

EVIDENCE OF INFLUENCES ON JOHN KENNEDY
TOOLE'S *A CONFEDERACY OF DUNCES*,
INCLUDING GEOFFREY CHAUCER

Version 2.1 (2 June 2014)

H. Vernon Leighton

Dedicated to Richard E. Smith

Abstract

This study uses the evidence held in John Kennedy Toole's papers located at Tulane University to investigate many literary works and authors who may have been possible influences on his novel *A Confederacy of Dunces* (*Confederacy*). Part one is a catalog of evidence about authors, texts, and characters to which *Confederacy* has been compared, including Boethius, Chaucer, John Lyly, Edmund Spenser, Cervantes, Shakespeare's Falstaff, John Milton, various authors of picaresque novels, Jonathan Swift, the Romantic Poets, Mark Twain, Herman Melville, Joseph Conrad, T.S. Eliot, various ethnic melee dramas, Walker Percy, J. D. Salinger, and Flannery O'Connor. Part two then analyzes themes common to both Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Toole's *Confederacy*, such as the use of the grotesque, the dynamics within intimate relationships, and the parody of romance. In *Confederacy*, Ignatius Reilly is an agent of Fortuna and fulfills a role occupied by the planetary god Saturn in Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*. Some critics have called Toole's outlook deterministic. This study argues that he was not a determinist, and that his Boethian position on free will was derived indirectly through the influence of Chaucer.

Introduction¹

Prior to the posting of version 1.0 of this study in July of 2010, efforts to study John Kennedy Toole's intellectual development and how it may have influenced his *A Confederacy of Dunces* (*Confederacy*) had been remarkably weak, especially considering the critical attention paid to the text. Since that time there have

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<http://course1.winona.edu/vleighton/toole/Leighton_Toole_Chaucer.pdf>. I gratefully acknowledge the permission of Tulane University Louisiana Research Collection to reuse passages from the *Toole Papers*.

Throughout this paper, box and folder numbers are given for materials in the *Toole Papers*. Those are the boxes and folders in which the materials were located in August of 2009. Tulane reserves the right to reorganize the materials, so they may not always be in those locations. Although this paper has not been published in a peer-review journal, it has been reviewed by many persons, including several current or emeritus professors of literature. The paper has been endorsed by W. Kenneth Holditch, Joel Fletcher, and William Bedford Clark. If a peer-review journal would like to republish part or all of this paper, please contact the author at: vleighton@winona.edu. I would like to thank the following individuals for providing either assistance with the research for this essay or commentary on earlier drafts: W. Kenneth Holditch, John Kerr, Kent Cowgill, Matt Lungerhausen, John Campbell, Joel Fletcher, Emilie Griffin, Melissa Smith, Mary M. White, Leon Miller, Kenneth Owen, Eira Tansey, Susanna Powers, Lauren Leighton, Colleen Burlingham, Elizabeth Z. Bennett, Rachel Dowling, Ann Leighton, Pam Arnold, Jocelyn Wilk, Joe Jackson, Susan Byom, and Mark Eriksen.

been several works (including versions of this text) that have investigated Toole's development.² During the first 30 years of its reception, *Confederacy* had been compared to the literary works of numerous authors. The book encourages such comparisons because it offers numerous literary references, or, as Richard Simon described it, *Confederacy* is "a playful and devious tour of literary history" (99). Nevertheless, only one published study prior to 2010 had investigated Toole's papers for evidence of influence by other authors, and that investigation was not comprehensive. I began this study with the hypothesis that *Confederacy* was a parody of themes in *The Canterbury Tales*—parody here meaning "repetition with critical distance" (Hutcheon 6). The evidence in Toole's papers supports the claim that Toole was at the very least influenced by Chaucer. Few of the scholarly studies which have compared *Confederacy* to other works have claimed an actual authorial influence *per se*, but many comparisons are detailed enough to invite the reader to speculate about actual influence.³

² Cory MacLaughlin used the *Toole Papers* and personal interviews in his scholarly biography of Toole. Also see my online *Ideas for Papers or Term Papers on John Kennedy Toole's "A Confederacy of Dunces," the Occasional Series* and my "Dialectic of American Humanism" paper.

³ Two studies included here that do discuss influence (Gillespie, Rudnicki) draw theoretical support from Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*. I prefer the theoretical perspective of Linda Hutcheon's *Theory of Parody*. Some literary theorists criticize the effort of literary commentary to analyze the intentions of the author, including the possible influences of other authors. For example, Eagleton invoked the "intentional fallacy" of Wimsatt and Beardsley to warn off would-be critics from speculating at all about an author's intentions (48). In this

This paper is divided into two parts. Part one reviews the archival papers for evidence of knowledge of those authors or works to which Toole and *Confederacy* have been compared.⁴ This catalog can be rather dry; however, one claim in the scholarly literature about what Toole knew and did not know (see the section on Boethius below) is in fact refuted by the evidence. Part two explores Geoffrey Chaucer's influence on Toole and how that influence may alter the reader's understanding of *Confederacy*. For the reader who is primarily interested in the Chaucer interpretation, I recommend that you read the Boethius and Chaucer sections of part one, and then skip to part two.

Part I: The Archival Evidence

John Kennedy Toole left behind evidence of his studies and

matter, I concur with E.D. Hirsch's perspective in *Validity in Interpretation*, in which he argues that Wimsatt and Beardsley were referring to evaluation and not analysis and that their ideas are misused by modern theorists (11-12). My goal is analytical rather than evaluative. The success of the analysis ultimately rests on its explanatory power, not on its plausibility as an intention.

⁴ This paper is focused on possible influences by literary works. There have also been historical personages to whom the main character, Ignatius Reilly, has been compared, such as Jesus Christ (Gillespie 39; Pugh 85), Boethius himself (Elizabeth Bell 21; Simon 108-9; Lambert 10, 14; Kaylor 78; Beste 57-59), Thomas Aquinas (Percy vi; Kaylor 74), and Ignatius of Loyola (McNeil 43; Pugh 80; McCluskey 7). None of them—Christ, Boethius as a person, Aquinas, or Loyola—appears in the *Toole Papers*.

literary interests, though his papers are by no means comprehensive. Toole earned a bachelor's degree Phi Beta Kappa from Tulane University in 1958 and a Master's Degree in English from Columbia University in New York in 1959 (Booth 746). He focused on medieval and renaissance literature in both his undergraduate and his graduate studies. After Toole's death, many of his possessions were donated to the Louisiana Research Collection at Tulane University (hereafter referred to as the *Toole Papers*) by the individuals who had received those papers from his mother, Thelma Toole. According to Cory MacLaughlin, some of Toole's papers were destroyed in the flooding from Hurricane Camille (213).

This collection includes 1.) numerous assignments from his undergraduate career at Tulane, many of which have the course number and the instructor's name, 2.) a bibliography of the books in his library, which was sold by bookstore owner Rhoda Faust after his death (box 5, folder 5), and 3.) a variety of other materials, including his transcripts from Columbia and Tulane with course numbers and titles (Columbia: box 3, folder 6; Tulane: box 10, binder). From the course numbers, the course catalogs of Tulane and Columbia provide further information about the content of Toole's studies. To supplement the information in Toole's papers, the present study also uses works by the noted Chaucer scholar Robert Lumiansky prior to the course Toole took from him in 1957 as well as some texts that Lumiansky himself cited during that period. Further, Toole's Master's thesis at Columbia provides information about his knowledge of John Lyly and Lyly's works.

