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**“A big part of the story is lost when
it becomes a movie”:**

Warren Miller's *The Cool World* and Shirley Clarke's Adaptation

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To Mustafa Abd-AlHusain my guardian angel , the greatest man I ever knew.

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ABSTRACT

My thesis will discuss Warren Miller's novel *The Cool World* (1959) and Shirley Clarke's film adaptation (1963). The first part of my thesis will cover the Civil Rights Movement and life in Harlem. In the second part, I will contextualize Miller as a writer and provide an analysis of his novel. In the third part, I will concentrate on the director Shirley Clarke, pointing out her revolutionary story as a woman artist in the time in which she lived and worked. In the fourth and last part, I will briefly discuss novel-to-film adaptation theories and analyze *The Cool World* (1963). While applying McFarlane's approach of adaptation theories in his book *Novel to Film*.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on novel-to-film adaptation, examining Shirley Clarke's film *The Cool World* as taken from Warren Miller's homonymous novel. Since Clarke and Miller have not gained, and this thesis contributes to explore their their life, work, and achievements. My thesis relies on a theatrical frame which reacts against fidelity as a paradigm for interpreting adaptation, a position shared by many scholars, including McFarlane. Fidelity limits the filmmaker's creativity.

In the first part of chapter one, I present The Civil Rights Movement, between the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, as a context for discussing *The Cool World* by Warren Miller, and the film by Shirley Clarke.

In the 1950s many organizations were established that helped in fighting for Black people's rights - such as NAACP, CORE, and The Regional Council for Negro Leadership. Each one of these organizations had its methods for fighting against racism, and they successfully managed to organize effective campaigns like marches sit-ins, protests, lawsuits, etc.

The year 1951, had a great deal of events that I will mention in the first chapter, one of the important ones was building the well-known case *Brown v. Board of Education* that continued for two years. Then in the year 1953, the year when boycotts started, because of the Baton Rouge, LA Bus Boycott, the importance of this boycott is that it inspired the famous boycott in Montgomery. In Baton Rouge's boycott, the leader was accused of betraying his people because he accepted to compromise, I will explain the reasoning behind his decision by using an episode on NPR News by Debbie Elliot. The year 1954, when the Civil Rights activists were more evident, the case *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled in favor of the appellants. That was the year when Warren Miller technically started writing *The Cool World*. And I will explain how that case, in my opinion, influenced Miller. This year was also the year of the Murder trial of Ruby McCollum, which shed

light on the practice of “paramour rights”, this case is also explained based on an article by Kai EL’ Zabar.

As for the year 1955, I will focus mainly on the crimes that were committed against Black people of that year as well as the years that followed. In addition to that, I will cover the Montgomery bus boycott, which was inspired by Baton Rouge’s boycott in 1953. In the Montgomery boycott, there is a recognition of women’s impact, as well as the recognition of Dr, Martin Luther King as a leader for the Civil Rights. After that I will shift the focus towards the right of education, that Black people did not have at the time. I will present Autherine Lucy’s story in this regard, based on her biography in National Women’s History Museum site. Then the year 1957, a short film that was made on All-American News covering the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, took place in Washington DC.

Moving forward in time, the year 1960 plays a big change for Black people and all Americans, in a sense. It is the year John F. Kennedy was elected as the president, I will explain how that happened and how Kennedy’s victory in the election impacted The Civil Rights. As for the year 1961, I will focus on Black people attempting to earn the right to vote. Using *They say I’m Your Teacher*, a short film, as the source for these events. I will close the first part of chapter one with the year 1963, the year *The Cool World* was released in Venice Film Festival and the year Black people and Americans to some extent lost Kennedy.

The second part of the first chapter is mainly devoted to Harlem, where our novel and film are set. Harlem, or as they call it ‘Black Mecca’, witnessed many changes in its population, it was inhabited by different ethnicities along with Black people for more than 200 years. However, Harlem witnessed a change in its future when a subway line was constructed. Philip A. Payton, a real estate agent, was the reason behind Harlem being Black people’s ghetto: he was the one

suggesting to fill the apartments with black people, and the landlords approved because they had no other choice.

Harlem had its impact on The Civil Rights, in fact it was the place in which many civil rights events occurred. In addition to Civil Rights, Harlem had had its golden age that is named 'Harlem Renaissance', in which Black people presented their talents, or, more accurately, they found a place where they can express themselves. In this part, I will present the Black experience in Harlem, and how the housing situation was. Basing the topic on Liliana Bierer's article *Designed in Oppression: The History of NYC Public Housing Mirrors Current Poor Conditions* and *The Nation's* article *No Place Like Home*. I will close this part by explaining how Harlem's situation can impact its people and how Miller and Clarke made use of that.

In the first part of chapter two, I will give an introduction of Warren Miller, and what was his main work and how he gained a reputation of being a Black author, whereas as a matter of fact he was a white author that was interested in Black people's cause and, managed to give voice to Black people in his novels, even gaining James Baldwin's praise. Miller was a white Jewish author, who unfortunately did not gain much recognition because of the topics he wrote about. I managed to retrieve an article written by Glen A. Love, that helped me present Miller's life and writing style thoroughly. Miller's literary legacy is remarkable and his talent showed in his versatility regarding literary forms: he moved from writing essays, children stories and political books, to Black people's experience towards the end of his career. Miller was applauded for his talent in using a dialect (Negro slang) which is one of the main reasons that made *The Cool World* a remarkable novel. In the second part, I will discuss the novel, its themes, plot, and characters.

The third chapter is devoted completely to Shirley Clarke, the director and editor of *The Cool World*. Clarke was a woman pioneer in the filmmaking industry, and she had to deal with

some obstacles along the way, trying to prove that she is as talented and creative as a man can be. Like Miller, Clarke did not gain enough recognition and because of that, there were not enough sources to cover her life.

I managed to retrieve some interviews and after contacting scholar Karen Pearlman, as she is working on a book about Clarke that is supposed to be published in the year 2025. She was helpful to recommend me some sources and share with me her work, one of which I will use as a main source in the fourth chapter to present the making of the film. I also managed to contact Emmy Humes, who is working on a documentary about Clarke and she recommended *Points of Resistance*: this book led me to find Elaine Dundy's autobiography. Dundy is Clarke's sister and I will use her book as main source to project Clarke's life.

Clarke had an intriguing life, she started as a dancer, then shifted herself into filmmaking. Clarke grew in a strict Jewish family, but that did not stop her from distinguishing herself from her peers. In this chapter I will discuss Clarke's life in a way that I hope will do her right, in highlighting her life and her works as well as her contribution to the American cinema as an independent filmmaker.

In the fourth chapter, I will discuss her film *The Cool World*. The first section covers the making of the film, the reasons why Clarke decided to make it, how the casting process worked, the film's setting and the obstacles that Clarke faced while filming in Harlem. In the second section, I will present Pearlman's essay *Editing, directing, and The Cool World: filmmaking as a choreographic art*, I will make use of Pearlman's essay to present Clarke's techniques in making *The Cool World*, by focusing on the first scene. In the third section, I will focus on the other aspects of the plot, turning point, main events, themes and characters.

In the second part of the fourth chapter, I will briefly discuss adaptation theories, mainly following Brian McFarlane's book *Novel to Film*. McFarlane discuss fidelity in adaptation, relying on Ronald Barthes' narrative theory.

I will end my thesis by presenting my study case (from Miller to Clarke), hoping to contribute scholarly work on Clarke's adaptation of Miller's novel.

CHAPTER 1

THUG LIFE¹

1.1 The Civil Rights Movement

This chapter will cover the Civil Rights Movement in the 50s and the beginning of the 60s. Which is the same timeline, both Warren Miller's novel *The Cool World* and Clarke's movie were made. Starting with the year 1950, the Civil Rights Movement was at its highest moments. Many associations were fighting for black people's rights during that time, each association had its way of fighting such as the NAACP² which took cases into court, CORE³ who were encouraging and organizing non-violent protests, the Regional Council of Negro Leadership were working on voter registration and preachers in churches and in the streets they were affecting people and encouraging them to fight for their rights peacefully without violence.

The year 1951, was full of civil rights activism, its main events⁴ were: the pilgrimage for "Martinsville seven" from Richmond to Martinsville, the student strike at Moton High in Virginia, NAACP started to build the well known case (*Brown v. Board of Education*) which extended until 1954, the "We Charge Genocide" petition to the United Nations, that was submitted by Paul Robeson and William Patterson, and the Regional Council of Negro Leadership (RCNL) which was founded by T.R.M. Howard in Mississippi. By the end of 1951 Harry and Harriette Moore

¹ "The Hate U Give Little Infants Fs Everybody" Tupac's tattoo, which he explained its meaning 'what society feeds into you has a way of affecting us all'

² National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

³ Congress of Racial Equality

⁴ For more details concerning the events visit (<https://www.crmvet.org/tim/timhis51.htm>)

who were one of the first civil rights leaders were killed in their house in Florida, by four members of the Ku Klux Klan⁵ who were identified as being involved in the Moore's murder almost half a century after their death.⁶

The year 1953 main event was the Baton Rouge, LA Bus Boycott that took place in June. However, it is not as well known as the Montgomery bus boycott, the reason behind that according to Douglas Brinkley, a CNN Presidential Historian, was because the outcome of the boycott was nothing but a compromise black people had to make, according to him it only meant that the Jim Crow System was still alive⁷. On the other hand, Reverend Jemison (the leader of the boycott) explained the reason behind accepting to compromise, by stating that they achieved what they wanted (getting seats in buses), the Boycott started because the situation of riding the bus to black people was "inequitable". the boycott lasted for eight days, and it inspired the famous boycott in Montgomery⁸.

In the year 1954, the civil rights movement's activists became more evident. As NAACP has been building the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, which was about five segregated schools the Supreme Court has merged. In May 1954, the Court verdict was in favour of the appellants. However, segregation in schools did not end, and there was a resilient from extreme racists who refused to have unsegregated schools. The final verdict was read by Chief Justice Earl Warren, he said: "We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs

⁵ KKK, a hate organizations that employed terror in pursuit of their white supremacist agenda. One group was founded immediately after the Civil War and lasted until the 1870s. The other began in 1915 and has continued to the present. Ku Klux Klan, either of two distinct U.S. hate organizations that employed terror in pursuit of their white supremacist agenda. One group was founded immediately after the Civil War and lasted until the 1870s. The other began in 1915 and has continued to the present.

⁶ <https://naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/civil-rights-leaders/harry-t-and-hariette-moore>

⁷ Debbie Elliott from NPR News, All Things Considered (The First Civil Rights Boycott)

⁸ Ibid

and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, because of the segregation complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.”⁹.

The matter of unequal opportunities regarding education, was projected in the novel by Miller when he explained Duke’s (the protagonist of the novel) educational experience in Harlem (where the novel took place), Duke did not get a fair chance to learn: “Some of the teachers tell you. “Stay out. Do not come to school an we wont report you.... They don’t want to be bothered” (Miller 12).

