of the U.S.’s involvement in the Cold War with Russia, which was communist at the time. Although America was democratic, and was a liberal society compared with totalitarian Russia, there was a widespread feeling that state authorities in America, like the police, had too much power over citizens, whom they could arrest on thin pretexts. There was also concern that governmental power might increase in America and that this would mimic that of communist countries.*



Irene exits the shop and rushes to Ignatius’s side. She grabs the lute string and demands to know what the policeman wants with her son. Patrolman Mancuso asks Ignatius if he has a job and Irene nervously tells the policeman that Ignatius helps her at home because of her arthritis. Ignatius confirms this and adds that he is also writing a book about the evils of modern society. The old man joins in again and says that Irene is very lucky that Ignatius helps her. Patrolman Mancuso tells him to be quiet.

*Laws against vagrancy in New Orleans during the 1960s meant that it was illegal to be unemployed—it was essentially forbidden to be an unproductive citizen under capitalism, a system driven by productivity. On an ideological level, this is not so different from the enforced labor which existed in communist countries like Russia, which America viewed as a threat to democracy and freedom. Irene is quick to justify Ignatius’s unemployment because she knows that, if he is discovered to be unproductive, he will be considered a criminal in American society.*



Irene quietly asks Ignatius what he has done, and Ignatius blames the old man and says that he started it. Irene tells Patrolman Mancuso that he should arrest the old man—who still insists the police are communists—and begins to shout about how much she loves the police force. People from the crowd take her side and join in while Patrolman Mancuso begins to arrest the old man.

*Irene's response reflects widespread fear of totalitarianism in American society and supports the idea that Irene, who has lived through the Cold War, is afraid that people's freedoms will be taken away, either by communists or by authoritarian governments. This supports the idea that, among older generations in the 1960s, there was a widespread concern about protecting one's rights. Patrolman Mancuso's behavior suggests that he is willing to arrest almost anyone, so long as they look suspicious, purely for the sake of making an arrest. Toole implies that this is the role of the police in society and that, so long as state authority is given free reign, there will inevitably be groups who are unfairly persecuted.*



Ignatius and Irene flee the scene and rush down Canal Street. Ignatius complains that he will have a heart attack if they do not slow down, and Irene tells him to shut up. They turn into the French Quarter and Irene demands to know what Ignatius did to get himself arrested. Ignatius protests that he did nothing and Irene ushers them into a nightclub, called the **Night of Joy**, for a rest.

*This passage shows that, although Irene is suspicious of authority, she is equally suspicious of Ignatius and, in fact, believes it is more likely that Ignatius is in the wrong. This suggests that Irene is not anti-authority but, in fact, believes that government authority is necessary to protect people's freedom from those who commit crimes or do not comply with society's rules.*



The **Night of Joy** is dark, dingy, and deserted. Irene takes a seat at the bar and sets the boxes of cake from the bakery out before her. Ignatius reluctantly sits down but complains that the bar smells terrible and that it will soon be raided by the police. Irene orders two beers and the bartender grudgingly serves them. He asks Ignatius if he will take off his **cap** and Ignatius furiously replies that he will not.

*Ignatius's reluctance to sit at the bar suggests that he ideologically rejects indulgence in vices like alcohol, and likely views this club as yet another symptom of modernity's corruption. Ignatius's cap symbolizes his individuality because it makes him stand out. He will not remove it because he is not willing to compromise his values or beliefs and his hat shows that he believes he is morally superior to the other customers.*



Ignatius asks Irene how her doctor's appointment went, and she tells him that her arthritic elbow needs frequent massages. Ignatius tells her that he cannot help because he hates human contact. He says that he would be more help to Irene if he could drive, but laments that he cannot because he gets carsick. He then begins to tell a story about a time that he took a Greyhound Bus to Baton Rouge and got sick on the journey. He hated being outside the city and felt that he had entered "the heart of darkness."

*This introduces the reader to Ignatius's aversion toward human intimacy. Ignatius is a misanthropic character and tends to despise others or feel superior toward them. Ignatius is also extremely conservative—not only in his political and philosophical views, but also in that he dislikes change—and even a short trip out of the city has proven to be too much for him. [Heart of Darkness](#) is a novel by Joseph Conrad about a man who journeys into an Africa colony under European rule in the late 1900s. The novel contrasts the war-torn, colonized country the man travels into with the order of the narrator's previous life. Ignatius relates to this idea because he sees any alteration in his circumstances, or in society, as a descent into chaos. Toole uses this comparison to comically highlight how dramatic Ignatius is about change.*



Irene listens resignedly to Ignatius's story, which she has heard several times before. He explains that he refused to get the bus back and, instead, went in a taxi. He made the driver go terribly slowly, however, and they were pulled over by the police. Irene remarks that Ignatius never did take the job that he went to Baton Rouge to apply for. Ignatius replies that the Medieval Department where he interviewed was a den of corruption—his favorite jacket was stolen while he was in the bathroom.

The bartender approaches again and seems to take an interest in Ignatius's story. Ignatius furiously berates him for eavesdropping and Irene quickly orders two more beers, which the bartender sulkily serves.

*Ignatius is so averse to and afraid of change that he will not take an opportunity which might be good for him. As a medieval scholar, Ignatius would likely make a good medieval professor. It is implied that Ignatius's avoidance of change and superiority complex—he wants to believe he is morally pure in comparison to the "corrupt" department—are ways to protect himself and avoid risking failure.*



*Ignatius generally lacks social graces because of his superiority complex: he treats the barman as though he is inferior to them. Irene, by contrast, is better at judging social situations and tries to appease the barman. Ignatius looks down on working people because he feels that they have sold their freedom for conventional, material comfort. He does not realize that, for most people, freedom is dependent upon being able to earn a living and meet one's basic needs.*



## CHAPTER 1, PART 2

In the police station, Claude Robichaux (the old man whom Patrolman Mancuso arrested) sits in a cell alongside a black man in sunglasses named Burma Jones, who is also under arrest. Claude lays his identification cards out on his knee and Jones watches him curiously and asks why he has been arrested. Claude says that he doesn't know, and Jones is amazed by this. Jones says that black people are always being arrested for no reason, but that the same doesn't often happen to white people.

Claude explains that he called Patrolman Mancuso, a communist. Jones says that if he had done that, he'd have been in prison by now. Jones explains that he has been framed. Someone stole a bag of cashew nuts from Woolsworth when he was in there and the guard blamed him. Even though he doesn't have the nuts, he says that the police will probably go out and buy some just to set him up. He reckons the guard stole the nuts himself, anyway.

*Claude has not committed any crime and believes that his identity cards—which comply with regulations—will protect him. This shows that Claude has faith in the American system, which claims to protect citizen's freedoms, even though he has just been wrongfully arrested. Burma Jones, in contrast, has no such faith in the system because, as a black man in the 1960s (just after the introduction of civil rights laws for black people and the abolition of segregation laws in the South) his freedom is always under threat. Racial prejudice, based in the South's legacy of slavery, meant that black people were often discriminated against by the authorities and were widely believed to be criminals, even when they committed no crime. Jones thus believes that American society is hypocritical because it claims to support the freedom of black people but, in practice, does not.*



*Jones is fully aware that he, as a black man, is treated more harshly than Claude, a white man. While Claude as, at least, involved in an altercation with a police officer, which explains his arrest, Jones was simply in a shop where a crime was committed. This suggests that there was systemic racism within the police force during this time—if a white person committed a crime, they could easily pin it on a black person. Black Americans faced the constant threat of incarceration simply because of their race—something which white Americans did not experience.*



The sergeant behind the desk calls Claude up to speak to him. Patrolman Mancuso hovers in the background and Claude lays his cards in the desk and miserably tries to explain himself. When the sergeant learns that Patrolman Mancuso tried to arrest Ignatius, who was just waiting for his mother, he turns on Mancuso and says that they will need to “fix him up.” The sergeant dismisses Claude—who is in tears—and tells Mancuso to take him home. Jones watches in amazement from his cell.

*The sergeant’s harsh response when he hears that Patrolman Mancuso has tried to arrest a white man for no reason suggests that white people’s freedoms are respected by American authorities. It is, therefore, embarrassing for a policeman to wrongfully imprison a white person. However, American society is shown to be hypocritical because these same rules do clearly do not apply to black citizens—the sergeant does not have the same reaction to Jones’s arrest, even though Jones has not committed a crime.*



## CHAPTER 1, PART 3

Evening begins to fall outside the **Night of Joy** and a few more customers join Ignatius and Irene. A young, sad looking woman named Darlene drinks alone at the bar. Elsewhere, a fashionable young man, Dorian Greene, drinks a cocktail. He spills his drink on his jacket and Irene calls the bartender for a cloth. She asks the young man what he is drinking, and he replies that Irene would not understand even if he told her. Ignatius takes offense to this and the two men begin to bicker. Irene, who is quite drunk, orders another drink and tries to buy one for Dorian as well.

*Dorian is a fashionable character, which Ignatius despises this because he believes that care for one’s appearance equates to vanity. Ignatius views vanity as a problem in modern society, because it is not checked by a system of morality, as it was in the medieval period, of which Ignatius is a scholar.*



Ignatius starts talking about the bus again, and Irene complains that she cannot listen to that story one more time. Ignatius is offended, but Darlene overhears and wants to know the story. Ignatius launches into it again. The bartender irritably serves Irene and makes a cocktail for Dorian. Irene tells Dorian about her and Ignatius’s run-in with the police and Dorian listens sympathetically.

*Distrust of the authorities is clearly a widespread attitude in New Orleans, and in American society more generally in the 1960s. Dorian is not surprised to hear that Ignatius was almost been arrested for no reason, which suggests that people in this area are frequently incarcerated for no reason, despite the purported importance of American ideals about freedom.*



Dorian suddenly asks Irene if he can buy her hat—he runs a vintage clothing business—and Irene drunkenly agrees. Dorian pays her and rushes off, and Irene complains to Ignatius that she is hungry. Ignatius is midway through the bus story and Darlene looks extremely bored. Ignatius irritably tells his mother to eat the cakes she bought, and Darlene gets excited when she sees the food and cuts Ignatius off.

*Dorian’s character is associated with costume, disguise, and aesthetic appearance throughout the novel. He is the antithesis of Ignatius, who despises vanity and who, ironically, goes out of his way to appear scruffy in order to show the world that he is not vain.*



The three of them begin to eat the cakes, and Irene tells Darlene that Ignatius has a master’s degree and that he “graduated smart.” Ignatius makes a sarcastic comment about his mother’s choice of words, but Darlene tells him off and says he is cruel to his mother. Irene begins to sob when she hears this and tells Darlene that Ignatius treats her badly. Ignatius says Irene is drunk and tries to persuade her to leave.

*Ignatius has a superior and condescending attitude toward Irene. Although he believes that he looks out for his mother and protects her from herself (as when he tries to stop her from drinking), Ignatius merely wants to control his mother. His attitude toward Irene, therefore, is self-serving rather than charitable.*



A woman in a black leather coat bursts into the bar and asks the bartender what is going on. She looks at Ignatius and Irene and accuses the bartender of trying to ruin her business. The bartender insists that he has tried to get rid of them. The woman, Lana Lee, turns on Darlene and says that she shouldn't encourage people like them. Irene and Ignatius indignantly get up to leave—Ignatius calls Lana a Nazi as he goes—but Lana screams at them to pay for their drinks. Irene pays but says that they will "take [their] trade elsewhere." Lana says that this is good because people like them are "the kiss of death" to a business.

Irene and Ignatius stumble down the street towards their car. Ignatius asks Irene where her hat has gone, and Irene tells him that she sold it to Dorian. Ignatius is upset—he says the hat was a memento from his childhood—and wants to stop at a hot dog stand to cheer himself up. Irene refuses and leads Ignatius firmly to the car.

Irene tries to drive out of her parking space. Ignatius pressures her to hurry up and Irene accidentally smashes the fender of the car behind her. When she finally maneuvers out of the space, the car shoots forwards and crashes into a nearby building. The balcony overhead collapses on top of the car, covering them with rubble. Irene whirls around to see if Ignatius, who is in the back seat, is okay. Ignatius is unhurt but vomits out of the rear window.

Patrolman Mancuso is on his way home from work dressed as a ballerina. His sergeant has put him in charge of arresting "suspicious characters" on the condition that he must wear a different costume to work every day. As he passes Chartres Street, Patrolman Mancuso hears a crash and rushes around the corner, where he is confronted with Ignatius vomiting out of the car window.

*Ignatius is preoccupied with the idea that there are totalitarian forces at work within modern society, and that these forces want to take away his freedoms. He calls Lana a Nazi because she is controlling in the way she runs her bar and he feels he is being unfairly oppressed by her, despite him only reluctantly sitting at the bar in the first place. Furthermore, Ignatius views anything which restricts his behavior as an authoritarian force because he is not willing to compromise in any way to fit in with society. Ignatius also loves movies and associates Lana's style of dress with portrayals of Nazis in 1960s film.*



*Ignatius's obsession with the past and aversion to change supports his deeply conservative nature. He is a medieval scholar and believes that the past is superior to the present. The hot dog stand foreshadows Ignatius's interaction with a hot dog vendor later in the novel.*



*This scene showcases Irene's relationship with Ignatius, who bullies her and treats her as though she is incapable. Although Ignatius pretends that he does this for Irene's own good, he is really concerned about his own comfort. Irene is so preoccupied with appeasing Ignatius that she accidentally causes him suffering. This reflects the co-dependent nature of their relationship, which holds them both back.*



*A fateful accidental brings Irene, Ignatius, and Patrolman Mancuso together again and sets many of the novel's plot strands in motion. Fate is a major theme throughout the novel—Ignatius, as a scholar of philosopher Boethius, believes in the medieval concept which stated that every person's destiny was controlled by a blind goddess, Fortuna, who spun a wheel of fortune to control people's lives.*





## CHAPTER 2, PART 1

In his bedroom, Ignatius writes in one of his notepads. He writes about the medieval period and laments that, after this era, “Fortune’s wheel” turned “against humanity” and a new age of “chaos,” insanity, and vulgarity began. Ignatius stops to read what he has written and is rather pleased with himself. Ignatius writes that once “The Enlightenment” started, people became obsessed with money rather than spirituality. This left humanity with a terrible fate: they were forced to “go to work.”

Ignatius sets the pad down on the floor, which is already strewn with other notepads and sheets of paper. He plans, one day, to assemble all these fragments into a great work, but progress so far has been slow. Ignatius lifts his nightshirt and sees that his stomach is bloated. He often bloats in times of stress, and so feels that his body is trying to tell him something. Perhaps it portends the beginning of a “bad cycle” in which Fortuna’s wheel will spin downwards for him.

Ignatius lies down and begins to pray to Fortuna. Irene shouts through the door that Patrolman Mancuso will arrive soon to talk to her about the car accident. Ignatius tells her to go away and bounces up and down on the bed, trying to burp to relieve his bloating. The movement arouses him, however, and he begins to masturbate. As he reaches a climax, he pictures his pet dog, Rex, who has been dead for several years.

*Ignatius believes that the medieval period was superior to the Enlightenment, which came after it. The Enlightenment was the birthplace of many modern ideas, such as the development of modern science and political concepts like democracy. Although the Enlightenment is generally viewed as a period of rationality, Ignatius believes that, in fact, the medieval period was more civilized than the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment also brought about modern economic theory and capitalism, which Ignatius despises.*



*Ignatius thinks about his body in medieval terms and feels that it is subject to “humors,” a medieval medical term for the forces which make up the human body. These humors required balance in order to work correctly, and so Ignatius interprets his stress as something which creates an imbalance in his body and, therefore, causes physical symptoms. Although Ignatius rejects modern medicine, the physiological effects of stress are something which modern medicine also supports (although it has disproved ideas about humors) and this suggests that, although Ignatius is obsessed with his health throughout the novel, he is not necessarily wrong to think stress causes some of his symptoms.*



*Ignatius literally believes in Fortuna as a deity. He thus assumes that he has no control over the direction of his life and hopes to appease the goddess with prayer. Ignatius’s fantasy about Rex in this passage occurs while he is masturbating, which suggests that his sexual urges are unconventional. This is ironic given that Ignatius claims to hate sexual deviancy and modern society’s corrupt obsession with sex. It demonstrates that Ignatius is a hypocrite but also suggests that his outrage may be rooted in shame over his own sexual urges because they do not fit conventional standards.*



## CHAPTER 2, PART 2

Jones goes to see Lana Lee at the **Night of Joy** and applies for a job as the porter. Jones tells Lana that he needs a job because he has recently been arrested, and the police will imprison him for vagrancy if he is out of work. At first Lana is reluctant to hire him, but then she realizes that, because he needs the job so desperately, she can pay him almost nothing. She tells him the job pays \$20 a week and Jones asks what happened to the minimum wage. Lana says Jones must take it or leave it and Jones bitterly accepts.

*Whereas Ignatius is unemployed, Jones must find a job because otherwise he will be arrested. This suggests that vagrancy laws (which, in theory, were supposed to apply to black and white people) really only applied to black people in practice. Lana exploits Jones for her own gain because she knows there is nothing that he can do about his circumstances.*



Darlene breezes into the bar, and Lana shouts that she is late. Darlene says that her pet cockatoo was ill, and Lana begins to berate Darlene for drinking with Ignatius and Irene the previous night. Darlene tries to explain that she felt sorry for Irene, but Lana says that Darlene knows the type of people Lana wants in the bar. Lana then announces that she is going to the shops. As she leaves, she warns Darlene and Jones to stay out of the cabinet beneath the bar.

When Lana has gone, Darlene complains to Jones that Lana is a slave driver and an awful boss. Jones agrees and says that Lana has not so much employed him as “bought” him. Darlene tells Jones that she wants to be an exotic dancer, but that she works on commission for Lana and only gets paid if people buy drinks. This is hard work, though, because Lana waters down all the alcohol she serves.

Darlene doesn’t understand what Lana has against Ignatius and Irene. They spent a lot of money and, she says, they get far worse people in the **Night of Joy**. Darlene thinks the sight of Ignatius’s strange **cap** annoyed Lana. She tells Jones not to worry about getting the bar too clean; it is too dark inside to see dirt on the floor. Jones can’t see it either—he can hardly see a thing through his dark glasses.

## CHAPTER 2, PART 3

Patrolman Mancuso rides his police motorcycle down St. Charles Avenue dressed in a false beard and Bermuda shorts. He loves the motorcycle and thinks the trees that line the street look beautiful on this mild winter afternoon. He is going to see Irene Reilly even though it is his day off. Mancuso felt so sorry for her when he found her at the scene of the car crash that he vowed to visit her when he was free.

*Lana is totally self-interested and only cares about what makes her business look good. Darlene, on the other hand, is genuinely sympathetic and cares about other people. She sincerely worried about Irene, who was drunk and upset the night before.*



*The American South, where the novel is set, has a long history of slavery. Jones suggests that he is like a slave for Lana because Lana disregards his working rights and pays him below minimum wage. He is also like a slave since vagrancy laws mean he will be arrested if he tries to leave the job. Systemic racism in the South allows Lana easily take advantage of Jones because he is unlikely to find a better situation elsewhere.*



*Lana seems to believe her strip club is somehow different from others to justify her behavior in running one, an attitude that demonstrates her self-deception and hypocrisy. Ignatius’s cap is a sign of his individuality and makes him stand out in most situations, marking him as someone who does not blend easily into conventional society. Jones’s sunglasses function in a similar way to Ignatius’s cap. Because Jones is black, he too struggles to fit into conventional white society; his sunglasses operate as a mask to disguise his emotions about this and to keep him at a distance from a society which rejects him.*



*Patrolman Mancuso is a mild-mannered and sensitive person, although in his professional role he is meant to be an intimidating authority figure. However, to be a good undercover officer, Mancuso must learn to essentially lose himself by putting his own personality aside and slipping into a professional, inconspicuous role that people will be fooled by.*



Patrolman Mancuso finds the Reilly's house and parks his bike outside. Irene's car is in the driveway, and Mancuso notes that the house is very small and run down. A radio blares inside. Patrolman Mancuso realizes that the neighbors are watching him through the shutters and rings the doorbell. Through the window of the house next door, a woman yells that he should go around the back because Irene is in the kitchen. Patrolman Mancuso obeys and finds Irene in the backyard, hanging out some laundry to dry.

Irene is startled when she sees Patrolman Mancuso. When she realizes who he is, she invites him inside for coffee. The kitchen is grimy and bare—unlike his own clean, modern one at home—and Irene makes the coffee in a pan on the stove. Patrolman Mancuso takes off his fake beard and sets it on the table. Irene offers him a doughnut, which he declines. In the other room, Mancuso can hear a pop music TV show that Ignatius is watching. Irene tells him that Ignatius hates the program but that he watches it religiously.

Irene sits down with Patrolman Mancuso to drink her coffee and Mancuso tells her that she will have to pay a \$1,000 fine for the damage she caused in the car crash. Irene is horrified and Mancuso listens with genuine sympathy as she complains that she has no way to get the money. Abandoning his TV show for a moment, Ignatius enters the room and coolly greets Mancuso. Irene tells Ignatius about the fine, but he says that this is Irene's problem and she will have to find the money somewhere.

Irene glumly suggests that she could remortgage the house, but Ignatius indignantly tells her that she should refuse to pay. Irene realizes that this is not an option and Ignatius sweeps back to the living room. When he has gone, Irene complains to Patrolman Mancuso that Ignatius would not care if she went to jail. She begins to cry, and Mancuso tells her that, whenever he gets down about things, he goes bowling with his aunt. Irene takes a bottle of wine from the oven and drinks from it. Mancuso admits that sometimes, when family life gets on top of him, he would like to get drunk.

*The neighbors keep Ignatius and Irene's house constantly under surveillance. Although American society reveres individual expression, this passage shows that it is also deeply concerned with conformity—people are suspicious of those who do not fit in. As one cannot really be free to express oneself under these conditions, society's obsession with freedom is painted here as hypocritical and ironic.*



*Ignatius has a complicated love/hate relationship with television. He despises it as a symbol of modernity and views it as a corrosive force in the world. At the same time, however, he enjoys and is drawn to it. This suggests that Ignatius's most basic urges often diverge from his belief that he should remain morally pure and uncorrupted by modernity, which he views as vulgar and shallow.*



*Ignatius is suspicious of Patrolman Mancuso because Mancuso symbolizes authority and the enforcement of conventional modern values—thing with which Ignatius feels at odds. Ignatius is extremely selfish—although he is quite happy to live off his mother, he is not prepared to help her. In this sense, Ignatius is hypocritical and does not take responsibility for his role in causing the car crash. He generally does not feel responsible for incidents in his own life because he believes that a medieval goddess named Fortuna controls his fate, and thus any change in his behavior will prove futile.*



*Irene, like many of the other characters in the novel, faces the idea that her freedom may be taken away and that she may go to prison. Her reaction supports the idea that losing one's freedom is a significant personal blow since it is an important aspect of human life, although one that is difficult to protect or ensure in most societies. The threat of imprisonment runs through the novel and is overlaid by the fact that Ignatius's favorite scholar, Boethius (who wrote [The Consolation of Philosophy](#), which Ignatius uses as a life manual) wrote this tract while in prison.*



Ignatius storms back into the room and tells Irene that she must start his dinner so that he can be at the movies on time that evening—he does not want to miss the cartoon. Ignatius tells Patrolman Mancuso that he should leave, and Irene begins to yell that Ignatius doesn't care about her. Patrolman Mancuso tries to excuse himself and Ignatius stomps back to his room.

In his room, Ignatius slumps on his bed and begins to write on one of his notepads about the evils of television. Irene comes to the door and yells for Ignatius to let her in. He refuses and she throws herself against the door in a fury. Finally, Ignatius relents—although he claims that he is afraid to let her in because she is so emotional—and opens the door. Irene is horrified by the mess of papers on the floor, but Ignatius explains that this is his life's work.

Irene complains about the smell in Ignatius's room, and he accuses her of being drunk. Irene tells him that he must go out and get a job to help her pay the fine for the car crash. Ignatius replies that Patrolman Mancuso must have put this perverse idea in her head. Ignatius warns her that Mancuso is their enemy; he is responsible for a downward spin in Fortuna's Wheel. Mancuso is also the type of man who thinks that everything will be alright so long as people “work all the time.”

Irene insists that Ignatius must get a job, or she will remortgage the house. Ignatius is horrified. He says that he cannot possibly work because he is about to have a mental breakthrough with his writing. Nor can Irene remortgage the house, he says, because the loss of his family home would send him mad. Instead, he suggests Irene spend less money on wine. Irene counters that Ignatius's room is full of “trinkets” and useless things, which Ignatius fiercely denies.