The first point to be made about the *Toole Papers* as a whole is how incomplete they are. Despite the presence of assignments

from nine out of the thirteen English courses he took as an undergraduate at Tulane, many of the topics covered in those courses—according to the course catalog (Tulane 1955)—are not present in the papers, and there are no papers from his graduate studies at Columbia except the Master’s thesis itself, which was only a reworking of his Honor’s thesis from Tulane.⁵ Finally, there are also notes from two graduate courses he took at Tulane in 1968 while pursuing a doctorate in English and notes from courses that Toole himself taught, perhaps at Dominican College.

Each section below discusses the comparisons that reviewers and critics have made between *Confederacy* and the work of other authors. The evidence from his papers is then examined for Toole’s knowledge of that potential predecessor. The entries are arranged below in approximate chronological order of the other author. One clear limit on the possibility of an actual influence on Toole is the date of composition of *Confederacy*: Toole began sketches for the novel in 1961, began writing in earnest in February of 1963, finished the first draft in February of 1964, and last edited it in 1965.⁶ In Joel Fletcher’s memoir, *Ken and Thelma*,

⁵ The Honor’s thesis, entitled *The Women in Lyly’s Plays* (box 2, folder 15), was thirty-nine pages long, while the Master’s thesis, *Lyly’s Treatment of Women* (box 2, folder 13), was fifty pages long. The lack of other papers was reported by an archivist at Columbia in 2008.

⁶ In a letter to Robert Gottlieb from March of 1965, Toole explained that, while teaching at Hunter College in New York, he began sketches in which Ignatius was named Humphrey Wildblood (Fletcher 115). That letter also indicates that the first draft was finished in February of 1964. In a letter to his parents from 15 May 1963, Toole referred to the draft of

he concluded, after his discussions with Thelma Toole, that the text ultimately published was in fact the first draft finished in early 1964 (121).

Boethius⁷

The Consolation of Philosophy (Consolation) by the Roman philosopher Boethius plays two roles within *Confederacy*. Not only does the novel's main character, Ignatius J. Reilly, recommend it to others as the foundation of his medieval worldview (137, 139, 219, 255), but a copy of the book plays a role in the novel's plot. As both William Bedford Clark (273) and Michael Kline (287) have pointed out, Ignatius has a limited view of Boethius and only refers to that part of *Consolation* where its narrator laments Fortuna and her wheel. In the *Consolation* itself, Lady Philosophy instructs the narrator to reject Fortuna's wheel and to see that fate is ultimately under the control of providence. Both Clark and Kline argued that, just as Boethius's Lady Philosophy contradicts his narrator, *Confederacy's* narrative contradicts Ignatius's views: out of the apparent chaos of fate the order of the plot arises. Similarly, when Simon in 1994 compared *Confederacy* with Walker Percy's novel *The Moviegoer*, he argued that *Confederacy* is a study of fate and that the book's resolution repeats a medieval solution to the paradox of free will. Ignatius "finds the same kind of consolation from [Boethius and Fortuna]

Confederacy as "The 'creative writing' to which I turned about three months ago ..." (box 1, folder 8).

⁷ Much of this section was also published in Notes on Contemporary Literature as "A Refutation of Robert Byrne."

that Binx [from Percy's *Moviegoer*] has found in Kierkegaardian repetition and rotation" (103). Simon then analyzed *Confederacy* as a repetition of Boethius's life and his *Consolation of Philosophy* (108-109).

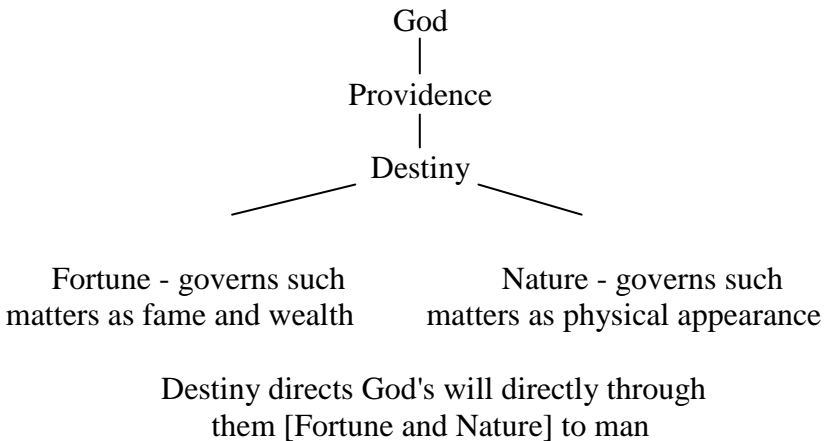
These Boethian interpretations of *Confederacy* were called into question in 1995, when Carmine Palumbo published an interview with Robert Byrne, the undisputed real-life model for Ignatius Reilly (Fletcher 20). There, Byrne claimed that Toole had only a limited knowledge of Boethius's *Consolation* despite having used it explicitly and extensively in *Confederacy*. "Mr. Byrne explained to me almost immediately that Toole had never, to his knowledge, read *Consolation of Philosophy*, ... and that what he did know he had picked up from Byrne ..." (Palumbo 63).

Toole's papers support Byrne's first claim—there is no evidence that Toole had actually read Boethius—but they flatly refute his second claim—that Toole only knew of Boethius from Byrne himself. Toole's assignments contain two references to Boethius. First, a typescript shows that he was familiar as an undergraduate with the philosophy of Boethius and Chaucer's use of it. The assignment is dated 8 March 1957, and was written for a class at Tulane (English 612, *Chaucer*) taught by Robert Lumiansky (box 2, folder 11). The Lumiansky assignment contains lengthy answers to questions that are not present in the typescript itself, and two of them discuss Boethius. Figure 1 below shows Toole's answer thirteen in its original layout. This answer matches the explanation found in Lumiansky's 1952 article on the Knight's Tale which was reprinted in his 1955 book *Of Sondry Folk*. In that article, this same ordering is described as "the hierarchy, set forth by Boethius in the *Consolation*, through which God deals with human beings" ("Philosophical Knight" 54;

Sondry Folk 38).

Figure 1

Fortune and nature are, together, on the bottom rung of what might be called the Boethian hierarchy. A simple diagram may explain their functions:



Further down in this typescript, answer fifteen states: “Egeus’ [Egeus’s] philosophy is notably Boethian and is not out of context in The Knight’s Tale. After the lists have resulted in almost double tragedy he, as Theseus’ father, attempts to make some ‘consolation’ by suggesting that these events must be accepted. The thread of Boethian runs throughout this tale.” In short, Byrne was not the sole source of Toole’s knowledge of Boethius. Toole clearly understood the Boethian idea that an apparently

malevolent, worldly Fortune could be under the control of Destiny, the temporal agent of God's beneficent Providence.⁸

A second mention of Boethius, though less revealing of Toole's Boethian knowledge, is referenced within *Confederacy*. In an undated exam booklet which answered questions about Shakespeare's tragedies and histories (box 2, folder 7), Toole wrote: "The Wheel of Fortune is the old medieval device for explaining the rise and fall of illustrious men—de Casibis Virorum Illustrium. It is the Boethian notion of a blind goddess, Fortuna, spinning a wheel on which men's fortunes rise and fall." This passage is echoed in *Confederacy*, when Ignatius describes his own collapse on the floor: "*De Casibis Virorum Illustrium!* Of the Fall of Great Men! My downfall occurred. Literally" (105).