Another key point of the year 1954, was the murder trial of Ruby McCollum, a black woman who was sentenced to death for killing a white man. Ignoring her testimony, in which she said that Dr. C. Leroy Adams raped her more than once and forced her to keep his child, and that she was already pregnant with the other child when she shot him. The court ruled she was in no position to testify and that she was mentally unstable. McCollum’s case shed light on the practice of “paramour rights”, which gives any white man the right to take any black woman as his “concubine” and force her to have his kids. McCollum is seen as a brave woman who stood for her rights against a community “system” that clearly does not see her as a human being with rights.¹⁰

In year 1955, Reverent George Wesley Lee, a NAACP leader, was killed in Belzoni Mississippi, in his car and it was said that he died “in odd accident”. The governor refused any further investigations, and no one was arrested or charged for Lee’s murder. I personally thing that Miller projected this incident and the ones that followed (Black people being killed without having their assassin arrested or punished) when he wrote about ‘Grampa Custis’¹¹ getting killed, which

⁹ National archives

¹⁰ The Strange Case of Ruby McCollum, by: Kai EL’ Zabar

¹¹ Duke’s grandfather who was a reverent in one of the southern states in America.

can also be a reference to the KKK who commit crimes against Black people to spread fear, knowing they will not be convicted. Miller said through Duke: “He tippen his hat to all the white men an sayin. “How you Mister Snip ... They all smile at him an say like “Hows the preachin goin Revrent?” An like that. Same people that kill him after I leave to come up North with my Mother.” (Miller 83)

Black people being killed by extreme white racists without any consequences did not stop at Rev. Lee, there were many assaults followed Rev. Lee’s murder: Lamar Smith¹² a voting rights activist, Emmett Till¹³ a 14-year-old boy from Chicago, John Earl Reese¹⁴ a 16-year-old, and a black farmer named Herbert Lee was murdered by a white person who was cleared of accusations under the cover of “self-defence”. These crimes remained present until the 20th century with George Floyd’s murder and the start of Black Lives Matter movement. Most recently in 2024, a woman was killed by a police officer because he felt threatened by her holding a pot of boiling water and shot her in the head, Grayson who killed Sonya Massey¹⁵ was fired. Miller also talked about police brutality against Black people in his novel, in (Little Man’s) storyline in which he got brutally beaten by the police that he was not the same person again, Duke said: “Before the cops beat him so bad on the head Little Man used to be War Lord of the Crocadiles.” (Miller 37) it was also projected in Clarke’s movie. Black people are not safe until this day, as Joe Biden said addressing Massey’s murder “that all too often Black Americans face fears for their safety in ways many of the rest of us do not”¹⁶

¹²Buried Truth: Unresolved, Disregarded Lamar Smith Murder Haunts Lincoln County by: Donna Ladd 2021

¹³Library of Congress, Murder of Emmet Till

¹⁴<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/interactive/unresolved/cases/john-earl-reese>

¹⁵Illinois police release bodycam video of fatal shooting of Black woman in her home by: By Eric Levenson, Jillian Sykes and Brad Parks, CNN, 2024

¹⁶US officer fatally shot Black woman Sonya Massey in her home: Bodycam video, *Aljazeera*

By the end of 1955 the well-known Montgomery bus boycott took place, and it lasted Almost a year (381 days)¹⁷. Women had an important impact in the Montgomery bus boycott. It started with Claudette Colvin, a 15 years old who refused to give up her seat acknowledging her right to keep it, but she was arrested and many women after her had the same fate, but it was Rosa Parks, a secretary in Montgomery's NAACP and a registered voter, who lit the spark for the boycott. She refused to give up her seat for a white man, and was dragged and arrested brutally. Everyone in the Black community helped to make this boycott successful¹⁸ and it was indeed a huge success. The Supreme Court ruled that "segregation on public buses is unconstitutional"¹⁹.

From the year 1955 , Dr.Martin Luther King's impact and activist actions were more visible and he was in a way considered the leader of the civil rights movement, and he took the lead in Montgomery's boycott. With his peaceful methods, his influence in Mahatma Gandhi's opinions and his perspective on how life would look like without segregation thanks to his trip to Connecticut, in which he mentioned in one of his letters to his mother saying: "Negroes and whites go to the same church,"²⁰ black people saw hope in his leadership and believed in him.²¹

Back to the right of getting a fair education, during the beginning of 1956, Autherine Lucy a black bright minded woman wanted to pursue her academic studies in the University of Alabama, along side with her friend Polly Anne Meyers. They both applied and got accepted to find out later that their admission was overturned, when it was known that they were not white.Lucy got the support from the NAACP and attorneys (Thurgood Marshall and Arthur Shores), the case took

¹⁷(<https://www.britannica.com/event/Montgomery-bus-boycott>)

¹⁸Montgomery Bus Boycott by: By Arlisha Norwood, NWHM Fellow

¹⁹ <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/montgomery-bus-boycott#:~:text=Sparked%20by%20the%20arrest%20of,on%20public%20buses%20is%20unconstitutional.>

²⁰Letters MLK Sent as a Teenager Show How Time in CT Influenced the Civil Rights Leader by: Jane Caffrey, 2022

²¹<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Martin-Luther-King-Jr>

around three years²². During the time in which the well known case *Brown v. Board of Education* case was decided, the attorneys won the case and set plans for enrolling the next year. Lucy enrolment in Alabama university did not last long, though she became the first black person to get the chance to attend lessons at the university. Three days after her enrolment she was “whisked to safety” because she had been threatened many times, and under these circumstances the University of Alabama took it as an alibi to suspend her (for her safety), weeks later she was expelled.

Years later in 1988, The University of Alabama annulled her expulsion, and she managed to re-enrol this time it was with her daughter. Lucy got her master’s and in 2019 she was awarded an honorary doctorate²³.

Personally, I think that Lucy’s story was projected through Miller’s novel when he talked about Harrison²⁴, who was studying at Fisk University that is located in Nashville Tennessee a segregated state of the US, at the time the novel was being written. I see Harrison’s story line as a projection for how things would look like if everyone including Black people got a fair chance to finish their studies. As explained in the novel we see Harrison being a well educated man with good appearances: “Harrison readin a book. He wearin white shoes with thick red rubber soles dressed like all the college boys.”(Miller 22). Throughout the year 1956 a good deal of sit-ins and boycotts were held.

The year 1957, witnessed a great deal of civil rights events. The main events were: Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, Washington, DC, which took place on May 17th. The goal of this march was to encourage the federal government to continue working to implement *Brown v. Board*. And

²² The case started from 1952 after Lucy finished her Bachelor of Arts in English

²³ <https://news.ua.edu/2023/03/autherine-lucy-foster-the-life-of-a-legend/>

²⁴ The brother of Rod (another significant character in *The Cool World*)

it had many speakers²⁵. Among them was Dr. Martin Luther King, where he gave his speech “Give us the Ballot”. According to the library of Congress, All-American News (a newsletter for African American audience) made a documentary called “A Time For Freedom”²⁶ which documented the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom. the short film was narrated by Muriel Rahn.

In the same year, nine African American high school students challenged the racial segregation in schools in Little Rock, Arkansas. They enrolled in Little Rock Central High School. Their enrolment was accompanied with the objection from the white students in central High as well as the board of Education in Little Rock. They were warned not to attend the first days, the nine students attended the second day and were accompanied with ministers. However, the students were facing the whites rage and were threatened. Eventually, they had to stop attending school for a few days, but they did not give up. They went back to school and this time eight²⁷ of them managed to get through the academic year. In 1958 Ernest Green was the first African American student to graduate from Little Rock Central High School.²⁸

A significant event in 1960, was Dr. King getting arrested in Atlanta, Georgia, and sentenced to four months in prison. according to the *NewYork Times* Dr. King was moved “from an Atlanta jail to a remote rural facility in Klan-infested DeKalb County, and soon thereafter to the state’s notorious maximum-security prison in Reidsville” which meant, that his life was in grave danger. In the meantime, the elections were on between John F. Kennedy from the Democratic party and Richard M. Nixon from the republican party. Since King’s life was threatened his family

²⁵ Library of Congress

²⁶ To see the film visit (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1_fyXCxwFs)

²⁷Throughout the academic year the nine students were abused and assaulted by white student one of the students Minnijean Brown fought back and was expelled

²⁸(<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Little-Rock-Nine>)

and followers were trying to reach out to anyone who can help, and both Kennedy and Nixon campaigns were contacted.

Bobby Kennedy, J.F. Kennedy's campaign manager and brother, reached out to the judge and asked for King's release on bail, the judge responded and King was released. Kennedy's support to King helped him in gaining many voices, which resulted in Kennedy winning the election and becoming the youngest American president during that time²⁹. Kennedy speech after taking the oath, was full with a hopeful, free, and bright future, he said: "We observe today not a victory of party, but a celebration of freedom -- symbolising an end, as well as a beginning -- signifying renewal, as well as change."³⁰ Dr. King believed in the change that Kennedy can bring to America as well as to Black people. He reminded Kennedy in his speech in Tennessee: "Now we must remind Mr. Kennedy that we helped him to get in the White House. We must remind Mr. Kennedy that we are expecting him to use the whole weight of his office to remove the ugly weight of segregation from the shoulders of our nation."³¹

The year 1961 has witnessed many changes towards civil rights movement. The protests and sit-ins continued as well as Black people fight against voter registration, as it was not an easy process a Black person can go through, since to get through voter registration there were many complicated requirements such as: Poll taxes, literacy tests, fraud and intimidation all were obstacles to prevent African Americans from voting. That was until the year 1915, when the Supreme Court struck these restrictions down. However, some states used "grandfather clause" which meant you can not vote unless your grandfather had voted. which was impossible for most

²⁹ Civil Rights Movement Archive.

³⁰ Kennedy's Presidential Inaugural Address.

³¹ Civil Rights Movement Archive

people whose ancestors were slaves or died without having the right to vote³². Black people were trying to get more voters registration they were pouring their hearts into teaching other Black people how to read and write. Bernice Robinson said: “We had to read a section of the South Carolina state constitution in order to be able to vote, some people could read and could pass the test, but there were many and many that couldn’t”³³. The first school was hidden from white people and Robinson was their teacher. The Citizenship Schools spread through southern states. Regardless of the effort the right to vote was still a major issue. Until the year 1965, Black people were finally granted the right to vote.

The civil rights movement was at its height points during 1963 which is the year (*The Cool World*) was released. Wallace became the governor of Alabama, where he said: “*I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.*” In the same year Dr. King was arrested again, this time he was in Birmingham prison. Where he send a letter as a respond to *Birmingham News*, that attacked Dr. King and the movement by calling it “unwise and untimely” Dr. King wrote: “For years now I have heard the word 'Wait!' It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never.'”³⁴. Dr. King summarised the whole situation and why they (Black People) can not wait any longer and why they have to fight for their rights, in what Dr. King described a lengthy letter.

In June, 1963, president Kennedy gave a speech responding to Wallace’s speech, and for the first time since he was appointed president. He addressed the nation about the civil rights directly: “*This nation] was founded on the principle that all men are created equal, and that the rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened.... And this nation,*

³² The Library of Congress

³³ They Say I’m Your Teacher (short film)

³⁴ *Letters from a Birmingham jail*

for all its boasts, will not be fully free until all its citizens are free”³⁵. Kennedy’s speech gave hope to Black people and their cause. But it was followed by the assassination of Medgar Evers, which was a plan from the KKK, murdering three freedom workers in three states to spread fear.

Since Kennedy showed his support towards the civil rights movement, his campaign for winning the next election of the year 1964 did not stand a chance. Kennedy was losing the voices from the white people, because he of his support to Black people. Kennedy being a politician had to play the ruthless game of politics, and he turned his back to Black people in order to win the white people votes back. However, Black people continued their efforts towards earning their rights and did not wait for someone to save them. In September, the well known March on Washington for jobs and freedom took place, where Dr.King delivered his speech “I have a dream”. Dr.King’s speech gave strength and hope to everyone, and as he always did, he encouraged them to have faith and keep their peaceful path towards freedom, he said: “We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.”³⁶ Days after Dr.King speech the KKK stroke again with another brutal attack. A church in Birmingham was bombed, that bombing resulted in the death of four little girls. Dr.King and the movement leaders asked Kennedy for actions to support and protect Black people from the Klan, but their request was left unanswered.

By the end of the year on November 22, president Kennedy was assassinated. During his travel to Dallas Texas, Kennedy was welcomed with hatred from the whites segregationist, and there were many posters filled with Kennedy wanted for treason. The day he was killed *the Dallas Mornings News* published a full page anti-Kennedy. The murder is attributed to a “lone-gunman”,

³⁵ The John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum

³⁶ NPR News

yet to our day there are people who believe that Kennedy's assassination is nothing but a plot or a conspiracy that involves whites segregationists, right wingers and those who refused what Kennedy stood for and were clearly opposed Black people's rights. Kennedy is mourned by many Black people even though some of them especially the leaders, felt disappointed because he did not fulfill his promises, but they did not applaud his death. Unlike many in the segregated south who some of them celebrated openly for Kennedy's death.

The Civil Rights Movement is still going on until this day. Sit-ins, protests, and marches continued, since assaults, and brutality by the police forces towards black people continued. A new movement was formed (Black Lives Matters) in 2012. It started on social media, in respond for the murder of unarmed black teenager in Florida, then it was extended in 2014 as protests in the streets after the murder of two unarmed black men in New York and in Missouri. People were protesting because none of the police officers were charged for their unjustified crime. In 2020 another unarmed black man was murdered by police officer, and this incident led to great rage from people around the United States and the world and there were huge protests calling for police brutality against black people and racism. by 2021, Chauvin (the officer who killed Floyd) was found guilty of murder, and this was a rare case of police violence that resulted in a conviction.³⁷

1.2 Black Mecca (Harlem)

Harlem, also known as Black Mecca because of Black people migrating to it. It was inhabited by many different races and ethnicities such as: Dutch, Irish, German, Italian and Jewish. In the year 1658, Dutch were its settlers and they were the ones giving its name Nieuw Harlem, the name was taken from Haarlem in the Netherlands. Harlem was mainly farmland and undeveloped

³⁷ Britannica, Black Lives Matter

territory for more than 200 years, and even with the growth of New York's population, Harlem did not get the needed attention for its progress.

