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DEAR HUBERT CREEKMORE:
AN ARCHIVAL SEARCH INTO THE LIFE OF A QUEER MISSISSIPPI WRITER

by

Mary Stanton Knight

A thesis submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree

of

Master of Fine

Arts in

Documentary Expression

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ABSTRACT

DEAR HUBERT CREEKMORE: AN ARCHIVAL SEARCH INTO THE LIFE OF A QUEERMISSISSIPPI WRITER examines the life of writer, translator, poet, painter, and trained classical pianist Hiram Hubert Creekmore, Jr. through archival research of collections donated by the author at three public institutions. The thesis explores the private relationships Creekmore had with literary and artistic figures from 1940-1966 and the silence surrounding LGBTQ archives to produce a more extensive biographical work on the author. Creekmore's relationships with a variety of writers, composers, artists, and publishers is examined in order to discover his circle of friends as well as attempt to discover what his life was like as a gay man from Mississippi in post-World War II America. A second component of this thesis, the short documentary film *Dear Hubert Creekmore* explores the author's ties to his childhood home of Water Valley, Mississippi in his novels and poems.

DEDICATION

This work would not have been possible without the support of my family, and I thank them for their encouragement and determination that gave me the drive to continue.

Thank you, Geoffrey and Jackson. You both helped me make the impossible possible.

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I wish to thank my thesis committee for their continued support and guidance throughout this process - Dr. Andrew C. Harper, Dr. Jaime Harker, Dr. Katie McKee, and Dr. Jessica Wilkerson. I'd also like to include a special thanks to Dr. Jaime Harker for starting me on this journey to find out more about Hubert Creekmore. If not for you, Jaime, I likely would not have created this work.

I also want to thank the instructors and members of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture and the Southern Documentary Project for their feedback in our workshops for MFA students. Without the suggestions of Rex Jones, John Rash, David Wharton, and Ava Lowery, among others, this work would not be the quality that it is. Thank you for your generosity with your time and for sharing your knowledge and insight with me.

My research travel and short documentary film was made possible thanks to two film grants from the North Mississippi Hill Heritage Film Area Alliance distributed by the Oxford Film Festival and the Mississippi Film Alliance's Emerging Mississippi Filmmaker Grant. I offer my thanks to these organizations for their support.

This thesis depends on research in the Hubert Creekmore collections housed in three institutions - Archives and Special Collections at the University of Mississippi, the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center at Boston University, and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Secondary materials also came from various university and private

collections. I wish to thank the librarians, research assistants, and collectors who aided me in my quest to discover more about Hubert Creekmore.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Irving Stone wrote that, “Even if there is endless documentation, it would be impossible to know what a man thought inside his own mind... This is where the novelist's creative imagination has to take over.”¹ In the search for information about the life of Mississippi writer Hubert Creekmore, there is a silence in archives similar to the silence that surrounded the LGBTQ community of post-World War II America. As Stone wrote, it is nearly impossible to truly learn about the inner thoughts of a man such as Creekmore, who was a gay man from the South. However, through a close examination of the archived collections on Creekmore, it is possible to suggest a clearer image of the life he led.

Archival research can lead to gold mines of information. In the best of situations there would be tape recordings, video tapes, and reams of correspondence from the subject of the research to and from a variety of people. The ability to hear how someone spoke, to see their mannerisms, and to read the ways in which they wrote to the different people with whom they were connected with is the best a researcher can hope to find outside of having a sit down interview with the individual. Knowing all these things about someone allows for a four dimensional image, so to speak, a well-rounded idea of who someone was. Unfortunately in Creekmore’s case, most of this type of information is missing from his collections or is buried so

¹ "Irving Stone Quotes." BrainyQuote.com. Brainy Media Inc., 2019. 26 March 2019. https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/irving_stone_714118.

deep that my limited access to his archives barely scratched the surface at finding such correspondences and communications.

In order to find out more about Creekmore's life after his military service until his death in 1966, numerous correspondences between friends, business associates, family members were examined as were a travel diary, date books, scrapbooks, and various other items in Creekmore's collections. Parallel to this was my search through the various collections of those I identified as Creekmore's close friends: William Jay Smith, Barbara Howe Smith, Clifford Wright, and Herbert Cahoon. My searches did turn up some useful correspondences, however, the few letters I did find from Creekmore tended to leave me with more questions than answers and wishing for more such correspondence.

Information on Hiram Hubert Creekmore, Jr. was very limited previous to my research on him. What was known was that he was born in January 1907 in Water Valley, Mississippi to Hiram Hubert Creekmore, Sr. and Mittie Horton Creekmore. He was the third son in what would eventually be a family of four - his baby sister, Mittie Elizabeth arriving ten years later. Creekmore attended the University of Mississippi, the University of Colorado, Yale drama school, and Columbia University for a master's degree. He then moved away from the South, wrote a few novels, including one called *The Welcome* that was about "modern marriage," and died of a heart attack while in a taxi cab on the way to JFK airport in May 1966. The poet and Creekmore friend, William Jay Smith published a broadside entitled "To Hubert Creekmore: Who died in a taxi on his way to the airport"² shortly after Creekmore's death.

The discussion concerning Creekmore with members of my thesis committee and other scholars who have studied the writer suggested that he led a closeted life since being openly gay

² Smith, William Jay. *Roanoke Review*: Fall 1967 v.1 n.1:21

in the South during his lifetime was not tolerated. My hypothesis was that Creekmore was identified as closeted in the South, but lived openly in New York City, his main residence for the last decade of his life. My objectives in conducting research into Creekmore's personal life were to create a short documentary film and a thesis paper in which I would produce a larger biographic source on the writer.

In the various collections of Hubert Creekmore's personal and professional writings, I found a tale of a complex man who cared about the political happenings in his home state and across the South, enjoyed the theatre and ballet, had many lifelong friendships with those he met as a young man living in Jackson, and who yearned for travel and adventure. However, it became evident that Creekmore's voice is silent more than not. Historian John Howard notes in his book *Men Like That* the way Creekmore seemed very much like the typical elite white male of his time with his educational background, resume in publishing, and how he presented himself. Creekmore seems to have created a persona for himself as the Southerner who successfully moved to New York and became a published author.³ He is the bachelor uncle, focused on work and too busy with industry parties and engagements to devote time to anything other than simple gardening and constant reading of new books. As Howard said, "the assumption of straightness will persist even in the face of evidence to the contrary." In Creekmore's case, his evidence is in the silence that exists in what he doesn't say to his family, but hints at in letters with his friends and notes cryptically in the pages of his travel diary.

Outside of his letters to his parents and siblings, Creekmore's writings are limited to his rough drafts of poems, short stories, and novels. The one travel diary that he archived at the Howard Gotlieb Research Archive is limited to a few months in 1949. This silence prevents a

³ Howard, John. Brown Bag Panel Discussion. 4 April 2019.

full representation of Creekmore, and it became apparent that in order to learn more about his life, I'd have to research the people he regularly corresponded with. By discovering more about their lives and their relationships with Creekmore, I hoped to find out about the writer and fill in the gaps left by the silence in his archival collections.

2. SILENCE IN THE ARCHIVES

Archives hold memories, stories, photographs, and mementos that are the remaining summary of a person's life and a record that a person existed. "Archives are how we know ourselves as individuals, groups, and societies,"⁴ according to archivist Rodney G.S. Carter. My questions during this research focused on the information Creekmore kept in his personal collections that provided understanding of who he was as a person, and how he identified to those in his most private circles.

I examined three of the five known collections that house sizable amounts of Creekmore's personal and business correspondence. These collections are located at the University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections (UMASC), the Howard Gotlieb Research Archive at Boston University (HGRA), and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH). I also discovered various smaller amounts of correspondence related to Creekmore in Indiana, New York, and Missouri.

Personal letters and correspondence with his family members and friends are housed at UMASC in Oxford, Mississippi, most of which were donated by Creekmore's family members. The bulk of the collection is letters between Creekmore and his parents, which span from the

⁴ Carter, R. (2006). Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence. *Archivaria*, 61(61). Available at: <http://journals.sfu.ca/archivar/index.php/archivaria/article/view/12541/13687>

1940s to Creekmore's death in the mid-1960s, as well as correspondence from friends, fellow writers, and publishing associates.