Chaucer

Confederacy has but a single explicit reference to Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. Ignatius's mother, Irene, develops a friendship with Angelo Mancuso's aunt, Santa Battaglia. Despite her name, Santa is a decidedly unsaintly counselor, and she guides Irene to independence from Ignatius and toward a courtship with the elderly, financially stable Claude Robichaux. In anger, Ignatius calls her "Wife-of-Bath Battaglia" (329), after the Chaucerian character who repeatedly married wealthy, elderly men and dominated them to their graves. Prior to 2010, no essay in the

⁸ Although Kaylor does not compare *Confederacy* to Chaucer's writings, he correctly observes: "even if 'the masses' do not read Boethius's last work directly, they may come to it indirectly, by way of Chaucer's narratives" (80).

scholarly literature had compared *Confederacy* to Chaucer's works.

Two sources provide evidence about Toole's knowledge of the works of Geoffrey Chaucer—his college assignments themselves and the writings of Robert Lumiansky (one of Toole's professors, see section on Boethius above). The *Toole Papers* contain three different undergraduate assignments which reveal his working knowledge of the major themes in *The Canterbury Tales*—especially the fabliaux and the Knight's Tale. The assignment already discussed shows that Toole had learned about Chaucer's use of Boethius and knew about the Boethian nature of the Knight's Tale. From the two other assignments, one can see that he not only studied Chaucer, but also thought of Chaucer's poetry within Toole's own cultural context. From Lumiansky's writings, one can show that Toole was also exposed to the ideas current at the time about the nature of Chaucer's relationship to modern literature.

The two other Chaucer assignments come from English 201, *Major British and American Writers I*, taught by Professor Foote in Toole's sophomore year, the Fall of 1955 (box 2, folder 2). The assignment dated 17 October contains two brief essays. In the first essay, Toole discussed three tales—the Wife of Bath's Tale, the Merchant's Tale and the Franklin's Tale—and compared their treatment of marital infidelity. Toole specifically mentioned the moment in the Wife of Bath's Tale where the hag turns into the beautiful young wife—a detail that Toole later inverted within *Confederacy* (discussed below). Toole complained about its lack of realism.

The other assignment for Foote's class, dated 7 November

1955, is called “Indecency in Chaucer.” The “indecent” stories in question are Chaucer’s bawdy fabliaux with their farcical plots and carnal images. In the paper, Toole characterized the rural Southern whites portrayed in William Alexander Percy’s *Lanterns on the Levee* as being excessively religious one moment and sexually indecent the next moment. He claimed that, because Chaucer’s tales are by turns pious and indecent, the protestant, Anglo-Saxon population in the southeastern United States resembled the population in Chaucer’s England “remarkably.” Toole then took Tennessee Williams’ “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof”—set as it is in the Mississippi Delta—and drew parallels between the character of Big Daddy and Chaucer’s grotesque Wife of Bath. Thus, as an undergraduate, Toole used this essay to draw thematic connections between Chaucer’s use of carnal and grotesque characters and the people and literature of the modern South.⁹

Lumiansky also likely exposed Toole to George Kittredge’s position that Chaucer’s work was a relevant predecessor to contemporary fiction. For example, Kittredge, who dominated Chaucer criticism in the early twentieth century, made this claim about Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*: “It is the first novel, in the modern sense, that ever was written in the world, and one of the best” (*Chaucer and his Poetry* 109). In *Of Sondry Folk*, Lumiansky acknowledged that his study furthered Kittredge’s research programme by exploring the dramatic tension among the Canterbury pilgrims (6). He concluded the book: “Thus, though certainly we must not read medieval literature wholly in modern

⁹ This assignment is incidentally also the only reference to Tennessee Williams (Fletcher 26, Woodland 324, 326) in the *Toole Papers*.

terms, it does not follow necessarily that *The Canterbury Tales* can be most effectively read by limiting our perspective to the conventions which governed other storytellers than Chaucer in the fourteenth century ..." (249). He characterized both the idea that Chaucer was modern and the idea that Chaucer was strictly medieval as "extreme." Lumiansky may have inspired Toole to use elements from Chaucer's work within Toole's own fiction.

Cervantes, Spenser, Shakespeare's Falstaff, and Milton

No scholar has conducted a detailed examination comparing *Confederacy* to Cervantes' Don Quixote, to the works of Spenser, to Shakespeare's Falstaff, or to the work of John Milton. However, brief or casual references abound for these works and authors, beginning with Walker Percy's own introduction to the *Confederacy*, where he called Ignatius a "fat Don Quixote" (vi) and the novel "Falstaffian" (vii). John Lowe briefly compared Ignatius's entrance into the French Quarter to the entrance of Spenser's Red Cross Knight into the Woods of Error (165). John Milton is mentioned within *Confederacy*, such as when Ignatius mentions that he should end his Miltonic isolation and become engaged with the world (109). Regan briefly pointed that fact out (173). Milton also factors into the history of New Orleans Carnival. In 1857, the first club dedicated to an organized Carnival parade chose the name "Mistick Krewe of Comus" as a reference to the Comus masque by Milton (Young 66).

The *Toole Papers* contain direct evidence that Toole had at least a passing knowledge of Falstaff and indirect evidence that he likely had knowledge of Don Quixote. In an assignment for English 201, dated 11 November 1955, Toole answered some basic questions about Shakespeare's "Henry IV Part 1" and about

Falstaff (box 2, folder 2).¹⁰ There is no direct evidence of Cervantes, but there are assignments that show Toole's thorough knowledge of Spanish literature. His undergraduate transcript (box 10, ring binder) shows that Toole only took introductory classes in French and German, while his papers contain assignments from advanced survey courses in Spanish literature (311 and 312), where some of Toole's lengthy answers are actually written in Spanish (box 2, folder 5). For example, in an assignment dated 27 October 1955 for Spanish 311, Toole discussed several works of medieval Spanish literature, such as *Condi Tuscanos*, *El Cid*, and *Juego de escamio*, which was a vulgar theater that burlesqued the *juegas escalores*.¹¹ It is unlikely that Toole would have attained such a detailed knowledge of Spanish literature without also having read *Don Quixote*. Nevertheless, the *Toole Papers* make no mention of Cervantes or that novel.

In the *Toole Papers*, the evidence for Spenser is, first, that Toole took a course devoted to Spenser at Columbia (English 280, *Spenser*, box 3, folder 6), and second, that he owned a collection of Spenser's political writings (see Appendix A). As for Milton, there is very little reference. In an assignment from Tulane's English 102, Toole was quizzed on his knowledge of the poem

¹⁰ This is by no means the only assignment on Shakespeare's works. There are numerous assignments from numerous courses on Shakespeare's various works in the *Toole Papers*.