During the 1880's, Harlem saw the light of progress shining in with the extension of rail lines and by 1904 The Lenox Avenue IRT subway line was completed, which made many speculate that this would make Harlem desirable for down Manhattan's residents. Apartments were built expecting a growth in Harlem population, but, the IRT subway did not have that effect only on Harlem but also on Washington Heights, the Bronx and other northern points of the north that were more accessible³⁸. However, that was the beginning of a new era to Harlem. Phillip A. Payton, who was real estate agent and entrepreneur, approached landlords by offering to fill their properties with Black tenants. Payton's offer was accepted and indeed he managed to move black families into Central Harlem. According to Harlem Heritage Tours, Payton is considered the father of "Black Harlem".

Black people continued moving to Harlem and, with the beginning of WWI, in 1915 many foreigner immigrants sailed back to their homelands, which resulted in vacancies and job opportunities and that worked as a motivational factor for Black people they moved from the south to the north in hope of more job opportunities and better wages. During the 1920's, Harlem was not only a New York borough for Black people, but it was also thriving with cultural and artistic expression and this period of time is known as "Harlem Renaissance": black people were showing America and the world that they are not limited by colour and that they are intellectual, artistic, and most importantly human just like everyone else and they should be treated like so. In the year 1929, the Great Depression effected the world as well as Black communities including Harlem.

³⁸ Harlem Heritage Tourism & Cultural Centre

The pressure of high rent and unemployment not to mention the discrimination towards blacks, led to riots during the years 1935-1943.

Harlem played an essential role in The Civil Rights Movement, as preachers and leaders were expressing their displeasure with the status quo from the street's corners. This detail is projected in Clarke's movie adaptation of Miller's novel *The Cool World* : the first scene of the movie presents a man talking to people about how the life they have is not fair and about how they need to change it by being together against what he calls "the white devil". The scene lasts for two minutes before the audience are introduced to Hampton Clanton who played Duke's role the protagonist of both the novel and the movie.

These issues and social problems led to a decrease in Harlem population during the 60s to the 70s. Harlem became a place for underprivileged residents and fast decaying housing stock³⁹ Harlem was not a good place to live in, and Black people were crammed in this small city with no job opportunities nor good housing. This aspect also was presented in both the novel and the movie, as Clarke chose to film the movie in Harlem's streets without changing anything in the scenario of Harlem, and the situation of Harlem streets and its housing projects were vividly clear. Whereas Miller managed to present Harlem through the young generation's eyes, and he also managed to present the issues Black people were dealing with during that time such as: lack of job opportunities and, if available, the minimum wage that was close to nothing, the issue of drug dealing as well as addiction (since there is not enough jobs available for everyone some of Harlem's residents chose selling drugs and eventually they ended up either in jail or drug addicts), the bad situations of the

³⁹ Ibid

buildings, police assaults, and many other problems that lead the residents in one way or another to turn into criminals.

With all the problems that Harlem had, as mentioned earlier Harlem was a place where you could find art and cultural expression which was known for a period of time as Harlem Renaissance, that was between the end of WWI and the middle of the 1930s, Black people found a place where they could express their talents freely. The great migration had its role in bringing some of the greatest minds of the day to Harlem. According to Britannica encyclopaedia, Harlem Renaissance was a follow up to the “New Negro” movement, as its participants embraced their heritage and self expression rejecting the stereotypes they were limited by. Among the many talented African Americans during that time there was: Alain Locke (a writer and philosopher), who is considered the leader of the Renaissance; W.E.B. Du Bois, who had a significant role in founding NAACP; Claude McKay ,the author of *Home to Harlem* (1928); Langston Hughes; Zora Neal Hurston; Paul Robeson the actor and activist; Duke Ellington the jazz musician; Josephine Baker dancer and singer; Aaron Douglas the father of African American art, and many others who played a crucial role in Harlem Renaissance.

The living situation in Harlem throughout the 50s and the 60s, impacted Miller’s perspective. As he managed to create a novel inspired by Harlem, and was described by James Baldwin as “the finest novel about Harlem that had ever come to my way” (Baldwin 305). As well as Clarke’s work on the film, since she used the exact location of Harlem, which is first. She filmed all the events in the streets of Harlem and its people. Clarke also casted people from Harlem with the help of Carl Lee, Clarke said in an interview that at some point she felt they were not able to cast the film because: (“we were getting all the "good" kids in school, and they weren’t giving us

believable readings”) (Rabinovitz 10) that was when she convinced Lee to get to the gangs, eventually they managed to get the casting she wanted.

After World War II, New York had witnessed a period of prosperity, the city regained its economy. New York became “the world’s largest manufacturing centre”, but Black people did not gain anything from this prosperity, factories were denying Black people’s job applications. However, between 1940s and 1970s another migration took place, and more than 5 million African Americans left the segregated south and head toward the north, Midwest and West. The lack of job opportunities, housing shortages, and segregation led to crowded conditions in the city, which led to riots. According to an essay written by: Liliana Bierer, she explained that during the 50s, when urban rehabilitation programs began, NYCHA (The New York City Housing Authority) started building public housing units ‘hastily’ which only meant that they are insufficiently constructed, and was separated from public neighbourhoods, in a way these housing units were built this poorly to disassociate Black tenants from ‘higher-income residents’ as well as not attracting them to these units⁴⁰. This situation is projected in Miller’s novel through Duke: (“The project has a little elevator like a telephone booth the green walls all scratched with initials an you know things. An it smells like garbage. New bilding but it got the Uptown Stink”) (Miller 22) in an essay from *Time Magazine* that is titled (No Place Like Home) it describes clearly why Harlem is Black people destination regardless of its situation: (“Harlem is no place like home”) but it gave Black people their freedom in one way or another. They found themselves able to express their opinions, it is said that: (“A negro here [Harlem] is different from a Negro in Philly or Frisco because he belongs”) the comforting idea of belonging to Black people made Harlem their Home. They created

⁴⁰ Designed in Oppression: The History of NYC Public Housing Mirrors Current Poor Conditions, by: Liliana Bierer on May 21, 2016.

their own life style, even the time it runs an hour behind white people's time or as they call it C.P.T (Coloured People's Time) Harlem was no place of living but it became home to Black people, it gave them their identity and helped them to see who they are.⁴¹

In Miller's novel Harlem helped creating Duke's personality, and his ideas of power, it can be said that Harlem had its effect on Duke and his peers in choosing the wrong path, but Miller made a turn of events by ending the novel with hope for new beginning, a hope for a fresh start with better mentality. As Duke started seeing life outside of Harlem and he accepted leaving this place without feeling the need to stay in Harlem and fight to survive. Whereas in the movie Clarke took the realistic path and made use of the New York version of Italian neorealism⁴², which is something she did in most of her films. Clarke did not show as much hope for Duke as Miller did in the novel on the other hand, she managed to create the idea that Duke had to deal with the consequences of his actions which resulted in getting arrested. In my opinion it is also a projection to the fact that during the time of making the movie Black people were still fighting for their rights and it would not make sense giving Duke a second chance in reality, which is what led Clarke to give him a realistic end. Miller's end can be seen as a projection for how he hoped things would be in the future.

⁴¹ Time magazine, Nation: No Place Like Home, July 31, 1946.

⁴² It is defined according to Britannica encyclopedia as: "Italian literary and cinematic movement, flourishing especially after World War II, seeking to deal realistically with the events leading up to the war and with the social problems that were engendered during the period and afterwards."

CHAPTER 2

MILLER'S WORLD

2.1 Warren Miller's Life and Work

Warren Miller a white Jewish American writer, who was born in Pennsylvania in 1921 and died of lung cancer in New York in 1966. Miller is known for writing about the issue of race, and for his political views as he published a book regarding the war in Cuba⁴³. His early death and his handling of the issue of race might have been contributing factors to why he has not gained enough fame to this day. Many details about his life remain obscure because of the lack of sources. Miller witnessed the invasion of Normandy, while he was serving in the US Army. He worked as a creative writing instructor at The University of Iowa, where he earned his bachelor's and master's degrees. After moving to New York, Miller worked in public relations and then became a writer. He also worked as literary editor of *The Nation*. He got married twice, first to a woman named Abby, to whom he dedicated *The Cool World*, and then to Jimmy Curely. He had two daughters Scout and Eve⁴⁴.

Miller began writing later in his life, during the 50s and early 60s. He published several romantic novels, such as *Love Me Little* (1957) and *The Bright Young Things* (1959), which were published under his pen name Amanda Vail. He also published *The Sleep of Reason* (1956), *The Goings on at Little Wishful* (1959), and *The Cool World* (1959), the novel that made him famous, then *The Way We Live Now* (1959), *90 Miles From Home: The Face of Cuba Today* (1961), *Flush*

⁴³ *90 Miles from Home: The Face of Cuba Today* (1961)

⁴⁴ Miller's obituary in *The New York Times*

Times (1962), *Looking for the General* (1964), and *The Sage of Harlem* (1964). Together with Edward Sorel, Miller also wrote tales for children, such as *King Carlo of Capri* (1958), *Pablo Paints a Picture* (1959), and *The Goings on at Little Wishful* (1959). He also wrote articles for various newspapers. His fame began with *The Cool World* (1959), a novel set in Harlem that was believed to have been written by a black author. Some of the reasons for this assumption were Miller's use of black people's slang and, James Baldwin's review of the novel.

Glen A. Love, an English professor at the University of Oregon (1965-2000) who taught a course on American satire, was also led to think that Miller was a black novelist. Love was looking for a novel by a black writer that would address black people's experiences through satire. Finding such a novel, was somewhat difficult, as, according to Love, satire was not commonly found in books by black writers. Robert Bone once observed, "Satire as a literary attitude was out of the question for the early Negro novelist. The social struggle he was engaged in was too compelling, and humor too keen a blade for his blunt needs. Self-satire, Moreover, could hardly be expected of those whose first impulse was to defend their race against the slanderous attacks of white authors." (Bone 89)

Eventually, Love's search ended when a black student, introduced him to Miller's novel *The Siege of Harlem*. This was Love's first step into Miller's world. Love discovered that satire was not as rare as he thought among black writers. In fact, he found many authors who used satire, such as George Schuyler, Wallace Thurman, Ossie Davis, Ishmael Reed, and William Melvin Kelley. What set Miller apart from these authors, Love noted in his article⁴⁵ was "Miller's innovative use of a Black speaker as his narrator, a stylistic device which I thought gave the resulting ironic probes at white racism a more pungent authenticity, I returned to Miller in order to

⁴⁵ Warren Miller: White Novelist in A Black World

study his work more carefully. Only then did I discover that he was not Black but white and that he was versatile with other worlds and voices as well” (Love 11).

Love, however, was not the first to assume that Miller was a black novelist. As mentioned earlier it started with James Baldwin’s review regarding *The Cool World* , in fact, Baldwin said: “I could not be certain, when I had read his book, whether he was white or black.” (Baldwin 305) Also, Mark Bould included Miller among African-American writers in his article titled “Come Alive by Saying No: An Introduction to Black Power SF” (2007). Eight months later, after discovering that Miller was not a black man, Bould published a corrected version of the article.

The confusion over Miller’s racial identity can be explained in the following statement: “There are others who insist upon the separation and exclusiveness of this experience, that it can belong only to Black writers and their Black audience” (Love 15). According to this statement critics at that time, were convinced that black novelists are entitled to deal with black people’s experiences only. Because of this belief, there was a major problem associated with Miller’s Harlem novels. As Love put it “Can the non-Black writer who has steeped himself in the Black experience participate in the creation of Black American Literature?”(Love 15) Love’s argument essentially revolves around the problem of the definition of Black American Literature.