A second collection of Creekmore's that contains personal correspondence as well as drafts of two of his novels, some Navy publications, and sheet music of works he composed is housed at the MDHA in Jackson, Mississippi. Some of the items in this collection came from Creekmore directly, while other items were donated after his death by relatives overseeing his estate. Letters there date back to the 1930s when Creekmore was attending Yale Drama School and then earning his Master's degree from Columbia University. Eudora Welty's correspondence is also housed there and does contain several letters from Creekmore during the 1940s to the 1950s.

The third and most extensive collection of Creekmore's personal papers is housed at the HGAR at Boston University. Creekmore sent the items that comprise this collection in the year prior to his death. Some items were also donated by his friend and former employer, John Schaffner, who was also the executor of Creekmore's estate. This collection holds numerous drafts of two of his novels, *The Fingers of Night* and *The Chain of the Heart*, unfinished and unpublished poems, short stories, and even a draft of a play adapted from his novel, *The Welcome*. There are also a number of letters to Creekmore from friends such as composer Ben Weber, artist Clifford Wright, writer David Smythe, and poet William Jay Smith. The collection includes several date books, an address book, and a travel journal. After reading the collection's summary, I had high expectations for what I might find there.

There was a fourth collection that intrigued me at the New York Public Library dealing with the Yaddo Artist Residence. Creekmore stayed there on at least one occasion in the early 1950s. Renowned to this day, Yaddo was, and still is, a by invitation only residency that allows

guests to stay for short durations throughout the year. In order to be invited Creekmore had to have recommendation letters, which are housed in the Yaddo collection. His close friends Ben Weber and Clifford Wright were also Yaddo mainstays, and writer Edward Field made mentioned of wild drag parties that occurred there of which Creekmore was a main participant.

There are two other collections concerning Hubert Creekmore in California and Texas. The first relates to Creekmore's extensive work on a biography of Ezra Pound and the second is a collection of New Directions Publishing, a company he worked for during the 1940s. Since these two focused less on Creekmore's personal life, I did not examine these collections.

I wanted to understand how Creekmore saw himself through the materials he archived. However, I had two problems in my research. The first mentioned in the introduction was the limitation of letters by Creekmore to those outside his family. The second is the coded nature in which queer men of the post War World II era lived and communicated.

According to Joshua Burford, Director for Community Engagement of the Invisible History Project, queer political organizations formed in the 1960s, but those were mainly in bigger cities. Any collections containing LGBTQ information likely came from these organizations and went to cities like Los Angeles or New York City. Collections of individuals labeled as queer are rare and most often found in similar cities.⁵

“The problem was that people were skeptical of what the archives would do with their collections,”⁶ said in an interview conducted for this thesis. “It was a well-earned skepticism because a lot of the materials that were donated were either destroyed or mislabeled. There are

⁵ Burford, Joshua. Personal Interview. 8 February 2019.

⁶ Burford, Joshua. Personal Interview. 8 February 2019.

accounts of a person donating materials and then later seeing staff members throw the donations into a dumpster.”⁷

Aside from the concern that materials would even be kept, those that were archived may have been mislabeled or never labeled as relating to LGBTQ materials because of the fluidity of terms people used to identify themselves during this time, said Burford. “Self-identity was very flexible then. People didn’t identify as gay even though that was in the lexicon. There was so much of identity kept undercover and it was so specific to region.”⁸

It is unclear how Hubert Creekmore identified himself. Examination of the contents of his various collections revealed pamphlets about anti-lynching groups, letters to the editor speaking out against Mississippi’s elected officials, brochures from various avant-garde art exhibits, playbills from numerous Broadway and off-Broadway productions, and a vast postcard collection from his overseas travels. There are also numerous letters from queer identifying men with whom Creekmore shared close friendships. Basically, Creekmore was friends with openly queer men. He took part in drag parties. He was very much a part of the scene in which, in the words of Edward Field, “sexuality was very fluid and not as questioned.” The evidence indicates that Creekmore, if given the freedom and security to identify openly as queer would do so. It is worth noting that considering my research was limited by the lack of correspondence from Creekmore to those outside his family unit, this conclusion may or may not be wholly accurate of Creekmore’s definition of himself. However, this conclusion is not a great leap according to Burford. “In these cases you have to do so much reading between the lines. These are intuitive

⁷ Burford, Joshua. Personal Interview. 8 February 2019.

⁸ Burford, Joshua. Personal Interview. 8 February 2019.

leaps that happen when the records remain hidden, but you can be able to speculate with information that can be gathered,”⁹ said Burford.

In 1965, Hubert Creekmore made the decision to leave numerous items that he’d kept throughout his life to the HGRA at Boston University. It is not known if anything was left out of this collection by Creekmore prior to sending it to Boston, nor how much was kept by the archive after arrival. The same can be said for the personal papers he or his family donated to the MDAH in that same timeframe. The collections are not as thoroughly cataloged as for example the Eudora Welty collection which is also housed at MDAH. Whereas letters in that collection are individually filed and protected in transparent sheets, Creekmore’s is listed as unprocessed. The collection in Boston is collected in large boxes, seemingly unprocessed, and at times not labeled correctly. The likelihood that anything was purposefully kept out of these collections that may relate to the LGBTQ community is small given the state of disarray. If anything was kept out it was mostly likely Creekmore’s decision to do so.

If there were other journals or travel diaries that were more explicit in nature than the few writings made by Creekmore that hinted at queer life, the writer may have kept those out of the archives in order to maintain the image he worked so hard to convey. It is clear that Creekmore was very much a part of the queer scene in New York City, but kept that part of his life separate from his family back home in Mississippi. Of Mississippi in the 1950s, historian and author John Howard writes:

While Mississippi has long been considered America’s most repressive locale, the 1950s have long been assumed the most repressive period. And yet through internationally acclaimed works of “serious” literature published at midcentury, novelists Hubert Creekmore and Thomas Hal Phillips and playwright Tennessee Williams, for example, crafted wily individuals challenging the precepts of heterosexual normalcy.

⁹ Burford, Joshua. Personal Interview. 8 February 2019.

Like these fictional characters, their real-life counterparts fashioned circumspect relationships, prudently and judiciously sheltered from destructive forces.¹⁰

Evidence of the double life that Creekmore lead can be seen in the ways he manufactured a public persona versus who he was in private. This can be seen in the materials he kept and didn't keep that involve his novel, *The Welcome*.

The numerous collections that hold Creekmore's letters and papers all have one thing in common - silence when it comes to his second novel, *The Welcome*. Written likely between 1946 to early 1948, the novel centers on Don and Jim, two men who were once boyhood friends in small Ashton, Mississippi. Marketed as a tale of modern marriage, *The Welcome* examines how Don, newly returned from a life in New York City, and Jim, now married to an overbearing wife, work through their feelings for each other after a few years apart. Anthony Slide writes in his book, *Lost Gay Novels* that in *The Welcome*,

“is a love that dare not speak its name. There is no reference anywhere to homosexuality. The author does not even find the need to use queer as an adjective...*The Welcome* is a gay novel that makes no effort to announce what it is all about. Yet in many respects, as a study of gay love in the South, it is far more revealing and far more impressive than, say, Thomas Hal Phillip's *The Bitterweed Path*, published the following year.”¹¹

Creekmore did not use the term “queer” in any of his personal letters, and therefore does not seem unusual that he did not overtly mention homosexuality or queerness in the novel.

Creekmore is subtle in his identification. He is passive, coded and indeed silent when it comes to *The Welcome*. In fact, there is little in his personal collections about the novel except for a scrapbook and numerous loose newspaper and magazine clippings of reviews of the novel or interviews with Creekmore about the work. If not for the scant mentions of how he was working

¹⁰ Howard, John. *Men Like That*. University of Chicago Press, 1999. p. xiv.

¹¹ Slide, Anthony. *Lost Gay Novels*. Routledge Press, 18 Feb. 2003. p.62

on the novel in a handful of letters home to his parents, it would seem as if *The Welcome* magically appeared one day.