¹¹ This thorough knowledge of medieval Spanish literature supports Helga Beste's observation that Ignatius associates Gonzalez with King Alfonso (94), and then leads "moors" against him. Several of the Kings Alfonso campaigned against the moors in medieval Spain (Beste 96).

“Lycidas” (box 2, folder 9). Otherwise, Milton is only mentioned by Toole’s mother, Thelma. Milton’s name is one of many included in Thelma’s lyrics for “My Worldview,” the song she had planned to be the theme song for the movie version of *Confederacy*. The other authors mentioned in “My Worldview” include: Boethius, Dante, Chaucer, and “Ben Johnson [sic]” (box 14, folder 1).

John Lyly

In the one critical study to use any evidence from the *Toole Papers* at Tulane prior to July 2010, Robert Rudnicki showed evidence that Toole knew well and was influenced by the prose style of John Lyly called Euphuism. Lyly’s Euphuism brought an affected classical style to English, which was then satirized by Shakespeare. Rudnicki analyzed the pompous style of Ignatius Reilly’s journals within *Confederacy*, demonstrating persuasively the Euphuistic elements of the prose.

Other than the theses (both Honor’s and Master’s), Lyly does not appear in the *Toole Papers*. Within the Master’s thesis, Toole discusses first the Euphuistic style of Lyly’s prose works and then each of Lyly’s plays in turn. Rudnicki suggested that, of the plays, “Mother Bombie,” which has a fortune-teller, may have influenced *Confederacy* (287), but to me, of the plays, the most potentially influential is “The Woman in the Moone,” which Toole discussed in his master’s thesis (45-46). The main character in that play is Pandora. Throughout the play, the planetary gods (Venus, Mars, Saturn, etc.) take turns standing on a balcony over her and influencing her behavior. Her erratic behavior drives the plot. In *Confederacy*, Ignatius can be seen as a male (or gender ambiguous) Pandora with Saturn continually standing on the

balcony over him (see section on Disorder below).

Seminal Picaresque Novels

Several researchers have cast *A Confederacy of Dunces* as a picaresque novel. Elizabeth Bell (19), Robert Byrne (Palumbo 67) and Patteson and Sauret (84) all described Ignatius as a picaro, without actually comparing *Confederacy* to any specific picaresque novel. Greg Giddings took Stuart Miller's 1967 study *The Picaresque Novel* and systematically compared the aspects of Miller's set of seminal picaresque novels to those same elements in *Confederacy*. Giddings concluded that, despite Ignatius's many picaresque qualities, *Confederacy* is not a picaresque novel, in part because it exhibits the orderly resolution of the traditional comedic novel (85). The classic picaresque novels Giddings examined were *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), *The Unfortunate Traveler* (1594), *El Buscon* (1626), *Simplicissimus* (1668), *Moll Flanders* (1722), and *Roderick Random* (1748).

The *Toole Papers* contain evidence of only one of the novels that Giddings discussed. In exam booklet dated April 1958 (box 2, folder 7), probably for English 644, *English literature 1700-1744*, Toole wrote an essay on the contradictions between Christianity and capitalism in Defoe's *Moll Flanders*.

Jonathan Swift and other Eighteenth Century Novelists

The explicit references to Swift within *Confederacy* (to say nothing of the book's Swiftian title) make it clear that Toole possessed knowledge of Swift, and the archives are rich with confirming evidence. In the critical literature, Jonathan Simmons

studied *Confederacy's* quotations from—and references to—Jonathan Swift and compared Toole's satirical use of the grotesque to Swift's own (37-42). McNeil briefly compared Swift's use of satire with Toole's (36), and several reviewers have suggested Toole as a modern day Swift. The *Toole Papers* include, first (in the same exam booklet as the essay on *Moll Flanders* above), a discussion of *Gulliver's Travels* and the "Battle of the Books," second, a transcript record that, while at Columbia, Toole took English 285A, *The Augustan Satirists*, in the autumn of 1960 (box 3 folder 6), and, finally, notes that Toole himself taught *Gulliver's Travels* in at least one of his own classes (box 3 folder 10). Two other books covered in Toole's course were Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*, which have been compared to *Confederacy* by Lowe (163) and Simon (100), respectively.

The Romantic Poets

Prior to July 2010, only one critic had pointed to the influence of the Romantic Poets, even though their presence in the Toole Papers is significant. John Lowe noted that the Reilly house "with its collapsed fence, dead banana tree, dog grave, and wrecked car, occasions a parody of Keats: 'There were no shrubs. There was no grass. And no birds sang.' (an echo of 'La Belle Dame sans Merci')" (168). However, the Toole papers contain a great deal of evidence of the Romantics, including two Tulane courses (English 651, *English Romantic Poets*, and English 787, *Romantic Criticism*), three books of poetry in Toole's library (see Appendix A), and about a dozen assignments dealing with Blake, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Byron and Coleridge, including discussions of their use of Platonism (box 2, folders 2 and 7). For

Romantic Criticism, he wrote a 28 page paper on Coleridge's theory of drama (box 2, folder 2).¹²

Mark Twain and Herman Melville

Confederacy repeatedly makes reference to, as Ignatius says, “that dreary fraud, Mark Twain” (103). Several critics have compared *Confederacy* to Twain's life and works: Robert Regan (173) briefly examined Ignatius's own comparison of himself to Twain as a writer; Clark (275) compared Ignatius' childishness with that of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn; McNeil (34) noted that both Toole and Twain employed the technique of reverse satire; and both McNeil and Britton (17) made detailed comparisons between *Confederacy* and *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (*Connecticut Yankee*). Britton also examined Twain's *Mysterious Stranger* (21). Lowe speculated that Toole likely admired and imitated *Connecticut Yankee* (167). Lowe also briefly mentions Melville's *White-Jacket* (163).

In the *Toole Papers*, there is only one passing reference to Mark Twain's writings prior to 1963, but in 1968 there is a suggestive statement. The undergraduate reference occurred in an undated essay comparing *The Scarlet Letter* to *Moby Dick*. While discussing the inner growth within Dimmesdale and Ishmael, Toole wrote: “A most basic instance of this sort of maturity, of

¹² The Coleridge paper includes a discussion of the classical dramatic unities and thereby lends support to Beste's observation that the action in each chapter in *Confederacy* strictly occurs in a 24 hour period: “Es scheint fast, als habe sich Toole der vom Drama bekannten Einheit von Zeit, Ort, und Handlung bedienen wollen” (103).

growth, is *Huckleberry Finn*—or, even more recently, *The Catcher in the Rye*” (box 2, folder 11, page 53). None of Toole’s preserved pre-1968 college assignments show any evidence of Toole being assigned to read Twain, and none of the course catalog listings for courses that he took specifically state that Twain would be read (Columbia; Tulane 1955; Tulane 1958).

In 1968, however, on the first page of notes for a Theodore Dreiser course, Toole made a list of authors and their novels entitled: “Basic works - primary for this period.” In that list is found “Twain - Huck Finn; Con Yankee; Mysterious Stranger” (box 3, folder 8). It is not clear whether Toole had read these three novels prior to taking the course or whether they were simply recommended by his professor; however, the other novelists in Toole’s list (Howell, Norris and James) were ones that had been explicitly listed in the 1956 course catalog for English 678, *Modern American Novel*, which Toole’s transcript indicates he took in the Spring of 1957 (box 10, binder; Tulane 1955). This evidence suggests that Toole might have read these three Twain novels by 1963.