Maurice Lee made an experiment with a group of students and a group of professors and he asked them to comment on an anonymous poem, which was written by a black poet. Neither group mentioned anything about black people’s issues, because they did not know the poet’s race. On the other hand, there was one student who knew the poet and his comment was “Oh, well, this poem is by a black poet, so I assume it has something to do with the Black Experience” (Lee 528). Lee concluded his experiment by stating “We are too racially oriented” (Lee 528). Assuming that the subject of a literary work has to do with black people’s experience just because it was written by a black author is, according to Lee it is: “a hypocritical attitude toward literature”. As for Love,

he argues that if one shifts the focus from the author to the work itself, black literature can be defined as “that literature which reflects the characteristic experience of Black American, that experience, presumably, having to do with themes of racial identity and racial oppression” (Love 15) If one applies this definition to Miller’s Harlem novels, then they can be considered part of The Black American literary canon.

Miller’s obituary in *The New York Times* newspaper recognized his “gift” for using a dialect (–Negro slang) - which he would have learned where he lived, on East Street. Miller explained, “saw gang fights from my window, boys killing under a street lamp, in front of the house where a bronze plaque attests”⁴⁶. The versatility in his writing style (he moved from writing articles, children's stories, and political books, to Harlem novels, which were highly acclaimed in his day) explains what Love meant when he described Miller by saying: “he was versatile with other worlds and voices as well” (Love 11). On the other hand, James Baldwin considered Miller’s book *The Cool World*, “one of the finest novels about Harlem that had ever come my way.” (Baldwin 305)

2.2 *The Cool World*

Miller said: “The idea of writing *THE COOL WORLD* was five or six years old when the novel finally began. It was that many years ago I lived near East Harlem – at the realtor’s frontier, 96th Street – and saw gang fights from my window, boys killing under a street lamp, in front of the house”⁴⁷. To some extent one can argue that the novel was inspired by true events, however its characters were fictional. Miller witnessed Harlem’s life as it was, as he had first-hand knowledge of it and represented it faithfully. He said, “Among the families I knew, there was hardly one that

⁴⁶ *The Cool World*’s book cover

⁴⁷ *ibid*

did not have a son or daughter ‘in trouble’ – involved with a gang, taking dope, sought by the police.”⁴⁸ Miller’s faithfulness was also recognized by Baldwin who stated: “He appears to be one of the very few people who have ever really listened to it and tried to understand what was being said” (Baldwin 306). The time line the novel was written and published was in a way during the beginning of The Civil Rights Movement, and Martin Luther King taking initiatives for the sake of black people’s rights.

The main core of *The Cool World* is Duke Richard Custis, a black teenager lives in Harlem, who is also the narrator of the story. Duke is the name that was given to him by his friends from the “Crocadiles” gang . Duke sees life from a through a different lense, according to him the only way to gain respect is by getting a gun or as he calls it ‘the piece’ and being a “cold killer”, he sees this is the only way to survive Harlem’s unfair, and out of order life. Miller stayed true to the character of Duke and his social background. It is noticed that Miller spelled some words exactly as they would be spoken by a black man, which earned him the applause of many such as James W. Byrd, who said “The author does not make Duke transcend his knowledge or his powers of language in telling the story. In fact, Miller makes extraordinary literary capital out of the very limitations of his narrator” (Byrd 395).

The fact that the novel’s main protagonist is Duke, does not mean that Miller neglected the other characters. On the contrary, Miller gave each character a background story in Duke’s world, or as Byrd described it “it’s a world of wired characters that Duke contacts for business or pleasure” (Byrd 395) for instance: we have the story of ‘Priest’ a killer from Georgia whom Duke turns to, to get the gun. ‘Lu Ann’ is a 15 years old girl who is treated as gang’s property, but still dreams of being able to start a new life in ‘San Fran cis co’ from the money she gained as the gang ‘whore’,

⁴⁸ ibid

'Chester' who escaped Harlem life and is living with a white man a 'friend' but he is not happy about the status quo. His storyline has to do with Homosexuality at that time, as it was not a widely accepted topic, even though at the time of writing the novel there many protests for homosexual people's rights it was still a frowned upon topic. This can be more clear in 'Rod's' storyline, it is never clearly stated that he is homosexual, nor his relation with men but it is implied throughout the novel as in part 12 titled *Finally I Go to the Park*. And last we have the "junkies" who are drug addicts and can not be trusted nor stay in the gang as they cause trouble. ("Junkies dont care. When they need the stuff they sell they goddam shoes an close. Or steal. Steal anything aint nailed down", Miller 44). their storyline tackles drug addiction and its effect on people and how it destroys their lives. It can be said that each character in Miller's novel represents a theme.

From the novel's atmosphere, it is understood that life in Harlem is not the best as Miller says through 'Harrison' (Blood's older brother): "They make us live like animals. Is it any wonder then that some of us act like animals an some of us become animals. The fantastic thing is how few of us succum to their idea of us." (Miller 24) Based on this statement, people who live in Harlem are (in one way or another) forced to live a specific life pattern which can be the reason why some of them turn to drugs, join gangs, and become criminals. There is no law in Harlem and that forces people to make their law to survive.

Giving a broader scope to the themes of the novel, that were also adapted to the movie. There is the representation of black women that was found in Christine Lo Giudice's thesis. Black women have three stereotypical representations which are the Mammy, the Sapphire, and the Jezebel, according to Lo Giudice "these stereotypes have been enforced since the birth of cinema and have been spread into television in the 1960s" (Lo Giudice, 98) I found them apply as well in Miller's novel. We have Duke's Mother who can be the representation of both stereotypes, the Mammy "woman holding a care-giving job (e.g. therapist, doctor). Making it her duty to take care

of others. As a consequence, when she has a family of her own, the Mammy is a neglectful parent (Walker-Barnes, 2014:85-88) (Lo Giudice, 99) Throughout the novel, there is not a completely mother-son conversation between them except when Duke gets ‘knifed’ by the ‘wolves’ in which his mother shows her concern but she eventually ends up going to bed with one of her husbands ‘Mister Osborne’. The caring part of her is not shown properly. The Sapphire stereotype is presented in Duke’s mother, who is a “deeply unhappy, aggressive, loud and bitter woman, the Sapphire allows no back talk and demands respect and integrity from those around her” (Lo Giudice,100) She asks Duke for respect and does not allow him to answer her back. As for Lu Ann, she can be the representation of the Jezebel stereotype who is “a promiscuous and insatiable sexual being who cannot control her sexuality (Collins, 2008). Her only weapon is her body, which allows her to manipulate and exert control over men” (Lo Giudice, 100) Lu Ann sees the way to achieve her dreams is by selling her body which she did for a year before she becomes the gang’s property.

Duke’s mother moved to Harlem by herself first, leaving Duke with his grandparents in the south, because she believed that the doors to a better future would be open there, a better way of living, away from problems like segregation (“They crush thy people, O LORD an say the LORD will not see”, Miller 81). Duke spent his childhood with his grandparents while his mother was working in Harlem. After she had organized everything she brought Duke up north. A while after that, his grandfather “Grampa Custis” was murdered, and that is how his grandmother moved in with them in Harlem (“After my mother come an got me and brought me up North they kill Grampa Custis. That when Grama came up to live with us in Harlem”, Miller 80-81)

Duke lived in a household of women (his mother and grandmother) without a father figure in his life. His mother had many husbands, but all of them left her and her son. Duke did, however, has one particular memory of a man who could be considered as a father figure in his life: “I

dreamed about going to the zoo when I was a little kid. One of my mothers husbands carried me on his shoulders an I was eatin pop corn an some of it spillin down on his head.” (Miller 52), but he does not remember the man’s name “what the name of that husband who took me to the zoo when I was a little kid?” (Miller 53).

Duke believed that respect can only come from being considered a “War Lord” and “a Cold killer” (“Some day I come walkin down the street they all look at me with respect an say “There goes a cold killer. Here come Duke Custis. He a cold killer”, Miller 9) which is why it is important to him to have “the piece” - the gun. (“When you have a gun then you aint no animal any more. You a hunter an can stand tall an dont have to take a soundin from no body”, Miller 24). Getting the piece was his way toward a better situation (“Shitman you get yourself a piece you gonna be President of the Crocadiles. Aint no doubt about that”, Miller 13). Because the piece was not cheap, Duke had to work to raise the money to get it. Duke began working with “Royal Baron” in selling cigarettes: “Our product gives pleasure. Real pleasure. It is non habitforming & has no harmful after effects” (Miller 61).

After Blood the head of the gang, becomes a drug addict and steals the gang's money, Duke becomes the “president” of the Crocadiles gang. After Duke becomes president, a long-awaited fight finally happens, but Duke still has not laid a hand on the piece (“I know Priest aint ever gone to be there ever again. ... Then I remembered the Armory... I take out the blades an look them over an finely I pick one for my self. I pick the best one in the Armory”, Miller 219-220). The fight ends with the deaths of Cowboy from the Crocadiles and Angeles from the Wolves. On the other side, Rod and Duke try to escape because the cops are chasing them, but they part ways. Eventually, Duke is caught by the cops, and there are two alterniteves on how he got caught. One is his mother

calls about him or tells the police he might be in Mister Hurst apartment⁴⁹, “An I hear my Mother screamin an cryn an sayin all the time. “I gave him up. I gave him up. I gave him up. I gave him up” (Miller 238), “You get in trouble jus one more time an I turnin you over to the cops.”⁵⁰ (Miller 54-55) “That where they picked me up. My Mother with them. They musta gone up to our apartment first an then they come to Mister Hursts”⁵¹ (Miller 237). The other alternative is Mister Hursts is the one who calls the police on Duke because he was the one finding Duke and, kept him in the apartment until he got picked up. It appears in the novel that Mister Hurst is someone who does not encourage violence nor how life in Harlem is going⁵² “They are just poor boys like you. He say. “Wolves. They aint no Wolves” (Miller 34) . The jury's verdict was to send Duke to the reformatory, “the judge say. “I don’t care if they aint room for him. You make room hear? I aint sendin him back to the streets. You find a bed. I aint sendin him back” (Miller 239) putting Duke in the reformatory meant he got a better chance to live.

The ending of the novel has different interpretations. Byrd wrote that it featured “a conclusion which seems to have been written with one eye on Hollywood” (Byrd 396). According to him, the novel should have ended with “Rumble is on,” an open, mysterious ending, or as he put it “with its terrible suspense and the powerful simplicity of the murder” (Byrd 396). On the other hand, Baldwin's comment on the ending, saying: “I confess that I do not believe in his “rehabilitation” (Baldwin 306). Both Byrd and Baldwin, however, agreed on the fact that such an ending “superficial” as Baldwin described it could not detract from the “superb naturalistic writing” or “the book’s great power”. David Matza’s and Love's commentary regarding the ending was different from Baldwin and Byrd. Matza saw it as an optimistic ending: “To introduce, in the

⁴⁹ Personal conclusion based on the following quotes.

⁵⁰ Duke’s mother talking

⁵¹ Duke talking

⁵² Personal conclusion based on the following quote.

manner of optimistic afterthought, the forces of hope, improvement and betterment is to soften the caricature and to balk its implications.” (Matza 553) While Love compared the ending of *The Cool World* to that of *Native Son* by Richard Wright: “The novel’s conclusion suggest that Duke has, unlike Richard Wright’s Bigger Thomas, in *Native Son*, narrowly escaped succumbing to the role of beast which has been appropriated for him” (Love 12).

Besides the different interpretations of the ending. A comparison between Duke’s old life and the new one in the reformatory is projected. Such as, in his education, Duke says explaining what his teachers used to tell him: “Stay out. Dont come to school an we wont report you. You co operate with me an I will co operate with you” They dont want to be bothered” (Miller 12). Whereas now it is different (“I doin good in the school classes. I learnin how to spell an write an I can read real good now”, Miller 240). The living situation is now better than before (“I live in a real house”, Miller 239). Lastly, Duke does not feel the need to go back to Harlem (“Some times I think about the old days. Wonder about Lu Ann an think where is she? Little Man. Rod they put him away some place I dont know where. Cowboy dead. Most of them I guess back on the street. At first I miss it. But now I dont so much any more. I mean Man who need it? Man that one sue cio⁵³ city an I dont care if I neve see it again?”, Miller 241). Richard⁵⁴ now lives in a better place and he has better chances in life (“Doc say if I keep on like I am maybe I can go⁵⁵”, Miller 241).