*It is ironic that Ignatius expects Irene to take his whims seriously, especially when it involves something trivial and childish, like the cinema cartoon. His hypocrisy is shown again as he, in turn, does not take Irene seriously when she has legitimate problem, like the fine.*



*Ignatius justifies his consumption of media to himself because he pretends that it is research for his tract about the evils of modernity. However, really, it is likely that Ignatius simply enjoys modern pleasures like television, but cannot admit this to himself because it would damage his idea of himself as superior to modernity. Irene cannot see the value in Ignatius's academic work, and this supports the idea that Ignatius sees himself as someone who is unappreciated and misunderstood in his own time.*



*Ignatius belittles Patrolman Mancuso's belief in productivity because it is a modern idea. Ignatius feels that modernity is anti-spiritual because, rather than address problems religiously or philosophically, modern people tends to address them physically or through things like productivity or material accumulation. Ignatius's medieval worldview, based on the belief that the goddess Fortuna controls one's fate, is the opposite of this and holds that productivity is pointless because one can never change the outcome of destiny.*



*As a medievalist, Ignatius has a different view of productivity to a modern person. Medieval societies tended to be feudal, meaning the ruling class kept most of what peasants made. However, modern society allows individuals to accumulate indefinitely and tends to view productivity only in terms of this material accumulation. Ignatius therefore feels that his intellectual and spiritual productivity are undervalued. It is, of course, partly ironic that Ignatius considers himself productive because he works rarely and in very short bursts.*



Irene is adamant that, with his education, Ignatius can find a good job. Ignatius says that employers feel threatened by him because he is so individual and nonconformist. Irene protests that he has only had one job, at the public library, and that all he had to do was put labels inside books. Ignatius says that the librarian turned against him and fired him because his methods were too unique and creative. Irene suggests the college, where Ignatius worked for a term, but he says that there, too, his individuality was a barrier. A fellow professor spread a rumor that Ignatius was a Papist, and the students demonstrated against him.

Ignatius realizes that he cannot fight Fortuna and agrees to find a job, although he says his academic work will be greatly interrupted. He tells Irene that she should feel guilty for forcing him into work and should go to her priest to receive penance. Ignatius laments that his ex-girlfriend, Myrna Minkoff, would be disappointed that it has come to this, and Irene suggests that she and Ignatius should get back together and have a baby. Ignatius is repulsed by this idea and tells Irene to take him to the cinema.

*Ignatius has likely faced rejection and alienation as a result of his inability to fit into conventional society. This possibly explains his reluctance to engage with the outside world and suggests that his mask of superiority is a disguise he adopts to hide his feelings of inferiority and shame. Ignatius also suffers from feelings of persecution which suggests that he is highly sensitive to what others think of him.*



*Ignatius does not attribute his need to find a job to his literal circumstances, believing instead that it is the work of the medieval goddess Fortuna, whom he worships. Therefore, in his mind, employment is something he has no power over and cannot rectify with changes in his behavior. Ignatius also blames Irene for this, which further shows his struggle to accept responsibility for his actions and his need to justify his bad behavior to himself. Irene wishes that Ignatius could lead a conventional, American life, which shows that she does not accept Ignatius for who he is and is concerned about how others view her family.*



## CHAPTER 2, PART 4

Jones sits on the bus beside an elderly white woman. She clearly dislikes being so close to him and tries to draw herself away. Jones thinks that she probably assumes he is going to rape her and bitterly considers his job at the **Night of Joy**. It pays very badly, but at least it will ensure he won't get arrested. The old lady gets off the bus and Jones begins to read a copy of *Life* magazine which Darlene has given him to read for "self-improvement." Jones looks at the pictures of people in nice houses, with expensive clothes, and thinks that he wants to be just like them.

*As a black man in 1960s New Orleans, a Southern city with a history of slavery, segregation, and racism, Jones is painfully aware of the way he's perceived by society. Jones knows that the woman likely believes in the racist stereotype that black men are specifically a sexual threat to white women. Beyond equal social treatment, Jones also wants to receive the same benefits from work that white people get when they are paid a reasonable wage, which he, as a black person, is not. Darlene believes Jones can change his own situation but, due to the systemic prejudice Jones faces, this is extremely difficult.*



## CHAPTER 2, PART 5

Ignatius sits in the cinema, surrounded by snacks and intent on despising the movie he has come to see. It is a musical, and he despises many of the actors whose names appear in the credits. Ignatius makes a lot of noise and upsets several children in the audience. The manager recognizes him and observes that he comes to the cinema quite regularly. Ignatius sits through the film until the sex scene, when he jumps up furiously and goes to the snack counter. Ignatius begins to swear again, when he returns to his seat, and the manager wearily trudges down the aisle toward him.

*Again, Ignatius seems to enjoy consuming media which he claims he despises. This suggests that his desires are nuanced and that he does not always consciously like the things which attract him. Ignatius's extreme reaction to the sex scene suggests that Ignatius has repressed emotions when it comes to sex. If he was truly indifferent to sex then it would not arouse such fury in him, but his response suggests that he may unconsciously desire sex and feel that this is a shameful aspect of himself.*



## CHAPTER 3, PART 1

Ignatius enters his house and is greeted anxiously by his mother, Irene, who says that he looks “terrible.” Ignatius complains that he became ill on the bus, and Irene asks if he got the job. Ignatius says that he did not, and Irene asks if he wore his **hunting cap** in the interview. Ignatius replies indignantly that he did because the office was cold. The manager was an inferior being, he says, and the place did not suit Ignatius at all.

*Irene recognizes that Ignatius's refusal to compromise his individuality to be professional will hamper him when it comes to getting a job. Employers require a degree of flexibility so that workers put personal quirks aside in order to adopt a professional persona, which often hides or tempers their true personalities. Ignatius's cap symbolizes his individuality, and his refusal to remove it reflects his unwillingness to compromise.*



Irene tells Ignatius that he must look on the bright side, and Ignatius asks her who has filled her head with this drivel. Irene says that Patrolman Mancuso tells her to stay optimistic, but Ignatius claims that optimism is a perversion and that the “Mancusos of the world” are a scourge and refuse to accept that it is humanity's place to be miserable. Irene tells him to cheer up and says that they should look in the paper to see if there are any job openings listed there.

*Religion in the medieval period (of which Ignatius is a scholar) was largely based in concepts of suffering and original sin, and it was considered a devotional act of faith for humans to suffer. However, in modern society, which is highly convenient compared with medieval life, Ignatius's attitude seems out of place.*



Irene spreads a newspaper and comes across an advertisement for a “clean, hard-working, quiet” type. Ignatius snatches the paper off her and reads the rest of the ad, which is for an office worker at a factory called Levy Pants. Ignatius says that he is not cut out for this and that he would rather be a paper boy, but Irene insists that he must apply.

*Ignatius is not clean or hard-working, but Irene is adamant that he must change to impress a potential employer and get a job. Ignatius, by contrast, wants a job in which he will be left alone and will not have to alter his attitude for mainstream society.*



## CHAPTER 3, PART 2

Patrolman Mancuso goes to see his sergeant. Mancuso phoned Irene the day before to invite her to go bowling with him. Ignatius answered the phone and screamed at him to leave them alone and to investigate a club called the **Night of Joy** instead. Ignatius said the bar had real suspicious characters in it, not like him and his mother. Mancuso tells the sergeant that they should visit the Night of Joy, but the sergeant dismisses him and wonders where he got his information. Dejected, Patrolman Mancuso leaves.

When Patrolman Mancuso has gone, the sergeant turns to another officer and tells him to investigate the **Night of Joy**. The sergeant does not want Mancuso to know, however, or to get the credit for anything they discover there. The officer says that they have had a complaint from a woman who says that a man in a sombrero harassed her on a bus. The sergeant knows that this man is Mancuso and jokes that maybe they ought to arrest him.

*Although Ignatius wants his own freedom to be respected, he has strict, conservative rules about what should be tolerated within society. He views strip clubs like the Night of Joy as morally corrupt and feels that society should not allow them. Ironically, this suggests that (like most of the characters in the novel) Ignatius only seems to be in favor of freedom when society's values suit his own preferences rather than the diverse interests of others.*



*Patrolman Mancuso is a weak-willed character and cannot stand up to his sergeant, who humiliates him at work. This suggests that people in positions of authority, like the sergeant, often abuse their power if they can get away with it and hypocritically apply different rules for themselves than for others. Mancuso cannot possibly blend in with the ridiculous disguises that the sergeant makes him wear—he is set up to fail.*



## CHAPTER 3, PART 3

Mr. Gonzalez, the office manager at Levy Pants, arrives at work early every morning. He hopes to get some credit for this from his boss, Mr. Levy, who hates the factory and tries to stay away from it, but Mr. Levy just complains about everything to do with the business. Mr. Gonzalez does not have many regular employees, except an elderly lady named Miss Trixie who has been with the company for years, and who Mr. Levy has given strict orders not to retire. Mr. Gonzalez desperately needs new staff because everyone he hires tends to quit without notice.

Miss Trixie comes into the office, carrying the large bags full of junk which she always has with her. Ignatius enters the office and Mr. Gonzalez hopes that he has come to apply for the job. Mr. Gonzalez greets Ignatius cheerfully and offers to take his things. Ignatius likes the dingy, sleepy office very much; it reminds him of his room at home. He notices Miss Trixie falling asleep at her desk and thinks this is the workplace for him.

Mr. Gonzalez eagerly introduces Ignatius to Miss Trixie, who mutters something about being promised a Thanksgiving turkey. Ignatius asks about the wage, which is \$60 a week, and thinks it is meager. Ignatius says that he has received much higher offers elsewhere. Mr. Gonzalez tries to persuade Ignatius to take the job, and eventually Ignatius agrees. That morning, three more employees quit.

*Mr. Levy wants to avoid responsibility for the factory and tries to free himself from it as much as possible. Miss Trixie, by contrast, is trapped at Levy Pants and cannot enter the freedom of retirement because of Mr. Levy's orders, which Mr. Gonzalez finds inexplicable.*



*Ignatius wants to have the appearance of being employed without putting in any work. He also wants to reap the financial benefits of employment, at the expense of Mr. Levy, without contributing to the factory.*



*Miss Trixie resents the fact that she is not allowed to retire or receive her Thanksgiving turkey for her years of service. Ignatius tries to manipulate Mr. Gonzalez and suggests that it is in Mr. Gonzalez's best interests to hire him. However, Ignatius is not thinking of how best to help Mr. Gonzalez but only looking out for himself. In fact, it is implied that he drives away three other members of the staff, which will not help Mr. Gonzalez.*



## CHAPTER 3, PART 4

In the **Night of Joy**, Jones sweeps the floor and Lana reprimands him for wearing his sunglasses indoors. Jones gives Lana a sulky reply and says that he won't watch where he's going when he's only paid \$20 a week—not even minimum wage. Lana says that she has an errand for Jones to run, but Jones refuses. Lana says that she will get Darlene to do it, but Jones tells her that this is unfair to Darlene because she works for almost nothing too. Lana says that Jones should tell the police if he doesn't like it, and Jones goes back to noisily sweeping the floor.

A stylish young boy enters the bar, and Lana asks him if the “orphans” like their package. The boy, George, gives Lana some money. George says the orphans especially liked the one with the glasses and the desk and that the next one should involve a piece of chalk. Lana seems interested and gives George a packet to take with him. Jones watches and makes a sarcastic comment; he does not believe the packages are for orphans at all.

Lana begins to count the money. She drops a coin on the floor and demands that Jones help her find it. When she does find the coin, she makes a delighted sound and Jones makes another sarcastic comment. Lana reprimands him again, but Jones says that she cannot do anything to him; she is not “Scarlett O’Horror.”

*Like Ignatius, Jones refuses to compromise aspects of his personality, like his sunglasses, which are key to his identity. However, while Ignatius’s attitude seems unreasonable (employers are willing to pay him well in exchange a minor sacrifice), Jones’s attitude protects him from being psychologically affected by the discrimination he experiences. Although Lana takes advantage of him, his sunglasses give him a modicum amount of power which Lana cannot remove—he is able to annoy her in this small yet satisfying way as a means of revenge.*



*It seems unlikely that someone as uncharitable as Lana would be engaged in charitable work with “orphans.” Either she is a bigger hypocrite than Jones thought and uses profits she gets from crime and exploitation of her employees to give to charity, or she uses the guise of packages for the “orphans” to transport something illegal.*



*Lana is obsessed with money and takes advantage of her staff to increase her profits. Jones explicitly links Lana to a slave owner because of the way she exploits him at work. Scarlett O’Hara is the main character from the Southern novel, Gone with the Wind, about a plantation owner. Jones suggests that Lana is no different from a literal slave owner because if he tries to leave his job, Lana threatens to have him arrested for vagrancy. In this sense, Jones is not free to leave and is, in a sense, enslaved by Lana.*



## CHAPTER 3, PART 5

Ignatius takes a taxi home from his first day at Levy Pants. In the taxi, he begins to write on a sheet of paper. He writes that, although he despises work and modern systems, he is prepared to face them at Levy Pants and to find out all he can about them. He has already discovered that Levy Pants is partially controlled by a woman named Mrs. Levy who insists that Miss Trixie must not retire. The only person whom Ignatius disliked was a young woman named Gloria, who wore high heels and lots of makeup. Ignatius had Gloria fired when he told Mr. Gonzalez that she planned to quit anyway.

*Ignatius despises modern capitalism because he thinks that it is shallow and focused on material gain. He also despises open displays of sexuality and dislikes Gloria because she wears makeup and heels, which Ignatius associates with modern vanity and vice. He has a dictatorial approach to the office and plans to get his own way as much as possible, even at the expense of others. This suggests that, although he is very concerned about his own freedom to do as he pleases at work, he selfishly disregards others’ freedom.*





Ignatius continues that he has many plans to revitalize the factory, including getting everyone except himself and Miss Trixie fired. He has convinced Mr. Gonzalez to pay for his taxis to and from work out of Gloria's salary. Ignatius thinks the job is a sign that Fortuna's Wheel has spun upwards for him again. He concludes his piece and instructs the driver to take him home very slowly.

When Ignatius arrives home, Irene hurries out to meet him and tells him that their neighbor, Miss Annie, has taken a fainting spell. Annie claims it is because Ignatius wakes her up too early playing his lute. Ignatius indignantly denies this and tells Irene about his job. Irene is delighted but wishes it was more money. Ignatius tells her that there are opportunities for advancement. Irene tells him that she is going out bowling with Patrolman Mancuso and Mancuso's aunt, Santa Battaglia. Ignatius is extremely annoyed by this. Irene tells him he has a letter from Myrna Minkoff and hurries out.

Left alone, Ignatius rips open the letter from Myrna. She writes that she does not believe that Patrolman Mancuso tried to arrest Ignatius. Instead, she thinks Ignatius had a paranoid sexual fantasy linked to Freud's theories of homosexual repression. Ignatius scoffs at this. Myrna urges Ignatius to have sex as soon as possible.

Myrna's letter continues that Ignatius must participate in society and that he must align himself with a social cause. She uses herself as an example and tells Ignatius that she has endless opportunities for activism in New York. She is working on a play about race relations and has befriended several black actors. She has a gift, she says, for making them think about racism even when they don't want to. The play is being funded by her father. She signs off with a note which begs Ignatius not to write to her until he has taken part in something—she "cannot stand cowards." Ignatius closes the letter and thinks that he will have revenge.

## CHAPTER 4, PART 1

At Levy Pants, Ignatius spends his morning making a sign for his desk, which showcases his name and position at the company. Miss Trixie steps on it and leaves a shoeprint in the paint, which Ignatius irritably covers up. When it is finished, Ignatius shows the sign to Miss Trixie and Mr. Gonzalez. Miss Trixie demands to know who Ignatius is; she thought Gloria worked there.

*Rather than increase productivity at the factory, Ignatius plans to stop it entirely. Ignatius is willing to put everyone at the factory out of a job in order to organize the workplace into a place where he can do as he likes. This suggests that Ignatius is extremely self-interested and that he is willing to infringe on others' freedoms (such as the economic freedom their wages give them) to make himself comfortable.*



*Ignatius is not considerate of Annie and views her desire to sleep in as an attack on his freedom to play his lute whenever he wants. These types of conflicts are frequent throughout the novel and in real life, as people often have clashing desires that infringe upon or interfere with other people's needs or wants. Compromise, to which Ignatius is so resistant, seems a necessary part of peacefully coexisting in a free society.*



*Myrna suspects that, although Ignatius pretends to hate sex, he secretly desires it and that, because he represses these desires, they manifest in unusual ways. This is a modern psychological perspective which Ignatius despises because he believes that medieval ideas about the human soul are superior to modern ideas about the human psyche.*



*Myrna is the opposite of Ignatius—she is politically progressive rather than conservative. However, although Myrna believes that she is a force for social good, she often comes across as hypocritical and overly aggressive. For example, this passage suggests that Myrna does not empathize with the black people she claims to help but, instead, forces them to engage in uncomfortable conversations to make her feel better about herself.*



*Miss Trixie's shoe print emphasizes the idea that, although Ignatius always wants total freedom to do what he wants, he cannot always have it. Other people's desires and freedoms will inevitably encroach upon his own carefully crafted worldview.*



Mr. Gonzalez admires the sign and politely asks Ignatius to get started on the filing, which has piled up. Ignatius says that the height of the filing cabinet has badly affected his valve, so Mr. Gonzalez brings him a wheeled stool to sit on. The stool is very small and Ignatius squats uncomfortably on it. Ignatius tentatively tries to wheel it to one side and falls dramatically on his back.

*Mr. Gonzalez is a timid boss and it is easy for Ignatius to take advantage of him and to do no work while at the factory. However, despite his ability to manipulate others, Ignatius still does not fit in comfortably with his surroundings because of his physical size. Although Ignatius is overdramatic about his fall, this passage has wider implications about how Ignatius feels he was simply not made for the world around him—even when he is able to gain leverage, he still struggles to fit in.*



Mr. Gonzalez is horrified and offers to help Ignatius up. Ignatius fends him off and screams that his back may be broken. Miss Trixie tries to help but topples over onto Ignatius. Her visor strikes him in the neck and Ignatius makes a choking noise. Mr. Gonzalez struggles to help Ignatius up and falls over too. Mr. Levy enters the office behind them and asks what is going on.

*Ignatius reduces the office to chaos. This suggests that he is a disruptive force in society because he does not fit in. This is both something that Ignatius does on purpose and something that, in some ways, he cannot help. This suggests that society is often hostile to people and things which cannot easily assimilate or which go against conformity and convention.*



Mr. Gonzalez jumps up, and Ignatius struggles to his feet and tries to introduce himself to Mr. Levy. Mr. Levy eyes Ignatius coolly and says that he has come to collect his mail. Ignatius explains that he has taken a special liking to Levy Pants and wants to make some changes. Mr. Levy notices the sign and seems unsure. Mr. Gonzalez fetches Mr. Levy's mail and says that they have had a problem with a client, Mr. Abelman, who claims that he was sent pants that were only two feet long.

*Mr. Levy seems unsure of Ignatius, presumably because of Ignatius's unusual appearance. Levy Pants is obviously a highly unproductive place, even without Ignatius.*



Mr. Levy seems unconcerned, tells Mr. Gonzalez to sign his mail as usual, and rushes off. After Mr. Levy has gone, Ignatius watches Mr. Gonzalez forge Mr. Levy's signature on a letter. Mr. Gonzalez then says that he must visit the factory and Ignatius says he will start his filing. As soon as Mr. Gonzalez has gone, however, Ignatius sits down to write to Mr. Abelman because he thinks that Levy Pants must take a firmer line with clients. Ignatius writes a vicious letter to Mr. Abelman and signs it with Mr. Levy's name. He then picks up the heap of papers to be filed and throws them in the bin.

*Mr. Levy is reluctant to engage with the factory in any way and seems desperate to be free from it. Mr. Levy is hypocritical, however, since he is willing to benefit from the money that the factory makes but will not take responsibility for what goes on there. Ignatius does not care about the potential consequences of his actions since he believes that everything in life comes down to fate and that humans cannot cause or control their own destiny.*



## CHAPTER 4, PART 2

At the **Night of Joy**, Jones asks Lana if she has seen Ignatius hanging around recently. Lana says no, and Jones asks why the orphans pay her so much for her "charity." Lana says that she likes to do good deeds. Jones laughs and says that the police would be interested in these orphans. Lana thinks about the undercover policemen who have begun to frequent the bar and wonders if Jones has tipped them off. She asks him if he has been to the station recently and Jones says no; he is waiting for some evidence in the orphan case.

*Jones suspects that Lana uses the orphan story as a front to hide criminal activity. He implies that, although Lana pretends to be charitable, she is really only interested in helping herself. Jones's hint about turning Lana into the police shows that he has found a potential way to gain back some power over his situation, given that Lara has threatened to turn Jones into the police for vagrancy if he tries to quit his job.*



## CHAPTER 4, PART 3

Irene sits in her kitchen and sips wine. The house is quiet and peaceful because Ignatius is at work. Irene observes happily that it no longer smells like him. A baby cockroach walks across the table and she blows it to the floor. The phone rings and Irene answers. It is Santa Battaglia. The two women reminisce about how poor they were growing up, and then Santa remembers why she called.

Santa asks if Irene remembers the night they went bowling, when Patrolman Mancuso got arrested. Irene says yes, and Santa says that a man asked about her when she was at the bowling alley—a nice-looking old man who said he has grandchildren. Irene says she is too old for that sort of thing, but Santa brushes this off and says that she and Mancuso will pick Irene up for bowling that evening. Irene says that Ignatius does not like her going out, but Santa insists Ignatius is big enough to take care of himself.

*Irene feels that she is free from Ignatius for the first time in years. Although he is an adult, Ignatius is extremely dependent on her and this stops Irene from living her life. Her casual disposal of the baby cockroach symbolizes Ignatius and the idea that Irene has unceremoniously rejected his influence over her and sent him out to work.*



*Santa takes Irene under her wing and tries to reinvigorate Irene's life. Santa is pushy, however—although she seems to want to help Irene and free her from Ignatius's influence, really, Ignatius's overbearing behavior is simply replaced by Santa's overbearing behavior, and Irene is still bossed around.*



## CHAPTER 4, PART 4

Mr. Levy and Mrs. Levy relax in their lakeside home. Everything in the house is designed to be comfortable and luxurious. Mr. and Mrs. Levy see each other as the worst things about the house. Mrs. Levy nags Mr. Levy about his role in Levy Pants, and Mr. Levy irritably tells Mrs. Levy to go on her exercise machine. Mrs. Levy snaps that she cannot because she has just had her hair styled, and Mr. Levy tells her that he went to the factory that day and that nothing is happening there.

Mrs. Levy says that nothing happens at the factory because Mr. Levy, unlike his father who started the company, has no drive. She laments that Mr. Levy has let his father's work go to waste, but Mr. Levy counters that his father destroyed the business himself because he was too dictatorial and wouldn't allow anything to change.

Mrs. Levy cries that it is no wonder their daughters have turned out the way they have given Mr. Levy's example. Mr. Levy says the girls are alright and suggests that they sell the factory and move to Miami. Mrs. Levy seems horrified by this, but Mr. Levy tells her not to make a big drama out of it. Mrs. Levy then asks about Miss Trixie and wants to know if she still works at the factory. Mr. Levy says she does, but that this is a miracle because she is so aged.

*Although externally Mr. and Mrs. Levy live an extremely privileged life of material comfort, internally their life is a trap from which both are desperate to escape. Their relationship is a source of constant conflict which demonstrates that money cannot buy happiness and that, often, material wealth comes with its own barriers and restrictions.*



*Mr. Levy has lost his passion for work because he has not been allowed any creative input in the factory. This, combined with his implication that his father was a dictator, suggests that people are often better and more creative when they are free to have ideas themselves, rather than under the control of a tyrannical force.*



*Mr. Levy constantly wants to escape his circumstances and run away from the factory, which he feels metaphorically holds him captive. Mrs. Levy is frustrated by her husband's lack of ambition, but her controlling and dictatorial attitude likely remind Mr. Levy of his father and only makes the problem worse. Mrs. Levy does not realize her behavior is controlling and justifies her unreasonable demands by pretending that her husband is the tyrant rather than herself.*



Mrs. Levy rebukes Mr. Levy for his cruelty. She claims that Miss Trixie needs her job to feel valued and says that she would like to bring Miss Trixie to the house so that she can work on her physical and psychological rejuvenation. Mr. Levy says that he does not want Miss Trixie in the house and Mrs. Levy sulks. Mr. Levy says that the new employee is a strange man.

Ignatius does not go to the cinema that night because he thinks the film that is on sounds philosophical and dull. He stays home to write, instead, and looks through a stack of old articles that he failed to send off. He has a new idea for a project: a piece about his experiences as a “working boy.” He settles down to begin and writes that he has grown used to the “hectic pace of office life.”

Ignatius describes his “work saving methods,” such as coming in an hour late every day, and his top-secret filing method. He writes about Miss Trixie and says that he has tried to befriend her. She seems to hate Levy Pants, and Ignatius intends to get her a present to win her around. Ignatius also writes that he plans to visit the factory. So far, he has only seen the factory workers when they come into the office to complain that the foreman is drunk. Ignatius plans to organize some type of social action to help the workers.

Ignatius signs off on the piece and is very pleased with his work. The idea of organizing something for the workers is especially satisfying to him because he thinks it will show Myrna Minkoff that he is progressive and revolutionary. He believes the piece could be published somewhere modern and radical and thinks about writing a letter to Myrna. He decides to play his lute and relax instead.