Evidence for Herman Melville in the *Toole Papers* is much stronger than for Twain. In the Fall of 1957, Toole took English 673, *Poe, Hawthorne, Melville*. In a lengthy typescript that contains many Toole assignments, there are two assignments that discuss Melville. The first is the one quoted above in the discussion of Huck Finn, and in the second, on page 54 Toole states that both Hawthorne and Melville escape “into the world of symbolism and allegory.”

Joseph Conrad and T.S. Eliot

In *Confederacy*, Ignatius refers to Eliot's *Wasteland* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in his often told tale of traveling to Baton Rouge (10). He again refers to Conrad when describing the factory at Levy Pants (104). McCluskey compared Toole's novel to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (17-18). Ruppensburg (125) commented briefly that *Confederacy* has more in common with T. S. Eliot and Salinger than with traditional Southern literature. Within the *Toole Papers* there is an essay exam dated 11 April 1956 on *The Heart of Darkness* (box 2, folder 3) in which Toole argued that Kurtz and Marlowe are the same person. The only mention of Eliot is the quiz from English 102 that was also the source of the only Milton reference.

Ethnic Melee Dramas

Lowe compared *Confederacy* with ethnic melee plays, such as *The Melting Pot* (1914) and *Abie's Irish Rose* (1922), and radio and TV dramas, such as *Life with Luigi* and *The Goldbergs*. These dramas share with *Confederacy* a farcical closing melee, in which the various characters cross their ethnic social barriers and unite to attack a scapegoat (186). In the *Toole Papers*, there is no evidence related to any ethnic melee dramas.

Walker Percy, J. D. Salinger, and Flannery O'Connor

Critics have often grouped Walker Percy, J. D. Salinger, and Flannery O'Connor together. Michael Gillespie and Lucinda MacKethan both compared the work of Percy, O'Connor, and Toole. Sara Dunne contrasted the moviegoing experience within

Confederacy, *The Moviegoer*, and J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*.

The literary work about which the most compelling case for influence on *Confederacy* has been made is Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer* (1961). In addition to the critics above, Regan (171), Simon, Woodland, and Simpson all compared *The Moviegoer* to *Confederacy*. Bryan Giemza listed the reasons why some scholars still (half-seriously) hold Percy to be the author of *Confederacy*.

Evidence for Toole's familiarity with Percy is limited to one item: according to the list of Toole's library (box 5, folder 5), Toole possessed a first edition copy of *The Moviegoer* (Knopf, 1961, condition fair). For *Catcher in the Rye*, the evidence is much clearer. Toole's unambiguous praise is found in the student-edited literary magazine from Tulane called *Carnival*. There, Toole, the non-fiction editor and cartoonist for 1956, wrote a review of current books in which he stated: "*Catcher in the Rye* continues to be one of the finest books of its type ever written. No college student should fail to read it ..." ("Reading and Writing" 13). He also recommended the parody of the book that featured a boy's failed attempt to lose his virginity in the July 1956 *Playboy* magazine entitled "Catcher in the Wry" (Turner).

The only reference to O'Connor in the *Toole Papers* (other than newspaper reports about Toole) was not written by Toole, but by his mother, Thelma.¹³ In her notes toward a biography of her

¹³ The only mentions of Dante (Gardner, *Comedy* 102; Clark 278; Elizabeth Bell 17; Pugh 81) and Rabelais (Gardner, *Comedy* 98; Simon 100; Pugh 83; Lowe 162; Rudnicki 287) are likewise not written by Toole but by Thelma. In the case of Rabelais, the name simply appears alone in her notes with no discussion or context. In the case of Dante, his

son, Thelma wrote,

(a haughty disdain for the feelings and rights of others)
 (this is relative to Ken's 'A Confederacy of Dunces';
 Flannery O'Connor's 'A View of the Woods' is a story
 with a comic or absurd surface beneath which lies a feeling
 for the human reality which approaches the tragic)
 (monstrous egotism and haughty disdain for the feelings
 and rights of others.) (the child stands for a quality of
 imagination and sensibility which can recognize in
 ordinary pine trees some of the glory and wonder of
 nature.) (box 14 folder 1)

This lack of evidence regarding O'Connor says a good deal about the deficiencies of *Toole Papers*. The evidence elsewhere for Toole's knowledge of O'Connor is strong. In his description of when they first met, Joel Fletcher wrote that he and Toole "discovered that we shared a few literary enthusiasms, among them the comic novels of Evelyn Waugh and Flannery O'Connor's short stories and novellas" (16). One of the newspaper articles about Toole indicated that O'Connor was to be the subject of his Ph.D. thesis (Coburn). No notes for that dissertation or other notes on O'Connor by Toole are present in the *Toole Papers*.¹⁴

name is one of many included in Thelma's lyrics for "My Worldview" as mentioned above.

¹⁴ *Confederacy* has been compared to the works of other authors for which there is no evidence in the Toole Papers, including Hroswitha or Hrotsvit (Wilson 4; Zaenker 278), Langland's *Piers Plowman* (Patteson and Sauret 80; Elizabeth Bell 17; McCluskey 11), Ebenezer Cook (McNeil 43), Soren Kierkegaard (Simon 111-112), George Washington

Harris (Ruppersburg 118), Henry David Thoreau (McCluskey), George Washington Cable (Woodland 325), D. H. Lawrence (Lewis), Margaret Mitchell (Simon 100), George Orwell (Rudnicki 292), and Witold Gombrowicz (Starnes 239). Subjects found in Toole's assignments, letters, and library that might be of interest to future scholars include Platonic philosophy, Freudian psychology (Lowe 167), and Social Darwinism. MacLaughlin suggested the influence of Waugh (162). Other promising authors present in the *Toole Papers* about whom no critic has written are Nathaniel Hawthorne, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and (briefly) Eugene O'Neill. For other potentially interesting books in Toole's library, see Appendix A.

Part II: Chaucer and *Confederacy*

Three well-studied themes

For many aspects of *The Canterbury Tales*, one can find corresponding themes within *Confederacy* that are already well known: both Chaucer and Toole displayed the dichotomy between the carnal and the ideal aspects of human nature in a carnivalesque mode; both wrote about power and dominance within intimate relationships; and both mocked the romantic hero and his adventures. While these common literary themes have been handled by many influential works of literature, the tangible evidence in the *Toole Papers* at the very least establishes Toole's familiarity with Chaucer's use of them.

Chaucer's contrast between the carnal and the ideal mode of human experience can be most easily seen by comparing the courtly idealism of the Knight's Tale with its carnivalesque parody in the Miller's Tale. The Boethian philosophy that underlies the Knight's Tale is ideal in the Platonic sense, while Chaucer's Miller is portrayed as carnal: the hairs that sprout from the wart on his nose are as red as the bristles in a pig's ear. In *Confederacy*, Ignatius Reilly professes the ideals of Boethian virtue and providential justice as expressed by Chaucer's Knight, but he acts in the carnal mode of Chaucer's Miller. His body parts and actions are described regularly in animal and bestial terms: bristles sprout from his ears (1), his hands are referred to as 'paws' twenty-two times in the text, and his actions include barking, braying, snorting, slobbering, and masturbating while fantasizing about his late pet dog, Rex.