The Cool World, as we have seen , is a novel that can be said to belong to black American literature. It deals with a very important topic, which is the importance of belonging. Duke and his peers are seeking belonging, a community that cares about them. Duke explains how he got the

⁵³ Sujo in Portuguese means dirty

⁵⁴ At the end of the novel Richard’s nickname (Duke) that was given to him by the gang is no longer used. He is now being called Richard and that can be Miller’s way of reflecting Richard’s new life.

⁵⁵ Referring to the school in town

money from the "coolies"⁵⁶ and that is why it is a simple thing because they are all alone and do not belong ("Bein coolies they got no protection you know. They jus dont belong", Miller 72). Duke on the other hand feels happy and blessed to belong to a place. Duke goes to the 'Royal Baron' and he is told that he is no longer provided with cigars until things are settled⁵⁷. This was a huge step backward for Duke and his quest for getting the 'piece' ("Time like this you know whut havin a gang to belong to really mean. It mean you got a place to go to a place where you can go when you in trouble an not just get kicked at an yell at", Miller 193). Even when everything goes bad Duke reassures himself by reminding himself that he belongs to a place he is not all alone in the wild ("You dont have the piece an maybe you aint gone to get the piece but Man you got the gang. You belong.", Miller 223)

However, the need for belonging inside Duke disappears gradually. When he ends up in the reformatory, suddenly the need to belong does not seem much needed ("I mean Man who need it?", Miller 241) because now he lives in a place where there are laws and he does not need to make them, unlike in Harlem ("They aint law on the street. No an none in the houses Because when they aint law you gotta make law. Other wise evry thing wild Man an you dont belong an you alone", Miller 223)

The Cool World has been admired and reviewed by many, including writers like Don DeLillo who showed his admiration for the novel in a letter to Miller⁵⁸. James Baldwin called it "one of the finest novels about Harlem" (Baldwin 305) and expressed in his words what the "cool" world of the title is about: "a world in which children watch their contemporaries and their elders dying by the hour. And we ignore this world at our own very great peril, for as long as they are

⁵⁶ According to the novel, the "coolies" is a name Duke gave to boys who live in Harlem but, do not belong to a gang so they are unable to defend themselves.

⁵⁷ After 'Royal Baron' was picked up by the police

⁵⁸ The Neglected Books Website by Brad Bigelow. The letter was not in the records.

dying, we are dying too” (Baldwin 307). Baldwin also praised Miller for dealing with this issue faithfully by saying: “He appears to be one of the very few people who have ever really listened to it and tried to understand what was being said” (Baldwin 306). Byrd, on the other hand, pointed out Duke and his peers' struggle with society, “who claim they are not understood by their parents or society, and evidently they are not. The values taught by the world they grow up in are as different as possible from the traditionally accepted values of society” (Byrd 396). Byrd also sheds light on the issues at stake in the novel: “Along with dope addiction and prostitutes, Duke’s “Cool World” is inhabited by male prostitutes, homos, sadists and masochists” (Byrd 396). As this novel received much acclaim, it was adapted as a Broadway play by Miller and Robert Rossen in 1960, and then it was adapted as a movie produced by Shirley Clarke in 1963.

CHAPTER 3

CLARKE'S WORLD

3.1 Shirley Clarke's Life and Work

Shirley Brimberg Clarke, a “DANCER, bride, runaway wife, radical filmmaker, and pioneer”⁵⁹. Was born on October 2nd, 1919 in New York, and grew up in a Jewish family, or as her sister Elaine Dundy called it in her autobiography “Part of the Jewish new rich”⁶⁰. Clarke's life is as obscure as Warren Miller's, however, she is generously portrayed in her sister's autobiography. This book is my main source for Clark's life in addition to three interviews I managed to retrieve.

Clarke was the elder sister to Dundy and Betty, daughters of Samuel Nathaniel Brimberg who was born in Warsaw (Poland), moved to Canada first, then to the US at the age of seventeen, where he had to take care of his family. According to Dundy, their father was a very successful, respected man but he was not a father a daughter would wish for: “Here is Sam Brimberg, successful businessman, active philanthropist and popular raconteur of locker room jokes at his golf club, but a tyrant in his home and a damaging destructive father” (Dundy 21). Even though, their life might seem perfect, Clarke and her sisters grew up under the roof of an abusive father. It all started in 1929 when the stock market crashed, Clarke was about 10 years old and as an older

⁵⁹ That is how Manohla Dargis described her in his article “Woman With a Lens, Restored”

⁶⁰ Dundy Dundy, *Life itself!* , P.4

sister, she had to protect her sisters from their father's abuse, because for some reason their mother could not protect them.⁶¹

From a young age Shirley knew what she wanted to be, even though education was not easy for her, because she was a dyslexic and it was not something teachers of that time knew how to deal with (Dundy). However, Shirley chose to become a dancer, as her sister explained in her autobiography Shirley was in a way inspired by an interview in the 80s in which the interviewer said in order to be known "in their class 'at Lincoln'" being rich, attractive and having popular parents does not guarantee your popularity, what guarantees it, is what you choose to be. Especially if you choose something not everyone has. That's why Shirley ended up choosing to be a dancer. Shirley said: "We had a class poet, a class chess player, a class actor, a class chemical engineer, and so on. But there was one thing we didn't have. So that's what I decided to be" (Dundy 36). According to Dundy, Shirley's passion towards dancing started when she went on a school trip with her class to the Metropolitan Opera ("She was drawn to the ballet corps because 'they seemed to have a nice time dancing') (Dundy 36). A while after Shirley enrolled in the Fokine School of Ballet (that was the start of her dancing career) she switched from ballet to modern dancing. Although she never received support from her father in her career choice she insisted on pursuing dancing. As Dundy explains: "She actually invited Daddy, insisted that he come with us to watch her performing in dance troupes in places such as Bennington College during the summer. Hoping, I guess, to educate and enlighten him, or maybe just to rub his nose on it." (Dundy 40)

⁶¹ The reason is not mentioned clearly, but Dundy explained some situations in which their mother was not showing any help. On page 13 Dundy asks herself where her mother was when her father was hitting her and Shirley, as well as calling her mother a "snitch" "we sisters the inmates and my mother the snitch." (Same page) . A personal reasoning is since they come from a traditional Jew family a woman was raised to obey her husband even if he was mistaken, and divorce is not a valid option, as it is shown in Dundy's autobiography their mother was not sure if she should divorce their father (Dundy,13).

After her graduation from Lincoln High, Shirley was clearly going to pursue a career “as a modern dancer” while Dundy was still figuring things out. Dundy probably saw in her sister Shirley a strong woman who knew what she wanted and worked hard to get it: “In every aspect of the arts as well as in her life she was to pin her colors to the avant-garde, speed after it, and, in catching up, become one of its leaders.” (Dundy 42) Dundy also saw Shirley as a rebellious soul from the beginning, rebelling against her father and against rules that might limit her, Dundy stated that Shirley's rebellious spirit continued even during her filmmaking career: “During her film career the same spirit of rebellion made her dig in against certain censorship problems when compromise would have been wiser” (Dundy 40). Another aspect Dundy appreciated about Shirley was her excellence in networking and, as Dundy explains in her book, Shirley always knew someone to help out. Like when she recommended Dundy to Piet Mondrian, who wanted to learn jitterbug. She told him that Dundy “was the best jitterbug dancer she knew” (Dundy 41), or when she was ready to contact an editor of *The New Yorker* to advise Dundy in case she wanted to be a writer, or when she got in touch with the right photographer when Dundy wanted a career in modeling.

In 1942 Shirley married Bert Clarke with whom she had a daughter named Wendy. Shirley kept Bert's last name even after their divorce. Bert was also from a Jewish family but he was nothing like her father. When Shirley married him, she was already a dancer. Bert supported her in every way possible. As she explained to *The Times* reporter Howard Thompson: “I wanted to learn film technique, so Bert, my husband, and I and some friends decided to organize our own class and hire one master”⁶². According to Dundy Shirley enlisted Bert as her cameraman, Clarke managed to produce extraordinary dance films and that was when she decided to shift from dancing towards films making. She started by making short films such as *Dance in the Sun* (1953), *In Paris Parks*

⁶² Woman With a Lens, Restored by Manohla Dargis , *The New York Times*

(1954), *Bullfight* (1955), *A Moment in Love* (1957) and many more. Between the year 1975 and 1983, she also taught film and videos at University of California in Los Angeles. (Rabinovitz).

Shirley's movies according to her interview with Lauren Rabinovitz⁶³ in *Afterimage*, were divided into three kinds: : Experimental films 1953 – 1958 (*Dance in the Sun* 1953, *In Paris Parks* 1954, *Bullfight* 1955, *A Moment in Love* 1957, and *Brussels "Loops"* 1958), documentary films 1959 - 1960 (*Bridges-Go-Round* 1958–59, *Skyscraper* 1959, *A scary time* 1960, and *The Connection* 1960), and, lastly, feature films 1961 - 1967 (*The Cool World* 1963, *Robert Frost: A Lover's Quarrel With the World* 1964, and *Portrait of Jason* 1967). she also made three "videography"⁶⁴ (*Savage Love* 1961, *Four Journeys into Mystic Time* 1980 and *Tongues* 1982)⁶⁵.

As mentioned before, Shirley's career as a dancer started early, and she managed to become very good as she did her training along side with Martha Graham (McDougall). Dancing remained a part of her soul, and, as Rabinovitz explained it, Clarke applied her ideas about dancing to films. The first short movie she made was *Dancing in The Sun* in which Danny Nagrin danced on the stage while imagining himself dancing on the beach. Clark used "spatiotemporal cut"⁶⁶ in making this movie, in which she managed to create harmony between the dancer's moves and the camera, something that made the viewer relate to the movie (Rabinovitz 8). In an interview with Lauren Rabinovitz, "Choreography of Cinema An Interview With Shirley Clarke", Clarke explains the making of this movie and how the idea came to her mind. In a way, Daniel Nagrin and his wife Helen Tamiris inspired Clarke to make this movie. They were leading choreographer/dancers in

⁶³ Lauren Rabinovitz is an assistant professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

⁶⁴ According to Rocky Mountain College of Art, Videography is responsible for capturing events on video. They are often a one-man crew that film and edit their shots without the need for a larger team. Videographers work on filming the world around them without getting much say in the location, art direction, or overall feeling of a scene.

⁶⁵ Choreography of Cinema An Interview with Shirley Clarke, *Afterimage*, December 1983

⁶⁶ It is a concept Maya Deren wrote about, and Clarke used in her movie, in simple terms it means making cuts between shoots while maintaining the relation between time and space.(Rabinovitz)

the development of American modern dance in the late 1940s and early 1950s (Rabinovitz 8). Clark said “That film got made because Danny Nagrin and his wife Helen Tamiris were friends of mine.” (Rabinovitz 8). The first idea was to film on a beach, but it was not an easy thing to do. However, Clarke was determined to make it happen. She explained: “Poor Danny couldn't dance on the sand. He would sink up to his neck. So we put some sand over concrete, and I shot the dance. But Danny got shinsplints.” (Rabinovitz 8)

To understand Shirley Clarke as a filmmaker, three interviews will be used, with Lauren Rabinovitz,⁶⁷ DeeDee Halleck⁶⁸, and Harriet Polt⁶⁹. According to the interviewer DeeDee Halleck, Shirley made use of the New York version of Italian neo-realism⁷⁰, which made Clarke’s work “the best expression of marginal life in that era” (Halleck). We also know that Clarke saw her self close to the European filmmaking, like Rossellini, DeSica and Fellini. (Halleck). As Clarke told Halleck “I was pals with Godard and that whole bunch. That's who I identified with.” (Halleck) In a different interview with Harriet Polt, Shirley told about her movie and about the fact that she was not that sure whether it would be a success or not. However, Clarke won a prize for her short movie *Dance in The Sun*, which made her an authority on dance films. She made seven short movies before making *The Connection*. One of her short movies, *Skyscrapers*, won two prizes in Venice and in the U.S. and gave her some fame. While talking about her short movies, she described *Scary Time*, a film she shot for UNICEF as her first true film. She told Polt that probably the movie was not shown in any Middle Eastern countries or the US, because UNICEF did not like the last scene of the film and asked Clarke to cut it while she refused. (Polt). Clarke explained: “The film ends

⁶⁷ Choreography of Cinema an Interview With Shirley Clarke, *Afterimage*, December 1983

⁶⁸ Transcription of an interview with Shirley Clarke and DeeDee Halleck, Chelsea Hotel, NYC, 1985

⁶⁹ Interview: Shirley Clarke A 1964 interview with the director of *The Connection* and *Cool World*, *Film Comment*, spring 1964.