In contrast, there are at least three different versions of his first novel, *Fingers of the Night* and his third, *The Chain in the Heart* at both archives in Boston and Jackson, along with numerous short stories that sometimes found their way into the finished novels. Within his collection at the MDAH, I found a few clippings of reviews Creekmore kept on *The Welcome* written by men which ran in various papers such as *The New York Times* and others. These reviews sometimes had a note or underlined passages, but otherwise were rarely commented on.

However, one review by Diana Trilling for *The Nation* was not well received by Creekmore. In fact, he felt the need to reply to her short column review with a five-paged-typed “Letter to the Editor” that was so long the editors were hesitant to print in its entirety. It seems that Creekmore took offense to Trilling labeling his work as homosexual instead of anti-feminism, writing that “the novel is admittedly hard on women; since it is so, I cannot understand why Mrs. Trilling has warped it into something unpleasantly hard on men. She has made it sound like a plea for homosexuality - which it is not - instead of an attack on modern feminism and its destructive effects in our culture.”¹²

Trilling, in return, wrote a short one paragraph reply denouncing Creekmore’s complaints of her review which included, “But I am afraid I am not persuaded that he fulfilled his intention in his book. However, this is surely only fortunate. I think Mr. Creekmore should be glad that by some happy accident he failed to convey in his novel the whole animus against women which his letter expresses.”¹³ The exchange was nothing more than a public showing by Creekmore to turn

¹² Creekmore, Hubert. “A Muddled Reviewer.” *The Nation*. 8 Jan. 1949

¹³ Trilling, Diana. “A Fortunate Error.” *The Nation*. 8 Jan. 1949.

talk away from Trilling's mention of homosexuality to a conversation about the dangers of feminism. Perhaps it was successful, since Trilling is the only reviewer to mention homosexuality that I found my archival search.

However, Creekmore's audience of queer men like Richard Bergen were not fooled by his public denouncement. In a letter dated February 1949, Bergen wrote to Creekmore that *The Welcome* "has substance, feeling, and deep courage." He goes on to ask if Creekmore ever read "Harlan Cozad McIntosh's 'This Finer Shadow.' A work of remarkable genius...based upon the theme you employed so skillfully in your manuscript."¹⁴ Creekmore did as requested and acknowledged Bergen's letter as there is a follow-up from Bergen dated March 1949. In the second letter, he tells the author more about *The Finer Shadow*, which was published by McIntosh's wife after he committed suicide. A review of the book says it "draws upon the Freudian/ psychoanalytic theory of homosexuality as 'inversion', which was conventional wisdom in the 30's."¹⁵ It is also worth noting that Bergen writes that within Creekmore he "finds a paradox though...you write a courageous theme but you fear the opinion of Gide." André Gide was a French author who wrote "a treatise on the legitimacy, salubrity, and expediency of homosexuality, a sexually dissident text for its time,"¹⁶ in his work *Croydon*, which is "considered to be his most important book."¹⁷

There are mysteries surrounding the novel, however two of those which Slide pointed out in writing, "there is no documentation on Hubert Creekmore. Neither is there any record of Ted

¹⁴ Bergen, Richard Letter to Creekmore. February 1949. Hubert Creekmore Collection. University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections.

¹⁵ SchMike, Chad. "This Finer Shadow Review." GoodReads Website. 8 Sept. 2013. Available at: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/18466976-this-finer-shadow>.

¹⁶ Cairns, Lucille. "Gide's 'Corydon': The Politics of Sexuality and Sexual Politics." *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 91, no. 3, 1996, pp. 582–596. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3734086.

¹⁷ Cairns, Lucille. "Gide's 'Corydon': The Politics of Sexuality and Sexual Politics." *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 91, no. 3, 1996, pp. 582–596. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3734086.

Rearick, the man to whom he dedicates *The Welcome*,” are not wholly true. There is vast amounts of documentation on Creekmore as evidenced in this work. Also, one exciting breakthrough in my research was discovering the identity of Ted Rearick in that he was Creekmore’s editor at Appleton Century. There are certainly aspects of Creekmore’s life that are unknown and may never be known, however, him hiding his queerness or what Burford calls a “double life” was not usual during his lifetime.

“There is an expectation of a double life across queer lives. The idea of muddying waters fit in perfectly in that time, and someone like Creekmore leading a double life was part of the deal - this idea that you had to have a normal life in public,”¹⁸ said Burford. The information found in the various collections on Creekmore can be used to discover more about his life and also provide evidence of the double life he led as a queer man determined to maintain ties with the South while unable to fully live there.

¹⁸ Burford, Joshua. Personal Interview. 8 February 2019.

3. CREEKMORE & FRIENDS

I spent days in the archives formulating questions about Hubert Creekmore such as did he self-identify as gay or queer? Did he know the other famous gay writers of the time? Was *The Welcome's* main character a fictional representation of him? Did Creekmore have a lover? Multiple lovers? The majority of my questions led to more questions, until I began to examine the people who appear again and again in the three main archival collections. I have divided those people into three main groups: the Mississippi Friends & Extended circle, the Literary & Artists circle, and the Potential Lovers circle. A final circle that will be mentioned is comprised of people appearing in one of the three main groups are those listed in Creekmore's last will and testament.

Mississippi Friends & Extended Circle

Numerous letters between Hubert Creekmore and his mother spanning several decades are available in the University of Mississippi library in Archives and Special Collections (UMASC). The two wrote to each other constantly, sometimes more than once a week, but usually at least three or four times a month. Their topics varied from day to day life, the latest gossip, the weather, to how a friend did or didn't like Creekmore's newly decorated apartment, and to who was sick and who may have recently passed.

Archives and Special Collections director Jennifer Ford likened the amount of letters between Creekmore and his mom to being as constant as email exchanges today. "They really did keep in contact with each other, so much so that at some points that their letters crisscrossed

each other,” said Ford.¹⁹ In his letters to his mother, Creekmore was matter of fact and, while he told her of friends he spent time with and parties he attended, the details stayed within the realm of casual conversation. However, the people and events listed in letters to his mother laid the foundation for deeper searches that helped paint the picture of Creekmore’s life and defined who his closest friends were.

When his family moved to Jackson in the 1930s, Creekmore found a new circle of friends that revolved around a connection to Jackson’s Central High School. While he had grown up in Water Valley and attended the University of Mississippi, his family ties expanded to include Eudora Welty through the marriage of her brother Walter to Creekmore’s sister Mittie. Welty, a former student at Central High School, had grown up with several young men who eventually found their ways to a variety of artistic and academic careers. This circle included Frank Lyell, and Lehman Engel among others.

The group of Engel, Welty, Lyell and Creekmore tended to gather at Welty’s house so often to talk about literature and such that they gave themselves a name - The Night Blooming Cereus Club.²⁰ Creekmore and Welty had a long relationship, especially since Welty and her mother spent many holidays with the Creekmore family. My early research into Hubert’s life began with Welty biographies, since he is listed in most all of the books written about Eudora’s life. Biographer Ann Waldron gives a description of him as being “ambitious and tireless” and that he “wrote constantly.” From my examination of Hubert’s archives, I tend to agree with Waldron’s assessment. Creekmore seems to have been almost salesman like in his determination to be a writer. He had many projects going simultaneously at times and dedicated notebooks to

¹⁹ Ford, Jennifer. Personal Interview. Spring 2018.

²⁰ Engel, Lehman. “Engel on Welty.” *Mississippi Sideboard*. 10 Feb. 2017. Available at: <https://jesseyancy.com/tag/frank-lyell/>

keeping track of which stories he sent out to numerous literary publications. He seemed to have an idea for a book or novel at any given moment, and in correspondence with friends usually mentioned a mutual acquaintance he hoped they could connect him with so he could discuss his new idea for a publication.