Another major theme within *The Canterbury Tales* that can be

found in *Confederacy* is the role of women in marriage and related issues of sovereignty and dominance in intimate relationships. The tales of the Man of Law, the Wife of Bath, the Clerk, the Merchant and the Franklin—Kittredge’s so-called Marriage Group—focus on this issue (Kittredge “Marriage”). The Man of Law’s Tale praises submissive women. In response, the Wife of Bath’s Tale answers the question: What is it that women most want in marriage? The answer is sovereignty, or control, and when that tale’s despairing knight submits to the hag’s sovereignty, she magically turns into a beautiful young wife.

Within *Confederacy*, this dominance theme is manifest in the motif of the womb: some characters control other characters through the use of a symbolic womb, and part of the resolution to the book is the departure of each trapped character from that dependence (Gardner, “Midst” 88; Lambert 1-17). In the case of Ignatius, the reader’s expectation that the womb maintainer is dominant is inverted: Ignatius fights to stay in his immature state, manipulating his mother to keep her caring for him. The book’s overall plot follows her long struggle to achieve independence by symbolically ejecting him from that womb. In the case of the Gus Levy, Gus is oppressed, emasculated, and enwomed by his aggressive wife. When Ignatius’s prank letter threatens a lawsuit against Levy Pants, Mrs. Levy loses sovereignty and reverses the magical transformation seen in the Wife of Bath’s Tale: “Mrs. Levy grabbed the letters from Mr. Gonzalez. She read them and became a hag” (236). Specifically, she is shocked by the idea that Gus will become dominant (321).

Both Chaucer and Toole employed the genre of mock romance and shared a fondness for parody. For example, in the Wife of Bath’s Tale, the Arthurian knight, instead of rescuing a lovely

damsel in distress, is himself in distress and is rescued by a hideous damsel. *Confederacy* too offers a romantic parody. Ignatius blunders his way through the book, failing in his attempts to start two crusades and to rescue a fair maiden—his imagined Boethian scholar. He starts his crusades not to impress “Minkoff, my lost love” (6), but to confound her. When Myrna finally is confounded by his telegram about organizing Sodomites for Peace, she appears with her white Renault and saves Ignatius from being hauled off to the mental hospital. The knight is again rescued by the damsel. Both Elizabeth Bell (19) and Patteson and Sauret (84) compare *Confederacy's* mock-epic and picaresque qualities to Cervantes' *Don Quixote*; yet, the evidence in the *Toole Papers* points to Chaucer.

Disorder within *The Canterbury Tales* and *Confederacy*

In Chaucer's Knight's Tale, the planetary god Saturn is a force that disrupts earthly order. The tale features parallel action between, on the one hand, knights contesting over the hand of a young maiden, and, on the other hand, planetary gods contesting over the fates of the knights. Worldly order is represented by the rule of the wise duke Theseus. Theseus has imposed order and justice on the rivalry between the two love-struck knights, Palamon and Arcite, by ordering that a tournament be held and that the winner of the tournament will get the maiden Emelye's hand in marriage. Venus and Mars dispute over which knight should prevail, because Venus has indicated to Palamon that he will marry Emelye, while Mars has indicated to Arcite that he will win the tournament. Saturn intercedes in the dispute with a solution: he will cause Arcite to fall from his horse and die after his tournament victory, thereby allowing both prophecies to be

fulfilled. Saturn disrupts Theseus's orderly process and upsets the worldly affairs of the tournament, allowing Palamon to get the girl. During the debate of the gods, Saturn explains some of his influences:

Myn is the drenchyng in the see so wan;
 Myn is the prison in the derke cote;
 Myn is the stranglyng and hangyng by the throte,
 The murmure and the cherles rebellyng,
 The groynynge, and the pryvee empoysonyng;
 [...]
 Myn is the ruyne of the hye halles,
 The fallynge of the toures and of the walles

(Chaucer I. (A) ll. 2456-2460, 2463-2464)¹⁵

During Toole's academic career, Saturn was viewed by some purely as an agent of disorder. In 1957, Charles Muscatine wrote, "Saturn, disorder, nothing more nor less, is the agent of Arcite's death" (190). This agent of disorder nevertheless serves as part of a broader pattern of ultimate benevolence in the universe: in the Knight's Tale, Saturn's disruption of order resolves to a happy marriage and to a peace between Athens and Thebes. Lumiansky himself associated the planetary gods with the Boethian hierarchy whereby Fortune and Nature serve Destiny, which is the agent of divine Providence ("Philosophical Knight" 56; *Sondry Folk* 38). Boethius's vision that the immediate injustice of the mutable

¹⁵ This is the edition of Chaucer's works that Toole possessed at the time of his death, according to Faust's list (box 5, folder 5).

world serves an ultimate benevolence beyond it is represented by the fact that the orderly society is achieved through and despite Saturn's disruptions.

Just as Saturn is identified as the agent of disorder in the Knight's Tale, Ignatius is identified as the agent of disorder in *Confederacy*, where he causes his own misfortunes and disrupts the lives of the other characters. When his mother after years finally enters his room and sees his littered copybooks, she asks, "Ignatius, what's all this trash on the floor?" He replies: "That is my worldview that you see" (41). At Levy Pants, he discards the alphabetic files, destroying the order of the official record (98-99). He compares opening his door to opening Pandora's Box (101). He decries his own misfortunes and prays to Fortuna to improve his situation, but each misfortune is the result of his own behavior, especially lies that he has told, as demonstrated by Gardner (*Comedy* 121).¹⁶

Ignatius's disorder also disrupts the lives of others and changes their fortunes. Prior to the beginning of the book, Ignatius has exploited his mother, leaving her in financial straits after paying for his education. In the book's opening chapter, Ignatius resists arrest and, with the assistance of his mother, tricks Patrolman Mancuso into arresting the upstanding Claude Robichaux.

¹⁶ This interpretation of *Ignatius as Disorder* is supported by the only statement Toole made to Byrne about *Confederacy*. Byrne described talking to Toole about the book: "he [Toole] smirked and he says, well it's about somebody like you. I said what do you mean, and he says somebody who causes disasters but is untouched by them" (Palumbo 73).

Mancuso's superiors then punish Mancuso with humiliating assignments. The fates of both Robichaux and Mancuso have spun downward. Later, Ignatius's prank letter drives down the fortunes of the Levy's, forcing Gus to face possible financial ruin. George's fortunes are riding high until Ignatius uses George's pornography to blackmail him (248). In the book's climax, Ignatius wrecks the striptease act at the Night of Joy, which provides the opportunity for the arrest and imprisonment of Lana Lee. As Irene says, "Whatever went wrong, Ignatius done it. He makes trouble everyplace he goes" (313).