Just as Ignatius begins to play, Miss Annie screams at him to be quiet. Ignatius responds furiously and rushes to the kitchen to get a pot of water, which he plans to throw through the old lady’s window. As he gets back to his room, he sees Patrolman Mancuso and Irene sneak past his window through the alley. He hears Patrolman Mancuso say that Ignatius is not home.

*Mrs. Levy is extremely controlling and infringes upon people’s freedom. Although she claims that she wants to help Miss Trixie, she ignores Miss Trixie’s actual desire to retire because it does not suit her version of events.*



*Although Ignatius claims to be an intellectual, he rejects the idea of going to see an intellectual film. This stands in contrast with the fact that Ignatius actively looks for reasons to despise modernity and that one of his major complaints about it is that there is no serious media produced. However, when he is given the opportunity to view a philosophical piece of modern work, he turns up his nose because it does not fit in with his preconceived idea that all modern films are shallow. Ignatius chooses to believe he is unappreciated because he is too intelligent but, really, no one has read his work because he either too lazy or too intimidated to send any of it out.*



*It is ironic that Ignatius describes himself as a “working boy” when he spends all his time avoiding work. Ignatius condescendingly assumes that, as an educated person, he knows what is best for the workers. In fact, Ignatius only wants to organize social action to annoy his girlfriend, Myrna, but (like Myrna herself) he only pretends that he is genuinely interested in social justice to make himself look better.*



*Although he does not write it in his journal, Ignatius’s desire to take social action is not to help the workers at all, but to show Myrna that she is wrong and that he is progressive after all. He does not write this in the article because he wishes to disguise his true motives and create a public persona of a “working boy” who is deeply concerned about the plight of black workers.*



*Ignatius tries to use aggression against Annie to prevent her complaints about him. This suggests that Ignatius’s worldview is actually a fascist one and that he will do anything to silence voices of dissent and to stop those who want to infringe on any of his freedoms.*



Curious, Ignatius slips out the front door and walks around the house to the kitchen, where Irene and Patrolman Mancuso have entered. Ignatius peeps in through the back door and sees his mother laughing happily as she and Patrolman Mancuso watch Santa Battaglia dance. Patrolman Mancuso begs Santa to stop and worries that Ignatius will come back, but Santa tells Mancuso to forget him. Ignatius watches through the door in horror as his mother laughs.

*Ignatius dislikes this situation because it represents the idea that Irene is slipping from his control while he wants to continue dominating his mother and preventing her from living an independent life. This supports the idea that Ignatius is a controlling, authoritative person despite wanting to appear progressive.*



## CHAPTER 5, PART 1

At the **Night of Joy**, Lana complains to Darlene that the only people they get in the club are undercover policemen. Lana worries that Darlene can't recognize them and might try to sell them drinks. Darlene says that she can't see who's who because the bar is so dark, and Lana tells Darlene not to tell Jones about all the policemen because she knows how black people feel about the police. Lana says she is trying to help Jones and keep him off the streets, so she doesn't want him to quit.

*Darlene is a good-hearted person who takes people at face value. She does not judge people on appearances and does not suspect that people pretend to be what they are not, because she would not do this herself. Lana, on the other hand, pretends that she cares about Jones's welfare, but is only thinking about herself. She knows that she exploits Jones and does not want him to try and get revenge by tipping off the police about her criminal activity, which is especially deplorable because she also disguises her illicit scheme under the façade of charity.*



Jones passes by with his mop, and Darlene says to Lana that all the other nightclubs have shown that involve animals. Darlene thinks the **Night of Joy** should get an animal, too, and suggests that they use her cockatoo; she has taught the bird a dance routine. Lana is reluctant and snaps at Darlene that she is not the manager. George enters and Jones jokes that he is not an orphan. Lana dismisses George and says she has nothing for him today. After he is gone, Darlene warns Lana that George does not look like a real orphan.

*Lana is dictatorial in the way she runs her club: the staff are not free to give her input or to make creative suggestions. Jones wishes to intimidate Lana because she forces him to work at the club for very low pay and threatens to call the police if he quits—a threat which genuinely has weight because Jones is black and will be subject to racist vagrancy laws if he is unemployed. Jones wants Lana to feel that he could incriminate her, too, for her criminal behavior, because this gives Jones a degree of power in the relationship.*



Lana follows George outside and tells him that they can't exchange packages in the bar because Jones is watching. Lana thinks that Jones suspects something. George tells Lana to fire Jones, but Lana says that she can pay him hardly anything because he thinks she can turn him into the police. Lana tells George that he will have to collect the stuff earlier, while Jones is at lunch, and George complains that he will have to carry it around all afternoon because he can't deliver it until 3:00. Lana tells George to leave it at the bus station and says she will see him the next day. Back inside, Darlene pleads with Lana to give her bird routine a chance. Finally, Lana agrees and says that Darlene and the cockatoo can have an audition.

*Lana currently has power over Jones: she can have him arrested if he quits because it is illegal to be unemployed. As Jones is black, the police will look for an excuse to arrest him because the American South had a history of racism and segregation, and the laws are applied more harshly to black people than white people. However, Lana recognizes that Jones is not stupid despite society's perception of him, and that he will take revenge on her if he can find anything incriminating at the club. Lana does not care what might happen to George if he is caught and only thinks about herself.*



## CHAPTER 5, PART 2

One early morning, Mr. Gonzalez sits in Levy Pants and waits for his employees to arrive. He ponders the amazing change Ignatius has made to the office. Ignatius has decorated, brought plants, and is kind to Miss Trixie. His filing is so rapid Mr. Gonzalez hardly notices him doing it. While Mr. Gonzalez sits and smokes a cigarette, Miss Trixie arrives in her nightdress and Mr. Gonzalez sends her home to change. Ignatius arrives next and continues work on a large cardboard cross he has made to decorate the office.

Mr. Gonzalez suggests that Ignatius could visit the factory that afternoon, but Ignatius says the cross is his top priority. Ignatius tells Mr. Gonzalez that he has brought a sandwich for Miss Trixie and hopes that Mr. Gonzalez has not “broken her spirit” by sending her home. Miss Trixie returns at lunchtime, however, and takes the sandwich from Ignatius, whom she confuses with Gloria.

Miss Trixie munches her way through the sandwich while Ignatius watches. Mr. Gonzalez works on some papers. Miss Trixie stops after eating half the sandwich, and Ignatius suggests she give the other half to Mr. Gonzalez. Mr. Gonzalez says no, but Miss Trixie insists and drops the sandwich onto the paper he is working on.

Mr. Gonzalez rounds irritably on Miss Trixie and Ignatius seizes his opportunity to berate the manager and rile up Miss Trixie. He is disappointed, however, when Mr. Gonzalez tells Miss Trixie to go to the bathroom and she obediently agrees. Ignatius finishes painting the cross and announces that he will now visit the factory. He says that he “cannot tolerate injustice” and Mr. Gonzalez weakly agrees.

*Unlike Ignatius, who only pretends to care about Levy Pants and, in fact, throws all his files away, (which is why they disappear so fast) Mr. Gonzalez is genuinely dedicated to the wellbeing of the factory. Mr. Gonzalez mirrors Patrolman Mancuso, who is similarly dedicated to the police force. These hapless and much abused characters suggest that, although it is admirable, there is not much advantage to being dedicated to one’s job when the upper management is corrupt. However, both Gonzalez and Mancuso share the belief that, with hard work, a person can change their fate—a belief that Ignatius scorns because he believes, instead, that one’s fortune is decided by a medieval goddess, Fortuna, instead.*



*Ignatius pretends that Mr. Gonzalez is a dictator who cruelly drives Miss Trixie, and the rest his workforce, to the brink of despair with his unreasonable demands. However, this is clearly not true. Really, it is Ignatius who wants to take over the factory use the workers to his own advantage, to annoy Myrna and prove he is socially progressive. Ignatius, therefore, hides his true intentions behind a façade of charity.*



*Ignatius uses Miss Trixie to try and provoke Mr. Gonzalez. Since Ignatius wants to cause a riot at the factory, he looks for an excuse to do so and feels that, if Mr. Gonzalez snaps at Miss Trixie for dropping a sandwich on his work, then he can prove Mr. Gonzalez is an authoritarian boss. It is ironic, then, that Ignatius is the one who behaves authoritatively as he tries to manipulate the situation to his own advantage.*



*Ignatius wants to start a riot in the factory and wants to provoke Mr. Gonzalez into doing something that will justify this. This suggests that Ignatius knows he has no justifiable reason to disrupt the workplace—other than his own selfish goal of annoying his ex-girlfriend Myrna—but still wants to pass his behavior off as moral when really it is self-interested.*



## CHAPTER 5, PART 3

Patrolman Mancuso still has not arrested anyone. He tried the night before but met with three aggressive women and now has a bandage on his head because of the encounter. He approaches the sergeant, who irritably asks him why he hasn't brought in anyone like the three women who were arrested for brawling the previous night. The sergeant is also disappointed with Mancuso's tip about the **Night of Joy**; so far, they have turned up no criminal activity in the club. The sergeant tells Mancuso that they are transferring him to the bus station bathrooms until further notice.

*Mancuso has still not learned to blend in and make himself inconspicuous while dressed in disguise. This suggests that society is quick to judge appearances, and to recognize those who do not conform. As a result, Mancuso loses his professional freedom, which suggests that even those in authority run the risk of having certain privileges removed. This supports Ignatius's belief in the medieval wheel of fortune—someone who occupies an important place in society can suddenly find themselves reduced to a lowly one at a turn of Fortuna's wheel.*



## CHAPTER 5, PART 4

Ignatius sits writing in his room. Through the wall, he can hear Irene preparing to go out. Before she leaves, Irene bangs on his door, but Ignatius tells his mother to go away. She begins to kick the door, and at last Ignatius opens it and finds his mother made up, with powder all over her dress. Ignatius berates Irene for spending all their money going out with her friends, but Irene defends herself and says that Ignatius's wages are too low.

*Ignatius does not want to take responsibility for the fine that Irene owes for the car crash because he does not believe he is responsible for what happens to him—rather, fate determines everything. This belief conveniently removes any guilt Ignatius may feel for not helping his mother and allows him to justify his selfish attitude toward her.*



Ignatius begs Irene to leave him alone, but Irene insists that he kiss her goodbye. Ignatius does so and a car horn sounds outside. Irene rushes off and Ignatius hurries to his room, opens the window, and throws a bottle of ink at Santa Battaglia's car as it drives off with his mother and Patrolman Mancuso inside.

*Ignatius resents Santa because she has replaced him as the most influential person in Irene's life. Ignatius previously had a controlling relationship with Irene and believed that he took charge of her life for her own good. However, Ignatius really controlled Irene to benefit himself.*



Satisfied, Ignatius sits down to continue his "Diary of a Working Boy." Ignatius writes that he has decorated the office and that Mr. Gonzalez is a dictator who makes Miss Trixie want to retire. Ignatius describes the conditions in the factory, where most of the workers are black, and says that it is like a modernized version of slavery, except that instead of picking cotton, black workers are sewing it. He then goes off on a tangent about pollution in the Mississippi River and his journey on the bus out to Baton Rouge. He would really prefer it if public buses were discontinued altogether.

*Ignatius deliberately skews his narrative to suggest that Mr. Gonzalez is a tyrant and to justify his own desire to hold a riot at work. As he wishes to use the riot to make himself look socially progressive (in order to annoy his progressive ex-girlfriend, Myrna) Ignatius must imply that Mr. Gonzalez is like a slave owner and therefore needs to be overthrown. In reality, Mr. Gonzalez has little say over the factory conditions. Ignatius deliberately draws the connection between the manufacture of garments (for which the black workers are underpaid) and cotton fields (in which black people worked as slaves). His criticisms of racism and discrimination are in some ways relevant because the black workers are forced to work for low pay to comply with vagrancy laws. However, Ignatius's aims are essentially selfish and dictatorial, rather than genuinely caring.*



Back to his description of the factory, Ignatius writes that he entered a world of chaos when he walked onto the factory floor and that he was reminded of [Heart of Darkness](#). He saw a young woman sewing an evening dress for herself instead of Levy's pants, and looked for Mr. Palermo, the floor manager, who is always drunk. Ignatius thinks the workers must be paid very badly because there are so many bars in the area around the factory.

Jazz music plays from the speakers in the factory, and Ignatius turns it off because he thinks the workers don't like it. However, when he does, people shout out in protest, so Ignatius turns it back on and begins to dance for the worker's entertainment. Midway through a step, he falls and is helped up by some of the workers. He chats with them for a while and learns that they are very badly paid.

Ignatius feels a type of kinship with the black workers because, like them, he sees himself as an exile from American society. He is confused to learn that many of the workers admire American middle-class society and want to earn enough to join it, but he does not hold it against them. He writes that, if anyone tried to make him middle-class, he would protest violently and even damage property. Ignatius even feels that perhaps he should have been born black because he would have enjoyed terrorizing white old ladies who had to sit by him on the bus.

*Ignatius again invokes Joseph Conrad's novel [Heart of Darkness](#), which describes a colonizer's journey into the African Congo and his horror at the chaos and corruption which he witnesses under colonialism. Ignatius compares the factory, in which the black workers are underpaid but otherwise unmolested, to the horrors of colonialism. Ignatius is being dramatic, but there is, again, some validity to the idea that although the black workers are paid for their labor, they are not at the factory through choice. Instead, they face limited career options because of racism and the legacy of slavery in the South, which was a direct result of colonialism and the slave trade, both of which Conrad wrote about.*



*This passage demonstrates that Ignatius does not understand the people he believes he can set free. He has a condescending attitude toward the black workers: he presumptuously turns their music off and then feels that he has won them over with a childish dance when they are presumably laughing at him, not with him. Ignatius is manipulative in his approach—although he pretends to want to help the workers, he is only interested in proving to his ex-girlfriend, Myrna, that he is progressive. He does not care how the workers may be negatively affected by a riot.*



*Ignatius redundantly compares his own feelings of lethargy and persecution in modern society to the experience of black people in the South. However, Ignatius's suffering is most often the result of his own unwillingness to adapt, rather than the result of systemic prejudice. He cannot empathize with the black workers and fails to recognize his own privilege. Ignatius's belief that it would be fun to terrorize white people on the bus is directly contradicted by Jones's experience of a white woman who was afraid of him on the bus. In reality, the experience is uncomfortable and upsetting for Jones because he does not want to be viewed as a threat and faces significant personal risk if he is perceived this way by white society.*





Ignatius also feels that if he and Irene were black, Irene would be too exhausted from years of work to force him into a job or to go bowling. Ignatius would feel secure knowing that nothing he could do would change his fate. He thinks it would be an insult to black people if they became middle-class, as it would spoil their noble heritage. It is lucky, therefore, that he is writing his testament because it will provide a sharp, unbiased picture of contemporary American life and all its problems.

Ignatius talks for a long time with the factory workers about their wages and conditions. He is amazed that they do not protest and thinks that if he were in their position, he would have “stormed” the office by now. Ignatius then goes on to describe his first meeting with his ex-girlfriend, Myrna Minkoff, while at university. They met in a coffee shop and had a long argument about politics. Myrna considered herself very progressive and found Ignatius backward and conservative.

Ignatius notes that Myrna is from a wealthy New York family and had come to a Southern university to gain experience of life beyond the city. Ignatius found Myrna annoying and felt that she went out looking to be persecuted. Their regular sparring led them to become a sort of platonic couple who confused and infuriated the people around them.

Myrna believed that the answer to all social and personal problems was sex and constantly tried to liberate people from their beliefs about virginity and sexual conventions. She befriended two southern girls and tried to sexually liberate them. In the end, one tried to commit suicide and the other had a nervous breakdown. Myrna, meanwhile, was almost raped by a janitor after she tried to preach sexual liberation to him.

*Ignatius draws a parallel between black slaves and people under medieval feudal systems, and thinks that both states are preferable to modern capitalism. In modern American society, there is an emphasis on personal responsibility—people have individual rights but are partly responsible for their level of income through the job that they choose. Ignatius dislikes this because he does not wish to take responsibility for his life in any way and feels that it would be better to be enslaved. This mindset only emphasizes the fact that Ignatius has never been persecuted in a meaningful way and has no idea how horrible it would be. He simplifies and romanticizes the experience of black Americans because he imagines that it is nice to have all choice removed from life—a slave could not choose how to work but could only comply with the master’s rules. However, he does not acknowledge that he is lucky to have many choices and freedoms compared to a black person, even in the 1960s, when slavery had long been abolished.*



*Ignatius displays ignorance about why black workers cannot simply change their circumstances and hypocritically imagines that he would do a better job himself, although he does not believe he can change his current circumstances despite being a white man with a great deal of social privilege. Although black people were granted civil rights in the 1960s, the legacy of slavery in America meant that black people were still subject to systemic prejudice. Ignatius believes in a return to a medieval worldview, so his perspective is not only conservative but hundreds of years out of date.*



*Myrna and Ignatius are simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by each other. Myrna is argumentative and likes the fact that her views irritate Ignatius. Ignatius, too, seems to enjoy conflict and gets a thrill out of provoking both Myrna and the people around them.*



*Although Myrna believes that her progressive approach to life will help liberate people, this is clearly not always the case. It is implied that Myrna manipulated the Southern girls into having sex with her because the girls were deeply conservative and presumably averse to sex before marriage. Although Myrna feels that she has helped the girls by freeing them from beliefs she finds oppressive, her actions only harmed them. As they girls both end up mentally devastated by the experience, this suggests that Myrna thinks more about herself, and imposing her own worldview on others, than she thinks about the effects of forcing others to change themselves.*



Myrna did not finish college and thought she could learn more out in the world than at school. Ignatius still sees her sometimes because she comes to the South on cultural expeditions. The last time he saw her, she had come to teach folk songs and chain gang music to black people but found that they were more interested in modern music. The white communities turned against her, however, and chased her out of town—something of which she was very proud.

*Myrna rejects academia because she does not like to have her perspective challenged, even though she considers herself progressive. Myrna, in fact, proves herself as blind to the experience of others as Ignatius is, especially when it comes to the social position of black people in the South. She does not view black people as individuals who can adapt to and become equal citizens in modern American society, but rather as a product of their cultural history that she can use to make herself look charitable and progressive.*



Ignatius and Myrna write to each other quite often and Myrna always tries to persuade Ignatius to come to New York and join her in her many social causes. However, Ignatius thinks it is inevitable that one day Myrna will be arrested, and this will give her life a purpose it has hitherto lacked. Ignatius found Myrna's last letter especially offensive and so has decided to take social action to show Myrna that he is not reactionary. He will organize a protest at work and take on the "fiend" Gonzalez, who keeps the workers down. On this triumphant note, Ignatius signs off.

*It is striking that Ignatius equates Myrna's inevitable incarceration with her spiritual liberation. It reflects Ignatius's worldview—that the material world is meaningless (though of course Ignatius enjoys many material pleasures). This is based on medieval philosophy and Boethius's idea that the world is a prison and that one can only be free in one's mind. However, it also suggests that Myrna likes to think of herself as persecuted, like Ignatius, because she thinks that she is too wise for modern society and will be locked up because of this. Although Myrna professes to hate persecution, Ignatius suspects that the opposite is true—she craves it, and goes out of her way to be provocative.*



## CHAPTER 5, PART 5

In his office at the university, Dr. Talc, a lecturer and academic, hurriedly works on a talk he must give the next day on his special subject: the history of the British monarchy. Dr. Talc does not, really, have a good in-depth knowledge of this subject, although it is his life's work. He covers this up with sarcasm and generalizations. While he searches through his desk for a paper, he comes across a note which attacks his academic qualifications, signed "Zorro." Dr. Talc wonders what happened to the student who sent this to him.

*Dr. Talc knows that he is not what he claims to be and must put on a false persona using humor in order to trick his students. The student who sent Dr. Talc the note has clearly seen through his disguise and despises him for pretending to be something he is not. This suggests that, although Dr. Talc is generally convincing, he cannot keep up this charade forever.*



## CHAPTER 6, PART 1

In a bar called Mattie's Ramble Inn, Jones drinks beer with the bartender, Mr. Watson, and complains about his job at the **Night of Joy** and his boss, Lana Lee. Jones complains that Darlene's bird, who now works at the club, probably gets paid more than him. Mr. Watson warns Jones to stay out of trouble. Jones complains that Mr. Watson is too well-behaved, and that Lana would love him. Jones wishes he could earn a bit more and get himself a television.

Jones tells Mr. Watson that he knows Lana is operating something illegal from the **Night of Joy**. The "head orphan," George, has not been in for a while, and Jones suspects it is because he started asking questions about the operation. Mr. Watson tells Jones that his son is a teacher now, and Jones says that he never went to school because his mother was so poor that he had to work. Jones says that his job at the bar is so bad that it is like he is working in "modern slavery."

Mr. Watson says that Jones ought to try and sabotage the **Night of Joy**. Another man in the bar says that, where he works, they are planning a demonstration. Jones asks where that is, and the man replies that he works at Levy Pants. He tells Jones that a fat, white man who wears a **hunting cap** has organized the demonstration and wants to drop a "nuclear bomb" on the office to get rid of the manager, Mr. Gonzalez. Jones says that this man will get all the workers thrown in prison.

The man says that the protest organizer is very educated and that he talks about the medieval period and has a story about riding into the "har of darkness" on a bus. Jones remembers Ignatius and tells the man that he has met him. Jones warns the man that the police were after Ignatius, and that if they demonstrate with him, they will get into real trouble. The man says that he will ask Ignatius, as he doesn't want to go to jail.

*This passage demonstrates the difficulty faced by black people in the 1960s South, as most wanted to receive fair treatment but also faced incarceration if they demanded it. This lived experience directly contrasts Ignatius's claim that, if he were a black worker, he would start a riot and demand his freedom. Jones's situation, in which he must find a subtle way to free himself from exploitation or risk going to prison, is a much more realistic portrayal of the black experience. Jones does not want much from life—merely the comparative luxury of basic things which white people, who earn more than him, can enjoy.*



*As a black person in the South, Jones has not had the same advantages as many of the white people in the area because the legacy of slavery means that black people often struggle to find adequate employment. This demonstrates that racism and the legacy of slavery in the South puts black people at a disadvantage in terms of improving their situations. Jones feels like a slave because he is literally not free to leave his job: he will be arrested if he tries.*



*Jones immediately sees Ignatius's protest in terms of the consequences it will have for the black workers, something which Ignatius has clearly not considered. While it is unlikely that Ignatius will be arrested for inciting a riot, the black workers will certainly be punished for attacking an office worker. And given their unfair treatment in the legal system, they will, no doubt, face serious sentences for this behavior.*



*Ignatius has shared his philosophy with the black workers but has not listened to them or tried to understand their position. This shows that Ignatius's behavior is fundamentally self-interested, although he pretends to organize the riot on behalf of the black workers. In fact, the riot will likely cause harm and legal problems for the workers, whereas Ignatius (a white man) will likely face only minor consequences. Jones, on the other hand, feels solidarity with the black workers and warns them about Ignatius for their own good.*



## CHAPTER 6, PART 2

Mr. Gonzalez gets to the office early and happily sets up his little workspace. He admires the decorations that Ignatius has put up and wonders how his employee is able to get through the filing so quickly. Ignatius bustles through the door and Mr. Gonzalez remarks that he is very early. Ignatius indignantly replies that he is not and accuses Mr. Gonzalez of being paranoid. Mr. Gonzalez is confused and watches helplessly as Ignatius storms into the factory, where he now spends almost all his time. Mr. Gonzalez hears a cheer go up from the workers as Ignatius enters.

On the factory floor, four of the workers struggle to lift Ignatius onto a table. With difficulty, and under Ignatius's panicked direction, they deposit him onto one of the surfaces. He stands before them with a sheet wrapped around his waist and begins to make a speech about the attack they will make on the office. The workers laugh and wave the sticks and fenceposts they have brought to use as weapons.

A man in the crowd calls out to Ignatius and says that he heard Ignatius is wanted by the police. Ignatius denies this and unwinds the sheet, which he has decorated as a banner with the words "Crusade for Moorish Dignity." The sheet has several stains on it and the workers begin to wonder out loud why they need to bring this disgusting old thing with them. Ignatius is indignant and calls two women forward to carry the banner. They don't want to touch it, but gingerly take a corner each.

Ignatius directs the workers to scream and shout, or to jump up and down, as they enter the factory, and they amusedly play along. Back in the office, Mr. Gonzalez hears the din and wonders what is going on. Ignatius films the group as they begin to get riled up, and gleefully imagines Myrna's annoyance when she sees the footage. Ignatius commands the group to sing as they enter the office and directs them to attack Mr. Gonzalez on his command.