Eudora Welty scholar and author Suzanne Marrs' book, *Eudora Welty: A Biography* first mentions Creekmore and his friendship with Welty over a shared love of photography. "Late in 1933 Eudora and Hubert Creekmore worked for the Jackson Junior Auxiliary, taking pictures for the organizations *Clarion-Ledger* exhibition."²¹ The two frequently entered photography contests held by Jackson newspapers, and Creekmore kept the clippings of the contest outcomes. Creekmore is also cited as being the one Welty consulted with prior to sending out her stories for publication. He was supportive of her work, commenting that "Death of a Traveling Salesman" was "very swell indeed."²²

According to Marrs, the group of Jackson friends enjoyed "literature and the theater and the New York scene, hearing both classical music and jazz," and engaging in "activities that Lehman eventually labeled camp."²³ The love of camp followed Creekmore throughout his life according to Edward Fields, a friend of the writer from their time at Yaddo in the 1950s. Fields told me about the camp activities that went on at the artist residency during an interview in the summer of 2018. The definitions of camp varies, but Sontag's definition is likely the closest to how Creekmore and his Yaddo friends used it:

Sontag refers to camp's propensity for excess, the love of the exaggerated, and the spirit of extravagance: "Camp is a woman walking around in a dress made of three million feathers." Or a headpiece made of bananas. In Busby Berkeley's *The Gang's All Here*, Carmen Miranda sported a colossal, banana-plumed headdress while singing "The Lady

²¹ Marrs, Suzanne. *Eudora Welty: A Biography*. Harcourt Press, 2005. p.42.

²² Marrs, Suzanne. *Eudora Welty: A Biography*. Harcourt Press, 2005. p.52

²³ Marrs, Suzanne. *Eudora Welty: A Biography*. Harcourt Press, 2005. p. 45

in the Tutti-Frutti Hat”: “Some people say I dress too gay, but ev’ry day I feel so gay, and when I’m gay, I dress that way. Is something wrong with that?”²⁴

According to Field, Creekmore and two other friends were at times ask to keep the “camp” down by Yaddo director Elizabeth Ames while at the communal dinner table. He said also that Creekmore would play piano for composer Ben Weber, who would dress in drag as opera divas in private parties Fields knew about but was not invited to join.

Of Creekmore’s sexuality, Marris writes that “Of course, Eudora had many close and enduring friendships with homosexual men. Among her youthful friends in Jackson, a number were or were considered gay (Hubert Creekmore, Lehman Engel, Frank Lyell)...”²⁵ The passage gives particular insight into Creekmore’s personality, going on to say that Welty had “at times bemused distance from, at times discomfort with, men and women who self-consciously flaunted their homosexuality.”²⁶ Another Welty biographer Ann Waldron writes that “eventually, everyone knew that Lyell, Creekmore, Engel, and [John] Robinson were all homosexual.”²⁷ Evidence of these claims isn’t given by either author, although Waldron does write that Hubert “took an active part in the Little Theater, which was a very social group.”²⁸ Historian and author John Howard uses oral histories to construct a narrative about the lives of queer men in the pre-World War South in *Men Like That*. Of Creekmore’s sexuality he writes that “Ron Knight remembers meeting Creekmore, an avid bourbon drinker, at several Jackson parties. Creekmore was in Knight’s view, a closet case.”²⁹

²⁴ Dansky, Steven F. “On the Persistence of Camp.” *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide*. 1 March 2013. Available at: <https://glreview.org/article/on-the-persistence-of-camp/>.

²⁵ Marris, Suzanne. *Eudora Welty: A Biography*. Harcourt Press, 2005. p. 207

²⁶ Marris, Suzanne. *Eudora Welty: A Biography*. Harcourt Press, 2005. p. 204

²⁷ Waldron, Ann. *Eudora Welty: A Writer’s Life*. Doubleday, 1998. p.57.

²⁸ Waldron, Ann. *Eudora Welty: A Writer’s Life*. Doubleday, 1998. p. 62

²⁹ Howard, John. *Men Like That*. University of Chicago Press, 1999. p. 192

While Hubert might have taken part in camp activities with friends, otherwise he seemed very careful of revealing much about his sexuality. According to Howard, Creekmore crafted himself as a successful, confident, and well-educated man.³⁰ In newspaper articles that Hubert kept, he does talk about his hobbies of gardening and painting, however what he doesn't mention is how he also kept ledgers detailing to the penny the amount of money he spent on household needs. Nor does he mention his struggles to find work and depending on loans from family members or places to stay at friends' homes. It appears that Creekmore was well aware of the need to project a public image of confidence and class, while privately he was living in near-poverty conditions.

Creekmore's various personal collections have clippings of letters to newspapers in which is voiced his disdain of the leadership in Mississippi, particularly that of Theodore Bilbo. According to Waldron, in 1955, Creekmore wrote that "Mississippi is disgusting and frightening with its segregation fanaticism and I'll be glad to get away from it...Furthermore, it was all very dull."³¹ His thoughts on the state didn't change much during his life. In 1962, Hubert told Eudora he was not coming home for Christmas "because he couldn't stand having family and friends chastise him about being a brainwashed-intellectual who doesn't love Ross Barnett."³² It is worth noting that in the 1960s, Mississippi police enforced sodomy laws more than any other state according to the historian John Howard. "It was a troubling time with crackdowns on bathrooms and tea rooms in attempts to find homosexual behavior."³³ Creekmore likely did not feel safe in his home state because of this and thus had one more reason to stay away.

³⁰ Howard, John. *Men Like That*. University of Chicago Press, 1999. p.198-199

³¹ Waldron, Ann. *Eudora Welty: A Writer's Life*. Doubleday, 1998. 242

³² Marrs, Suzanne. *Eudora Welty: A Biography*. Harcourt Press, 2005. p. 294

³³ Howard, John. Brown Bag Panel Discussion. 4 April 2019.

Other than Welty, Hubert had a long friendship with fellow Mississippian Frank Lyell. There are dozens of letters from the University of Texas in Austin professor to Hubert that span from the 1940s up until Creekmore died in 1966. A friend to Welty since high school, Lyell was described as “such a sissy that even his own brother made fun of him.”³⁴ He was also considered “the most sociable, most amusing member of Eudora’s crowd” who was “funny, charming, and extraordinarily bright.”³⁵ Lyell wrote to Creekmore about art exhibits, books he’d read, theater productions, and gallery showings. He included items like brochures, magazine articles, and news clippings with markings and circles around things he found interesting and wanted to draw Creekmore’s attention to reading. If Lyell had a social media account, he’d be a wizard at Facebook and tagging people. His handwriting is so tiny, and he used every inch of space available on the postcard. Lyell also wrote such lengthy comments that the words are meshed together. I feel like there is so much more to the friendship between Frank and Hubert, but time constraints kept me from being able to dig in to the correspondence from Lyell. There is certainly a lot of history between them, with their letters spanning over twenty years. However, something did seem to occur in 1965 because Creekmore apparently stopped writing to Lyell, although he kept all the letters Frank sent. A persistent Lyell asked in one letter, “When will there be a spring thaw in the winter silence?”³⁶

There are three more Mississippi friends that I feel the need to mention, although my information on them is sparse. James “Jimmy” Wooldridge was an insurance man who eventually worked at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Wooldridge joined

³⁴ Waldron, Ann. *Eudora Welty: A Writer’s Life*. Doubleday, 1998. p. 4

³⁵ Waldron, Ann. *Eudora Welty: A Writer’s Life*. Doubleday, 1998. p. 56

³⁶ Lyell, Frank postcard to HC. Hubert Creekmore Collection. Howard Gotlieb Research Archives.

Welty and Creekmore often in gatherings at Welty's house as far back as the 1930s.³⁷ Like Eudora and Hubert, Jimmy occasionally appeared in productions at the Little Theater³⁸ and visited New York regularly. His letters give updates on Welty and the health of the family as well as insight into Creekmore's life, such as when he wrote that Hubert's mom "will have a fit if you don't come home for Christmas. Just warn the family that discussions will be confined to subjects such as cooking and things of a Yuletide nature."³⁹

In the 1950s, Creekmore and Wooldridge were part of a group called the Basic Eight, which also included Eudora Welty, Charlotte Capers, then assistant director of the Mississippi Department of History and Archives, Frank Lyell, and Major White.⁴⁰ Capers and White are two people that also come up again and again in Creekmore's archives. And while there are letters from Wooldridge and Capers, Creekmore talked of White with others, but didn't seem to archive any letters from him. The relationships between Wooldridge and White and Creekmore are ones that I'd also like to research more since I believe the three men were close throughout their lives.