In a footnote to his study of Toole, Percy, Boethius, and Kierkegaard, Simon observed that Ignatius Reilly personifies disorder and represents Fortuna herself, possessing some of her traditional qualities: he spreads disorder, and he is proud, unclean, dishonest, vindictive, and uncertain on his feet (113). Perhaps a more accurate statement is that Ignatius acts as Fortuna's Wheel incarnate: he is described as "spherical" (245), and he careens into people like a human bowling ball. For example, during the homosexual rally, Ignatius is pushed by the violent lesbians into a partygoer. As one of the lesbians says, "Hey, you knocked that bitch of a cowboy over like a tenpin" (278). This idea is consistent with Patteson and Sauret's observation that Irene gives up drinking for bowling, which they viewed as an aggressive symbol (83).

One can extend their point: Irene's bowling accompanies her increasing control of her fate and her independence from Ignatius. When she finally tells Ignatius to go to hell, she is wearing bowling shoes (293). Ignatius as the Wheel of Fortune spins the fates of the other characters when he comes in contact with them, but their bowling gives them the power to resist him. Indeed, Patteson and Sauret display the idea of Ignatius as Wheel visually

when they provide a graph of the subplots within *Confederacy* that has Ignatius in the center, connected to the surrounding subplots by spokes as though he were the plot's hub (78).

Beyond the motif of Ignatius as the agent of disorder, he is associated with all but one of the fates of Saturn as described in the Knight's Tale: drowning, prison, strangling and hanging, rebellions of the lower classes, and collapsing structures.¹⁷ Irene's accident occurs when her car knocks the support out from under a French Quarter balcony, which collapses (23). Ignatius's "Crusade for Moorish Dignity" at Levy Pants is a rebellion of the lower classes. There are no drownings, hangings, or strangulation in *Confederacy*, but references to them abound. When Ignatius meditates on the Mississippi River and its significance, he points out that many have drowned in its polluted waters (103). As he flees with Myrna, he cautions her against going to Mandeville: "Barges are always hurtling into that causeway. We'll plunge into the lake and drown" (336). As for strangulation, Ignatius describes vending hotdogs in the French Quarter thus: "Symbolically, a

¹⁷ A detailed investigation of the Saturnine qualities of Ignatius can be found in my essay "The Dialectic of American Humanism," which studies the connection between *Confederacy* and Marsilio Ficino's theory of *the Genius as a melancholy child of Saturn*. An exemplary quote from Ficino that relates to Ignatius's dichotomy between the ideal and the carnal is: "Saturnus non facile communem significat humani generis qualitatem atque sortem, sed hominem ab aliis segregatum, divinum aut brutum, [...]" (Klibansky 253). A possible influence here is Lyly's play "The Woman in the Moone" (see above section on Lyly). There is no evidence of Ficino himself in the *Toole Papers*, or of Paul Oskar Kristeller, the likely source of this theme.

Desire bus hurtled past me, its diesel exhaust almost strangling me” (197). When Ignatius traps George into staffing the hotdog cart, George feels himself choking (248), and when Ignatius first sees Myrna Minkoff at the end of the book, his initial impulse is to wrap her hair around her throat and strangle her (331).

Prison is the most common Saturnine fate featured in *Confederacy*. Ignatius’s tricks often put characters in a situation where prison is a serious threat, a point previously examined by Pattenon and Sauret (86). Claude is arrested and threatened with prison (12-13), and Irene fears prison due to her financial straits (38). When Angelo Mancuso is punished for arresting Claude, his own downward spin of misfortune finds him locked in a prison-like toilet stall (124). The rebels in Ignatius’s “Crusade for Moorish Dignity” halt their attack because “We got enough trouble without gettin throwed in jail” (124). Finally, in the book’s denouement, Lana Lee is imprisoned (298).

Ignatius’s actions bring changes to the lives of the other characters, but because the relationships around him are oppressive, these changes are potentially beneficial. Lana abuses Darlene and Burma, and she corrupts children with pornography. Mrs. Levy emasculates Gus and tortures Miss Trixie. Ignatius himself exploits Irene and manipulates her into serving him. Through his lies and tricks, Ignatius disrupts the unjust social order and allows persecuted characters the opportunity to overcome their oppressors. Just as the Knight’s Tale ends in marriage and peace, *Confederacy* ends with an expectation of marriage between Irene and Claude and with the hope that worldly affairs will be well managed, as Gus Levy renews his obligations to his business and his employees. In what is perhaps an instance of the novel commenting on its own interpretation (Hutcheon 1),

Myrna calls Ignatius's writings "gems of nihilism," to which he replies, "That is merely a fragment of the whole" (335). Likewise, when Ignatius explains to his mother that the trash on the floor is his worldview, he adds "It still must be incorporated into a whole ..." (41). Chaos serves the cause of the book's comic happy ending, just as Saturn's apparently arbitrary, unjust action is but a fragment of a larger, beneficent pattern in the Knight's Tale.¹⁸

Determinism in *Confederacy*

Now that evidence of Toole's knowledge of Chaucer and some of the parallels between *Confederacy* and *The Canterbury Tales* has been presented, it is reasonable to ask the question: how might this new perspective alter the reader's conclusions about the novel? Many Toole critics have argued about the questions of what the meaning of *Confederacy* is and what Toole's intentions about its meaning were.¹⁹ Some of those proposed meanings have

¹⁸ Another connection between Saturn and chaos is the New Orleans tradition of Carnival. Numerous critics have discussed the carnival elements present in *Confederacy*. While some have used currently popular theories of carnival such as Bakhtin (Williams chapter 5, Lowe 160, Lambert 20) and Stallybrass and White (Gatewood), Toole himself was more likely to have drawn on the popular books about the history of New Orleans Carnival published during his boyhood which reference Frazer's *Golden Bough* and identify carnival with Roman Saturnalia, the feast of Saturn (Tallant 85, di Palma 14). Neither Tallant nor di Palma appears in the *Toole Papers*.

¹⁹ As discussed above, many literary theorists are cautious about claims of intended meaning. To argue for the theoretical importance of the author's intentions for understanding a literary work, one needs to posit

been positive. Ruppensburg saw in its ending the hidden workings of a God none believe in (125); Patteson and Sauret saw Ignatius's psychological liberation (86); and Helga Beste saw Ignatius as finally finding a way out of the separation and confinement that (*a la* Foucault) socially define his madness (174-5).²⁰ McNeil viewed the novel as paradoxical: positive yet teetering on the brink of "unredeemable pessimism" (47). Other critics have seen a more thoroughly negative meaning. Elizabeth Bell interpreted Toole's vision as dark: "Toole saw himself as inevitably one of the dunces doomed to the deceptions . . . of a hostile world" (22). Britton declared Toole a determinist who shared the later Twain's pessimism regarding the inevitability of fate and the futility of social progress (23). Ronald Bell saw Toole as a nihilist (33). Simon interpreted *Confederacy* as, "among other things, a four-hundred-page suicide note" (104) that refuted Walker Percy's positive ending to *The Moviegoer*. My own view is positive, and it derives from this point: if one compares Chaucer's technique for handling the question of fate and free will to Toole's technique for

that the work is not internally contradictory and that the author had a consistent set of intentions (Eagleton 64). Despite the theoretical dubiousness of the concepts of 'the text's meaning' and 'the author's intentions,' many practicing critics—including those listed here—find them worth considering.