*Mr. Gonzalez genuinely cares about the success of Levy Pants and the continuation of the business. He also cares about his employees, and lets Ignatius do what he wants because this is what seems to make Ignatius happy. Mr. Gonzalez is naïve, however, in his belief that everyone is selfless and well-meaning, like himself. Gonzalez does not recognize Ignatius's self-interested plan to abuse Gonzalez's power over the workers because this is not something that he himself would ever do.*



*Ignatius almost literally crushes the workers beneath him as they try to lift him up. This symbolizes the protest in general, as Ignatius is also willing to figuratively crush the black workers and put them at risk in order to serve himself.*



*It is demeaning for Ignatius to ask the workers to carry his dirty bedsheet, but he has not thought of this and expects them to blindly follow his orders. This suggests that Ignatius does not think of the black workers as individuals whom he genuinely wants to help, but as pawns to help him achieve his personal goal of annoy his ex-girlfriend, Myrna. This suggests that Ignatius is not so different from a historical slave owner who felt that they could use black people to improve their own status.*



*Ignatius wants the black workers to behave violently to suit his own ends. Although they do not seem particularly angry about their treatment at the factory, or with Mr. Gonzalez personally, Ignatius thinks that it will make him look like a better activist if they act the way he tells them to. This suggests that Ignatius is not concerned with helping the black workers achieve better working conditions or social mobility, but only with making a film which paints himself in a heroic light.*



When Ignatius sounds the order, the women begin to sing, and the procession moves towards the office. Ignatius realizes they are leaving without him and cries out for someone to help him down from the table. The march has gone, however, and Ignatius is forced to struggle down himself. He drops his camera and smashes it on the way down. He hurries into the office and sees the protest standing around confusedly while Mr. Gonzalez and Miss Trixie gape at them.

*Ignatius wants to be the center of the protest even though, really, the plight of the black workers does not affect him. He has placed himself at the heart of the issue and organized the protest for his own self-interested purpose, and wishes to control it for this reason. However, this scene demonstrates that the black workers know how to protest in a way that suits them—singing and praying—and that Ignatius, as a white man, is not an important part of this.*



Ignatius rushes to the front and asks Mr. Gonzalez grandly if he will now “help these people.” Mr. Gonzalez seems baffled and Ignatius sounds the attack. Someone knocks over his plants and the sign he has made. Someone else begins to defend Mr. Gonzalez, who has not been given a fair chance to speak. Ignatius grows irritated and snaps at the choir to stop singing. Another voice in the crowd says that Ignatius is a “bad man” and that the police are after him.

*Ignatius wants to incite violence but does not want to be affected by it, again suggesting that he feels that he can manipulate the black workers and does not think of them as individuals. As the self-proclaimed leader of the protest, Ignatius has objectified and used the black workers, not anticipating that his things, such as the plants in the office, may be broken in the process. This parodies the wider attitude of white people during this time period who claimed to want an equal society but did not want to give up the privileges they experienced under the racist status quo.*



The protesters begin to file back toward the factory, but Ignatius screams that someone must attack Mr. Gonzalez. The remaining protesters begin to lose interest and complain that they have enough problems without going to prison. Ignatius furiously screams at them to stay. He suggests they could attack Miss Trixie instead, but the demonstration comes to an end.

*The black workers are not interested in violently attacking someone who has done nothing to them. Ignatius’s behavior suggests that he is racist and believes that black people are violent and will automatically commit crimes if prompted. Although he has tried to arrange the riot to prove that he is not racist, the experience has the opposite effect, highlighting the racist attitudes Ignatius has tried to mask for his own personal gain.*



## CHAPTER 6, PART 3

In the booth at the bus station bathroom, Patrolman Mancuso has developed a terrible cold. What’s worse, when he tries to leave, he finds that he is locked in the bathroom and can do nothing but rattle the door meekly and call out for help.

*Patrolman Mancuso’s accidental imprisonment in the tiny booth is an example of the various kinds of incarceration faced by characters in the novel. Mancuso’s cell is also meant to remind the reader of the figure of Boethius, the medieval philosopher who Ignatius idolizes and who wrote [The Consolation of Philosophy](#) while imprisoned.*



## CHAPTER 6, PART 4

At home, Irene berates Ignatius because he has been fired. Ignatius complains that it was Myrna Minkoff's fault, but Irene dismisses this and tells him he must find a new job. Irene grabs the newspaper and begins rifling through it for the job's page. Ignatius is distracted, however, and thinks about what he will write to Myrna now that his protest has failed. Irene tells Ignatius that he must go out early and look for a job, and Ignatius feels that Fortuna has spun his wheel down again.

*Ignatius has been fired because he tried to organize a race riot at work to prove to his ex-girlfriend, Myrna, that he is socially progressive. Ignatius's intentions with the riot were totally self-interested: he gave no thought to the black workers, who nearly lost their jobs because of his actions. As a result of Ignatius's enduring belief in destiny, he does not acknowledge that he was fired because of his own actions, instead attributing it to a random accident of fate. This suggests that because Ignatius feels he has little control over his life, he does not take responsibility for his actions and therefore never develops as a person or learns from his own behavior.*



## CHAPTER 6, PART 5

In the Levys' home, Mrs. Levy lies on her exercise board and allows herself to be mechanically massaged. Mr. Levy comes home early, and his wife is surprised and disappointed to see him. Mr. Levy tells her bitterly that he spent all day at the factory and had to fire Ignatius. Mrs. Levy complains that Mr. Levy never did care about the factory, and Mr. Levy thinks that although he is never there, the factory is a source of constant stress for him.

*Mr. and Mrs. Levy both feel imprisoned by their circumstances. Although Mrs. Levy leads a life of leisure, her reliance on commodities, such as the exercise board (which exercises her body for her and, therefore, removes her freedom and autonomy from this process entirely) makes her feel trapped. Mr. Levy also feels trapped by his job: even when he avoids the factory, it is his responsibility and he cannot easily escape from it.*



Mrs. Levy asks why Ignatius was fired and Mr. Levy tells her about the protest. Mrs. Levy says that her husband underpays and overworks his staff. She has received a letter from their daughters, who are away at college, and who write that they will not return home until Mr. Levy improves conditions at the factory. Mr. Levy is deflated by this, but Mrs. Levy says it is his own fault.

*Although Ignatius arranged the riot for a selfish reason, it is true that the workers at Levy Pants are underpaid. This demonstrates the legacy of slavery in New Orleans, as white employers can clearly get away with paying their black staff less. Although black people were ostensibly protected by civil rights laws by the 1960s, a long history of racism and discrimination in the South means that these laws were often ignored or worked around.*



Mr. Levy knows that Mrs. Levy will write to their daughters and will portray him as a heartless monster who has fired a "young idealist." Mr. Levy tries to explain to his wife that Ignatius was strange, and was wanted by the police, but Mrs. Levy says that Mr. Levy thinks everyone who has "character" and "integrity" is strange. Mr. Levy loses his patience with Mrs. Levy and tells her to shut up. Mrs. Levy is offended and accuses Mr. Levy of having never cared about her.

*Mrs. Levy immediately takes Ignatius's side and decides that her husband fired Ignatius for helping the workers. This is ironic because, of course, Ignatius only organized the protest to gain an upper hand with Myra. Similarly, Mrs. Levy wants an excuse to bully her husband and justifies her own frustration with him by taking Ignatius's side.*



Mrs. Levy says that Mr. Levy has many psychological complexes which need attention. She says that he has treated Miss Trixie appallingly and Mr. Levy is confused. Mrs. Levy says that Mr. Levy has destroyed her ideals and hemmed her in with material comfort, which does not fulfil her. She demands that she be allowed to bring Miss Trixie to the house, so that she can rejuvenate her, or Mrs. Levy will write to their daughters and tell them what a monster Mr. Levy is.

Mr. Levy says that they should let Miss Trixie retire, but Mrs. Levy is adamant that retirement would kill Miss Trixie. Mr. Levy disagrees, and Mrs. Levy says that she should have married “a doctor, somebody with ideals” instead. She pleads with her husband to see a therapist because she feels he has repressed emotional problems. Finally, Mr. Levy relents and says that Mrs. Levy can invite Miss Trixie to the house.

*Mrs. Levy pretends that she wants to help Mr. Levy but really only wants to help herself. Mrs. Levy claims that Mr. Levy has repressed emotional problems, but it seems that Mrs. Levy is the person with the most pent-up frustration, and her attacks upon Mr. Levy give her an outlet for this and allow her to justify her own behavior. She pretends to help her husband—and, by extension, Miss Trixie—so that she can feel better herself.*



*Mrs. Levy is deeply unhappy, although she lives a life of leisure and is free to do whatever she wants. Mrs. Levy projects her idea of freedom, which is to have a fulfilling career (something she's never had) onto Miss Trixie. This disregards Miss Trixie's feelings and demonstrates that Mrs. Levy has a dictatorial approach to helping others, rather than a democratic one. Mrs. Levy clearly wants a project to keep herself entertained rather than to actually help Miss Trixie.*



## CHAPTER 7, PART 1

Paradise Vendors is a business which sells hot dogs from carts. The carts are stored in a garage on Poydras Street, and when the door is open, a terrible, chemical smell emerges into the street. Walking along this road, Ignatius smells the hot dogs and goes inside. He finds an old man, Mr. Clyde, cooking sausages there, and asks for several hot dogs. While he talks with Mr. Clyde and eats the hot dogs, Ignatius tells Mr. Clyde that he needs a job, so Mr. Clyde offers Ignatius work as a vendor.

Ignatius refuses—his health is too delicate to stand out in the cold all day. Mr. Clyde asks Ignatius to pay for the hot dogs he has eaten, and Ignatius says he only has enough money for his car fare home. When Mr. Clyde hears this, he grows enraged and threatens to stab Ignatius with his hot dog fork. Ignatius is adamant, however, that he will not walk all the way home. Mr. Clyde suggests that Ignatius take one of the hot dog carts out for an hour to try and earn the money back, and Ignatius agrees.

*Ignatius makes no effort to actively find a job that he might enjoy and instead wonders into one by chance. Ignatius bases his worldview on the writings of the philosopher Boethius, who believed that humans had very limited control over their own fate. While this worldview was relevant in the medieval period, when people lived under a feudal system and did not have opportunities to transcend their birth status through work or material accumulation, this worldview does not translate to the modern industrialized world and especially does not apply to someone like Ignatius who, as an educated white man, has many opportunities.*



*As a result of Ignatius's belief that he has no control over his own destiny, he does not take responsibility for himself and takes hot dogs for which he knows he cannot pay. He treats the incident as an unfortunate accident, rather than something he could have prevented, because he takes no accountability for himself.*



Mr. Clyde apologizes for his outburst but explains that no one respects the hot dog trade. He gives Ignatius a Paradise Vendors uniform—although Ignatius refuses to remove his **cap**—and a cart to push. Ignatius pushes the cart along for a short while, and then parks it in a secluded street and eats several hot dogs himself.

Ignatius thinks about his mother, Irene, who has been in a bad mood all week. She will not leave him in peace and has threatened to sell their home. She compares Ignatius to Patrolman Mancuso, who Irene says loves his work. Ignatius gave her **The Consolation of Philosophy** to lend to Mancuso. Ignatius thinks it may inspire him because Boethius, the writer, was also unjustly imprisoned, as Mancuso is in his demoted job at the bus station.

Ignatius decides to move and sets out again with the cart. He runs into George, who steps into his path and asks to buy a hot dog. Ignatius looks George up and down and tells him that, as a young boy, George should eat healthy things. Ignatius refuses to sell him a hot dog and says he must save his supply for better clients. George demands a hot dog, and Ignatius rams him with the cart. George escapes into the crowd, who tut at Ignatius, and call him a “bum” for causing a scene.

To calm himself down, Ignatius eats some more hot dogs and then hurries back to the vendor’s garage. He runs the last few paces to the open door and, when he arrives, tells Mr. Clyde that he has been robbed and that the thief stole all his hot dogs. Mr. Clyde is amazed—he has never heard anything like this before. He asks Ignatius if he will come back the next day and try to make the money back, and Ignatius agrees.

*Ignatius’s cap symbolizes his individuality and his inability to fit in easily with the modern world. Ignatius feels that modernity is hostile toward him and persecutes him both for his antiquated worldview and his appearance. This scene demonstrates that people are often willing to compromise with Ignatius. However, because he is hypocritical and takes no responsibility for his actions, disrespectfully eating the hot dogs, this willingness to compromise is clearly not reciprocated by Ignatius.*



*Patrolman Mancuso’s approach to life is opposite to Ignatius’s. Mancuso believes that if he works hard, he can change his destiny. However, Ignatius believes that human life is controlled by a blind goddess, Fortuna, whose wheel of fortune decides people’s fates. This belief is based on Boethius’s writings in [The Consolation of Philosophy](#), which gained popularity in the medieval period. It was also written while Boethius was in prison and suggests that all of life is a prison of fate, from which humans cannot escape—a lesson which Ignatius seemingly wishes to teach Patrolman Mancuso.*



*Ignatius once again shows himself to be hypocritical, as he eats very badly himself but tells George to eat healthily. Although this advice seems to be for George’s own good, Ignatius really says it to benefit himself, as he wants to eat all the hot dogs rather than share with George.*



*Ignatius pretends to be a victim of random persecution so that Mr. Clyde will feel sorry for him. He pretends that he is invested in Mr. Clyde’s business to avoid being reprimanded or fired for eating all the hot dogs himself. Ignatius also evades responsibility for his actions, something he justifies with his belief in the medieval idea that humans are not responsible for their actions but, instead, are subject to the whims of fate.*





Ignatius tells Mr. Clyde that he must get a job to appease his mother, who drinks, and says that he will wear the uniform home to prove to her that he is employed. Mr. Clyde seems confused by all this but does not object. Ignatius says that, before things go any further, he must tell Mr. Clyde about his valve.

*Ignatius makes Irene sound worse than she is, painting himself as a victim of her abuse so that Mr. Clyde will feel sorry for him and will not hold him accountable for his behavior. Despite wanting to give off the appearance of a responsible employee to Mr. Clyde and Irene, Ignatius avoids taking responsibility for his behavior, even preemptively giving Mr. Clyde excuses about his valve (a stomach problem) so that he cannot be held accountable for his job performance.*



## CHAPTER 7, PART 2

At the **Night of Joy**, Lana Lee goes out on an errand and leaves Jones to mop the floor. Before she leaves, Lana warns him to stay away from the cash register and the cabinet underneath it. When Lana has gone, Jones sits down to read the copy of *Life* magazine that Darlene has given him. Lana returns and yells at Jones. The floor is still dirty, she says. Jones has left streaks of dirt all over the place. Jones knows this—he plans to ruin Lana’s business.

*Lana demonstrates her racist worldview, as she believes that Jones is likely to steal from her while she is out merely because he’s black. Lana’s attitude embodies more widespread racist attitudes in places like the American South, which have a history of slavery and racial prejudice. Jones knows that he cannot quit his job (Lana will have him arrested for vagrancy if he tries) so he does his best to ruin Lana’s business and regain some power in the limited ways available to him.*



Jones tells Lana that when she pays him properly, he will clean properly. It is not easy, he says, living on less than minimum wage. After all, he’s got to feed himself. He asks Lana why she doesn’t give him some of the money for the orphans now that George no longer visits. Lana ignores Jones and puts the receipt for the chalk into her ledger. She has a globe, too, and now only needs a book to complete the little collection. She will get George to bring her one.

*Lana knows that she can exploit Jones and pay him as little as she likes because, if Jones tries to quit, she will have him arrested for vagrancy. Lana has all the power in this relationship because she knows that the authorities will side with her, as a white woman, against Jones, and therefore Jones cannot protect himself.*



Lana feels that her luck has changed for the better. The undercover policemen have stopped coming into the bar, which means she can rehire Darlene as a bargirl and cancel her performance with the bird, which will be more expensive for Lana to pay for than having Darlene work on commission.

*Lana wants to exploit Darlene and pay her as little as possible, and it costs Lana more to pay Darlene as an exotic dancer than to have her work on commission. Lana’s attitude toward luck suggests that Ignatius is not the only character who believes human life is largely a product of luck and chance. Although Ignatius believes this literally and to the extreme, other characters in the novel also subscribe to this general way of thinking, suggesting that this worldview may not be as incompatible with modernity as Ignatius likes to assume.*



Darlene enters the bar, carrying her cockatoo with her in its cage. She pulls the cover off the cage and reveals the huge, scruffy bird. Lana tells Darlene that her bird act is cancelled, and Darlene pleads with Lana to give her a chance. She has trained the bird to tear her clothes off during her dance. Lana says that it's not safe to have a big bird in a club. Darlene counters that if Lana will not let her perform, she will tell the police about the "you know what's."

Jones senses an opportunity for sabotage and joins in. He tells Lana that she must give Darlene's act a chance. He tells Lana that there is another club in town that has an eagle and Darlene joins in and begs Lana to let them try. Eventually, Lana agrees.

*Lana pretends that she wants to cancel the bird act for the safety of Darlene and her customers. This disguises Lana's true intentions, which are mercenary motivated by profit. Darlene clearly knows that Lana's supposed charitable donations to the orphans are a front for criminal activity and tries to blackmail Lana to remind her that her freedom may be in jeopardy.*



*Jones wants to sabotage Lana because Lana essentially keeps him prisoner. Although he is an employee and not a slave, Jones cannot quit his job without being arrested. This suggests that, although slavery has long been abolished in the South, institutional racism means that black people are often in similar circumstances to their slave ancestors. They, too, are forced to work for virtually nothing and will be imprisoned under discriminatory vagrancy laws if they are not productive.*



## CHAPTER 7, PART 3

Irene phones Santa and tells her that Ignatius has become a hot dog vendor. Irene is distraught and Santa agrees with her that hot dog vendors are a "bunch of vagrants." Irene is mortified that her son is selling hot dogs despite all his education. She asks Santa how Patrolman Mancuso is, and Santa explains that he has gotten a terrible cold from sitting in the bus station bathroom all day. Apparently, Ignatius lent him a book which he called "inspirational literature." Irene sympathizes, and Santa complains that it is unfair because Patrolman Mancuso "loves the force."

Irene complains about Ignatius again and Santa tries to cheer her up. Santa says it is not Irene's fault that Ignatius is an ungrateful "brat," and that what Irene needs is a boyfriend. Santa has seen Claude Robichaux around and remembers that the old man once inquired after Irene. Irene asks if he has asked for her again and Santa says no. Irene says that he doesn't care about her, but Santa brushes this off and says that she will throw a party and invite Irene and Claude.

*Irene and Santa are deeply concerned with conforming to the standards of respectable American society and their own status in the community. Irene is embarrassed by Ignatius's job as a hot dog vendor because she knows that this looks bad and that her neighbors will judge her. Patrolman Mancuso has been imprisoned in a cell-like stall in the bus station as punishment for his failure, an incarceration which parodies that of Boethius, the medieval philosopher who wrote the book that Ignatius lent Mancuso.*



*Santa is keen to interfere in Irene's life and break the hold that Ignatius has over her. However, although Santa believes she is doing this for Irene's own good, Irene is not enthusiastic about Claude and does not seem to want a boyfriend. Santa overrules Irene, however, and this suggests that Santa wants to set Irene and Claude up not because she genuinely wants to help them but because she likes the sense of control that matchmaking gives her.*



Ignatius is in the bath, having a relaxing soak after his first day as a hot dog vendor. On the side of the tub is a letter, which he eventually feels calm enough to open. It is a poster for a lecture given by Myrna Minkoff titled “Sex in Politics: Erotic Liberty as a Weapon Against Reactionaries.” Ignatius scoffs at this and thinks it is ridiculous that Myrna has been allowed to speak in public. On the other side of the poster is a letter from Myrna to him.

Myrna writes that she hopes Ignatius was not too offended by her last letter; she only talks about his sexuality because he will not address it himself. She thinks a sexual experience would be good for him and would help him emotionally. She is no longer making a film about race. The young black actress objected to the lack of pay and, therefore, Myrna dismisses her as not really dedicated to the cause. She has been persuaded to give public lectures by a Jewish friend of hers who uses folk music as a weapon of protest.

Irene bangs on the bathroom door, interrupting Ignatius. She asks what he does in there that takes so long and he tells her that he has a letter from Myrna. Irene protests that Myrna got him fired from his last job, but Ignatius says that this was a blessing in disguise since he prefers his job as a hot dog vendor. Irene shrieks that he had better not get fired from this one, and Ignatius tells his mother to go away and drink her wine.

Once Irene has gone, Ignatius continues to read Myrna’s letter. She goes on to say that, although the folk singer helped her get a lecture, he wanted sex in exchange for helping her out. She then discovered that he was not really a Jewish folk singer at all, but an undercover agent for the Baptist Church and the Ku Klux Klan. However, she hopes the lecture will help further her career.

Myrna asks if Ignatius has made any progress with his “personal problems.” She wishes he would move to New York; she knows he is intelligent and thinks he could develop in the city. She also thinks he needs to get away from his mother’s influence and that he must build a political consciousness. Last time they discussed politics Myrna recalls that Ignatius suggested the President should be selected by “Divine Right.” She does not write this idea off completely, and instead thinks it may be a useful tool for mopping up “fascist support.”

*Myrna’s obsession with sex infuriates Ignatius because he believes that sex is sinful, and that modernity is corrupt because it is liberal about sex. Ignatius bases his notions about sex on his belief in the supremacy of medieval over modern culture.*



*Myrna wants to help Ignatius and convince him to get in touch with his own sexuality. However, Myrna has no evidence that this really would help Ignatius and, instead of respecting his beliefs, she constantly tries to impose her own worldview onto him. This same trait comes out in Myrna’s political activism. While Myrna claims that she wants to fight for black people’s rights, such as their lack of fair pay, she does not want to pay her own black employee. Instead of taking responsibility for her own hypocrisy in this case, Myrna instead blames the actress for merely wanting to be paid.*



*Rather than take responsibility for his own actions (his decision to start a riot at work) and admit that this is what got him fired, Ignatius clearly blames Myrna for his own mistakes. This again demonstrates Ignatius’s complete unwillingness to take responsibility for his own actions and emotions.*



*Myrna clearly feels persecuted because of her progressive views, which do not fit in with the more conservative mainstream American society of the 1960s. She feels that she is a target for extremists because she is so progressive. Ignatius, however, feels Myrna is a target because she constantly agitates and challenges people with her beliefs.*



*Myrna views herself as progressive and modern and Ignatius as conservative and backward. Ignatius believes that the medieval period was superior to modernity and believes in the archaic Divine Right of Kings, which states that political rulers are selected by God rather than through democratic election. Myrna views this position as fascist because it does not allow people a vote but, instead, imposes a ruler upon them. However, she is not fundamentally against fascism, which suggests that Myrna, like Ignatius, is not opposed to an oppressive society so long as it works to her own advantage.*



Myrna begs Ignatius to write to her. He is one of her “most important projects.” Ignatius finishes the letter and gets out of the bath. He goes to his desk to begin a reply to Myrna and finds an old yo-yo in his drawer. He tries to play with it, but the string breaks when he spins it. He can hear Irene on the phone to Santa, complaining about all the money she spent on her parents.

*Although Myrna claims that she wants to help Ignatius, it's clear that she views him as a project and is only invested in him as a measure of her own success. The yo-yo represents Ignatius's belief in the medieval wheel of fortune, which he believes controls his destiny. The fact that the string snaps suggests that he is not entirely mistaken in this belief—sometimes events really are outside of one's own control.*



Ignatius starts his letter to Myrna. He tells her that he is not interested in her “sordid” exploits and that he knows her lecture will be a failure. She will probably only attract homeless old men who will be excited by the sexual content of her talks and will expose themselves to her. He says that he will no longer have much time to write to her as he is now an important figure in the “food service” sector. With that, he signs off.

*Myrna believes in sexual liberation, but Ignatius views it as impure and deserving of punishment since he subscribes to a medieval worldview in which sexuality is sinful. Therefore, Ignatius feels that Myrna will bring about her own punishment—the excites old men—if she openly discusses sex.*



## CHAPTER 8, PART 1

At Mr. Levy and Mrs. Levy's house, Mrs. Levy has finally got Miss Trixie where she wants her. Mrs. Levy has always loved causes, and for years has wanted to have Miss Trixie brought to her home so that she can psychoanalyze her. Mrs. Levy even did a psychology course, which she completely failed. Mr. Levy has always refused to bring Miss Trixie home, but Mrs. Levy has blackmailed him because she threatened to tell her daughters that he fired a “young idealist” from Levy Pants for organizing a race riot.

*Mrs. Levy only wants to help Miss Trixie because she is bored with her own life. Although she claims to want to protect Miss Trixie from Mr. Levy, Mrs. Levy's apparent charity is only thinly veiled self-interest. It is ironic that Mrs. Levy wants to prove Mr. Levy is a bully, since her own attitude towards Mr. Levy—against whom she frequently uses emotional blackmail—is bullying and cruel.*



Miss Trixie is asleep and is very confused to be woken up by Mrs. Levy. Miss Trixie asks hopefully if she is retired and is angry when Mrs. Levy says no. Mrs. Levy tells Miss Trixie that she must stop thinking of herself as “old and tired,” since she is still a “very attractive woman.” Miss Trixie seems confused and falls asleep again while Mr. and Mrs. Levy bicker.