The friendship between Creekmore and Engel appeared to be more of an acquaintance considering the letters from Engel in Creekmore's collections. The two corresponded more while both serving in World War II, when Engel did what he could to help Creekmore get a stateside post. After the war and once he was living in New York, Engel introduced him to Jerry Dale and Joe Morris, two men who are frequently listed as dinner companions in Hubert's datebooks.⁴¹ Creekmore's close friendships with Dale and Morris are two examples of those he formed after

³⁷ Marris, Suzanne. *Eudora Welty: A Biography*. Harcourt Press, 2005. p. 47

³⁸ Waldron, Ann. *Eudora Welty: A Writer's Life*. Doubleday, 1998. p.62

³⁹ Letter from JW to HC. 1963. Hubert Creekmore Collection. Howard Gotlieb Research Archives.

⁴⁰ Marris, Suzanne. *Eudora Welty: A Biography*. Harcourt Press, 2005. p.214-215.

⁴¹ 1961 Datebook. Howard Gotlieb Research Archives. Boston University.

he ventured out of Mississippi, but also of how a number of such new circles connected back to his home state.

Literary & Artistic Circles

Through Welty, Creekmore met husband and wife poets William Jay (Bill) Smith and Barbara Howe Smith, both of whom wrote poems about him after his passing. As mentioned previously, Creekmore's connection with Engel led him to close friendships with Jerry Dale and Joe Morris and both were constant dinner or lunch companions during his years spent living in New York City. While at either Yale Drama School or Columbia University, Creekmore likely befriended writer David Mynders Smythe. From Memphis, Smythe eventually settled in New Orleans with his partner Stephen Rome and remained lifelong friends with Creekmore, eventually serving as pallbearer at his funeral. While at Yaddo, Creekmore met the eccentric painter Clifford Wright and composer Ben Weber. The two were mainstays at the artist colony in upstate New York and remained pen pals with Creekmore into the last year of his life. Fields recalled in his book how, "In the privacy of their rooms Ben [Weber] and Hubert held drag parties where Clifford [Wright] joined them."⁴²

While I have been successful in learning more about Weber and Wright, I am very much interested in learning more about David Smythe, since I know that Creekmore likely stayed at Smythe's New Orleans home while writing *The Welcome*. I believe the two met possibly as early as the late 1930s while Creekmore was either at Yale Drama School or at Columbia. The two shared another long friendship and there is hope that Smythe possibly kept letters from Creekmore, which I assume would be very insightful. I'd also like to spend more time in the

⁴² Fields, Edward. *The Man Who Would Marry Susan Sontag: And Other Intimate Literary Portraits of the Bohemian Era*. University of Wisconsin Press, April 2007. p.49

Schaffner collection at the University of Boston to possibly unearth more on the connection between Creekmore and John Schaffner.

Possible Relationships

The literary scene of the Cold War era included many gay writers such as Charles Isherwood, Stephen Splendor, Gore Vidal, Speed Larkin, Truman Capote, and so on. In the early 1940s, Creekmore worked for New Directions Press and did come into contact with some of these men, however, most of his interaction with them seemed limited to brief encounters at theatre openings or cocktail parties. He writes of an encounter with Stephen Splendor while on vacation in Europe, mentioning in a travel diary that he saw him while in Venice. Creekmore speaks of Splendor as an admirer, wishing the writer knew more of him than he did of Splendor. There is more of a connection with Speed Larkin, although the details are murky due to lack of correspondence on this individual from Creekmore to his friends. In one of two letters I received from a Clifford Wright collector in the Netherlands, Creekmore talks of spending time at the Hartford Foundation in Pacific Palisades, another artist colony, with Larkin. Creekmore was less interested in being around the writer saying that “Speed only wanted to talk about sex.”

There are two individuals that seem to skirt around the literary world in which most of Creekmore’s friends traversed. One name that appears in Creekmore’s travel diary is W. Miller Wilcox. From my research, I gathered that Wilcox was an architect Creekmore met while on holiday in Europe around 1949. The two spent time together in France and Italy, sightseeing and “laughing at a male who offered himself as a companion via walking past them often and casting his eyes over and hesitating.” Creekmore and Wilcox shared a “full round of dinner courses around St. Germain des Paris area” and a “late night out ending at Prizpol Bar” leading to the “next day Miller and I got out to lunch and then to the Eiffel Tower.” When Wilcox traveled on

to Rome without him, Creekmore wrote “another relief from the general faltering flattering and indecision of his personality - and I have a single room.”

In a letter to future Morgan Library curator, Herbert Cahoon dated June 21, 1950, Creekmore tells Cahoon to “don’t date yourself and Miller up during the week of 28-July 5 so we can convene.” It appears Wilcox and Creekmore did indeed continue their friendship well after their time together in Europe as noted in this letter as well as by the postcards from Wilcox years later housed in Creekmore’s various collections. Cahoon’s New York Times obituary dated May 17, 2000, stated he was survived by friend, W. Miller Wilcox of New York.

Another often mentioned person in Creekmore’s letters home was Chuck Schrader. Possibly a former model or actor, Schrader and Creekmore met sometime during the late 1950s with the first mention of him being in a letter dated April 5, 1956. From late 1958 to 1960, Creekmore mentions Schrader constantly in his letters to his mother, writing in January 1960 of how Chuck liked a glass dish that seems to have been a Christmas present from Creekmore’s mom and that a thank you note was on the way to her. Creekmore writes of spending time with Schrader as the two shared meals and watched various television shows together like Alfred Hitchcock among others. They lounged on Schrader’s rooftop during the summers in New York City, celebrated Creekmore’s birthday at a restaurant in Greenwich Village and “listening to beats in coffee shops.”

The pair scouted for apartments for Creekmore and attempted to secure a place in the same building as Schrader. Creekmore wrote that there was confusion when Schrader said a unit was available but the woman over the building said there wasn’t anything available in the price range quoted. While on a trip home to Mississippi, Creekmore bought several items including “elegant silver” and a red decanter set to decorate his new apartment. He wrote to his mother that

Chuck didn't like the items, especially hating the red decanter and that he wanted it all gone. Most of Creekmore's references to Schrader occur during the first half of 1960 and steadily dwindle until one last mention of him in March 1961, in which Creekmore writes that he "never see[s] Chuck anymore, not even passing down the street."

Those in Creekmore's Last Will & Testament

Through Welty's biographies, I was able to see the faces of some of Creekmore's friends who are listed in his last will and testament, such as insurance salesman/archives employee Jimmy Wooldridge and Charlotte Capers, the longtime director of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. They along with Eudora Welty, Frank Lyell, David Smythe, Stephen Rome, and John and Perdita Schaffner are also listed. Edward Field wrote of that Creekmore "worked in New York City for literary agent John Schaffner who, in spite of being gay, was married to Perdita, the daughter of lesbian poet H. D," and that "when [Field] visited Schaffner at his office on 3rd Avenue, [he] couldn't fail to notice the back room with a big ramshackle sofa where his encounters with male hustlers took place."⁴³

I know some information about these people and how they fit in Creekmore's life. However, I am unable to find as much information as I'd like on Smythe and Rome. I'm also lacking information on Bill Middlebrooks and Major White, the last two people listed in Hubert's will. As previously mentioned, Creekmore talks about White in his letters home, but there isn't much correspondence from White to him. When it comes to Middlebrooks, there are letters and a newspaper clipping of the two taking part in a panel discussion that gives some evidence of their shared passions for literature. I believe Middlebrooks was from Tennessee, but I have not been able to research his life given the time constraints.

⁴³ Fields, Edward. *The Man Who Would Marry Susan Sontag: And Other Intimate Literary Portraits of the Bohemian Era*. University of Wisconsin Press, April 2007. p.50

More research into the people listed in Creekmore's will would likely provide a wealth of information that could give insight into more of his life. These were people he felt the closest to, I believe, and most of them were in his life for at least thirty years if not longer. He shared life experiences with them, and I believe they were the people who truly knew the many facets of Hubert Creekmore.