⁷⁰ Halleck’s interview

with a long, long shot of a Moroccan baby whose face is all covered with flies; all through the shot, the baby never moves to brush the flies away, as if to say, isn't everybody covered with flies? UNICEF hated this and wanted me to cut it from the picture, but I refused" (Polt). This was not the last time Clarke's work was criticised and was asked to be edited or cancel some footage. She dealt with censorship especially when *The Connection*, a film about drug addicts waiting for their dealer, was released (Rabinovitz). It took her a year to get her case through the court, but eventually she won the case (Polt). Shirley also won an Academy Award Prize for *The Connection*. However, she told Halleck during their interview that she was not that happy about it, while she was happy to say that *The Connection* got a Prize at Cannes.

In her interview with Rabinovitz, Clarke said that editing images is the essence of filmmaking. She used it first in making *Dance in The Sun* (1953). For *Bullfight* (1955), instead, Clarke told Rabinovitz: "I used repetition; I rechoreographed the film. I employed abstract use of color, fast editing, layered images." (Rabinovitz 8) Clarke also changed the original story, in which the dancer is both the matador and the woman who is watching. Clarke added that the woman was also the bull. Clarke said "I came up with several exciting concepts for me." (Rabinovitz 8) Clarke's way in understanding a movie and its concept can be slightly different from how her audience sees it. For example, Clarke told Rabinovitz that everyone saw *The Connection* (1960) as a movie about addiction, but Clarke disagreed, she told Rabinovitz: "I think it's about alienation, and that was something with which I did identify." (Rabinovitz 10) Not only *The Connection* but also *The Cool World*, and *Portrait of Jason*, are movies about alienation, according to Clarke.

In her interview, Polt asked Clarke whether she was thinking of making a film in Hollywood, and Clarke's answer was: "Never". That was, because she saw that Hollywood was more interested in movies that would make money or, as she put it, "The Hollywood idea is that films about

Negroes or films about young boys don't make money" (Polt) which meant that her movie *The Cool World* would never get support from Hollywood. Clarke explained to Polt during their interview the reason behind her not continuing making short movies: "Economically, it's impossible to stay with shorts. You have to find a sponsor" (Polt). In their interview during the Venice Film Festival, Polt and Clarke talked thoroughly about the making of *The Cool World*, which will be tackled in the following chapter.

During her interview with Halleck, Clarke talked about her experience as a woman in the filmmaking industry. While telling about the project. Of a collaboration on a Hollywood movie with Roger Corman, Clarke explained that she withdrew from the project as follows: "I found out that what Roger wanted was for me to be 22 years old. He wished I had never done anything in my life." (Halleck) Clarke explained that from the beginning she did not like the script of that movie nor she understood it: "For me to make a cheap film I didn't respect with a script that I didn't like, without the right to at least do it the way I want, for God's sakes, that's insane." (Halleck) Corman did not trust Clarke's knowledge in making a film. He most likely thought that he was doing her a favour. At one point, they were arguing about shooting technique, and "Maybe we really shouldn't be working with each other. I'm sorry, but I hoped I could do for you what I had done for Martin Scorsese, Peter Bogdonovitch" (Halleck). These directors as Clarke pointed out, were younger than she was when they made their first movie with him, so it was clear to Clarke at that moment Corman had no idea about who she was and what she had done. Halleck asked whether Clarke thought that things would be different if she had been a man, and Clarke replied: "There's deep discrimination against women artists that is still very strong. I was a representative of tokenism. I was relied on to be the woman filmmaker. No one person can carry that burden. There's no question that my career

would have been different if I was a man, but if I was a man I would be a different human being.”
(Halleck)

This topic has also been talked about in Clarke’s interview with Rabinovitz, in which Clarke was asked if she felt isolated as a woman filmmaker after what Clarke said about feeling alienated: “As a woman in this world and a woman filmmaker, I know a lot about alienation [...] I think all women filmmakers are aware of it. It was the subject of a lot of the conversations I had with Maya Deren ... We were very clear about the fact that we were isolated. We were aware that it was no cinch to be a lady filmmaker.” (Rabinovitz 10) Accepting her alienation did not mean for Clarke that she was not affected by discrimination that was happening around her. She told Halleck that during her time working at “the Television Lab at WNET” was “probably the most overt discrimination I ever had” (Halleck) Clarke also told Halleck that this experience was traumatic to her, but she could not say anything because she was a woman, and she was aware of the limitations to her career just because she is a woman. Clarke never said that she was a feminist but, her endeavours were all for the sake of women, she was always in the first line proving that a woman can do as much as a man can do. she told Halleck: “I had to be outwardly a lot stronger than I am. I always had to present a front, I always had to be in charge. I always had to take over.” (Halleck) Halleck reminded Clarke of a photograph, in which Clarke appears “with a camera suspended on clotheslines from the ceiling so that you could move with the camera and have a hand-held camera look without the weight. The first homemade steadicam!” (Halleck) and Clarke said that the idea came to her mind because she was a woman.

Around 1988 Shirley started showing signs of memory loss, and her situation got worse during her 70s. Dundy explained the whole situation in *Life Itself!* in part 3 chapter 32 (“Shirley Clarke leaves The Planet”) Dundy said: “I called Wendy [Shirley Clarke’s daughter] saying ‘see?

She's all right!' 'that means she does have Alzheimer's' said Wendy. 'Dundy, you can stay in denial if you like, but I can't' (Dundy 349). Dundy described Shirley's situation by saying: "she was plunging instead into the senseless cruelty of Alzheimer's: the disease that kept her alive while wrecking all her hopes" (Dundy 349). Due to Alzheimer she had to go through hip surgery and she forgot how to walk, was no longer able to learn anything and she ended up in a wheelchair. Shirley spent her last years in David Cort's house with his wife Piper and his two daughters. David was Shirley's friend, they were close to each other, as Dundy points out: "Shirley and David shared that special relationship possible between a man and a woman who are not lovers but the closest of friends and coworkers." (Dundy 348) They met in the 1970s and they shared enthusiasm for video camera. In September 1997, Shirley had a stroke which left her unable to eat, drink, speak, see, or hear: "She lingered without a support machine for fifteen days. Asleep most of the time, her vital signs were normal" (Dundy 352) Dundy said "on the morning of September 23 – day 15, an exhausted Wendy called. Shirley had died in her sleep at 2.00 a.m. When Wendy went in to see Shirley, they had laid her out. 'she looked luminous'" (Dundy 353).

According to her sister, Clarke received many obituaries from magazines, newspapers, and even messages from her students. *Los Angel Times'* Myrna Oliver in her obituary on Clarke, praised the fact that Clarke was "a self-taught film director--learning first to operate a camera, to record sound and to edit film." (Oliver) Oliver also mentioned Clarke joining the women's movement in the 1970's, bringing her own experience. Oliver also mentioned the problems that Clarke faced with Hollywood, as they supported only male filmmakers, stating that Clarke said: "I was some kind of a threat. I didn't make myself acceptable and I had no intention of making their films." (Oliver) In *The Independent* ("Obituary: Shirley Clarke") Tom Vallance, applauded the three films for which Clarke is best remembered: *The Connection*, *The Cool World* and *Portrait of Jason*. In

The New York Times ("Shirley Clarke Is Dead at 77; Maker of Oscar-Winning Film") Lawrence Van Gelder, remembered Clarke for, founding along with the critic Jonas Mekas, the Film-Makers Cooperative, which was a nonprofit company "for the distribution of independent films". (Gelder) Clarke said: "there must be 40 or 50 others like me in the country, with a desire for self-expression and no urge to move to Hollywood and make soap opera" " Clarke continued: "We're creating a movie equivalent of Off Broadway, fresh and experimental and personal. The lovely thing is that I'm alive at just the time when I can do this" (Gelder). It is clear as Dundy described her sister, that Clarke was the kind of a woman who would do whatever she could to help anyone in need. It is as if she had taken this hard path in order to pave it for the new generation. As Robert Frost's said in his poem "The Road Not Taken": "I took the one less traveled by, / And that has made all the difference." (Frost, lines 19-20)

CHAPTER 4

ADAPTING *THE COOL WORLD*

4.1 Introduction to Clarke's *The Cool World*

4.1.1 The Making of The Film

The Cool World is one of Shirley Clarke's greatest films that, unfortunately, did not get a fair recognition. The film is available online in poor quality, it is also available to watch in person at the Library of Congress (Washington DC, USA), and most recently it was uploaded on archive.org. Fredrick Wiseman owns the distribution rights to the film but his film company (Zipporah) did not prioritise "the preservation or circulation of the film"⁷¹. Jaimie Baron, in a lecture she presented at Harvard Radcliffe Institute, argued that the reason why Wiseman did not allow to distribute the film until today lies in a disagreement between Clarke and Wiseman himself, which led to keeping the film in the dark⁷².

According to Baron, the idea of making the film started with Wiseman, which is something Clarke also mentioned in one of her interviews. Baron explained that Wiseman was interested in films and, after he saw the Living theatre production of *The Connection*, he set his mind on producing a film based on Gerber's play. That was when Lewis Allen, a producer, suggested Clarke to direct Wiseman's film *The Connection*. All in all, Wiseman was satisfied with how the movie turned out, even though he lost money at the end, yet he admired Clarke's rebellious side and

⁷¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YUqEnb6HkUE>

⁷² Ibid

“Clarke's insistence on fighting against obscenity laws that restricted the reproduction in films”(Baron). As he was interested in the idea of making films and wanted to take the chance with a book he read and admired called *The Cool World*, Wiseman got involved in filmmaking. Wiseman chose Clark to direct this film.

In those years, there was a good deal of films about juvenile delinquency, but this film was different. By 1963, when the film was released, it became known as a “radical experiment”, as Baron said, it was “one of the first American films to not only be vocalised entirely through a Black character’s experience but also to deploy an internal monologue of a Black character in voiceover”⁷³. In her interview with Lauren Rabinovitz, Clarke said: “He (Fredrick Wiseman) had read the novel. He came to me, asked if I would be interested in making a film, and I said yes. He thought he could make a deal to pick up *The Cool World*” (Rabinovitz 10).

Clarke visited Warren Miller before she started making the film. He had seen her work and liked it. According to Clarke, Miller gave her freedom over the script. She said: “But he himself [Miller] did not participate in the making of the film. He was not even going to read my script. When the film was finished, he would come and see it.” (Rabinovitz 10) Miller’s trust in Clarke’s work gave her more freedom to work on the film and make the best out of it.

Since the novel talks about a black teenager and the Black community in Harlem, Clarke chose Carl Lee, a Harlem-born Black actor, to help her in the process of making the film. He also played the role of ‘Priest’ in the film. *The Cool World* was not Lee’s first time working alongside Clarke: in fact, he got the chance to work with her in *The Connection*, where he played the role of

⁷³ Ibid

the dealer of heroine. Lee was also an important part of Clark's life as they lived together on and off throughout the 60s.

Clarke's sister Elaine Dundy mentioned their relationship in her autobiography *Life Itself!* : "At Cannes, Shirley's hour had come. She was heroine of the Beats, the Queen of Cool. And she had found her prince charming. [referring to Carl Lee]" (Dundy 240) Dundy did not seem to like the relationship between her sister and Lee, however, she acknowledged in her book that Lee was Clarke's ticket to enter the Harlem ghetto. Dundy said: "Without his endorsement of her, Shirley would not have had access to record it [*The Cool World*] so intimately" (Dundy 242), Dundy also reported that Clarke gave Carl Lee credit for co-writing the script: "She [Clarke] credited Carl with 'ironing out the novel, changing the dialogue and putting characters together' but the power of the film, I thought, lay in Shirley's camera." (Dundy 242)

Lee was a great help in the casting process for the movie, Clarke credited him in an interview: "It took Carl three months of going to Harlem all the time, gathering kids, and bringing them down for us to interview. For a while, we really thought we weren't going to be able to cast the film because we were getting all the 'good' kids in schools, and they weren't giving us believable readings" (Rabinovitz 10) Clarke convinced Lee to "get to the gangs", that is when she got the cast she wanted: they were teenagers from Harlem street and some of them did not even know how to read the script and had to improvise the script. Clarke described her cast as "real"⁷⁴. Clarke explained that, since some of the cast that she wanted for the film were not able to read, they "used this technique throughout the film—a mixture of memorising lines and improvising. You can't get quiet, tender moments by improvising, so those we had to write out. But many of the

⁷⁴ Choreography of Cinema An Interview with Shirley Clarke by: Lauren Rabinovitz

others we improvised, using a straight Stanislavsky technique either before or during the shooting”(Polt).