*Miss Trixie clearly wants to be free from her job at Levy Pants and views retirement as a symbol of her well-deserved liberation after years of work. Mrs. Levy does not accept Miss Trixie's version of freedom, however, and instead tries to impose her own version of freedom onto Miss Trixie. Mrs. Levy is presumably projecting her own desire to be free from her marriage and live as a single, financially-independent woman onto Miss Trixie.*



Miss Trixie wakes up again and tells Mr. Levy and Mrs. Levy to be quiet. She liked it better with Mr. Gonzalez, she says, where it was nice and peaceful. Mrs. Levy snaps at Mr. Levy that this proves Miss Trixie's desire to work. Miss Trixie notices Mr. Levy and snarls that he is the man who fired Gloria, her only friend, who gave her “socks and luncheon meat.” Mr. Levy insists that he never fired any Gloria, but Mrs. Levy tells him that he will not ruin Miss Trixie's life like he has ruined hers.

*Mrs. Levy does not care about Miss Trixie's desire for peace and relaxation, and is instead fixated on her own desire to prove that Mr. Levy is a tyrant who ruins women's lives. Mrs. Levy feels trapped in her marriage and, rather than deal with this and set herself free through divorce (something which was still socially taboo in 1960s America), Mrs. Levy uses Miss Trixie to take revenge on Mr. Levy because she herself is unhappy.*



## CHAPTER 8, PART 2

In his booth at the bus station bathroom, Patrolman Mancuso's cold has grown even worse. He is desperate to escape the booth and knows he must make an arrest to do so. He has been reading the book Ignatius lent him, [The Consolation of Philosophy](#) by Boethius. Mancuso finds it depressing because the man who wrote it is in prison and is about to be tortured and killed by the king. Mancuso thinks Boethius might have been a gambler because he writes a lot about odds and chance.

*Patrolman Mancuso feels trapped in the bus station because he is not free to do his job on the streets. This suggests that freedom is subjective and that, while to some, the idea of work is limiting, to others work is a privilege. Mancuso misunderstands Boethius's description of the wheel of chance, which was believed to be controlled by the goddess Fortuna in the medieval period, and instead interprets the book in a modern sense. However, Mancuso is not wrong in his assertion that many people in modernity, such as gamblers, still subscribe to ideas of fate and chance, which they view as a mystical force beyond their control.*



While he is thinking, Patrolman Mancuso notices a young man enter the bathroom. It is George, who Patrolman Mancuso has noticed comes in everyday at about the same time. George writes something on his hand, and Patrolman Mancuso exits the booth and asks him what he is doing. George is startled and wonders what Patrolman Mancuso wants. He says he has done nothing wrong, but Patrolman Mancuso tells George that he is under arrest and under suspicion.

*Although George is involved in criminal activity, Patrolman Mancuso has no evidence of this when he decides to investigate. This suggests that people in 1960s America were not as free as they perhaps imagined and could be investigated purely based on appearances.*



George snatches the book from Patrolman Mancuso and hits him over the head with it. George escapes from the toilet and rushes out of the bus station, carrying the book and the package (which he'd planned to leave at the station) with him. He runs downtown and finally slows to a walk when he sees he has not been followed.

*George is involved in criminal activity and reacts to Patrolman Mancuso's interest violently in order to stop his crime from being discovered. This suggests that, in this instance, Mancuso is right to judge George on appearance. However, this is an exception to the rule in *A Confederacy of Dunces*, in which characters are often in disguise and does not justify the belief that people who appear suspicious or do not fit in should automatically be persecuted.*



George mentally curses Lana Lee. It is her fault that he must carry the packages around all afternoon, now that he can no longer leave them at the bus station, because she won't fire Jones. George doesn't want to wander around the streets all afternoon, but he can't go home because his mom is always there. He notices that he still has the book and thinks that he will give it to Lana for her collection.

*Lana will not fire Jones because she knows she can pay him as little as she wants and that he cannot quit because it is illegal to be unemployed in New Orleans. Vagrancy laws are applied very harshly to black people due to the legacy of racism left behind by slavery, and Jones, who has been wrongly arrested before, could easily be imprisoned again. George comes across [The Consolation of Philosophy](#) by chance and just happens to find it useful. This suggests that much of human life is subject to fate, and supporting Ignatius's belief in medieval concepts such as Fortuna's wheel, which he believes controls human life.*



## CHAPTER 8, PART 3

Santa prepares for her party and greets Irene and Patrolman Mancuso excitedly when they arrive. Santa and Irene commiserate with Patrolman Mancuso about how bad his cold sounds, and Santa tells Irene that Mancuso lost the book Ignatius lent him. Irene says that this doesn't matter, but that they better not tell Ignatius. Santa quickly tries to change the subject—she does not want to talk about Ignatius all night.

Irene continues to complain about Ignatius as Santa leads them into the kitchen. Santa sends Mancuso to make them some drinks while Irene tells Santa that Ignatius makes her iron his huge uniforms and that he is still a hot dog vendor. Santa tries to distract Irene by telling her that Claude is excited to meet her. Irene seems anxious but pleased about this. Santa sends Mancuso to lie down because his cough sounds so bad.

Irene makes a second drink and Santa wonders where Claude is. Irene compliments her on the house—she can barely hear the neighbors through the wall—and Santa warns Irene not to drink so fast before Claude arrives. Irene seems to lose her nerve; she says she better get home early to check on Ignatius. Santa grabs her wrist firmly and tells her that she should meet Claude—he has money, and he'll take care of her and can pay off her debt. Irene starts as Claude knocks on the window.

Santa lets Claude in and introduces him to Irene. Irene stares into her drink and will not make eye contact with Claude. Claude tells Santa that he has seen Irene before, the day that he was arrested. Santa and Irene suddenly realize that it was Patrolman Mancuso who arrested Claude, and Irene desperately tries to excuse herself. Santa tells her to sit tight, however, and asks Claude what he would do if he ever saw the policeman who arrested him again.

Claude says that he hates the police; they are all communists. Santa suggests that the police have a hard job and are doing their best. Claude disagrees and Santa hurries out of the room to hang up Claude's coat. There is a long, awkward silence between Claude and Irene. Irene tries to leave the room to check on Santa, who she thinks may have slipped on the nice tiled floor.

*Santa dislikes the subject of Ignatius because it ruins her fun. Discussing Ignatius brings Irene down and, therefore, brings down the overall mood. Although Santa claims that she wants to look out for Irene's wellbeing, she is mainly concerned about the effect it will have on her party.*



*Irene is embarrassed that Ignatius is a hot dog vendor because she thinks it makes the family look bad, and Irene is concerned with her public appearance. Santa does not want to talk about Ignatius because it will ruin the mood of her party. This is also why she sends Mancuso to lie down—she is not particularly worried about him, but his cough depresses her. Although Santa seems concerned for her guests' wellbeing, she mainly wants them to comply with her desire to have a fun party as planned.*



*Irene's comment about the neighbors suggests that people in New Orleans are concerned with appearances and conformity because everyone lives in close quarters. Therefore, people do not have the space to enjoy their individual preferences or lifestyles without infringing on other people's. Santa does not seem deterred by Irene's reluctance to be matched up with Claude, suggesting that Santa is more concerned about having her own way than with what Irene really wants.*



*Santa does not care that Irene is uncomfortable with the situation and, instead, is determined to have her own way and set Irene up with Claude. Although Santa's plan seems to have others' best interests in mind, her controlling attitude suggests that she is primarily concerned with getting her own way.*



*Claude hates the police because he feels they unfairly take away people's freedoms. Claude associates this behavior with communism, since this totalitarian ideology was practiced by Russia, America's enemy during the Cold War in the mid-20th century.*



Claude says that it is good to be careful, and he and Irene get into a conversation about this. Irene says that she always tells Ignatius to keep himself safe, and Claude says that he has seen Ignatius around and that he really stands out. Irene says that she has a hard time with Ignatius and suddenly bursts into tears. Claude is surprised and asks her what is wrong. Irene sobs that Ignatius never helps her around the house and that all the neighbors know he is a hot dog vendor.

Irene insists Ignatius has a good education, but Claude says that he might have been corrupted at college. Colleges are full of communists, Claude says. Irene seems to think this is possible and Claude tells her to ask Ignatius what he thinks of democracy. Claude tells Irene that he admired the way she acted when Ignatius was nearly arrested outside D. H. Holmes. Irene says that she wishes she'd let Patrolman Mancuso take Ignatius away, and then panics because she has revealed that she knows the policeman who arrested Claude.

A moment later, Patrolman Mancuso walks in and Claude leaps up in a fury. Santa and Irene defend Patrolman Mancuso; the incident was not his fault, they say, but Ignatius's. Santa tells Claude that Mancuso has had a very hard time recently and Claude relents somewhat. The group makes up and everyone agrees that it would best if someone beat up Ignatius.

## CHAPTER 9, PART 1

Ignatius arrives at his job at Paradise Vendors and is immediately berated by Mr. Clyde. A public health violation has been issued against Ignatius because he was seen playing with a cat while he was out with the hot dog cart. Ignatius decides that the cart—number 7—must be unlucky and demands to be given another. Mr. Clyde refuses and deducts the hot dog that Ignatius begins to eat from his pay. Ignatius tells Mr. Clyde that he has been treated very badly—he did not know that cats were considered unclean—and that, if he is fired, his drunken mother will beat him with a wine bottle.

*Claude, like Irene and Santa, is very concerned with conformity and public appearance. He notices Ignatius because Ignatius stands out and does not seem to conform to contemporary standards of dress. However, given that Claude defended Ignatius from Mancuso at the beginning of the novel, it's reasonable to assume that Claude likely cares more about having his rights infringed upon by the state than infringing on the rights of others merely because they look different.*



*Claude echoes American paranoia about communism, an attitude that reached new heights in the 1950s when America was at war with communist Russia. During this time, many people were investigated on suspicions of harboring communist beliefs and lost their jobs as a result. It is, of course, ironic that a country which claimed to support individual freedom imprisoned and blacklisted people for their political beliefs. It is further ironic that these measures were ostensibly put in place to protect freedom. Ignatius does dislike democracy, but, not because he is a communist—rather, he believes in the absolute monarchy of the medieval era. This suggests that there is not much fundamental difference between various authoritarian systems.*



*Claude, Irene, and Santa blame Ignatius for refusing to conform and feel that he brought his strange appearance brought arrest upon himself, even though he did nothing wrong. This suggests that Santa, Claude, and Irene are hypocrites. They claim to love freedom and are indignant when they think their own rights are threatened, yet they don't want to allow Ignatius the freedom of nonconformity.*



*This is another example of the way in which life in 1960s America was not as free as it might seem to those who did not live through this period. Although Ignatius has violated a rule, this scene gives the impression that citizens are always under surveillance. Rather than take responsibility for his mistake, Ignatius blames fate in typical fashion and links his transgression to the number on his cart. The number seven was believed to be a magic or prophetic number in medieval philosophy, Ignatius's field of study.*



Mr. Clyde feels sorry for Ignatius and says that he does not want to fire him. Mr. Clyde says that he will change Ignatius's route and send him into the French Quarter to get the tourist trade. Ignatius is annoyed; he says that tourists are "degenerates." Mr. Clyde asks Ignatius to hand over the day's profit, but Ignatius does not have much because he ate most of the hot dogs himself and spent the afternoon plotting to destroy Myrna Minkoff and playing with the cat. Mr. Clyde grows angry at this and threatens Ignatius with the fork again. He tells Ignatius to show up bright and early the next day.

When Ignatius gets home, Irene asks him why his hands are covered in scratches. Ignatius tells her he had a fight with a prostitute and Irene laments that her son goes from bad to worse. She asks him if he is a communist and Ignatius tells her not to be ridiculous and that he wants a king, rather than a democracy. A letter has arrived for Ignatius, and Irene gives it to him and sadly watches him open it. As Ignatius suspects, it is a reply from Myrna.

Myrna writes that she was deeply offended by Ignatius's last letter, but that she will not take it personally. She knows that he is going through a "psychosexual crisis." Myrna tells him that she has become the lover of an African sculptor, who is "real and vital." Ignatius scoffs at this. Myrna also explains that her therapy group often uses Ignatius as a case study and that they all hope that he will address his issues and get better.

Ignatius crumples up the letter. Irene begins to talk about a homeless woman whom she gave money to and Ignatius grows enraged—he does not want all his pay given away to tricksters, who he says pretend to be vagrants. Irene tells Ignatius not to be so harsh and Ignatius storms off to his room to plan a rebuttal for Myrna. He knows he must plan something political to really annoy her.

## CHAPTER 9, PART 2

Lana Lee sits on a stool in the **Night of Joy** and thinks about how strong and beautiful her body is. Backstage, Darlene prepares for her first rehearsal. Lana is glad that she has agreed to let Darlene perform because she thinks that it may give her club an edge to have a bird in the show.

*Ignatius dislikes tourists because he associates them with leisure, which Ignatius feels is a sign of modernity's corruption in comparison with the medieval period, in which leisure did not exist in the same way. This is, of course, hypocritical, as Ignatius himself indulges in a life of leisure and objects to all types of work.*



*Ignatius wants to upset his mother and knows she will be horrified if she thinks he has been with a prostitute. This demonstrates that, although modernity claims to be liberal about sex, there are areas of sexuality, such as sex work, which are still viewed as shameful or taboo.*



*Ignatius views Myrna as a symbol of modernity's obsession with sex, which he believes is a sign of corruption in comparison with the medieval period, during which time sexual desire was considered sinful. However, Myrna does not represent the social mainstream in the novel, and, in fact, stands out because of how progressive she considers herself. This suggests that modern society is more closely aligned with Ignatius's perspective on sex than he realizes.*



*Ignatius believes that homeless people put on a façade to serve themselves. Although Ignatius claims to despise Myrna, he cares about what she thinks of him and is willing to go to great lengths to prove her wrong. Ignatius is obsessed about her, which suggests that he may, unconsciously, be attracted to her and want her to notice him. Because he is not honest with himself about these desires, they become repressed and manifest as anger and disgust.*



*Lana views everything in terms of how she can profit—she even sees her body as a commodity to be sold. In this sense, Lana represents self-interest and modern concepts of capitalism taken to an extreme. Her exploitative attitude is also not drastically different to that of slave owners—the way in which Lana sells women's bodies is a loose parallel to how slaves were dehumanized and sold.*





Darlene calls out that she is ready, and Lana tells Jones to put the music on. Jones says he needs to be paid more to do extras like that and Lana threatens to call the police. Jones replies that he will call the police on her and Lana asks him what he means. Jones says he is sick of being threatened and will report Lana for suspicious behavior in the “orphan trade” if she doesn’t start to treat him right. Lana hisses at Jones that the police will never believe him over her, and Jones sulkily puts on the music.

Darlene walks onstage and sets the bird on its perch. She begins to grind and writhe around the pole and offers the bird a piece of her dress to rip off. The bird pulls the little hoop sewn into the gown and Darlene’s clothes tear off. Lana cries out for her to stop. Lana says that Darlene acts like a tramp and that this will never do in her classy establishment. Darlene protests but Lana says that the men who come into the **Night of Joy** do not want to see a stripper because “stripping’s an insult” to women.

Lana explains to Darlene that customers want to see demure women perform sex acts, not strippers. Jones calls Lana his nickname for her, “Scarlett O’Horror,” and this gives Lana an idea. She says that Darlene will dress up as a virginal “Southern Belle” who lives on a plantation and has come to say goodnight to her pet bird. When Darlene goes to kiss the bird, the bird will rip off her clothes.

Jones makes a sarcastic comment and Lana has an idea. She says that Jones will be the doorman for the night and will dress up as the plantation slave. Jones tries to refuse, but Lana says she will call the police. Jones says he will work the door, but that he will let in all sorts of disreputable customers. Lana sends him away and he hears she and Darlene begin to argue as Darlene practices the act.

Jones goes behind the bar to get himself a drink of water. While Lana is distracted, he notices that the cabinet under the cash register has been left open. Jones crouches down, takes off his sunglasses, and looks inside. He sees several packets of brown paper, a box of chalk, a globe, and a book. Rather than move anything in the cabinet, Jones gets a pencil and writes the address of the **Night of Joy** in very small letters on each packet.

*Lana pays Jones less than minimum wage and exploits him at work simply because he has no other option. The police are much more likely to believe Lana’s accusations against Jones than Jones’s accusations against Lana because Lana is white, and Jones is black. This demonstrates the way in which systemic racism puts black people in danger and at a disadvantage in society.*



*Ironically, although Lana sells sex for a living, she is uncomfortable with certain sexual displays, as she knows that American society is still somewhat puritanical about sex despite its supposedly liberal attitudes.*



*Lana is aware that American society is hypocritical when it comes to sex—despite the liberalism of the 1960s, people were still uncomfortable with the idea that women enjoyed sex and wanted to be overtly sexual. Lana assumes her audience would rather see a woman who is forced to be sexual rather than a woman who chooses this for herself, suggesting that Ignatius is far from the only person in modern society with repressed and potentially sinister sexual proclivities. Lana is also willing to exploit the South’s history of slavery to make a profit, referencing the novel *Gone with the Wind*, whose main character, Scarlett O’Hara (on whom “Scarlett O’Horror” is based), is a plantation owner.*



*It is extremely insulting to dress Jones as a slave, as his ancestors probably were slaves in the American South. Lana’s willingness to exploit this suggests that, although slavery has long been abolished, this is still how Lana thinks of Jones, and presumably black people in general.*



*Jones knows that he cannot do anything to sabotage Lana—he is trapped by his circumstances. Jones appeals to fate and hopes that writing on the packet will cause something consequential to happen. Jones is one of many of the characters in the novel who believe in fate, which cannot be explained or controlled, likely because he does not have the personal agency to enact change directly.*



## CHAPTER 9, PART 3

In the police station, Patrolman Mancuso begs the sergeant to let him out of the bus station bathroom. He has a terrible cold and says that, if he is not let out of the bathroom soon, he is going to die. At first, the sergeant is disgusted by Mancuso and calls him weak. When he hears Mancuso's cough, however, he reconsiders—he does not want to be responsible for a death—and says that Mancuso may go out on the street and try to bring someone in. Mancuso swears that he will try, and the sergeant sends him off to fetch his costume for the day. Mancuso will be dressed as Santa Claus.

*Patrolman Mancuso's incarceration in the bathroom mirrors the Roman philosopher Boethius's imprisonment, during which time he wrote [The Consolation of Philosophy](#), on which Ignatius bases his worldview and which he lent to Mancuso. [The Consolation of Philosophy](#) also outlines the idea that humans cannot control their own fate but are at the whims of the goddess Fortuna, who is the supreme authority on destiny. Mancuso's sergeant parodies Fortuna in this sense, as he arbitrarily controls Mancuso's fate from a distance.*



## CHAPTER 9, PART 4

Ignatius sits in his room and ignores Irene, who bangs on the door outside. He works on the "Diary of a Working Boy" and describes Mr. Clyde's request that Ignatius sell hot dogs in the French Quarter, which Ignatius views as an attempt to sabotage him. Most of the people he sees in the French Quarter are drug addicts, although, Ignatius writes, their suffering lends them a type of holiness which is rare in the modern world.

*The French Quarter in New Orleans had a reputation as being a poor and disreputable area during this time, and Ignatius feels that being made to work here is a form of persecution. Ignatius rejects the modern world's materialism since he views this mindset as shallow and unspiritual compared to the medieval period. During this time, suffering was considered holy because it was so pervasive and, therefore, was considered God's will.*



Ignatius continues to lament his situation. He feels that Fortuna's wheel is in a very bad cycle and that, although he used to live a life of comfort and austerity, he is now forced out into the world and must struggle to make a living. What's worse, Mr. Clyde now makes him dress up as a pirate to sell hot dogs because, he says, it will attract the tourists. Ignatius must wear an earring and carry a fake cutlass. When he first put it on, he jokingly brandished the cutlass at Mr. Clyde. The old man misunderstood the joke, however, and came at Ignatius with his fork. The pair duelled for quite some time until Ignatius surrendered.

*Again, Ignatius does not feel that he is in control of his own life, believing instead that his fortune is dictated the medieval goddess Fortuna. Because of this, Ignatius does not feel that he can change his circumstances and that he must instead surrender to them. Ignatius's pirate costume is one of many examples of disguise within the novel, and it seems to imbue him with a sense of bold confidence that he does not otherwise possess.*

Dressed as a pirate, Ignatius sets out with the cart for the French Quarter. He has not been out long when his feet grow tired and he sits down on the curb for a nap. A policeman wakes him, and Ignatius contemplates the fact that he seems to attract law enforcement. He is sure that one day he will end up wrongfully imprisoned. He moves off and heads deeper into the French Quarter. Ignatius is deeply suspicious of this part of the city. There are vagrants on every corner, and he hears laughter and shrieks from inside the ramshackle houses.

*Ignatius feels that he is persecuted by modern authorities but does not understand why. In some ways, Ignatius is oblivious to the fact that he stands out and does not think there is anything unusual about an educated man who chooses to become a hot dog vendor. Ignatius does not think he is strange because, in terms of his worldview, his job is not an active choice, but instead the result of random chance.*



A group of tourists passes Ignatius and takes photographs of him. He poses as a pirate for them and overhears them discuss whether to give him money or not—they seem to think he is homeless. Ignatius would not object to taking their money but a conservative among them says that Ignatius will only spend it on drink. The others agree and the group shuffles off. Ignatius sells a hot dog to a tramp and bumps into Patrolman Mancuso, who is stalking around the French Quarter in his disguise for the day.

Patrolman Mancuso cheerfully greets Ignatius, but Ignatius demands to know where his book (**The Consolation of Philosophy**), which he lent to Mancuso, is. Mancuso nervously explains that he has not finished it yet and Ignatius cries that he wants it back as soon as possible. Ignatius moves off again and almost forgets his hot dog cart. That afternoon, he returns the cart to Mr. Clyde as usual.

Ignatius writes in his journal that he has still not come up with a way to get revenge on Myrna for her disrespectful letters. He concludes that he must go to the cinema soon—there is a new film out which stars an actress whom he loathes. His final observation is that Irene has turned against him.

*Ignatius shows his hypocrisy here, since earlier in the novel complained about his mother giving money to a homeless woman. Although Ignatius often complains about vagrants and claims that they only pretend to need money, he himself is happy to take money from these people even though he could easily find a more lucrative job if he tried.*



[The Consolation of Philosophy](#) is an important book to Ignatius because he has based his whole worldview around it. Ignatius lent it to Mancuso to convince him that the medieval notions of destiny expressed in *Consolation* are far superior to modern ideas about the importance of work and productivity. Mancuso himself is more aligned with the modern world, as he feels that hard work helps one control one's fate.



*Ignatius is simultaneously repulsed by Myrna (who provokes him and makes him angry with her progressive ideas about sex and culture) and obsessed with what she thinks of him. This suggests that he is secretly attracted to her, whether intellectually, sexually, or both. This also speaks to Ignatius's relationship with cinema, which he both loathes and loves.*



## CHAPTER 9, PART 5

In Dr. Talc's office, a young girl tells him that she loves his course and his approach to history. Dr. Talc is flattered and considers asking the girl out for a drink. He thinks she is much nicer than most of his female students and remembers Myrna Minkoff with a shudder. Dr. Talc wonders whether she married Ignatius Reilly, who used to gang up with Myrna against him in class. After a few moments, however, the girl asks what happened to an essay she handed in a couple of months ago. Dr. Talc realizes that she wants to know her grade and is not interested in him.

*Dr. Talc clearly wants sexual attention from his female student but realizes that she only flatters him because she wants her essay back. Although Ignatius and Myrna view each other as enemies, their argumentative demeanors make them seem similar and make people think that they must be attracted to each other because they are so alike. In this sense, the reader can see why Ignatius and Myrna had a "platonic" affair even if they weren't romantically interested in each other and continue to intellectually spar with each other via letters.*



Dr. Talc begins to root through his filing cabinet, searching for the girl's essay. As he does this, a paper plane slips loose from one of his folders and falls on the desk beside the girl. She quickly unfolds it and reads the note. It accuses Dr. Talc of crimes against knowledge and says he should be strung up by his genitals. It is signed "Zorro." Before Dr. Talc turns around, the girl slips the note into her bag.

*The girl takes the note because she thinks, in future, she may be able to use it against Dr. Talc to get her own way. The note is clearly from Ignatius, who has signed it "Zorro" because he views himself as a heroic crusader for knowledge, battling against the ignorance of the modern world.*



## CHAPTER 10, PART 1

At Mr. and Mrs. Levy's house, Mr. Levy glumly watches Mrs. Levy pamper Miss Trixie, who is asleep on the couch. Mr. Levy despairs of his wife. He is a nice, sociable man, and cannot wait until he can go away on another business retreat. Mrs. Levy has bought Miss Trixie false teeth and rubs face cream into her skin. Mr. Levy tells her to take Miss Trixie outside, but Mrs. Levy hisses that Mr. Levy would like to toss Miss Trixie out as though she were nothing. Mrs. Levy says that Miss Trixie is a symbol of everything at which Mr. Levy has failed.