4. DEAR HUBERT CREEKMORE

As a student in MFA in Documentary Expression program at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi, I knew that part of my thesis project would likely lead to me creating a short documentary film about Hubert Creekmore. The film that I produced entitled *Dear Hubert Creekmore* uses a combination of poetic and performative modes, a two-person narrative structure, and various editing and stylistic approaches. The structure is in the form of a letter with me as the narrator addressing Creekmore and using passages from his novels and poetry as responses to my questions. The following section will give the reasons why I decided on these particular modes and narrative structures, while also pointing out the editing and stylistic techniques used throughout the film in greater detail.

My first thought for a film about Creekmore was to find primary or first-hand sources to interview, such as family members, friends, and experts on his works or the time frame in which he lived. Unfortunately, most of the people who knew Creekmore personally have passed away, since his siblings have passed as well as most of his friends. I did find two first-hand connections and several secondary connections to him though; and I also found numerous experts to speak about the time period in which Creekmore lived. I tracked down writer Edward Field, the man who had spent time at Yaddo during one of Creekmore's stays there, and recorded a telephone interview with him.

I also contacted students of Ben Weber as well as a collector of Clifford Wright's letters. Although I didn't gain much more insight about Creekmore from them, I did get learn more

about the lives of his friends. I interviewed Creekmore's niece, Mary Alice Welty White, who is the daughter of his late sister Mittie, and obtained from her numerous childhood photos of him and his siblings as well as photos from his travels and time in New York. Although I had one solid on camera interview, I did not quality of my audio recording with Fields. This issues, along with the volume of information I was learning about Creekmore made me rethink my initial idea of using interviews as part of my film. I realized early on that the life of Hubert Creekmore, even when using *The Welcome* as a center point, was not going to be easily translated into a short documentary film.

I determined that I wanted to expand my skills as a filmmaker and produce something that was not the standard "talking head" documentary, also known as a participatory documentary, that I had more experience in creating. The participatory documentary is one that includes experts who appear on camera and give soundbites on a subject, either fully developing the narrative of the piece or being interspersed with either the filmmaker's voice or another central narrator voice that guides the viewer through the story. I have both a bachelor's and a master's degree in broadcast journalism and have spent many years as first a news videographer and then a broadcast communications specialist. During both these careers I created versions of participatory news stories and short public relations films highlighting students and/or programs of study. It's my comfort zone of filmmaking and I wanted to venture away from that.

I was also hesitant to use the participatory film style because of the complex nature of Creekmore's life and of his various relationships with his family and his friends. Fellow filmmakers shared with me that short documentaries under fifteen minutes in length are more

likely to be selected by film festivals than those between fifteen to twenty minutes long. I had received a film grant by the Oxford Film Festival to fund the creation of my film and knew that I wanted to produce one at or under the fifteen minute mark for that screening. It also seemed reasonable to maintain that length in any other versions of the film since I intended to submit it to other festivals after completing my MFA. I knew going in that a full biography of Creekmore was not going to work in a short documentary, however, even the idea of focusing on one of his novels such as *The Welcome* was too limiting.

The amount of information I had learned about Creekmore was immense, and I knew that I wanted to find a way to convey the most information about him that I could in such a short amount of time. Thus I decided to break out of my participatory mode comfort zone, find a way to make a film that did not use expert voices, and challenge myself to create one that was more abstract in nature. I reasoned that in going back to Creekmore's fiction and poetry, I could highlight major themes in his life such as otherness/queerness, race issues, and religious fundamentalism in a film. My intention was to showcase these various aspects in order to give viewers a better understanding of Creekmore's interests, passions, and what issues he focused on during his life.

Dear Hubert Creekmore, fits in both the poetic and performative modes of documentary filmmaking. For example, it is poetic, which is defined as reassembling fragments of the world poetically,⁴⁴ in the usage of abstract video as black and white still photographs in sections and silence - no natural sound or music - under photographs of Creekmore to represent the silence in his archival collection. It is also performative, defined as stressing subjective aspects of

⁴⁴ Nichols, Bill. *Introduction to Documentary*. Indiana University Press, 2001.

classically objective discourse⁴⁵, in the way pieces of Creekmore's writings are used as dramatic readings set to music and black and white imagery as well as how the narrative structure of the film is a letter to Creekmore from me with the dramatic readings being a response to my questions.

This narrative for the film developed from the questions I found myself asking Creekmore during my time in the various archives in Oxford, Jackson, Boston, and New York. I wanted to know what his childhood was like growing up in Water Valley, and how much influence did the African Americans he might have known have on his novel, *The Chain in the Heart*. Creekmore had a number of pamphlets and newspaper reports that centered on lynching and the plight of African Americans. A fan letter from Richard Bergen noted that he'd like to see how Creekmore being a Southern man would tackle race prior to the publication of *The Chain in the Heart*.⁴⁶

Bergen's letter did not inspire Creekmore to write such stories because he had already amassed a collection of drafts on the subject since his days at Columbia University. However, many of the short stories about African Americans in Creekmore's collection in Boston are about their perils of living under the constant scrutiny and threats of whites. One published story was told from the point of view of a black man as he waited in a jail cell after being caught by an angry mob. The story ends with the man being lynched. I wondered if Creekmore sent Bergen that story or any of the ones similar to it. No doubt he kept at getting his novel published, seeing that as a Southern writer he could claim an area of expertise in race relations.

⁴⁵ Nichols, Bill. *Introduction to Documentary*. Indiana University Press, 2001.

⁴⁶ Bergen, Richard letter to HC. March 1949. University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections.

I also wondered about the impact religion had on Creekmore's life and the basis for the short story he started in graduate school and eventually turned into the novel, *The Fingers of Night*. Water Valley had at least three main branches of Christian churches during Creekmore's childhood there. According to Churchfinder, at the time of this writing, there were twenty Christian churches listed in the Water Valley area code and six of those had addresses along Main Street.⁴⁷ In *The Fingers of Night*, the reader follows the struggle of teenager Tessie to break away from her overbearing, religious zealot father. At the book's open, Tessie has witnessed the near fatal beating of her sister by their father after he caught the older girl kissing her boyfriend. Tessie watches as her sister is put to bed in the family home, tended by and prayed over for a period of weeks by fellow members of their father's beliefs – a woman and her husband.

Tessie's father is never admonished. Instead, he is praised for beating the Devil out of the child and saving her soul in doing so. If she dies, it will mean she was not saved. If she lives, she will be atoned and released of her sins. Throughout the course of the novel, the reader comes to understand that Tessie's mother was also beaten by her father, although she did not repent and so died from her sins. Tessie's life is full of fear and very controlled. I wanted to know if Creekmore felt that way about his own life, and perhaps even fearful of what might happen to him if he attempted to break away as Tessie did.

Lastly, I kept coming back to the lack of rough drafts or short stories for his novel, *The Welcome*, which was then publicized as a tale of modern marriage but now recognized as being similar to several other gay novels published during the 1940s. There are passages in the novel that describe the house Creekmore lived in from the time he was born until he left home for

⁴⁷ Churchfinder Website. <https://www.churchfinder.com/churches/ms/water-valley>.

college. The wooden floorboards, the white lace etched glass door leading to the upstairs balcony, and the large windows that lookout over the main street of town are all there still. In the book, the main characters Jim and Don feel trapped by their hometown. Jim describes the isolation he feels in knowing he is different, while Don yearns to be anywhere but home as he must return to care for his ailing mother. While Jim married, Don had not; and it is his return home that sends Jim into a crisis of identity and place within the community even worse than what he already suffers.

I wanted to know how these characters related to Creekmore, given that he clearly had numerous friends throughout his life who were either self-identified or publicly believed to be gay/queer, such as Frank Lyell, David Smythe, John Schaffner, Clifford Wright, and Ben Weber to name a few. Creekmore owned works by contemporary queer artists of the time, which he in turn bequeathed to his friends after his death. Yet the silence surrounding *The Welcome* as well as the innuendo of Creekmore's private life had me wondering about how guarded of a man he might have been, and how determined he was to disguise his true sexual orientation.

I realized during my research that the numerous questions I had regarding Creekmore were ones that no one other than the author himself could answer. While there were letters that offered insight, Creekmore's own novels and poems gave the best responses to my wonderings. I created the narrative structure of my film as a letter to Creekmore, in which I asked him questions about his life and used selections of his writings as a response to my queries. I set up two different characters in the film - myself as the main voice with Creekmore becoming the second, which would be voiced by an actor reciting the writer's own words. In doing this, my film became less about experts and interviews and focused more on abstract and creative film techniques.