The teenagers that Clarke chose “had police records. The life they played in the film was pretty much the life they had lived.” (Polt) However, after making the film their life changed. Clarke explained “Hampton Clanton, who plays the lead, is finishing his last year of high school and goes to a neighbourhood playhouse. The boy who plays the leader of the enemy gang is working as a messenger for a playhouse. Some of the boys are acting in an off-Broadway play that our set-builder has written” (Polt) Clarke continues: “The film gave them a sense of pride: the idea that they are important enough to make a film” (Polt).

Making the film in Harlem was no easy task. Clarke explained to Rabinovitz in her interview that since *The Cool World* was the first film to be filmed in Harlem’s streets, “there were times when crowds collected that were not always friendly.” (Rabinovitz 10) However, it seemed like Clarke considered that, she had Madeleine Anderson as her assistant editor, and her job was “to explain to the people in the street who were upset by the filming why we were doing the movie and what it was all about. For the most part, that cooled the street.” (Rabinovitz 10) Most of those who worked for *The Cool World* film were also black.

It took Clarke two years to make her film and during that time, The Civil Rights Movement was at its peak. Some people in Harlem thought that Clarke was making a film that was anti-Harlem, as Clarke explained: “Baird Bryant, who was the white cameraman (the other cameraman, Leroy Lucas, was black), myself, and the two black kids were on 125th St . right next to a black nationalist bookstore. The owner of the store thought the film was anti-Harlem, and so he started chasing us down the street.” (Rabinovitz 10) Clarke also explained that no one had ever thought of filming in Harlem because it was too dangerous, and she also believed that shooting her film in Harlem played

a role in the success of the film. Clarke did not look at the profits that came from *The Cool World*. She stated: “But I don't really know if there are any profits or if I ever got my original money back . But I sure am glad I made the film!” (Rabinovitz 10). This explains that Clarke had always cared for the African American community, and telling their story was what mattered the most to her. This is something her sister Dundy also mentioned in her autobiography “[Shirley] genuinely worshipped black genius (as did we all growing up in nightclubs and dance circles in New York). A political activist from her teens, the injustices suffered by American blacks had always been a cause close to her. To Shirley, black was beautiful; negritude spoke to her soul. It also spoke to her filmmaking. Three of her major films – *The Cool World*, *Portrait of Jason*, and *Ornette Coleman: Made in America* – are about black people.” (Dundy 242) When Polt asked Clarke how did she became interested in Black people’s issues, Clarke explained: “For the past four or five years I have felt that this is America’s key problem. Without a solution to it, we will never have a free country. After all, we whites are in the minority—two thirds of the world is colored.” (Polt) Clarke also sees that the issue of racism is more important than her issue as a woman working in a field that is dominated by men, she said: “My personal woman’s experiences seemed unimportant” (Pearlman 7)

Clarke talked about the setting in her interview with Polt: “The exteriors were all shot on location in Harlem. For the interiors, the New York Housing Authority gave us the use of a whole tenement building was about to be demolished. For each set, we used a different floor of the building. We didn’t have to buy a stick of furniture—we just used what was there. Our interiors were all pre-lit, so we could move the camera freely. Throughout the film, the camera was hand-held. For sound, we used radiomicrophones, so we didn’t need a boom.” (Polt) Another recognition the film was received for being made in the streets of Harlem, Amy Taubin wrote: “The film is as

much as document of uptown street life just before the period of Black Power as it is an early landmark in the history of American neo-realism”⁷⁵ Clarke’s faithfulness was not only limited to the setting of the film but, influenced by the Italian neo-realism, she also wanted dialogues to sound real, she explained: “We never did a scene without checking with the kids first to see if the action seemed believable to them” (Polt)

4.1.2 Clarke as The Director and The Editor of *The Cool World*

There are not many accessible sources regarding the technique of making *The Cool World*, besides Karen Pearlman’s essay *Editing, directing, and The Cool World: filmmaking as a choreographic art*. In this essay, Pearlman talks about the importance of editing in making a film, and argues that “a director’s work is more analogous to that of a choreographer than that to an author”. Editing is a fundamental aspect of Clarke’s directing, since Clarke distanced herself from the movie that she ‘only directed’ (the Robert Frost documentary): “For Clarke, a film she does not edit does not feel like ‘her’ film” (Pearlman 7). Pearlman’s case study in this regard is *The Cool World*, which she described as a “World built by editing”. Italian neo-realism’s influence on Clarke is also noted by Pearlman, as she acknowledged ‘the improvisational and observational methods’ as a lead in Clark’s ‘editing powers’ Pearlman explains: (“She [Clarke] used a hand-held camera and radio mics so they ‘would be very free to move where and however’”) (Pearlman 8). Pearlman’s essay focuses on what a movie would be like when the editor and the director are the same person. She took *The Cool World* as her study case, I am using Pearlman’s essay to explain briefly how Clarke made the film, by focusing on the first scene only.

⁷⁵ Quoted from David Hudson’s *Celebrating Shirley Clarke*

Pearlman focuses on the opening scene, and argued about the unnoticed details such as ‘the juxtaposition and the phrasing of the movement’ which are what elicit an emotional response to what the audience is seeing: “when viewing the particular edited passage of *The Cool World*, we have a cultural response. If we are white, we perhaps feel unease, anxiety, culpability, or shame on hearing the Street Speaker’s incendiary words.” (Pearlman 8) In addition to eliciting emotional responses to the scene, Clarke also managed to give her audience the experience of being ‘outsiders’: “she [Clarke] creates a sense of unspoken understanding/connection between people that we can observe, but within which we cannot participate” (Pearlman 9).

The opening scene starts with the camera focused on a man who is shouting at an audience, Pearlman argues that this man is “yelling at us. Accusing. Berating. Calling us out.” (Pearlman 9) Because he is looking directly at the camera, Pearlman sees that the man’s shout will “set the record straight”, by telling the listeners “the truth about the white man”. The opening scene is about two minutes long, and Clarke’s use of cuts to create this short scene helped the viewers to understand what this movie is about, and managed to make her audience relate to this scene and to the film, as she gave them an idea of how daily life is in Harlem. By using the transition between the man who is telling the truth, his audience and their physical expressions: “Their nods are synchronised they hear, believe and respond to the same thing.” (Pearlman 10)

As noted earlier, Clarke’s edits are invisible to the audience, Pearlman explains the reason by saying: “So, the magic trick is set up. We are primed. The eye-lines, the frame size, the composition of the crowd, the continuing sound, make the edit itself ‘invisible’ to us.” (Pearlman 10) By explaining the first three cuts, we will understand what does Pearlman mean in saying the edits are ‘invisible’. The fact that the edits are unnoticeable does not make them less important on the contrary, to Clarke they are essential to make the film.

The film starts with the camera focused on the man saying: “Do you wanna know the truth about the white man?...” The man is looking directly to the camera, that is what made Pearlman assume that he is shouting at us, we as viewers are included here, and this speech is for everyone. The man continues speaking for about 25 seconds, “brothers listen to me” the camera starts moving backwards slowly [a difference in the frame size is noticeable]⁷⁶. We start to have a sense of a crowd and the speaker is addressing them. From that moment the camera’s focus is shifted from the speaker to his surroundings. Clarke starts creating a crowd while keeping the amount of it unknown. Pearlman argues that Clarke “is deliberately withholding information about the size of the crowd because she has a larger point to make, which is that any and everyone in Harlem is affected by this speech. So, in two shots she makes us infer a crowd of unknown size, one that feels big and tightly compacted” (Pearlman 10)

The speaker’s voice is echoing “listen to me”, the first cut is made to four men looking where the man is standing, and nodding their heads in agreement with they are listening to. “white is that the absence of color” the second cut is made to other 3 men standing and like the ones before they are looking at the direction of the speaker. But this frame was dominated by a Black man wearing a hat, he turns his face and looks directly at the camera. “The white man is incomplete and imperfect” The third cut is made but this time the camera is now focused on a white police man. Which gives a sense of the place, and that the Black man was in fact looking at the white cop who is standing on the other side, as seen in the two frames.

⁷⁶ Visit (<https://youtu.be/JKUeVELJgDM?si=d6Fy4ysbroXPQIsd>) to see the opening scene



Figure 2 The black man in the hat is looking straight to the camera: Clark's cut makes it appear as if he is looking at the policeman standing in front of him.



Figure 1 The white policeman that the man in the hat is looking at.

Clarke gives the man in the hat's point of view or, what Pearlman calls 'eyeline'. That is what made the edit 'invisible': Pearlman sees the result of this editing is "constructed a phrase of movement: Speaker-listeners-listeners-cop" (Pearlman 10) Clarke continues making cuts to create crowd while maintaining the presence of the speaker's voice, which is one of the ways to keep the edits 'invisible'. Eventually after about ten cuts Clarke managed to create a crowd.

Clarke continued making a series of 25 shots that gives an idea on how day to day life is in Harlem. Clarke shot different frames of people in Harlem, Pearlman noted: “These could be from any place in Harlem, any members of the community. They are clearly not in the same light, or space, or even necessarily in earshot of the speaker. These 25 shots mix plausible listeners with people chatting, smoking, reading, sketching.” (Pearlman 13) Pearlman also argues that Clarke’s idea for these different shots was that “a whole community of people in Harlem, whether present or not, is affected by the speech, described by it, and connected to it. They and the speaker are in dialogue, amplifying each other, connected by incendiary rhetoric” (Pearlman 11) These cuts, edits and shots are what made this film considered as ‘hybrid’.

In a short scene, Clarke manages to create a link between the spoken word and the surrounding environment, Pearlman explained this by saying: “The shots are not analogous to words, and Clarke is not the author. She is, like all great conductors of orchestras, an active listener, choosing points of emphasis, rhythmic design of the visual and aural to make a point” (Pearlman 13). In Clarke editing and directing her own films she manages to create a connection between her idea as a director and her idea as an editor ‘choreographer’, which is Pearlman’s main argument.

Clarke made use of jazz in making the majority of her movies, since jazz had an impact in African American community, Clarke used jazz not only as soundtrack for *The Cool World*, but also as a narrative and emotional element. Clarke chose Mal Waldron as the composer. We notice jazz music played in the background of the majority of the scenes, especially the ones where Duke is having inner thoughts. The use of jazz here is like a mirror to what the characters are dealing with. Harriet R. P noted that “The jazz score, by Mal Waldron, played by Dizzy Gillespie, Yusef Lateef, Arthur Taylor, and Aaron Bell, seemed to me totally in keeping with the action of the film. It is not one of those scores that you don't notice. Its noticeability is accentuated in those scenes,

such as the one of Priest's entrance to the apartment just before the rumble, when the music is interrupted, then continued, then again interrupted. The counterpoint between music and action accentuates both music and action.” (Harriet 35)

4.1.3 About *The Cool World*

The Cool World ,was first released in September of 1963 and presented at the Venice Film Festival⁷⁷. Then it was released in the US in April of 1964. The reason behind the film being released in the US six months after presenting it in Venice Film Festival, was explained Clarke in an interview: “The film was barely finished when we brought it to Venice, and it still needs some cutting.”(Polt) The film is based on Warren Miller’s novel that has the same title, and the play by Miller and Robert Rossen. However, the script was written by Shirley Clarke and Carl Lee, and was improvised in some scenes by the cast as long as it sounded believable. The film presents how daily life is in Harlem, by focusing on the young generation and covering topics such as the issue of race, poverty, and violence.

The film talks about a Black teenager named Duke Custis , who lives in Harlem, under the influence of streets life, Duke is a part of a gang called Royal Python. The film’s premise shows Duke’s main goal which is to have a gun or as he calls it a ‘piece’. Having the gun meant that he would be in a higher status to be the president of the gang. Duke believes that the only path earn respect is having a gun, he sees it as a symbol of strength, and manhood.

⁷⁷ *The Cool World* is the first independent film to be presented at Venice Film festival

The film presents Duke's journey attempting to get the gun, while Duke is trying to get the money 'bread' to get the gun, we see how he gets in contact with different characters among them people want to help him and others want to take advantage from him. Duke's struggle is the result of his messed-up perception of reality.