Mr. Levy insists that Mrs. Levy's behavior is pointless—Miss Trixie is old and wants to retire. In her sleep, Miss Trixie mumbles that she is a “very attractive woman,” and Mrs. Levy takes this as proof that Miss Trixie does not want to retire. Mrs. Levy begs Mr. Levy to have therapy, and Mr. Levy says that if he had any sense, he would sell Levy Pants. Mrs. Levy is horrified by this and screams at her husband. Miss Trixie wakes up and snarls at them both to be quiet—she swears that she will have revenge on them. Mrs. Levy tells her to shut up and Miss Trixie falls asleep again.

Mr. Levy tells Mrs. Levy not to worry, since there is no one who would buy the factory from him. Mr. Levy goes upstairs to have a bath, and when he comes downstairs, finds Mrs. Levy putting a wig on Miss Trixie. Miss Trixie does not seem to like this and snaps and swears at Mrs. Levy, who ignores her and seems very pleased with Miss Trixie's transformation. Mr. Levy is amazed: he thinks Miss Trixie looks like Mrs. Levy's mother.

## CHAPTER 10, PART 2

In Mattie's Ramble Inn, Jones complains to Mr. Watson about his job in the **Night of Joy**. Mr. Watson agrees that Jones is in a bad situation; he is not happy about Lana Lee making Jones dress up as a plantation slave for Darlene's opening night. Mr. Watson suggests that Jones go to the police and tell them that he will get another job, but Jones does not like this idea and says that since he got himself into this situation, he will get himself out.

*Mr. Levy does not understand why Mrs. Levy works so hard to prove he is a bully, because Mr. Levy does not want people to be unhappy. Mrs. Levy tries to transform Miss Trixie with her makeover in order to metaphorically turn her into a new woman, a transformation that Mrs. Levy herself clearly wants to undergo and is merely projecting onto Miss Trixie. Mrs. Levy feels trapped in her marriage and blames Mr. Levy for this, although she does nothing to meaningfully change her situation.*



*Mr. Levy is not fooled by Miss Trixie's temporary transformation and can see that Miss Trixie is still just an old woman who wants to be free from work. Mrs. Levy cannot accept that the problem is with herself—she feels trapped and unfulfilled in her marriage—and not with Mr. Levy and Miss Trixie, both of whom just want to be left alone. Rather than taking responsibility for her own life, however, Mrs. Levy pretends that she wants to free Miss Trixie from Mr. Levy's influence when, really, she wants to free herself.*



*Mrs. Levy feels that she has succeeded in transforming Miss Trixie. However, Mr. Levy, who is not delusional like Mrs. Levy, easily sees through this temporary disguise. Mrs. Levy wants to believe that the transformation is a success because she thinks this will prove Mr. Levy wrong.*



*Mr. Watson is slightly naïve and believes that the police will try to help Jones, a black man, the same way that they would help a white person. Jones knows that this is not the case—there is a long history of racism in the police force, especially in places like New Orleans where there is a legacy of slavery. It is unclear whether Mr. Watson is black or white, but either way his advice underestimates the level of prejudice held against black people in the South. Jones, unlike many of the other characters in the novel, is willing to take responsibility for his actions despite the fact that he arguably has the least amount of control over his circumstances as a marginalized individual.*



Mr. Watson asks how the sabotage is going and Jones says that it is not going very well. All he has done is move dirt around the floor and write the club's address on Lana Lee's "orphan" packages. Mr. Watson says again that Jones should go to the police, but Jones says he is afraid of the police and does not want to go to jail.

Jones asks Mr. Watson if the man who worked for Levy Pants, who talked about the demonstration led by Ignatius, has been seen in the bar since then. Mr. Watson says no, and Jones says that he wishes he could track down Ignatius. He reckons that Ignatius is the type of person who could sabotage Lana Lee's business, so he wants to lure Ignatius to the club.

*Jones knows that the police in New Orleans, a Southern American state which has a long history of slavery and segregation, will not believe the testimony of a black person without evidence and will use any excuse to lock him up and incriminate him.*



*Jones views the riot Ignatius tried to organize at Levy Pants as something extremely destructive. Unlike Ignatius, who only thought about what he could get from the rally, Jones looked at it from the black workers' perspective and saw that it would cause destruction because they would all be thrown in jail. Jones wants to subvert Ignatius's rash actions for his own purposes, replicating the chaos of the riot in Lana's bar to get revenge on Lana, who has exploited Jones because of his race.*



## CHAPTER 10, PART 3

Ignatius has a stomachache and believes his valve is stuck. He tries to burp to relieve the pain and knows that it is partly caused by eating so many hot dogs. However, he feels that there is more to it than this. Irene has been acting very strangely and he thinks she might have joined an extreme political group—she has seemed unusually interested in his political beliefs recently. On top of this, he has had a series of nightmares about Myrna Minkoff. In one, Myrna pushed him in front of a train.

Ignatius's job as a hot dog vendor is not going well either. There is little interest in hot dogs among the inhabitants of the French Quarter. One morning, Ignatius reads in the paper that the Women's Art Guild is hosting an outdoor show of their work in Pirate's Alley. He has made a new sign for the hot dog cart (it reads "Twelve Inches of Paradise") and he trundles down to Pirate's Alley to try and sell to the ladies. When Ignatius arrives, however, the women are horrified and tell him to go away.

*Ignatius has a medieval understanding of biology which he believes is superior to a modern scientific one. In his view, all physiological symptoms are brought on by external imbalances in one's life. He sees Irene's rebellion against him (he used to be able to control her easily) as a sign of this disorder. Irene believes that Ignatius is a communist and interrogates his political beliefs because of this. Her behavior parodies American paranoia about communism in the mid-20th century. Ignatius's violent dream about Myrna suggests that he is conflicted about her, which supports the idea that (like his conflicting attitudes about sex and popular culture) he both despises and is drawn to her.*



*It is ironic that Ignatius, who is disgusted by sex and the way that sex is used in modern advertising, inadvertently makes a sexual innuendo on his hot dog sign. Although Ignatius views modernity as hypersexual, the women are very offended by the double entendre and this suggests that the general public's worldview is more puritanical than Ignatius suspects.*



Ignatius then notices the artwork on display, mostly still-life paintings of flowers, and cries out that it is an affront to taste and decency. The ladies tell him that he does not have to look at it and throw things at him as he walks away. Tired, Ignatius stumbles into a nearby alley and slumps down on the steps of a cathedral. Dorian Greene waltzes up to Ignatius and asks him what on Earth he is supposed to be in his costume. Dorian says Ignatius looks like a “fortune teller.”

*Ignatius is as offended by the ladies' artwork as they are by the sexual hot dog sign. This suggests that culture is subjective—things that are considered shocking and offensive by some might be considered innocuous or even valuable by others. Dorian is associated with costume and Carnival throughout the novel and encourages people to dress up because he knows that, in disguise, people are able to reveal their true selves. This links to his reference of a fortune teller, as these figures are believed to uncover people's secrets.*



Ignatius snaps at Dorian to go away. When Dorian doesn't leave, Ignatius asks irritably about Irene's hat, which Dorian bought from her in the **Night of Joy**. Dorian says the hat was destroyed at a party and Ignatius is disgusted. Dorian continues to tease Ignatius and Ignatius says he will call the police. Dorian says it is Ignatius who will be arrested in that outfit, and Ignatius throws his boot at Dorian. The two begin to spar and Ignatius hacks at Dorian's expensive sweater with the toy cutlass. The ladies' guild, noticing the commotion, begin to flee with their artwork.

*Although Ignatius is only dressed as a pirate, the costume has an absurd effect on him and causes him to actually behave like one and duel people with his sword. This demonstrates the power of disguise and the temporary transformation that it can bring about in people.*



Dorian and Ignatius are distracted from their fight when a man dressed as a sailor passes. Ignatius calls out for assistance, but Dorian says that this is “only Timmy” and that he is not a real sailor. Ignatius is horrified that someone would impersonate a naval officer—the armed forces may be full of homosexuals in disguise. Dorian thinks this would be wonderful and is delighted when he sees Patrolman Mancuso follow Timmy at a distance. Dorian tells Ignatius that everyone knows Mancuso is an undercover policeman and that they simply love his outfits.

*Almost everyone Ignatius encounters in the French Quarter is also in disguise, suggesting that things in this part of the city are not always what they seem and that the usual order of life does not apply here. This supports the idea that many people who could not live openly in respectable American society (such as homosexual men like Dorian and Timmy) live freely in the French Quarter by using disguise. In this sense, costumes can empower people and ironically enable them to leave their lives more authentically than they would be able to if they presented their true selves to the world.*



Ignatius is suddenly struck by an idea for how to get back at Myrna. If homosexuals infiltrated politics and the armed forces, he thinks, world peace could be achieved. Everyone would be too busy fornicating to start any violent wars. Ignatius suggests this to Dorian, who laughs that this would be brilliant. Ignatius feels triumphant—Myrna has often said that sex must be brought into politics and now Ignatius has a perfect method for this. He tells Dorian that they must organize a political campaign, but Dorian loses interest and says this sounds boring.

*Ignatius has an extremely stereotypical view of homosexuals and does not view them as individuals who are free to make decisions for themselves. This mirrors Ignatius's treatment of the black workers during the race riot and suggests that he sees minorities as inferior groups whom he can use to benefit himself as a social activist and to annoy Myrna.*



Ignatius insists that Dorian must help him bring about a political revolution and that they must have a party. Dorian perks up at the idea of a party and agrees to host one. He says that Ignatius must wear his pirate costume—he loves people in fancy dress because it reminds him of Mardi Gras. Ignatius says that the party must have blue, white, and red banners, and Dorian grows excited about decorating.

*This passage suggests that political parties rely heavily on presentation and outward appearances. Political groups often conceal their true intentions of benefitting themselves by pretending to help and represent the needs of others. Mardi Gras is a Carnival which takes place in New Orleans. The idea of Carnival also relates to the medieval ideas which run throughout the novel, as Carnival (a period of time in which the normal order of society was considered to be reversed and people masqueraded as members of a different class) was considered an important part of medieval society which helped maintain balance between the nobles and the peasants.*



Timmy wanders past again, followed by Patrolman Mancuso, and Ignatius snaps that, if Timmy is caught, their plan will be ruined. Dorian sighs that Timmy is rather dim and says that, of course, the party will be fancy dress. Ignatius cautiously agrees and Dorian says that he will go and warn Timmy that he has been followed. Ignatius feels that his wheel is in a bad cycle and that he must be desperate to associate with Dorian Greene. Still, the thought of getting revenge on Myrna cheers him up and he sets off again in search of some customers.

*Ignatius does not feel that he has a choice about the direction his life takes, but really, there is no reason why Ignatius must associate with Dorian if he doesn't want to. This suggests that Ignatius secretly does want to be involved with Dorian, even if he cannot admit this to himself because he is homophobic.*



## CHAPTER 10, PART 4

George struggles to find somewhere to store his packages from Lana in the afternoons. He can no longer leave them at the bus station and hiding out in the cinema makes him nervous. He sits in a church for a few hours, but all the time he has the packages on him, he worries that they will break open in the street and that he will be arrested. He sees Patrolman Mancuso skulking around and is amazed that the police always seem to know where he is.

*George has a guilty conscience because he is involved in criminal activity, but feels that he is unjustly persecuted by the police. He does not realize that his run-in with Patrolman Mancuso in the bus station bathroom was simply the result of chance and, instead, believes that Mancuso is onto him. Unlike many of the other characters in the novel, George does not resign himself to a predetermined destiny—rather, is fully aware that his actions have real consequences.*



George darts down Pirate's Alley to avoid Patrolman Mancuso and sees Ignatius's fight with Dorian Greene. George thinks Ignatius is crazy and wonders why he is dressed as a pirate. George gets on a bus and rides around for a while. The bus passes the **Night of Joy** and George sees Jones and Lana Lee arguing outside. Jones flicks a cigarette at Lana, which narrowly misses her, and George thinks that he and his friends should go out and throw some eggs in a black neighborhood. As he rides the bus, he suddenly has an epiphany: he should store the packages in Ignatius's hot dog cart.

*From George's perspective, Ignatius and Dorian's fight has an absurd, pantomime-like quality, although to the individuals involved it makes perfect sense. This suggests that things cannot necessarily be judged from a distance and ties into Ignatius's very literal belief that much of life is the result of blind fate.*



## CHAPTER 11, PART 1

Santa, Irene, and Claude meet at Santa's house for dinner and discuss a new Debbie Reynolds movie. Santa says that she recently liked a film in which Debbie Reynolds "got herself raped" and the others agree the actress is sweet. Irene tells Claude that, recently, Ignatius has become obsessed with world peace. She asks Claude what he thinks this means and Claude says that it might mean Ignatius is a communist. Santa says that Patrolman Mancuso has seen Ignatius going about with an earring on, which Irene thinks this is a very bad sign.

Claude and Irene compliment Santa on the food and Claude says that he likes to cook. Santa nudges Irene and says that a man who cooks is a fine thing. Irene gets distracted thinking about Ignatius and all the strange, processed foods he likes to eat. Claude tells Santa that he has a good pension and that he has invested his money in property. Santa asks if he likes living with his daughter and Claude says he does but that he'd like his own home. Irene says that it is nice to stay with one's children, but Santa stamps on her foot.

Santa suggests that they all go see the Debbie Reynolds movie and Claude enthusiastically agrees. Irene says that Ignatius has probably seen this movie and Santa tells her angrily that she must stop worrying about Ignatius. Santa says that Ignatius should be locked away; she knows a hospital run by nuns where they lock up crazy people. Irene likes the sound of this but thinks that Ignatius would probably escape. Claude joins in with Santa and tells Irene that sending Ignatius away is a good idea.

Santa, Irene, and Claude walk through the neighborhood, which is noisy and lively in the warm evening. As Irene watches the film, she thinks about Ignatius and is startled when Claude takes hold of her hand. Irene wonders what it is about the cinema that makes men so romantic—it reminds her of her deceased husband, Mr. Reilly. Santa, engrossed in the film, cries out that Debbie Reynolds is pregnant and Irene bursts into tears.

*Irene, Santa, and Claude do not have a very liberal attitude towards sex and feel that women's actions can bring rape on themselves. This is an old-fashioned view and suggests that 1960s society was not as liberal about sex as it was purported to be. Irene's disapproval of Ignatius's earring also shows that she judges people based on appearances and how well they fit into mainstream society. It is ironic that Claude makes a connection here between world peace and communism—theoretically, communism is a utopian ideology, but communist regimes have generally been violent and oppressive in practice.*



*Although Ignatius claims to despise modernity, he loves processed food, which is a quintessentially modern delicacy. This is yet another example of how Ignatius is often primally drawn to things which disgust him on a moral level. Santa does not allow Irene and Claude's relationship to develop organically and, instead, is very controlling. She seems more concerned with getting her own way than with whether this is what Claude and Irene truly want.*



*It is ironic that Santa, Claude, and Irene, who are paranoid about communists taking away people's freedom, want to lock Ignatius up because his way of life does not fit in with their beliefs about normality. Although Ignatius and Irene have a troubled relationship, Ignatius has not committed any crimes and does not intentionally hurt people with his worldview, strange and careless though it is. The fact that Santa wants to lock him away for the good of society, then, suggests that Santa is hypocritical and only believes in freedom when it suits her version of morality.*



*Irene's reflection that the cinema "makes men so romantic" and emotional reaction to Debbie Reynolds's pregnancy implies that Ignatius's conception took place after she and Mr. Reilly went to the movies. Remembering this upsets her because her relationship with Ignatius is now so strained. Although Santa is adamant that Irene needs a relationship, physical contact with Claude does not seem to make Irene happy and this suggests that Santa is more interested in controlling others than she is in Irene's best interests.*





## CHAPTER 11, PART 2

Back in his room, Ignatius writes about his encounter with Dorian Greene and his idea to bring about world peace. He plans to form a group of homosexuals to take over the military and overthrow the government. Once this group is in place, he reasons, they will all be too busy sewing dresses and having parties to go to war and, therefore, world peace will be achieved. It will be easy, Ignatius thinks, as all homosexuals think the same way.

Ignatius thinks that this scheme helps him relate to Boethius—he, too, led an uncivilized world out of darkness and toward civility. He feels that this is a real opportunity to annoy Myrna, who will wish she had thought of the idea. Ignatius feels Myrna could never come up with this sort of idea, however, because she is not progressive enough. Although Ignatius believes homosexuality is a type of “degeneracy,” he feels that it is worth it for the sake of world peace.

Ignatius plans to make a film about his political achievements and begins to plan a series of lectures. He concludes his journal with a note about Irene, who he feels is dangerously out of control. He also notes that a new film is coming out which he is keen to see. He does not understand his compulsion to watch films when he usually hates them. He also notes that he has gained weight since he started his job at Paradise Vendors.

## CHAPTER 11, PART 3

Mr. Levy watches as Mrs. Levy helps Miss Trixie up the steps into the Levy Pants office. Miss Trixie has had her makeup done is wearing a new outfit and a wig. Mrs. Levy is delighted with the change in her. As soon as they enter the office, Miss Trixie angrily asks why they are there—she thought she was retired. Mrs. Levy tells Miss Trixie that she has been greatly missed at the factory, but Mr. Gonzalez seems dismayed to have her back.

*Ignatius has very stereotypical and reductive views about homosexuals, believing them all to think the same. This is obviously untrue and suggests that Ignatius views homosexuals in the same way he views black people (which was demonstrated when he organized the riot at Levy Pants), as things that he can use for his own ends.*



*Ignatius believes that the modern world lacks moral and philosophical guidance, and that the medieval period, his area of specialty, was superior to modernity. Boethius's work influenced culture in the changeover from the Roman Empire to the medieval period, a shift which many historians view as a change from civilization to barbarism. However, Ignatius views modernity as barbaric because it is obsessed with the material world rather than the spiritual. Ignatius is obsessed with Myrna's opinion of him despite claiming to hate her, which suggests that his feelings for her are more complex than he realizes. Ignatius does not really care about world peace but uses his idea about homosexuality to try and impress Myrna.*



*Ignatius pretends that his control over Irene is for her own good, to stop her from descending into chaos, but it's really is to make his life easier. Ignatius is aware that he is both repulsed by and attracted to cinema and does not understand contradiction in himself. This also speaks to his relationship with sex and pleasure throughout the novel and suggests that Ignatius represses his genuine desires.*



*Mrs. Levy believes that she has brought about a permanent change in Miss Trixie's temperament because she has changed the old woman's appearance. However, this illusion is immediately pulled aside when Miss Trixie realizes what is going on and reveals that she has not changed at all and still wants to retire. This suggests that costume, though potentially transformative and empowering, cannot fundamentally change reality.*



Miss Trixie asks if she has been sent her Easter ham and Mr. Levy begins to drag Mrs. Levy out of the office. Mr. Gonzalez calls Mr. Levy back to give him his mail. As Mr. Levy returns, he notices a new employee: a tall, sallow man named Mr. Zalatimo. Mr. Gonzalez tells Mr. Levy in a hushed voice that he does not think Mr. Zalatimo will work out. Mr. Gonzalez gives Mr. Levy his mail and says there is a letter from Mr. Abelman among the pile.

Mr. Levy opens the letter from Mr. Abelman and reads it. Mr. Abelman has sent back a copy of the letter Ignatius wrote to him, which Ignatius signed as Mr. Levy. Mr. Abelman plans to sue Mr. Levy because of this letter, and Mr. Levy is horrified. He demands to know who wrote the letter, but Mr. Gonzalez doesn't know. Mrs. Levy snatches the letter and begins to sob that her husband has ruined her. Mr. Levy asks to see Mr. Abelman's file but quickly learns that all the files have vanished, which is why Mr. Zalatimo seems so confused about what he is meant to be filing.

Mr. Levy demands to know who was placed in charge of Mr. Abelman's file, and Mr. Gonzalez tells him it was Ignatius. Mr. Levy wonders if Ignatius wrote the letter, and Mrs. Levy screams that Mr. Levy would blame it on the "young idealist." Mr. Levy asks for Ignatius's phone number and Miss Trixie snaps that she is charge of the phones. Mr. Levy asks her for the number and Miss Trixie finds it for him.

Mr. Levy calls Ignatius's house number. Irene answers and sobs down the line that Ignatius is not home. Mr. Gonzalez says sadly that Ignatius seemed like a refined young man until he started a riot with the workers. Mr. Levy begins to drag Mrs. Levy away as she calls out instructions to Mr. Gonzalez on how he must treat Miss Trixie. After they have gone, Mr. Zalatimo approaches Miss Trixie and asks her for help with his filing. She bites him on the hand with her new false teeth.

In their car, Mr. and Mrs. Levy continue to argue. Mrs. Levy tells Mr. Levy she will set up a foundation in his father's name, and Mr. Levy snaps that if Mr. Abelman wins his lawsuit, they will have no money left for a charity or for anything else.

*Despite her physical transformation, Miss Trixie is not changed on a deeper level by her change of appearance and still wants exactly what she wanted before—the freedom of retirement and her Easter ham.*



*Although Ignatius does not take responsibility for his actions, such as the letter he wrote to Mr. Abelman, because he feels that everything in life is the result of chance, these consequences still exist in the form of the letter. Mrs. Levy wants to paint herself as the victim in this scenario and blame her husband because her life is unhappy. This comes across as self-obsessed, however, because she only thinks about how the loss of the factory will affect her rather than the employees.*



*Mr. Levy discovers, once again, that just because he avoids Levy Pants does not mean that he is free from the havoc that the business wreaks on his life. Although Mr. Levy tries to shirk his responsibility to the factory, underneath his avoidance he is a kind person and wants to make people happy.*



*Mr. Gonzalez believes that hard work pays off. In this sense, he is the opposite of Ignatius, who believes that humanity cannot change its fate because it is a force outside of their control that no amount of work can change. Although Miss Trixie has undergone a physical transformation, she is the same bitter old lady underneath, and this suggests that appearances can deceive but that they cannot disguise reality.*



*Mrs. Levy wants to set up a charity just so that she will have an excuse to bully her husband and remind him of his own failure in comparison to his father. Mrs. Levy's charitable enterprise, therefore, masks a deeply selfish and uncharitable desire.*



## CHAPTER 11, PART 4

George waits outside Paradise Vendors for a chance to approach Ignatius. George can tell by the way Ignatius talks that he is educated, and he decides to try and use this to persuade Ignatius to let him store his packages in the hot dog cart. George watches as Ignatius leaves the garage, pushing his cart along. George follows him and watches as Ignatius gets the cart stuck in a tram line on the road. Ignatius tries to free the cart, but it tips over. George hurries to his aid.

Ignatius tries to send George away; he dislikes the boy and thinks George is a criminal. A tram approaches on the track and honks at Ignatius to get out of the way. Finally, he allows George to help him lift the cart. George gives Ignatius \$2 and Ignatius eats a hot dog to calm himself down. George then launches into his plan and tells Ignatius that he will pay him \$8 a day to leave the packages (which he claims are school supplies) in Ignatius's cart.

Ignatius does not believe George and grabs one of the packets from him. George tries to get it back, but Ignatius easily holds him off and takes out one of the photographs which are stored inside the parcels. Ignatius is amazed. The photos are of a naked woman, posed suggestively with a globe and a piece of chalk. Her face is hidden behind a copy of **The Consolation of Philosophy**. Ignatius wonders who this goddess could be and notices that there is an address written on the packet.

Ignatius tells George that he may store the photos, but only if he watches the wagon that afternoon while Ignatius attends a pressing appointment. George protests, but Ignatius tells him that he will set his friend, Patrolman Mancuso, on George if he does not agree. George asks who Patrolman Mancuso is and is horrified to discover that he is the cop from the bathroom. George grudgingly agrees to watch the cart and Ignatius strides off down the street to the cinema.

*George hopes to flatter Ignatius so that he can get his own way. George is not a naturally charitable person and only helps Ignatius with the cart to get something for himself later. This suggests that, in this instance, George is able to hide his selfish interests behind a veneer of helpfulness, similar to characters like Mrs. Levy and Ignatius himself.*



*Ignatius feels that modern society is corrupt and that he is superior to it. He believes that the medieval period, which he studied, was a far superior age because ordinary people knew their place within strict, class-based hierarchies and criminals, like George, were punished.*



*Although Ignatius dislikes sex and displays of sexuality, he is attracted to the woman in the photo because she poses with his favorite book. Ignatius assumes, therefore, that the woman is a medieval scholar like himself and that she, too, must be morally pure and see the failings of modern society. This suggests that, while Ignatius shuns human contact, underneath he secretly longs for companionship and someone who understands and accepts his unconventional worldview. Although he is repulsed by sex, he romanticizes emotional connection.*



*It is pure chance that Ignatius brings up Patrolman Mancuso, with whom George has had an earlier run-in. Although Ignatius does not know about this, his words have the unintended consequence of frightening George because George believes Mancuso is specifically on his case. This suggests that, although people may not always acknowledge or understand the consequences of their actions, these consequences still exist and can manifest in fateful ways.*



The film, starring an actress whom Ignatius particularly dislikes, has a series of graphic love scenes. Ignatius grows incensed during these and protests loudly that the actress should be whipped. After the film, he returns to the wagon to relieve George and tells him that he will meet him at the same time the next day. Ignatius then sets out to find the mystery woman from the pornographic photo. He heads for the address on the packet and, while on his way, daydreams about Myrna's fury when he writes to tell her of his tryst with a fellow medievalist.