Using the form of a letter as a narrative structure meant I had to find ways to give information to the viewer while avoiding lengthy background or biographical material. One reason was that a person wouldn't write a letter to Creekmore and tell him about his life. Secondly, lengthy information would slow down the flow of the film. I gave myself a parameter this way, knowing that I could rely on my journalism background of asking questions, yet limited how much I could tell instead of ask. This also gave the viewer the ability to draw their own conclusions about Creekmore's reasoning for writing what he did.

The narration is directed at Creekmore as I write how I came to know about him and now wanted to learn more. Since my early understanding of his life came through the letters from him to his family as well as the letters sent to him by friends, I tell him that a letter to him was my inspiration for the film. My questions are divided into topics - religion, racial relations, and queerness as well as touches on his childhood in Water Valley, and passages from *The Welcome*, *A Personal Sun*, *The Chain in the Heart*, and *The Fingers of Night* are used as responses or replies.

Selections from *The Welcome* describe life in the fictional town of Ashton, which is based on Water Valley, as well as the way Jim has a sense of otherness and feeling like an outsider. Poems "Boxcar 388146" and "By the Window" from *A Personal Sun*, relate Creekmore's longing and restlessness. "Boxcar 388146," set inside a train car, is the plea from a soldier for the train to take him and his fellow servicemen safely home, while "By the Window" is about the longing for companionship and the fear of never finding such. Religion and sin is highlighted by Tessie's memory of her mother dying and her father's justification of the righteousness of the killing in the passage selected from *The Fingers of Night*. And the young

black child George, who is at the center of *The Chain in the Heart* is confronted by the family's enraged landlord for stealing a marble to show Creekmore's writing on race.

Since Water Valley is a major player in the film as well, the bulk of footage comes from places around town. While filming there, I kept in mind a feeling of otherness and of being an outsider. Since I am not a resident of the town, this wasn't a hard task for me and I brought with me the vision Creekmore wrote about in his works as well as the freshness of a visitor when noticing the sights and sounds around the business and residential streets. When filming in Creekmore's childhood home, I quickly noticed the white lace etched glass as the one he described in *The Welcome*, for instance. I also felt the oppression Tessie likely felt when surrounded by her father's converts as I noticed all the churches and steeples in every direction I looked. The building mural of a passenger train with a loading dock and a group of children playing marbles took on a whole new meaning for me since reading about George's life being threatened after being falsely accused of stealing one.

I also tried to imagine what the town might have looked like during Creekmore's childhood there, knowing that it had changed considerably since the railroad station and train yard had been demolished years ago. Even with these landmarks gone though, there were remnants of the Water Valley that Creekmore wrote about. There are churches, some businesses, and many houses like Creekmore's own childhood home that were constructed in the early 1900 through the 1930s are still standing. While the town is different, I believe Creekmore would still recognize much of it as the small town he in which he grew up.

There are several editing and stylistic techniques that I used to further the narrative structure and further the sense of otherness that I wanted the film to convey. Sequences narrated by the actor as Creekmore were decolorized to black and white. I attempted to have the majority

of the still frames in these sequences to be more figurative in nature, except in passages from *The Welcome* and *The Chain in the Heart*. Since Creekmore's house overwhelmingly matched several descriptions in *The Welcome*, such shots of the wood-planked floorboards and etched glass were used. Similarly, the mural with the children playing marbles perfectly illustrated the selection from *The Chain in the Heart*. The sequences using Creekmore's writings also utilized still frames as mentioned previously, purposefully giving these sequences no movement so that the viewer is given more time to focus on the image and listen closely to the writer's words. Lastly, there is music in these sequences, however it is a minimal plucking of guitar strings that occurs every other beat and is used to emphasize certain words or moments in the readings.

Contrasting these editing and stylistic techniques were the sequences of my narration that were in full color, had movement, and relied on natural sound under the narrative track. My narration showcased the vibrant colors of present day Water Valley, using shots of flowering plants, cars passing through the business streets, and people walking along the sidewalks or inside stores. Every shot has movement of some kind whether it be a slow zoom, pan, or motion from the subject of the frame. I purposefully decided to shoot interiors of two places in the town with those being Creekmore's childhood home and the queer/feminist bookstore.

All other shots were of exterior locations in which I filmed from the outside of business looking inside their storefronts or along the sidewalks or public spaces of the town. This was done to convey the sense of the outsider looking in, yet not being able to go in, and further the feeling of otherness to the viewer. In these sequences I also relied heavily on natural sound instead of a bed of music. I wanted the viewer to feel as if they were in the town, and so allowed the noise of passing cars, the rustle of trees by the wind, and the sound of birds chirping and cawing to be heard under my narration. A final technique I used was to remove any sound save

the narrator track under photos of Creekmore. This was to imply the silence that surrounded a majority of my research into the writer's private life.

Dear Hubert Creekmore allows a viewer who is unfamiliar to Creekmore's work to be exposed to his writing and have more understanding about his complexities as a queer man from Mississippi. By utilizing the form as a letter as the narrative structure, I can tell about my discovery of Creekmore's life and compare the parallels of it to the characters in writings. I can take the viewer on a tour of his hometown to show the passage of time as well as the slowness of change and progress. Viewers are able to learn about Creekmore's complexities in a simple form through the breakdown of key issues on which he centered his works. The film's poetic and performative modes are showcased by the use of a two-person narrations of my voice and Creekmore's voice, allowing for two tales to intertwine into one story. This along with the various editing and stylistic techniques emphasize the sense of otherness and feeling like an outsider through words, music, natural sounds, silence, and imagery that fully envelope the viewer in Creekmore's story. *Dear Hubert Creekmore* ultimately sets out to give the viewer a glimpse of what it might have been like to live as Creekmore did and leave them longing for and seek out more information about the writer.

5. CONCLUSION

Of course Hubert Hiram Creekmore, Jr. is worthy of more than a few lines in an obituary or verses of poems that spoke of his life ending in a taxi cab on the way to a European destination. However, the mention of how he exited this world is very fitting for a man who seemingly spent his entire life moving from one role to the next as a way to protect and safeguard the most secretive side of himself.

Creekmore did indeed reveal himself to be a chameleon, a man who carefully crafted a resume fitting of his elite status as a member of a well-known family in Jackson, Mississippi, at the early part of the 20th century. The son of a prominent judge, brother to a respected attorney, and practically kin to the famous Eudora Welty, Creekmore had roles thrust on him, and he likely felt weighted down by them when in his home state. He publicly spoke out against the political leaders of the time even though to do so strained the relationships within his family to the point that he dreaded coming to Mississippi for the holidays. However, when it came to his sexuality, he was silent on the subject, perhaps knowing that his outspoken nature was only accepted, and even then only thinly, in certain areas.

The elite status Creekmore held allowed him to attend universities such as Yale and Columbia, giving him an escape from the South and the secrecy of his sexuality. Creekmore found queer friends within the state, yes, but he flourished once beyond the boundaries of the Mason Dixon line. While he might not have reached the success of Capote, Creekmore did thrive

in the post-World War II years when living in New York. There he was able to see the ballet and theatre performances he very much enjoyed as well as go to avant-garde and various art exhibits. There, as his niece Mary Alice Welty White said to me, he was able to live his life, a life he would not have had he stayed in Mississippi.⁴⁸

Hubert Creekmore is a lost Mississippi writer, but more importantly he is a lost queer writer. His silence speaks volumes about the magnitude in which he struggled to find a place for himself in a state that was not only not accepting of men like him, but also determined to expose and destroy the reputations of those deemed to be queer. Creekmore used his elite status and ability to travel to carve out a space outside of the South in order to live the life he wanted as an openly queer man. However, since he maintained close connections within his home state, he remained very protective and secretive of his queerness, even when he was thousands of miles away from Mississippi.

⁴⁸ White, Mary Alice Welty. Personal Interview. July 2018.