²⁰ Other positive views of the intended meaning of *Confederacy* exist. Gardner saw *Confederacy* as a "Christian comedy" with the possibility of salvation at its end ("Midst" 90), and Edward Reilly saw Ignatius becoming more engaged with life (11). McCluskey saw the battle of the spirit over the corrupting influence of money in the novel (9), while Rudnicki saw it as being about the process of literary influence itself (293).

the same, one can argue that *Confederacy* presents a view of characters capable of decisive action in determining their fates.

Beyond Chaucer's influence on Toole's use of carnality, dominance, mock romance, and disorder, Toole may have been influenced by Chaucer's technique for incorporating Boethius's philosophical position on determinism and free will into a literary text. This technique involves having the characters believe that they are the victims of fate, while the outcome of the narrative depends upon their freely chosen actions. The text itself contradicts the claims made by characters that they are not responsible for their fortunes. This technique was associated with Chaucer in 1939, was known to Lumiansky in 1955, and could have been presented to Toole in 1957. The same technique can also be found within *Confederacy*: Ignatius loudly declares himself the victim of fate, while the plot moves by decisive actions, including his own. Ignatius first prays to Fortuna, then insults her (“Fortuna, you degenerate wanton!” (292)), but he refuses to see his predicament as the result of his own actions. Again, the road from Toole to Boethius is not direct: it passes through Chaucer.

In the 1939 book *On Rereading Chaucer*, H. R. Patch defended Chaucer against the charge of determinism which earlier critics had leveled against him (chapter 4). Patch saw a spectrum of possible philosophical opinions about the degree to which external circumstances might constrain or control an individual. He reserved the word *determinism* to mean an extreme end of the spectrum which would exclude any trace of free will. According to Patch, determinism makes us all into “irresponsible puppets” for whom moral accountability is an illusion (106). He argued: “If [determinism] is used to connote only a degree of compulsion ...

[then] nearly everyone, the orthodox Christian, the pagan, the modern scientist ... would be a determinist” (104).

The fatalistic declarations within the Knight’s Tale and Troilus’s long monologue in favor of predestination in *Troilus and Criseyde* do not represent Chaucer’s own view, according to Patch, but rather the view of characters who lack wisdom. “[Troilus’s] soliloquy on predestination ... is the perfect expression of his need to put blame for failure on something outside himself” (88). Patch showed that the Knight’s Tale’s Arcite, Troilus, and Criseyde all suffer due to actions that they themselves have chosen: to some extent they have chosen their fates. “When Arcite suffers, we remember that it was in defiance of his oath of brotherhood that he turned rival to Palamon ...” (110). While Lumiansky’s own discussion of the Knight’s Tale emphasizes causes for the major action which are external to the character (“Philosophical Knight” 54-56; *Of Sondry Folk* 35-38), it is nevertheless the case that Lumiansky cited *On Rereading Chaucer* in *Of Sondry Folk* (3, 117), and he could have presented Patch’s ideas on Chaucer’s handling of determinism to Toole during his 1957 course.

In *Confederacy*, just as in the Knight’s Tale, external circumstances constrain the characters, but their fates ultimately result from choices they have made. Ignatius creates opportunities for the other characters, but not outcomes. Irene chooses to reach out to new friends and to force Ignatius out of her life. Gus realizes that Miss Trixie is making a false confession, but he decides to accept it and to grasp the opportunity to take control of his life and his business. Burma Jones removes his sunglasses and writes the Night of Joy’s address on the packages of pornography, enabling Ignatius to find their source. Burma then seizes the opportunity in the climactic scene to show Angelo Mancuso the

evidence against Lana Lee. Angelo perseveres through his toilet stall humiliation and stakes his money on new clothes to make an arrest. As Elizabeth Bell observed, “What resolutions there are in the novel are brought about by the individuals in the novel acting unexpectedly and decisively ...” (19). As in the Knight's Tale, their decisive actions allow the characters to fulfill their fates, good or ill.

As we have seen in the context of Chaucer, the view that blind fortune dominates the human condition does not entail either determinism—in the sense of no free will—or meaninglessness. Toole may have been deterministic in the sense that Britton understood it; namely, Toole may have shared Ignatius Reilly's rejection of the idea that one can improve the human condition through enlightened social progress. That possible concession does not mean that Toole was a determinist or a nihilist in the sense of rejecting the possibility of freely chosen action in the teeth of blind, worldly fortune. *Confederacy*, then, is not a repetition of Boethius directly, as Simon suggested, but a repetition of Chaucer's technique for handling Boethian fate and free will.

Confederacy's ending is positive, but in a qualified way. Claude gets Irene, but he will suffer a fabliau-like surprise when he discovers that she is an alcoholic who cannot cook and that she looks back on her one sex act with horror. Gus has gained control of his life and business, but he still owns a dilapidated factory with an apathetic workforce. Burma gets an award and a job from Gus, but his further success will not be guaranteed. The publicity from Darlene's failed striptease has given her a break, but she literally does not have her act together. Angelo has saved his job, but he is still weak-willed. Ignatius himself escapes commitment to a

mental hospital, but he continues to be an impossible person, and Myrna is not likely to show him the patience his mother had. All of these lucky beneficiaries of Ignatius's chaos may see their fates spin down again. They will have to take their good fortune and make something of it. The chaotic crusader has brought down the old order and renewed life, warts and all.

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Appendix A: Books of Interest listed in the Toole library

Except for the Kerouac book, these are listed in Rhoda Faust's bibliography in the *Toole Papers* (box 5, folder 5). This list does not include books mentioned in the body of the above paper.

Allen, Frederick Lewis. *The Big Change*. New York: Bantam, 1961. Condition: Very poor

Anthony, Katherine. *Queen Elizabeth*. New York: Knopf, 1929. Condition: Poor

Coleridge, Samuel T. *Selected Poetry and Prose*. Paper Ed. New York: Modern Library, 1951. Condition: Notes, fair

Gover, Robert. *One Hundred Dollar Misunderstanding*. New York: Grove, 1961. Condition: Fair, torn jacket

Graves, Robert. *Goodbye to All That*. New York: Doubleday, 1957. Condition: Very poor, losing cover

Joyce, James. *Finnegan's Wake*. New York: Viking, 1959. Condition: Notes. Pages falling out

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Kerouac, Jack. *The Subterraneans*. New York: Grove, 1958. (the book itself at box 5, folder 17) Condition: Fair (HVL)

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McCarthy, Mary. *The Group*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1963. Condition: Fair

Pragmatism and American Culture. Ed. Gail Kennedy. Boston: Heath, 1950. Condition: Notes

- Romantic and Victorian Poetry*. Ed. William Frost. 4th Ed. New York: Prentice Hall, 1954. Condition: Notes, fair
- Salinger, J. D. *Franny and Zooey*. [edition not recorded]. Condition: Notes
- Spencer, Edmund. *The Political Works of Edmund Spencer*. New York: Oxford UP, 1921. Condition: Fair
- Tillyard, E. M. W. *Elizabethan World Picture*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1956. Condition: Fair
- Vidal, Gore. *A Thirsty Evil*. New York: Signet NAL, 1958. Condition: Poor, about to lose cover
- Warren, Robert Penn. *All the King's Men*. New York: Modern Library, 1953. Condition: Fair
- Waugh, Evelyn. *Brideshead Revisited*. New York: Dell, 1945. Condition: Very poor, pages darkening and falling out
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