*Ignatius's reaction to sex seems excessive and suggests that, although he outwardly rejects sex, inwardly he desires it and resents this about himself. He associates sexuality with impurity and vulgarity because he believes in a medieval worldview, in which sex was considered sinful. It is ironic that Ignatius has this reaction to a love scene, but then sets off in search of a pornographic model. However, Ignatius differentiates between lust and spiritual connection, which he feels he might achieve with a woman who shares his intellectual perspective.*



Ignatius arrives at the address and is amazed to find that it belongs to the **Night of Joy** club. There is a sign on the window which announces a show by "Harlett O'Hara and pet." Ignatius collapses on the sidewalk for a rest. Lana sees him through the door and leans out to shout abuse at him. She does not want him near her club as he is "bad for her investment." Darlene notices Ignatius, too, and begins to shout at him for the way he treats his mother. Lana orders Jones to shoo Ignatius away, but Jones says he is not paid to be a bouncer.

*It is ironic that Lana, who runs a strip club (something Ignatius views as the height of modern vulgarity) sees Ignatius as someone vulgar and inferior. This suggests that morality is partially subjective and that, while American society claims to be free, people are still often judged based on their looks or career. Lana also judges Jones based on his appearance as a black man, and continues to exploit him in his role knowing that he will stay in order to avoid being arrested for vagrancy.*



At last, Jones reluctantly approaches Ignatius. Ignatius tells Jones that he has been fighting for black rights very recently, and Jones asks him if he means the riot at Levy Pants. Ignatius says yes, and Jones asks Ignatius why, with all his education, he works as a hot dog vendor. Ignatius says that he likes the outdoors and Jones says that, if he were educated, he'd get himself a good job. Ignatius sneers at this and asks Jones if any of the women at the **Night of Joy** like to read.

*Ignatius looks down on Jones because Jones wants to improve his situation in life. Ignatius believes that aspiring to a life of material comfort is shallow and stupid—this is hypocritical, however, since Ignatius lives a life of extreme comfort and laziness. He is oblivious to his privilege as a white man, which has up until recently allowed him to remain unemployed despite vagrancy laws. Jones, in comparison, is forced to work for less than minimum wage because he is black and will surely be imprisoned if he does not, since vagrancy laws applied more strictly to black people than to white. Jones views Ignatius's choice to be a hot dog vendor as a waste of his privilege.*



Jones says that one of the girls always gives him things to read, and Ignatius asks where he can find her. Jones cannot believe his luck. He tells Ignatius to come and see her show. Ignatius realizes that the woman is Harlett O'Hara and asks Jones if Lana will be present on Harlett's opening night. Jones says no, and Ignatius asks Jones to reserve him a table.

*Jones wants to use Ignatius to achieve his own goals. He knows that Ignatius will cause chaos in the club and upset Lana and plans to use this to shut the club down and free himself from service there.*



Jones says he will and asks Ignatius if he likes being a vagrant. Ignatius replies that he likes it very much and that Jones should embrace his vagrancy and be glad that he does not have to deal with the pressure of being white and ambitious. Ignatius leaves and Jones thinks that Ignatius really is a “freak.”

Ignatius feels that his luck has changed. He gives Mr. Clyde a portion of his money from George and then cheerfully heads home. When he arrives at his house, he finds Irene on the phone to Santa. When Irene hears Ignatius arrive, she abruptly stops the conversation and drops her voice to a whisper. She and Santa have been talking about having Ignatius incarcerated. Santa thinks that Claude will soon propose to Irene and says she will pick Irene up that evening to go bowling.

When Irene hangs up the phone, she demands Ignatius’s earnings for the day. Ignatius indignantly refuses and Irene snatches the pornographic photo from his pocket. Irene bursts into tears when she sees it and Ignatius begs her not to slander the name of the presumably brilliant woman in the picture. The phone rings and Irene sobs that it is Mr. Levy—he has phoned twice that day.

Ignatius answers the phone and puts on a fake voice. He asks Mr. Levy what he wants and then tells him that Ignatius has been committed to a mental institution. Mr. Levy is shocked to hear this but asks if Ignatius can have visitors. Ignatius says he can, and then hangs up the phone.

## CHAPTER 12, PART 1

The next day, an urgent letter arrives from Myrna. She is amazed that Ignatius plans to bring homosexuality into politics and thinks this is a very unhealthy expression of his sexuality. She wonders what has happened to the “divine right” party they had planned and begs him to write to her. Ignatius is delighted. He tells Irene that Myrna wants to kill herself because of him, and Irene says that this is terrible. Ignatius explains that he has become involved in politics and Irene suspiciously asks if he is a communist.

*Ignatius does not realize that he is privileged and that, if he were black, he could not spend all day wondering the streets as a vendor because he would be treated as a criminal and hassled by the police. Racism and discriminatory vagrancy laws meant that, while it was illegal for anyone to be unemployed in New Orleans, these laws were applied more strictly to black people than to white.*



*Ignatius feels that his fortune is decided by the medieval goddess Fortuna, and that he therefore has no control over his luck. Ignatius suspects that Santa and Irene want to have him locked up because he does not fit into conventional society. Ignatius is right to think this, and the novel suggests that those who do not fit in are persecuted by mainstream society, even though America claims to be a free country that values individualism.*



*Although Ignatius believes that modern society is overly liberal about sex, Irene’s reaction shows that this is not the case and that pornography was still considered shameful in 1960s America. Although Ignatius does not believe that he can control the consequences of his actions, his behavior at Levy Pants—when he wrote a rude letter to a client—now comes back to haunt him.*



*Ignatius clearly feels, on some level, that he is likely to be put in a mental institution. Although Ignatius does not believe he is insane, he understands that American society views those who do not conform as insane, and is aware that his own behavior is atypical and could be considered mad.*



*Although Myrna claims to be progressive, she does not view homosexuality as a healthy expression of desire. This suggests that Myrna is a hypocrite and that, because her progressivism gives her a superiority complex, she sets herself up to fail because society will inevitably change and render her ideas outdated.*



Ignatius ignores Irene and she worriedly suggests that he might like to go to the mental institution for a rest. Ignatius tells her that he is perfectly fine, and that the modern world imprisons anyone who does not fit in. Irene says that this is not true, and that psychiatry really helps some people. Ignatius scoffs and says that those who are locked up in hospitals are the martyrs of the modern age. He asks his mother for money; he plans to leave the hot dog wagon with George and go to the cinema again.

Ignatius puts on his pirate costume and makes to leave the house. When Irene sees what he is wearing she loses her temper (she cannot believe Ignatius goes out in public like that) and tells him he cannot wear it. Ignatius dashes from the house, pursued by Irene, and escapes in a taxi. He orders the taxi driver to take him to Dorian Greene's house and directs him with his cutlass.

Dorian Greene's house is a beautiful apartment building in the French Quarter. Ignatius rings the bell and Dorian answers, and asks where Ignatius has been. Ignatius is dismayed to see that Dorian is drunk and hopes the party has not lost its political purpose. Dorian says that several people "will be ruined" after the gathering and Ignatius tells Dorian that his house is horribly "flamboyant." Dorian sighs and says that his family from the Midwest pay for him to live there.

As they reach the door of the apartment, Ignatius hears noise from the party and fears it has grown out of hand. Ignatius hopes the gathering has not been infiltrated by opposing political forces. As they enter, they hear screams from the "slave quarters" out on the deck. Ignatius rams the glass paneled doors with one shoulder and discovers that Timmy has been chained up inside. Dorian stares in horror at the shattered door.

Ignatius demands to know who chained Timmy. Timmy replies that it was a prank. Dorian snaps at Timmy that it is his fault that the door is broken, and Timmy wails to be released. Ignatius watches Timmy and Dorian argue and feels that their political cause is going rather off track. Timmy is drunk and cries out to be punished. Ignatius confusedly hits him with his cutlass and Dorian sets him free.

*Ignatius does not believe in modern medicine and feels that the medieval period, before the discovery of modern scientific methods, was a far superior time to live. Although many of his beliefs seem strange, he is right when he says that society locks up those who do not fit in. For example, Irene does not really believe Ignatius is insane but dislikes his unconventional behavior and is encouraged by her friend Santa, who is very bossy and wants everyone to fall in line with her idea of what is right and respectable.*



*Irene is very concerned about what people think of her and how she looks to the neighbors. She feels that Ignatius's costume is visual proof that he is mad and that this will disgrace her.*



*Dorian is associated with beauty and appearance—something Ignatius views as shallow and frivolous. Dorian feels "people will be ruined" by the party because the gathering is fancy dress and Dorian knows that people shed their inhibitions while in costume and will behave in ways that they would be ashamed of in their everyday life.*



*New Orleans has a history of slavery and was home to many plantations owned by white families who used black slaves to work their land. The legacy of slavery is reflected in the presence of the "slave quarters" (a cabin outside where a slave could live) in this historical building.*



*Timmy's literal bondage reflects the many different types of incarceration which take place throughout the novel and represent a small-scale, carnivalesque version of the struggle undertaken by many of the characters to retain their freedom in a restrictive society, which, although it claims to be free, persecutes those who do not fit in.*



They enter the party and Ignatius is unnerved to see a huge crowd of fashionable men waving cocktail glasses and cigarettes, talking loudly over a record playing Judy Garland. In the center of the room, a man teaches guests how to use Judo holds. Ignatius sneers at the décor and Dorian tells him that he talks too much. He takes Ignatius to the kitchen to meet the “ladies auxiliary.”

In the kitchen, three burly women are seated at the table drinking beer. Dorian introduces them to Ignatius as Liz, Betty, and Frieda. The ladies greet Ignatius roughly—one of them nearly breaks his hand with her handshake—and offer him a beer. Ignatius declines and the ladies begin to argue among themselves. This argument soon descends into a brawl and Dorian screams at the ladies to stop. Ignatius comments on their crude behavior and one of them throws a beer can at him.

Dorian and Ignatius hurry out of the kitchen and Ignatius asks why Dorian invited these people to his party—he worries they will sow seeds of descent among the others. Dorian says that he had to invite them, because otherwise they just break in anyway. The ladies have recently been in trouble with the police and are annoyed about it. Dorian and Ignatius return to the living room and Ignatius looks around in disgust. He complains that the party is an orgy of hedonism and that they must return to their true political purpose.

Dorian seems bored by Ignatius’s talk of politics and thinks the party is going well. Ignatius demands that Dorian turn off the record player so that he can make his speech and Dorian wearily agrees. A great outcry occurs when the music stops, and Ignatius tries to grab the attention of the crowd. He makes a plea for world peace, but the guests are disgusted by him and cannot understand why Dorian would invite someone so “unattractive” and “depressing.” Dorian puts the music back on and Ignatius is left alone and ignored.

*Ignatius is homophobic and is uncomfortable in a group of gay men because their behavior at the party reinforces many of his stereotypical ideas about gay people. Ignatius is uncomfortable with human contact in general, and dislikes the gathering because it is emotionally expressive and filled with people who touch and show affection for each other. This suggests that, although Ignatius pretends that he is above the need for human contact, he secretly desires it but is uncomfortable with this desire because he associates it with weakness and vulgarity.*



*Dorian’s party is associated with Carnival and role reversal. Carnival in the medieval period, which Ignatius studies, was believed to a time in which the normal order of life is reversed. New Orleans is also associated with Carnival because it is the home of Mardi Gras. At Dorian’s party, men act in a stereotypical feminine way, while the women are stereotypically masculine, and this suggests that the party is a free space in which conventional norms do not apply.*



*Ignatius has an extremely reductive view of gay people: he believes they all think the same and, therefore, will all be swayed by his argument. He worries the women will sew descent because they are not gay men and, therefore, may react differently. This suggests that Ignatius dehumanizes gay people—rather than view them as autonomous individuals, he views them as an inferior group that he can use for his own self-interested ends, just as he did the black workers at the Levy Pants riot.*



*Ignatius wrongly believes that gay people are inferior and that they will be easily convinced by his superior intellectual ideas. Dorian immediately upsets this idea and has an autonomous reaction to Ignatius’s politics: he finds them boring. Ignatius’s plan is clearly based in his desire to gain political control and impose his own order on society, not to help society, as he claims. Although Ignatius feels that gay people are naturally more peaceful than other groups, the gay men at Dorian’s party are just as capable of cruelty as anyone else, and end up rejecting Ignatius based on his appearance and demeanor just as he prejudged them.*



The guests begin to dance, and Ignatius is reminded of a day at school when his chemistry experiment exploded in class. He was startled and wet his pants, and everybody in the class ignored him for the rest of the day. Now, in the middle of the party, Ignatius pretends to fight an invisible person with his cutlass to hide his embarrassment.

Betty, Frieda, and Liz leave the kitchen and join Ignatius in the corner of the room. They tease Ignatius and assure him that someone will ask him to dance. Ignatius is insulted and says that he never dances. Timmy wanders in from outside and asks Ignatius to waltz with him. Ignatius refuses, and Betty, Frieda, and Liz attack Ignatius for causing trouble. The brawl throws Ignatius onto the dancefloor and he knocks over a man dressed as a cowboy, who has been dancing with Dorian.

The crash, as Ignatius and the cowboy tumble to the floor, causes the music to stop. The guests recoil in horror and scream for Ignatius to be removed from the party. Dorian hisses at Ignatius that he has ruined everything. Betty, Frieda, and Liz throw him out onto the sidewalk. Furious, Ignatius shouts that their political movement is doomed. Another attempt to foil Myrna has failed.

Ignatius looks at his watch and realizes that it is still early. He does not want to go home to his mother and decides, instead, to go to the **Night of Joy** and watch Harlett O'Hara's opening night. He hopes that news of this will sufficiently upset Myrna and sets off towards the club. Ignatius does not notice that he is being followed by a man in a silk suit.

Outside the **Night of Joy**, Ignatius finds Jones dressed up like a plantation slave. Jones tells Ignatius that there is table waiting for him and that Lana Lee is away on business. Jones asks Ignatius why he is still dressed like a pirate, and hurries Ignatius inside. Ignatius stumbles through the dark club to a table by the stage and sits down. He plans to sit close so that he can give Miss O'Hara a sign, or whisper to her about Boethius.

*Ignatius is shut out from physical affection and human connection, which is represented by the dancing guests. This has been a theme throughout Ignatius's life and suggests that his strange worldview may be a defensive reaction to a lifetime of alienation, which he has not always brought on himself but has been foisted on him because he has always been different and unable to fit in.*



*Ignatius claims to dislike human contact and is homophobic. Therefore, he refuses to join the group and is attacked as a result of his failure to conform. This suggests that, even if Ignatius secretly wants to join in, these desires are repressed under a veneer of superiority because Ignatius fears rejection.*



*Ignatius is presented as a disruptive force in society because he causes chaos wherever he goes. He is expelled from the party for this and this represents his interactions with society in general. The party also supports the idea that societies—or even small groups of like-minded people—generally expel those who do not fit in or conform.*



*Although Ignatius claims to despise Myrna, he spends most of the novel trying to find ways to get her attention and to annoy her. In this scene, he seems to want to make Myrna jealous, which suggests that Ignatius may be more attracted to Myrna than he is willing to admit.*



*Lana, who employs Jones and pays him less than minimum wage because he is black, thinks of him as her slave and has literally dressed him as one for the opening night. This suggests that Lana is totally insensitive to the way that she exploits Jones and to the insulting message she sends by making him dress as a slave in a city that has a long history of slavery, and in which Jones's ancestors were probably slaves. Ignatius thinks that Harlett O'Hara is a fellow medieval scholar because he has seen her with a copy of his favorite book, [The Consolation of Philosophy](#). This suggests that Ignatius is keen to find someone who relates to his worldview despite generally shunning human connection.*





Ignatius tries to signal to the bartender for a drink, but the bartender ignores him. Instead, a Latin woman approaches Ignatius and he orders a Dr. Nut. The woman goes back to the bar and returns with a bottle of champagne. She says they have no Dr. Nut and that Ignatius must pay for the champagne. Ignatius refuses and tries to pull away from the woman, who has bad breath. Lana Lee appears onstage and Ignatius realizes that Jones has tricked him.

Darlene makes her entrance with the cockatoo. Ignatius is horrified to discover that *this* is Harlett O'Hara. Her dress is covered in hoops for the bird to pull. The bird, however, notices Ignatius's earring, swoops down on him, and fastens its beak to his ear. Ignatius flails around, trying to get the bird off, and knocks over several tables. Lana Lee begins to shriek as Ignatius destroys her club and tumbles out into the street. He lurches past Jones and almost faints into the street, where a bus is approaching. Jones seizes him by the collar, however, and tugs him back. Ignatius falls unconscious on the sidewalk.

Lana and Darlene rush out of the club. A crowd has gathered around Ignatius and the man in the silk suit drives them back and checks if Ignatius is breathing. The cockatoo returns to Darlene's arm with Ignatius's earring in its beak. Jones looks at the man in the silk suit and thinks he looks familiar. Lana fires Jones, Darlene, and the Latin woman, who still insists Ignatius needs to pay for the champagne.

The man in the silk suit approaches Lana and asks to use her phone to call for an ambulance. Lana thinks the man looks soft and decides to try and make some money. She pulls out a pornographic photo and offers it to the man. The man tells Lana she is under arrest—it is Patrolman Mancuso in disguise. Just as this happens, Betty, Frieda, and Liz appear among the crowd.

*Lana exploits all her staff, not just Jones, at the Night of Joy. This exploitation is evident when the bartender tries to trick Ignatius into buying champagne. The bar girls at the club are paid on commission, based on how many drinks they sell, and this incentivizes them to trick customers so that they can make more money.*



*Ignatius believes that Harlett O'Hara is a fellow intellectual who shares his interest in the medieval period, and is disappointed when he sees Darlene, who he has met before and who he thinks of as intellectually inferior. Darlene also represents sexuality throughout the novel and Ignatius is disgusted by the open portrayal of sex. Darlene, therefore, is the opposite of what Ignatius hoped for. Ironically, this also mirrors the ruse that Lana has made Darlene adopt for the act, to hide the sexual content of the original performance, and suggests that other people in the club are like Ignatius: they believe that sex is impure, but want to enjoy it without feeling impure themselves, and so hope to see a pure woman perform sexually—something which is logically impossible. Jones proves himself to be the real hero of the novel here, as he saves Ignatius purely for the sake of doing a good deed and with no benefit to himself.*



*Lana does not take responsibility for her dreadful treatment of the staff—especially Jones, whom she has exploited because he is black. Her shock and anger in the midst of this chaos suggests that, although one may not acknowledge it, there are consequences to one's actions.*



*Lana tries to use the situation to her own advantage because she is mercenary and always thinks about how to get ahead. However, in this case, her behavior backfires, and Lana is ultimately punished for her consistently selfish and hypocritical actions. Patrolman Mancuso finally wins out and his hard work to adapt to his disguises is rewarded. He has temporarily managed to blend in and lose himself despite his conspicuous costume.*



## CHAPTER 13, PART 1

Ignatius wakes up in hospital with Irene at his bedside. Irene is furious with Ignatius because he has caused a public scandal which has ended up in the paper. She shows him a report of the night's events, complete with photographs. Ignatius reads it, amazed. Lana Lee, Betty, Liz, and Frieda were all arrested by Patrolman Mancuso. Jones even led Mancuso to the stash of pornography under the bar. Ignatius asks Irene what Mancuso was doing there and Irene says that she had Ignatius followed to find out if he was a communist.

Ignatius is very indignant about this and laments that he is gravely injured. Irene scoffs and says that he only fainted and bumped his head. Ignatius realizes that he is aroused and tries to dismiss his mother from his bedside. She is furious with him, however, and tells him that she has considered leaving the neighborhood because she is so ashamed. On top of that, she still has no money and now knows that Ignatius spends all his time with strange people from the French Quarter in strip bars.

Irene gives Ignatius his copy of **The Consolation of Philosophy** back and tells him that Patrolman Mancuso found it in the **Night of Joy** after it was stolen from him at the bus station. Ignatius is horrified. He believes that Patrolman Mancuso and Lana Lee may have worked together to lure him there. Irene tells him this is ridiculous and says that Claude is coming down to pay Ignatius's hospital bill. Ignatius tries to protest but Irene is angry and determined. Ignatius feels that Fortuna's wheel has spun downward again.

*Irene is more worried about how Ignatius's antics make her look than she is about her son, suggesting that she cares more for herself than she does for Ignatius. In the aftermath of the incident at the Night of Joy, fate has drawn the main characters of the novel together and resolved their overlapping storylines. Jones was freed from his servitude, Lana was caught, and Mancuso redeemed himself in his job—all because of Ignatius's hapless mistake. This suggests that Ignatius's belief in the medieval wheel of fortune is perhaps not totally misguided—even though people may not always be able to influence or predict the outcome of their actions, every action has a fated consequence.*



*Ignatius seems to have strange sexual urges although he claims to despise sex and sexual deviancy. Irene is concerned with her own reputation and feels that Ignatius's odd behavior will make it impossible for her to fit in and maintain a good reputation in the community. This suggests that, although American society claims to be free, it is very concerned with conformity.*



*Fate ultimately brings Ignatius's book back to him. This suggests that, just as Ignatius has been on what he believed to be a fated quest, the book, too, has been on a journey of its own. Ignatius feels that he is persecuted, and that society conspires against him because he does not fit in. Although he is misguided in his paranoia about Mancuso and Lana, he is right to think that people want to lock him up because he does not conform, as Claude, Santa, and Irene are plotting to do just that.*



## CHAPTER 13, PART 2

Mr. Clyde opens the morning paper and sees the report on Ignatius. He immediately decides that Ignatius is fired because he has worn his uniform outside of work and disgraced himself in it. Mr. Clyde worries about his business's reputation and wonders how he will get the uniform back from Ignatius. He tries to call Ignatius at home but there is no answer. Mr. Clyde wonders if Ignatius's mother is too drunk to answer the phone.

*Mr. Clyde worries that Ignatius will make his business look bad. Although American society considers itself to be free and liberal, it is highly concerned with conformity and appearance, and Ignatius struggles to fit in because he is unconventional. Although hot dog vendors are already considered disreputable in this narrative, Mr. Clyde feels that Ignatius is too strange even for this line of work.*



## CHAPTER 13, PART 3

In his office, Dr. Talc peruses the morning papers and thinks miserably about his situation. The notes he received from Ignatius, which accused him of “perverting” young minds, have been circulated around the college and taken before the administrative board. Although Dr. Talc is embarrassed, he knows that the board will remember Ignatius.

*Dr. Talc assumes that the board will automatically take his side against Ignatius because Ignatius was a strange person and a disruptive student. This suggests that American society is intolerant of those who do not fit in. However, at the same time, Ignatius is prone to disruptive behavior and does not take responsibility for his actions. Instead, he feels that he is not in control of his fate, which he believes is controlled by the medieval goddess Fortuna, and this makes him a difficult person to compromise with.*



Dr. Talc remembers Ignatius and Myrna with a shudder. They were his worst students, and always made rude comments and talked back in his class. As he looks through the paper, Dr. Talc is amazed to see a photo of Ignatius sprawled on his back outside a strip club, dressed as a hot dog vendor. Dr. Talc cannot understand this: Ignatius was annoying but was a brilliant student. Dr. Talc realizes that he cannot tell the board that the notes are from Ignatius because Ignatius will bring the hot dog cart onto campus and cause a scandal. Instead, Dr. Talc miserably resigns himself to his fate.

*Ignatius was clearly an excellent student but could not fit in at the university because of his disruptive behavior and strange demeanor. This suggests that, although Ignatius would be suited to work in a university, he does not fit in with fellow academics because he is so unconventional and will not compromise or try to conform. Dr. Talc is worried that Ignatius, given his current station in life, has nothing to lose and will therefore not shy away from a scandal. Although Ignatius is considered strange because of his literal belief in the powers of fate, Dr. Talc also seems to believe in some form of inescapable destiny, and this suggests that Ignatius's beliefs may not be so strange after all.*



## CHAPTER 13, PART 4

Annie, Ignatius's neighbor, opens the morning paper and sees the reports about Ignatius. She is furious. As far as she is concerned, Ignatius and Irene give the street a bad name. Annie decides that she will start a petition and will force Ignatius and Irene to move out.

*Although American society prides itself on being free, Annie's reaction suggests that conformity is still extremely important. While people are technically free to live as they like, those who do not fit in will find it harder to find a place within society.*



## CHAPTER 13, PART 5

Down at the police station, Patrolman Mancuso poses for a series of photos that recreate his arrests from the previous night. His co-worker takes the pictures for him and Mancuso tells her they are for his relatives. The sergeant comes in and congratulates Mancuso. Not only has he broken up a notorious pornography ring, he has also arrested Betty, Frieda, and Liz, three characters the police have been looking for. Mancuso is so proud he can hardly speak.