The climax point in film is when 'Little Man', one of Duke gang's member and friend, gets killed by the rival gang, who call themselves 'Wolves'. At the same time of Little Man's death, Duke becomes the president of the gang and he gets 'Blood' out of the gang., because Blood is a drug addict a 'junkie' and he is no good for the gang anymore. After that, Duke gives up on Priest giving him the gun without having the money for it, because Duke knows better that no one is willing to give anyone anything for nothing.

Duke starts having second thoughts about the fight with the other gang, because he does not have the gun yet. Eventually Duke convince himself that he needs to act on and do it anyway, fight with the Wolves and revenge Little Man's death, even if he does not have the gun, at least he has the gang, he belongs. The movie shows those two group of teenagers fighting each other, Duke ends up killing the Wolves' president (Angel) as he said he will.

An interesting dialogue happens between Duke and Angel, as Duke says "I told I'll do it and I did it" and Angel's reply was "Thank you". I personally think that Angel saw his death as salvation from this city that has nothing to give for him nor to anyone else. The film ends with Duke having to deal with the consequences of his actions. He tries to go back to the apartment, where he left Priest, Priest asked him for a place to stay in for few days because there were people after him, Duke gets to the apartment to find Priest lying there dead, and he decides to head back to his mother's apartment. That is where he gets caught by the policemen and apparently ends up in juvenile.

The main characters in the film are: Hampton Clanton as (Duke Custis), Carl Lee playing (Priest) whom Duke contact to get the gun, Gloria Foster playing Duke's mother (Mrs. Custis), Clarence Williams III playing the role of (Bubba) Duke's right hand and best friend, Yolanda Rodríguez playing (LuAnn) the gang prostitute with whom Duke becomes interested. The film has many different themes such as poverty, which is presented in the setting of the film in decaying Harlem its abounded buildings, and neglected streets. The film also gives a perspective into how an environment can have an impact on the young generation, forcing them into illegal activities, joining gangs (like Duke and his peers) ,taking drugs (like Blood) or prostitution (like LuAnn). The film also projects the concept of masculinity, and what it means to be a man. As we see Duke believing that power and respect will be his if he has a gun. Of course for a movie set in Harlem, racism and segregation is one of its themes and we can see that from the first scene.

4.2 Novel-to-Film Adaptation

Since *The Cool World* is Clarke's adaptation of Miller's novel, a brief introduction to adaptation theories will be presented, based on Brian McFarlane's *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (1996). In an interview with Linda Hutcheon, a scholar who is working on adaptation theories, Hutcheon was asked by Eleanor Wachtel how she came across adaptation as a topic. Hutcheon explains that she worked on parody because everyone was saying it was not an important topic but, she believed the opposite, the same goes for adaptation. Hutcheon said: "Adaptations were another one of these things that people see as, secondary, derivative. I think they are really interesting"⁷⁸ Hutcheon continues explaining that we as human beings have always been

⁷⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYE07Tf3y6M>

retelling [adapting] stories, which is what made her believe that adaptation is an important aspect to deal with.

On the other hand, McFarlane in his book *Novel to Film: an Introduction to The Theory of Adaptation* (1996) sees adaptation as a common concept among people. He noted: "Everyone who sees films based on novels feels able to comment, at levels ranging from gossipy to the erudite on the nature of the adaptation involved. That is, the interest in adaptation, unlike many other matters to do with film (e.g. questions of authorship), is not a rarified one" (McFarlane 3). Robert Stam in *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Adaptation* (2005) noted: "If adaptation studies at first glance seems a somewhat minor and peripheral field within cinematic theory and analysis, in another sense it can be seen as quite central and important." (Stam 45) All these previous quotations express the importance of adaptation. As mentioned earlier, I will present the adaptation approaches that were presented in McFarlane's book, starting with his criticism to the notion of fidelity.

Fidelity was one of the earliest approaches to adaptation theories, it simply evaluates how faithful an adaptation is. According to McFarlane: "Fidelity criticism depends on a notion of the text as having and rendering up to the (intelligent) reader a single, correct 'meaning' which the filmmaker has either adhered to or in some sense violated or tampered with." (McFarlane 8) According to McFarlane, this approach is 'doomed' because "the critic who quibbles at failures of fidelity is really saying no more than: 'This reading of the original does not tally with mine in these and these ways.'" (McFarlane 9) In this regard, McFarlane is not alone, as Robert Stam seems to agree with him. He noted: "We can still speak of successful or unsuccessful adaptations, but this time oriented not by inchoate notions of "fidelity" but rather by attention to "transfers of creative energy," or to specific dialogical responses, to "readings" and "critiques" and "interpretations" and

"rewritings" of source novels, in analyses which always take into account the gaps between very different media and materials of expression" (Stam 46).

McFarlane aims to apply and develop Roland Barthes' narrative theory in his book, making it suitable to be applied in comparing between a novel and a film⁷⁹. McFarlane noted: "'A narrative is never made up of anything other than functions: in differing degrees, everything in it signifies.' He [Ronald Barthes] distinguishes two main groups of narrative functions: distributional and integrational and, though he is not concerned with cinema in this discussion, this distinction is valuable in sorting out what may be transferred (i.e. from novel to film) from that which may only be adapted" (McFarlane 13) Distributional function is explained by McFarlane as something that "refers to actions and events; they are 'horizontal' in nature, and they are strung together linearly throughout the text; they have to do with 'operations'; they refer to a functionality of doing" (McFarlane 13) . Whereas integrational is a "concept [that] embraces, for instance, psychological information relating to characters, data regarding their identity, notations of atmosphere and representations of place. Indices are 'vertical' in nature, influencing our reading of narrative in a pervasive rather than a linear way; they do not refer to operations but to a functionality of being." (McFarlane 13)

The distributional function is split into two functions: cardinal and catalysers. The former provides visible changes to the development of the story. As McFarlane noted: "the reader recognises the possibility of alternative consequences" (McFarlane 13,14); for example changing the end of a story from a tragic ending to a happy one.

⁷⁹ What is Transferred from Novel to Film? Some Criticism of Brian McFarlane's Adaptation Analysis Method by Erika Huszár, 2011

McFarlane argues that if a filmmaker wants to keep the ‘fidelity’, they should preserve applying the cardinal function. On the other hand, catalysers is simple additions to the story without risking changing its development. McFarlane explains “Unlike the risky moments' created by cardinal functions, the catalysers lay out areas of safety, rests, luxuries'; they account for the moment-to-moment minutiae of narrative.” (McFarlane 14)

The integrational function is also subdivided into two functions: indices proper and informants. McFarlane explained “Only the latter [informants function] may be directly transferred. Whereas the former [indices proper] relate to concepts such as character and atmosphere, are more diffuse than the functions proper, and are therefore more broadly open to adaptation rather than to the comparative directness of transfer,” (McFarlane 14). What McFarlane means in transferred directly is the elements that are “not tied to one or other semiotic system” whereas open to adaptation means the elements that are “closely tied to the semiotic system”.

4.3 A Study in Adaptation [from Miller to Clarke]

I will try to approach Clarke’s *The Cool World* through McFarlane’s approaches. Clarke wanted and managed to get in contact with the author of *The Cool World*, which is something not that common in most of the adapted films. Clarke was given full authority over the script, and Miller did not participate in the script. Perhaps Miller trusted her completely as he had the chance to see her work on *The Connection* [which is an adaptation of Jack Gelber’s Play *The Connection*] and he knew what Clarke is capable of making.

If we are talking about fidelity, I would say that Clarke was faithful to Miller’s novel to a certain extent. She kept the same title, the setting of the novel, and filmed in Harlem. She used one

building that was given to her by the New York project in Harlem, a building that was to be demolished. She said that she used each floor for a specific purpose, even the furniture she found.

Another part Clarke was faithful to in regards of the novel was the main concept. Clarke kept all the elements that made the novel significant at the time. Especially the casting, I think the reason behind Clarke wanting the ‘real’ kids and not the well-behaved ones that were presented to Lee when he was doing the casting. Because one of the most important part of the novel is language. The novel gained its fame for its language, Miller wrote it perfectly as if it was written by a black man, he maintained the Black people language that he used to hear. By choosing the ‘real’ kids Clarke managed to keep that aspect, even though there is a slight difference between the novel’s dialogues and the film’s, since the script was written by Clarke and Lee. Clarke herself said that she wouldn’t film a scene before running the script to the actors [the teenagers] to see if they see it believable. In addition to the fact that some of the kids were not able to read, which led to improvising some of the scenes, all these factors made the film more ‘believable’ ‘faithful’ and realistic.

Moving into the narrative approach, which is in a way four functions, starting with ‘Cardinal’ which is subdivided from the ‘distributional’ function. This function refers to the actions and events of the story, applying the cardinal function to Clarke’s *The Cool World*, this function is described as ‘risky’ by McFarlane, because if applied on an adapted work it means visible changes in the story, like “provide a happy ending rather than sombre ending”. Clarke did the opposite of McFarlane’s example in regards of cardinal function.

The ending of the novel was somehow considered a happy ending because it ended with hope [unrealistic], the film on the other hand, ended with Duke getting dragged and arrested by the police. This change in my opinion has nothing to do with adaptation approaches as much as it does

with Italian neo-realism's influence on Clarke. Clarke gave the main character a realistic ending that aligns with the time of making the film, when Black people were arrested, guilty or not.

However, if we take into consideration the other adaptation approach 'integrational' with its subdivisions 'indices and informants' we see that Clarke kept all the functional elements of the novel, since 'indices' has to do with the concept. It is more than obvious that Clarke kept the concept of the novel without altering it, which is something according to McFarlane open to adaptation. I think that McFarlane considered the concept of the novel [text] as open to adaptation as his way of allowing more freedom to the filmmaker, no longer limited by fidelity criticism.

I think when talking about fidelity in regards to *The Cool World*, one could argue with Stam that "We can still speak of successful or unsuccessful adaptations, but this time oriented not by inchoate notions of "fidelity" but rather by attention to "transfers of creative energy," or to specific dialogical responses, to "readings" and "critiques" and "interpretations" and "rewritings" of source novels, in analyses which always take into account the gaps between very different media and materials of expression" (Stam 46). This statement describes Clarke's work on *The Cool World*, since she was 'faithful' to an extent, but having Miller's trust in her work gave her more confidence in being more creative. I think Clarke did not keep in mind adaptation theories while working on the film. What she kept in mind is presenting a 'believable' story, something that her audience Black or white relates to.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in the first chapter I presented the decade of the Civil rights movement between the 50s and the beginning of the 60s: these years are the years when the novel and the film were made. In presenting these years, we can notice the influence that they had on Clarke and Miller and their work, starting with the right of education, and police brutality. In addition to the community issues, Harlem as a place had its influence on its people, on Clarke and Miller, and on Duke in both film and novel.

In the second chapter, Warren Miller is presented. Miller was assumed to be a Black author. We understand at the end that the reason behind that was Miller's use of a dialect (Negro slang). We also understand that the reason behind Miller not getting enough recognition are the topics he tackled in his books.

The third chapter is mainly about Clarke, and I used her sister's Elaine Dundy autobiography as the main source, in addition to some other interviews I managed to retrieve. Clarke was one of the first women in a field dominated by men, but even though she did not earn enough recognition, there is no doubt that Clarke is one of the most impactful filmmakers. Throughout this chapter I also managed to explain the reason behind Clarke choosing to work on Black people mainly, and what distinguished her from her peers was the influence of the Italian neo-realism on her style.

In the fourth chapter, where the main argument of the thesis is presented, and after exploring McFarlane's adaptation theories. I applied those approaches, while keeping an eye on the Fidelity approach. I saw that Clarke was faithful to an extent to Miller's novel, which did not affect her creativity in making a remarkable film, as what McFarlane and many other scholars claim. I understand that Clarke was not completely faithful, but if we applied the distributional and

integrational approaches with their divisions on Clarke's film while thinking of the fidelity theory, and according to McFarlane's approach, that is of changes being made without risking the concept of the text, we see that Clarke was as faithful as she could be, while maintaining her own style of filmmaking. As Stam put it: "We can still speak of successful or unsuccessful adaptations, but this time oriented not by inchoate notions of "fidelity" but rather by attention to "transfers of creative energy," or to specific dialogical responses, to "readings" and "critiques" and "interpretations" and "rewritings" of source novels, in analyses which always take into account the gaps between very different media and materials of expression" (Stam 46).

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