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APPENDIX

HUBERT CREEKMORE TIMELINE

January 16, 1907	Hiram Hubert Creekmore, Jr. born at his parents' home on Panola Street in Water Valley, Mississippi
1924 - 1927	Attends the University of Mississippi
1928	Parents move to Jackson, Mississippi
1928-1929	Attends Yale Drama School
1930s	Begins studies for Master's degree at Columbia University - also begins writing novels, <i>The Chain in the Heart</i> & <i>God's Tenant Farmer</i> (later <i>The Fingers of Night</i>)
1940	Graduates from Columbia University Publishes <i>Personal Sun</i> poetry book
1941	Enlists in the U.S. Navy
1942	Ward Island, Corpus Christi, Texas
1943	Publishes <i>The Stone Ants</i>
1944 - 1945	South Pacific
1946	Publishes <i>The Long Reprieve & Other Poems</i> Appleton Century publishes <i>The Fingers of Night</i>
1946 - 1947	Creekmore spent time in Oxford & NOLA writing <i>The Welcome</i> .
Spring 1948	Appleton Century Crofts publishes <i>The Welcome</i>
1948 - 1949	Working at New Directions Publishing New York office
1949 - July 1949	Iowa City, Iowa at the Iowa Writing Workshop –

July - October 1949	European Tour - W. Miller Wilcox
April 28 - June, 1950	Yaddo stay Nom de guerre Owen Masters
Dec. 26, 1950	Hiram H. Creekmore (Creekmore's father) dies
May - June 1951	Yaddo stay
Sept. 1951 - April 1952	Hartford Foundation in Pacific Palisades, California
April - May 1952	New York City working on <i>The Chain in the Heart</i>
Late May 1952	Returns to Jackson, MS
June 1952	Charles Scribner Son's publishes <i>A Little Treasury of World Poetry: Translations from the Great Poets of Other Languages, 2600 B. C. to 1950 A. D.</i>
October - Nov. 1952	New York City
1953	Random House publishes <i>The Chain in the Heart</i>
March - April 1953	NOLA extended stay with David Smythe
July 1953	Yaddo Residency
October 1953	Trip to Florida
Jan. 1956 - May 1956	New York City
Feb. 1958	First mention of Chuck Schrader
August 1960	Trip to St. Martin
March 1961	Last mention of Chuck Schrader
1963	New American Library publishes <i>The Satires of Juvenal</i> (Mentor Classic, MT535)

1965	Donates collections to Boston Library & Jackson, Stops writing to Frank Lyell & Creekmore's mother falls ill
May 14, 1965	Last Will & Testament signed
Jan. - May 1966	Walker publishes <i>Daffodils Are Dangerous</i> Creekmore writes that his doctor says he is in the best health that the doctor has ever seen him. Pays off \$2,000 debt. Books travel to Spain.
May 23, 1966	Hubert Creekmore dies in a taxi cab while on his way to JFK Airport

CURRICULUM VITAE

Mary Stanton Knight

206 Eagles Nest Lane, Oxford, MS 38655

Email: marystantonknight@gmail.com | Films: vimeo.com/marystantonknight

EMPLOYMENT

- 2019+ COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST – University of Mississippi
- 2017+ FILMMAKER – Southern Knight Films
- 2005 - 2019 BROADCAST COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST – University of Mississippi
- 2018- 2019 BOARD VICE PRESIDENT – Theatre Oxford, Volunteer
- 2017-2018 SOCIAL MEDIA MANGER – Theatre Oxford, Volunteer
- 2000 - 2005 VIDEOGRAPHER/REPORTER – WTVA, Inc.

EDUCATION

- 2017 – 2019 MASTER OF FINE ARTS, Documentary Expression – University of Mississippi
- 2010 – 2013 MASTER OF ARTS, Broadcast Journalism – University of Mississippi
- 1998 – 2000 BACHELOR OF ARTS, Broadcast Journalism – University of Mississippi

GRANTS

- 2018 Mississippi Film Alliance Emerging Filmmaker Grant
- 2018 Oxford Film Festival Mississippi Literary Figure Short Documentary Film Grant

CREATIVE EXPERIENCE

DEAR HUBERT CREEKMORE, Short Documentary Film

MATERNAL GRACE, Experimental Documentary Film

CLOSE TO YOU, Experimental Documentary Film

SINGING OUT, Short Music Documentary Film

FOUND OBJECTS: GEORGE TOBOLOWSKY, Short Documentary Film

A FOOD LOVE STORY: LAUREN STOKES, Short Documentary Film

FAULT LINES: MARY ZICAROOSE, Short Documentary Film

CHEF DIXIE, Oral History Podcast

P R E S E N T A T I O N S (SOLO)

2015+ OFFICIAL SELECTION TRAILER, Oxford Film Festival

2019 DEAR HUBERT CREEKMORE, Selection of the Oxford Film Festival

SINGING OUT, Selection of the South Georgia Film Festival

BROWN BAG LECTURE: “DEAR HUBERT CREEKMORE” FILM SCREENING

– Archives and Special Collections at the University of Mississippi

FILM SCREENING/Q&A: “DEAR HUBERT CREEKMORE”

– Public Performance at Oxford Film Festival

“PANEL DISCUSSION & FILM SCREENING: “HUBERT CREEKMORE’S THE WELCOME: GAY MEN OR THE DANGERS OF FEMINIST WOMEN?”

– The Southeastern Women’s Studies Association (SEWSA) in Oxford, MS

FILM SCREENING/Q&A: “DEAR HUBERT CREEKMORE”

– Public Performance at Bozarts Gallery in Water Valley, MS

2018 FAULT LINES, Selection of the UM Film Festival

LYLAH'S LEGACY, Selection of the UM Film Festival

FOUND OBJECTS, Selection of the UM Film Festival

2016 BROWN BAG PANEL: "THE CULTURE OF BREASTFEEDING"

– Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi

2014 GARAGE SALE, Selection of the Oxford Film Festival

2013 THE ARTIFACT, Selection of the Oxford Film Festival

BROWN BAG LECTURE: "THE DEATH OF HOUSE BILL 488" FILM SCREENING

– Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi

P R E S E N T A T I O N S (G R O U P)

2019 SHOOT & SLICE: SOUTHERN MUSIC DOCUMENTARIES

– Crosstown Arts in Memphis, TN

Film screening of "Singing Out" and Q&A with John Rash and Rex Jones

QUEER MISSISSIPPI: ORAL HISTORY PERFORMANCE

– The Southeastern Women's Studies Association (SEWSA) in Oxford, MS

Performance in collaboration with Jonathan Smith, Ellie Campbell, Frankie

Barrett, Sarah Heying, Kaimara Herron-July, Hooper Schultz

PANEL DISCUSSION: "DOCUMENTING HISTORY: THE UPS AND

DOWN OF FILM AND PHOTOGRAPHY PROJECTS THAT FOCUSED ON

HISTORICAL PEOPLE, PLACES AND EVENTS"

– The Southern Studies Conference in Montgomery, AL

In collaboration with graduate students at the University of Mississippi - Jonathan Smith, Derrick Lanois, and Chelsea Loper

2018 AUTUMN SHOWCASE: DOCUMENTARY EXPRESSIONS

– Public Exhibition/Screening at the Powerhouse in Oxford, MS

In collaboration with MFA in Documentary Expression students

QUEER MISSISSIPPI: ORAL HISTORY PERFORMANCE

– Public Performance at Burns Belfry in Oxford, MS

Performance in collaboration with Jonathan Smith, Ellie Campbell, Frankie

Barrett, Sarah Heying, Kaimara Herron-July, Hooper Schultz

SKILLS

Technical Camera: Sony FS5 + Canon 5D & C100 + Panasonic GH5

Editor: AVID Certified Editor + Final Cut + Adobe Premiere

Key Client Relationship Management + Detail-oriented + Adaptable

Flexible + Time Management + Creativity + Teamwork

ACHIEVEMENTS

2019 The Peter Aschoff Award for Southern Music Documentary, “Singing Out” through the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi

Oxford Film Festival Selection Screener

2018 Indie Memphis Selection Screener

Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society

2017 Daniel W. Jones, M.D. Outstanding Team Service Award

2015 Oxford Film Festival Screener

2013 Kappa Tau Alpha Inductee & Top Scholar

2003 First Place in Series, Mississippi AP Broadcast Awards