

**JOHN KENNEDY TOOLE
MANUSCRIPT**

**SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVES
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY**

COLLECTION 23

JOHN KENNEDY TOOLE MANUSCRIPT

John Kennedy Toole's posthumously published novel *A Confederacy of Dunces* is famous in its own right as a "minor classic;" it won the Pulitzer Prize in 1981. But in the literary world Toole and his novel are likewise noted for the long, tortuous journey of the *Confederacy* manuscript from a box in Toole's mother's house in New Orleans to its publication and unexpectedly immense popularity--a journey the whole of which took place after Toole's suicide in 1969. Thelma Ducoing Toole, the author's mother, worked for years after her son's death to get his manuscript published, meeting no success until she decided in 1976 to appeal to Walker Percy, an influential southern novelist then teaching at Loyola University. After months of trying to sidestep Thelma Toole's legendary pestering, Percy accepted the manuscript from her, read and liked it and eventually was instrumental in its publication at LSU Press in 1980.

But from the moment Thelma Toole delivered the manuscript to Percy, the number of people involved began exponentially to increase, and with it the number of manuscripts circulating, as they were retyped from Percy's copy or distributed by Thelma Toole. One can hardly know how many manuscripts were produced in the ensuing years of complications and delays; certainly one cannot identify an isolated manuscript's place in the succession without more information than is currently available. As the scholarship stands, there is only an anecdotal description of the first manuscript as "smudged typescript on onionskin paper," and fragmentary or passing references to the progression from reader to reader, to help with any project of identification. For example, Loyola's Special Collections has another similar manuscript in its New Orleans Review Collection, while several others are to be found in the Special Collections of Tulane University.

This manuscript was donated by Lyn Hill Hayward, a longtime friend of Walker Percy's, and described by her as the manuscript given Percy by Thelma Toole. It is a typewritten draft entitled "Ignatius Reilly" (the name of *Confederacy's* protagonist), with a few penciled edits and blanks where the typist could not identify a word (cf. *Ignatius Rising* pp. 190-1). It is missing pages 3 and 4.

For more information, see: Rene Pol Nevils and Deborah George Hardy, Ignatius Rising: The Life of John Kennedy Toole; and Patrick Samway, Walker Percy: A Life.