*Patrolman Mancuso always believed that, one day, his hard work would pay off. However, while this is a happy ending for Mancuso, it shows that his personality has not fundamentally changed—he still desires the approval of his superiors at work more than anything else. This demonstrates that the time Mancuso spent in costume may have empowered him to achieve his arrest, but has not changed him as a person.*



## CHAPTER 13, PART 6

In her house, Santa holds up the article about Ignatius and shows it to her mother's picture, which sits upon the mantelpiece. Santa is extremely proud of Patrolman Mancuso because he has arrested Lana Lee. Santa worries about Irene, though, and thinks that Irene needs to lock Ignatius up if she wants any chance at a second marriage.

*Although Santa is proud of American freedoms, she also values law enforcement when it maintains order according to her subjective view. While Lana is a criminal and brought her arrest on herself, Ignatius has committed no crime except being strange, yet Santa wants to incarcerate him. This suggests that Santa only believes in freedom when it conforms with her strict ideas about how people should behave.*



## CHAPTER 13, PART 7

On the bus on his way to the hospital, Claude Robichaux looks at the morning paper and feels sorry for Irene. Ignatius is such a worry for her, Claude thinks, and should be locked away. Claude will pay Ignatius's hospital fee, which is \$20, but he thinks next time it may be more. The worst part, Claude thinks, is the disgrace Ignatius brings on Irene.

*Claude is a conventional character who believes in conformity and keeping up appearances. For him, there is nothing worse than public disgrace, which suggests that Claude has strict ideas about what is and is not acceptable in society—even in a society like America, which is supposed to be tolerant and free.*



## CHAPTER 13, PART 8

In his house, George sticks the article about Ignatius and the **Night of Joy** into his scrapbook. He thinks that Patrolman Mancuso must be an amazing cop to have solved the case all by himself. George even wonders if it might be best for him to get out of town for a while. George's mother watches him hopefully and wonders if the scrapbook is a sign that he might try harder at school from now on. The doorbell rings and George's mother answers. It is a policeman and they are looking for George. George realizes he is trapped—there is no back door through which to escape.

*The consequences of George's criminal behavior finally catch up with him. The ending of the novel, in which all the character's conclusions are neatly tied up, suggests that there is something to Ignatius's belief in the medieval idea of the wheel of fortune, which he believes is controlled by the goddess Fortuna and decides if people have either good or bad luck. Although it is not luck that has brought the police to George, but his own involvement with Lana, the fateful events which led to George's connection with Patrolman Mancuso and the Night of Joy could not have been predicted when they were set in motion—there is something undeniably fateful and mysterious about the way the novel plays out.*



## CHAPTER 13, PART 9

In her cell, Lana Lee reads the newspaper article and then tears the paper up in a fury. Lana is in a cell with Betty, Frieda, and Liz and is not happy about it. She screams at the warden to move her, but the warden ignores her pleas. Betty, Frieda, and Liz begin to tease Lana. Finally, they pounce on her and try to get the pornographic photos which she has stashed in her bra.

*Lana gets what she deserves and is finally arrested for her immoral and criminal behavior. She is punished not only because of her criminal activity, but because she is selfish. If she had been kind to Jones and employed him for a fair wage, rather than trying to exploit him, he would likely have been inclined to keep her secret rather than go to the police.*



## CHAPTER 13, PART 10

Dorian Greene puts his apartment up for rent and finishes cleaning up after the party. Without Betty, Frieda, and Liz (who will be in jail for a while) there is no one to protect him or the property. Dorian thinks that if the girls had been nicer, someone would have warned them about Patrolman Mancuso, and they would not have attacked him. Dorian wonders if Ignatius is alright and thinks that he must feel terrible with all the negative publicity.

*As a gay man, Dorian lives in opposition to conventional society and faces significant threats to his safety and freedom. Homosexuality was illegal in 1960s America, which this suggests that although the country prided itself on being a free society, people who did not conform to mainstream beliefs were targets of persecution and incarceration, even when their unconventional behavior did not hurt anyone.*



## CHAPTER 13, PART 11

In her apartment, Darlene puts away her Harlett O'Hara dress and wonders what she will do for a job now that the **Night of Joy** has been shut down. Lana was right about Ignatius—he was a harbinger of doom for the club. Darlene's phone rings. It is a man who wants to offer her a job because of the press coverage she received the night before.

*Darlene is out of a job because of Lana's criminal activity. However, although her situation seems bleak, fate intervenes on Darlene's behalf and, in the confusion of the night before, her picture appears in the paper. Although Darlene does not believe in Ignatius's medieval concept of fate as something beyond humanity's control, fortune seems to reward Darlene for her generally well-meaning behavior, and her career takes off after all.*



## CHAPTER 13, PART 12

In Mattie's Ramble Inn, Jones shows the newspaper article to Mr. Watson and tells him about the chaos of the night before. Mr. Watson asks Jones what he will do for a job now, and Jones replies that he deserves a holiday after working for Lana Lee. Mr. Watson asks how Jones will evade the police. Jones says that he has asked Patrolman Mancuso to get the department to leave him alone for a while, since Jones led them to the pornography. Overall, Jones admits, he is in much the same position as he was before his job in the **Night of Joy**. Still, he says, things could be worse.

*Jones finally gets a reprieve from the persecution he faces from the police merely for existing as a black man in a racist society. Because of his involvement in Lana's arrest, Jones briefly gets the respect he deserves. He is realistic about this transformation, however, and expects that it will not last forever. Unlike the other characters in the novel, who do not face systemic oppression because of their race, Jones knows that he cannot simply transform his circumstances with a change of job or attitude because he is discriminated against for his appearance—something he cannot change.*



## CHAPTER 13, PART 13

In Mr. Levy's house, Mr. Levy flicks through the morning paper, while Mrs. Levy bounces on her exercise board, eats cookies, and draws up plans for her charitable foundation. They drove out to the mental institute, where Ignatius was meant to be imprisoned, but found that he was not checked in. Mr. Levy wonders why he should keep Levy Pants open and decides that he should keep the factory if only for the sake of Mr. Gonzalez, who is such a loyal employee. Mr. Levy worries that if the factory closes, Mr. Gonzalez might kill himself.

*Mrs. Levy wants to start the charity so that she can make herself look good and make her husband look bad by comparison. However, she has not earned the money for the charity herself and, therefore, uses Mr. Levy's father's reputation to make herself appear philanthropic. On the other hand, Mr. Levy genuinely thinks of others before himself and considers his employees in his decision to keep Levy Pants.*



Mr. Levy comes across the article about Ignatius and says that he has found the “young idealist.” Mrs. Levy looks at the picture of Ignatius in the gutter outside the strip bar and says that Mr. Levy has ruined Ignatius’s life. Mr. Levy scoffs and says that Mrs. Levy would like it if Mr. Abelman won his lawsuit and ruined them. Mrs. Levy replies that Mr. Levy has brought the lawsuit on himself and that something like this was always bound to happen. She just hopes it won’t affect their daughters too badly.

Mr. Levy realizes that Mrs. Levy *wants* him to fail so that she can be proven right. He announces that he will go to Ignatius’s house to track him down and Mrs. Levy announces irritably that she will come too. Mr. Levy says he will stop by Levy Pants and Mrs. Levy says that she is worried about Miss Trixie, as she heard that Miss Trixie bit Mr. Zalatimo. Mr. Levy thinks that Levy Pants is like a curse and that even staying away from it doesn’t help. In fact, the more he stays away from it, the more trouble it causes.

Mrs. Levy jumps in the car with Mr. Levy and explains to him that she has diagnosed him with a “death wish” as they speed towards the factory. Mr. Levy drops Mrs. Levy off at Miss Trixie’s house and drives on alone to Ignatius’s. When he arrives, Annie shouts through the window that Ignatius and Irene are not home and are still at the hospital. Mr. Levy asks her if she knows Ignatius well, and Annie responds that she has lived next to them since Ignatius was a boy.

Annie tells Mr. Levy that Ignatius was very proud of his job at Levy Pants, and Mr. Levy wonders if Ignatius is crazy. Annie tells him that Irene is a drunk and that Ignatius was a nice child until his dog died when he was in high school. After this, she says, things went bad and Ignatius spent all Irene’s money on his college education. Ignatius got a girlfriend at college, Annie says, but she was awful—Annie used to hear them having terrible rows. Mr. Levy feels sorry for Ignatius as he listens to this story.

Annie says that the newspaper report is the last straw and that she plans to drive Irene and Ignatius off the street. As she finishes her story, Irene and Ignatius pull up in their car and stumble out mid-argument. Ignatius accuses Irene of plotting against him with Claude and Patrolman Mancuso. He is furious that his mother has been having a relationship with Claude and shouts that he will not live “with a loose woman.”

*Mrs. Levy wants her husband to fail so that she will look merciful and like a patient martyr because she stays with him. This is not a very charitable impulse and, although Mrs. Levy says that Mr. Levy will ultimately get what he deserves, this prophecy might rebound more negatively on her than she thinks.*



*Mr. Levy is finally spurred into action because he realizes that he must try to take control of his destiny and that, if he lets Mrs. Levy have her way, he will give up and fail. The more Mr. Levy tries to avoid his responsibility at the factory, the more it seems to trap him, and this suggests that one cannot escape one’s fate.*



*Mrs. Levy wishes to make Mr. Levy seem mad and herself seem sane. Although she claims that she wants her husband to seek psychological help for his own good, she really just wants to have control over him.*



*Annie’s story supports Ignatius’s idea that his wheel of fortune has been in a bad cycle for many years. Ignatius’s belief that his life is out of control and that he cannot do anything about it because a medieval goddess, Fortuna, has absolute power over his fate, seems to have started young and persevered through his whole life. Although Annie does not realize it, part of Ignatius and Myrna’s attraction to each other was the fact that they had an argumentative nature in common.*



*Although America claims to be a free society in which people can do as they please so long as they do not hurt others, Annie’s behavior suggests that, really, people must conform to strict behavior standards or face social ostracization. Ignatius’s interpretation of Irene’s love life as gratuitously sexual is clearly ridiculous and overdramatic, showcasing Ignatius’s disgust when it comes to sexual relationships.*



Irene and Ignatius stomp onto the lawn and continue to argue. Irene kneels on the ground to pray and lament her fate, and Ignatius shouts that she is on Rex's grave. Irene shouts at Ignatius for keeping money from her and for treating her badly, and Ignatius yells back that Irene has forgotten his father and that she has disgraced herself by sneaking around with Claude, who he believes is a fascist. Irene says that Claude is only interested in politics because he is lonely, but that he is kind to her and that she deserves to be treated well.

Mr. Levy cautiously approaches and interrupts Ignatius and Irene's fight. Irene demands to know what Ignatius has done now, and Mr. Levy suggests they go inside. Once inside the house, Mr. Levy shows Irene the letter to Mr. Abelman and asks Ignatius if he wrote it. Irene says that of course Ignatius wrote it and begins to beat her son on the head. Mr. Levy feels sorry for Ignatius and begs Irene to stop. The phone rings and Irene answers. When she hangs up, she tells Ignatius that it was Mr. Clyde on the phone, and that Ignatius is fired.

Ignatius begs Mr. Levy to listen to him; he is under attack, he says, by Irene and her friends. Ignatius suggests Mr. Levy asks Miss Trixie about the letter. Mr. Levy protests that Miss Trixie is too old, but Ignatius says that she knows more than she lets on. Mr. Levy is amazed (this is what Mrs. Levy has always said about Miss Trixie) and Irene starts to berate Ignatius again. Irene reminds Mr. Levy of his wife, and he tells her firmly to back off as he follows Ignatius to his room.

Once inside his room, Ignatius shows Mr. Levy excerpts from his "Journal of a Working Boy," which suggest that Ignatius loves Levy Pants and that Miss Trixie knows more than she lets on. Mr. Levy feels ill because of the smell in Ignatius's room and tries to get out quickly, but Ignatius bars the door. He begs Mr. Levy to believe him and insists that Miss Trixie hates the company because they will not let her retire. Mr. Levy assures Ignatius that he believes him and stumbles back into the hall.

Outside, Irene is desperate to know what Ignatius has done wrong. Mr. Levy hurries away, however, and speeds off in his car. Ignatius and Irene watch him go, and Irene asks Ignatius how they will pay off the fine if Mr. Abelman successfully sues Mr. Levy. Mr. Levy drives back to Miss Trixie's apartment. Mrs. Levy is inside, and Miss Trixie munches her way through the cookies Mrs. Levy brought.

*Ignatius's reaction to Irene and Claude's relationship is immature and disproportionate. It demonstrates his desire to control his mother for his own selfish means and again highlights his disgust with sex, which may be based in the repression of his own urges. It is also ironic that Ignatius thinks Claude is a fascist, as Claude believes that Ignatius is a communist. Claude and Ignatius have highly divergent views on proper behavior, and both wish to impose their worldview on the other and to limit the other's freedoms. This suggests that people of different beliefs must learn to co-exist and that attempts to stamp out behaviors that one doesn't like often stem from an authoritarian impulse.*



*The consequences of Ignatius's behavior—his letter to Mr. Abelman—finally catch up with him because of a random twist of fate: his appearance in the newspaper after his accident at the Night of Joy, which was similarly brought about by a series of fateful events.*



*Although Ignatius story about his persecution sounds far-fetched, he is, in fact, quite right—Santa, Irene, and Claude have made a plot to incarcerate him so that he will not tarnish their reputations. Although Santa has convinced Irene that this plan is for her own good, really, Santa is annoyed by Ignatius because he will not conform and wants him out of the way.*



*Ignatius's journal account has been largely fabricated to make himself look better than he is (he wrote it with Myrna in mind and wanted to make himself look good to provoke her because of their love/hate relationship) but it works out in his favor now. This supports Ignatius's belief that fate often work in mysterious ways.*



*Irene has totally lost faith in Ignatius and no longer has any hopes for his future success, which was once a source of hope and pride that she clung to. Although Irene presumably wanted the best for Ignatius, she also hoped his success would make the neighbors envious.*



Mr. Levy asks Miss Trixie if she wrote the letter to Mr. Abelman. Mrs. Levy scoffs that Mr. Levy is being ridiculous, but Mr. Levy insists that Ignatius said Miss Trixie wrote it. Miss Trixie thinks for a moment. Ignatius (whom she believes to be Gloria) was her friend and wouldn't lie, so Miss Trixie thinks she must have written it. Miss Trixie tells Mr. Levy that she did write the letter, and Mrs. Levy tries to attack her. Mr. Levy holds Mrs. Levy back and asks Miss Trixie why. Miss Trixie says that she wants to retire, and Mr. Levy says that she can and that they will have a doctor write to Mr. Abelman and confirm that Miss Trixie wrote the letter because she is senile.

Mr. Levy triumphantly tells Mrs. Levy that the whole situation is her fault because she would not let Miss Trixie retire. Mrs. Levy grows upset, but Mr. Levy announces that he will rebrand Levy Pants as Levy Shorts and make the business profitable again. Mrs. Levy exclaims that Mr. Levy will destroy all his father's hard work. But Mr. Levy says, with newfound confidence, that his father was a useless businessman and ruined the business himself.

Mrs. Levy tearfully asks about the foundation she planned to set up. Mr. Levy says she can still do this and that the first award should go to Jones, whom Mr. Levy has seen in the paper and who helped stop a notorious pornography ring. Mrs. Levy is horrified and says that her awards are meant for nice people. Mr. Levy calls her a hypocrite and says that she must go to the nearby grocers and telephone Jones from there to tell him. Miss Trixie snaps that while Mrs. Levy is there, she can buy her a retirement ham, and Mr. Levy says this is an excellent idea.

Mrs. Levy leaves and Mr. Levy contemplates the day's events. Miss Trixie falls asleep on the couch. Mr. Levy ponders over the letter and thinks that he has heard language like that before somewhere. He realizes that it is the way Ignatius talks and realizes that Miss Trixie has been framed. Mr. Levy thinks this is probably for the best and that he will offer Jones a job in the factory.

*Mrs. Levy's true intentions toward Miss Trixie (to use her to get back at her husband) come out here, when Mrs. Levy flies at Miss Trixie. She has never really cared what is best for Miss Trixie and only cares about herself and the power struggle within her marriage. Miss Trixie earns her freedom at last and can retire.*



*The revelation of Mrs. Levy's truly selfish motives, which she disguised behind a veneer of selflessness, finally frees Mr. Levy from his wife's abuse. This shift in power also frees Mr. Levy from his father's influence, which Mrs. Levy has also held over his head—Mr. Levy can finally call his father out for what he is, not what Mrs. Levy portrayed him to be. The change in Mr. Levy's attitude supports the idea that people are more content and productive when they are free.*



*Mrs. Levy is a hypocrite and, although she wanted to set up a charity, she only wanted to extend that charity to those she considered deserving of it and who conformed to her view of what constitutes respectable society. The history of racism in the South means that black people were often considered criminals purely because of their race. Mrs. Levy hypocritically reveals this uncharitable belief here, and Mr. Levy finally frees Miss Trixie.*



*Ignatius's actions have unexpectedly benefitted Jones and freed him from his servitude under Lana at the Night of Joy. Jones will receive a degree of freedom with a job at the factory because he will no longer have to work for slave wages and will not have to worry about the police. However, Jones's freedom here is meant to be slightly ironic, as Jones will still likely be paid less than a white person and is still required by law to have a job, so it is not an entirely liberating outcome. The fateful conclusion to Ignatius's letter suggests that fate does operate in mysterious ways as Ignatius believes, and that actions often produce unexpected results.*





## CHAPTER 14, PART 1

Ignatius spends the rest of the day in bed, alternating between napping and masturbating. He feels that his persecutors have finally gotten their claws into him, and the situation with Mr. Levy and Mr. Abelman concerns him greatly. Irene will not look at or speak to him and spends all day on the phone with various relatives to whom she complains about Ignatius. When Irene listens outside Ignatius's door, she hears the squeaking of his bed springs and feels that there is only one thing that she can do.

Irene phones Santa and tells her that, for Ignatius's own good, they must have him committed to the charity hospital. Santa agrees this is a good idea. She tells Irene that Claude is afraid of Ignatius because Ignatius is so big and kicked up such a fuss when he saw Claude at the hospital. Irene says that they must get Ignatius declared "temporary insane" before the police take him away. Santa asks what has happened and Irene cries that Ignatius made a mistake when he was working for Levy Pants.

Santa says that she will call the hospital and tells Irene to get herself out of the house and come around to hers. Claude will be there, too, and the people from the hospital will sort Ignatius out. Irene hangs up and hastily prepares to leave. As she heads out the door, however, she has a moment of guilt and knocks on Ignatius's door to say a tearful goodbye. Ignatius reluctantly opens the door and kisses her. Irene sobs that she is sorry she ever crashed the car and dashes out of the house.

Ignatius suspects Irene is up to something. He heard her whispering on the phone to Santa, and she has mentioned to him that Santa wants him committed to a mental institution. Ignatius realizes suddenly that, if he is committed, he cannot stand trial for the lawsuit against Mr. Levy. Ignatius suspects that Irene has acted for his own sake, but he despises modern psychiatry and does not want to be locked away.

*Although Ignatius claims to despise sex, he masturbates frequently, which suggests that he is not as repulsed by the idea of sex as he claims to be. Ignatius does not believe that he is in control of his fate—instead, he believes a medieval goddess, Fortuna, controls his destiny—and, therefore, takes no responsibility for his actions and feels that he cannot change the outcomes that life has in store for him. Although this is not strictly true, it is true that uncontrollable circumstances are sometimes difficult to escape, as will prove to be the case with Santa, Irene, and Claude's plot to institutionalize Ignatius.*



*Unlike Santa, who wants to lock Ignatius up because he interferes with her plans but who pretends this is for Irene's benefits, Irene genuinely believes that Ignatius will be better if he is in the asylum. There, he cannot be sued for the letter he wrote to Mr. Abelman.*



*Santa pushes Irene toward her decision to institutionalize Ignatius merely because Ignatius irritates Santa and she wants him out of the way so she can have fun and plan Irene and Claude's wedding. Although Santa pretends that this is what's best for Irene, really, her motives are self-interested and will probably hurt Irene in the long run as they will damage her relationship with her son.*



*Ignatius understands that his mother's motives are selfless, but that they will have the unintended consequence of hurting him. Again, Ignatius demonstrates his belief that medieval philosophy and spirituality are superior to modern medicine and psychiatry.*



Ignatius realizes that he must try and escape, but he doesn't have any money. The people from the hospital may be on their way at that very moment. Ignatius dresses in a hurry and is about to leave when someone knocks on the front door. He peers out through the glass and is amazed to see Myrna on the doorstep. At first, the sight of her fills him with rage, but then he realizes that Myrna might provide him with a means of escape.

*Ignatius knows that his freedom is under threat. This ties into his belief that he is destined to be persecuted by modern society. It also speaks to his feelings of kinship with the philosopher Boethius, who wrote his philosophical tract (on which Ignatius bases his worldview) while in prison. Ignatius's furious reaction to Myrna seems excessive and suggests that his passion may be rooted in a secret attraction to her, although he hates everything she stands for and is annoyed by his feelings for her. Still, he plans to use her for his own selfish means.*



Ignatius rushes to the door and acts as though he is overjoyed to see Myrna. Ignatius tells her that they must leave immediately for New York. Myrna is confused and wonders if Ignatius has had a nervous breakdown. She has been driving all night, she says, and needs a rest. Ignatius hurriedly explains that his last few letters have been the result of his broken mental state and that he must leave because Irene is engaged to be married and is trying to get rid of him.

*Ignatius conceals his hatred of Myrna and plans to trick her into believing that he needs her for his own selfish ends. However, Ignatius really does need Myrna to escape in this moment and avoid incarceration, which suggests that what he views as just a façade may have some truth behind it.*



Myrna agrees to take Ignatius with her, and Ignatius tries to rush out the door. Myrna suggests he might like to pack some things, so Ignatius hurriedly leads her to his room to collect his writings. He does not want Irene to get ahold of what he has written and "make a fortune" from them. While he packs, Ignatius tells Myrna that his mother has been seduced by a fascist and that they have been interrogating him about his worldview. Myrna listens, stunned, and says that this sounds awful.

*Ignatius genuinely believes that his academic work—which advises modern society to adopt medieval beliefs—will one day lead humanity out of its condition of chaos and barbarism, and into a new age of enlightenment. This is ironic, as the medieval period is often considered the opposite of the historic Enlightenment, during which time many modern ideas were developed. It is ironic that Ignatius, who claims to despise other people, believes that he will one day be considered their savior: it demonstrates that he cares more about being proven right than about genuinely helping others.*



Myrna says that her therapy group will be delighted to hear about Ignatius. She says that they imagine him like a medieval monk, writing in his cloister. Ignatius says that he cannot wait to be in New York and ushers Myrna towards the door. Myrna becomes emotional and says that she feels she is "saving someone." Ignatius agrees that she is and says that he will not leave a note for Irene because it will take her weeks to read it.

*Although Myrna believes she wants to help Ignatius she really only views him as an experiment and his escape from New Orleans as a personal triumph, rather than something that will help him. Like Ignatius, Myrna believes that she is superior to modern society, in her case because she is so progressive. She thinks that she is a savior who will lead Ignatius out of the medieval period, which Myrna considers a dark age, but which Ignatius considers superior to modernity. Ironically, Myrna is the same as Ignatius in many of her beliefs, except that she sees herself as superior because she is so progressive while Ignatius feels superior because he is so conservative.*



Ignatius hurries Myrna out to her car and clambers into the back seat. Myrna says he can sit in the front, but Ignatius shouts that he will not sit in that “death trap” and then yells at Myrna for getting her guitar in his face. Myrna gets ready to drive and tells Ignatius that he is back to his “horrible self.” She hopes she has not made a mistake by agreeing to take him. Ignatius tells her to hurry and says that they can stop somewhere to sleep when they are out of town.

Myrna’s car pulls out just as an ambulance drives past and parks nearby. Ignatius ducks down in the back and is almost insulted when he sees how small the ambulance is that they have sent to collect him. Ignatius begins to relax as the car drives off. He wonders what Fortuna has in store for him next and feels as though he is on the verge of a new life. He stares gratefully at the back of Myrna’s head, and seized by sudden affection for her, picks up her pigtail that is hanging into the back seat and presses it to his lips.

*Myrna and Ignatius already begin to clash, which suggests that, although Ignatius pretends to be reformed so that Myrna will take him with her, he has not really changed at all. He appeases Myrna, who wants to believe that she has saved him from the error of his ways, but Ignatius only wants to use Myrna to escape institutionalization at the mental hospital.*



*Ignatius has a grandiose impression of himself and feels that he would easily be able to fight off the hospital staff. Although Ignatius pretends to Myrna that he has changed, his beliefs remain the same underneath and he does not take any responsibility for his previous actions or feel that he has any more control over his life now than he ever did. Instead, he still believes that his fate is randomly decided and out of his control. The only slight change in Ignatius is his expression of affection towards Myrna, which he previously would have shunned as vulgar, suggesting the development of genuine affection. This small but significant shift implies that, although Ignatius has not changed his core beliefs, his move to the city may have new revelations and new twists of fate in store which may lead to an eventual transformation.*





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